QUEERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A WOMAN-LED TECH STARTUP IN BERLIN

by

Miguel Wilson

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. Kendra Jason

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Dr. Anne-Kathrin Kronberg

_____
Dr. Camille Endacott

ABSTRACT

MIGUEL WILSON. Queering Entrepreneurship: An ethnographic study of a woman-led tech startup in Berlin

(Under the direction of DR. KENDRA JASON)

With the rise of more women-led firms in the tech industry, the question of how these organizations either differentiate or align themselves with their male-dominanted competitors is of growing interest. I examine whether a women-led tech startup in Berlin, Germany, with a socially-driven product, would embody the same problematic work culture (e.g., "work hard, play hard," sexual harassment, overwork) that has been reported in previous research on tech firms (Pöllänen 2021). Data collection took place in June-July of 2022 and included ethnographic participant observation, triangulated by semi-structured interviews and photo-elicited interviews with workers from More Than A Jewel (MTAJ), a women-led tech startup in Berlin. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2017), through the lens of queer theory, I abductively test Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations and explore the presence of MTAJ's non-normative gendering processes. I argue that these processes were fundamentally queered due to MTAJ's organizational logic that workers should exercise their duty by engaging in communal work in order to be empowered. With growing concerns surrounding employee engagement and organizational commitment (Sull, Sull, & Zweig 2022), this study provides an example of how communally-empowered work can better serve employees and organizations at large. Future research should continue to explore what it means to behave communally at work, and how historically excluded groups, particularly queer individuals, can be made to feel more included in today's workplaces.

Keywords: gendered organizations, feminist, queer, work culture

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Joan Acker's words from 1990, still ring true today: "Most of us spend most of our days in work organizations that are almost always dominated by men," (139). It is not the men that are the problem, but the cultures of violence and inequality that normatively gendered organizations often replicate (Acker 2006). Startups and technology companies, in particular, have long been sites of sexual harassment, misogyny, and gender-based inequities, including hiring, pay, and promotion—all of which have disadvantaged femme-identifying individuals and rewarded men (Burleigh 2015). These rewards are doled out because of work cultures that reify and cater to masculinity contests, where men compete to demonstrate that they are "real men," (Berdahl et al. 2018).

After years of bearing witness to these contests, many women are choosing to disengage. In their 2020 report on women in the workplace, McKinsey & Company found one in four women are contemplating downshifting their careers or leaving the workplace (Thomas et al. 2020). Working Mother Media ran a survey, and half of the women of color stated that they plan to leave their jobs in the next two years due to their experiences of marginalization and disillusionment (Tulshyan & Burey 2021).

More and more women that are leaving the traditional workforce are starting their own ventures (Schultheiss 2021). This is likely because barriers to women's market participation, like combining work and family, are being dismantled by the rise of digitalization and technology (Punkari & Lange 2021). Support for women is on the rise as well. Startups founded by women raised $40.4 billion in the first nine months of 2021 alone (Gupta 2021). There is evidence to suggest that women are more likely to be recruited to work within these women-led firms (Costa et al. 2017), as women-led startups have been found to employ their organizations with two and a half times more women (Bittner & Lau 2021).

Many women-led startups are being categorized as social enterprises, wherein businesses combine revenue growth with meeting the unmet social needs of the public and the environment (Argarwal, Bersin, and Lahiri 2018). These social ventures are also where communal traits, such as empathy, emotion, and compassion, are crucial to firm performance (Rosca et al. 2020). Under the

assumption that organizations are not gender-neutral (Acker 1990), it stands to reason that these newer work environments are worthy of investigation.

For this study, I conducted an ethnographic study, supplemented by interviews and photovoice, of a wearable technology startup, founded and led by women in Berlin, Germany, to examine gender in their workplace. I arrived at this research topic after reckoning with my own time spent working at a woman-led firm. As a queer person, my experiences in organizations have often been fraught with discomfort; not necessarily from individual encounters, but as a byproduct of the jarring, uncomfortable framing of organizational work and culture within most cis-gendered, male-dominant organizations. Yavorsky (2016) defines such organizations as sites that uphold the belief that femininities are meant to be demoted, along with the people that do not fit "normative conceptions of gender and sex," (949). My stint working at this particular company stood out to me as distinctly different and positive, but at the time I lacked the theoretical training to appropriately assess what made the experience so unique.

I used queer theory, a field of critical theory rooted in questioning normative practices, to frame my research (Souza 2017). I aimed to look critically at what entrepreneurship and technology mean within the context of femme-dominant spaces. In the case of investigating a startup founded and run by women, where their product is a wearable technology targeting the social issue of gendered violence, I positioned gender as a construct and performance (West & Zimmerman 1987) that can be mobilized for social change. My research was guided by two questions: (1) *Are Acker's (1990) gendering processes present in this organization?; and* (2) *As a women-led social enterprise in the male-dominant tech industry, how is gender present in this organization's gendering processes?*

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Below I provide the background for my research. First, I discuss gendered organizations, while also touching on gendered processes and the construction of masculinity and femininity within the context of work. I also take time to define feminist organizing. Then, I discuss startup work culture and women as social entrepreneurs. Lastly, I introduce the relevancy of Germany and Berlin as the setting of my study.

Gendered Organizations

The study of gendered organizations has helped conceptualize how performances of gender shape the ways we live, work, and communicate (Cameron 1998). Though we have come a long way from the days of seeing men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, these roles and imagery still permeate into the ways we do gender and what is deemed socially acceptable (Bozani 2020). Gendered organizations are gendered because, within these spaces, "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, meaning and identity," are all influenced by the respective evaluation and devaluation of masculinity and femininity (Acker 1990:146).

Lorber (1994) stated that it is gender we encounter every day in our social organizations and perceived gender difference that essentially drives inequality. In organizations, gender often dictates what can be done and by whom (West & Zimmerman 1987; Acker 1990). Overlooked elements of gender in organizations have been found to lead to disparate work outcomes, such as when men and women are employed to do the same job and share the same educational background, and gendered lines of division still take place, causing discomfort and undue stress (Bloksgaard 2011). Chan and Anteby (2016) found that task segregation in the work of airport security screening workers led to the disproportionate overexposure of female workers to relational strain, emotional labor, and physical exertion.

Gendered processes become embedded in an organization by way of masculinity and femininity, as well as within the identities of individuals within the organization (Acker 1990). Organizations have often been modeled after masculinities with characteristics such as being aggressive, competitive, efficient, and goal-oriented. Femininities like kindness, being supportive, and displaying empathy have historically been left out of processes that define organizational cultures (Acker 1992).

Theorists have also posited gender as something that is 'done,' not something one simply 'is' (West & Zimmerman 1987; Bloksgaard 2011) because gender is not performed within a vacuum. Cultural ideals shape how we define masculinity and femininity (Bloksgaard 2011). Moreover, gendered divisions exist not only within the context of the work being done but also within the industry of the organization as well (Alvesson 1998). So regardless of the organization in this proposed study being a woman-led social entrepreneurship venture, it still operates within the larger ecosystem of the masculine-dominant technology startup industry.

Similarly, one of the relevant processes that create gendered organizations has to do with interactions that take place among individuals (Acker 1992). Thus, interactions that take place between women and women are just as imperative to examine as those that take place between men and women. My ethnographic observation queered this research by examining and inserting myself into these interactions as a nonbinary queer individual. I aim to move away from discussions of masculinity and femininity, as male- or female-typed, but instead as traits (agentic and communal) that can be done across the gender binary. It was still imperative that I understood how others have discussed gender in the workplace. My review of the literature provided me with no instances where men were no longer present in the workplace, but I hypothesized that potentially creative repurposing of what it means to perform these traits would

be present. The following sections discuss how the current literature defines said masculinities and femininities at work.

Masculinities at Work

Worley (2021) identifies the following array of areas relevant to masculinity when studying gender at work: ways of caring, heroism, self-reliance, relational styles, a worker/provider tradition, group orientation, risk-taking, and use of humor. Notably, given the dichotomous nature of masculinity and femininity, these areas also serve as talking points for femininity at work as well, which I cover in the next section.

Traditionally masculine work is deemed of higher status as well as denoting more prestige (Bloksgaard 2011). Masculine ways of caring often involve an element of risk (e.g., police officers and soldiers) (Worley 2021). Masculine work is also simultaneously shaped by an image of demanding physical labor (Bloksgaard 2011). Short hair and pants, as well as what's been perceived as "craftsman jargon" represent prevailing masculine modes of expression in the workplace (Bloksgaard 2011).

Pöllänen (2021), conducted an ethnographic study of organizational culture in a Finnish startup and found the use of harsh language and aggressive behavior as masculinity presenting itself in the workplace. Masculine acts of drinking and sports become relevant elements of office culture, especially within startups (Wynn & Correll, 2018). This reflects the inherent, and often exclusive, informalism of masculinities, whereby "humour, sport, cars, sex, women, and drinking," are used as a means to maintain an "in-group" amongst certain men (Collinson & Hearn 1994:14).

Masculine traits can be viewed as instrumental—like when one is willing to take risks and able to be decisive in crucial moments (Worley 2021). Moreover, tasks that involve fixing

things are often perceived exclusively as masculine (Bloksgaard 2011). Masculinity works more collectively, by linking individuals, not personally together, but by way of groups and organizations (Worley 2021). Thus, those enacting masculinity are more likely to be focused on the organization as an entity, and not so much on the relationships they hold within it (Worley 2021). Women face challenges with being perceived as authoritative figures in traditional masculine roles but also stand to reap social advantages. Bloksgaard (2011) found that a woman electrician struggled with having the men she works with follow her orders. However, two women police officers cited evading certain violent situations, because oftentimes men would not be as outwardly violent towards them (Bloksgaard 2011).

One of the most harmful manifestations of gender is hegemonic masculinity, or the most revered and powerful enactment of masculinity, which upholds the ideal man as being "rich, White, heterosexual, tall, athletic, professionally successful, confident, courageous, and stoic," (Berdahl 2018:426). In organizations, hegemonic masculinity affords men who are able to fit the aforementioned description with higher status and influence (Berdahl 2018).

When given free rein, hegemonic masculinity can negatively impact a workplace and its employees. One instance of this is the Challenger space shuttle explosion which was, in part, caused by masculinity contests in the workplace culture of NASA (Martin 2006). Transcripts from the meeting prior to the failed launch paint a scene of men butting heads. Engineers voiced concerns about the seals in the joints of the rocket, but were effectively brushed off by their managers, who were feeling pressure to launch after already having the project delayed several days (Maier & Messerschmidt 1998). One manager stated, "Go away and don't bother us with the facts," but those facts wound up costing seven people their lives (Maier & Messerschmidt 1998:329). This brand of masculinity, which is embedded within the culture of the startup tech

industry at-large, is what keeps women from advancing in their careers and starting their own ventures (Marlow & McAdam, 2012). Women cannot simply take on masculine traits to further themselves because their actions will often only lead to unfair evaluations by their peers and supervisors (Bozani 2020).

Femininities at Work

Femininity is distinctly tied to gender, as a socially constructed idea of what are resoundingly believed to be "female" modes of expression (dress, behavior, attitudes, etc.) (Mills 1992). As men participate in roles perceived socially as feminine, they face backlash for taking on tasks that are seen as low status (Alvesson 1998). For example, as care providers in healthcare, many men are asked why they would voluntarily take on 'women's' work (Bloksgaard 2011). Further, as noted by Sargent et al. (2021), the norm of a masculinized "male" worker has proven harmful for those that do not fit traditional gender beliefs. Take for instance the case of men who request family leave. Not only were these men found to be perceived as feminine, and thus weak, but they were also more likely to be demoted or subject to downsizing in the future (Rudman & Mescher 2013).

Femininity is shaped by an image of care and being able to help others (Bloksgaard 2011). For example, showing concern and kindness are both perceived as feminine traits (Worley 2021). Many choose to view these elements as signs of weakness (Gao 2020). Thus, femininity is not valued in the workplace because, in conjunction with entrepreneurship, society conceptualizes the ideal worker as masculine, strong, and male (Acker 1990). Feminine work, which typically prioritizes softer skills, such as communication, has also often been characterized as being low-wage and dead-end (Acker 1992).

The exploration of femininity at work appears to illuminate a different experience for workers. Feminine characteristics such as being friendly and cooperative are a departure from more masculine traits like ambition and competitiveness and ultimately make for different work environments (Gao 2021). Relationally, femininity prioritizes and cultivates close, personal relationships that in turn form the linkages between individuals (Worley 2021). Socially, this presents itself as a propensity to take part in unselfish acts and being more friendly with those you work with (Worley 2021). When women are interacting with other women, Moskowitz, Suh, and Desaulniers (1994) found that the prevalence of this brand of femininity is increased.

Mavin and Grandy (2016) based their work around the discursive and relational process of respectable business femininity, wherein discipline is applied to one's body and appearance. Feminine expression is stereotypically defined by things like having longer hair, wearing make-up, and jewelry (Bloksgaard 2011). Appearing respectable and treating others respectfully shapes this process. This is a clear departure from the raucous nature of masculine behavior observed by Pöllänen (2021).

Feminine tasks are often more socially oriented. There is also often the incorporation of what is described as traditional housewifery within these tasks, like dusting and vacuuming (Bloksgaard 2011). In the context of my study, it was revealing to see who exactly ended up doing what in the organization. Further, Alvesson (1998) defines a feminine organization as one in which feminine ethics and characteristics, such as emotionally governed work, minimal focus on careerism, flatter organizational structure, and close working relationships, are present. The absence of all of these aforementioned markers of femininities will signal that this organization is not feminine.

Femininities are allegedly problematic as well. The study of relationships between women has explored catfights and "bitchy" behavior (Carr & Kelan 2016:3). This area of research has been of growing interest and birthed the "queen bee phenomenon," wherein successful women are believed to negatively impact the advancement of the women that they supervise (Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat 2018). The presence of such experiences would go against the oft accepted perception of women as agents of change in the face of organizational inequalities (Stainback, Kleiner, and Skaggs 2016). Howbeit, there is growing evidence to suggest that the queen bee phenomenon might be a myth (Arvate et al. 2018) or at least that such processes are actually caused by the emulation of masculinities in the workplace (Faniko, Ellemers, and Derks 2021).

Contrastingly, the literature has also evolved to conceptualize mobilizing femininities (Carr & Kelan 2016). In effect, the interpersonal relationships between women are proving to be sites of change (Gao 2021). Within this line of thinking, femininity does not belong to one specific portrayal of the feminine, and femininities can be utilized to liberate humanity from the systems of oppression that confine us all (Hoskin & Blair 2022). For instance, Whiley (2021) discusses how femininity, by way of emotionality, humility, and empathy, could drastically change today's current, toxically masculine peer review process in academia into a fair and compassionate experience for women and historically excluded groups. In my own investigation, I wondered if systems of oppression would be undone in this workplace as well. Literature on feminist organizing, which I discuss in the next section, helped contextualize what I found in my observations.

Feminist Organizing

To better understand femme-dominant spaces, I drew from the literature of feminist organizing. Feminist organizing, defined by Ewig and Ferree (2013) as efforts made by women to explicitly challenge their subordination to men, has been around since the nineteenth century. Feminist organizing has not received much attention in organizational sciences. Yet, concepts like consciousness-raising, promotion of community, and democratic participation of organizational members, also known as feminist management practices (Martin 1993), appear to echo theorized principles of social entrepreneurship. A review of feminist theory and feminist organizational practices done by Calàs and Smircich (1994) provides a point of comparison for work done in a femme-dominant social venture and theoretical practices that they may or may not be aligned with.

Koen (1984) defines a feminist workplace as having flexible job designs, equitable income distribution, interpersonal and political accountability, and rotation of leadership. With a flatter, more equitable organizational structure, power takes on a different meaning. Power is shared, work begins to be conceptualized as a service to others, and a culture of care is fostered by the community (Rothschild 1992). It also stands to reason that in such environments, relationships become less opportunistic.

This might be because employee growth is another key embedded part of Rothschild's (1992) feminine model of organization, and it mirrors social entrepreneurship's focus on employee needs. Feminist organizations were also found by Iannello (2013) to prioritize ability or background over one's rank relative to others. Consequently, these are organizations that see members as individuals with their own unique contributions (Rothschild 1992). This affects

decision-making within feminist organizations, where critical decisions are consensually agreed upon by the group, while routine decisions are reserved for individuals.

The literature on feminist organizing provides an understanding of what organizations experience in the absence of men. Storytelling and vulnerability might be means for women to foster solidarity in these spaces (Weatherall 2020). Solidarity also serves as a response to the inequality that potentially might take place in spaces where men are not present and differences between women are more salient. It is worth noting, however, that Weatherall's (2020) work was an ethnographic study of an organization composed of indigenous women, which is not the case in my study.

Like any organization, feminist organizations strive to be perceived as legitimate through formalization and formal structures (Ashcraft 2001). Counterintuitively, such practices eat away at the hallmarks (e.g., democracy, egalitarianism) of being a feminist space creating a gap between the literature and what actually occurs. Ashcraft (2001) asserts that in spite of the challenge of bridging the theoretical-practice gap, feminist organizations should still work to "confront dominant gendered meanings and organizational patterns," (84). These efforts take shape within the organization's culture, which is where gendered processes and inequality are created and maintained.

Startups & Work Culture

Organizational culture, as defined by Schein (2010) refers to shared basic assumptions learned by members within an organization. The culture of an organization is deeply tied to the founder of the organization and their beliefs and values (Pöllänen 2021). This is because early value creation goals set by the founder eventually become the reality of the company's work culture (Hechavarría et al. 2017). I centered the new economy and tech startups' typically exclusionary

practices, firm flexibility, women entrepreneurs' inclusive strategies, and the underexplored cultural realities of social enterprises in order to discuss startups and work culture within my proposed context. I answered Pöllänen's (2021) call for further examination of instances where women hold higher positions in startups. This is because in the tech startup space especially, there is a growing need to explore the experiences of women-founded ventures. It appears women-led organizations might be better positioned to create positive, healthier work cultures.

Startup Culture and the New Economy as Exclusionary

The new economy is defined by companies that leverage social platforms, flexible working hours, and the ability to work remotely as a means to attract employees (Thompson, Payne, and Taylor 2015). These mechanisms also help shape workplace inequalities (Acker 2006). Though their work looked specifically at coworking spaces, Sargent, Yavorsky, and Sandoval's (2021) investigation of inequality regimes in the new economy provides an important context for work done outside of traditional office spaces. They found that organizational logic, or the practices and policies of a company, could either disrupt or amplify inequalities. I similarly aimed to look at how inequality regimes are either strengthened or weakened in a space where no men are present, but differences in nationality, motherhood status, and other identities are salient.

Acker (1990) stated that organizational logic helps to shape an organization's work culture. There is mounting evidence to suggest that the work culture of startups differs from traditional organizations. These spaces are often more relaxed and low in hierarchy (Pöllänen 2021). Many of today's startups model themselves to be youthful, family-free open-office spaces that cater to young men and their interests, often including beer fridges, gaming consoles, and foosball tables (Wynn & Correll 2018).

Culture creates an environment for a workplace and ultimately determines who is included and who is potentially ostracized (Sanderson 2017). In most tech startups, culture often poses a challenge for underrepresented groups (Klein & Díaz-Hernández 2014). For example, with the adoption of gender-neutral recruitment policies and the promotion of transactional networking, many companies in the technology sector have replicated gender inequality, instead of eradicating it (Ozkazanc-Pan & Clark Muntean 2018). Similarly, Klein and Díaz-Hernández (2014) discuss how in tech firms, "culture fit," or one's ability to assimilate is often mobilized as a means to bias against those that are not white and male. Homosocial reproduction, or "the selection of incumbents on the basis of social similarity," is the mechanism by which these biases are reproduced (Fawcett & Pringle 2000:256). Thus, these spaces are often more alienating for women and tend to exclude older workers (Pöllänen 2021).

Women Entrepreneurs & Work Culture

Entrepreneurship itself might be a path to reducing experienced and lived gender inequality (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020). The literature already speaks to women in leadership positions setting work policies that promote equality (Stainback et al. 2016). In a study done in Europe, Nordenmark, Vinberg, and Strandh (2012) found self-employed women experienced a significantly higher level of both work-life balance and well-being when compared to employed women. These effects might be trickling down to the employees working within these women-led entrepreneurship ventures as well. The Harris Poll study by Berlin Cameron (2018) found that half of Americans would prefer to work for a woman-led company, given cultural norms (e.g. collaboration, compassion, and the free reign to be one's complete self in the workplace) often held by these organizations. In leadership positions, where both men and women work, it has been found that women are not exempt from participating in homosocial

reproduction, but when they do, there is evidence to suggest that it actually has the effect of reducing gender inequality (Stainback et al. 2016).

Though women entrepreneurs and the work cultures of their firms have been theorized, very little has been examined when it comes to social enterprises. Much of what we know in the literature today also still assumes men will be present in the work being done. It would appear that social entrepreneurial ventures, given their prioritization of human capital and the empowerment of others (Brush & Cooper 2012), might not struggle as much as other startups when it comes to issues surrounding work culture. Brush and Cooper (2012) also found that human capital had a greater impact on women and their likelihood of starting their own business when compared to men. This is further evidenced by Robinson (2001) who, in an exploration of rural women entrepreneurs and their management styles, uncovered that as leaders, women worked to create a culture that minimized interpersonal conflict among employees and placed importance in trying to sympathize with each employee's needs.

How does being a woman-led technologically-focused social enterprise influence organizational work culture and subsequent work-life balance? Despite recognizing the relevance of feminine characteristics in the assessments of social entrepreneurship creation, little has been done to explore whether, and how, the absence of masculinity contests, might shape day-to-day work and work-life balance for those working within a femme-dominant startup work environment. To date, we do not know much about the experiences of these workers, let alone those within a femme-dominant tech-centered social enterprise.

Social Entrepreneurship: A Different Approach to Entrepreneurship

There is a paucity of research about the role women play as entrepreneurs themselves in tech, especially when their product is socially and technologically driven (Pöllänen 2021). Though

women's entrepreneurial activities have increased over the years, they are still about half as likely to start a venture when compared to men (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020). This is likely due to men historically being viewed as the ideal entrepreneur and masculine (Eckel & Grossman 2002). Discussing the history of entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon and the linkage between women and social entrepreneurship highlights how more women today are disproving this and creating their own social ventures that are often influenced by femininity (Rosca et al. 2020). According to Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon (2020), this connection between gender and social entrepreneurship is still nascent and under-researched.

History of Gendered Entrepreneurship

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor defines entrepreneurship as the creation of a new venture by an individual, a team of founders, or an existing business (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020). Woman-owned businesses, aside from being "one of the fastest-growing entrepreneurial populations in the world," continue to bring about change in the markets they operate within (Brush & Cooper 2012:1). This is in spite of entrepreneurship long being regarded as a "male field" (Wilson, Kickul, and Marlino 2007). Early entrepreneurship literature supports this perception, wherein masculine traits like risk-taking, courage, and persistence have long been associated as crucial characteristics of the entrepreneur; with language originally defaulting automatically to masculine pronouns (Pettigrew 1979).

The push to move beyond the "heroic self-made man" as the face of entrepreneurship has been complicated (Barber & Odean 2001). There are inherent difficulties many women face when pursuing a career in entrepreneurship. 'Socialization' dictates that women be mothers and only take on small, meaningless jobs (Heilbrunn 2004; Marlow & Patton 2005). Favor has been given to men that fit the idealized image of a male entrepreneur, and because of this women have

been historically placed at a disadvantage (Eckel & Grossman 2002). This relates more broadly to the gendered division of home and work. This ideology posits that the ideal worker is male and someone who does not have to take care of children or do chores, because it is assumed they have a wife to take care of the unpaid labor associated with housework (Davies & Frink 2014).

Though they face difficulties, it has been found that more and more women are disproving and moving beyond this socialization (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020). They tend to set up their businesses in male-dominated sectors like technology, where they are more apt to receive funding (Constantinidis, Cornet, and Asandei 2006). Even with this growing number of women entrepreneurs in the technology sector, they still face significant challenges when it comes to accessing networks, finding mentors, and receiving funding (Ozkazanc-Pan & Clark Muntean 2018).

In their exploration of differences between men and women entrepreneurs, social scientists have often only roughly scratched the surface, failing to assess deeper nuances. Cromie (1987) found most women tend to pursue entrepreneurship because they have the need for a means to accommodate both their work and child-rearing roles. Most men, on the other hand, were reported to be "more strongly motivated by making money" and simply had "more experience of business founding than women" (Cromie 1987:259).

Though family responsibilities are still a relevant predictor of why many women entrepreneurs pursue their ventures, family responsibilities have also been a significant barrier. The rise of digitalization and technology has helped many women devote more time to their work (Punkari & Lange 2021). Recent literature has also found other substantive motivational factors for women entrepreneurs. Jafari-Sadeghi (2020) found that many women are motivated by their own aspirations of self-development; while some women are seeking out supplemental

income for their household. Others, as evidenced by European women entrepreneurs during the economic crisis that took place between 2009 and 2012, were likely "pushed" into entrepreneurship due to narrow job market demand, and hiring discrimination (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020).

Women & Social Ventures

Regardless of what path leads them to entrepreneurship, many women entrepreneurs have chosen to carve out their own spaces and think beyond the bottom line. Brush and Cooper (2012) found that women were more likely to be motivated by more than just financial success when they considered the growth expectations of their venture. Many women entrepreneurs, given their propensity to care for others, are more likely to start social entrepreneurship ventures (Hechavarría et al. 2017). This route into entrepreneurship is often tied to communality. It is argued that many women social entrepreneurs find the means to empower not only themselves but others as well (Prameshwara Anggahegari et al. 2019).

Practitioners, academics, and policymakers alike have expressed an increasing interest in the growth of social entrepreneurship and its ability to create social value (Dwiveldi & Weerawardena 2018). Though talk of social entrepreneurship likely dates back to the 1980s, it did not reach academic circles until the late 1990s. Definitions of social entrepreneurship, though varied, all aimed at highlighting the importance of an underlying mission or need being fulfilled by the work of the venture (Bacq & Janssen 2011).

Social entrepreneurs stand out by aligning themselves with the needs of a marginalized group and working to help not only them [the marginalized group] but society as a whole (Chandna 2022). This is because social entrepreneurs have grown adept at filling in the gaps left by the private sector and the state (Satar & Alarifi 2022). My research aimed to also address

whether the work being done in this organization aligned with other studies of social entrepreneurship ventures; as well as what potential departures there might have been thanks to their being a technology firm as well.

Gender and diversity scholars have already maintained that many women, given socialized femininities such as empathy, compassion, and emotion, are likely better positioned to start social entrepreneurship ventures (Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan 2016). It still remains to be seen how these socially gendered traits actually play out within the cultures of these social enterprises. Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon (2020) called for research to address how gender influences the creation of a social venture, and how those working within the venture might affect the organization's growth as it simultaneously balances its financial and social goals.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMING

Queer Theory

Queer theory found its way into the organizational sciences with Gibson-Graham (1996) and their discussion of "queer(y)ing" capitalist organizations. Gibson-Graham (1996) recognized that when we begin to question and investigate structures, like capitalism and heterosexuality, we run the risk of simply being performative and reifying their existence without the lens afforded by queer theory. This brand of reflexivity is central to queer theory, and ethnography as well (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004), and it helps uncover details that might have gone overlooked (Rumens, De Souza, and Brewis 2019).

As a queer researcher, this research is inherently queer. In choosing a theoretical framing for this study, I wanted an approach that would afford me the opportunity to further disrupt the status quo. Queer theory is uniquely positioned to do just that. Since its inception, queer theory has been characterized by its inability to be plainly labeled (Jagose 1996). This has a great deal

to do with its naming. Queer, a term that began as slang for homosexuality, and a slur for homophobic abuse, has grown to mean much more. Not only is queer a unifying term for those existing on the margins of society, but in organizational literature, it has been co-opted for other purposes. Sullivan (2003) best makes use of queer as a verb, in order to queer things like pop culture, gender, and race. Following this approach, I will use queer theory as a means of pushing back against norms and defining non-normative perspectives (Rumens et al. 2019).

Many early queer theorists, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, did not refer to their work as "queer," but eventually found themselves unified by the intent behind their research and the need to rid themselves of binaries or dualities; hallmarks of hegemonic society (Sedgwick 2011). These theorists, such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Joan Scott, helped narrow the focus of queer theory, which often investigates questions related to gender and sexuality (Rumens et al. 2019). To label queer theory though, would be distinctly un-queer. Sedgwick (2011) stands firm that queer theory rests in resisting categorization. Meanwhile, some such as Butler (2004) harp on queer theory's intention of critiquing identity, not an identity in and of itself.

I am not the first to view entrepreneurship through the lens of queer theory. Most notably, Bruni et al. (2004), in their ethnographic study of entrepreneurs in Italy, appear to position queer theory as integral for the investigation of gender and entrepreneurship, given the need to question patriarchal society at its root. Queer theory allowed the aforementioned authors to define entrepreneurship beyond the prevailing masculine narrative. They found specific strategies employed by the women entrepreneurs in the study, like performing remedial work to restore the cultural order and maintaining boundaries between their public and private lives (Bruni et al. 2004).

In recognizing the empirical potential of queer theory, new efforts have made a push to focus on utilizing queer theory in management and organizational studies (Rumens et al. 2019). Though barriers to publication have often been an issue, the organizational literature focused on historically excluded identities, especially those identifying under the umbrella of LGBTQ+, has increased in recent years (Ng & Rumens 2017). Today, researchers are still devoting their efforts to the ever-evolving experience of what it means to be queer in the workplace, and queer theory provides a natural means to do so. Two concepts often left unexamined by queer theory, especially within the context of work, are heteronormativity and heterosexuality. It is argued by Beasley (2015), that some applications of queer theory have misguidedly framed heterosexuality as normal, instead of queering it and looking at its potential non-normative elements. I extend this work by simultaneously queering entrepreneurship in a space where predominantly heterosexual, white women work, as well as queering what it means to be a tech startup when your mission is socially driven.

Gendered Theory of Organizations

Figure 1 below illustrates how Bates (2022) conceptualized the interconnectedness of Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations. The final overarching process, organizational logic, operates throughout the remaining processes. Gendered organizational logic sets expectations for worker behavior, and it typically appears to be gender-neutral (Britton 1997). However, the experiences of men are what actually shape said expectations. The image of an "ideal worker" becomes a man, someone assumed to be "unencumbered" outside of his work, and given precedence over women (Acker 2012:218).

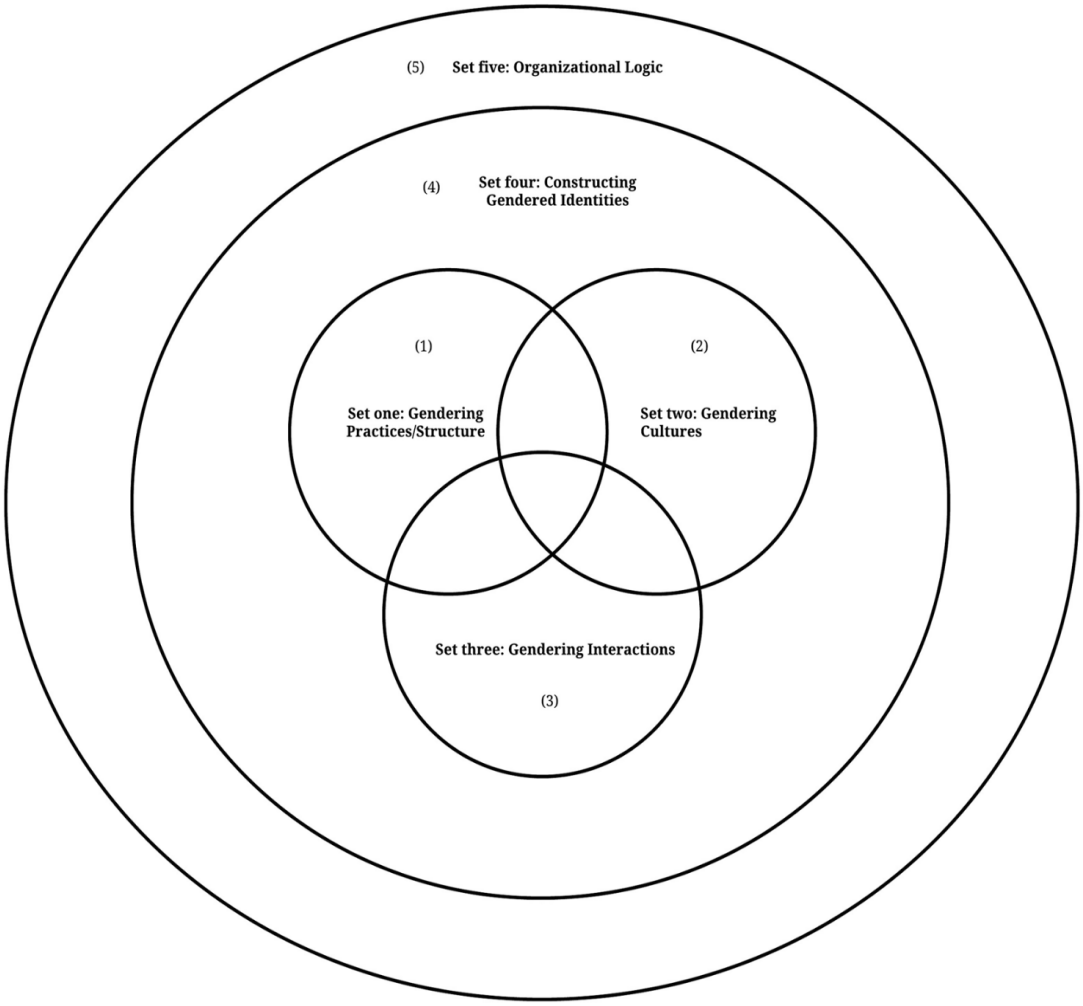

Figure 1. "Relational Model of Acker's Five Gendering Processes" (Bates 2022:1044)

The first gendering process is gendering practices and structures. Bates' (2022) model of an abductive approach to testing Acker's theory of gendered organizations (see Figure 2) below introduces the three components which constitute the gendered nature of an organization's gendered practices and structures: division of labor, division of power, division of locations in physical space, and allowed behavior. Acker (2012) named the sex segregation of jobs as one of the most common gender inequalities. In traditional organizations, this division of labor assigns women to roles in lower-status positions (Mickey 2019).

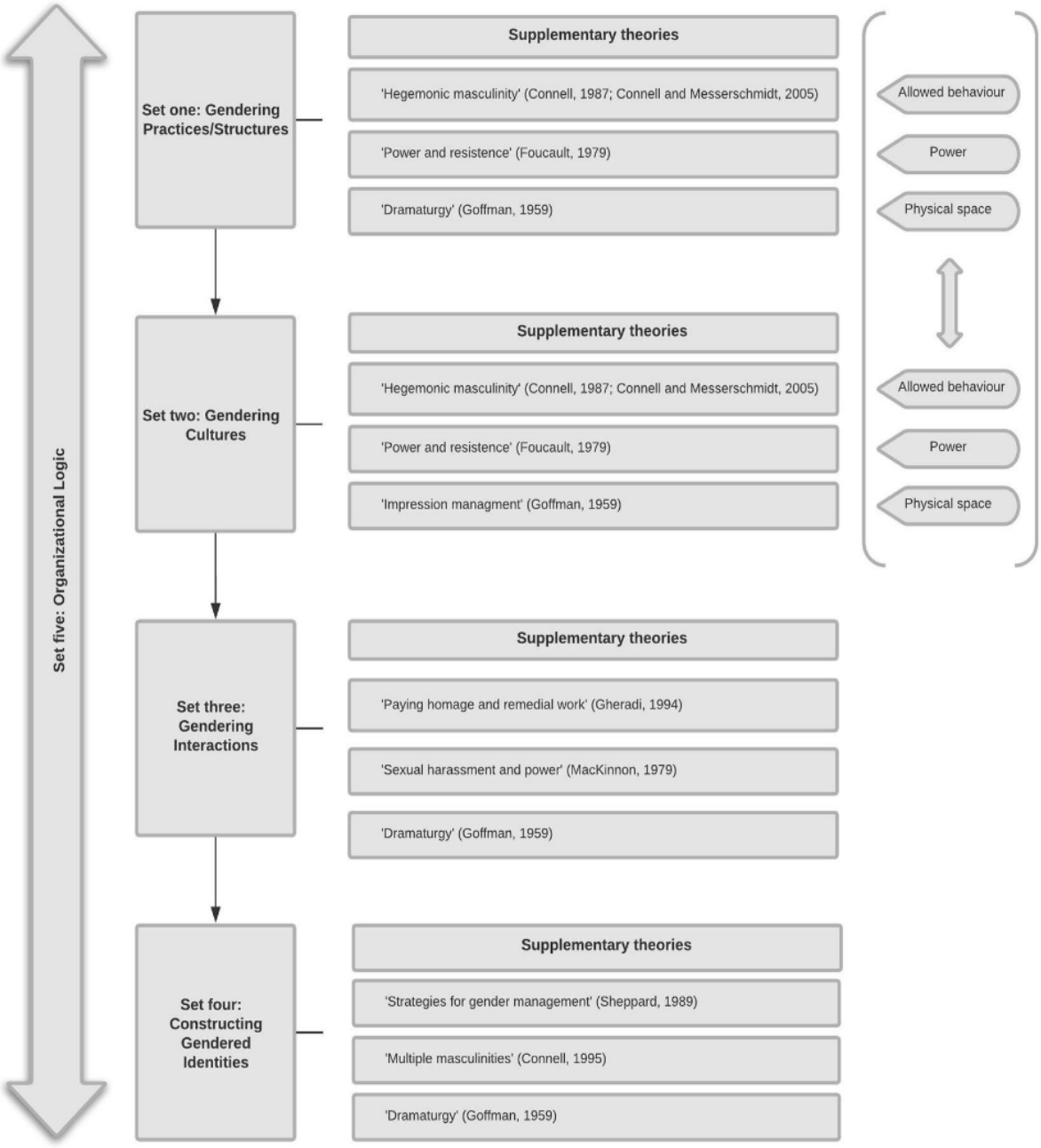

Figure 2. "An Abductive Approach to Working with Acker" (Bates 2022:1060)

The second process refers to gendering cultures. Acker (1990) defined this set as "the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose" the practices and structures of the organization (146). Culture often constitutes the images, both real and idealized that are centered by the organization. I agree with Bates (2022) that cultural

constructions of the family unit are rarely explored in relation to gendered organizations. Previous studies have made sense of this process by considering the performance of gender through Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective.

Next, gendering interactions are the construction and deconstruction of the organization's gender hierarchy. Martin (2006) has reflexively examined how we say and do gender at work. Gendered interactions are often only conceptualized as occurring being men and women, and rarely are gender-diverse perspectives considered. My study examines gendered interactions from this very specific perspective.

Finally, the fourth process is defined as gendering identities. Acker (1990) states that gendered identities are "internal gender constructions that help to produce gendered components of individual identity," (147). As individuals, we create our own understandings of gender, and organizations are a stage in which we perform gender. Your choice of clothing, the kind of work you do, and the language you use all shape your gendered identity (Martin 2006).

CHAPTER 4: DATA & METHODS

The German Context

It is important to contextualize what it means to be a startup in Germany. Though the European tech industry is continuing to grow, still only 25% of startup founders identify as being a woman (Atomico 2021). In Europe, Berlin is considered to be one of the best cities for entrepreneurship (Fajga & Kratzer 2019). The city's entrepreneurial scene is bustling, as there are currently more than 4,500 startups in Berlin's startup ecosystem (Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises 2022).

Europe and the United States were found to be the most similar in a study looking at gender differences across an exploration of 26 different cultures (Costa, Terracciano, and McCrae 2001). This sets the stage for my study to further illuminate potential areas of overlap as well as critical points of departure within our own two cultures. Western, individualistic countries were found to report the most significant evidence of difference across gender, even in spite of being perceived as more progressive (Costa et al. 2001). This demonstrates that gender is clearly a relevant and novel topic worthy of exploring in Western contexts.

There are important differences to note between the United States and Germany in regard to social entrepreneurship, and this distinction stems from their different expressions of capitalism. The American model places importance on short-term financial and individual success (Bacq & Janssen 2011). Invariably, this bleeds into American organizations and the way their employees orient themselves. While in Western Europe, the Rhineland model focuses on long-term, collective success, where employees often take on co-management roles within ventures (Bacq & Janssen 2011).

Capitalism has also played a hand in Germany's rich history of feminist organizing. After World War II, West Germany became known for its feminist organizations that were built around projects run by and for women only (Ferree 2012). This was in response to capitalist influences that only prioritized the concerns of unions, corporations, and the government, while bolstering the importance of the family unit, but noticeably without considering the voices of women (Ferre 2012: 92).

Setting: More Than A Jewel

More Than A Jewel (MTAJ), a wearable technology startup founded and led by women in Berlin, Germany, was the setting of my study. MTAJ's unique position as a social venture in the technology industry made for an interesting case study of how gender impacts work culture and vice versa in a femme-dominant space that operates in a broader masculine-dominant ecosystem. Startups like More Than A Jewel occupy the unique space of being both a social venture and a tech startup, where they compete with masculine-dominant firms for funding and assumedly prioritize the aforementioned communal characteristics within their product and work culture (e.g. altruism, sensitivity, empathy, etc.) (Smith 2013).

Women entrepreneurs are becoming more likely to start companies in male-dominated sectors like technology, where they are more apt to receive funding (Constantinidis et al. 2006). Notably, this appears to be the case in the organization I studied. Though previous research has investigated the embedded masculinities of a masculine-dominant tech startup (Pöllänen 2021), to my knowledge the current literature has not assessed a femme-dominant tech startup's culture.

Confidentiality & Privacy

Pseudonyms were used for participants and the organization. The product is mentioned as a wearable technology aimed at solving gendered violence. Though organizational access had

already been granted, each employee was still required to sign an individual informed consent form. Participants of the photo-elicitation guided interview were asked to sign a photo release form as well. Photos involving any identifiable information (faces, tattoos, logos, or depictions of the company's product) were discarded, though descriptions of the photos were recorded. All of the data collected remains confidential.

Data Collection

UNC Charlotte's IRB review board approved my study before I began collecting data. This study took place over the course of June and July of 2022. The study was completed entirely in English. I was granted access to the organization, More Than A Jewel (MTAJ), and its employees through one of the founders, Louisa. I was the sole researcher, conducting an ethnographic observation of the organization within their office. My role as a researcher was known by others. I took on the role of an unpaid employee by supporting the organization's marketing and public relations efforts. Upon first arriving in Berlin, I set aside time to interview each member of the team, which at the time was seven workers. Before leaving the field, I asked each member to participate in a photo-elicitation guided interview.

Participants

The workers at MTAJ all identified themselves as white, hailing from different parts of Europe and the United States. They ranged in age from 20 to 35. All the workers were college educated. Only one worker was working part-time, everyone else was full-time. Workers were informed that their employment was not contingent on their participation in the study. After signing their consent form, participants chose their own pseudonyms.

I was also a participant-observer at MTAJ. Tracy (2019) defines participant-observers as researchers that enter a scene explicitly as a researcher, with a set agenda of which they intend to

gather in the scene. I spent around 20 hours a week working as a participant-observer within the organization for six weeks. My experiences, as a Black queer individual, working within the organization, and interacting with its employees and culture shaped the data I collected.

Ethnography

I followed in the tradition of previous ethnographers who have looked specifically at gender in organizations (Alvesson 1998; Pöllänen 2021). With distinct ties to anthropology and sociology, ethnography has been around for more than one hundred years (Gobo & Marciniak 2011). Ethnography, as a qualitative method of conducting research, is very much queer. The level of involvement and participation calls for the researcher to 'other' and question themselves in spaces they grow to be active participants in (Dahl 2011). My observations included me taking detailed notes of informal office desk conversation interactions, my own experiences as someone delegated work, smaller dyad and triad meetings, and formal organization-wide meetings.

Within organizational settings, ethnography has proven to be extremely beneficial as a means of truly understanding topics like organizational culture and change (Neyland 2016). Dahl (2011) argues that "femme-inist ethnography…a way to write femme differently, but also perhaps the meaning of femininity within and beyond queer communities," (p. 3). In this tradition, as someone who often identifies and is perceived as femme, I aim to utilize a femme-inist ethnography as a means to further our understanding of potential embedded femininities in tech startups.

As an ethnographer, my aim was to be open to surprises and to look for contradictions; to let the deviations from my expectations be points of further investigation (Alvesson 1998). The startup that I studied was a remarkable example given the centrality of things like clothing, garments, and accessories to the feminine aesthetic (Dahl 2011). In giving visibility to this rare

femme-dominant organization, in a hypermasculine field such as tech startups, I aimed to give voice to these women and the work they took part in.

Interviews

I conducted interviews during my first week within the organization. These took place with 7 employees and ranged in duration from 30 minutes to 60 minutes during the work day. MTAJ's office space included multiple meeting rooms, which allowed for privacy. In this interview, I aimed to learn more about the organization, and build camaraderie amongst my new work colleagues. I used a semi-structured interview guide which I developed as a product of my review of the literature as well as the work of other ethnographers that have included interviews within their research designs (Chan & Anteby 2016). Questions covered topics such as what a typical workday looks like, defining work culture, and the roles that employees carry out in the organization.I provide an example of my proposed questions below in the Appendix. I did not aim to specifically probe for social entrepreneurship or gender within these questions. These questions are positioned to allow for an initial understanding of work culture within this organization, as well as a baseline for what tasks are done by whom. As I conducted my ethnographic observations, returning to the transcripts of these interviews served as a point of contrast and comparison; potentially illustrating what was or was not said and done.

Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation is a visual qualitative research method in which participants' own photos guide the interview discussion (Harper 2002). Photo-elicitation aims to address the shortcomings of traditional research by giving participants the ability to frame the interview based on an assigned prompt. Including photo-elicited interviews allowed me to ensure that the experiences of these workers was appropriately and accurately told.

In week four of my time in the organization, I asked participants to partake in their own photo-elicited interview. These interviews were also considered the second round of interviews. Following the work of other studies that have used visual methods (Andrada-Poa, Jabal, and Cleofas 2021), participants used their own phone cameras to take five photos, with the stipulation that no identifiers (faces, logos, or depictions of the company's product) must be included in the photos. These photos, taken before the second interview, should answer the question: "What does my work mean to me?" Such an open question allows for a richer exploration of what social entrepreneurship and the company's work culture meant to those within the organization. Participants were asked to pick the order in which their photos were discussed. This interview lasted for 60-90 minutes.

Analyses

Fieldnotes from my ethnographic observations were the primary focus of my analyses. I triangulated them with the data collected in the initial individual and photo-elicited interviews. I relied on an embedded design (i.e., multiple levels of analysis) for the analyses of this study (Davis 2016). This approach is imperative, given the understanding that gendered processes are present on multiple organizational levels (Acker 1990). This allowed for analyses to be done at the individual level, where I could examine each employee's unique construction of their workplace gender identity. I also conducted a content analysis comparing the photos participants selected and how they described them. I used my own ethnographic observations to compare these findings to my own perspectives of the organization.

I analyzed data at the organizational level. This allowed for examination of how the organization positions itself within the tech industry and what influence, if any, interactions with those outside the organization (particularly with men) have on the culture of the firm. Analyses

also occurred at the relational level (among groups and dyads), which helped with assessing interactions and potential instances of tension and inequality (Sargent, Yavorsky, and Sandoval 2021).

I utilized constructivist grounded theory methods (GTM) to guide my analysis. GTM is traditionally inductive in nature and aims to construct a new framework for understanding phenomena (Khan 2014). Charmaz (2017) put forth constructivist GTM as a means to integrate critical inquiry into the research process. This allowed me to pragmatically assess Acker's Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations, which few studies have actually thoroughly tested. Following the work of Bates (2021), I applied an abductive approach to analyze the field notes from my ethnographic observation, preliminary interviews, and last round of photo-elicited interviews to examine if and how this organization was gendered. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) reasoned that grounded theory and abductive reasoning can be complementary through "a process of revisiting, defamiliarizing, and alternative casing in light of theoretical knowledge," (180).

Data was analyzed through the coding of major categories. The field notes, resulting from the scratch notes taken during my ethnographic observation, were read over using open coding to capture initial themes. Transcripts from the interviews, that I transcribed myself, were read over as well to establish themes to identify any departures from the findings in my observations. Next, in axial coding, I worked at combining and narrowing down the codes derived from my open coding and creating a codebook. After going back through the data and looking over the more focused coding, I returned to my research questions and Acker's (1990) theory. I looked for any instances that either fit within the theory, or did not, and reported such cases.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Fieldnotes from my ethnographic observation, transcripts from preliminary interviews, and a photo-elicited interviews provided evidence of Acker's (1990) five gendered organizational processes: organizational logic, gendered practices/structures, gendered cultures, gendered interactions, and gendered identities at MTAJ. I found that while these organizational processes were gendered, in this women-led social tech startup, they occurred non-normatively. I argue that these processes were fundamentally queered due to MTAJ's organizational logic–the "logical systems" that serve to legitimize an organization–that workers should exercise their duty by doing communal work tasks in order to reap the benefits of being empowered (Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012:550). I argue that MTAJ's organizational logic queered its other gendered processes (practices/structure, culture, interactions, and identity), all of which challenged normative conceptualizations of a gendered organization. The founders at MTAJ untraditionally maintained control of the technological development of their product, the organization's cultural images centered on empowered women, men at MTAJ were nudged to perform care work in their workplace interactions, and workers' gendered work identities expanded beyond the heteronormative binary.[1]

[1] This section includes participants' photos. These are not all of the photos that were collected (see Appendix). These photos were taken in response to the following prompt: "what does your work mean to you?" Each photo taken was discussed in the photo-elicited interviews, as they helped to shape the conversation. I incorporate the following photos throughout my analysis as a means to triangulate my findings.

Gendered Organizational Logic

The founders of MTAJ established an organizing principle that disrupted this traditional ideal worker norm. While their organizational logic made this organization gendered, it did so untraditionally. The founders, Judi and Louisa, created an ideal worker norm that centered themselves, as women, with lives outside of their work. They aimed to ensure that their workers reaped the same benefits they did from their own work, which was organized around two iterative principles: *doing work communally* in order to *be empowered.*

Founding Values

The founders, Louisa and Judi, both valued creating a workplace where they could meet the needs of the organization (communal) and their own needs (agentic). Their values centered on their own experiences as women with previous knowledge of how exclusive, male-dominated spaces were and the importance of also prioritizing one's life and family outside of work. "Doing" work at MTAJ involved utilizing communal traits (e.g., communication, compassion, sensitivity) to be empowered by more agentic traits (e.g., agency, independence, determination).

This organizational logic played out first in the ways that Louisa and Judi, founded the organization. As a social enterprise, MTAJ appears to have prioritized communal traits. The importance of helping others led co-founder, Louisa, to establish this organization. Though referring specifically to their product, she stated, "I wanted to create something that helped people." Many women social entrepreneurs are motivated by their desire to provide for others (Garcia-Lomas & Gabaldon 2020).

In her photo-elicited interview, Louisa included a photo of green trees, with a blue sky, on a sunny day (see Figure 3 below) to describe what her work meant to her.

Figure 3.“Freedom” (Louisa)

She went on to state the following:

> “[The picture] means freedom…I like to enjoy my time with my kids and my husband.” – Louisa

As a social entrepreneur, creating a product that helped others was a path to Louisa’s own empowerment as well. Louisa’s experience appears to be representative of the literature that posits that women entrepreneurs in Europe have a higher level of both work-life balance and well-being (Nordenmark et al. 2012). Her ability to balance the demands of her work and family was not only made possible by the flexibility often ascribed to women entrepreneurs. She also discussed how there were days she would work longer because she did not have her children in the afternoon. During my time at MTAJ, I also noted two instances where she would leave Berlin to attend technology conferences in other countries. She and Judi both also attended a couple of

networking events held during the evenings in Berlin (see Figure 4). Her husband's support with her children queered what it meant to be a mother running an entrepreneurial venture. Louisa's experience helped shape MTAJ's founding values, conceptualizing the ideal worker as someone who integrates work and life without making the sacrifices associated with traditional work.

Figure 4. "Women Networking Event" (Judi)

Helping as an organizing principle

Helping, a communal trait, appears to be integral to the firm's organizational logic. Workers conceptualized the work they were doing as "helping." They first viewed their work as serving the organization's mission, which was stated on their website as being focused on keywords related to empowerment, responsibility, and innovation. Their work was also a service to the organization itself. Daniel, a finance intern, disclosed what brought him to work for MTAJ:

> "I thought, 'the product is so genius this is so cool.' And the cause that it stands for as well is great. When a company is in this stage—they're clearly in an important stage—all the help they can get—they'll be really thankful for" – Daniel, finance intern

Daniel talks of MTAJ as an entity that could greatly benefit from his help. Workers centering communal traits in their work, such as helping, highlights how this organizational logic moves beyond the competitive, aggressive organizing principles first theorized by Acker (1990) in a traditionally gendered organization. A man centering behaving communally highlights how MTAJ has queered gender in its organizational logic.

Empowerment as an organizing principle

The founders demonstrated how organizational logic was not simply shaped by behaving communally through their own roles. These two principles together, doing work communally and being empowered, organized their work. Judi spoke specifically about her desire to create her own structures: "It's like more about being your own chief." Judi, a woman without children, highlights how women entrepreneurs venture into business not only out of a desire to meet the demands of their families (Jafari-Sadeghi 2020). Her motivation for founding this organization was influenced by her desire to finally have control over how her work was structured. Her previous experiences in hegemonically masculine spaces where "everyone looked the same," helped her create an organization where individuals were given agency. As an organizational logic, this likely informed the way that the founders approached managing their employees.

Louisa stated that what made working at her organization unique was her approach to managing her employees. Louisa did not monitor or micromanage when and how workers got their work done. In the following quote, she describes how she allowed workers to structure their own work:

> "I know he's doing his job and…it doesn't make a difference [to me] when he does it. The same with my employee who is working remotely. I know that she is working during the day." - Louisa

The founders' vision of work enabled flexibility for themselves, and shaped the work rules they gave their workers. These rules, or the lack thereof, allowed workers to feel comfortable taking control and structuring parts of their own work, so long as they were adequately helping others in the organization.

Workers' own accounts of their work highlighted that this was how people oriented themselves to working at MTAJ. Many workers first mentioned the flexibility their work provided them. After further questioning, they explained how they had to effectively communicate in order to have agency over their work schedule. Their flexibility was dependent on them being sensitive to the demands of the founders and the organization. Ivy, in finance, provided evidence for this logic. She explained her flexibility was contingent on her ability to complete work tasks and communicate with whoever assigned her work:

> "I have flexibility…as long as I'm doing [my job]–doing the work I get and talking with [Judi, co-founder] and making sure it's what she wants and what works best for the company." – Ivy

Ivy's words here show how MTAJ's organizational logic normalized workers meeting their own needs, but not without first meeting the needs of MTAJ. By serving the organization, or doing what "works best for the company," workers were then empowered to restructure their own work.

Collectively, these two principles of *doing* work tasks communally and *being* empowered helped to integrate a queered substructure into MTAJ's gendered processes. Prameshwara Anggahegari et al. (2019) reasoned that women social entrepreneurs are positioned to empower the women that work within their firms. My findings may demonstrate that empowerment can occur across the gender binary in these firms as well. I reason this was because the ideal worker

norm was no longer set by standards of who works the longest or sacrifices the most, as their organizational logic did not condone or promote competition. The ideal worker for MTAJ was not an unencumbered man, but of meeting their own needs and those of the organization they served. I expand on this finding in the forthcoming sections, as this logic does not work in isolation but serves as a means to integrate the remaining gendered processes (i.e. structure, culture, interactions, and identities) into my analysis of this queerly gendered organization (Dye & Mills 2012).

Gendering Practices & Structures

Similar to Bates (2022), I found evidence that MTAJ's organizational logic informed and was informed by its gendering practices and structures. In the following section, I argue that MTAJ's organizational logic helped to rationalize and queer the presence of the organization's practices and structures. I follow Acker's (2012) conceptualization of gendering practices and structures and discuss MTAJ's application in 4 distinct ways: division of labor, division of power, division of locations in physical space, and allowed behavior.

Division of Labor

Mickey (2019) stated that division of labor often dictates that women be assigned to lower-status positions. I argue however that this was not necessarily the case at MTAJ, though their division of labor did appear to be gendered normatively. The inherent hierarchical status granted to the founders, as leaders of the organization, and MTAJ's valuation of "women's work" led to its queered division of labor.

Two men, Alex and Toby, primarily performed the technical tasks at MTAJ. Their roles were not privileged, nor was there an increased likelihood of them emerging as leaders, given the established presence of the founders. This was not the case for Ridgeway (2001), who found that

status beliefs benefit men, granting them higher status and perceptions of competence. MTAJ's hierarchical structure did not follow this expected status order because of their organizational logic, which did not center on a male ideal worker.

I noted in the previous section how the managerial approach of Louisa and Judi granted their workers the ability to empower themselves, but only insofar as they were serving the organization. Serving the organization also meant serving the founders, as evidenced by Ivy "making sure" she's doing what Judi "wants" (refer to Organizational Logic: *Empowerment as an organizing principle*). This logic helped establish a hierarchy that privileged Lousia and Judi, and challenged normative valuations of unskilled labor. To demonstrate this I examined how their knowledge was utilized across the firm. Judi and Louisa brought years of experience with them to their roles at MTAJ. They utilized their skills, especially in the technical development of their product. Louisa, in particular, highlighted how her work integrated knowledge from her previous career in Public Relations (PR). In her photo-elicited interview, she decided to include an image of the tech core of their product (see Figure 5 below):

Figure 5."Technical Core" (Louisa)

> "[This is] it's the tech core of our product. And this means for me [that] this project is so much fun because I [am] able to add a completely different profession to what I'm doing…I was studying fashion design and [was] into communications and PR and now I'm working with a tech team and working on a tech product and talking to customers and getting to learn about the use cases and this is actually super exciting." - Louisa

Louisa's presence in the development of MTAJ's product shows how engaging in communal work (talking to customers) led to her empowerment (enjoying her work). The organizational logic of performing work communally in order to be empowered helped to ensure that "women's work" was not seen as unskilled (Acker 1990).

This was likely tied to the way that she oriented herself to her own work. She included a photo of an arts and crafts cart (see Figure 6) to show how her work is "DIY," or do-it-yourself. She went on to explain why she described her work this way:

> "[you] learn everything by yourself [and] you need to learn do stuff that you have never done before and just experiment."
>
> – Louisa

Figure 6."Work is DIY" (Louisa)

I focus specifically on Louisa here because she alludes to how it was important for her to understand the technical side of MTAJ's product, even despite her not having the technical background that Judi had. Learning new things allowed her to utilize her own knowledge in decision-making.

This division of labor did not lead to the same outcome that Mickey (2019) found in a high-tech organization where men's knowledge was prioritized. At MTAJ, men were not granted prestige because of their technical roles. The founders also prioritized low-skilled work, as it reinforced the firm's organizing logic of performing communal work tasks. The following section further illustrates why the presence of men in technical roles was non-normative and queered by MTAJ's division of power.

Division of Power

MTAJ's organizational logic helped to explain how power was divided. Power at MTAJ was queered by the fact that the founders, two women, aimed to empower their workers, but without essentializing the presence of men in an otherwise femme-dominant organization. Louisa and Judi distanced themselves from power by centering a communal orientation to work and leveraged their power (empowered themselves) by having the final say in decision-making.

Sharing power through communal work. In each photo-elicited interview, participants chose the first photo we would discuss. In Judi's interview, her first photo (see Figure 7) showed the team together at their Christmas party. It might have been a coincidence that Judi chose to first discuss her team, but she still went on to state the following:

Figure 7. "Team Holiday Party" (Judi)

> "That's why I work here…to have a team because…without the team working on the product…it wouldn't work." – Judi

This is only one example of the many times the founders praised the work of their team. Judi's acknowledgment of the importance of her team highlights MTAJ's communal orientation to work. This normalized work as something done together as a team. Judi and Louisa were dependent on their workers to complete the varying tasks of the organization. Their dependency on their workers required a task structure where hierarchy was of little importance, and individuals could feel like their efforts were valued and appreciated. This required relinquishing some of their [the founders'] power in the everyday practices of MTAJ.

Workers shared this understanding of what it meant to work at MTAJ. Communal work necessitated an untraditional distribution of power, in which workers could feel empowered to speak up. Ivy, in finance, alluded to this power structure in the following quote:

> "I think it definitely feels like more collaborative here, even though there are founders…I feel more able to ask questions easily and kind of talk and suggest ideas" – Ivy

In other words, even though Louisa and Judi were clearly the leaders of the organization, their power was not salient in the everyday practices or structure of MTAJ. Workers found power in their own work by collaborating and asking questions. With this communal approach to work, power was not solely felt by men or people that were similar to the leaders of the organization. On the marketing and finance side of MTAJ, power appears to have been shared across roles.

Empowerment by excluding men from decision-making. While communal work was distinctly tied to empowerment as MTAJ's organizational logic, divisions of power in its practices and structure still produced tension for certain workers. Both Toby and Alex, men

working on the technical side of the organization, were constrained by the power of Judi and Louisa. Toby, an embedded developer, noted, "When decisions are made about technical things I'm usually excluded," which describes the amount of authority he yielded in decision-making at MTAJ. This was surprising to hear. Toby's role was solely focused on the product. Here he described the day-to-day structure of his work:

> "It's more like we feel like colleagues…I know that they're my bosses, I know that they are superior to me but…I usually don't get so many commands from them." – Toby

The conflicting nature of Toby's experience, not having a say in major decision-making but controlling smaller decisions, highlights the queer power relations found at MTAJ. The organization's power dynamics ran counter to Acker's (1990) stance that "white men in women-dominated workplaces are likely to be positively evaluated and to be rapidly promoted to positions of greater authority" (143). Judi and Louisa asserted their power by prioritizing their own knowledge and authority when making decisions about their product's technological development.

My experience working with Louisa on the marketing side of MTAJ highlights how the aforementioned power dynamics evident in MTAJ's technology-related decisions were gendered. I did not experience the same constraints as Toby and Alex. The following fieldnotes excerpt describes how I felt that I had a great deal of control over what content I produced for MTAJ's social media:

> "I've been working on more content for social media, and enjoying the leeway I've been given to write about what interests me."
> – (fieldnotes, July 5, 2022)

I never felt excluded from the decisions being made about my work. This might have to do with the fact that I often used "we" when referring to my work, hinting at the communal nature of what I was engaged in: "We're putting the finishing touches on the newsletter, with the intentions of having it sent out tomorrow," (fieldnotes, June 14, 2022). Louisa and I collaborated throughout the process of creating the newsletter, though I still felt empowered to make decisions surrounding what got posted and written about. Contrast my statement with how Alex, an engineer, described his work:

> "...when I first started we had the first version for our device which *I developed…I had to produce* the documentation for our devices…*I need to assemble* more." (emphasis added) - Alex

I argue the work on the technical side of MTAJ was more independent in nature, bringing about tension with its organizational logic. For this reason, my experience likely differed from that of Toby and Alex. Judi was noticeably not included in any of my work on social media, nor did she have a say in what felt like *my* decision-making process.

MTAJ's division of power was queered. The organization was structured around sharing power through communal work. Daily practices empowered workers to collaborate and share responsibilities. MTAJ deferred from other women-dominated firms by way of its power dynamics, which ensured that men were not given preferential treatment. Judi and Louisa asserted their power in technology-related decision-making by constraining the input of Toby and Alex, the two men who worked on their product at the time.

Divisions of Physical Space

Divisions of labor and power at MTAJ were also predicated on its existing divisions in physical space. MTAJ queered the use of its physical space by not granting priority to the areas where

men primarily conducted their labor. Before examining why this was significant, I would first like to generally discuss MTAJ's physical space.

Physical space in tech startups typically caters to young men (Pöllänen 2021). On my first day in the office, I noticed some of the following elements were present in the coworking space that MTAJ shared with a couple of other startups:

> "Very typical startup space: Open office space, bright foosball table, ping pong, complimentary coffee and tea, and plenty of smaller rooms for meetings" (fieldnotes, June 6, 2022)

The space was more open, allowing non-hierarchical access to leaders, which helped with MTAJ's organizing logic of doing work communally. Certain amenities however, like the foosball and ping pong tables communicated what Pöllänen (2021) defined as the masculine nature of the typical tech startup environment (e.g., pool tables, ping pong, beer fridges). The inclusion of these games made MTAJ appear to be similar to other tech startups' offices. I never saw anyone use these games. Perhaps this demonstrates that these office features were not relevant to this women-dominated tech startup, where a 'fratty' or 'geeky' culture, that "might deter women from applying," was not desired (Wynn & Correll 2018).

While there was evidence of what would be considered a normative tech startup office space, divisions of the space hinted at how MTAJ's gendering practices and structures were yet again queered. Physical space was divided by having the technical operations occur in a lab removed from the marketing and finance operations. MTAJ's division of physical space favored the work being done in its marketing and finance operations. Predominately women worked in this part of the organization, where work was typically more communal (e.g., collaboration, research, communications, design-oriented).

The technical development of MTAJ's product took place detached from its marketing and finance operations, in a different part of the building. In what would typically be considered a position of higher status, these workers remained *physically* below us:

> "The technical team is back and has come up to work on the product." (fieldnotes, June 13, 2022)

The placement of MTAJ's predominately male tech workers ensured they would have to be the ones initiating communication and collaboration, making trips themselves "up" to the main office space when questions and problems arose. The role the technical workers served in the organization, which would typically be given more status, was not viewed as hierarchically more important than the work done upstairs.

Evidence of MTAJ's organizing logic interacted with its physical space, creating gendering practices where men and their typed work were not viewed as having higher status. Technical workers at MTAJ had to engage in communal work tasks, centering their ability to communicate effectively with the women overseeing them, in order to enjoy the privileges of having agency over their work.

Allowed Behavior

One of MTAJ's founding values was helping others. As a social venture, MTAJ's focus was specifically on gender inequality and violence directed at women. In Felix's photo-elicited interview, two of their photos explicitly captured the importance of the organization's socially-driven mission. This influenced not only why they enjoyed working for this organization, but also demonstrated the element of activism that has been evident since the

organization's inception. In this quote, Felix describes one of the photos (see Figure 8) and why they chose to include it:

> "So this one is the one that Daniel took in the men's bathroom, and I made him write, 'NO MEANS NO.' And 'NO' [was] underlined twice, or three times [and] he did it…kind of as like a message of what we're trying to do here—defending women's rights. I've been doing that a lot—going into men's bathrooms and writing 'no means no,' and underlining the second no. And I thought it was more powerful to do it here because we want to work here and we want to advocate that." – Felix

Figure 8. "NO MEANS NO" scribbled on bathroom mirror (Felix)

At the time of my participant observation, Roe v. Wade was overturned and the discussion of women's reproductive rights was front and center in the office. MTAJ's organizing principles of communal traits and empowering workers queered what acceptable behavior in the workplace was. Previously, Acker (1990) situated male-dominated organizations as places devoid of sexuality. Organizational acceptance and support [Daniel, in particular here] of Felix's display of

activism demonstrated how sexuality was not barred from the workplace at MTAJ but was centered as an issue of gendered violence.

Gendering Cultures

Here I detail how MTAJ's values, symbols, and images were non-normative and helped to express and legitimize its gendering practices and structures.

Values

As a social enterprise, MTAJ's centering of a social cause helped to promote a culture of helping. However, this cultural value came with the stipulation that helping should not require the subjugation of oneself. This value figured nicely into the firm's organizational logic of performing communal tasks to be empowered. Gender shaped the presence of this value and, in turn, MTAJ's practices and structures. I argue MTAJ's values deconstructed normative views of women helping and men working.

Returning to an examination of what led the founders to start MTAJ provided early evidence of the firm's cultural values. Louisa grew up in a household where both her mother and father worked:

> "The idea for the first product kind of came from [my mom] because she managed everything so well, and she was like a super young mom, and I was just admiring her way and how she managed to do all this, more or less alone because my father was working." - Louisa

Louisa went on to elaborate that both of her parents worked. Louisa's use of "more or less alone," however alludes to her mother taking on a majority of the household tasks. Louisa's upbringing likely influenced her own egalitarian parenting style. This, in turn, shaped the

expectations she set for her workers. MTAJ's ideal worker norm was of someone capable of meeting the needs of the organization and their personal life, without having to make the kinds of sacrifices Louisa witnessed her mom make. Disrupting cultural evaluations of what it means to be a mother and a worker allowed for MTAJ's gendering practices and structures to empower workers without normatively prioritizing men.

Symbols

MTAJ's product and underlying technology helped to symbolize the startup's legitimacy. While centering technology typically connotes an image of masculinity, MTAJ queered this perspective by performatively highlighting the communal nature of its technical work. I classify this as an instance of symbolism given the fact that MTAJ's technical team was far removed from MTAJ's marketing and finance operations, where work actually did occur communally. MTAJ displayed its technology to a broader audience. To make sense of this, similar to Bates (2022), I too draw from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, to consider the role that the technical lab played in the firm's "performance" as a technology startup.

One day, Louisa told us all to pause our work and come downstairs to take photos in the technical lab. At the time, no one was working on the product, as both Toby and Alex were not in the office. Still, we were told to "pretend" that we were working. With essentially all of the marketing and finance team posing for this photo, I was reminded of my interview with Alex, who spoke about how support was much needed in the technical operations of the firm:

> "We don't have a lot of engineers and we produce a hardware device…We don't have a mechanical engineer or software engineer. And we need to have these specialists because without them we cannot produce something new." - Alex

There was a disconnect between the resources actually being allocated to MTAJ's technical operations and the way the organization presented itself to outsiders. The firm's organizing principles prioritized a higher valuation of the work done primarily by women (marketing and finance) and instances where work was performed communally. Externally, outsiders were presented with a performance of the technical operations of the firm, that transcended its actual divisions of physical labor, to communicate an alignment with its organizational logic, along with its legitimacy, to its investors and target audience. Founders aimed to communicate the company's communal working style, not that men were present in the creation of the product. This symbolism further illustrates that the work of men was not given higher status at MTAJ.

Actual Images

The firm's social media provided images to support the allowed behavior mentioned above in its gendering practices and structures. The public face of the organization was primarily the women founders and other women (e.g., customers, networking events, profiles of prominent women). Judi included one of those images (see Figure 9) in our photo-elicited interview:

Figure 9. "Meeting Berlin Politician" (Judi)

> "That's the [politician] of Berlin talking to us. We got the opportunity to be there, to be with quite interesting people. That's more like the political side there…" - Judi

Similar to Felix, Judi highlights the political activism behind MTAJ's mission. Organizational images depicted empowered women wearing MTAJ's product. Such imagery challenges normative portrayals of women. Through MTAJ's website and social media, images communicated not only that women were capable of being empowered, but also that we all should be working to deconstruct gender inequality. Posts called out topics like catcalling and victim blaming, and also included infographics with statistics on gendered sexual violence. MTAJ's actual images allowed workers, like Felix, to engage in gender activism and challenged normative portrayals of women.

Gendered Interactions

The fourth gendering process exemplifies how interactions help to shape an organization's social structures. Acker (1990) defined interactions as those occurring "between women and men, women and women, men and men," where women are sources of emotional support and men perform as actors (146-147). MTAJ's gendering interactions were queered by the presence of men performing care work.

MTAJ's organizational logic, behaving communally to be empowered, shaped interactions in the organization. Toby stated that his work allowed him flexibility, stating, "I'm kind of my own boss." However, in cases where he chose not to perform communally, like choosing to not communicate with others, his work could be frustrating. He told me about a time he struggled with a project, only to realize one of the founders was in possession of helpful information all along:

> "They might have some information that might be helpful for me and I didn't ask because I didn't [think to]" - Toby, Embedded Developer

MTAJ's organizational logic was oriented around doing work communally to become empowered. Toby's sense of being "like his own boss" hinted at him being empowered by his work, but possibly not all the time. Toby's experience of frustration over trying to fix something on his own, when his community and communication held the answer, appears to have been an instance of a normative gender interaction and structure being disrupted. It was only after *he* chose to speak with one of the founders, that he finally found help. Toby's work dictated that he prioritize performing communally, or he risked meeting gender tension and losing his sense of empowerment. This instance of tension also demonstrates how interactions at MTAJ were queered by the structure of the organization and its organizational logic.

Bates (2022) found no evidence of men engaging in care work in the gendered organization that they studied. MTAJ's gendering interactions appeared to have been queered by the presence of men engaging in care work. I recall Toby being the first and only person to check on me one day after losing my wallet:

> "Toby checked on me when I was outside. Clearly building deeper, meaningful relationships" - (fieldnotes, July 5, 2022)

Such displays of caring demonstrate how gendered workplace interactions were done non-normatively at MTAJ. MTAJ's workplace interactions highlighted how women were not conceptualized as the only workers expected to act communally. Their queered organizational logic also potentially nudged men to take on more responsibility when it came to performing communally-oriented tasks (e.g., helping, communicating).

I argue that the presence of men engaging in care work was also a byproduct of the physical space of MTAJ. While many of the office's normative tech startup offerings (i.e., ping pong tables, foosball tables) were not utilized, the building's dining hall, referred as the canteen, was used daily by the team. Daily lunches together as a team helped to foster MTAJ's fun, friendly work culture, which was specifically how all the participants defined it. Ivy, in finance, described these lunches as a time to "take a break and kind of chitchat." Such interactions helped to normalize the care work expected of the organization's men. The canteen and the team's lunches came up in many of my photo-elicited interviews with participants as we discussed what their work meant to them. Daniel shared the following photo (see Figure 10) and elaborated on why lunches were special at MTAJ:

Figure 10. "View From Canteen" (Daniel)

> "It's something I'll remember—just because it's one of the nicest places in the building and it's awesome that we have that and also just talking to everyone–it's always good conversation up there."
>
> – Daniel

Work was not a topic of discussion during these lunches. Lunch time conversations did not privilege men, as discussions never ventured into "sport, cars, sex, women, and drinking," (Collinson & Hearn 1994:14). Lunches were a space to connect with each other. Unlike Pöllänen (2021), I found no evidence of harsh language or aggressive behavior in any of these [MTAJ's workplace] interactions. For this tech startup, establishing connections with each other helped to ensure male workers were engaging in care work. Meaningful conversations also helped shape MTAJ's gendered identities, which I examine in the next, and final, gendering process.

Gendered Identities

Acker (1990) reasoned that "organizational processes and pressures" help construct our individual gender identity (140). She went onto state that our clothes and language are some of the ways we construct our gender identity. The firm's organizing principle of being empowered created an environment where everyone could feel comfortable working (i.e., wearing their clothes and communicating in ways that aligned with themselves), which in turn allowed for the construction of non-normative gender identities. In this section, I switch to an individual-level of analysis and examine how a cis-woman, a queer individual, and a cis-man constructed their own non-normative work identities at MTAJ.

I first addressed identity in relation to the founders and how their backgrounds helped to shape MTAJ's organizational logic. Judi's experience, in particular, influenced her to create her own work structure. The literature on entrepreneurship and organizations still continue to predominately present women as mothers and reproducers who balance work and family (Acker 2004). Judi, however was not a mother, showing women entrepreneurs' desires for autonomy extend beyond wanting to balance family demands (her free time was spent going to weddings, attending women founders' events, and visiting with her mother and father).

Her background in technology also helped her to construct an identity often not viewed in tech startups. My observations of her and some of the pictures she included in her photo-elicited interview present her as someone who proudly wears dresses, leads talks at tech conferences, and confidently leads a team without being overbearing. As a conventionally feminine person, Judi did not face the same negative outcomes that Alfrey and Winddance Twine (2017) witnessed in their study of women working in the tech industry. Judi's status and power in decision-making likely helped to ensure that she did not have to construct a gender-fluid identity in order to be respected at MTAJ.

My own experience as a queer individual also helped me to make sense of how others might be able express themselves outside of the gender binary. I was not policed on how I should be dressed, which bathroom I should use, nor was I expected to engage in what would otherwise be typed masculine-typed labor. The binary still existed however. Nonetheless, I noticed my own empowerment as I considered how my aforementioned communal work tasks allowed me to shape a work identity where I could choose to wear dresses, go to the bathroom of my choice, and engage in "women's work" while feeling like my presence was extremely valued.

Seeing how cis-men constructed their gender identities at MTAJ only further proved the way MTAJ differed from other tech startups, where Toby, a heterosexual man, talked about the discomfort he experienced working in other companies, where more men were present:

> Toby:"Working [with] a lot of men…makes me feel uncomfortable
> and [I] become quiet…[otherwise] I have to talk loud and also
> prove myself in a social way.
> Me: And why do you think that's not like here?

> Toby: I'm not entirely sure, I feel they're [MTAJ] a bit more caring and…nicer to people" - Toby

At MTAJ, workers were not challenged to prove themselves, and "being loud" was never a requirement for being heard. Toby's thoughts here highlight how MTAJ's gendered culture and interactions helped him to construct a gender identity where he was no longer pressured to engage in masculinity contests (Berdahl et al. 2018). This acknowledgement is crucial to understanding how MTAJ's gendering identities process was queered. We construct our gender identities through the ways that we experience and see our bodies (Acker 2004). Toby acknowledges that he is experiencing something distinctly different at MTAJ, compared to an environment where more men were present.

Both masculinity and femininity, were performed non-normatively at MTAJ. As organizational pressures, these binaries often restrict the gender identities that workers are able to construct (Acker 1990). Findings from these workers highlight how the firm's organizing principle of empowerment also entailed liberation from narratives of women not being technologically-inclined, it put a halt to masculinity contests, and allowed a queer individual to safely and authentically express and experiment with their gender.

Expanded Model

My findings guided me in my creation of the expanded model above (see Figure 7 below). Similar to the five-set venn diagram on page 21 (see Figure 11), I position organizational logic as occurring throughout the different processes. I build off the work of Bates (2022), and acknowledge the macro-micro continuum that Acker's (1990) gendering processes occur on. For instance, in my model, the structure of work, a macro concept, passes through gendered culture and interactions to ultimately inform how individuals express their gender and language use, and vice versa. I queer this model by introducing the division of care work, work that is often rendered invisible, to "Gendered Interactions," as I witnessed men at MTAJ being nudged to engage in care work by the organizational logic. Such interactions were allowed by the creation of non-normative gendered work identities and justified by a gendered culture that centered empowered women.

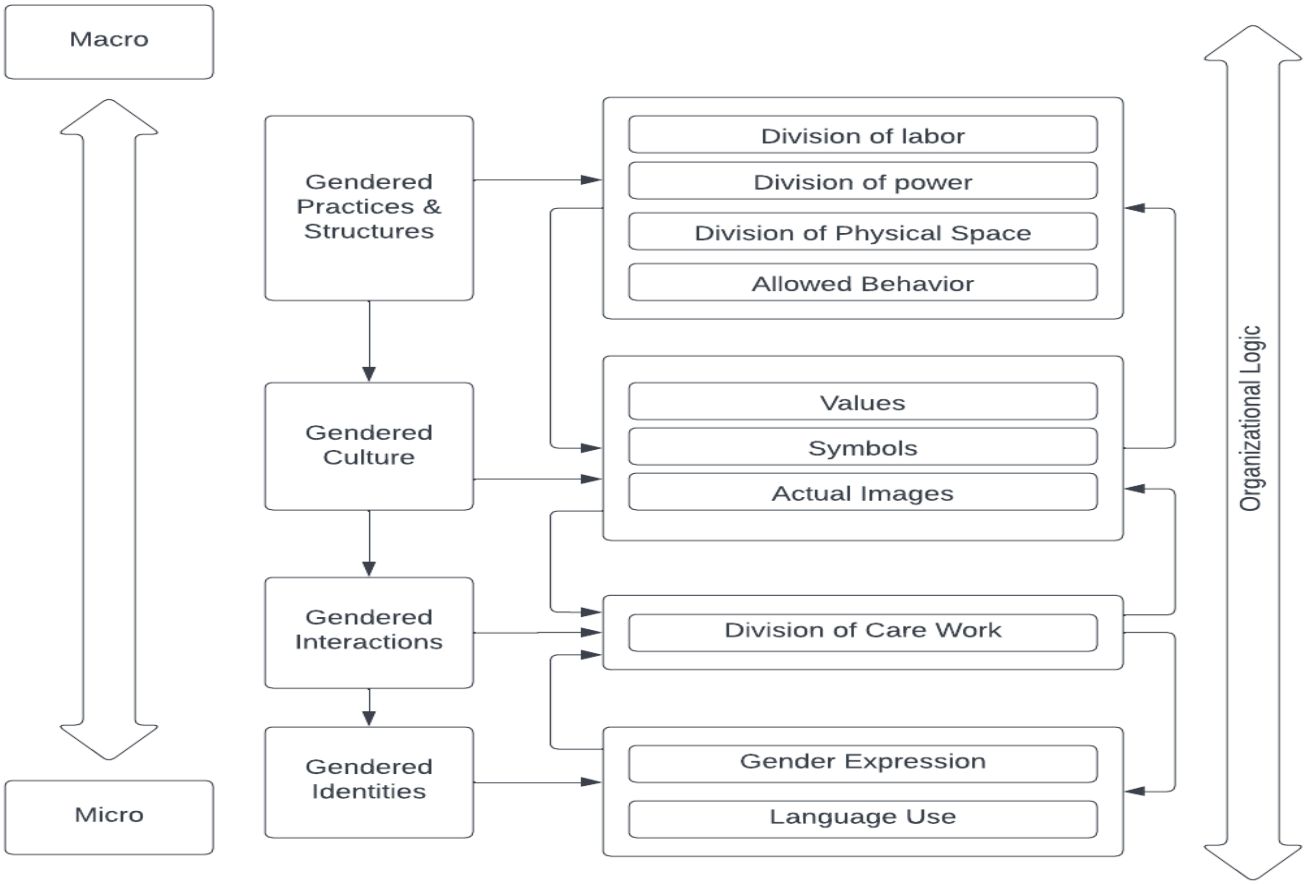

Figure 7. Expanded Model of "an Abductive Approach to Working with Acker."

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The goal of this project was to abductively test whether and how Acker's (1990) gendering processes manifested in a woman-led social venture in a masculine-typed industry. Using GTM, through a lens of queer theory, I was able to expand on the framework developed by Bates (2022) for a deeper understanding of these processes. I add to the social entrepreneurship literature, but also the budding field of startup organizational culture literature. This exploration of a femme-dominant space, serves to open up academic discussions of what contemporary work and entrepreneurship look like.

Findings

The co-founders at MTAJ challenged the image of an entrepreneur being a "heroic" man (Barber & Odean 2001). I see this as being crucial to the ideal worker at MTAJ also not being a white man. Founders' values play a definitive role in shaping the logic of their organizations (Hechavarría 2017). This was the case at MTAJ as well, where founders' values and previous experiences in masculine-dominant workplaces likely led them to center cultural images of empowered women in their own organization. It is important to note that while their workers' empowerment was important to the founders, MTAJ's organizational logic still prioritized communality first. Without it, workers like Toby faced ambiguity and frustration in their work. Ivy also alluded to this when she talked about how as long as she was serving MTAJ, and the founders, she enjoyed flexibility in her work. This is potentially because, similar to Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan (2016), I found communality was a key characteristic of the organization. I echo the sentiments of Rosca et al. (2020), in stating that communal traits shaped the founding of the organization and the work culture within the organization.

Communality also shaped how MTAJ situated itself in relation to external stakeholders. For both of the founders, talking with their customers was noted as one of their favorite parts of their work. In their interactions with other startups, I saw Louisa and Judi engage in formal networking events targeted for women in entrepreneurship. However, the founders were not limited to only engaging in those networks. I also noted their creation of informal networks with tech startups run by men. This starts to challenge Mickey's (2022) understanding of networking in the New Economy. I cannot be certain why they were successful in making diverse connections. This was likely a mixture of their location and social mission. For instance, MTAJ appeared to receive support from the local government, as evidenced by Judi's choice to include an image of her, Louisa, and a prominent politician in Berlin at an event centered on addressing safety in the city that they personally invited to attend. Though it is important to note the unique nature of work done at MTAJ, I still argue there are theoretical and practical implications that can be derived from my findings.

Theoretical Implications

Nascent literature has failed to provide evidence of what work looks like in a women-led social tech venture. As a participant-observer, I now understand what it means to operate within such a space, particularly as a queer person. My findings highlight the potential benefits of studying these non-normative spaces. This is an important advancement in Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations, which originally only conceptualized gendered workplace interactions as those occurring in the interactions of men and women.

Work appeared to occur differently here than in other, male-dominant tech startups, particularly when it came to workers' identities. Queer theory argues that the components of one's identity intersect and combine (Souza 2017). As a social entrepreneurship tech venture,

MTAJ was itself an organization of multiple identities, which workers appeared to be cognizant of. I argue this because workers aligned themselves not only with the mission of the organization's social cause, but also enjoyed witnessing the firm and themselves grow agentically.

On the marketing and finance side of MTAJ, power appears to have been shared across roles. This runs counter to Simon (2019), who came to no such conclusions in an examination of gender and racial inequalities in Hollywood talent agencies. That said, MTAJ was not completely immune from inequality. The men on the technical team faced gendered divisions to their labor, power, and physical space. The empowerment of Louisa and Judi took precedent over that of their technical workers. Toby and Alex were not essentialized, which should not have been true according to the previous literature on men and their status in organizations (Ridgeway 2001). In many cases, they even faced challenges that the workers in marketing and finance roles were not subjected to. Their physical location placed them below other workers, requiring them to make a concerted effort to behave communally, and they were also often left out of technical decisions.

The reactions of the male technical workers were positive, but their subtle subjugation could have just as easily been an area of conflict. I would argue MTAJ's organizational logic helped Toby and Alex rationalize their experiences. It also likely pushed Judi and Louisa to maintain control of their organization's technical decision making. Women in power are typically assumed less competent when it comes to technology (Amis, Mair, & Munir 2020). Louisa and Judi queered this dynamic in their organization by asserting their technological competency in decisions regarding their product's development. Their roles at MTAJ also provide a new perspective to the literature, as they were not subjected to the same demoted status as women managers in other studies of tech work and development (Alegria 2019).

Practical Implications

I demonstrate that the non-normative nature of MTAJ, as a women-led tech social venture, allowed for individuals to construct their own work identities. Not only did I feel comfortable working here, but individuals like Toby and Judi could express themselves authentically in their technical roles. There was no "bro" or geek culture at MTAJ that workers felt pressured to conform to (Alfrey & Windance Twine 2017). This likely had a great deal to do with the values of the founders and the management practices they utilized to organize work in their organization.

MTAJ's founders stated that the organization was not modeled to be a feminist organization, but there appears to be evidence to suggest otherwise. Feminist management practices like consciousness-raising, the promotion of community, and democratic participation of organizational members appeared to be present at MTAJ (Martin 1993). This study demonstrates that the integrated nature of gendering processes require considering both micro and macro-level phenomena in the workplace. Practitioners that aim to make their organizations more inclusive should consider ways to incorporate feminist management practices into their organizational structure, culture, and processes.

Limitations & Future Research Recommendations

A limitation of this study might be that MTAJ's queered gendering processes only worked here because hired workers were likely perceived to be similar to the founders. While gender diversity was present at MTAJ, workers' alignment with the organization's social mission hints at homosocial reproduction (Fawcett & Pringle 2000). Outside of gender, diversity was a pressing concern at the time of my observations. At the time I was one of two persons of color working at MTAJ. MTAJ has since hired more racially diverse workers. I cannot make any assumptions

about their experiences, but can state my experience working at MTAJ was positive. Future research might consider how gendering process operate in a women-led startup with more racial and ethnic diversity.

Future research might also look at the potential linkage between feminist management practices and social enterprises. Neither my study nor the current literature assesses how gender is constructed in a masculine-dominant social enterprise, let alone in tech. Furthermore, MTAJ's success may be a template for future femmes that aim to take up space where they have previously been unacknowledged. Considering queer theory's aforementioned conceptualization of identities, one avenue for future research could be Investigating other organizations that have salient and distinct identities, that workers are aware of, and examine how workers construct their own identities within their work, and whether or not queer workers align themselves with the organization.

Interestingly, operating as a social venture, with a focus on women in an industry dominated by men, appeared to actually work to MTAJ's advantage as a means of differentiating themselves from other organizations. This was not without concerns, as both Lousia and Judi mentioned how the support they received was not the same as meaningful mentorship–something they were seeking at the time. They noted people being excited about their idea, but failing to provide the criticism they would need to grow as a firm. This echoes the sentiments of Poggesi et al. (2020), who identify mentoring as a specific industry barrier faced by women entrepreneurs in STEM fields. Future studies might consider how women-led social tech startups navigate both being competitively advantaged and establishing meaningful mentoring relationships, while navigate the process of growing as an organization.

The use of photo-elicitation not only allowed for triangulation with the other methods used, but also provided greater richness to understanding the collective reality of what it meant to work at MTAJ. Photos allowed the implicit to be explicit and in some cases highlighted parts of each individual's work that I might not have been privy to (for instance: Felix's "no means no" photo). Seeing themes across participants' photos also informed my data analysis and vice versa. One limitation might be that I did not explicitly ask about gender in any of my interview guides. Future studies should consider utilizing similar visual methods and directly exploring gender and gendering processes.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

By centering an organizational logic of communally-driven empowerment, MTAJ became an inclusive workplace, where everyone could feel comfortable to craft a more authentic work identity. The founders, Judi and Louisa maintained control of their product's technological development, empowered women were central to MTAJ's cultural images, care work was performed by men at MTAJ who were nudged to do so in their workplace interactions, and gendered work identities at MTAJ were not restricted to the heteronormative binary.

In separate interviews, all of the participants used the same three words to describe their work culture: fun, flexible, and friendly. Authenticity is of growing importance in today's workplaces. Albeit in small pockets, we are seeing pushback against the historical narrative of workplaces as male-dominated spaces. With a growing trend of women both leaving these environments and creating their own spaces through entrepreneurial ventures (Tulshyan & Burey 2021), this study is at the forefront of what more and more future workplaces will look like. In the tech industry especially, these femme-dominant spaces have previously been underexplored, but they are exciting as we continue to grapple with the meaning of work in the 21st century. Particularly of interest here, is the potential reintroduction of how feminist organizing appears to manifest itself today, and how social enterprises might be better positioned to support and engage workers.

Acknowledging social ventures and embedded femininities within the context of organizational culture, can not only serve to benefit practitioners in the tech startup world, but also those in other industries that find themselves grappling with issues of turnover and masculinity contests. As we know, toxic work culture is at the root of the Great Resignation, wherein a record number of more than 24 million American employees left their jobs (Sull et al.

2022). Moreover, 2021 was the deadliest year on record for transgender women (Powell 2021), many of whom have been denied access to traditional organizations thanks to femmephobia, or the devaluation of femininity (Hoskin 2020). This study demonstrates how gendered organizations can be queer in the manifestation of their processes. Ultimately, I believe queering our organizations, identities, and research methods will be integral to envisioning a better world to live, work, and learn within.

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APPENDIX

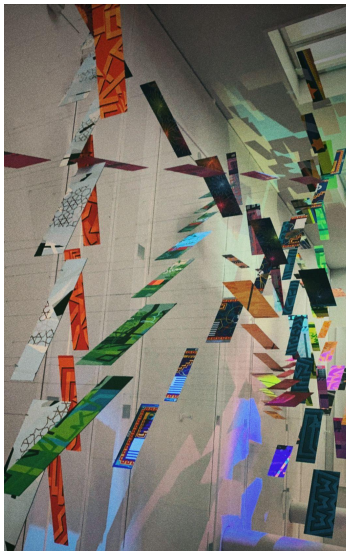
INTERVIEW 1 GUIDE

1. How long have you been working here and what role(s) have you had since you started?
2. What do you do in your current role? How would you describe it?
3. What are all the things that you do on a typical day at the office?
4. What led you to apply to work here?
5. Do you find the work you do here meaningful? Why do you say so?
6. What are some words you would use to describe the work culture of this organization?
7. What is unique about working here? How does working here compare to other places you have worked?
8. What is most satisfying about working here?
9. Are there any aspects of your work that you would like to see changed?
10. Do you see growth and advancement for yourself here? Why do you say this?
11. Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to address?

INTERVIEW 2 GUIDE (PHOTO-ELICITATION)

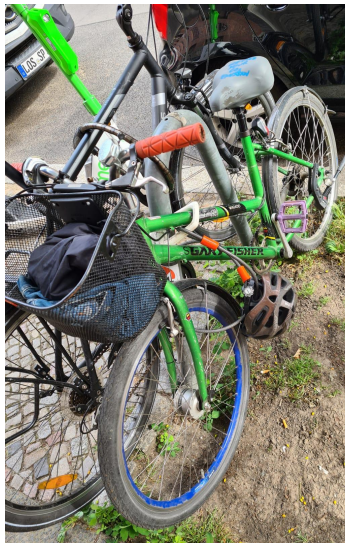
1. Why did you choose this order for your photos?
2. What do you see here?
3. What is really happening here?
4. Why does your work take on this meaning for you?
5. How can others experience this?

Participants' Other Photos From Photo-Elicited Interviews

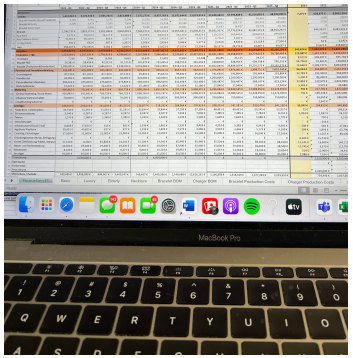


"Work as 'Mismatch' that 'Fits'" (Ivy)

"View From Office" (Ivy)



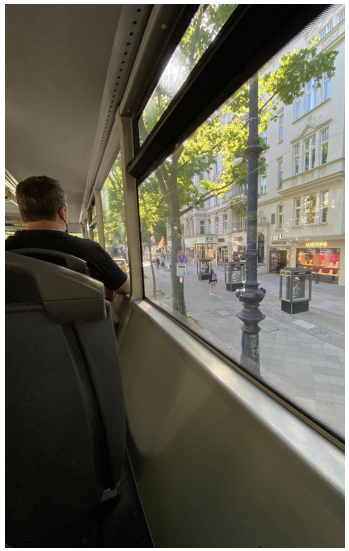
"I Don't Do This For Money" (Louisa)



"Excel Spreadsheet as Challenging Self" (Daniel)

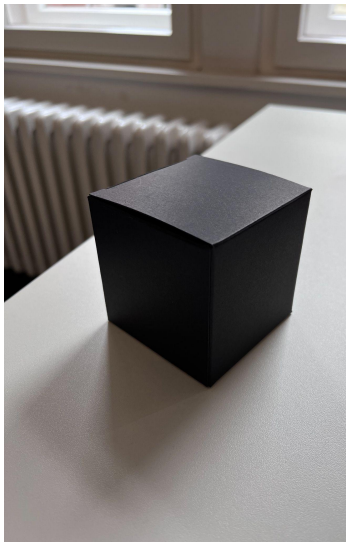
“Public Safety & MTAJ’s Mission” (Felix)

“Water Cooler” (Ivy)



“Commute to Work” (Ivy)

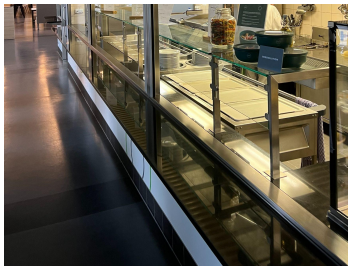
“Canteen Trays” (Ivy)



"Work as 'You never know what you'll get'" (Felix)

"'Coffee keeps me going'" (Daniel)

"Being Open to Others" (Felix)



"Canteen" (Ivy)