

Gendering the Eye of the Norm: Exploring gendered concertive control processes within two self-managing teams.

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Abstract

This article explores the workplace interactions of two self-managed teams of recruitment consultants. I use data from participant observation and recorded interviews to show the gendered nature of what Barker (1993) terms *concertive control*: the social processes by which team members regulate each others' conduct in line with negotiated team values.

My analysis examines how team members negotiate core team values, translate these into specific actions, and regulate these actions through concertive control interactions. I then set out three ways in which gender acts as a resource for these concertive control processes. These are: team members' assumptions about men's and women's relative skills and capacities, the 'tough' masculinity of the haulage industry in which one of the teams operates, and the regulation of performances of heterosexuality during customer interactions.

Building on research by others, I show gender to be not only embedded in the *values* and managerial *style* associated with teamwork (Benschop and Doorewaard 1998, Metcalfe and Linstead 2003), but also integrated into the collaborative *process* of teamworking itself. I emphasise that social categories like gender, become resources in the regulation of conduct at work, and can reify hierarchies even within so-called 'participative' practices like self-managed teamwork.

Keywords: Teamwork/Concertive Control/Gender/Sales Work

Introduction

This article demonstrates that self-managing teamworkers draw upon gendered discourses as a resource during ‘concertive control’ interactions, in which team members exert pressure on their peers to act in line with a negotiated consensus about team values (Barker 1993 p411). These interactions serve to reify the team values as specifically masculine.

The article explores the experiences of two self-managed teams working for ‘Spotlight’ (a pseudonym), an international recruitment consultancy. I extend research highlighting the presence of masculine discourses embedded in the *values* of self-managed teamworking (Metcalf and Linstead 2003, Benschop and Doorewaard 1998), by suggesting that masculine discourses are regulated within the interactions which comprise the *practice* or *enactment* of teamwork.

My analysis is framed by a two-stage understanding of concertive control. I begin by showing how the consultants translate core team values into specific work tasks, attitudes and behaviours. Secondly, I demonstrate that these behaviours are regulated through everyday teamwork interactions such as team meetings, gossip, and banter. Following this, I extend Barker’s (1993) work on concertive control, by identifying three ways in which gender acts as a resource for consultants to draw upon during the enactment of concertive control, so that this process can facilitate the reproduction of masculinist identities at work. My conclusion considers the implications of the findings for future research directions and practitioners of self-managed teamwork.

Firstly, though, I examine the literature on teamworking, masculinities and service sector work which informed this study, highlighting how this article extends current understanding.

Self-managed teamwork and concertive control: A review

The concept and practice of self-managed teamwork has been the focus of much research within the field of organizational studies. Definitions of self-managed teamwork vary, but generally include a less hierarchical structure, with work tasks

allocated within the team and facilitated by a team leader, rather than supervisor (Mueller and Purcell 1992).

The practice of allowing teamworkers to regulate their own task allocation and work processes was first documented amongst the mining communities in northeast England (Trist and Bamforth 1951). Interest in the process grew during the 1980s however, when self-managed teamwork became a core part of ‘high performance’ management rhetoric aimed at increasing employee commitment levels (Walton 1985) and productivity whilst promoting more participative, empowering workplace relationships (Katzenbach and Smith 1993).

By demonstrating how teamworkers contribute to their own work intensification through inter-team discipline, Barker (1993) makes a significant, and critical, contribution to the study of self-managed teams. He develops Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) notion of concertive control, conceived as a lateral ‘unobtrusive’ control mechanism in which

‘explicit written rules and regulations are replaced by the common understanding of values, objectives and means of achievement, along with a deep understanding for the organization’s “mission”’ (ibid p184).

Barker (1993) documents how the high levels of social interaction and decision-making amongst teamworkers facilitate a process by which team members establish shared values in line with a management-defined vision. These values are linked to objectified rules about appropriate team behaviour, which is then regulated through teamwork interactions.

Teamworkers are controlled, Barker suggests, by the discourse about how to display identification with organizational values, which they themselves construct, and which informs their sense of self (ibid). With its focus on self-regulation, concertive control has strong links with other forms of ‘normative’ control in which workers identify with organizational values (Barley and Kunda 1992). Barker’s work has been extended by research which highlights how these normative processes are linked to the formation of team workers’ identities (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). However,

Barker's theory represents a laterally diffused form of control in that team members are responsible for ensuring their own and their team-mates' adherence to these values. Team members feel a sense of moral responsibility to their colleagues to avoid letting the team down.

Concertive control theory makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of self-managed teamwork by demonstrating how this surveillance process is embodied and enacted during everyday team interactions, and Barker's work is regularly cited in articles discussing the regulation of team values and identities (e.g. Knights and McCabe 2003, 2000). Like these more recent studies of teamwork, Barker uses a Foucauldian theoretical framework, whereby teamworkers' subjectivities are discursively constituted through the practice of enacting teamwork in line with collectively established norms and values (1999). Alternative ways of doing teamworking are foreclosed by the normalising effects of these self-generated notions of what teamworking should be (Foucault 2002). Workers find themselves under surveillance by other members of their team, and must discipline themselves to perform appropriately.

However, whilst concertive control theory has been influential for authors exploring the identity regulation processes within self-managed teamwork, the social and cultural resources which team workers draw upon during concertive control interactions remain underexplored. Rendering explicit these frames of reference would deepen our understanding of how concertive control works and its implications for organizations and their employees.

Barker (1993) describes how team members with family responsibilities (mainly women) faced severe concertive control pressure from their colleagues, who accused them of not being 'committed' enough to the team. Yet he approaches this rather uncritically, making no mention of how gender or other ways of categorising individuals might impact on concertive control interactions. Other researchers have identified that teamwork continues to perpetuate a gendered division of labour, with women occupying lower status roles within the team (Vallas 2003, Greene *et al* 2002). Here, I seek to contribute to the literature on gender, teamwork and concertive control. I demonstrate that recruitment consultants, working in two self-managed

teams, use gender as a resource during teamwork interactions to regulate team members' conduct. In the following section, I identify existing research linking gender and self-managed teamwork.

Gender and Self-Managed Teamwork

In the years since Barker's analysis (1993), authors such as Metcalfe and Linstead (2003) and Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) have acknowledged the relevance of masculine discourses for teamwork. These 'masculinities' are theorised as webs of socially-generated ideas and associations about maleness and male behaviour (Kerfoot and Knights 1993), constructed in relation to femininity and alternative notions of masculinity (Carrigan *et al*, Connell 1995). Masculinities are created and maintained in the workplace through the social interactions of men *and* women (Kerfoot and Knights 1993). As Collinson and Hearn (1994) argue, there is nothing exclusively *masculine* about performing masculinities. Workplace behaviours associated with masculine discourses, such as sexualised banter, are also routinely instigated and performed by women (Pollert 1981, Filby 1992), who may experience it as a reinforcement of their self-esteem and identity as empowered, sexual, feminine beings (*ibid*).

Metcalfe and Linstead (2003) suggest that teamwork rhetoric and practice prioritize quantifiable teamwork *outcomes*, over the communicative *practices* through which team members organize their work. They argue that teamwork contains masculinist discourses because demonstrating performance and achievement is thought to be linked to notions of 'male' identity (*ibid*, Kerfoot and Knights 1998).

Knights and McCabe (2003) have pointed out that the emphasis on performance over process is contradictory, given that negotiating core team values intensifies levels of communication within teams, compared to other work forms. This focus on team performance and results has led Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) to argue that the 'abstract' [team]worker (Acker 1990) remains male, despite the reliance of effective teamwork on 'feminine' skills such as communication. The authors' research identified that teamworkers prioritized managerial discourses such as entrepreneurialism and careerism, identified by Collinson and Hearn (1994) as

masculinities because they are associated with ‘maleness’ by individuals in their everyday lives. In the sales industry, where the case study teams discussed in this article are located, these masculinities are interpreted through notions of the ‘heroic’ pro-active, independent *salesman* (Hodgson 2003). Once again, so-called ‘feminine’ values such as participation and communication (Metcalf and Linstead 2003) are marginalised.

The research I have outlined briefly here confirms that gender identities, as hierarchical social categories which, as we enact them, help us to define ourselves and ‘others’ (Beasley 2005), have implications for self-managed teamwork. However, this research has focused on the presence of masculine discourses within *managerial styles* and *core values* associated with teamworking. Despite the importance of concertive control interactions for regulating both core team values, and teamwork processes, academe has largely overlooked the possibility that teamworkers might question or reproduce gendered discourses within team-based concertive control interactions. If, as Metcalfe and Linstead (2003) and Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) suggest, teamworkers identify with masculinist managerial values, we might expect workers to demonstrate and reinforce them through their interactions. In this article, I demonstrate that gender is used as a resource during concertive control processes, and that this control form represents a means for the replication of hierarchical gender relations.

Gender and Service Sector Teamworking

Concertive control processes are embedded within an organizational and wider social context. The service industry in which the case study organization, ‘Spotlight,’ operates is implicated in how concertive control is enacted. Korczynski and Ott (2004) argue that service workers must ‘enchant’ their customers so that they can be guided smoothly through service interactions. The authors argue that the process of enchantment involves service workers matching their behaviour to customer expectations, to ensure an appropriate customer response (ibid, Urry 1990).

It has often been suggested that women’s performances of [hetero]sexuality are important resources for enchanting customers in some areas of service work

(Hochschild 1983, Gherardi 1995, Filby 1992). Enacting sexualised identities, for example by flirting with customers (Brannan 2005, Filby 1992) or wearing uniforms designed to show off a woman's body (Hoschild 1983), can lubricate customer interactions, helping service workers to make sales, deal with customer complaints and satisfy demands about the provision of customer service.

However, although notions about sexuality, masculinity and femininity are sown into managerial discourses and styles as described above, these same notions cannot be fully managed (Knights and McCabe 2003). This opens up the possibility for contradictions and tensions within the concertive control process, which might not necessarily operate around a unitarist, shared value system as perceived by Barker (1993) or Tompkins and Cheney (1985), but which is sensitised by a multiplicity of conflicting norms and assumptions. In my analysis I offer vignettes showing that Spotlight team members' concertive control interactions harness notions of male and female [hetero]sexuality as resources which encourage men and women to regulate their behaviour and conform to different gendered and sexualised 'norms'.

A final word on the use of masculinity theorisations

The concept of masculinities or masculine discourses as employed in this study has not been immune to critique. In particular, Metcalfe and Linstead's (2003) work has been criticised for retaining essentialist language because it divides teamworkers' characteristics and 'team values' into masculinities and femininities, and implies that certain essential feminine characteristics must be repressed by women teamworkers (Fournier and Smith 2006).

I agree that certainly, masculinities and femininities cannot fully escape reliance on gender binaries. Yet as my findings will show, employing the notion of masculinities and femininities does not necessarily involve 'fixing' social practices permanently as masculine or feminine: such practices might draw on different gendered assumptions in connection with the specific social and temporal *context* in which they are situated. Indeed, the argument that masculinity theories are either essentialist or non-essentialist does not itself transcend the issue of binaries.

Retaining the notion of masculinities in this instance allows us to discuss actions and behaviours from which women have conceptually been marginalised, whilst keeping these actions separate from the category ‘men’. This is necessary because not all men, and many women, participate in these practices, as I hope the ethnographic vignettes and interview data presented here will show.

Methodology

This article focuses on the interactions within two self-managed teams in a UK branch of an international recruitment agency I call ‘Spotlight’. AdminTeam and DriveTeam resource administrative staff and HGV drivers for the commercial (office-based) and transport industries respectively. All the employees in the study were white and identified as heterosexual and the overwhelming majority were in their thirties. There was a noticeable difference in the gender make up of the teams: all the consultants in AdminTeam were female, but the only women in DriveTeam were the female manager and I.

My data stems from a three-year period of ethnographic research. In 2004 I was employed as a full-time temporary member of DriveTeam, and at the same time secured the consent of my colleagues to engage in ethnographic research, informing them that I intended to explore, via participant observation and interview techniques, their working practices and interactions focusing on teamwork and gender. In line with British Sociological Association research guidelines (BSA 2002), I have made every effort to protect the identities of the research participants, including using substitute names for the participants and the organization.

Since all my colleagues made copious notes at their desks, I was able to write detailed fieldnotes without this becoming obtrusive, later extending them at lunchbreaks and in the evenings. After a week or so I began to organise these notes into the themes which had emerged during my observations, following ethnographic research practice (Geertz 1999, Van Maanen 1988). As well as detailing the teams’ physical surroundings and the intricacies of their labour process, I recorded interactions between team members ranging from more formal team discussions to office gossip, instances of humour and flirting, sales pitches to clients, interviews with candidates

seeking employment, and team meetings, in an attempt to explore the relationships between team members and across teams, as well as with managers, clients and job candidates. I also noted in detail instances of resistant or 'committed' behaviour and the coping mechanisms used during stressful or busy periods.

Whilst my fieldnotes brought to light the symbolic interactions involved in 'doing teamwork', the contextual subtleties of which would not have been gained from interviews alone, continued on-site discussions with participants helped me to reassess the fieldnotes in conjunction with further observations and interview responses, in line with an iterative 'theory building' approach which involves constantly reassessing and adapting theory whilst in the field (Eisenhardt 1989).

Following eight weeks of participant observation as a full-time, paid member of DriveTeam, I returned to the field regularly over a subsequent three-year period, during which I conducted semi-structured, recorded interviews, with all members of AdminTeam and DriveTeam. This helped me to evaluate how the teamworkers *talk* about teamwork, as well as how they *do* it. The interviews lasted about an hour on average, and questions were organised into sections, which included: perspectives on and feelings about sales targets, how to recognise 'good teamwork', life as a member of AdminTeam or DriveTeam, being part of (or resisting) team culture, and being a 'team player'.

During these three years I also engaged in countless on-site informal discussions during which my participants would tell me about recent events at the office, changes in work practice, or gossip about their managers. Since ethnographic research involves a fluid network of research techniques, all of which must be (and in this case were) consented to by participants (Sin 2005), I made a continued effort to keep in touch with the consultants through email, telephone calls and office visits so that they were up-to-date with the latest developments in my project. I offered renewed opportunities to discuss the research, as a group and on a one-to-one basis, to ensure the participants were informed about the methods I was using and the direction of my analysis (Bartunek 1994, Sin 2005).

This approach to research was informed by the feminist methodological perspective that engaging in a dialogic, participative form of research can go some way towards redressing the power imbalances between researcher and researched (Oakley 1981). Some feminist academics assert that research should be documented as embodied, emotional and political, a *lived* process (ibid., Roseneil 1993) which is constructed through power relations from which we cannot extricate ourselves (Foucault 2002). For this reason, I have also tried to include my own presence and participation in the teamwork interactions I offer up in this article.

I make no assumptions regarding the generalisability or reliability of any of the data I present here, arguing instead all ethnographies are tales of the field constructed by the author, and are therefore necessarily partial (Van Maanen 1988). Accordingly ‘fiction’ is an unavoidable, necessary part of ethnographic research, which derives its authority not from methods used to judge quantitative scientific research, but from the ‘thickness’, or rich descriptive elements, of the account (Geertz 1999), and relatedly, the ability of this account to convince the reader (Gibb Dyer and Wilkins Jr 1991).

In the following account, I explore the concertive control interactions engaged in by members of AdminTeam and DriveTeam, which draw upon gender and masculinity as a resource for regulating team conduct. My analysis takes a two-stage view of the concertive control process. I begin by highlighting the heroic values, linked to salesmanship, which are collectively negotiated and prioritized by team members, translated into specific behaviours which the consultants associate with ‘good teamwork’ (stage 1). I then examine how this notion of teamwork is transmitted laterally through the team within concertive control interactions which occur during formal interactions such as team meetings, and informal interactions such as team banter and gossip (stage 2).

Following this, I explore how assumptions about men and women, articulated during concertive control interactions, are used as a resource to reify heroism as specifically ‘masculine’, so that being a ‘good teamworker’ means ‘doing heroic masculinity’. My data explores three gendered resources which are drawn upon during concertive control interactions. These are: perceptions of the relative skills of men and women,

the ‘tough’ masculinity of the transport industry, and the invoking of sexualized gender identities during customer interactions.

Working at Spotlight: ‘The English translation for stress’

In Spotlight’s UK branches, teams of consultants specialize in different areas (or divisions) of recruitment. The two teams that make up the branch in question, AdminTeam and DriveTeam, share an open plan first floor office in the main shopping district of an English city.

Problem-solving and decision-making occur at team level, and are rewarded with team-based bonuses. Accompanied by the facilitative role occupied by team leaders, this work organization reflects the principles of semi-autonomous teamworking (Manz and Sims 1987, Katzenbach and Smith 1992). Spotlight consultants may be promoted through an established career structure to team leader (also known as branch manager), and then to area manager, division manager or operations manager. A hierarchical gendered division of labour is evident in that although the majority of consultants and branch managers are female, very few women are promoted above branch manager level.

Working in a Spotlight team is, according to a consultant’s observation, recorded in my fieldnotes, *‘the English translation for stress’* (original emphasis). Each team interacts with two groups: organizations (known as clients) who require that a vacancy be filled, and individuals looking for work (known as candidates, or within DriveTeam, as drivers). Within both teams, pressure to fill client vacancies is accentuated by a battery of quantitative targets which every consultant must fulfill, regarding the number of vacancies filled, the number of sales calls made to existing and potential clients, and number of new candidates and clients registered on team databases. The targets focus on the core values defined by senior management in Spotlight’s ‘sales culture’ statement, which endorses *‘actions and behaviours which continuously generate profitable growth for our business.’* Although these targets are individually based, they form the benchmark for monthly team-based bonuses rewarded to ‘successful’ teams. The targets are a source of constant anxiety to both teams and from my time at Spotlight, to the time of writing this article, team bonuses

remain very rare, having been secured only twice by AdminTeam, and never by DriveTeam.

In comparison to the heavy emphasis on results and sales performance, the consultants articulated that Spotlight's management cared very little about the cooperative process that is teamworking. There are no targets relating to the participation and communication which are such a vital part of their team working process. The subordination of teamworking's softer aspects in favour of a 'masculine' performance orientation (Metcalf and Linstead 2003) often caused teamworkers to vent their frustration, as Phil does below:

Phil: *Arrrgh, for God's sake! Bloody hell... they [senior management] just don't care about communication.... We [consultants] just don't know what each other is doing and it's really important to know because you have to know who is on top of what.* [DriveTeam consultant, recorded in fieldnotes]

Although Phil acknowledges the vital importance of participation and communication for teamworking, he recognises that this is not a priority for management. The marginalisation of this 'feminine' attribute of teamworking was reflected during interviews, in which only one consultant suggested that strong communication skills demonstrated that a consultant embodied the core values of teamworking.

Spotlight's results orientation therefore bears strong similarities to the findings of Metcalfe and Linstead (2003, see literature review for further discussion), who show how this focus on outcomes prioritises masculine values within teamworking. Yet as Barker (1993) suggests, it is the teamworkers themselves who, firstly, objectify these values into specific ways of working together, and who, secondly, regulate this through concertive control interactions. In the following section I explore these two stages, to demonstrate that the consultants associated the sales aspects of their work with a particular kind of masculinity focusing on heroic sacrifice.

Concertive Control Process Stage 1: Translating heroic values into specific team behaviours.

Like respondents in other studies of sales work (e.g. Hodgson 2003), Spotlight consultants prioritise individual, ‘heroic’ acts which show them to go beyond the call of duty. Below, Jackie demonstrates her identification to team values by exceeding personal targets:

Jackie: *I set myself a personal target of having at least eight [interviews for job candidates with potential employers] a week...now, the Spotlight standard is five, that’s the minimum expectations. I want more than five, because I want chances to get the candidate out in front of the client, and the more opportunities you have, obviously the more job offers [for candidates] you can potentially have.* [AdminTeam consultant, in recorded interview]

Jackie considers that simply fulfilling targets is inadequate for her as a committed member of her team. On this subject, Sarah, AdminTeam’s leader, expresses sentiments articulated by many consultants and both team leaders:

Sarah: [It’s] *quite an immature attitude... you know, the ‘I’m here, I’ll do enough not to get sacked’ approach...rather than a career attitude. [They] don’t make the effort to make sales, because they don’t care about the glory...*[AdminTeam leader, in recorded interview]

Sarah is referring to the glorified status, within the team, of team members who make heroic efforts to make sales. Simply meeting targets is not what Sarah considers ‘*making an effort*’. She suggests that employees who are not career-oriented are unlikely to desire the glory of a sale (Hodgson 2003).

Like the sales workers in Hodgson’s study, (ibid), Sarah associates women with this lack of career-mindedness, arguing that this can interfere with their domestic responsibilities:

'From a practical perspective, unless you've got a stay at home husband or a nanny...[Women] don't often want a career'. [AdminTeam Leader, recorded in interview]

According to Jackie and Sarah, team values are linked with individual 'heroic' sacrifices which must be performed on the consultant's own initiative, recalling Hodgson's (2003) discussion of the heroism within sales work discourses, and which may be concurrent with the 'entrepreneurialist' and 'careerist' masculine discourses associated with men (Collinson and Hearn 1994), also found in teamworking by Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) and previously discussed in the literature review. Whilst Sarah's comments imply that women with family responsibilities find it harder to embody these discourses, it is the concertive control interactions which ensure that these values are specifically reified as gendered. In the next section, I offer two examples of concertive control interactions: one formal and one informal. Following this, I offer three examples of how gender is used as a resource which frames the core values of heroism and sacrifice as 'masculine'.

Concertive Control Process Stage 2: Invoking heroic behaviours during formal and informal teamwork interactions.

Concertive control interactions conveyed messages about how to embody the entrepreneurial, pro-active, 'heroic' values that both Spotlight's managers and consultants prioritised. The following discussion took place in one of the team meetings which were held weekly:

Jackie: Let's do the OXO thing! You know, if you're visiting one client, go and see the people to the left and right....

Kate: Yeah, spread the word [about Spotlight to other potential clients]!
[AdminTeam consultants, during team meeting, recorded in fieldnotes]

Team meetings typically concentrate on how to improve sales and 'numbers out' (numbers of candidates working for client organizations, or numbers of drivers on the road). In the above, Jackie is suggesting that her teammates should incorporate the high-status, autonomous, pro-active, sales-hunting behaviour into their client care

regime, which ordinarily might not offer them the chance to demonstrate the core team values. By constantly hunting for sales whilst nurturing existing clients, the consultants might never miss an opportunity to embody the characteristics Spotlight values most.

Whilst team meetings represent a formal (management-imposed) site for the dissemination of core team values via concertive control, more informal interactions, such as gossiping about teammates, also contained implicit references to the team's core values. Both positive and negative references to other colleagues were made which reinforced the attitude considered appropriate for the teams.

The following extract concerns Richard, a consultant with DriveTeam, who was renowned for chauffeuring drivers to their starting destinations at 2:30am, if other transport was unavailable. Following this, he would drive straight to the office and work until past six in the evening. The other consultants often marvelled at Richard's total commitment to his team and the organization. Teamworkers often gossip about other members of their team, and I recorded the following vignette about Richard's approach to work one busy afternoon.

Anna: Let's tell Rich to go home...he's been in since 3am! He dropped a driver off [at a client's workplace] and came straight in.

Louise: Crazy! He loves it though, don't he...loves it....

[DriveTeam and AdminTeam consultants, recorded in fieldnotes]

For these consultants, Richard's presenteeism, his willingness to make apparently heroic sacrifices in terms of his personal time, is a sign that he truly cares about his work. It has been noted elsewhere (see Collinson *et al* 1990, Leidner 1993, Willis 2003) that sales workers often emphasise the heroic masculinity entrenched in their role, articulating the autonomous efforts they make to hunt down new leads and win over new clients as part of their role as 'breadwinner'. Gossip like this, where particularly heroic actions are admired, has an important concertive control function, in that it creates pressure to enact the specific 'actions and behaviours' which the team has decided are appropriate to Spotlight's sales culture.

Gossip sessions about teammates who were deemed to be less successful also contained implicit references to the team's core values:

Richard to Phil: *That Nina, she just didn't do the work. She could have made a fortune out of that [client name] shit! She should've got in her car and driven up there and presented [her case] to them. You can't get a response if you're just sat at your desk!* [DriveTeam consultants, recorded in fieldnotes]

Richard's comment about a former consultant's lack of entrepreneurship was met with nods of assent from his colleagues. His statement was strengthened by the fact that Nina had left the team some weeks previously, offering 'proof' that consultants who failed to demonstrate their commitment in the way which had been defined as appropriate, would not progress at Spotlight. His comments reveal the irony in the team's values, which elevate individualistic, heroic actions, over collaborative, team-based ones. Richard is warning his team members to demonstrate commitment to 'heroic' team values through pro-active individual behaviour.

The vignettes presented here demonstrate that heroic behaviours are not merely the preserve of men. However, the resources used to exert concertive control often drew upon 'identifying categories' like gender in order to make them effective. In the next three sections, I explore three ways in which gender contributed to the concertive control process. Firstly, I show how assumptions about men's and women's respective skills act as resources for reifying heroic conduct as specifically masculine.

Gendered Resource 1: Perceptions of masculine and feminine skills.

Whilst women and men consultants are both capable of identifying with performance-oriented team values (Kerfoot and Knights 1993), these values form part of Spotlight's gender subtext because they reflect common-sense assumptions about men, but not women (ibid). Social rules and norms about the relative characteristics of men and women act as resources according to which team members gauge how well their colleagues can invest in these values. For example, the managers' and

consultants' views are influenced by common-sense gendered perceptions of skill. Lorraine is talking here about the relative attributes of male and female teamworkers:

Lorraine: *I've got more attention to detail, procedures, policies, things like that...but [men] might know more about the transport industry than I do, and they can make sales that way.*

[Team leader (DriveTeam), in recorded interview]

In DriveTeam, transport industry knowledge is perceived to be the property of men. It is privileged over the administrative skills constructed as her own 'feminine' skill by Lorraine, because the passive role of administrator does not reflect the heroic values and performance orientation which a committed teamworker should demonstrate. The gender binary becomes reified because of perceptions of 'male' and 'female' knowledge and skill. However, the binary becomes a hierarchy (Kerfoot and Knights 2004) since 'masculine' knowledge about the transport industry, rather than 'feminine' administrative skills, is thought to facilitate performance.

How then, are these assumptions embedded into concertive control processes? Informal team-based interactions help to reinforce gendered hierarchies with disarming subtlety, the following quote being a typical example:

Phil to me [about fellow DriveTeam member Geoff] *You know, in some ways Geoff hasn't got what it takes...it took Lorraine seven weeks to get him to answer the phone properly and he just doesn't know how an office works...but the drivers like him and he knows the driving regulations*

[DriveTeam consultant, recorded in fieldnotes]

Once again, gossip sessions operate as a vehicle for concertive control, reifying the hierarchy within team values. In this vignette, Phil informs me that Geoff possesses the transport industry knowledge required to make sales, and which Lorraine, above, associates with men. Geoff's lack of administrative skills and office etiquette often causes antagonism, but is perceived as unimportant because behaviours directly related to selling – and masculinity – are the only way for consultants to demonstrate their identification with core team values. As a truck driver, Geoff adds an aura of

legitimacy to DriveTeam, who have to operate within the notoriously sexist, traditionally blue-collar transport industry. Within DriveTeam, this involved drawing upon the rough, tough masculinity taken to be part of the transport industry culture. The following section highlights how DriveTeam's concertive control interactions drew on this sense of masculine 'toughness', to regulate conduct in line with team values. This represents the second gendered resource that this article explores in relation to concertive control.

Gendered Resource 2: 'the nature of the transport industry'

In DriveTeam swearing, references to the sexual attributes of colleagues, and discussions about pornography are expected ways of 'bonding' with (predominantly male) drivers, clients, and other team members. This was explained to me in my first conversation with a fellow team member:

Phil: *Do you mind swearing?*

[Beverley]: *No, why?*

Phil: *Good...it's part of the job to talk to the drivers on their level.*

[DriveTeam consultants, recorded in fieldnotes]

In this example of a gendered concertive control interaction, Phil is warning me that I must adapt to the masculine culture of the transport industry, through which I too am expected to demonstrate my commitment to DriveTeam's values. Phil accepts that the macho, or 'laddish', culture within which DriveTeam operates is an inevitable part of working in the transport industry.

This discourse, known as 'informalism', is identified as a specifically masculine discourse by Collinson and Hearn (1994) because it can involve objectifying women sexually, often through competitive one-upmanship. Within DriveTeam, sexualised office banter establishes a 'pecking-order' amongst consultants. Rankings within teams are informed by the extent to which individuals demonstrate their commitment to Spotlight by embodying masculinist team values, as the following extract demonstrates:

Richard: [Bev], *when me and Phil go away on training, we're taking you as our plaything! Don't worry, Phil'll be soft with you, he'll make you a cup of tea afterwards, but I won't, I'll be tough, I'll make you put the kettle on after!*

Phil [to me]: *Richard's so sexist, but it's the way the industry works.*

[DriveTeam consultants, recorded in fieldnotes]

Interactions like this are intended as jokes, but contain messages about how to demonstrate identification with team values by invoking an appropriate, gendered identity. During these concertive control interactions, teamworkers become socialised that *'the way the industry works'* requires consultants to harness a 'tough', emotionless masculinity which objectifies women. This 'toughness' reflects the masculine, emotionless, results orientation contained in Spotlight's team values (see also Knights and McCabe 2001, Metcalfe and Linstead 2003). Richard tells Phil he lacks the 'toughness' idealised by team values, and simultaneously constructs himself as epitomising the masculinity desired by 'the industry' and entrenched in Spotlight values. His words act as a powerful concertive control mechanism which regulates behaviour by is drawing upon a specific kind of masculinity, embedded in team values.

Phil's slightly apologetic comment about how sexism is inherent in the transport recruitment labour process (typical of remarks made by *all* the Spotlight employees during discussions and/or interviews) informs me that Richard is behaving in line with team values and therefore simply being a committed Spotlight employee. His remarks have a concertive control function, conveying to me the passive, tolerant sexual identity which women, as 'playthings', are expected to enact for *'the [transport] industry'*. It is clear that my commitment to team values (including adapting to the transport industry culture) might be questioned, should I decide not to accept this.

On occasions like this I made my discomfort known to my my colleagues, who responded with placatory comments about *'the nature of the [transport] industry'* (Lorraine and Phil both used these words). Informal discussions with my female colleagues revealed that they too find such practices sexist and exploitative, but

believe it forms an inevitable part of their job in the transport industry, indicating that discourses about heroism and conquering makes the subordination of other masculinities and femininity (Connell 1995) appear natural (Leidner 1991).

The resources employed during concertive control interactions are conditioned by the presence of clients and candidates in the labour process. To promote the myth of customer sovereignty which ensures the manageability of customer service interactions (Korczynski and Ott 2004), committed teamworkers perform interactions according to customer expectations, including expectations relating to gender which are informed by social constructions of male and female sexuality (Mills 1989, Cross and Bagilhole 2002).

Embodying team values therefore requires Spotlight employees to enact sexual identities which comply with the heterosexuality pervading team values. The following section explores how sexuality is used as a third gendered concertive control resource, ensuring appropriately gendered conduct during client interactions.

Gendered Resource 3: Regulating sexuality in client interactions

[Hetero]sexualised banter saturates relationships within the branch and is initiated by male and female members of both teams. It is an expected part of being a Spotlight teamworker, such that all but one of the AdminTeam consultants interviewed suggested (unprompted) that '*not joining in with general banter*' (Jackie's words, recorded during interview) is indicative of low commitment to the team. However this discourse generally remains *outside* the service interactions forming the core of AdminTeam's labour process. AdminTeam workers are expected to remain '*very professional*' (Sarah's words) when dealing with their clients, who are mainly office-based HR managers. Their display rules conform to perceptions of professionalism which banish 'unmanageable' sexuality to the private sphere. Furthermore, the heterosexual discourses pervading organization (Gutek 1989) imply that women's sexuality can only improve sales outcomes when it is bestowed upon men. Given the feminised status of the HR profession (Legge 1995) and that all AdminTeam members are themselves women, sexuality is considered redundant to AdminTeam's service provision and women are expected to filter out their sexuality from service

interactions, again in line with the perceived expectations of their *'professional'*, often female, clients.

The findings from AdminTeam and DriveTeam suggest that men and women consultants demonstrate their core team values by 'managing' (exploiting or restraining) women's performances of sexuality according to norms related to client expectations. Sexuality becomes a resource which must be *collectively* regulated through concertive control.

The sexist banter within DriveTeam was not limited to inter-team chat and one-upmanship. It was an important resource for establishing relationships with our clients, these being the transport industry managers we worked with. The following banter between DriveTeam's female team leader and a male consultant occurred during a telephone conversation with a client:

Richard [on phone to driver]...*I don't know what you said to Lorraine but she wasn't the same after! I had to take her outside and fuck her...*

Lorraine [laughs]...*Richard, you're incorrigible...*

[DriveTeam consultants, recorded in fieldnotes]

Sexualizing women consultants during telephone conversations with clients in this way serves not only to 'lubricate' service interactions (Brannan 2005) and promote 'bonding' during sales calls and visits, but also acts as a resource to control potentially indeterminate outcomes, ensuring sales by seducing clients and drivers:

Sarah: [women working on DriveTeam] *can do the whole 'eye candy coming into the office'...then when they actually speak and they know what they're talking about, then you've got the respect as well as the 'oooohhhh'...it works well in our [Spotlight's] favour.* [Team leader, AdminTeam, in recorded interview]

Like many other female consultants and her fellow team leader, Sarah feels that in DriveTeam, women's sexuality benefits their service interactions. It facilitates their role as control adjuncts (Tancred-Sheriff 1989) during the tricky task of negotiating

the potentially conflicting needs of clients and candidates. Sarah is articulating that many women Spotlight employees feel empowered by enacting a sexualised feminine identity, because it enables them to bond with their teammates, disarm customers and make more sales – in other words, it acts as a resource which enables them to embody core team values, and to disseminate team values to others during concertive control interactions. Ironically, emphasising their otherness by focusing on their sexuality therefore helps female consultants to conform to the masculinist performance orientation. Rather than being passively objectified by these assumptions about gender, women consultants are *actively* engaging with them in order to negotiate the contradicting discourses about femininity and masculine heroism.

Conclusion

This article supports research on the gendered nature of teamworking (Metcalf and Linstead 2003, Benschop and Doorewaard 1998, Knights and McCabe 2001) by highlighting how masculine discourses and notions of masculinity and femininity are integrated into social interactions within two teams of recruitment consultants. The aim of the paper is to explore the concertive control processes which regulate the production of gendered identities within the teams, and to highlight the implications for team members.

Embedded within social interaction, concertive control disseminates gendered assumptions about embodying team values and reifies gender binaries relating to perceptions of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ skills and roles. In this way, gendered assumptions act as resources for regulating team conduct. Women have to successfully demonstrate adherence to masculinist core team values emphasising heroic sacrifice and entrepreneurship, but they must also negotiate a multiplicity of encoded rules about femininity which are constructed in opposition to masculinity, in line with the gender expectations of both their peers and the industry within which they recruit.

I began my analysis by offering a two-part explanation of how concertive control works. I highlighted how AdminTeam and DriveTeam prioritise heroic actions which

they perceive as vital to increasing the team's total sales. I then showed how these notions of heroism are translated into specific behaviours which are then disseminated across the team through concertive control interactions. Concertive control, conveying messages about appropriate team behaviour, can take place in formal situations like team meetings, and more informally, embedded in banter and gossip.

Following this, I set out three ways in which team members' invocation of gender, during concertive control interactions, affects the gender subtext within the team and associates the heroism of sales work with masculinity. Firstly, I showed how the consultants' views of their team members' abilities are influenced by gendered perceptions of skill, whereby only men are thought to possess the transport industry knowledge considered vital to making sales. Gossip sessions and team chat about the relative capacities of team members, act as concertive control mechanisms by reinforcing the notion that being able to make sales is the most important teamwork skill.

Secondly, I offered data on how concertive control interactions try to regulate conduct within DriveTeam so that team members enact the sexist, 'laddish' values of the transport industry culture, where swearing and discussions about pornography are common. During the banter that forms part of this culture, women are constituted as 'playthings', embodying a passive form of feminine [hetero]sexuality which seems to run counter to the active 'heroism' prioritised by the team. Men however, are expected to demonstrate their commitment to the heroic masculinity by engaging in competitive one-upmanship about their sexual prowess, a practice that has links to the competition for making sales and other heroic, 'conquering' behaviours prioritised by team members.

In my final analysis section I showed how team members must also regulate their gendered countenance during interactions with clients (those organisations who outsource their recruitment tasks to Spotlight), and candidates seeking work. I offered examples of how discussions with clients and candidates act as another kind of concertive control processes, sending messages to team members about what kind of gendered identity is appropriate for these interactions. Through concertive control, consultants ensure the countenance their team members convey to clients and

candidates ‘fits’ the cultural expectations of the industry within which they recruit (Urry 1990).

This need to enact an a passive sex object identity contains some ambiguities for women consultants because on first glance, it contradicts the active hero-figure embedded in core values. However, as Sarah points out, women’s sexuality is a ‘*double edged sword that works in our favour*’. She argues that women consultants working in the transport industry find that enacting a passive version of sexualised femininity enables them to make more sales, and therefore to demonstrate their commitment to the heroic actions required by the team.

In conclusion, I suggest that the article has implications for both academics and practitioners. It contributes to academic understanding of teamwork by demonstrating that the gender in teamwork is embedded in and reinforced by team *interaction*, as well as team *values*. I argue that the regulatory process of concertive control is central to the gendering of teamwork. More research is needed to discover how other social categories like age or ethnicity are implicated in, and linked together by, concertive control practices in teamwork.

For academics and practitioners of self-managed teamwork, the article highlights the need for sensitivity towards the way that identity categories, like gender, can be used as sense-making resources during teamwork interactions. Whilst self-managed teamwork has the potential to create a more participative, equal working process (Katzenbach and Smith 1993), we need to be aware that the regulation of team members’ conduct through concertive control can lead to the re-establishment of social hierarchies and perpetuation of sexist, discriminatory behaviour within these teams.

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