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Abstract

The paper aims to demonstrate that while researcher's background could be a factor in gaining access to research participants and to the organization, other elements like trustworthiness, reflexivity, and engaged participant listening help in overcoming gender barriers in interviewing the research participants. This paper is a reflexive account of field experience as a part of doctoral research aimed at establishing that not only could gender barriers to access to research participants be overcome, but also that a gender-outsider positionality offers insights into women's workplace experiences that are shaped through the discourses and practices of managerialism. The field experience highlighted the possibility of gaining and sustaining access through identifying spaces of engagement where the interests of the researcher, the organization, and the research participants intersect. The field experience pointed to the significance of the researcher's own past experience with managerialism, in taking a closer look regarding the lived experiences of women employees with managerialism. Lastly, it is demonstrated that institutional ethnographic fieldwork could also contribute to the organization's endeavors for creating a safe, non-discriminatory, and inclusive workspace for women employees. This paper establishes that gender barriers to access to research participants could be overcome through a standpoint of trusted outsider and use of institutional ethnography.

Keywords

access, embedded research, fieldwork, gatekeepers, gender barriers, institutional ethnography, organizations, organizational ethnography, participant listening, qualitative research, reflexivity

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Crossing the Gender Chasm for Productive Field Engagement

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The paper aims to demonstrate that while researcher's background could be a factor in gaining access to research participants and to the organization, other elements like trustworthiness, reflexivity, and engaged participant listening help in overcoming gender barriers in interviewing the research participants. This paper is a reflexive account of field experience as a part of doctoral research aimed at establishing that not only could gender barriers to access to research participants be overcome, but also that a gender-outsider positionality offers insights into women's workplace experiences that are shaped through the discourses and practices of managerialism. The field experience highlighted the possibility of gaining and sustaining access through identifying spaces of engagement where the interests of the researcher, the organization, and the research participants intersect. The field experience pointed to the significance of the researcher's own past experience with managerialism, in taking a closer look regarding the lived experiences of women employees with managerialism. Lastly, it is demonstrated that institutional ethnographic fieldwork could also contribute to the organization's endeavors for creating a safe, non-discriminatory, and inclusive workspace for women employees. This paper establishes that gender barriers to access to research participants could be overcome through a standpoint of trusted outsider and use of institutional ethnography.

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Introduction

Access to the field has been recognized as the central concern of doing organizational ethnography (Fjellström & Guttormsen, 2016; Khan, 2014; Karjalainen et al., 2015). The quality and quantity of data collection often depends on the dynamics of access – how access was obtained, who gave the access, and how access was sustained throughout the ethnographic study. The skills of the organizational ethnographer, too, determine the success of the ethnographic study (Collins & Evans, 2017). Scholars of organizational ethnography have been engaged in sharing their respective experiences with regards to access and theorizing access for reference to future ethnographic research work.

Each field research experience is unique. Even within the same field, the way different researchers engage with it would be different. Such differences may be due to a number of factors such as the research questions, researcher's familiarity with the field, researcher's approaches for engaging with the field, mode of entry into the field, level of access of the field, receptivity of the field to the researcher, and the context of the field at a given point in time. The mode of entry and mode of engagement determine what and how much the researcher can learn from the field (Bruni, 2006). The gatekeepers who give access determine boundaries of,

and privileges to, the field (Morrill et al., 1999). Negotiating access to the field is a continuous process, as the researcher encounters multiple organizational actors at different layers of organizational complexity (Bruni, 2006; Reeves, 2010). The ethnographer's understanding of the organization in terms of its structure, processes, people, and interactions is shaped by the initial and ongoing negotiation of access (Bisaillon & Rankin, 2013). The processes of entry and negotiation themselves often become ethnographic material that the researcher needs to account for (Bruni, 2006). One of the problems of access is the barriers male scholars might face in attempting to research women, in terms of observing or interviewing (Berliner & Falen, 2008). Yet another problem of access pertains to addressing the question of whether men can produce true accounts of women's experiences, being gender outsiders (Schilt & Williams, 2008). While gender barriers could be experienced by White male Western researchers while studying the experiences of women in organizations, a male researcher from India could face similar challenges owing to the gender relations prevalent in Indian society. Moreover, declarations of positionality and claims of reflexivity could be based on certain "positional piety" (Cousin, 2010, p. 9), either in terms of benevolence toward research participants who are unprivileged or in the act of disclosure of privileged position (Cousin, 2010). Even when the researcher is native to the research context, the claims to knowledge are subject to differential power relations due to the social stratification unique to the society (Parameswaran, 2001).

Based on the ten-month field experience that involved examination of institutional regimes (Burawoy, 2015; Rankin, 2017; Smith, 2005) that shape the workplace experiences of women employees, I sought to establish that not only can such barriers be overcome, but a gender-outsider positionality offers insights into women's experiences that are shaped through the discourses and practices of managerialism. The field experience highlighted the possibility of gaining and sustaining access through identifying spaces of engagement where the interests of the researcher, organization, and the participants intersect. Lastly, I attempted to demonstrate that organizational ethnographic field work can also contribute to the organization's endeavors for creating a safe, non-discriminatory, and inclusive workspace for women employees (Ghorashi & Wels, 2009).

A Matter of Epistemology

The question of whether a male researcher can understand women's experiences necessitates locating it within the broader epistemological debate. Broadly, it is a question of whether the "other" (De Beauvoir, 1953, p. 26) can be brought into the research engagement without the influences of the dominant definition (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 62) and dominant narratives that constructed such an "other" (De Beauvoir, 1953, p. 26) in the first place. Harding (1987, 1995), Smith (1987), and Collins (1986) delved into the question of methods and methodology for accessing women's experiences from feminist and women's standpoints. The dimension of post-colonial subjectivity has been addressed in the works of Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (1988).

The question of addressing power relations in situations when a White Western researcher is attempting to conduct research or interventions on non-White, non-Western populations has been highlighted in the works of Dar (2014, 2018), Girei, (2017), Macalpine and Marsh (2005), Manning (2018), Romani et al. (2018), and Swan (2017). Guru (1995) and Rege (1998) allude to the Dalit feminist standpoint, considering the caste-based social stratification as being an obstacle for others to apprehend Dalit women's lived experiences. Burawoy (1998) argued that extended case method (Burawoy, 1998) could eliminate the effects of "power – domination, silencing, objectification and normalization" (Burawoy, 1998, p. 30), through focusing on the context. Smith (2005) conceptualized institutional ethnography

research framework as a "method of inquiry," that anyone can undertake (Smith, 2005, p. 10). For Smith (2005), the standpoint as a method of inquiry in institutional ethnography research framework is different from the standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1987) or feminist standpoint (Hartsock, 1997) since it is a "point of entry" (Smith, 2005, p. 10) to explore social relations rather than political position.

The foregoing methodological debates and prescriptions resulted in establishing standpoint and reflexivity, as providing rigorous basis for objectivity of the research process, and generalizability of the research findings. However, researchers highlighted the problem of privileged position of the researcher in either not being able to build research engagement with the participants who were the "others," or in the inability to minimize, if not eliminate, the influence of the dominant definitions and narratives in constructing the accounts of the research participants' lived experiences (Cousin, 2010; McCorkel & Myers, 2003). The reproduction of wider social relations could continue even within the research process in which the researchers are conscious of their privileged position (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). In addition, claims of declaration of positionality and reflexive stance in research themselves are problematic (Cousin, 2010). Hence, the task of understanding women's experiences by a male researcher (native or non-native) in a research study becomes an aspect of epistemology, including the challenges of initial and ongoing access that the past literature identified.

Since the field of research study pertained to gender, I needed to account for the intersectionality of the research participants, and my own intersectional positionality in forming the basis for the research engagement that accounts for the varied experiences of women research participants. Hence, the task before me was declaring my positionality in terms of gender, class, and ethnicity (Ahmed, 2004; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Dar, 2018; Manning, 2016; Pal & Buzzannell, 2008) to overcome partial or selective accounting of workplace experiences of women research participants. The institutional ethnographic research framework offered such potential. Institutional ethnography, a form of critical ethnography, is a method of qualitative social inquiry that focusses on people's experiences in the everyday social world as shaped by textually-mediated organizations (Smith, 2005).

Institutional ethnography involves identifying an experience and the institutional processes that shape that experience and investigating those institutional processes to analytically describe how they form the basis of such an experience (LaFrance & Nicolas, 2012). Moreover, by focusing on "commonality of experiences" (similar experiences) (Burawoy, 2015, p. 203) and not categorizing experiences (Smith, 2005, 2009; Rankin, 2017), the institutional ethnography research framework could minimize the intersectionality debates (Walby et al., 2012) and explicate the "ruling relations" (institutional arrangements that coordinate everyday work of people; Smith, 2005, p. 10) or "ideological apparatus of production" (ideologies that are used to manage people in organizations; Burawoy, 2015, p. 3), or "inequality regimes" (practices, processes, actions and meanings in organizations that are used to maintain inequalities; Acker, 2006, p. 443). I now turn to declare my positionality in the research process.

My Positionality

I state my positionality in the research process (Ahmed, 2004; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Dar, 2018; Manning, 2016; Pal & Buzzannell, 2008) in terms of my biography in the intersectional categories of gender, class, and ethnicity. I am a male, 46 years old, born in the southern part of India in a Hindu family belonging to upper caste, and moved to northern India for higher education and employment. I have spent two thirds of my life living and working in northern India. My own lived experience of working in formal organizations,

in Information Technology and Business Process Outsourcing industries, has influenced my decision to undertake the research inquiry and the choice of research methodology.

About the Research Study

The study aimed at identifying the managerial practices and discourses in gendering an IT organization. Acker brought the attention of scholars to the processes of gendering of organizations (1990) and to how inequality regimes are created in organizations (2006). Drawing from Scott (1986), Acker (1990) notes that gendering occurs through gendered division of labor, construction of symbols and images, producing gendered interactions and individual identities, and through gendered organizational logic. The study focused on examining the organizational logic that creates and sustains gendered organization.

It is established that, of the five processes of gendering of organizations (division of labour, workplace cultures, gender identities, social interactions, and organizational logic), organizational logic needs more research (Abrahamsson, 2014; Alvesson & Billing, 1997, p. 197; Collins, 2002; Dye & Mills, 2012; Ely & Meyerson, 2000, 2010; Irvine & Vermilya, 2010; Reskin, 1993; Sayce, 2012; Williams, 2013). The organization logic is encoded in policies, procedures, managerial discourses, work practices, job descriptions, competency maps, and performance appraisal records (Acker, 1990). The labour process of a given organizational context embodies the organizational logic. To contribute to the influence of organizational logic in gendering the organizations, my study focused on empirical investigation of labour process in an Indian IT organization and how it influences the gendering of the organization. Indian IT sector employs about 3.9 million people, contributing to 9.3% of the GDP and accounting for an approximately 55% market share of the US $185-190 billion global services sourcing business in 2017-18. As the epitome of contemporary management practices, IT organization was attractive to explore managerialism and gender. In addition, my familiarity due to my past employment in IT organizations would provide an opportunity to make the familiar strange.

In line with the methodological emphasis of institutional ethnography, the workplace experiences of women employees of harassment (sexual and non-sexual) and discrimination served as the "point of entry" (Smith, 2005, p. 10; see also DeVault & McCoy, 2006). The study investigated the strategies and approaches used by managers to create and reinforce the gendered organization. The study found that managerialism constitutes women as a class, and that harassment (sexual and non-sexual) and some practices of gender-based discrimination are measures of managerial control. Additionally, the study found that managerialism perpetuates women's disadvantageous position in organization through the discourses of "equal but different."

Entering the Field

Finding an organization that would allow me to embed (Lewis & Russell, 2011) in the organization for a certain period of time was one of the most important aspects of my field research. Organizations are normally reluctant to entertain requests to conduct ethnographic study as an outsider (Bondy, 2013). Access strategies of past organizational ethnographic studies ranged from covert entry as an employee (Kunda, 2009; Roy, 2017) to overt engagement as a researcher (Jackall, 1998; Watson, 2001) that provided access, either to a narrow or wide area within the organization.

Gender diversity and inclusion has attracted the attention of organizations in the Indian IT industry (Kossek & Zonia, 1993). Moreover, it has been observed that social inequalities in the wider Indian society are often carried into the workplace, especially organizations in the IT

industry (Upadhya, 2007). However, gender diversity and inclusion has received more attention by organizations in the IT industry than other aspects of social difference (Buddhapriya, 2013). Indian IT organizations have been implementing programs for improving gender diversity and inclusion which presented an opportunity to identify common interests of the organization and my study. The study, aimed at examining the strategies and approaches of managers in creating and reinforcing gendered organization, found resonance with the gender diversity and inclusion programs of IT organizations. However, I needed to make a business case to allow my conducted ethnographic study in an IT organization as beneficial to the organization's gender diversity and inclusion efforts (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2009). I included a proposal that contained potential deliverables to the organization, and mode of engagement within gender diversity and inclusion so that they see some benefit in permitting the researcher to conduct the ethnographic research study as well as permit the researcher a certain level of embedding (Lewis & Russell, 2011) within the organization conducive for ethnographic research. A brief introduction to ethnography and its benefits to understand organizations were also contained in the proposal (Bate, 1997; Jordan, 2010; Tian, 2010).

The gatekeepers of the organization that allowed me to conduct the field research sought input on improving their gender diversity and inclusion program, in return for allowing me access to the organization for my study. They mentioned that despite their woman-friendly policies and practices, they have not seen any improvement in gender diversity and in reducing attrition of women employees. They indicated that the clients of the organization, too, sought to improve the gender diversity ratios in their respective projects. The gatekeepers reiterated that gender diversity is a board level concern, and that they would welcome any recommendations to improve the same. I mentioned that an ethnographic study would discover some reasons for low gender diversity and high attrition rates. I emphasized that the names of the research participants and interview data would not be shared since I would be bound by the requirements to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants' identities. In addition, I mentioned that interviews would be voluntary, and that they would not require any employee to participate in the research interviews. Similarly, I mentioned that all the data that I would collect would be confidential and neither the names of the people nor the organization would be mentioned anywhere in my doctoral thesis (Taylor & Land, 2014). A written consent was obtained from the organization. I signed the non-disclosure agreement of the organization and provided the HR team with a copy of my testimonials and identity documents. I was introduced to the organizational members (heads of the departments and everyone within each department) (Lewis & Russell, 2011) as a PhD candidate researching gender diversity in organizations. The gatekeepers provided me documents pertaining to HR policies and practices, job descriptions, performance appraisal process, sample performance appraisal records, and competency profiles.

Mapping the Terrain

The site of the study has about 4000 employees, of which 766 were women. 166 women were employed in managerial roles, while 600 were in non-managerial roles. Interviews are the primary source of data for institutional ethnography (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 15), as the experience emerges as it is narrated (Smith, 2005). They are considered significant ethnographic material (Forsey, 2010; Hockey, 2002; Hockey & Forsey, 2012). Hence, I adopted "engaged listening" (Forsey, 2010) as the institutional ethnographic method for in-depth interviews. I relied on observations of common events that could give a snapshot of organizational culture in terms of dominant discourses and work practices. Common organizational events such as town halls, provided a view into the macro-organizational processes that shape everyday work experiences of employees, and to be able to map the terrain

of the field for focused exposure (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2009). This is accomplished through zooming in to the specific work practices and zooming out to the macro relationships among work practices that are "rhizomatic in nature" (Nicolini, 2009). I participated in four common events, namely, new employee induction program, quarterly management steering committee meeting, women leaders' development program, and customer service orientation program. In addition to the common events, I focused on engaging with the senior management team of the organization through formal and informal discussions, to identify relevant ethnographic material that goes beyond the known processes of organizational gendering (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009). I was careful to avoid trying to see meaning when there is none, and to be open to the meaning that my encounters with the field would produce (Fine & Shulman, 2009).

The four common events provided an initial mapping of the terrain. New employee induction programs clearly started with the organization's heightened sensitivity to women employees' safety and security, as the workplace is located far from the city. Speaker after speaker emphasized the measures the organization has implemented to ensure that women employees are provided safe and secure transport arrangements to account for the isolated location of the workplace. The legitimation of discrimination begins with the discourses of women's safety (Poster, 2001). The women leaders' development program emphasized the specific training needs that women have, to be able to grow into managerial and leadership roles, essentializing women as different from men and needing improvement interventions to be able to become leaders (Poster, 2001). The service orientation program that every employee attends reinforces subordinate position of the organization vis-à-vis the global client organizations, and the need for taking ownership to meet the client requirements, which often meant staying back after hours and working on the weekends, both of which are infeasible for most of the women employees due to their domestic responsibilities. The quarterly steering committee meetings review progress of projects through the discourses and measures of ownership by further accentuating the differences between those who are available to meet client demands round the clock and those who cannot, who, in most cases, were women. These four mechanisms broadly laid the framework and guidance on what an ideal employee should be (Acker, 1990). The four common events highlighted the dominant managerial discourses of the organizations in terms of safety of women employees, women as having unique developmental needs, need to satisfy the client, and valorization of working extra hours. I decided to interview leaders, women employees, and women employees who use company crèche to examine managerial discourses pertaining to people and experiences of women employees with organizational policies and work practices (Reybold et al., 2013). I presented my findings from the four common events with recommendations. This was an opportunity for me to establish my capabilities as a process professional and ethnographer. The findings and recommendations were well received, and their agreement on the same provided me legitimacy to seek further access to the organizational units and people. The gatekeepers provided me the list of contact details of all women employees of the organization at the site of the study, in addition to the heads of departments. I conducted three sets of interviews, interviewing 40 women employees on their workplace experiences of harassment (sexual and non-sexual) and bullying, 13 women employees who were the users of the company crèche, and 24 heads of departments (men and women). The interviews were conducted over a period of six months to accommodate the schedules of the women employees, as well as multiple interviews with the same participants. To maintain the voluntary nature of interviews, I contacted the employees myself. It was essential that the prospective research participants do not see it as a mandate from the management to participate in the interview. Hence, I emphasized the voluntary nature of the interview participation, confidentiality of the interview data, and the purpose of the interview in my communication with the prospective research participants.

Empathy and Reflexivity

My familiarity with the industry and the gatekeeper's efforts in establishing my role as a researcher (intern from a premier educational institution) with significant prior experience in the industry, helped me become a "trusted outsider" that the research participants can be comfortable with, and willingly participate in the research interviews (Bucerius, 2013).

The visible changes in transport arrangements based on my recommendations to resolve the issues of women employees facilitated the process of becoming a trusted outsider. When I approached women employees with requests for interviews, they already had information about the planned changes in the transport arrangements. That background immediately established the possible positive outcomes from the interviews. However, I had to reiterate with every interview participant that I am primarily associated with the organization for collecting data for my doctoral research, and any actions that may result from my findings would be incidental and not automatic. In addition, I have reiterated that names and accounts of workplace experiences will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone within or outside the organization. Since the research participants would be seeing me at their workplace for a few months, it was important to assure them of the confidentiality, and that it was safe to talk to me about their workplace experiences (Gatrell, 2009).

Questioning women employees on their experiences of harassment (sexual or non-sexual) and discrimination was often an emotionally intense moment for the women research participants. There were a few women employees who broke down during the interview as they narrated their experiences of harassment (sexual or non-sexual) and discrimination. They were not expecting any resolution for their workplace issues from me or from the organization through me; the episodes of emotional breakdowns were a manifestation of their frustration of having to live with such experiences despite the complaints made to the senior management and HR representatives.

I have noticed improvement in my ability to empathize (Haynes, 2006) with their situation. Being empathetic meant being conscious to my emotions with regards to such workplace experiences that afforded appreciation of what women employees go through in their daily work lives (Mazzetti, 2016; Whiteman et al., 2009). Being empathetic also meant stepping within the veil (Du Bois, 2015) of the research participants to understand the conditions of possibility of their workplace experiences. These emotionally charged interviews reflected the dehumanizing contexts of organizational structures and work practices (Nugent & Abolafia, 2007) and the work of managerialism, as it demands an employee's complete self at its disposal, regardless of its perpetual denial of human dignity in the workplace (Fleming, 2015). I closed such interviews by saying that I will be presenting a summary of my findings to the senior management that might aid them in addressing such complaints across the organization. Many of them confided that though they did not expect any resolution to their situation from the interviews, they felt good about expressing themselves to an outsider, and hoped that my research would provide insights to the senior management, that may eventually result in certain organization-wide actions to prevent such situations for others (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). The inability of women employees to share their workplace experiences with anyone within the organization was a recurring theme in most of the interviews. Managerialism shaped the workplace experiences of women employees in multiple ways, ranging from denial of presence to denial of recognition.

The problem of invisibilization and discrimination were more acute in the case of returning mothers. Pregnant women employees were automatically made invalid the moment managers were made aware of their pregnancy. Though the company had six-month maternity leave benefit with the option to return to work, it was difficult to get back to the same role, and the period of pregnancy reset the career clock for all the women employees interviewed. Overt

and covert sexual harassment was evident in the accounts of the women research participants. At the same time, a few women research participants refused to share the details of their workplace harassment, fearing retribution.

The need to share the workplace experiences was profound among the research participants: the human need to be heard and for avenues for self-expression was clear in a fast-paced work environment where no one appeared to be interested in what they think and feel about their workplace experiences. To establish a productive interview relationship, I tried to make the interview experience as informal as possible. This need was consistent with the employee satisfaction scores for women employees, where most women scored less on satisfaction. I met all the research participants at a time and place convenient to them which meant staying late to accommodate their work schedules. Since all of them were billable human resources, they were hard pressed for time. The only time they could spare was around lunchtime, at the start of the workday, or towards the end of the workday. Giving primacy to their convenience was key to gaining their willingness to participate in the interview process. A small tech chat at the start of the interview, specific to their work area was an icebreaker.

Prior to meeting each interview participant, I gathered information about the projects on which they were working and the technologies and functional domains in which they were engaged. The preparation helped in making the initial connection. After elaborating on the interview protocol, I engaged in a brief conversation about my background and my academic pursuits. Pursuing doctoral studies after two decades of work experience generated interest in my study, as well as the fact that I was a man researching the gendering of organizations. Before we could start the interview process, most of the research participants shared their own academic and career trajectories, and what made them choose the career in IT. These initial conversations enabled a free-flowing interview context, where they were open and candid in articulating their workplace experiences. My experience of managing organization-wide process change projects involved gaining the buy-in of employees across many levels. Change management requires a high degree of empathy with the apprehensions of those affected by the proposed changes, and interpersonal skills that establish a working relationship based on trust. Prior experience of change management also enabled me to manage my own emotional responses to the accounts of women employees of their workplace experiences (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Mazzetti, 2016). Showing respect towards others, and demonstrating empathy helps in establishing an authentic working relationship with people at all levels. Engaging in open communication about the intent of the research interview, and on the possibility of their inputs not resulting in any immediate outcomes for them individually, established my credentials of an honest researcher. I was a trusted outsider (Bucerius, 2013; Mazzei & O'Brien, 2009). However, becoming a trusted outsider is not a planned activity, but rather, evolves with time, as my experience demonstrated. The management acceptance of recommendations on transport arrangements significantly influenced the process, in addition to the women research participants' acknowledgement that my prior work background demonstrated an understanding of their workplace experiences.

Undertaking research process that places the standpoint of the other gender, constantly made me reflect on my own privileged position as a man, and how I handled some of the similar experiences of marginalization and discrimination in my past work life (Ryan, 2018). Identification of the generative mechanisms of women's experiences at their workplace seemed easier, considering the managerial regimes I was part of, as a manager myself. There was a constant dialogue between the workplace experiences of women employees as narrated by them, and my own reflexivity on the working of managerialism that led to similar workplace experiences in the organizations with which I was employed (Mutua Kombo, 2009). While I had been critical of the managerialism in my own work life, I was also aware of the privileges I held as a man in negotiating the demands of managerialism. I could clearly see that similar

capacity for negotiation was not easier for many of the women employees I interviewed. My reflexivity throughout the interview process enabled me seek aspects of managerialism that were beyond my own cognition, as I listened to the workplace experiences of women employees. While reflexivity as a past manager and a man were important (Berger, 2015; Voyer & Trondman, 2017), it was also essential to relate the accounts of workplace experiences of women employees to relevant sociological themes and theories (Burawoy, 1998; Wilson & Chaddha, 2009) that further aid in seeking other empirical material to identify discursive and material structures that shape such experiences (Gabriel, 2015).

Empathy and reflexivity, as an individual as well as a social researcher, contributed to gaining trust of the research participants, and aided their willingness to voluntarily share their workplace experiences without the fear of reprisals. Of course, this does not mean that they lacked agency; rather, it was left to me to find ways to access their agency in sharing their workplace experiences. The women research participants displayed certain levels of awareness of the gendered organizational managerial practices and discourses that were shaping their workplace experiences (Meadow, 2013). What they found in me was a fellow human being who was keenly interested in knowing their workplace experiences. I became a trusted outsider, and not a representative of the management, as demonstrated by their willingness to recommend their colleagues to participate in the research interview. My gender did not become a hindrance for them to share their workplace experiences once they saw me as a trusted outsider (Bucerius, 2013; Mazzei & O'Brien, 2009).

A study by men of women's experiences can provide critical reflection of the generative mechanisms that lead to such women's experiences, of which men are active participants. The arguments for identity-based claims of knowledge production also deny existence of a variety of experiences of women, along the axes of race, class, caste, ethnicity, and religion, thereby questioning the very category of women. Identity categories as analytical frameworks and identity-based claims for knowledge production are inherently exclusionary of the diversity possible within such categories due to the intersectionality of social differences. Interviews that elicit experiences of individuals can lead to identification of the generative mechanisms that produce those identity categories (Davies & Davies, 2007), which any qualitative researcher, regardless of gender, could examine. Hence, the questions of whether men can do research on women, and whether men can produce true accounts of women's experiences need not be epistemological dilemmas, if one adopts an institutional ethnography research framework to explicate the generative mechanisms of women's workplace experiences. The use of institutional ethnography research framework that takes the workplace experiences of people as the "point of entry" (Smith, 2005, p. 10), and a position of "trusted outsider" (Bucerius, 2013; Mazzei & O'Brien, 2009) helped me access the workplaces experiences of women research participants. My experience and familiarity with the organizational context helped in explicating the institutional regimes that mediate such workplace experiences (Burawoy, 2015; Rankin, 2017; Smith, 2005).

Synergy of Interests and Useful Knowledge

In line with my initial commitment to the organization, I offered to provide my assistance towards the gender diversity and inclusion initiative of the organization. Such an assistance assumed multiple forms ranging from providing ideas to facilitating discussions on creating specific interventions. While I gained entry into the organization, it was equally important to sustain the access and maintain relationships with gatekeepers at multiple levels within the organization (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2009). Research interviews highlighted the transport problems, lower performance ratings, lack of recognition, lack of visibility to client, lack of work from home option and lack of opportunities for growth as specific to women

employees in the organization. The research interviews enabled me to establish myself as a legitimate inquirer of women's issues in the organization that would go on to provide a platform for me to approach other women employees with interview requests. The email communications from the department heads on research interview findings and the action plans to address the issues identified established trust and authenticity in the data collection process. For gatekeepers and the department heads, the research interviews provided additional insights that they could use as part of their gender diversity and inclusion initiative.

Each key stakeholder in the management team had their own set of expectations from my study, ranging from inputs to improving the gender diversity initiative, department-specific reasons for lower representation and attrition of women employees, to establishing the efficacy of the gender diversity initiative. Individual employees wanted to know what good would result from the interviews, for themselves and for the organization. There was synergy among the expectations of the gatekeepers, stakeholders, and employees in terms of my study being able to provide some insights that can improve the organization's gender diversity and inclusion initiative.

The specific recommendations from my observations included revamping the new employee induction program, rebranding the women development program so that it is not seen as devaluation of women employees' capabilities, and changing certain terminology of the quarterly management steering committee meetings to make them gender agnostic. From my interviews, recommendations included extending the crèche hours to accommodate afternoon shifts of women employees, broadening the definitions of bullying and harassment and associated disciplinary measures, redrafting the sexual harassment policy, and improvements in transport arrangements for women employees. My recommendations were discussed within the organization at the level of senior management, as part of the organization's gender diversity and inclusion initiative. While I was not privy to the action plans, there was acknowledgement from the gatekeepers that my association as a researcher, and findings, were fruitful for them.

My engagement with the organization as a researcher afforded me an opportunity to contribute to the organization's awareness on gender dimension of work practices and identify specific improvement interventions, and not merely collecting data for my doctoral thesis (Brannan et al., 2007). The study was not intended to engage in any transformative agenda within the organization (Holck, 2018). However, it was evident from my research experience that an organizational ethnographer contributes to an organization's transformative agenda in some measure without contaminating the field. While the organization's initiatives based on my findings would take its own course, subject to many factors, it was a productive field engagement for me, as well as for them.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to address the access question that past researchers engaged with, especially with regards to problems encountered by a male researcher researching women (Berliner & Falen, 2008), and whether male researchers can produce true accounts of women's experiences (Schilt & Williams, 2008). The paper highlights the need to be a trusted outsider (Bucerius, 2013; Mazzei & O'Brien, 2009) in addressing the former, while adopting an institutional ethnography research framework (Smith, 2005) that urges the researcher to take research participants' experiences as the "point of entry" (Smith, 2005, p. 10) to elicit the institutional regime (Burawoy, 2015; Rankin, 2017; Smith, 2005) that shapes those experiences, in addressing the latter. By not focusing on characterizing or categorizing experiences of research participants, the method provides a "point of entry" (Smith, 2005, p. 10) that any researcher can occupy to study any socially constructed "other" (De Beauvoir

1953, p. 26). Such an approach obviates the need for claims of "positional piety" (Cousin, 2010, p. 9), as well as minimizes power relations that underlie any research engagement (Parameswaran, 2001). The paper also shows that a researcher could seek opportunities for establishing a trusted outsider position to enable research participants to willingly participate in the study, through identifying spaces of engagement where the interests of the researcher, organization, and the participants intersect.

Personally, and as a social researcher, my field experience was enriching in terms of enhancing understanding the practice of ethnographic research and development of skills as a researcher, though the journey can never be complete. My study presented an opportunity to adopt the institutional ethnography research framework to account for the trajectory of accesses, and more importantly, being able to access the experiences of women employees as a gender outsider.

The road to establishing oneself as a trusted outsider is rather long. However, as my experience demonstrates, it is not infeasible. The standpoint of "trusted outsider" (Bucerius, 2013) that transcends identity categories, willingness and capacity to empathize based on one's own marginalization in some aspect of social milieu, and a commitment to inclusive social justice based on relational equality (Anderson, 2012), collectively enable a male researcher to cross the gender chasm that results in a productive field engagement.

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