A Meta-Analysis of Workplace Ethnographies : Race, Gender, and Employee Attitudes and Behaviors

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"... There are substantial gains to be had by simultaneously considering all available ethnographies in a given field to gain a more systematic overview of the findings and implications of these potentially huge bodies of work."

A META-ANALYSIS OF WORKPLACE ETHNOGRAPHIES

Race, Gender, and Employee Attitudes and Behaviors

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Workplace ethnographies suggest many hypotheses about the effects of organizational characteristics on employee attitudes and behaviors. These hypotheses, however, are difficult to evaluate by considering each ethnography individually. The current article uses qualitative comparative analysis of content-coded data from the full population of workplace ethnographies to provide a fuller evaluation of the lessons these ethnographies have to offer. The hypothesis that women are happy and quiescent workers receives only limited support. Women actually evidence less satisfaction and pride in their work than men, but they are more cooperative and less conflictual than men. Autonomy is the most consistent determinant of positive workplace attitudes, a finding that is consistent with survey-based research. These findings thus both confirm and condition prior conclusions about the workplace and suggest the importance of systematically compiling the findings of workplace ethnographies to evaluate and benchmark conclusions based on ethnographic analysis.

Keywords: *race; gender; organizations; ethnography; qualitative comparative analysis*

Grounded ethnographic observation has yielded a wealth of interesting hypotheses about social phenomena (L. Anderson 1999; Lofland 1995). The areas studied range from brief therapy (Miller 1997) to identity formation in the peace movement (Hunt and Benford 1994) to homelessness (Snow and Anderson 1993) to the "Promise Keepers" movement (Williams 2001). An important challenge for grounded observation has been to make these findings cumulative so that areas of agreed on knowledge can be established, contested, and defended. Each study typically contrasts its findings only to an internal comparison case, such as a different department in a factory or a peace movement in a different city. Comparisons to prior studies are also sometimes made, but these comparisons rarely involve more than a few selected cases.

The limited history of systematic, comprehensive comparisons across ethnographies of related phenomena leaves an unmet need in the

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ethnographic tradition. Successfully addressing this need could result in significant gains in the knowledge collectively generated by ethnographers. The possibility of such gains is evidenced, for example, by the intellectual advances spurred by Gamson's (1975) content analysis of ethnographies of social movements. Gamson's seminal study of social protest used data on fifty-three social protest movements taken from ethnographies and professional histories. For each social movement, Gamson coded seventy-four characteristics based on content analysis of movement histories. The variables coded included violence (by or against the group), secrecy, factionalism, hierarchical versus decentralized authority, bureaucracy, alliances, social class of membership, and many other group characteristics. The insights generated by Gamson's analysis of existing studies provided an important benchmark in social movement studies and in so doing spurred a whole generation of new studies.

The workplace has long been a central venue for ethnographic studies. The centrality of the workplace as a focus for sociologists reflects the centrality of work in peoples lives. For anthropologists, who have expanded their horizons from studying primitive people to studying urban life, the workplace has also emerged as a focal venue. One of the most notable characteristics of ethnographic studies of the workplace is the range of work settings that has been studied. Doctors and lawyers have an honored place (Becker et al. 1961; Granfield 1992) but so do more marginal occupations such as cooks (Fine 1996), maids (Romero 1992), barbers (Wright and Calhoun 2001), resort workers (Adler and Adler 2001), and pizza delivery drivers (Kinkade and Katovich 1997). Middle-class and working-class settings are also studied. Typical settings include police (Manning 2001), chemical factory workers (Halle 1984), and middle managers (Smith 1990). Less visible occupations such as sports medicine (Kotarba 2001), health care workers in abortion clinics (Kleinman 1996), and coastal fisher folk (Ellis 1986) are also studied. Cumulatively, these studies have succeeded in bringing an incredibly wide range of workplaces under the ethnographic lens. The contributions of ethnographic observation to organizational sociology are developed in greater detail in Barley (1996), Morrill and Fine (1997), and Lee (1999).

ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS ABOUT GENDER AND RACE AT WORK

Workplace ethnographies have generated many insights about the different work life experiences of men and women and majority and minority workers. Several repeated themes have emerged. One theme is that women, relative to men, are relatively happy in their work and acquiescent in their workplace behaviors (Constable 1997; Westwood 1982). Ethnographic observations of female workers being dutiful in their activities are bolstered by theoretical arguments that such behaviors are consistent with the expected subordinate and docile role of women in family and political spheres (Lee 1998; Drori 2000). Conversely, men are often observed to be more confrontational and aggressive at work (Beynon 1975; Hill 1976), behaviors that are also consistent with gender roles outside of the workplace.

On the other hand, recent ethnographic observations have also sought to discover the more hidden and subtle worlds of womens resistance in the workplace. Such studies have discovered a rich world of forms of resistance specific to women at work (Adams 2002; Staggenborg 1991). The general conclusion from these studies is that womens forms of resistance are different in kind than more traditionally observed resistance among male workers but that they are just as important in negotiating expectations for consent, compliance, and effort. Studies of womens resistance activities at work have provided insights on how maids resist status degradation (Groves and Chang 1999; Paules 1991), how policewomen resist the gendering of police work (Martin 1980), and how paralegals and legal secretaries resist exploitation by lawyers (Pierce 1995). Contrasting conclusions about the degree and nature of womens resistance in the workplace suggest the need for a more systematic review and integration of ethnographic observations on the extent to which women are happy and acquiescent at work (see also Wharton, Rotolo, and Bird 2000).

Minority workers, conversely, particularly African American workers, are sometimes seen as mired in an oppositional culture that reinforces negative minority stereotypes (E. Anderson 1999; Ogbu 1991). These oppositional behaviors are seen as grounded in perceptions of limited opportunity with a resulting downgrading of aspirations. Over time, these orientations may become part of racial subcultures that become self-reproducing (Farkas, Lleras, and Maczuga 2002). Other observers, however, have reported that supposedly oppositional

behaviors on the part of minority youth workers are based on stereotypic views by employers and do not accurately represent the behaviors of minority youth (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; Talwar 2001; Waters 1999). The existence and significance of oppositional culture among minority workers thus also appears to be an area of debate that might benefit from a more systematic evaluation of the ethnographic record of observation on the workplace.

ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS

Ethnographers are able to study organizations and their inhabitants across many levels of organizational life. As a result, they have developed insights about organizational life ranging from organizational structure and functioning, to supervisory behavior, to the nature of the work, to employee behavior. At the organizational level, one of the most widespread ethnographic observations concerns the debilitating effects of bureaucracy on worker morale and organizational functioning (Crozier 1971; Morrill 1995). Excessive bureaucracy interferes with spontaneous efforts to develop more efficient ways of doing work (Burris 1983). At the level of job tasks, one of the most common ethnographic observations is the importance of autonomy for soliciting worker pride, enthusiasm, and effort (Applebaum 1981). Autonomy is sometimes limited by bureaucratic rules, but it is equally often a casualty of overly close supervision. Indeed, ethnographers have identified supervisory style, and in particular harsh and abusive supervision, as a key debilitating workplace experience for many workers (Devinatz 1999; Hodson 2001; Wah 1999).

The corrosive effects of bureaucracy, lack of autonomy, and abusive supervisory styles have all been abundantly documented in organizational ethnographies. We would expect any systematic evaluation of organizational ethnographies to reveal a pervasive role for these negative characteristics as causes of reduced satisfaction, pride, and compliance at work. What remains unanswered is the particular constellations in which bureaucracy, autonomy, and abuse occur and the effects of particular combinations or conjunctures of these characteristics. We turn now to a consideration of techniques for synthesizing and integrating the knowledge available from the storehouse of ethnographic studies of the workplace.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

We use qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) techniques based on Boolean logic (Ragin 1987) to analyze information content coded from the population of organizational ethnographies. QCA techniques are increasingly used in social science research in studies of political, economic, and organizational issues. Recent articles using QCA include studies of wage policies and social welfare programs (Amenta and Halfmann 2000), the emergence of the social security system (Hicks 1994), strikebreaking and split labor markets (Brown and Boswell 1995; Brueggemann and Boswell 1998), patterns of union growth and decline (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999), labor policies in southern textile mills (Coverdill, Finlay, and Martin 1994), the success or failure of left-libertarian political parties (Redding and Viterna 1999), and the success or failure of mobilization drives among the homeless (Cress and Snow 2000).

QCA is uniquely well suited to address the hypotheses we have developed concerning ethnographic observations about labor force and organizational factors that may influence workplace attitudes and behaviors. QCA allows the systematic comparison of a large number of cases across a specified set of characteristics. It thus allows a comprehensive analysis of the observations provided by the full population of existing workplace ethnographies. QCA analyzes potentially complex patterns of causation by searching for conjunctures of causes. This conjunctural logic makes QCA particularly appropriate for analyses that seek to identify and understand complex patterns of interaction among causal determinants. This conjunctural logic also makes QCA uniquely compatible with the sorts of comparative logic that underlie qualitative research.

QCA, however, is not without certain limitations (see, for instance, Abbott 2001; Hicks 1994; Lieberson 2001). These limitations include being constrained to a limited number of independent variables because of the conditional logic of QCA and the number of configurations generated. The inclusion of large numbers of independent variables thus makes interpretation exponentially unwieldy. Consequently, the researcher using QCA is forced to focus on variables deemed theoretically central to the processes outlined. It can be argued, however, that the benefits of QCA in terms of the theoretical rigor it demands in choosing variables in the first place, its case-oriented logic, and the specification of potentially complex, conditional configurations

significantly outweigh its limitations (see also Boswell and Brown 1999; Griffin et al. 1991; Ragin 2000).

A more serious limitation, in our view, is the typically deterministic character of QCA results. In common usage, results are derived from a logical reduction of configurations that are positively related to the outcome. That is, configurations of variables are usually generated *in relation to the outcome always being 1 (i.e., yes or present)* and then reduced by the program by logically eliminating irrelevant configurations (ones that can be subsumed under some other configuration). While useful in denoting conditions under which an event *always* occurs, this approach to using QCA does not make full use of the data and does not capture tendencies, variations, and divergences from absolutes in the real world. Specifically, information on configurations associated with a negative (0) outcome on the dependent variable or configurations associated with a contradictory outcome (in which some cases in the configuration are 1 on the outcome of interest and other cases are 0) are usually not presented or considered. This is unfortunate, as configurations that are associated with 1, 0, and contradiction represent the actual degree of variation in the relation between the explanatory pattern and the dependent variable. Acknowledging contradictory configurations and their relations to the dependent variable of interest can introduce probabilistic possibilities and interpretations into the typically restrictive QCA model. Ragin (2000, 133) concurs on this point, suggesting how researchers can and should explore nondeterministic configurational patterns.

Our modeling takes these criticisms and suggestions to heart by using QCA to generate and then logically reduce all configurations represented in the data provided by workplace ethnographies. The result is essentially a set of organizational typologies—typologies that denote unique combinations of attributes in the data. More specifically, these configurations denote the minimum number of configurations needed to logically cover all positive (1), negative (0), and contradictory configurations in the data.

Beyond addressing positive, negative, and contradictory associations, and thus providing a more probabilistic interpretation of patterns, our strategy has the added benefit of offering some comparative leverage when examining multiple dependent variables. By selecting positive, negative, and contradictory configurations for the initial reduction, QCA retains the entire set of available cases for the analysis. The

Table 1: Models of Positive Worker Attitudes and Behaviors

Model	*Characteristic*
Labor force	WOMEN•minority
Organizational	bureaucratic•AUTONOMY•abuse
Combined	WOMEN•minority bureaucratic•AUTONOMY•abuse

NOTE: Uppercase letters indicate the presence of the characteristic, and lowercase letters indicate the absence of the characteristic. The • signifies "and," indicating that all the conjoined characteristics are necessary to specify the configuration.

configurations generated with QCA will thus be the same across dependent variables. This allows us to draw substantive conclusions about the relationships between a given set of configurations and a range of worker attitudes and behaviors.

The QCA models to be tested in this article are presented in Table 1. The notation in these models follows QCA conventions. Capital letters denote the presence of a characteristic, and lowercase letters denote the absence of a characteristic. The • denotes "and," which indicates that all the conjoined characteristics are necessary to specify the configuration. The labor force model suggests that positive attitudes and behaviors are most likely to occur in workplaces with female workers who are nonminority (WOMEN•minority). The organizational model suggests that positive attitudes and behaviors are most likely to occur in nonbureaucratic workplaces, with high worker autonomy and no supervisory abuse (bureaucratic•AUTONOMY•abuse). The combined model suggests that both these constellations are necessary to achieve positive work life experiences and behaviors.

DATA AND METHOD

The current analysis relies on data from the systematic coding of information from the full population of book-length organizational ethnographies. The systematic analysis of data from a comprehensive set of organization ethnographies takes advantage of the depth and range of observation offered by ethnographies while avoiding the limits posed by analysis of a single case or a limited set of case studies (Ragin 1987). The analysis of a comprehensive set of ethnographies thus combines the strengths of in-depth field observation with a broad coverage of organizations and the ability to use explicit comparison groups.

There are more than 120 book-length organizational ethnographies published in the English language. Each represents an average of more than a year in the field, with at least as much additional time spent in analysis and writing. The accumulated record of organizational ethnographies is thus based on more than 240 years of Ph.D.-level observation and interpretation. This resource, however, has remained *largely unanalyzed* by social scientists studying organizations (see Hammersley 1997; Schwartzman 1993). The in-depth observations provided by organizational ethnographies are particularly important for observing the subtle nature and consequences of such workplace phenomena as autonomy, abuse, pride in work, and resistance to work (Mouly and Sankaran 1997). The coding of information from these ethnographies allows for the development of multifaceted measures of worker behavior, as well as measures of the organizational contexts in which these behaviors occur.

SELECTING THE CASES

The data collection part of this proposal proceeded in two waves. The first occurred in the early 1990s with the assistance of a graduate practicum. The second occurred in the early 2000s with support from the National Science Foundation. The second wave both extended the number of cases coded and added additional measures. Throughout this process, thousands of published case studies were examined to locate and evaluate appropriate ethnographies. Likely titles were generated by computer-assisted searches of archives, perusal of the bibliographies of ethnographies already located, extensive use of interlibrary loan, and searches of the library shelves in the immediate area of previously identified ethnographies. We also used an advisory board of twenty experts in organizational ethnography to review our list and recommend other books to consider. Iteratively applying these search procedures resulted in an exhaustive search—eventually our pursuit of new leads produced only titles already considered.

We subsequently examined each book in detail. The criteria for inclusion in the final pool to be coded were (1) the use of direct ethnographic methods of observation over a period of at least six months, (2) a focus on a single organizational setting, and (3) a focus on at least one clearly identified group of workers—an assembly line, a typing pool, a task group, or some other identifiable work group. The

requirements of direct ethnographic observation and a focus on a specific organization and work group are necessary to obtain the depth of observation and understanding needed to ascertain and measure subtle aspects of worker and management behavior that are often cloaked behind easily proffered categories and explanations (Emerson 1987; Gans 1999; Miller and Dingwall 1997; Van Maanen 1998).

The majority of the books excluded reported on an occupation as a whole rather than on a particular group of workers in a specific organization. For example, a book might report on the work lives of secretaries in New York City. While valuable in their own right, such books do not allow the development of measures of the organizational characteristics that are central concerns in the current analysis. Following the above example, note that secretaries may work across diverse settings involving a range of labor force situations, organizational characteristics, and management styles. Other books were excluded because they studied industries rather than specific organizations, focused primarily on a specific job redesign program or strike or plant closing, or were community studies, often of a factory town. Because of the specialized focus of each of these categories of books, they generally failed to provide detailed information on organizational and labor force characteristics, coworker relations, and worker attitudes and behaviors under normal operating conditions and so were not suitable for the current analysis. These books remain available, however, for alternative analyses focusing, for instance, on job redesign programs or on the unfolding of strikes or other collective actions.

An example of a book that was excluded is Arlie Hochschild's (1997) *The Time Bind*. This book focuses on workers across a range of occupational settings in a large company, which is part of its strength given its theme of time conflicts between home and work. However, because of the range of occupations described, it was impossible to code detailed information for a specific identifiable group of workers. The book is also heavily thematic and does not provide detailed information on organizational or workforce characteristics outside its particular focus.

The selection process generated 149 ethnographic cases. These cases were derived from 124 separate books because the observations reported in some books allowed the coding of multiple cases. For example, 2 cases were coded from a book by Lee (1998) reporting on two Litton Electronics factories, one in Hong Kong and one in Shenzhen.

Eighteen cases were excluded from the current analysis because they focus on managerial occupations, bringing the number of cases for the current analysis to 131. These ethnographies constitute the population of published book-length English-language ethnographies that focus on an identifiable work group in a single organization and that provide relatively complete information on the organization, the nature of the work taking place there, and employees' attitudes and behaviors at work.[1] The national location and occupation focus of the ethnographic cases included in the analysis are reported in the appendix. The greatest number of cases are set in the United States, with a secondary focus on the United Kingdom. Together, the United States and the United Kingdom account for more than 80 percent of the cases analyzed. The modal occupational locus is assembly work (37 percent) with additional concentrations in service (15 percent) and the professions (14 percent).

CODING THE ETHNOGRAPHIES

A team of four researchers—the author and three advanced graduate students—developed the coding instrument for the ethnographies. First, we developed a list of relevant concepts and preliminary response categories. Second, over a period of six months, eight selected ethnographies were read and coded by each of the four team members. After each ethnography was coded, we discussed our respective codings to decide on the retention or removal of items and to develop new response categories and coding protocols. Our goal was to create an instrument that could be completed for every ethnography with high reliability by trained interviewers.

The ethnographies were read and coded by the same team of four researchers, by members of a yearlong graduate research practicum, and by additional graduate research assistants supported through a National Science Foundation grant. All coders were trained on a common ethnography and met twice weekly as a group to discuss problems and questions. Coders recorded up to three page numbers identifying the passages used for coding each variable. If multiple instances of a behavior were found, the coder was instructed to review all previous passages cited, reconcile inconsistencies between the passages, and record the best answer, along with all relevant page numbers. Each recorded variable thus summarizes a large body of data initially

observed and subsequently reported by the field researcher (Weber 1990).

As an example, conflictual coworker relations, which are an important outcome measure in subsequent parts of the analysis, were coded from an ethnography of bank employees in the following manner. The ethnographer describes a social world of invidious comparison and backbiting: "Individuals try to fashion . . . personal identifications by criticizing others, thus indirectly asserting their own individual worth and even superiority. . . . Each individual knows that she herself may become an object of criticism. This creates an enervating apprehensiveness of others' judgements" (Jackall 1978, 121-22). A records clerk at the bank, when asked if she is staying for a holiday party, expresses a widely felt anxiety: "I stay because if I don't, they'll talk about me" (p. 121). Another worker reports, "They're a bunch of phoneys. . . . They are snotty. I feel awful if I'm around any of them" (p. 121). A third reports, "Everyone is two-faced, and you have to watch out for yourself" (p. 122). The negative social atmosphere in the bank results in significant personal antagonisms between employees:

> There is a division between us and [another group of workers]. . . . They go around with their noses in the air. . . . [They're] *female, very female*. Like when a male walks in the office, they're like a bunch of high school girls. They're always giggling. . . . There's one who drives me crazy the way she walks. She is shaped like a seahorse and the way she walks is like she's saying, "I'm beautiful." (Jackall 1978, 121-22)

Another worker comments on one of her colleagues: "She's a friend of [the assistant operations officer]. That means she's getting a raise. That's not *fair*" (Jackall 1978, 127; emphasis in original). We coded these episodes as representing frequent coworker conflict. This coding is further supported by the absence of any reports by the ethnographer of positive or supportive coworker relations in this setting.

After completing a book, the primary coder was debriefed by a member of the research staff to check the accuracy of the codings. At this time, the codings were reviewed in detail. In addition, a 10 percent sample of cases was recoded as a reliability check. The average intercorrelation between codings is .79, indicating a relatively high degree of intercoder reliability. Validity checks indicate that the ethnographies evidence no distinct patterns of findings based on theoretical orienta-

Table 2: Labor Force and Organizational Characteristics

Variable	*Definition*	*Coding*
Women	Female workforce	Greater than 50 percent women
Minority	Minority workforce	Greater than 50 percent minority
Bureaucratic	Procedures fully detailed in written rules	No *versus* yes
Autonomy	Worker input into organization of work tasks	Average or less *versus* high or very high
Abuse	Verbal, emotional, or physical abusive by supervisors	Never, rarely, or sometimes *versus* frequently or constantly

tion or other ethnographer characteristics or on coder effects (Hodson 1999).

The systematic compilation of data from the population of organizational ethnographies allows their otherwise separate observations to be used to test hypotheses about work life experiences and workplace behaviors across a wide range of settings. These measures provide the empirical basis for the analysis presented in this article and are discussed in the following sections. An underlying assumption of the current analysis is that the ethnographic data constitute a realist account of the organizational structure and worker behavior existing in each workplace. Each ethnographer, in summarizing his or her experiences at a workplace, chose to report certain events as typical. It is these events that form the basis for our codings (L. Anderson 1999; Brunt 1999; Fine 1999).[2]

LABOR FORCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The labor force and organizational characteristics to be evaluated as determinants of workplace experiences and behaviors are listed in Table 2. A workplace with greater than 50 percent female workers is characterized as having a predominantly female workforce. A workplace with greater than 50 percent minority workers is characterized as having a predominantly minority workforce.

The organizational characteristics of bureaucracy, autonomy, and abuse require greater explanation, and can be illustrated by some of the passages that helped us code these variables for particular ethnographies. A *bureaucratic* organization of work is one in which decisions

and task requirements follow closely scripted rules. For example, the following passage from an ethnography of an insurance company contributes to a code of "bureaucratic = 1 (yes)" for this setting:

> The largest source of dissatisfaction for Kevin, however, is the bureaucratic framework of Servall, with its routinized work patterns and its restricted autonomy: " . . . I'm in a framework, a corporate framework, where I have to abide by their rules and regulations for everything, which gets to me because of all the bureaucratic junk that I have to go through to complete something. I know there's a faster way to do something, but I have to follow their ways, which is frustrating sometimes." (Burris 1983, 157)

Autonomy to make choices about the manner and details of work is illustrated in an ethnography of concrete workers. In this setting, the workers are proud that they are able to get more accomplished if the supervisor stays out of the way and allows them to take initiative:

> At the sewage treatment plant, there were several occasions when the men placed a thousand yards of concrete in a single day. No one from management told them to do it. The superintendent, foremen, and key journeymen decided and planned it on their own initiative. One evening, at the local bar, . . . after one of the thousand-yard pours, Pete expressed the pride and satisfaction that comes from extraordinary accomplishment, and said: "If they'd leave us alone, we can take care of the work and make money for the company. We did a thousand yards today. But I've done better. As long as Carmen [his employer] leaves Earl [the superintendent] alone we can turn out the work." (Applebaum 1981, 63)

Conversely, an almost total absence of autonomy is illustrated by an ethnography of nursing home aides:

> Aides cannot take a patient off the floor or alter care plans, even adding chair padding, without a nurse's okay. Patients' requests often have to go through the coordinating nurse. Should a patient want to stay in bed, the coordinating nurse must grant permission. If a patient asks an aide for a certain kind of food, she cannot call the kitchen herself but must go through the coordinating nurse. The same is true if the aide thinks some aspect of care determined by another department needs changing, say, the type of chair used. Aides cannot approach departments on their own; a nurse must do it. (Foner 1994, 81)

Abusive supervisory behavior is the final organizational characteristic to be considered. Abusive relations are reported in an ethnography of a biomedical products manufacturing facility. In this setting, workers are subjected to a variety of verbal and even physical abuses and a wide range of status degradations:

> The pettiness of Biomed's discipline permeated the entire working life of all the factory's production workers. Lori continually threatened to dock the workers if their time cards were not placed in their properly designated slots. Early one morning, she even made threats about washroom use to the gathered workers. "If you don't keep the bathroom clean, you will only be able to use it during breaks. We will have to lock it at all other times," she threatened. (Devinatz 1999, 86)

Similarly, abusive relations are reported in an ethnography of a Japanese apparel factory:

> There used to be a lot of malicious teasing. I cried a lot. . . . It was a supervisor—a woman—who was the mean one. . . . She yelled at us for brushing against the clothes that were hanging up in the changing room. . . . And if you were sewing labels on garments and you asked for some more, she would take a bunch and throw them at you, so they'd fall all over the place, and then you'd have to pick them up. It takes time to pick them up, and then you'd have to rush like crazy to catch up to your quota. I cried a lot. (Roberts 1994, 61)

EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

The employee attitudes and behaviors that we will investigate as influenced by labor force and organizational characteristics are presented in Table 3. We examine several interrelated aspects of work life experiences and attitudes, including fulfillment in work, satisfaction in work, pride in work, and commitment to work. Again, the meaning of these concepts can be illustrated by passages from the ethnographies analyzed. *Fulfilling work* is illustrated in the following passage from an ethnography of a surgical ward. In this setting, the surgeons experience great meaning in their work from the fact that their decisions have tremendous consequences, including life-and-death consequences:

Table 3: Worker Attitudes and Behaviors

Worker Attitude or Behavior	*Definition*	*Coding*
Attitude		
Fulfilling work	Sense of purpose and meaning in work widely held	Meaningless or somewhat meaningful *versus* fulfilling
Job satisfaction	Overall satisfaction with the job and workplace	Average or less *versus* high or very high
Pride	Pride in work	Rare or average *versus* a great deal
Commitment	Commitment to organizational goals	No *versus* yes
Behavior		
Procedure sabotage	Intentional violation of official operating procedures	No *versus* yes
Infighting	Conflict within work groups	Occasional or less *versus* frequent
Conflict	Frequency of conflict between employees and supervisors	Infrequent *versus* average or more
Strikes	History of strikes	No *versus* yes

> A judgmental error occurs when an incorrect strategy of treatment is chosen. . . . Attending surgeons in charge of devising treatment plans make the most and the most serious judgmental errors. In these cases judgment is not always incorrect in any absolute sense; the surgeon, given the clinical evidence available at the time, may have chosen an eminently reasonable course of action, but the result—a death or complication—forces the surgeon to consider whether some alternative might have been more profitably employed. Clinical results, not scientific reasoning, determine how correct judgment is. Surgeons have an aphorism that expresses this: "Excellent surgery makes dead patients." By this they state most flat-footedly their understanding that textbook principles of care have to be compromised to meet the immediate situation, that results and not the elegance of a clinical blueprint separate acceptable from unacceptable practice. (Bosk 1979, 45-46)

Conversely, an absence of meaning and fulfillment in work is reported in an ethnography of a wiring harness factory: "These small satisfactions [of completed work] were upset when machines broke down or when Carroll disrupted production with one of his schemes. Those were the hardest days for all of us. Without the pleasure of watching our completed work pile up, the day became exactly what it was: routine, long, and boring" (Juravich 1985, 132).

Job satisfaction is widely discussed in workplace ethnographies. A typical or average level of job satisfaction is exemplified in the following description of work in a fast-food restaurant:

> Few seemed to experience the workplace as generally oppressive. Resentment about unreasonable customers did not outweigh positive aspects of the job, and the workers expressed relatively little dissatisfaction with the extreme routinization. One reason was that, despite the constraints of the routine, some workers felt that their interactions with customers were more than mechanical and that they were able to express their personalities on the job. Other workers, in contrast, appreciated the routine precisely because it did not require that they treat exchanges with customers as full-fledged personal interactions. (Leidner 1993, 134-35)

Pride in work is also commonly discussed in workplace ethnographies. Workplaces in which pride is totally absent are not common; however, they do exist. An example is provided from an ethnography of a French automobile factory:

> Everyone here is a case. Everyone has his story. Everyone chews over his tactics and in his own way tries to find a way out. How can I find a direction in this semi-penitentiary, indefinitely provisional universe: who can imagine that he can "make a career" as a semiskilled worker? Who doesn't both resent deeply his presence here and see the wretchedness of his small-time bits of work as a kind of decline or accident? People dispense with scheming, they dream of going back to their own country and opening a little business. Many of them persist in betting, and only succeed in reducing still further their meager wages of four hundred francs every two weeks. (Linhart 1981, 60)

Conversely, a strong sense of *commitment* to the workplace is evidenced in a cooperatively owned plywood mill in the Pacific Northwest. In this setting, ownership and participation in the co-op foster a sense of collective responsibility and mutuality:

> You just find it's kind of a big family attitude. Those that can put out, do, and you don't feel too bad about the guys that can't. . . . It's altogether different here [than in my former job]. It took me a little while to get used to this because where I worked over there, there was a union and you did your job and you didn't go out and do something else. Here you get in and do anything to help. Everybody pitches in and helps. The people stick together, that's the reason we've gone so far and production is so high, cuz everybody works together. (Greenberg 1986, 38)

Ethnographies often do a better job of capturing actual behaviors than surveys, which rely on self-reports that may differ significantly from actual events. One of the strengths of workplace ethnographies is thus the detailed and situated descriptions they provide of employee behavior based on direct observation over a significant period of time (Allen 2000; Hindmarsh and Heath 2000; Preda 2002). These reported behaviors form a core component of the analysis reported in this article. In the ethnographies, we found detailed descriptions of procedure sabotage, infighting among workers, conflict with management, and strikes, as well as many other behaviors. Four core behaviors are described in the lower panel of Table 3.

Procedure sabotage is commonly reported in workplace ethnographies. Indeed, it appears to be a regular fact of work life in many settings. Procedure sabotage is often used as part of a strategy to get work completed in a way that does not exhaust the worker or require excessive or unnecessary effort. An ethnographer in a paper products mill

describes how employees violate procedures to reduce their workloads:

> Operators are aware that many of the [paper] cones that they reject would actually be perfectly acceptable to the customer. Almost all operators in the department therefore engage in a practice of separating out the cones that are substandard but still usable. They hide these around, and they wait for an inspector to pass by and approve a case before they pull these out of hiding and pack them. (Kusterer 1978, 58)

Infighting among coworkers is also a common occurrence in many workplaces and is frequently described in workplace ethnographies. The extended discussion of coworker infighting in a bank described in the method section above provides a good example of ethnographic description of pervasive horizontal conflict in a workplace.

Conflict between employees and management is also endemic in many workplaces and is widely documented in workplace ethnographies. For instance, an ethnography of a Japanese automobile factory in the American Midwest reports on how a group of workers used the Japanese team structure as a vehicle for expressing their own interests and demands. The episode starts with a team refusing to participate in morning meetings and continues after the close of the factory: "Team 1 members held a meeting while the team leader was absent and formulated a list of demands to submit to the team leader, focusing on issues of how the team was controlled" (Graham 1995, 119).

Strikes are relatively rare events and are only infrequently reported in workplace ethnographies. Many workplaces, however, have a history that includes past periods of strike activity. This history of strikes often becomes an important cultural resource for workers. For example, the period of initial unionization and related strike activity has become an important part of the employee culture in the British automobile factory described below:

> The stewards in the Paint Trim Assembly [PTA] plant met each other regularly. . . . On all these occasions they joked and told stories about people and events, about the city and the factories. More often they told stories about the plant, about the early days when the PTA plant was first unionized by the Transport and General Workers Union. These stories in particular were always told to newcomers (the same stories were told to me dozens of times during the months when I came to know them)

> particularly to new shop stewards and activitists and almost inevitably at times of crisis. . . . The fact that they were told so often indicates the significance of this period. In their telling, the stories take on a further significance. In handling the present, men call upon the past for guidance. The lessons of the past are learned and handed on as stories. (Beynon 1975, 74-75)

ANALYSIS RESULTS

The 131 workplace ethnographies that form the empirical base for this article are analyzed using QCA (Ragin 1987). Results from this analysis are reported in Table 4. Five configurations of the labor force and organizational characteristics to be analyzed are found among the cases. All other observed configurations can be reduced to these configurations by eliminating redundant aspects of the configurations. For example, the simplest configuration is "autonomy." The lowercase letters indicate that the essential trait of this configuration is the absence of autonomy. The lack of autonomy may occur with any number of other characteristics (or their absence), but for all these additional characteristics or configurations of characteristics, at least one case manifests the additional trait and another case manifests its absence, making the trait unnecessary to describe the underlying configuration.

The five configurations reported in Table 4 thus summarize the unique constellations of the labor force and organizational characteristics that are manifest in the 131 cases analyzed. To understand what these configurations of traits tell us about the ethnographic observations, it is important to discuss both the prevalence of the different configurations and the relation of these configurations to the worker attitudes and behaviors.

The configurations are listed in Table 4 starting with the most commonly observed configurations. The two most commonly occurring configurations are minority•abuse and autonomy. The minority•abuse configuration describes workplaces in which minority and abuse are absent (note the lowercase letters used to describe the components of the configuration). In other words, this configuration depicts majority workers who labor under largely nonabusive conditions. Autonomy describes workplaces with an absence of autonomy but with no other distinguishing features. Two less frequently occurring configurations are women•bureaucratic•abuse, which describes mainly male work-

Table 4: Workplace Configurations Related to Fulfilling Work, Workplace Ethnographies (*N* =131)

Configuration	*Total Cases*	*Number of Yes's*	*Number of No's*	*Ratio of Yes to No*	*Example Organizational Ethnographies*	
					Yes (Fulfilling)	*No (Not Fulfilling)*
minority•abuse	107	21	86	.24	Traweek (1988)	Zussman (1992)
autonomy	97	3	94	.03	Kesselman (1990)	Ospina (1996)
women•bureaucratic•abuse	33	7	26	.27	Lloyd and Mullen (1990)	Ouellet (1994)
WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abuse	24	4	20	.20	Simonds (1996)	Foner (1994)
women•BUREAUCRATIC•ABUSE	9	2	7	.29	Gamst (1980)	Devinatz (1999)
Total cases	131	23	108	.21		

NOTE: Configuration elements in capital letters indicate the presence of the characteristic. Elements in lowercase letters indicate the absence of the characteristic.

places with limited bureaucracy and little abuse, and WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abuse, which describes female workplaces with a predominance of bureaucracy and with limited abuse. The final unique configuration—women•BUREAUCRATIC•ABUSE—occurs least often and characterizes male workplaces with strong bureaucracies and significant abuse.

The second and third columns of Table 4 report the number of cases in which each configuration is associated with fulfilling work or nonfulfilling work. The fourth column reports the ratio of cases with fulfilling work to those with nonfulfilling work. The bottom row reports the summary statistics for all configurations combined. It thus serves as a baseline and indicates that nonfulfilling work is much more common than fulfilling work—the ratio of fulfilling to nonfulfilling work is only .21. The various configurations of labor force and organizational characteristics are relatively uniform in the prevalence of fulfilling work, with one notable exception. The configuration depicting an absence of autonomy manifests markedly less fulfilling work than any other configuration (only 3 percent of cases report fulfilling work). Thus, the analysis of fulfilling work provides support only for the hypothesis that the organizational characteristic of job autonomy is a significant determinant of fulfilling work. No other labor force or organizational configurations of characteristics appear to markedly influence fulfillment at work.

The final two columns of Table 4 list example ethnographies that represent each configuration in combination with either fulfilling or nonfulfilling work. It may be especially useful to examine the exceptional cases that represent fulfilling work for what they can tell us about the sources of fulfillment, even in the face of working under conditions that suggest the opposite. An example of fulfilling work for the first configuration (majority workers, no abuse) is provided by an ethnography of Tupperware distributors. These workers find significant meaning in their work and even take on the role of Tupperware distributors as part of their core identities. Regular meetings are important occasions for sharing information on how new products are selling and which sales techniques are most effective for these products. These meetings also help develop social cohesion and identity as a Tupperware dealer: "One Tupperware dealer, for example, said, 'Rally is every Monday morning. I wouldn't miss it. I'd kill to go to Rally'" (Biggart 1989, 152). Thus, in this and other special situations, majority workers in at

least some nonabusive situations are able to find meaning and gain fulfillment in their work.

The absence of autonomy has the most debilitating effects on fulfillment of any configuration. However, even in this situation, workers in some workplaces are able to experience fulfillment. An example of such a situation is provided by an ethnography of female welders in a World War II shipyard. Here, in spite of a lack of autonomy, the difficulty, importance, and acquired skills associated with the job all contributed to making the work meaningful for these female recruits who had not previously had access to skilled manual work: "Rowlands' shipyard experience, which she referred to as 'the only experience that I had that I really liked,' had given her a taste of a job she enjoyed" (Kesselman 1990, 117-18).

Men in nonbureaucratic, nonabusive situations (women•bureaucratic•abuse) are also able to experience fulfillment, at least in a minority of situations. Often, this occurs in craft settings. For example, fishery workers in the Great Lakes enjoy substantial craft skills and, accordingly, experience considerable meaning in work: "Alva Snell is typical of fishermen who practice one or more of these specialized skills. He is proud of his ability because it sets him apart from other fishermen. In some ways it is what makes him a life-time fisherman, not just someone doing it until another job comes along" (Lloyd and Mullen 1990, 62).

Women in bureaucratic settings with limited abuse (WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abuse) are also sometimes able to experience meaning and fulfillment in work, again, at least in a minority of cases. An example is provided by an ethnography of work in an abortion clinic where the women experience the birth control services they provide as liberating to the clients they serve (Simonds 1996).

The final configuration is men in bureaucratic and abusive settings (women•BUREAUCRATIC•ABUSE). Even in this situation with the aggravations of both bureaucracy and supervisory abuse, employees in a significant number of workplaces are still able to experience meaning and fulfillment in work. An example of such a workplace is provided by an ethnography of railroad engineers. In this setting, the obvious pride in high levels of skill appears to moderate the aggravations of bureaucracy and harsh supervision:

Table 5: Workplace Configurations Related to Positive Job Attitudes, Workplace Ethnographies (*N* = 131)

	Ratio of Yes's to No's			
Configuration (Number of Cases)	*Fulfilling Work*	*Job Satisfaction*	*Pride in Work*	*Job Commitment*
minority•abuse (107)	0.24	0.45	0.65	1.05
autonomy (97)	0.03	0.15	0.21	0.49
women•bureaucratic•abuse (33)	0.27	0.57	1.36	0.65
WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abuse (24)	0.20	0.41	0.33	0.60
women•BUREAUCRATIC•ABUSE (9)	0.29	0.50	0.80	0.50
Total cases	0.21	0.38	0.53	0.84

> The learning experienced by enginemen may be classified into at least four broad areas. The first is manual operative skills coupled with technical knowledge. . . .
>
> The second area is codified knowledge of rules and guidelines for operating procedures. It comes from intensive study, practical application, and constant interpretation and restudy of various written sources. . . .
>
> The third area is on-the-job judgment, apart from the skills noted in the previous two areas. This area cannot be readily taught and cannot always be easily learned. . . .
>
> The fourth area is learning the railroaders' code of etiquette. Here a rail internalizes the mores or values governing interpersonal relations within the railroad social system. . . . A good rail excels in all four areas. (Gamst 1980, 42-44)

The analysis of fulfillment in work is extended to several other job experiences and attitudes in Table 5. For each configuration, this table reports the ratio of positive to negative work experiences for job satisfaction, pride in work, and job commitment, as well as repeating the results for fulfilling work as a comparison. Analysis of these additional facets of work life highlights the main conclusion from the analysis of fulfilling work—that the absence of autonomy is the most important determinant of negative work life experiences. Indeed, the lowest prevalence of positive experiences for each of the four aspects of work life is manifest in workplace settings characterized by a lack of autonomy.

Analysis of these additional work life experiences, however, also suggests several new conclusions. The greatest pride in work is evidenced for men in nonbureaucratic and nonabusive settings (women•

Table 6: Workplace Configurations Related to Resistance Behaviors, Workplace Ethnographies (*N* = 131)

	Ratio of Yes's to No's			
Configuration (Number of Cases)	*Procedure Sabotage*	*Work Group Infighting*	*Conflict With Supervisors*	*History of Strikes*
minority•abuse (107)	1.10	0.11	0.26	0.47
autonomy (97)	1.16	0.11	0.45	0.52
women•bureaucratic•abuse (33)	1.20	0.10	0.32	0.27
WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abuse (24)	0.71	0.04	0.26	0.50
women•BUREAUCRATIC•ABUSE (9)	2.00	0.28	8.00	2.00
Total cases	1.26	0.13	0.38	0.45

bureaucratic•abuse). Men in this setting also evidence the highest job satisfaction. The high levels of job satisfaction and pride in work for men, at least in this particular employment situation, undermine the conclusion that women are satisfied workers. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case—men, at least in some employment situations, are able to derive greater satisfaction and pride in their work than are women. Indeed, the only configuration involving predominantly female workplaces (WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abuse) evidences only average fulfillment and satisfaction and below-average pride and commitment to work.

Only one of the five configurations of labor force and organizational characteristics involves minority/majority status. This configuration—minority•abuse—represents majority workers who work in nonabusive situations. The most notable feature of work in this situation is the high level of commitment to work. The hypothesis that minority workers are substantially unhappy in their work is thus not strongly supported, although greater commitment among majority workers, at least those who avoid abusive situations, is evidenced.

Thus far, we have considered only worker attitudes across different workplace configurations. It is also important to consider behaviors as well as attitudes. The prevalence of various employee behaviors across labor force and organizational configurations is reported in Table 6. These employee behaviors include procedure sabotage, work group infighting, conflict with supervisors, and a history of strikes. The important role of autonomy as a determinant of attitudes is not repeated in the analysis of behaviors. Instead, lack of autonomy is associated

with only average levels of sabotage, infighting, conflict with supervisors, and strikes.

Turning to the configurations involving gender contrasts, we see some support for the expectation that women are relatively acquiescent as workers. Women in bureaucratic, nonabusive situations evidence the lowest levels of procedure sabotage and work group infighting. However, their levels of conflict with supervisors and the presence of a history of strikes are more nearly average. Men in bureaucratic and abusive situations evidence the highest levels of all four confrontational behaviors—sabotage, infighting, management conflict, and strikes. These contrasts for configurations involving men and women provide significant support for the image of women as acquiescent workers and men as more confrontational, at least in situations involving bureaucratic rules and abusive supervisors.

It may also be useful, however, to consider contrary cases for the settings involving gender contrasts in acquiescence. In other words, in what situations are women *not* acquiescent and in what situations are men *not* as conflictual in their workplace relations? Examining the cases involving conflictual relations for women in bureaucratic but nonabusive settings (WOMEN•BUREAUCRATIC•abusive), we find that many of these cases are in settings outside the United States or involve minority status workers. The cases include apparel and temporary workers in the United Kingdom (Westwood 1982; McNally 1979; Huws 1984), Arab textile workers under Jewish managers (Drori 2000), and Chinese retail sales workers under Japanese managers in Hong Kong (Wah 1999). Examining the cases of nonconflictual relations for men in bureaucratic and abusive settings (women• BUREAUCRATIC•ABUSIVE), we observe that many of these also involve minority status workers or settings outside the United States. These cases include black Pullman car porters (Santino 1989) and automobile assembly workers in Japan (Kamata 1982).

The restriction of the current analysis to nonsupervisory employees may also help explain the relative acquiescence observed for female workers. In managerial settings, relations of power among colleagues become more important and may lead to heightened conflict, even for female managers. For example, both Morrill (1995) and Martin and Meyerson (1999) noted relatively confrontational behavior by female managers in settings characterized either by tokenism or by a significant number of female executives. It may well be that what is missing

for women in the settings we have observed is an institutional base for pressing their demands, a base that has been secured to a greater extent by men in nonsupervisory positions.

CONCLUSIONS

The most repeated relationship uncovered by a systematic analysis of all available English-language workplace ethnographies is the strong role of lack of autonomy as a corrosive effect on employees experiences and attitudes. This relationship is consistent with the conclusions of many survey researchers who also study the workplace (see Kalleberg et al. 1996). Interestingly, the negative effects of lack of autonomy are not evidenced on workplace behaviors. Because workplace behaviors are less often studied in surveys than worker attitudes, this discrepancy may indicate a gap in our current workplace knowledge based on an overreliance on survey-based research. This convergence and divergence of findings highlight the need for multimethods approaches to social issues.

The expectation that women are relatively happy and quiescent as workers is only partly supported. Women evidence no more positive attitudes than men, regardless of the configuration of labor force and organizational characteristics in which they work. Women are, however, somewhat less likely to engage in procedure sabotage and work group infighting, at least under conditions of bureaucracy and lack of abuse. Men, in contrast, evidence greater job satisfaction and pride in work than women under some situations. Thus, men, rather than women, appear to be relatively happy workers. Men also, however, appear to be more confrontational than women, across all four dimensions of workplace behaviors considered—procedure sabotage, infighting, management conflict, and strikes. Men could thus be characterized as relatively happy but confrontational, at least under conditions entailing both bureaucracy and abuse. We have, however, also noted several caveats and alternative explanations for this gender contrast. Women of minority status and in national settings outside the United States appear to be less acquiescent. Similarly, men of minority status and in settings outside the United States and the United Kingdom appear to be more acquiescent. The gender difference in workplace acquiescence observed (and theorized) may thus in part be unique to majority workers in Anglo-American cultural settings.

Minority workers evidence few unique attitudes or behaviors. This lack of contrasts provides little support for the image of minority workers as unhappy and oppositional. However, majority workers, when they are not abused, are more committed to work than is average across workplaces. This single contrast does provide some limited support to the image of majority workers as more committed than minority workers.

Abuse and bureaucracy are implicated in many of the configurations described above. In all cases, however, they are part of a configuration with either gender or racial status. Thus, rather than constituting specific causes with potentially unique effects of their own, abuse and bureaucracy are always manifest as part of specific configurations that also involve gender or racial characteristics. And it is only as part of these configurations that they have consequences for workplace attitudes and behaviors. More generally, all of the configurations, with the exception of "autonomy," include both labor force *and* organizational characteristics. The prevalence of such configurations suggests that neither labor force characteristics (race and gender) nor organizational characteristics can be interpreted alone. Rather, labor force characteristics take on their meaning only in specific concrete configurations in which they are conjoined with specific organizational characteristics. Similarly, organizational characteristics take on their meaning only in specific concrete configurations in which they are conjoined with specific labor force characteristics.

Ethnographies are undertaken as individual projects, often by single researchers laboring alone for months or years. However, there are substantial gains to be had by simultaneously considering all available ethnographies in a given field to gain a more systematic overview of the findings and implications of these potentially huge bodies of work. Our analysis of workplace ethnographies has yielded important clarifications about the role of labor force and organizational characteristics as determinants of workers' experiences and behaviors. The lack of job autonomy is a key determinant of negative work life experiences and attitudes. However, the strongest source of confrontational behaviors in the workplace is men working under conditions of bureaucracy in combination with supervisory abuse. The central role of autonomy in determining workplace *attitudes* identified by survey researchers must thus be conditioned by taking advantage of ethnographers' unique ability to observe workplace *behaviors*. Including a consideration of behaviors

shifts the focus partly away from autonomy and toward other organizational and labor force factors, such as gender, bureaucracy, and abuse.

The systematic analysis of workplace ethnographies reported here is based on a vision of ethnography as producing realist descriptions of the social world (Hammersley 1999). It thus rests on a fundamental belief in the ethnographer's "power to inscribe the world" (Fine 1999, 539). There are, of course, many other visions of the ethnographic project, including interpretative ethnography, ethnography as biography, and ethnography as a research program (Burawoy 1989; Dingwall 2001). This article makes no attempt to adjudicate between these competing interpretations, many of which may have validity and use. Rather, we simply seek to make use of the ethnographer's "power to inscribe the world" as a lens through which to perceive patterns of regularities in organizational life. We invite others to do the same with workplace ethnographies or with other bodies of ethnographic work.

NOTES

1. Lists of the ethnographies included and those considered but excluded are available from the author on request and at http://www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/rdh/Workplace-Ethnography-Project.html.

2. The code sheet, coding protocol, and data are available at http://www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/rdh/Workplace-Ethnography-Project.html. As with any content analysis project, we may have made errors in the interpretation of the texts or in the coding of the data. The data, however, are available for public scrutiny and analysis, and we welcome suggestions, criticisms, and alternative views on the recorded data.

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APPENDIX
Coverage of Workplace Ethnographies Analyzed (*N* = 131)

Coverage	*Percentage*
Country/Region	
Africa	2.3
Asia and Australia	8.6
Europe	6.7
United Kingdom	23.7
United States and Canada	56.5
South America	2.3
Total	100
Occupation	
Professions	13.6
Clerical	6.9
Sales	3.1
Skilled	10.8
Assembly	36.7
Labor	10.5
Service	14.6
Farm	3.8
Total	100