

Rethinking how we work with Acker's theory of gendered organizations: An abductive approach for feminist empirical research

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Abstract

In this article I demonstrate the methodological value of working abductively with Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations, as an approach for feminist empirical research. Although the value of Acker's theory is acknowledged, I note it is most frequently used to legitimize the idea that organizations are gendered, not to test whether they are. Few use her theory fully or as it was originally intended. Fewer still have questioned it. This, I argue, contributes to the stagnation of her ideas and results in blindness toward, or disregard for, data that does not support her theory. To realize the analytical potential of Acker's theory, I call for future studies to work abductively with data unaccounted for in the expectations and predictions set by Acker, while operationalizing her five-dimensional framework in its entirety. Abduction is about discovering new concepts, ideas, and explanations by working with surprising phenomena or data that cannot be explained by pre-existing knowledge. To demonstrate the utility of this approach, I draw upon a qualitative case study of one atypical Australian trade union. I outline the creative process of drawing inferences to best explain anomalous observations using other theoretical resources in the gender studies field, which together with Acker, constitute a plausible explanation for questions that arose during analysis. This analysis not only surfaces how masculine power is maintained by having women in leadership positions, who serve as "role models" while quieting "others," but that women and men cooperated as a "team" to

support a feminine public impression of the union that was knowingly contradicted in private, indicating a more “truthful” performance.

KEYWORDS

abduction, abductive reasoning, gender, gendered organizations, Joan Acker, trade unions

1 | INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing, Acker's (1990) *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations* had a total of 9817 citations, according to Google Scholar. Over 30 years ago she broke with tradition arguing that organizations and jobs were not gender neutral but inherently gendered through five interacting gendering processes: (1) practices/structures, (2) culture, (3) interactions, (4) identity, and (5) organizational logic. Testament to the longevity and influence of her theory (Bailyn & Fletcher, 2019), Acker's article is considered responsible for the emergence of the “gendered organization” field (Bridges & Messerschmidt, 2016). While Acker's theory is ubiquitous with management and organization studies (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019), such is its impact that her ideas have also spread to other fields including business ethics (e.g., Almer et al., 2021) and accounting (e.g., Atena & Tiron-Tudor, 2020), to name but a few. Consequently, Acker's theory is used as the main foil from which to advance the idea that organizations and jobs *are* gendered.

Despite the popularity and widespread circulation of Acker's theory, its analytical potential has not been fully realized. Even devoted practitioners have questioned whether her theory has fulfilled its promise to open-up spaces for gendering to be challenged due to inconsistencies in its interpretation and application (Dye & Mills, 2012). Although Acker's theory guides many researchers, its precepts are rarely challenged, and few use it fully or as it was originally intended. There is a sense in the literature that Acker's theory has been used to label any research endeavor that involves “gender” or “gendering” to uphold empirically unsubstantiated claims that organizations *are* gendered. Research that claims to use her theory often has very little to do with her five-dimensional framework, using the label “gendered” to account for lived experiences in already “gendered” organizations (e.g., Carmona & Ezzamel, 2016). Many others take a singular element of her framework as illustration of its applicability, or reference Acker to frame their understanding of gender (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019). Few have ever questioned what it really means to say that an organization is “gendered” (Britton, 2000) and there are just a handful of studies that have used Acker's framework in its entirety to test if an organization is gendered (e.g., Bates, 2018; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998a, 1998b). This problem extends to industrial relations research, in which most attention has been paid to theorizing gender inequality in trade unions using Acker's theory (e.g., Ledwith, 2012), but far less to working with her ideas empirically (for an exception, see Healy & Kirton, 2000).

Recently, some researchers have argued that because of the changing nature of work and organizations, Acker's theory needs updating. Using Acker's fifth gendering process—organizational logic—in isolation from the other four, Williams (2013, 2017; see also Williams et al., 2012) argues that the underlying, ongoing system of taken-for-granted assumptions and practices that construct and maintain gendered organizations has been “transformed” in the new economy. Similarly, Mickey (2019) shows how both “new” and “traditional” workplace logics can coexist but conflict in one high-tech firm “going public.” These studies continue to assert an a priori argument that organizations *are* gendered but, more troublingly, they segment how gender operates in organizations. Acker's five gendering processes interact (Dye & Mills, 2012), by failing to account for all five dimensions interaction is impossible and the heuristic value of her theory is lost (Lester et al., 2017).

While I share much with the goal of modernizing Acker's theory, I argue for a much more radical rethinking of how her theory is used. As I will develop below, rather than thinking about different ways to use her individual gendering processes, I propose an abductive approach that focuses on the kinds of knowledge that do not fit neatly into her theory. I argue that in the process of working with Acker, other theoretical resources offer the best possible explanations of data that are outside of its scope. While Acker's theory still provides useful tools for understanding gendering in organizations, it is through a focus on data unaccounted for in her expectations and predictions that her theory's analytical potential becomes meaningful.

Instead of using Acker's theory to legitimize the idea that organizations *are* gendered, I construct abductive analysis from her theory to test *if* an organization is gendered. Abduction, unlike induction or deduction, involves "modifying, elaborating upon, or rejecting theory if needed, or putting old ideas together in new ways to examine, understand, and explain the data" (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018, p. 54). This approach rests on working with anomalous observations in the context of existing theories and generating and evaluating hunches that may explain the anomaly (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). As such, it requires a fundamental rethinking of what constitutes "good research" using Acker's theory.

Real-world qualitative research is "messy" (Donnelly et al., 2013) but the orthodoxy that "good research" is linear, predictable and deliberate (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012), especially in the journal article format, means that the kinds of knowledge that do not fit neatly into dominant theories may be ruled out or forced to fit (Symon et al., 2018). Caught between "mess" on the one hand and a felt need to publish a "tidy" account of my findings on the other, I was sorely tempted to overlook aspects of the data during analysis that did not "fit" neatly within Acker's theory. Leaving my many questions unanswered seemed appealing, but I knew I couldn't—her legacy demands more from us.

This article comprises two parts. First, I outline how Acker conceptualizes the "gendered organization." After highlighting five key gaps in the utilization of her theory, I investigate why her theory is more often cited to support the view that organizations *are* gendered than used to test *if* they are. I point to two broad and interacting drivers: (1) Acker's ontological position and (2) segmentation practices. In the second, and main part of this paper, I describe how I used Acker's framework in its entirety—a process that left me with more questions than answers about the gendering processes I observed in one atypical Australian trade union. From this, I demonstrate the creative role of abduction in discovering ideas that in subsequent sections of this paper I develop into theory by logical deduction and inductive testing. This paper ends with a discussion that considers the eight supplementary theories utilized to explain anomalous observations unaccounted for in Acker's theory (see Figure 3), which together with Acker, constitute a plausible explanation of the data that accounts for questions that arose during analysis.

2 | ACKER'S THEORY OF GENDERED ORGANIZATIONS

Acker (1990, pp. 139–147) argues that to say an organization is "gendered" means that "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, and meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine." Working as "parts of the same reality," her theory holds that the gendering of organizations can be seen through a framework of five interacting processes: (1) practices/structures, (2) culture, (3) interactions, (4) identity, and (5) organizational logic. The logic—those underlying assumptions and practices that construct organizations—may appear gender neutral, but is, in fact, gendered, working to maintain and reproduce abstract jobs and hierarchies which assume a disembodied and universal worker.

Organizational logic has been located within Acker's (1990) framework and removed altogether (Acker, 1992a, 1992b). Responding to Dye and Mills (2012) who demonstrated its utility to integrate the other four processes holistically, Acker (2012b) returned it to her theory and outlined its relationship to the gendered substructure, comprising the subtext, organizational logic and ideal worker. Organizational logic underpins those gendered arrangements that serve to inform and be informed by processes of structure, practices, culture, interactions and identity, as shown in Figure 1. The review presented next is based on the five processes described by Acker (1990).

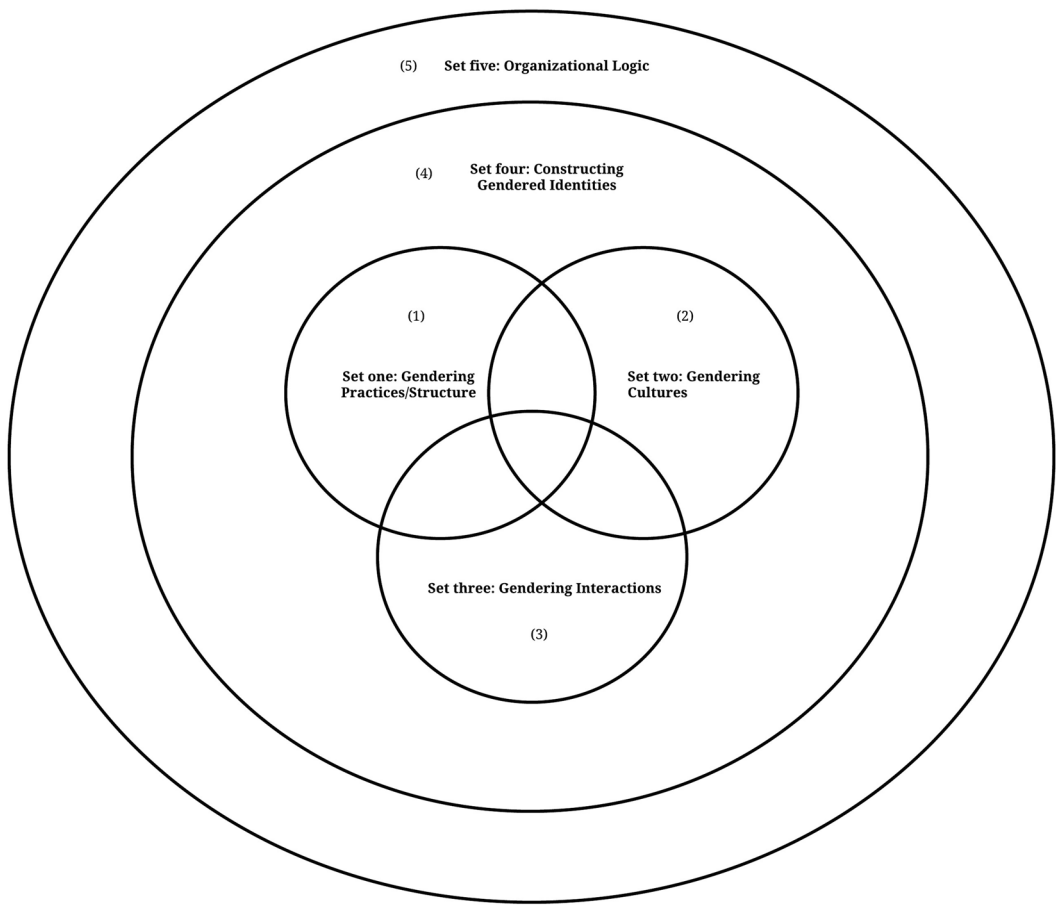


FIGURE 1 Five-set Venn diagram presenting the inter-connected relationship of Acker's five gendering processes. The figure is titled "Relational Model of Acker's Five Gendering Processes" and shows areas of overlap between the five process sets: (1) Gendering practices/structures; (2) Gendering cultures; (3) Gendering interactions; (4) Constructing gendered identities; and (5) Organizational logic, which works through the preceding four sets (1, 2, 3, and 4)

2.1 | Gendering practices/structures

Acker (p. 146) introduces this process as "the construction of divisions along gender lines—divisions of labor, of allowed behaviors, of locations in physical space, or power." This looks beyond the sex segregation of labor, examining practices or those recurring sets of behavior responsible for gendering in organizations (Dye & Mills, 2012).

Most studies which cite Acker's framework do so within this process, exploring gendered divisions of labor at the workplace and individual (e.g., Rowlands et al., 2020) or sectoral level (e.g., Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012). While some studies address divisions in physical space (e.g., Fagan & Teasdale, 2021), of allowed behavior (e.g., Forseth, 2005) or power (e.g., Simon, 2019), studies which deal with all four of the gendered divisions simultaneously are extremely limited (e.g., Price, 2008).

2.2 | Gendering cultures

Acker (p. 146) describes this process as “the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose those [gendered] divisions.” This examines those practices that are culturally available to “do gender” (Martin, 2003), found in and around organizations in symbols and images of masculinity and femininity (Dye & Mills, 2012).

Use of this process is limited, divided mainly across three key themes: (1) values and ideologies (e.g., Sayce, 2012), (2) symbols and images (e.g., Zippel, 2019), and (3) actual images (e.g., Staffansson Pauli, 2016). Studies have not (so far as I am aware) examined how familial symbols and images may explain each gendered division, despite Acker (1991, 2012b) arguing that the family both contributes to and is influenced by gender inequality beyond the family institution in organizations.

2.3 | Gendering interactions

Acker's (pp. 146–147) third process is “interactions between women and men, women and women, and men and men, including all those patterns that enact dominance and submission.” This relates to the literal practicing, “saying or doing of gender” in real time and space at work (Martin, 2003), “reflectively or non-reflectively” (Martin, 2006).

While highly cited, this process receives comparatively low levels of application. Studies have mainly focused on individual level interactions within organizations that perpetuate (e.g., Pringle et al., 2017) or deconstruct (e.g., Sanchez de Miguel et al., 2015) the gender order. There is a dearth of observational studies within this process, which are best able to grasp the processual and interactive dimensions of how gender is done in organizations (Jännäri & Kovalainen, 2015).

2.4 | Constructing gendered identities

Acker (p. 147) describes this process as those “internal gender constructions that help to produce gendered components of individual identity.” Central to this is the notion of “consciousness of the existence of the other three aspects of gender,” which can be conceptualized as doing (consciously) and practicing (unconsciously or unintentionally) gender (Martin, 2003, 2006) through “choice of appropriate work, language use, and clothing.”

Work in this area is largely outside of Acker's framework (e.g., Powell et al., 2009). Just a handful of studies explore gender identity constructions within it (e.g., Sobering, 2016). Studies that consider how other gendering processes inform gender identity construction are limited (e.g., Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998a).

2.5 | Organizational logic

Acker's (p. 147) final process relates to how “gender is implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures.” The logic is the gendered assumptions and practices which underly the organization in a substructure that is created in the organizing processes which, in turn, are responsible for its gendering.

Use of this process is extremely limited, falling into three conceptualizations: (1) organizational logic is positioned centrally within Acker's framework (Britton, 1997), with analysis of the other four processes undertaken through the fifth (Dye & Mills, 2012), (2) the processes (1–4) are the subtext, with analysis undertaken by a study of its parts (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998b), and (3) organizational logic is isolated from the other four processes and used as a distinct analytical tool (e.g., Mickey, 2019).

In sum, five key gaps in our understanding of Acker's framework remain: (1) spatial, power, and behavioral gendering processes remain largely under-researched, despite the focus of most studies on practices/structures; (2) studies have not examined how familial cultural images may explain each gendered division, despite Acker arguing for such an approach; (3) the number of observational studies that capture gendering interactions within her framework are limited; (4) work concerning gender identity has largely been undertaken outside of her framework; and (5) just a handful of studies have utilized all five processes for the reasons I will explore next.

3 | ACKER'S ONTOLOGICAL POSITION AND SEGMENTATION PRACTICES

Although Acker's (1990) heuristic is widely recognized as "a powerful analytical tool for disrupting the idea of gender-neutral organizations" (Nkomo & Rodríguez, 2019, p. 4), using it in its entirety is challenging. There are problems to overcome in Acker's ontological position and in the segmentation of her framework in the literature, which together explain why her theory is most frequently cited to support the supposition that organizations *are* gendered rather than used to test *if* they are.

3.1 | Acker's ontological position

Acker (1990, pp. 139–155) argues that organizations and jobs are *inherently* gendered masculine through an underlying substructure of gender difference, which reflects the interests of men. This is evident in her discussion of the "ideal worker": "men's bodies, sexuality, and relationships to procreation and paid work are subsumed in the image of the worker. [This worker] in actual social reality is a man." As Acker's analysis clearly demonstrates, she understands gender inequality as the outcome of how work and working are embodied as male. Similar arguments can be seen in her suggestions for reform: "[restoring] the absent female body ... would probably require the end of organizations as they exist today." Such a position is not surprising given Acker's materialist feminist sociology, which aligns with more radical feminist thinking (Adkins, 2019). Nor is it strange that Acker assumes men's domination of organizations given that her ideas emanate from a point in history when women were largely absent. What is perhaps less comprehensible is how readily scholarship continues to take-up Acker's theory when much has changed in the over 30 years since its publication and, as I have shown, it is largely untested.

A small number of researchers have highlighted the problems of conceptualizing organizations as gendered in an inherent way that essentializes masculinity. For instance, Britton (2000, p. 422) notes that Acker's immutable view "turns what should be a proposition into an assumption [leaving us] studying the ways in which gender is deployed in particular, already gendered contexts." Similarly, Lester et al., (2017, p. 13) argues that Acker's assumption that jobs are inherently gendered masculine suspends individual agency: "women are unable to become real workers; they have no agency to adopt, perform, or develop identities to align with organizational gendered expectations." While Acker (1998) acknowledged this criticism, later shifting to a more nuanced view of gender and organizations (2012b), it seems little has been done to address this problem empirically (for an exception, see Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012).

To realize the analytical potential of Acker's theory, we need to depart from her position that organizations that exhibit gendered patterns *are* gendered masculine in some essential, inherent way (Kantola, 2008). This means starting from the position that organizations *may* be gendered and viewing her framework as a tool for testing *if* they are. Understood in this way, Acker's theory works to explore gendering in organizations that may be less (or more) gendered than others, or gendered in different, context specific ways (Britton, 2000). As I will show, this shift in perspective also opens-up new spaces for gendering to be challenged in organizations as it becomes possible to see how power is resisted and revealed by gendered organizational actors.

3.2 | Segmentation practices

While Acker's theory is highly cited, of those studies that use her framework most do so only in part (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019). Most of these accounts have focused on the first of Acker's gendering processes (e.g., Rowlands et al., 2020) and to a lesser extent her second (e.g., Sayce, 2012). Few studies have looked at multiple processes (e.g., Pringle et al., 2017) and fewer still have used her framework in its entirety (e.g., Dye & Mills, 2012). Acker (2012a), herself, was not surprised that her theory is segmented in this way because looking at a smaller number of processes or just one in isolation is analytically easier, and I tend to agree.

Working with Acker's theory in its entirety is incredibly challenging. The absence of prescribed analytical tools for its integrative application makes for what Parsons (2017) describes as "thoroughly hard work." Similarly, with so few empirical examples of her work in its entirety, knowing what to put where or even how to start is hard. Although feminist scholarship consistently refers to Acker's theory, very few use her framework in practice, including Acker (2012a, p. 211) herself: "I realize that I am one of those who has not used it a great deal to inform empirical work." To address this, Sayce (2019) argues for more researchers to use Acker's theory fully in their empirical work. Having more studies use her framework in its entirety will provide much needed methodological guidance. However, this addresses only a small part of a much larger problem.

Given the challenges of working with Acker, we run the risk of continually "seeing what we have already seen," thereby missing her theory's potential to "maximize what we see" (Weick, 1987, p. 122). Despite considerable progress in understanding gender in organizations, in the body of work drawing on Acker's theory data are most frequently analyzed according to her predictions and expectations (e.g., Carmona & Ezzamel, 2016). While researchers may claim to be working inductively with Acker's theory (e.g., Atena & Tiron-Tudor, 2020)—that is, without pre-supposing outcomes a priori (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018)—their conclusions invariably proceed upon the supposition of its "truth," especially in nascent fields (e.g., Almer et al., 2021). In contrast, abduction involves selecting a provisional hypothesis, being open to the data, rejecting dogmatic beliefs and searching for plausible explanations using pre-existing theory as inspiration (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). The process "begins with observing and confirming an anomaly, and generating and evaluating hunches that may explain the anomaly, for subsequent deductive constructing and inductive testing." (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). It is this process of identification, analysis and explanation that I outline next through a case study of one atypical Australian trade union—an organization I call XYZ.

4 | THE CASE OF XYZ¹

XYZ has a majority female membership of over 14,000 workers and an elected female leadership team of President, Branch Secretary and Assistant Branch Secretary. Members are part of organized Workplace Councils and elect Delegates to represent them locally. Most Delegates are female, whereas the elected governing Council and Executive Committee is majority male. As one of 73 unelected salaried staff (see Figure 2), I worked as the only female Division Coordinator in the Office, a five-floor building located in the Central Business District. The field work reported next was conducted while I was an employee of XYZ and a PhD student.

4.1 | Data sources and collection procedures

Understanding gendering in organizations is gained with reference to the ways in which gender differences are reproduced in and through jobs and families (Acker, 1991). To this end, I collected data through familial life-history interviews (Plummer, 2001) and participated as an observer in the organization (Gold, 1958).

Following an advert for research participants in XYZ's newsletter, I selected seven participants from several volunteers to be interviewed. Given my familiarity with XYZ, I made knowledgeable decisions regarding interview

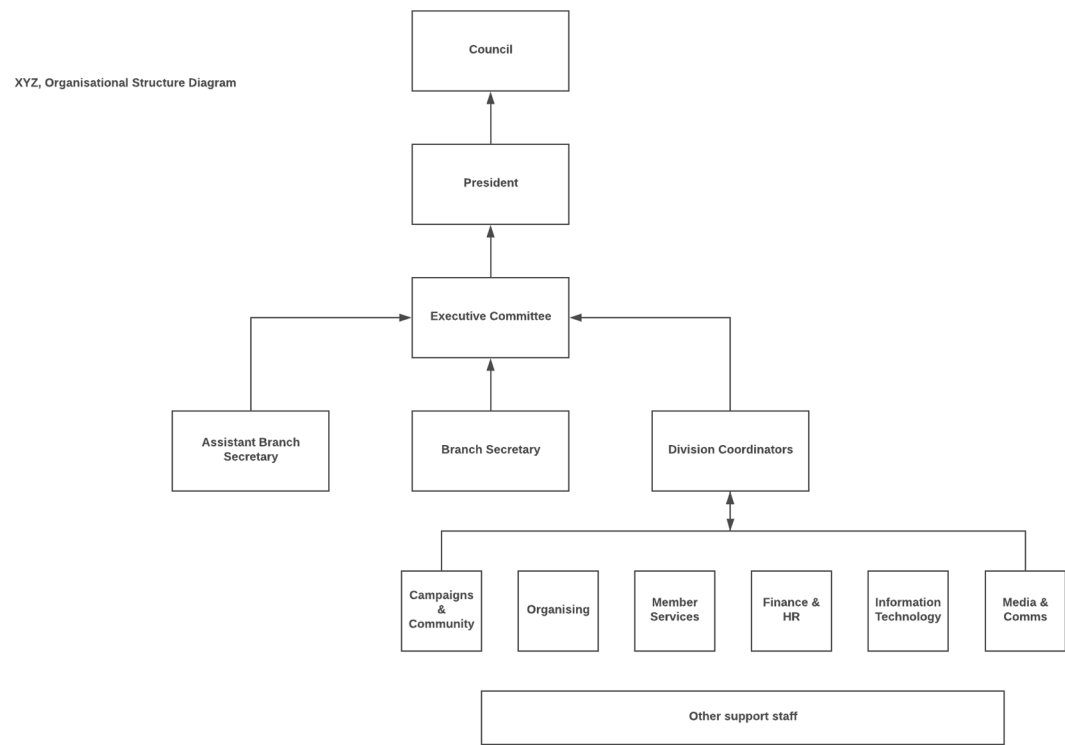


FIGURE 2 Organizational chart, delineating the interrelationships of positions within XYZ. The figure is titled “XYZ Organizational Structure Diagram” and highlights authority relationships among people working at different levels. It also shows the number of layers between the top (Council) and lowest managerial levels (Division Coordinators)

requests that included a variety of perspectives across age, duration of membership and type of employment. I interviewed four women and three men twice. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

When XYZ approved the study, my observations began. I openly participated as observer for more than 500 h at meetings, events and rallies at which I was working. I took descriptive, but also reflective field notes that focused on my reactions to key events and incidents I had observed (Emerson et al., 2001). Table 1 provides a list of each elected official and Coordinator by role. All names are pseudonyms to preserve the confidentiality of the union.

There are ethical tensions in participating as an observer. I was not only “looking at” participants (my colleagues, with whom I worked, and members), but “being with” them. My understanding of XYZ was, therefore, based on differing relationships which were inevitably influenced by the way participants perceived and positioned me, and the various ways in which they chose to present themselves to me. In accounting for the process here, I make clear the influence of my values and assumptions as a white, middle-class, lesbian woman in my late 30s on the process of inquiry.

4.2 | Data analysis

Feminists ensure that “voices” are heard (Harding, 2018), therefore analysis was conducted within the Voice Centered Relational (VCR) framework (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Voice Centered Relational analysis focuses on how “voice” can be influenced by contextual and structural factors (Brown & Gilligan, 1991). Hence, the method is consistent with Acker’s (1990) multileveled understanding of gendering—it is not just one thing or one

TABLE 1 Elected officials and coordinators by pseudonym

Pseudonym	Position
Jess	President (elected)
Sarah	Branch Secretary (elected)
Clare	Assistant Branch Secretary (elected)
Gerry	Vice President (elected)
Billy	Vice President (elected)
Brad	Treasurer (elected)
Stephen	Coordinator, Organizing (salaried)
Bob	Coordinator, Member Services (salaried)
Jack	Coordinator, Media and Communications (salaried)
Me (the researcher)	Coordinator, Campaigns and Community (salaried)
Bill	Coordinator, Information Technology (salaried)
John	Coordinator, Finance and Human Resources (salaried)

process, but many simultaneous processes which produce gender differences in and through other structures. The VCR framework consists of four, sequential readings.

Reading one comprises dual readings, reading for the plot, main events, the protagonists and for the reader-response. The first reading is an attempt to become aware of one's assumptions and their influence. Reading two reads for personal pronouns and shifts in their use, bringing difficult subject matter to the fore. Reading three reads for interpersonal relationships, whereas reading four places accounts and experiences within broader social and structural contexts by asking what is taken for granted and how this came to be? I undertook all four readings, working iteratively to explore what the fieldwork said that helped better understand the interviews, and vice-versa, while checking for emerging insights against Acker's (1990) framework.

Reading one was useful for understanding the overall story or plot, which I ultimately interpreted as the organizational logic. Listening and reading for recurrent images, symbols, words, metaphors and contradictions across the data highlighted participants' consistently mentioned phrases and terms related to *doing* duty and *being* responsible. For example, men talked about an active motivating awareness of and valued leadership, empowerment, providing, disciplining and protecting others in public, especially women. Whereas women spoke of themselves in passive terms and of their obligation to care, keep, protect, manage, organize, or accept others in private, especially men. The protagonists (mothers and fathers) in the participants' narratives were described using these terms and participants positioned themselves in relation to this imagery in interviews. As I related these images to my field notes, it became evident that not only were these dominant notions at play at the organizational level but that they served to make sense of the interplay between other gendering processes.

Reading two focused my attention of the active "I" in the data. This process highlighted where participants were emotionally or intellectually struggling to say something and identified those places where the respondent shifted between "I," "we," and "you," thereby signaling changes in how they perceived and experienced themselves. Attending to this in the context of body language and tone of voice in my field notes brought differences in discursive practices to the fore. For example, women seemed caught between two voices which articulated opposing positions and involved concealing aspects of the self-*doing* duty at home and embellishing *being* responsible at work. This reading was instrumental in helping to shed light on gendering practices, relationships, and dilemmas in domestic life versus those I had observed at work.

Reading three focused on familial relationships and relationships between individuals and others in the organization. Through this reading, I gained an understanding of which relationships participants and I regarded as positive, difficult, or constraining. This reading highlighted how I characterized Sarah, the Branch Secretary, my manager, as

"mother." My expectations of her and feelings of rejection emanated from the idealization of motherhood found in the familial (cultural) imagery of a mother/woman *being* responsible.

The fourth and final reading involved listening for how participants in interviews described structural and ideological forces as constraining and/or enabling in relation to my own observations. The use of moral terms such as "should," "ought," "right," "wrong," "good," or "bad" indicated where participants and I were speaking in terms of, or through the cultural norms, ideals and values. These "moral voices" often conflicted with, and constrained concrete day-to-day experiences—such as the discrepancy between the behavior of a "good" woman/man and that of a "bad" woman/man that were replicated at the organizational level in my observations.

At the end of this process, I had a list of evidence for each of Acker's first four sets and in following Dye and Mills (2012) a way of demonstrating how the gendered substructure was integrated through the organizational logic. But honestly, I felt lost. The process of analysis and interpretation had created more questions than answers, including questions about the practical relationship between processes one and two as I had no actionable frame to explain their interrelationship. I also wondered why I had acquiesced to sexual harassment and why only some women were subjected to this abhorrent behavior. Similarly, why was Sarah, the Branch Secretary, frequently late to or absent from meetings? Did her behavior even matter? I had a hunch that it did, but this data certainly didn't "fit." I also had no way to explain how the public image of XYZ at rallies and events was maintained when it was diametrically opposed to my experience in the Office. Then, there were questions of observed differences in clothing between the senior women, and I pondered why men (and some women) repeatedly mocked and ridiculed one man in particular in Office meetings. As a result, I spent months cutting and pasting "chunks" of data into Acker's framework only to remove them and start the process all over again. Each time, I stared at a new blank canvas. I wanted to give up: "I'm embarrassed, struggling. [It's] self-defeating and clearly isn't working. What the hell do I do now?" (Author, personal communication, May 6, 2018). The consequences of this constant internal struggle were twofold.

First, I was tempted to ignore the connection between processes one and two as I initially lacked the tools to construct a new interpretation. Second, I contemplated overlooking the questions I had about my observations. But I couldn't help inventing plausible explanations to render what I had seen and heard understandable, and coherent. In theory-building, there is a need to make guesses based on instinct and judgment (Hansen, 2008). In the end, I took my best shot and made creative leaps through an abductive approach that involved an iterative dialog between my data and a combination of existing theories (Van Maanen et al., 2007). This was a process of trial and error, a common feature in abduction (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021), through which I ultimately developed theory by logical deduction and inductive testing, as described next.

5 | WORKING WITH ACKER ABDUCTIVELY

5.1 | Organizational logic

I begin with organizational logic as it is important to make sense of the interrelationship between the other four processes that constitute the gendered substructure. Acker's (1990) fifth process works, as Dye and Mills (2012) demonstrated, as the organizing principle for structure, culture, interactions, and identity, which inform the gendered substructure—underlying gendered assumptions, arrangements, and practices.

At XYZ, the organizational logic involved *doing* duty (e.g., actively leading, empowering, providing, disciplining, and protecting others in public, especially women) and *being* responsible (e.g., passively caring, keeping, protecting, managing, organizing, or accepting others in private, especially men). These "dominant" femininities and masculinities supported the association between men's (and not women's) bodies and masculinity (not femininity) with leadership and, as I will show, sustained a range of "hidden" biases in XYZ's structures and practices.

A motivating awareness of one's values, *doing* duty involved a commitment to something. It required an active *doing* of what one felt obligated or expected to *do*, according to the "rules," guiding logic and cultural ideals of man-

hood. On the other hand, responsibility was the condition of *being* responsible, in which one was morally accountable and subordinate to duty. Responsibilities were the demanded duties or expectations of *being* a woman. From this perspective, *being* responsible and *doing* duty, underlying arrangements in the family and at the organizational level, constituted the ongoing system that at once evaluated and determined appropriate gendered behavior based on the logic, allowed and maintained the gendered arrangements of work, determined spatial divisions, regulated interactions, and manifest in the presentation of self. These organizational rules and structures were so taken for granted that they were responsible for reasserting appropriate ways of “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and actively worked to prevent resistance.

Following Parsons (2017), I developed an account of my findings that integrated *being* responsible and *doing* duty—the different elements of the gendered substructure—into “coherent arrangements” of structure, culture, interactions, and identity (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998b). This involved weaving the logic throughout my writing-up of the other four processes and (re)examining them through the logic in a discussion of my findings. This unified my findings into a coherent, whole case. In what follows, I draw upon my field notes to explain thus far unexplainable observations within Acker's theory to stimulate new insights.

5.2 | Gendering practices/structures

5.2.1 | Divisions of labor

At XYZ, woman, regardless of position or seniority, worked to *be* responsible by caring (i.e., fetching water, bringing biscuits, and responding to distress in meetings). Men, on the other hand, *doing* duty, worked to prevent, detect, and punish gender crimes by disciplining women in Office meetings (i.e., setting them up to fail and stepping in when they did). Men did not do any caring work. This could be explained through the logic against which individuals habitually functioned. However, I had observations in the remaining three elements of this process that required further explanation.

5.2.2 | Divisions of allowed behavior

In Office staff meetings, Bob, “widely respected, a man with presence and authority,” would *do* duty—discipline women (and out gay men) who spoke-up, telling them aggressively “now isn't the time,” thereby silencing them. He “sat back, hands behind his head and just talked.” Sarah, technically chairing proceedings, was *being* responsible. She “lapsed into passivity, stared at her mobile phone and accepted all forms of male behavior, or at least did not challenge them.” This included those practices of the “naughty boys” who occupied the “back-row” and worked to disrupt proceedings; “swearing violently at any women who dared speak.” The silence of the majority female audience (and my own) troubled me. What did it mean?

Noting that Acker (1990) had drawn on Connell's (1987) framework for the social analysis of gender, I turned to “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In doing so, I worked to explain the diversity of masculinities available within the frame of *doing* duty. Through this theory, Bob practiced the hegemonic ideal form of masculinity in Office staff meetings that structured and legitimized gender relations hierarchically. His was a configuration of gender practices that were distinguishable from Sarah's responsible emphasized femininity—and to the non-hegemonic masculinities practiced by “naughty boys”—and those femininities practiced by the audience in complementary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity. Sarah's passivity, a requirement of *being* responsible, encouraged the majority female audience to coalesce around and embody such unequal gender relations. *Being* responsible, rendered them (and me) complicit as we accommodated and helped sustain the hegemonic norm by not actively resisting it.

5.2.3 | Divisions of power

I had recorded over 150 instances of Sarah being late, or not turning-up at all to Office meetings across my 12 months of observations. Her lateness was “a long-standing joke” but I wondered how to explain it.

Acker (1990) argues that power in organizations is *always* included in interactions and expressed in what women and men are permitted to do and act, and how women and men are ranked and evaluated. Her perspective holds that structures have been constructed in the interests of dominant groups and serve to perpetuate these groups' dominance. Such a view, however, does not account for human actors and offers no insight into the role individuals play in creating or dismantling gendered divisions. By placing primacy on structure over agency, recognition of actors' agency and consciousness are largely ignored (Wharton, 1991). Recognizing that Sarah's practices could not be adequately explained through Acker's notion of power alone prompted my search for a theory that could. I turned to Foucault (1979).

Acker (1990, p. 151) makes the point that work on sexuality in organizations is “indebted” to Foucault (1979, p. 95) who argues that “where there is power, there is resistance.” Using this theory, I reasoned that Sarah's behavior likely stemmed from opposition to, and frustration with, enactments of systemic power, embedded in the organization, which worked, and were (re)enforced through the routine ongoing practices to privilege *doing* duty and subordinate *being* responsible. As the features defining “appropriate” leadership were intrinsically connected to *doing* duty in exclusively male bodies, Sarah, was squashed into the female role of *being* responsible to the extent she became incapable of the leadership role which required her to *do* duty. Such gendered divisions of power incited resistance directed toward the organization and manifest in her lateness and absences. This was one-way Sarah could push-back.

5.2.4 | Divisions in physical space

I had observed public rallies at which Sarah and Clare were *doing* duty—seemingly leading proceedings in front of huge female dominated audiences. Their “rah-rah” speeches on stage, accompanied by red banners displaying “CUTS HURT” and “PEOPLE BEFORE PROFITS” slogans, invoked tropes of *being* responsible. It felt deliberate though, orchestrated: “Female speaker after female speaker. Stage managed as feminine, and caring. If only they [members] knew what was really going on in the Office!” I wondered how to account for the maintenance of XYZ's public image of *being* responsible when I had evidence it was diametrically opposed to allowed behaviors in the Office. To explain this, I turned to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, conceptualizing XYZ as a “team.”

Goffman (1959) enables understanding of the group dynamic through “impression management” in which “teams” of actors cooperate in performance to influence the perceptions of others about the “team” to other ends. To do this, teams segregate audiences, putting on different performances, or emphasize different aspects of the team performance for different sets of people. The performance is predicated on the official stance of the team being visible in public, whereas, in private, “the impression fostered by the presentation is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course, indicating a more “truthful” type of performance.” (p. 112).

Adopting this theory worked to explain how a feminine, or at least less traditionally masculine, public impression of XYZ *being* responsible was maintained—through the cooperation of women *doing* duty while *being* responsible to be seen as recognizably womanly, and men masquerading as “team” members without being subject to the constraints that accompanied team membership. Beyond the watchful gaze of the majority female membership, the pseudo-private nature of the Office was a space relative to the “official” performance where men were less constrained by the team *being* responsible in public and could re-establish a masculinity that had been undermined by the “feminine” nature of their work. Goffman's work proved pivotal to explaining my observations in the next process and the remaining two.

5.3 | Gendering cultures

Two major familial concepts emerged from my analysis: the image of father *doing* duty and that of a mother *being* responsible. Participants drew on these cultural maternal and paternal frames in “doing gender” to represent themselves as masculine or feminine in similar behavioral contexts, including in the interviews (Benschop, 2009). However, as the processes are interconnected, this presented me with a challenge: how to relate cultural findings from the interviews to those observed gendered divisions and vice-versa? I crafted an applied and pragmatic solution.

I located my findings against and within each of Acker's gendered divisions and the theories already utilized (1) allowed behavior (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), (2) power (Foucault, 1979), and (3) physical space (Goffman, 1959). This reduced the complexity of the process as I had created an analytical tool for its application. Space permits only a glimpse at the ways in which this approach worked to highlight the associations between the gendered divisions I had seen and those I had heard.

First, in the family, women *doing* duty (providing) threatened the status quo of the domestic gendered division of labor supporting dominant ideals of *being* responsible (caring) and its association with the image of hegemonically masculine fathers *doing* duty (providing). Women *doing* duty (providing), in the absence of *being* responsible (caring), were no longer recognizably womanly, whereas when men were *being* responsible (caring) alternative masculinities were constructed to surpass the women around them. This explained XYZ's gendered division of labor.

Second, a similar gendered division of allowed behavior was found in the images of gendered culture in the family that defined and reinforced how women and men *ought* to behave. Participants worked to construct their own gendered identities and position those of others in relation to ideal images of fathers *doing* duty (discipline) and mothers *being* responsible (accepting) that were distinguishable from other enactments of masculinity or femininity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In the family, the underlying requirement that fathers *do* duty was so strong that it held true in how violence was reframed as an aspect of *doing* duty. Fathers were required to be violent (although this violence need not be physical or extreme) to uphold the gender order. It was women's responsibility to legitimate this violence through conforming to it, doing so to be seen as *being* responsible. This explained XYZ's gendered division of allowed behavior.

Third, in the family, power relations were embedded in processes of categorization and differentiation (Foucault, 1979). Men drew a distinction between a “good” mother/woman (*being* responsible) and a “bad” mother/woman (worthless or dirty). Women, similarly, drew a distinction between a “good” father/man (*doing* duty) and a “bad” father/man (failing in or rejecting his duties). The family contained a complex power dynamic between men's subordination of women and how they were constructed and constructed themselves as “good” women *being* responsible. This explained why only those women *being* responsible at XYZ were accommodated but as “other.”

Finally, participants were engaged in “impression management” during interviews (Goffman, 1959). The interviews afforded participants' opportunity to practice and present different gendered identities by concealing aspects of the private self and embellishing the public. Participants worked to influence the audience (my) perception of their public image in dichotomous ways. Men concealed aspects of the private self *being* responsible (caring) and embellished the public *doing* duty (providing), whereas women concealed aspects of the private self *doing* duty (providing) and embellished the public *being* responsible (caring). Such performances explained why men, working in public for XYZ, pretended to be members of the audience (*being* responsible) but were allies of the performers (*doing* duty). Similarly, these performances explained why women, *doing* duty in public, adjusted their performances to be seen as *being* responsible.

5.4 | Gendering interactions

For the most part, perpetrated by Bob, Gerry, Billy, and Brad in Executive Committee meetings, Clare and I were repeatedly “touched, made the subject of sexualized jokes, described as centerfolds, laughed at by other men” and, in

one instance, “passed around metaphorically as we asked to speak” but we never said a word. Jess and Sarah were not subjected to this. Much of the time they were silent, speaking “in monotone about industrial/tech matters” only when it was a requirement of their positions to do so (i.e., the meeting agenda required a report from the Branch Secretary). Executives men were “captivated by their performance and nodded approvingly.” While “clearly embarrassed”—“red faced,” Clare and I never challenged the behavior. We “looked down at the table” and Sarah and Jess “just ignored it, stared at their mobile phones or turned their heads away.”

Executive Committee was “a space for men to be men, be with male friends, talk about male things, and offend, humiliate and intimate women.” The logic worked to explain this and our silence, in part, as Clare, Sarah, Jess, and I were *being* responsible (accepting), and men were *doing* duty (disciplining) in private. But why were just Clare and I subjected to such abhorrent behavior? Why not Jess and Sarah? The behavior of Bob, Gerry, Billy, and Brad made me “feel sick to the stomach” and I despised Jess and Sarah for their inaction: “They made my blood boil—condoning such horrific behavior.” For an explanation, I turned to Gherardi’s (1994) notion of “doing gender” and MacKinnon’s (1979) power-based account of the sexual harassment in conjunction with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective.

Gherardi (1994, pp. 598–607) describes “doing gender” as a symbolically interactive activity involving a two-staged ritual: paying homage (ceremonial work) and remedial work (repairing the inequality inherent in gender difference). While this is different to Acker’s (1990) “doing subordination,” both approaches share the same theorizations of interaction (Goffman, 1959). Similarly, major themes in MacKinnon’s (1979) sociocultural power-based account of sexual harassment are compatible with Acker’s emphasis on gender as constructed. MacKinnon argues that men’s control over women’s jobs makes coerced sexual relations the price of women’s material survival. Bringing these theories together explained that the practices of submission to sexual harassment for Clare and I were a condition of our participation in a male domain and (for me) a condition of employment.

My out lesbianism, and for Clare, daring to speak, constituted an opposing reality for some of XYZ’s men—a defiance of the requirement to occupy the role of “other.” Requesting permission to speak we were *being* responsible (supportive of the gender order), with our silence to sexual harassment also in keeping with *being* responsible (remedial of the offense). I had full awareness that my choices and actions were circumscribed by the power of the gender order as I worked to remedy the “offense” of my presence by *being* responsible:

The consequences of challenging the behavior would be significant. Any challenge would be counter-productive, resulting in me being ostracized further and harassed by men more than I already am and/or losing my job.

For Clare and I, our visible embarrassment (appearing “red faced”) functioned in the same way as a verbal apology—to save face. “Looking down at the table” reaffirmed our submission and operated as an appeasement for trespassing in a male domain. Our practices had remedial value—simultaneously signaling concern for the norms of *being* responsible and our intention to *be* responsible in future.

This combined approach, also worked to explain that Bob, Gerry, Billy, and Brad were engaged in the ceremonial work of *doing* duty (disciplining women who transgressed) to enforce and maintain the behavioral compliance of women who ought to *be* responsible through the practice of sexual harassment. By playing along and laughing, Executives other men framed these interactions as a joke to avoid having to challenge the gender order. Their laughter reaffirmed the sexually aggressive behavior as necessary to uphold the symbolic order, thereby functioning to isolate Clare and I further. Sarah and Jess supported this behavior, or at least did not challenge it, to be seen as *being* responsible (accepting). In this way, sexual harassment remained hidden as it might be among the four walls of the home: the “problem” never appeared in public.

For Sarah and Jess, interactions at Executive Committee involved shuttling between *being* responsible (as women in leadership positions) and *doing* duty (the masculinity of the position). Clearly, these women risked being sanctioned as they negotiated different gender and leadership practices. To avoid this, I reasoned that they monitored their social identities discursively in monotone speech, including using “industrial/tech talk.” Men, “captivated” by their perfor-

mance, granted Sarah and Jess symbolic membership of the male domain. Such practices restored the gender order as men *doing* duty (protecting) afforded Sarah and Jess *being* responsible (accepting) safe passage.

5.5 | Constructing gendered identities

I had observed differences in clothing and appearance between Sarah, Jess and Clare in the Office versus at public rallies that I could not explain. Similarly, I wondered why men (and Jess and Sarah) repeatedly mocked and ridiculed one man in the Office in particular, Stephen. To explain these observations, I turned to Sheppard's (1989) "strategies for gender management," and Connell's (1995) "multiple masculinities," in conjunction with Goffman's (1959) "dramaturgy." As I had already utilized Goffman and Connell's earlier work, I reasoned that the leap to Connell's later theory seemed logical.

5.5.1 | Spatially cognizant strategies of gendered identity construction and management

Clare appeared "feminine and sexual in her appearance" regardless of where she worked. She wore "vividly colored plunge dresses and accessorized with chunky necklaces, hoop earrings, detailed handbags, and used faux leather iPad covers." I didn't take her seriously: "Is she really wearing that? What leader of a union in their right mind would dress-up like that? You're an embarrassment woman!" Sarah and Jess, on the other hand, appeared "frumpish in the Office, wearing drab, lifeless, ill-fitting clothing drawn from a pallet of just black or gray." In public, at rallies or member meetings, they applied "some make-up, styled their hair and wore red." I did not disparage them or observe anyone else doing so.

Sheppard (1989, pp. 144–155) suggests that "gender management strategies" exist on a continuum. Women who "blend-in" exercise control and self-discipline to meet notions of dominant femininity and cultural norms, whereas women who practice "claiming a rightful place" do not practice their gender or sexuality in a manner acceptable to organization. Adopting this theory from a dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959) worked to explain that Sarah and Jess practiced spatially cognizant "blending-in" strategies to balance *doing* duty (the masculinity of the job) with *being* responsible (as women in the job). In doing so, they managed their public impression (and vicariously the union) by not eliminating all signs of femininity in their public identity. On the other hand, Clare, "claiming a rightful place," threatened the status quo supporting dominant ideals of women *being* responsible while *doing* duty. Her clothing and appearance were understood by me to demonstrate that she had failed to live up to the gendered expectations of *doing* duty (leading). The underlying requirement that women *be* responsible was so strong that I assessed Clare relative to these expectations, determining that her clothing and appearance was too female, unlike the male-defined norms of *doing* duty. As a result, I deemed she lacked credibility, whereas Sarah and Jess did not.

5.5.2 | Working out gendered identity construction on stage

Stephen, Coordinator Organizing, managed most women in the Office. He was made the "butt of the joke" by men in Office meetings, called "a virgin and a fucking useless whinger." Most frequently, he was targeted by Jack, the "sex-positive, self-confessed bisexual," Coordinator Media and Communications. The women Stephen managed were described in "Office banter" as "illiterate, degenerate rabid dogs" and "overly emotional agitators who should know better than to speak." Sarah and Jess "scapegoated" Stephen in private meetings with me, deeming him "responsible for the supposed wrongdoings, mistakes, and faults of women organizers." In formal meetings they "rolled their eyes and quietly sniggered" when he spoke. Stephen "red in the face, looked down but carried on."

Connell (1995) notes that there are recurring tensions between masculinities characterized as hegemonic, complicit, marginalized, or subordinate in relation to each other as well as to emphasized femininity. The relationships through which they operate involve levels of dominance and oppression and processes of identification and differentiation. Dramaturgically, these practices are fueled by a desire to manipulate others' impressions of the performer when they believe that their public images are relevant to the attainment of desired goals, or a discrepancy exists between how they want to be perceived and how other people perceive them (Goffman, 1959). Bringing these theories together explained how men's domination/subordination relations were worked out onstage (in Office meetings). For men, I reasoned that identity was constructed through a disciplinary regime that intimately and inextricably linked hegemonic masculinity and strength in *doing* duty with an embodied and disciplined responsible emphasized femininity.

Men's discursive practices of mocking and ridiculing Stephen served to punish him. His management of "other" women who spoke-up belied the hegemonic masculine ideal of *doing* duty and its relationship to a responsible, silent emphasized femininity. By making him the "butt of the joke" and laughing at him, men reinforced the competitive prevailing hierarchy and reaffirmed their own dominant masculinity. Even Sarah and Jess achieved higher status as they were *being* responsible (organizing) by first "rolling their eyes," then watching on quietly as Stephen was ridiculed by men *doing* duty. Jack worked to overcome his subordinate (effeminate or weak) position in the gendered hierarchy by practicing complicit masculinity (punishing and humiliating Stephen discursively). This involved a convincing performance of strength on stage to protect and define status. By creating social, emotional, and physical distance between himself and Stephen, and the women whom he managed, who were considered "failed" or "weak," Jack appeared strong and importantly, not weak. That Stephen, "red in the face" concealed his embarrassment by "looking down" but carried on was an attempt to change the definition of the situation—a realigning action—through which he signaled that the norms defining the interaction were wrong and that he was in fact strong.

6 | DISCUSSION

As I argued earlier, there is considerable published work on Acker's (1990) framework, including that which has established that the constituent elements should be viewed holistically as a series of inter-related elements through the logic (Dye & Mills, 2012). This work proved fundamental in my understanding how each process could be an abstraction of the gendered substructure. However, using Acker's theory in its entirety, two things became clear.

First, despite the huge number of articles published, the analytical potential of Acker's theory has not been realized. Researchers rarely challenge the precepts of her theory in their studies, use it fully or as it was originally intended. In these uses of Acker's theory, the way the gendered organization is constructed and researched is largely assumed, at least implicitly, to be gendered. Given the complexities of working with Acker, this may be indicative of a general retreat away from a complex research endeavor to a simpler one (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). More directly, however, I argue the reason is the absence of a need to test something that has already been shown to be "true." Consequently, the testing of Acker's theory and replication of those tests has been relegated to a position of second priority relative to the theory itself. This contributes to the stagnation of Acker's ideas and accounts, although only in part, for the absence of innovation from her insights.

Second, there are kinds of knowledge that do not neatly fit into Acker's theory. Despite over 30 years of endeavor, I argue that data that does not "fit" with her predictions and expectations appears to be routinely marginalized or suppressed. While I cannot be exactly sure why, there is evidence to suggest that working with the "mess" of real-world qualitative research may not be welcome, given prescriptions for standardized criteria in management (Symon et al., 2018) and organization journals (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2014). The message seems clear. To publish qualitative research in top-tier management journals we are asked to make our research more "palatable" to reviewers' by "mimicking quantitative research," "showing and telling" but within page limits and, importantly, "focus on the process of fitting" (Pratt, 2008, pp. 496–499). Increasingly recognized in the management literature (Sætre & Van de

Ven, 2021), abduction provides a mode of reasoning to overcome this as it supports working qualitatively with existing theoretical resources in hypothesis development to best explain anomalous data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In what follows, I refocus on the synthesizing role *doing* duty and *being* responsible had in relation to each other and to the eight additional theoretical resources in a discussion of each (1–4) of Acker's processes.

6.1 | Gendering practices/structures

6.1.1 | Divisions of labor

Acker's first element of this process serves to provide an account of recurring practices that are responsible for gendered divisions in organizations (Dye & Mills, 2012). At XYZ, hierarchies and structures were gendered to manifest in clear distinctions between how men ought to *do* duty, whereas women ought to *be* responsible. The features defining appropriate leadership were, therefore, intrinsically connected with masculinity. Some women challenged the division of labor by being in elected leadership positions, but their mere presence did not subvert the relationship between masculinity and *doing* duty.

The first process alone does not reveal the governing gendered framework that serves to develop, maintain, or change the divisions' gendered character. The gendered "rules" pertaining to how women and men ought to behave as well as those qualities deemed important, physical space, and power should be included. However, each needs to be carefully delineated as they are required to examine practices in the second of Acker's gendering processes—culture.

6.1.2 | Divisions of allowed behavior

In terms of allowed behaviors, it is necessary to consider "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Acker (1990) endorses the view that organizations reproduce gender divisions, inequalities, and unequal power distributions that maintain and favor hegemonic masculine organizational practices. Such divisions define and reinforce how women and men ought to behave as they are constantly practiced at the organizational level, (re)producing the organizational logic.

At XYZ, *doing* duty celebrated a brutal and aggressive masculinity with hostility aimed at "others" who failed to comply. Such practices were actively supported by women *being* responsible who worked as "role models" to accommodate and help sustain the hegemonic norm by not resisting it, ensuring that it remained hidden from public view. In this logic, it was a normative requirement that women conform to masculine violence as by conforming they were *being* responsible—behaving within the strictly gendered norms of how to "do" the feminine and "be" a woman.

6.1.3 | Divisions of power

Acker's (1990) argues power in organizations is based on symbolic representations of ideal roles that are not grounded in any rational reasoning but found in and (re)produced through an organizational logic. At XYZ, this logic manifest in how the "right" or majority way to be union was associated with men *doing* duty. Men responded to the feminization of the union by establishing "rules," like those found in the family, about which women could be union to maintain the gender order. This was actively supported by "other" women *being* responsible. However, as I have shown, it is difficult to comprehend Acker's notion of power without fully understanding the concomitant notion of resistance.

Foucault's (1979) power and resistance is principally compatible with Acker's theory, and such an interpretation, by taking Acker's structures of power, provides a more judicious evaluation of her contribution. Notions of power and resistance are useful for understanding expressions of various modes of domination and control and networks of

power relations within Acker's framework. While practices of categorization in which the male body was viewed as more legitimately union worked to underscore the division of power at XYZ, some women did resist, albeit subtly.

6.1.4 | Divisions in physical space

The use of physical space is an important gendered cue that signals the relative importance of women and men at work. At XYZ, the logic worked to ensure individuals cooperated in a "team" performance to sustain a feminine impression of the union *being* responsible in public. The Office was a pseudo-private space where men *doing* duty did much of the real work necessary to keep up appearances by disciplining and sexually harassing women who were not *being* responsible. Goffman's (1959) work proved pivotal to this understanding.

While Goffman made numerous, unrecognized contributions to the development of feminist theory (West, 1996), Acker did not cite him directly. I contend that Acker's conceptualization of gender as constructed, and theorizations of interactions are compatible with the central tenants of his work. Both share a focus on underpinning studies which emphasize interactions amongst people and the interactional order of daily life (Garfinkel, (1967).

6.2 | Gendering cultures

Acker (1991) recognizes that contextual dynamics, including the family are at play in the construction of gender at work. In this study, the gendering in the family (and in the interviews) was at once a site for the creation of the logic and of its maintenance through the image of man/father *doing* duty and of a women/mother *being* responsible. The underlying requirement that women *be* responsible guided how the women interviewed worked through incongruence between sex category (female) and gender identity (doing duty) by *being* responsible to be recognizably womanly. However, it proved difficult to explain my findings in this process without reference to each gendered division.

I contend that familial images are best explored through and with reference to the supplementary theories adopted and those divisions in Acker's first process. This means paying attention to how social assumptions about fatherhood/motherhood in the family may inform gendered divisions at the organizational level. Such familial experiences are replicated in how gender is done in the everyday world of organizations as social processes of gender construction continue into working lives (Cockburn, 1985).

6.3 | Gendering interactions

Acker's (1990) third process is broad, but arguably intentionally so all situationally constructed exchanges are captured. However, explaining some of these observed interactions proved difficult. To overcome this, I suggest an approach that accounts for the spatial variations in interactions is needed.

I have shown that Gherardi's (1994, pp. 598–607) "ceremonial and remedial work" is a useful tool for understanding observed changes in speech behavior within Acker's framework. Similarly, MacKinnon's (1979, p. 32) notion that "sexual harassment is a persistent condition of work" aided my understanding of such personal experiences. This combined focus, within Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, worked to highlight two hidden practices. First, women recognized the organizational logic and developed strategies for repairing the diversity of their presence based on *being* responsible and made themselves "discreet." Second, the private practice of sexual harassment buttressed the logic and worked, as in the family, to justify, reframe, excuse or accept the behavior as it was perpetrated by men *doing* duty against "other" women who were not *being* responsible.

6.4 | Constructing gendered identities

Acker (1990) suggests that individuals work to present themselves as “appropriately” gendered members of the organization as they are aware of and respond to their surroundings. I contend that explaining gendering in this process means tracing the way that identity construction contributes to and is reflected in some form of demonstrated awareness of the requirements of the logic. However, I argue that understanding the consequences for individuals who do not present themselves positively as gendered members of the organization relative to and in maintenance of the logic cannot be explained with Acker's theory alone.

Connell (1995), Goffman (1959), and Sheppard (1989) shaped my approach in this process. For Sarah and Jess, identity construction involved dressing frumpishly in private (in the Office), while amplifying normative elements of femininity in public (at rallies) for demonstrating individual proficiency in *being* responsible. Clare and I, who transgressed, albeit for different reasons, were reminded of what was an expected, “normal” identity when we did not embody it by men actively (and women passively) policing the gender order. On the other hand, men's identity construction involved repudiating any notion of *being* responsible while actively *doing* duty. Men (and Jess and Sarah) invested in the logic could differentiate and elevate their own identity and power to be seen as strong and importantly not weak.

7 | CONCLUSION

My research supports the idea that the gendered substructure should be viewed as a set of interrelated processes, with Acker's organizational logic providing a way of understanding how such processes comes to inform the (re)production of the gendered organization. However, I have shown that when something is anomalous in the data—that is, unaccounted for in the expectations and predictions set by her original theory, abduction leads to looking for meaning, for a possible explanation. This iterative process ends with a theory that best explains my observations and accounts for the ways in which XYZ is gendered. Figure 3 shows the interaction between each of Acker's five gendering processes, along with their corresponding supplementary theories, and the interdependent relationship between her first (practices/structures) and second (cultures) processes. This theory has implications for the future of the study of gender in organizations.

First, future research should engage with Acker's theory but focus less on “fit,” giving greater emphasis to data that doesn't. Based on the analysis here, I reason that this shift in focus may open-up spaces for gendering to be challenged in organizations. Glimmers of resistance are evident in the data presented here. I have shown that women may have had full or partial awareness of the structural conditions, opportunities, and constraints they faced, and some women actively resisted them. However, the data also suggests that Jess and Sarah—XYZ's most senior individuals—while subordinated by the logic, also benefited from and actively participated in the reproduction of masculinities in interaction through practices that contributed to the construction of hegemony. This may provide justification for continuing gender inequalities and render the logic stable.

Second, future research should explore further the utility of Acker's theory in relation to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy of everyday life. While I acknowledge that using Goffman's work is unfavorable in view of his sexist language, his ideas played a significant role in my understanding how collective (and some individual) performances were spatially gendered. As I have shown, XYZ's women and men worked together as a “team” to support a feminine public impression of the union that was knowingly contradicted in private, indicating a more “truthful” performance. This may mean that the union renewal we “see” is not what it seems.

Finally, working with Acker abductively needs further testing empirically. There may be multiple legitimate explanations of my observations beyond those I have reasoned here. As studies are replicated, I hope improved approaches will be developed and utilized. To this end, I leave the last word to Acker (1990, pp. 155):

Feminist research and theorizing, by continuing to puzzle out how gender provides the subtext for arrangements of subordination, can make some contributions to a future in which ... dominance, control and subordination, particularly the subordination of women, are eradicated, or at least minimized, in our organization life.

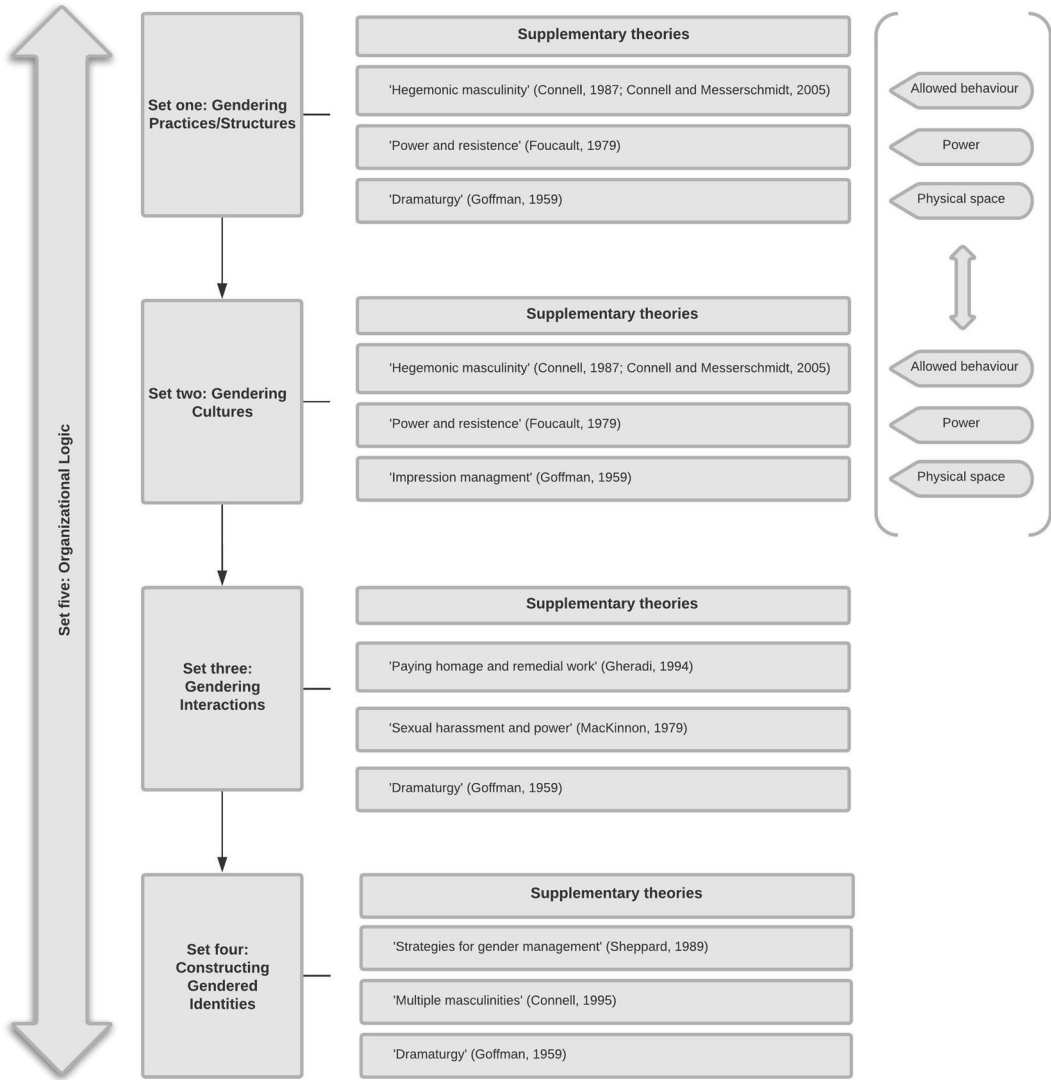


FIGURE 3 Sequence diagram, describing the interaction between each of Acker's five gendering processes, along with their corresponding supplementary theories. The figure is titled "An Abductive Approach to Working with Acker" and highlights the relationship between Acker's framework and eight theories: (1) hegemonic masculinity; (2) power and resistance; (3) dramaturgy; (4) impression management; (5) paying homage and remedial work; (6) sexual harassment and power; (7) strategies for gender management; (8) multiple masculinities. It shows the interdependent relationship between set one (gendering practices/structures) and set two (gendering cultures)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ENDNOTE

¹ There is currently an embargo on the thesis upon which this study is built. There are, therefore, limits on using the data from the thesis. All names, including those of the senior women and other staff have been changed.

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