



Article

Control and Dignity in Professional, Manual and Service-Sector Employment

Organization Studies
33(10) 1383–1406

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DOI: 10.1177/0170840612453529

www.egosnet.org/os



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Abstract

This study investigates implications of complex control combinations applied in manual, service and professional occupations for expressive, behavioral and emotional aspects of workplace dignity. Qualitative comparative analyses of 154 content-coded workplace ethnographies suggest that professionals encounter persuasive ‘bundles’ of control that enhance expressive and behavioral manifestations of dignity as well as pride. However, these benefits come at the expense of high levels of stress associated with internal drives and externally driven normative orientations and behaviors. Workers in manual and service occupations confront a broader array of approaches, including coercive control combinations that erode pride and effort by dehumanizing workers and inviting abuse. Furthermore, the benefits of persuasive control combinations in these settings are mitigated by supplementary constraints, which promote maintenance of a protective distance from employers that may also help to limit stress. The paper concludes with organizational strategies for curbing abuse in coercive manual and service environments and a discussion of changes necessary to address the problem of stress in the professions.

Keywords

abuse, alienation, autonomy, dignity, employment, jobs, labor process, manual, professional, service, stress, work

Introduction

Firms and their employees approach production with different and often competing objectives. Workers, driven by material needs as well as an innate labor impulse, seek not only adequate wages, but also avenues for self-expression, self-realization and social integration on the job (Kahn, 1981; Knights & Willmott, 1989). Firms, in contrast, seek to maximize returns on wages paid, and thus deploy a host of control techniques designed to increase effort and curb resistance (Edwards, 1979; Paradeise, 2003). Many controls limit opportunities for autonomous, creative and

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meaningful work, although some enhance capacity for these and other rewards (Blauner, 1964; Burawoy, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Hodson, 1996).

Research on the labor process has shown that individual modes of control influence opportunities for workplace dignity, and noted that professional work is less amenable to constraints routinely applied in manual and service settings (Kraft, 1999; National Research Council, 1999). Emergent impacts of complex *combinations* of control, however, are not well understood – especially as they relate to variations across diverse occupational, organizational and industrial contexts. This study asks: How do overall approaches to control compare in professional, manual and service-sector employment? How do these impact a multidimensional work experience, comprising expressive capabilities, behavioral orientations and emotional states? How is dignity experienced, assaulted and claimed at work? The answers to these questions have important implications for understandings of the labor process and worker experiences across a diverse occupational structure, and help to augment emerging scholarship on abuse in manual and service environments and stress and uncertainty in the professions (Crowley, Tope, Chamberlain, & Hodson, 2010; Nath, 2011; Stein, 2007).

In this study, I apply qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to data on 154 content-coded workplace ethnographies to identify ‘bundles’ of control encountered by work groups in manual, service and professional occupations. I then examine variation in exposure to coercive versus persuasive control structures within and across occupations, as well as impacts of each control configuration on expressive, behavioral and emotional aspects of workplace dignity. ‘Reimmersion’ in the qualitative data (see Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009) allows for inductive theoretical elaboration on emergent processes – highlighting how interaction and use of agency link workplace control and worker dignity in professional, manual and service-sector jobs.

Findings suggest that professionals encounter persuasive bundles of control conducive to self-expression, commitment, effort and pride, but they exhibit a great deal of stress, in part due to close identification with their work and blurring of lines separating themselves from their employers. Coercive bundles of control, found only in the manual and service sectors, limit not only self-expression but also effort and pride, in part because they can dehumanize workers and invite abuse. Customers may either intensify feelings of powerlessness or allow for meaningful interactions, depending on the overall nature of control. Finally, persuasive control structures in manual and service environments are far less beneficial compared to those found in the professions. Unlike professionals, however, workers in these environments maintain a protective distance from employers that limits exploitation and emotional stress. I conclude with recommendations for mitigating some of the negative impacts of control structures encountered in each occupational class.

The Labor Process and Dignity at Work

Research on the labor process has long sought to explain how the organization of work influences worker well-being. The earliest efforts in this regard were informed by the writing of Karl Marx (1977, p. 80), who argued that paid employment removes the capacity to produce according to one’s own will and imagination, thereby limiting pride and satisfaction while reducing work to a means of survival no different from the productive impulse of animals. Blauner (1964) noted that particular types of worker control (including bureaucratic rules and specific technological forms) produce varying degrees of *powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, *isolation* from production goals and *self-estrangement* (whereby work becomes a means to survival rather than an end in itself). Based on case studies of work in four industries, he concluded that power-machine and assembly-line technologies produced rates of alienation, but continuous-process technologies may help restore skill and freedom to manual work.

Sociological understandings of relationships between the organization and experience of work have surged in recent years with publication of Randy Hodson's (2001) *Dignity at Work*. Drawing from Marxist, Weberian and Durkheimian perspectives on work and well-being, Hodson posits that work arrangements vary in the degree to which they allow workers to self-express and to derive a sense of self-worth and self-respect from their jobs – producing measurable differences in outcomes such as autonomy, creativity, effort and pride. Studies have shown that exposure to individual modes of control (e.g. direct supervision, task segmentation, worker participation) influence opportunity for workplace dignity, and that professional and other high-status jobs allow for a more self-directed and expressive work experience (Gecas & Seff, 1990; Hodson, 1996; Kohn, Naoi, Schoenbach, Schooler, & Slomczynski, 1990; Ross, 2000; Schwalbe, 1985, 1986).

Recently, scholars have turned their attention to *emotional* impacts of work organization, especially among workers in service and professional settings (Boudens, 2005). For example, some have described how rampant abuse leaves service workers feeling physically polluted (Stein, 2007). Others have called attention to intense performance pressure, uncertainty and anxiety in the professions (Brooks, 2003; Crowley et al., 2010; Sennett, 1998), noting how shame associated with individualization of stress magnifies its impacts (Styhre et al., 2002).

The labor process tradition provides conceptual building blocks for a general model of control applicable across a range of organizational, industrial and occupational settings (see Delbridge, 2006). Six specific forms of control, described below, have emerged as especially central in these regards. Four of these (direct supervision, task segmentation, automation and rules) are based on explicit *constraint* of worker prerogative (see Harzing & Sorge, 2003). Two others (on-the-job training and participation) operate more indirectly – aligning interests to activate pro-social orientations of workers positioned as stakeholders in the firm (de la Cruz Déniz-Déniz & De Saá-Pérez, 2003; Harzing & Sorge, 2003). These methods secure consent by offering career advancement in exchange for consent to the terms of production, or through intrinsic rewards that activate self- and social controls (see Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Hopwood, 1974/1976).

Direct supervision

Direct supervision, the oldest and simplest form of control and a hallmark of early management, is still commonly used to control workers, particularly in the service sector, where customer surveys and complaints serve as proxy indicators for performance (e.g. Muehlberger, 2007). 'Facilitative supervision' can encourage citizenship behaviors, particularly in the professions where supervisory guidance aids in skill development (Frenkel & Sanders, 2007). In general, however, this form of control erodes worker dignity. Many feel demeaned and infantilized by direct supervision, which in turn diminishes citizenship and pride in work (Hodson, 2001). Unmediated by more impersonal influences (e.g. technology and bureaucracy), direct supervision also exposes workers to abuse that hampers meaning and cooperation (Rafferty & Restubog, 2011). Research on service-sector jobs notes increased visibility and sexualization of work subject to customer control, and calls attention to the deep emotional toll of customer abuse, the effects of which spill over into other aspects of work life, producing alienation, burnout and intent to quit (Deery, Walsh, & Guest, 2011; Nath, 2011; Stein, 2007). Excessive constraints on worker discretion, moreover, can intensify abuse (Williams, 2006).

Task segmentation

Simplification and subdivision of tasks was promoted by Frederick Taylor (1947) as a means to increase productivity and extract effort from workers assumed to labor at the slowest possible pace

(see also Au & Cheung, 2004). This form of control goes hand-in-hand with separation of planning and execution first observed in manual work and then applied elsewhere (e.g. administrative jobs and the service sector) (Davies, 1982; Leidner, 1993; Paradeise, 2003). Although Braverman (1974) described these methods as a means to systematically deskill and disempower workers, many jobs continue to draw upon – or have expanded reliance on – worker knowledge and skill (Smith, 1997). Strong negative impacts of task segmentation on autonomy, meaningfulness of work and overall satisfaction nevertheless have been documented (Hodson, 1996, 2001). Limited task variation is also a key factor in the negative influence of low-status jobs on workers' self-efficacy and self-esteem (Kohn, 1976; Ross, 2000).

Automation

Blauner's (1964) conclusion that automation would eventually eliminate the most alienating jobs attracted widespread criticism for ignoring how class conflict influences the selection of control techniques. Qualitative case studies indeed illustrate that it is not technology/computerization per se, but how it is incorporated into production, that matters for worker well-being (Vallas, 1993). Where 'tasks are not just mechanized but truly automated, the worker is reduced to an often-bored observer of a part of the flow of production' (Gamst, 1980, p. 29). Automation is typically used in combination with other forms of control – providing information for use in disciplining directly supervised workers, for example (Ball & Wilson, 2000; Vázquez, 2006). Its use in combination with task segmentation, for instance, helps account for the remarkably deleterious effects of assembly lines for pride, satisfaction and worker solidarity (Hodson, 1996).

Rules

Rules guiding performance and coordination accumulate alongside specialization and differentiation (Walton, 2005). As such, they pervade work organizations – crossing industrial and occupational divides and exerting control over workers with the symbolism of close attention being paid to their behavior and the threat of sanctions for noncompliance (Edwards & Whitston, 1989; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). In the professions, control derived from knowledge management systems tracking time use, decision-making and outputs may have more to do with self-imposed norms, standards and actions than with anticipation of punishment or rewards (Brivot, 2011). Anticipated scrutiny of recorded materials nevertheless promotes routines that generate self-discipline, especially among junior professionals cultivating an image of competence (Brown & Lewis, 2011, p. 880). 'Soft bureaucracy', wherein self-governance rules coexist with centralizing bureaucratic forms, allows for a 'soft domination' of workers somewhat liberated from more conventional forms of constraint (Courpasson, 2000, p. 146). Some also argue that professional cooptation of bureaucratic controls – and even development of alternatives in service to their own ends – promotes submission by planting seeds of increasingly managerialist orientations (Levay & Waks, 2009; Waring & Currie, 2009).

As this discussion suggests, rules are not created equally. They may enable or disable workers and thus vary in their impacts (Adler & Borys, 1996). Rules can restrict arbitrary decisions, increase predictability and enhance meaning and satisfaction, or they may have the reverse effect – impinging on autonomy, creativity, pride and effort (Beck & Kieser, 2003; Frenkel & Sanders, 2007; Hodson, 1996, 2001). Likewise, rules may replace more oppressive forms of control, but are often used in combination with them, altering their impact. For example, studies have shown that the combination of scripts, quality assurance rules and supervision generates stress and resistance

among call-center workers, who in turn withhold effort and commitment to organizational goals (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002; Knights & McCabe, 1998).

On-the-job training

Benchmark labor process theories have noted a shift away from constraint-based controls toward alignment of worker and firm interests (Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979). Internal labor markets, for example, offer on-the-job training (and thus skill development, career advancement and higher pay) in exchange for commitment and voluntary effort. In the professions, this form of control typically takes place in the context of apprenticeships, wherein workers develop skills in junior association with a partnership (Greenwood, Deephouse, & Li, 2007). These arrangements encourage positive behavioral responses to work, including a high level of effort and commitment to display knowledge of ‘best practices’ (Greenwood & Empson, 2003; Pinnington & Morris, 2002). Some of these are codified into written rules, which go hand-in-hand with informal collegial controls (Scott, 2008). Indeed, full acceptance is possible only when junior professionals obey written *and* unwritten rules, accepting their apprentice status and the high-stakes career path this entails: ‘Whereas it is only “Obey or out!” in the bureaucratic organization, in addition it is ‘Up or out!’ in the professional organization’ (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011, p. 1522). In some contexts, increasing firm size, supply of junior associates, and number of steps necessary to advance into partnership have made it more difficult to succeed (Ackroyd & Muzio, 2007).

Participation

Workplace participation, another means of controlling workers indirectly, can be achieved through either formal solicitation of worker input or provisions for bounded autonomy over work activities. Formal provisions for autonomy, even within limited domains, can heighten overall control – eliciting voluntary effort and commitment to organizational goals by conveying that the organization values workers’ contributions (Friedman, 1977). In manual and service environments especially, participative control can enhance pride, effort and commitment to organizational goals (Cappelli & Rogovsky, 1998; Hodson, 1996, 2001; but see Vidal, 2007). Its use in combination with constraints described above can mitigate their negative impacts (Austrin & West, 2005). Alternatively, the presence of constraint can undermine normative foundations of participative control (Korczynski, Shire, Frenkel, & Tam, 2000; Milkman, 1997; Vallas, 2003).

In the professions, worker participation involves use of abstract knowledge and discretionary judgment (Brivot, 2011). In this context, self- and social controls deriving from participation in self-monitored work emerge as prominent means by which to secure consent and commitment to organizational goals (see Hopwood, 1974/1976). Organizations promote these ideals, sometimes quite explicitly (Casey, 1999). Extensive time commitments also result from individuals’ own identity work – especially their efforts to portray a positive and distinct identity – for example, as a ‘dedicated and respectable professional’ or ‘performing meaningful work with lasting impact’ (Kuhn, 2006, p. 1346).

Recent scholarship has revealed important challenges to professional workers under participative control, including stress associated with shifting roles and continuous informal hierarchical re-positioning (Courpasson, 2000; Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011). Many of these pressures arise from temporary, project-based groupings that have both increased ambiguity and eroded bonds among coworkers (Crowley et al., 2010; Sennett, 1998). Even outside the context of teams, workers labor individually to create and sustain a professional identity – ‘a brand of me’ (Ogbonna &

Harris, 2004, p. 1197). Stress is compounded by isolation and obfuscation associated with fear of displaying weakness. Workers describe themselves as ‘pretending,’ ‘faking’ and ‘lying’ about job satisfaction, ‘smiling and nodding while inwardly seething’ about additional work, and feeling like a ‘complete fraud’ as a result (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004, pp. 1193, 1198). Moreover, organizations individualize stress, further isolating professional workers striving above all not to ‘rock the boat’ (Styhre et al., 2002). Similar pressures confronting managers, combined with managerial uncertainty about how professional work is done, impede leadership and communication, thereby increasing ambiguity and stress (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Styhre et al., 2002; Tengblad, 2004).

The Current Study

Benchmark labor process theories’ emphasis on emerging forms of control has imbued the literature with an evolutionary quality – one that often acknowledges, but implicitly downplays, the coexistence of multiple forms of control (Blauner, 1964; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977). Comparative empirical investigations of control and dignity thus have tended to use regression techniques that reveal the impacts of singular modes of control, net of others (e.g. Hodson, 1996). In reality, however, workers neither encounter singular modes of control nor feel their effects in isolation (Hodson, 2001). Rather, multiple controls applied simultaneously form ‘a dynamic, unstable equilibria of “contradictory tensions”,’ the emergent impacts of which may be empirically observed (Brivot, 2011, p. 492; Hopwood, 1974/1976).

Data

This study investigates complex control combinations and their emergent impacts on worker dignity in professional, manual and service occupations using data on 154 work groups culled from the population of published, book-length, English-language workplace ethnographies. Case studies were identified via electronic and physical archival and library research, with ethnographies containing sufficient information to code data for at least one identifiable work group (individuals performing the same job in a single organizational setting) retained for coding. A team of four researchers developed the coding instrument, generating a list of variables and preliminary response categories representing core concepts in the workplace literature (organizational attributes, the labor process, worker resistance, social relationships, and so on) and revising it following trial codings of eight ethnographies.

Once the coding instrument and coding protocol were finalized, the full set of ethnographies was read and coded by the same initial team of four researchers and participants in a year-long graduate research practicum and year-long graduate assistantships. All coders were trained to use a common protocol and to rely on direct evidence presented in ethnographers’ published findings. The coders worked individually, documented their conclusions with page numbers, and met as a group to examine each case in detail. If a coder was uncertain about how to code a particular variable, the entire team reviewed relevant passages and came to a consensus regarding the best answer.

The result is data on hundreds of work groups in an array of industries, occupations and organizations – 154 of which included information on all variables pertaining to this study.¹ Cases used in this analysis were completed between 1940 and 1999, allowing for identification of enduring occupational variations and causal patterns (the focus of the current study) as well as temporal variations (some of which are also reported). While it is impossible to know the degree to which these data represent all work groups since there exists no sampling from which to draw a fully representative sample, a broad range of industrial, occupational and organizational settings are represented, as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1. Industrial, occupational and organizational locus of work groups in the sample of workplace ethnographies (*n* = 154)

	Percent
Industry	
Extractive and construction	5.9
Nondurable manufacturing	17.0
Durable and electronic manufacturing	12.4
Transportation equipment	7.8
Transportation, communication, and utilities	7.8
Wholesale and retail trade	12.4
Finance, insurance, real estate and business services	6.5
Personal services	7.8
Professional and related services	17.6
Public administration	4.6
Total	100.0
Occupation	
Professional	24.0
Managerial	8.4
Clerical	3.2
Sales	3.9
Skilled	9.7
Assembly	24.0
Unskilled	5.8
Service	17.5
Farm	3.2
Total	100.0
Organization size	
Less than 50	25.4
50 to 99	9.2
100 to 499	22.5
500 to 999	12.0
1000 to 4999	18.3
5000 or more	12.7
Total	100.0

Measurement

Table 2 presents codes, means and standard deviations for key dependent and independent variables. Expressive experiences reflective of dignity include *autonomy* (the level of independent worker input into work tasks) and *creativity* (the degree to which workers use their own ideas to realize the goals of their work). Behavioral dimensions are investigated with measures for *commitment to organizational goals* and *effort* on the job. Emotional aspects are assessed by an array of measures associated with stressors, stress and self-esteem. These include *abuse*, *pride in work*, *stress* and *ambiguity* (reflected in the quality of organizational communication as perceived by members of the work group).

Analyses address controls not as independent of one another but rather as ‘site-specific combination(s) of presences and absences’ structuring activities and interaction (Pred, 1990, p. 123; Kuhn, 2006). Thus, each control is indicated with a binary variable valued at 0 (absence) or

Table 2. Codes, means and standard deviations for key dependent and independent variables ($n = 154$)

Variable	Codes and notation	Mean	Standard deviation
Dignity at work			
Autonomy	1-none 2-little 3-average 4-high 5-very high	3.1	1.3
Creativity	1-none 2-little 3-average 4-high 5-very high	2.8	1.3
Commitment	Commitment to organizational goals: 0-no 1-yes	.6	.5
Effort	1-reticence practiced widely 2-conditional effort given 3-extra effort given freely	2.5	.7
Abuse	1-never 2-rarely 3-sometimes 4-frequently 5-constantly	2.4	1.1
Pride in work	1-rare 2-average 3-a great deal	2.3	.8
Stress	1-none 2-some (regular emotion work or sacrifice of self-esteem) 3-extreme emotional stress	1.9	.7
Ambiguity	Organizational communications: 1-good 2-average 3-poor	2.1	.8
Forms of control			
Supervision	0-no (super) 1-direct supervision by a supervisor or work groups spends at least 65% of work time with customers (SUPER)	.6	.5
Automation	0-no (auto) 1-yes (AUTO)	.2	.4
Segmentation	0-job entails at least some complexity (seg) 1-job requires speed and dexterity only (SEG)	.2	.4
Rules	0-no (rules) 1-yes (RULES)	.7	.5
On-the-job training	0-no (ojt) 1-extensive on-the-job training (OJT)	.3	.4
Participation	0-no (particip) 1-firm assigns workers responsibility for the quality of their own work or formally solicits their involvement (PARTICIP)	.4	.5

1 (presence). *Supervision* indicates that the work group is subject to direct supervision – either by a boss or via significant proportion of work time (at least 65%) spent with customers. *Segmentation* denotes that tasks lack complexity associated with people, data or things. *Automation* signifies that a machine performs at least some part of workers' jobs. *Rules* denotes exposure to written rules, specifications, or targets dictating some or all of work activities. *On-the-job training* indicates that the work group receives extensive on-the-job training. Finally, *participation* signifies that the firm assigns workers responsibility for the quality of their own work or formally solicits their input. The latter generally entails normative control as well (ethnographers observed discipline enforced by workers in 95% of participatory manual work groups; rates for service and professional work groups were 92% and 59%, respectively).

Analytic strategy

To identify relevant combinations of control in occupational subsamples, I use qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), an analytic tool developed to assist researchers with statistical analysis of qualitative case studies (Ragin, Drass, & Davey, 2006). This technique requires data on the presence/absence of a limited number of meaningful conditions (i.e. modes of control) with

potentially emergent implications for outcomes of interest. The software then deploys Boolean and algorithmic logic to identify all possible combinations of independent variables and reduce them to the least amount of information necessary to predict an effect on dependent variables – generating parsimonious and generalizable representations of complex configurational phenomena.

QCA has traditionally been used to investigate the certainty that a given configuration of conditions would produce a single outcome of interest. This study employs a more recent application of QCA to detect configurations with positive, negative and contradictory effects (Hodson & Roscigno, 2004). This approach allows for investigation of how combinations of presences and absences impact the likelihood (rather than the certainty) of effects across multiple (rather than singular) dependent variables. Compared to traditional regression methods, which examine the impact of independent variables net of all others' effects, this technique better captures work as it is objectively organized and subjectively experienced by workers.

I use QCA to identify control configurations (analogous to typologies or bundles of control) among work groups employed in professional, manual and service occupations ($n = 37, 61$ and 31 , respectively). I classify each configuration as either coercive or persuasive, depending on the presence or absence of controls operating on the basis of constraint and/or alignment of worker and firm interests. *Coercive* approaches to control are those in which a majority of elements represent either the presence of constraint or absence of interest-aligning controls. *Persuasive* approaches are those in which at least half of the components reflect an absence of constraint or the presence of interest-aligning controls.

I then return to the entire sample of 154 work groups to compute dependent variable means for work groups exposed (versus not exposed) to each control combination. This technique allows for a standardized comparison of configurations – one untainted by selectivity and distortion that would result from reliance on comparisons within subsamples. Reimmersion in the original ethnographic case studies allows for exploration of processes driving quantitative patterns and theoretical elaboration based on inductive reasoning.

Findings

Table 3 displays the typologies evident in professional, manual and service-sector work groups, sample ethnographies, and distributions of work groups across control typologies. Upper-case denotes presence of a given form of control, lower-case indicates its absence and '*' denotes combination (see Table 2 for control abbreviations).

All 37 of the professional work groups in the sample encountered persuasive approaches to control. In contrast, just over half of both manual and service-sector work groups (32 of 61 manual work groups and 16 of 31 work groups employed in service-sector occupations) confronted coercive bundles of control at work. Segmentation and automation loomed large in coercive manual environments, but were absent from most persuasive control contexts. Direct supervision was observed in most coercive manual and service settings, and in both persuasive service environments.

Table 4 reports the mean dependent variable scores, significance of mean differences and direction of significant relationships for all 154 work groups (regardless of occupation), exposed versus not exposed to each control configuration.

Professional work groups: persuasive control

Persuasive combinations observed in the professions are overwhelmingly conducive to autonomy, creativity, commitment, effort and pride. Abuse and ambiguity are rare in these environments, although the latter has increased significantly over time, as indicated by sizable and significant

Table 3. Control typologies identified in professional, manual and service occupations, example ethnographies and distribution of cases^a

	Example ethnography	Cases
Professional occupations		
<i>Persuasive</i>		
seg*auto*RULES	Pierce, J. (1995). Gender trials. Berkeley: University of California Press. (lawyers)	16
seg*auto*super*ojt*PARTICIP	Powell, W. W. (1985). Getting into print. Chicago: University of Chicago. (book editors)	15
seg*auto*SUPER*OJT	Haas, J. (1987). Becoming doctors. Greenwich, CN: JAI Press. (physicians)	6
Manual occupations		
<i>Coercive</i>		
SEG*AUTO*SUPER*ojt	Juravich, T. (1985). Chaos on the shop floor. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (line assemblers)	7
SEG*AUTO*RULES*ojt	DiFazio, W. (1985). Longshoremen. South Hadley, M A: Bergin & Garvey. (longshoremen)	6
SEG*SUPER*RULES*ojt	Fink, D. (1998). Cutting into the meatpacking line. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. (meat processors)	8
SUPER*ojt*particip	Kusterer, K. (1978). Know-how on the job. Boulder, CO: Westview. (bench assemblers)	9
AUTO*SUPER*RULES*OJT*PARTICIP	Rinehart, J. W., Huxley, C., & Robertson, D. (1997). Just another car factory? Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. (automotive assemblers)	1
seg*AUTO*SUPER*RULES*OJT	Harris, R. (1987). Power and powerlessness in industry. London: Tavistock. (chemical producers)	1
<i>Persuasive</i>		
SEG*super*rules*ojt*PARTICIP	Edelman, B. (1997). Shunters at work. Stockholm: University of Stockholm. (railroad workers)	2
seg*super*RULES*ojt*PARTICIP	Gouldner, A. (1964). Patterns of industrial bureaucracy. New York: Free Press. (miners)	2
seg*auto*super*particip	Ouellet, L. J. (1994). Pedal to the metal. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (truckers)	8
seg*auto*super*rules*OJT	Applebaum, H. (1981). Royal blue. New York: Holt. (construction workers)	3
seg*auto*rules*particip	Savage, C. H., & Lombard, G. F. F. (1986). Sons of the machine. Cambridge, M A: MIT Press. (pottery manufacturers)	4
seg*auto*SUPER*ojt	Swordlow, M. (1998). Underground women. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (subway conductors)	6
seg*SUPER*RULES*OJT*PARTICIP	Wedderburn, D. (1972). Workers' attitudes and technology. London: Cambridge University Press. (boilermakers)	4
Service occupations		
<i>Coercive</i>		
SUPER*SEG*RULES*ojt*particip	Newman, K. S. (1999). No shame in my game. New York: Russell Sage. (fast food workers)	4

Table 3. (continued)

	Example ethnography	Cases
SUPER*auto*ojt*particip	Rollins, J. (1985). <i>Between women</i> . Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (maids)	1
SUPER*seg*auto*RULES*particip	Diamond, T. (1992). <i>Making gray gold</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (nursing aides)	7
seg*auto*RULES*ojt*particip	Ditton, J. (1977). <i>Part-time crime</i> . London: Macmillan. (independent salespeople)	4
<i>Persuasive</i>		
SUPER*seg*auto*rules*PARTICIP	Fine, G. A. (1996). <i>Kitchens: The culture of restaurant work</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (cooks)	8
SUPER*seg*auto*ojt	Lombard, G. F. F. (1955). <i>Behavior in a selling group</i> . Boston: Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration. (retail sales people)	7

^aUpper-case denotes presence of a given form of control, lower-case denotes its absence, and * denotes combination. Some work groups matched more than one control typology. For this table only, I assigned these cases to the most detailed matched typology. The few cases falling into equally detailed typologies were placed in the one closest fitting its industrial/occupational character. In nearly all of these situations, the case fell into either coercive or persuasive categories (not both); any case matching both types was placed in the persuasive category.

correlations with year of study in professional but not manual or service work groups (figures not shown; see also Crowley et al., 2010). Zussman's (1985) account of engineers in a metalworking firm illustrate how persuasive control (in this case, seg*auto*superv*ojt*PARTICIP), promotes self-expression and a positive behavioral orientation to work. In the absence of any of the most oppressive forms of constraint, workers choose how to organize their activities:

The use and organization of time is largely the engineer's own. Unless there is a pressing problem ("putting out fires"), he chooses in what order he will work on particular tasks and projects and how much time he will spend on them in any given day. (Zussman, 1985, p. 105)

Furthermore, because the chief organizing principle for the work is participation, it entails a great deal of creativity – something that also encourages effort on the job:

On the morning I met Bob, he was working on the early stages of a design. According to Bob, this is the most exciting part of his work, the part that takes "originality, coming up with the basic ideas." It is, in the word of another engineer, "skydreaming." (p. 44)

Outcomes associated with the emotional experience of professional work tell a more complex story. Very high rates of pride are apparent across all professional configurations, and are prominent in engineers' reflections on their work. And yet the above reference to 'putting out fires' – along with engineers' accounts of their own 'deficiencies' ('I feel inadequate here. I feel like I didn't learn anything at school') (p. 65) allude to anxiety and stress, which was elevated in two of the three professional configurations.

In some professional contexts, stress and/or threats to self-esteem pervade the work experience. Kunda's (2006) case study of engineers employed in a high-tech corporation, for example,

Table 4. Expressive, behavioral and emotional impacts of control typologies in professional, manual and service occupations: Mean dependent variable scores, significance of mean differences, and direction of significant relationships for work groups exposed versus not exposed to each control configuration^a

	Autonomy		Creativity		Commitment		Effort		Abuse		Pride in work		Stress		Ambiguity	
	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other
Professional occupations																
<i>Persuasive</i>																
seg*auto*RULES	3.5 > ***		3.3 > ***		.7 > **		2.6 > *		2.0 < ***		2.5 > ***		2.1 > ***		2.1	
	2.6		2.3		.5		2.4		2.7		2.1		1.6		2.2	
seg*auto*super*oijt*PARTICIP	4.4 > ***		4.0 > ***		.8 > *		2.8 > ***		1.5 < ***		2.7 > **		2.1 > †		1.6 < **	
	2.9		2.6		.6		2.4		2.5		2.2		1.8		2.2	
seg*auto*SUPER*OJT	3.1		3.3 > †		.9 > *		2.8 > *		1.9		2.7 > **		2.2		1.8	
	3.0		2.7		.6		2.4		2.4		2.2		1.8		2.2	
Manual occupations																
<i>Coercive</i>																
SEG*AUTO*SUPER*oijt	1.6 < ***		1.4 < ***		.3 < **		2.1 < *		2.9 > †		1.5 < ***		1.4 < **		2.3	
	3.2		3.0		.6		2.5		2.3		2.4		1.9		2.1	
SEG*AUTO*RULES*oijt	1.6 < ***		1.4 < ***		.3 < **		2.1 < *		3.1 > *		1.5 < **		1.5 < *		2.4	
	3.2		2.9		.6		2.5		2.3		2.4		1.9		2.1	
SEG*SUPER*RULES*oijt	1.6 < ***		1.4 < ***		.3 < **		1.9 < **		3.0 > *		1.3 < ***		1.6 < †		2.6 > *	
	3.3		3.0		.7		2.5		2.3		2.4		1.9		2.1	
SUPER*oijt*particip	2.0 < ***		1.9 < ***		.4 < ***		2.2 < ***		2.9 > ***		1.7 < ***		1.7 < **		2.4 > **	
	3.6		3.2		.7		2.6		2.1		2.6		2.0		2.0	
AUTO*SUPER*RULES*OJT*PARTICIP	2.5		2.0 < ***		.5		2.5		2.0		1.5		1.5		1.0 < ***	
	3.1		2.8		.6		2.5		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.2	
seg*AUTO*SUPER*RULES*OJT	3.5		3.0		1.0 > ***		3.0 > ***		1.5		2.5		1.0 < ***		1.0 < ***	
	3.0		2.8		.6		2.5		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.2	
<i>Persuasive</i>																
SEG*super*rules*oijt*PARTICIP	3.5		2.5		.5		2.5		2.5		2.0		1.5		1.5	
	3.0		2.8		.6		2.5		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.2	
seg*super*RULES*oijt*PARTICIP	4.3 > ***		3.9 > **		.8 > †		2.8 > **		1.5 < ***		2.7 > *		2.2 > *		1.7 < **	
	2.9		2.7		.6		2.4		2.5		2.2		1.8		2.2	

Table 4. (continued)

	Autonomy		Creativity		Commitment Effort		Abuse		Pride in work		Stress		Ambiguity	
	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other
seg*auto*super*particip	3.7 > **		3.3 > *		.7		2.1		2.6 > *		1.8		2.2	
	2.9		2.7		.6		2.4		2.2		1.9		2.1	
seg*auto*super*rules*OJT	3.5		2.8		1.0 > ***		2.0		2.8		2.0		1.0 < ***	
	3.0		2.8		.6		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.2	
seg*auto*rules*particip	3.0		2.8		.6		2.7		2.5		1.5 < *		2.1	
	3.1		2.8		.6		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.2	
seg*auto*SUPER*ojt	2.8 < *		2.5 < *		.5 < †		2.8 > *		2.3		1.9		2.5 > ***	
	3.1		2.9		.6		2.3		2.3		1.8		2.0	
seg*SUPER*RULES*OJT*PARTICIP	3.2		2.8		.6		1.4 < †		2.2		1.5		1.6 < †	
	3.0		2.8		.6		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.2	
Service occupations														
<i>Coercive</i>														
SUPER*SEG*RULES*ojt*particip	1.4 < ***		1.4 < ***		.4 < †		3.2 > *		1.1 < ***		1.6		2.5 > †	
	3.2		2.9		.6		2.3		2.4		1.9		2.1	
SUPER*auto*ojt*particip	2.2 < ***		2.1 < ***		.4 < *		3.1 > ***		1.9 < ***		1.8		2.5 > ***	
	3.3		3.0		.7		2.2		2.4		1.9		2.0	
SUPER*seg*auto*RULES*particip	2.6 < *		2.7		.6		2.7		2.4		2.1 > †		2.4 > †	
	3.1		2.8		.6		2.4		2.3		1.8		2.1	
seg*auto*RULES*ojt*particip	2.8 < †		2.6		.6		2.2		2.3		1.9		2.4 > †	
	3.1		2.8		.6		2.4		2.3		1.9		2.1	
<i>Persuasive</i>														
SUPER*seg*auto*rules*PARTICIP	3.5 > †		2.6		.5		2.7		2.5		2.3 > *		2.4	
	3.0		2.8		.6		2.4		2.3		1.8		2.1	
SUPER*seg*auto*ojt	2.8 < *		2.5 < *		.5 < †		2.8 > *		2.3		1.9		2.5 > ***	
	3.1		2.9		.6		2.3		2.3		1.8		2.0	

*Means were computed using the entire sample of work groups ($n = 154$) and therefore are not limited to professional, manual or service work groups. Means labeled Config were computed by averaging the dependent variable scores for all cases matching a given configuration. Means labeled Other were computed by averaging dependent variable scores for all cases outside that configuration. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .1$; two-tailed tests of significant mean differences.

documents intense work effort promoted by expectations explicitly outlined by the corporation, individual identification with the work, and continuous competition for informal status based on perceived skill and repeated success. 'Burnout', marked by near-constant work effort, emotional devastation, deteriorating health and family breakdown, is 'an integral part of life' for engineers in this organization (Kunda, 2006, p. 199). The 'primordial soup' of peer pressure – 'people nipping at your heels, holding a gun against your head' and intentional sabotage are important factors: 'I was warned that they would eat me alive before I came here, that they would burn me out. This is a rough place' (p. 200). However, burnout is also conditioned by an *internal* drive to display the highest level of performance:

You get carried away by the complexity of the problems... [You] want to develop the perfect design. Sooner or later it will take all you've got to be good, to be a genius... You have no other identity. 'I'm an engineer' versus 'I'm Joe.' (Kunda, 2006, p. 201)

This blurring of identities leaves individuals vulnerable to overwork and exploitation by eroding their capacity to establish protective boundaries vis-a-vis their employers. Without them, employees become susceptible not only to fear of failure, but also the trappings of success – making extreme sacrifices to the organization as a result.

This is a real seductive organization. You wanna do more and more. I work seventeen, eighteen hours a day... It's hard. A lot of burnout... They promise you a lot, make it lucrative, give you more and more... People get addicted to work. I look around and I see weird things... screwed up marriages...[messed]-up kids. I thought Ben had problems: alcoholism, a depressed wife... But now his replacement has just left his wife and kids himself. (p. 202)

Isolated from family members and from coworkers (who distance themselves from failing employees), individuals in the midst of burnout have difficulty gaining traction necessary to correct their course. This lack of support is illustrated in a coworker's response to an engineer's announcement that he was entering treatment for burnout-induced alcoholism: 'He didn't have to tell us... Keep that kind of shit to yourself... He's gone now' (p. 203).

Manual work groups: coercive control

In sharp contrast to the professions, nearly half (six of thirteen) of the configurations observed among manual work groups represent coercive approaches to control. Four of these exerted a remarkably strong and consistently negative impact on workers' psychological and behavioral outcomes, with rates of autonomy and creativity in the range of 'little' or 'none', while comparison scores hovered around 'average' (as Table 3 indicates, just under half of the manual work groups in this sample – and all but two of those confronting coercive control combinations – worked under conditions represented by these four typologies). Rates of commitment were half those of comparison groups and workers in these settings exhibited only 'conditional' effort (dependent on extra pay, for example). Additionally, employees in these environments were subject to significantly higher levels of abuse and displayed below-average levels of pride in their work. Two remaining coercive manual environments ran counter to this trend – having limited impact on dependent variables.

Devinatz describes experiences under coercive control (SEG**SUPER***RULES**ojt) among manual assemblers in a high-tech firm. Tight constraints removed all creativity from the work, which entailed 'a limited number of movements, over and over... and... required little, if any, use of one's mental faculties' (Devinatz, 1999, p. 58). Furthermore, segmentation, direct supervision

and rules are used *in concert* to maximize constraint. For example, direct supervisors call upon rules to maintain task segmentation – disciplining workers for working outside the bounds of their assigned functions (p. 37). Task segmentation in turn allows for easy measurement of productivity, which supervisors use to hold workers accountable to productivity rules.

The line foremen.... asked [workers] one or two questions repeatedly – ‘How many TR60s have you produced today?’ or ‘Have you reached your quota for the day?’... Debbie [was] barking at a woman assembler about making the quota for assembly work. [She] complained that the assemblers were not working fast enough... [and] threatened to fire them if they did not start to turn out more work. (Devinatz, 1999, p. 48)

Tight control eliminated opportunities for workers to display their capabilities. Viewed through this web of constraint, workers were regarded by management as incapable of anything more – ‘vegetables’, as one put it, who ‘don’t use their minds’ (pp. 59–60). This dehumanization paved the way for arbitrary and abusive supervisory practices that compounded workers’ misery. Devinatz explains:

When I first started working at Biomed, the workers were allowed to talk while performing their repetitive, monotonous jobs. In addition, there were two radios turned on... These helped to alleviate the boredom... Shortly thereafter, [a supervisor] announced... ‘From now on, there will be no radio playing or talking... If you talk, you will be issued a warning. Three warnings and you’re out of here’... These infringements on workers’ self-respect contributed to the total brutalization of factory work at Biomed... Although talking seldom interfered with working, it appeared that management wanted the work to be performed in as *painful* a manner as possible. (Devinatz, 1999, pp. 82–85, original emphasis)

The oppressiveness of this combination of multiple constraints – its all-encompassing nature, its disregard for participants’ needs, inclinations and capacities, and its tendency to demoralize workers exposed to it – call to mind Goffman’s (1961) concept of the ‘total institution’, originally applied to prisons among other places. Biomed employees indeed liken their workplace to a ‘prison camp’ (p. 84) – a metaphor frequently found in ethnographic accounts of work in overwhelmingly coercive manual environments (e.g. Milkman, 1997, pp. 27, 43).

At Biomed, as in many total institutions, ‘inmates’ are overworked under threat of dire consequences – usually having to do with job loss, which for many would imperil their ability to survive. In sharp contrast to the self-expression and pride observed among professionals quoted above, workers at Biomed experienced what Marx described as a fundamental feature of alienation: work so removed from its purpose of fulfilling human needs that it is reduced to a means for survival.

Sam... [said], ‘I don’t think there is one happy employee at Biomed. All the jobs in this place are miserable. There are no good jobs.’ ‘This is a terrible place to work,’ Kay said. ‘Who would work here if they didn’t have to? Look at the people who work here. They work here because they need the money.’ (pp. 58–59)

Contrary to assumptions that coercion is necessary to eliminate soldiering (Taylor, 1947), coercive control combinations appear to *generate* worker reticence. Consistent with criminological accounts of how coercion produces delinquency through alienation of the bonds between subordinates and those in control (see Unnever, Colvin, & Cullen, 2004), employees refused to share productivity-enhancing ideas with management and routinely devised ways to withhold effort: sleeping on the job, pretending to work and disguising underperformance – acts that helped reclaim

dignity in a 'total institution', but which also reinforced managers' low estimation of workers' abilities (Devinatz, 1999, pp. 60–61, 111, 175).

Manual work groups: persuasive control

Persuasive manual settings generated more positive outcomes, but were far less beneficial for workers in comparison to the professions. Only one of seven persuasive approaches identified in manual work groups was as advantageous for workers as those deployed in the professions (seg*super*RULES*ojt*PARTICIP), with workers experiencing high levels of autonomy, creativity, commitment, effort and pride, along with low levels of abuse and ambiguity. Another (seg*auto*super*particip) enhanced autonomy, creativity and pride. Overall, most differences were small and nonsignificant. Furthermore, significant differences sometimes ran counter to expectations – suggesting *lower* rates of autonomy, creativity and commitment, and *higher* levels of abuse and ambiguity relative to comparison groups.

Manual work groups in persuasive settings do receive some advantages, as Ouellet's (1994) case study of truckers (seg*auto*super*particip) illustrates. Yet, benefits are less striking compared to the professions owing to limits on autonomy and creativity deriving from the nature of assignments, the monotony of driving, and repeated short trips.

SandHaul drivers were free to choose their routes and delivery sequences, but this freedom was often moot... For example, if a driver was assigned load A, then he almost always [received] load B, and... it [usually] made sense first to deliver load A. For the most part, the drivers' flexibility allowed them to adapt to the sort of contingencies no amount of routine can eliminate, such as accidents or weather conditions that call for alternate routes. (Ouellet, 1994, p. 32)

As Ouellet explains, such duality is a fundamental feature of the trucking experience.

As a truck driver I experienced a wide range of emotions and feelings... I had episodes of utter boredom and times of depression at the thought that this life might be my fate... The... mindless and seemingly endless thirty-minute cycles from quarries to construction sites and back numbed my mind... Yet, trucking has another side... I felt a sense of accomplishment in handling an eighty-thousand-pound rig, particularly over challenging roads and in poor weather conditions. I found gratification in seeing the end stage of a haul: food in a supermarket, concrete made into a road, a diving board above the swimming pool in someone's backyard... Finally, I found the act of driving at times utterly and addictively pleasurable. (Ouellet, 1994, p. 3)

Levels of pride are likewise mitigated by constraints on autonomy and creativity. Yet they are bolstered by truckers' evaluation of their jobs in comparison to those found in more coercive settings where they load and unload.

'Yes,' a driver might say, 'driving may be dirty, but it is not as dirty as these jobs; it may often be boring, but excitement is liable to be around the corner; the boss may be bothersome, but I rarely see him; my work may sometimes seem repetitive, but not nearly so when compared to the bottle inspector, grain unloader, or scale attendant... Finally, perhaps more than anything else, the driver is likely to feel that the plant worker, as a plant worker, is a 'nobody,' while the driver, as a driver, is a 'somebody.' (Ouellet, 1994, p. 198)

Just as workers' autonomy, creativity and pride are mitigated by the structure and nature of the work, their positive behavioral orientations are mitigated by a somewhat defensive orientation toward employers. In sharp contrast to workers at Biomed, where reticence and disengagement are chief avenues for defense of dignity, cooperative controls allow truckers to pursue self-esteem and

subjectivity with pro-social behaviors. Unlike engineers, however, displays of effort and commitment are bounded by masculine occupational identities, which foster maintenance of a protective distance from employers that precludes excessive exploitation.

With self-esteem as a goal, drivers work longer, harder, and for less pay than they would if motivated only by coercion or economic need... To see drivers, however, as empty vessels into which the owner's... standards are poured is misleading... owners were successful in passing their values and standards on to drivers only to the degree that these were compatible with the values and myths associated with male roles, the occupation, and our culture's conception of the work... Among the widely shared notions regarding work in general that drivers can be assumed to bring to the job are: ... employers have a general right to direct their employees; and limits exist on what an employer can fairly or rightfully ask of an employee. (Ouellet, 1994, p. 140)

Service work groups: coercive control

Unlike coercive approaches observed in manual occupations, most of which seriously hampered workplace dignity, only half of the coercive typologies identified in service-sector work groups exert a consistently negative impact across expressive and behavioral indicators (they also scored low on pride and high on stressors, including abuse and ambiguity). One of these (SUPER*SEG*RULES*ojt*particip) is typical of front-line fast food service, where a potent combination of segmentation and rules severely constrains both autonomy and creativity, as Leidner (1993) illustrates:

For each work station... McDonald's... has... a short but highly detailed job description that lays out exactly how the job should be done: how much ketchup and mustard go on each kind of hamburger, in what sequence the products customers order are to be gathered, what arm motion is to be used in salting a batch of fries, and so on... The interactive part of window work is routinized through the Six Steps of Window Service and also through rules aimed at standardizing attitudes and demeanors as well as words and actions. (Leidner, 1993, pp. 65, 73)

Similar to conditions observed at Biomed, overwhelmingly coercive control dehumanizes workers and generates abuse. Unlike coercive manual settings, where incivility is generally confined to interactions with supervisors, coercive control in service environments can elicit abuse from a broad and diffuse customer base, severely limiting workers' capacity to take pride in their work. Leidner (1993) explains:

[As one worker] put it, 'We're sort of at their mercy.'... The window workers were exposed to abuse, not just because McDonald's service could be exasperating, but also because... customers were so often ready to express their exasperation openly... The extreme routinization of the work, as well as its low pay, apparently led some customers to believe that anyone working at McDonalds must be an idiot undeserving of consideration. (Leidner, 1993, pp. 130–132)

Traci tells me, 'Some people seem to look down on [us]. Like I was working one night, and... we were really busy. My friend had taken this one girl's order and... laid [a straw] on the counter. And the girl... got mad and said that [my friend] threw the straw at her. And she started calling her ignorant for working at McDonald's...' Dennis, a host, speaks very disparagingly about working at McDonald's. He says, 'This isn't really a job.' I ask what he means, and he says, 'It's about as low as you can get. Everyone knows it.' (p. 182)

Employees are careful not to burden their coworkers by doing less than their share, but they use the limited avenues available to them to defend their dignity. Similar to Biomed employees, who used reticence to restore their dignity, fast food workers 'forget' the requirements of suggestive

sales programs that invite customer abuse (Leidner, 1993, pp. 77–78, 138–139). Some also ignore requirements regarding emotional displays.

One strategy, familiar to most fast-food customers, was to refuse to take on the upbeat, enthusiastic persona that management tried to impose. Thus, some workers delivered their lines and carried out their tasks as assigned, but they did so with a minimum of emotional commitment. Their unsmiling faces conveyed the message, ‘I have to do this, but I don’t have to like it.’ (Leidner, 1993, p. 190)

In contrast, two coercive configurations had little or no impact on worker dignity. In these cases, absence of segmentation and automation allows for voluntary interactions moderating negative impacts of coercion on behavioral and/or emotional aspects of dignity. In other words, interaction with customers may enhance experiences in coercive service environments that do not dehumanize employees. To illustrate, nursing home aides describe the meaning and pride they derive from caring for and forming relationships with their patients, despite limits on autonomy owing to presence of rules and absence of participation.

‘It’s not depressing here, you can really help people.’ In fact, a great many aides spoke of the satisfaction they got from ‘making patients feel good’ and taking good care of them... Aides take pleasure, too, from feeling needed and becoming emotionally close to patients. ‘You’re working here,’ one told me. ‘You’re saving someone’s life. They can’t feed themselves, can’t dress themselves. I feel I’m helping them.’ (Foner, 1994, p. 49)

Service work groups: persuasive control

In contrast to professional work, persuasive control configurations in service occupations had limited benefits for workers. One (SUPER*seg*auto*ojt) was associated with significant *reductions* in autonomy, creativity and commitment, and increases in both abuse and ambiguity. In other words, the presence of supervision and absence of on-the-job training appear to mitigate some of the benefits of nonsegmented, nonautomated work. Likewise, significantly higher rates of commitment and effort among workers in a similar configuration (seg*auto*SUPER*OJT) observed in the professions suggest that the addition of on-the-job training could have helped secure more positive behavioral orientations among employees.

The only apparent benefit of persuasive control in service settings was an increase in autonomy in the SUPER*seg*auto*rules*PARTICIP configuration. Fine’s (1996) ethnographic study of restaurant cooks illustrates how this approach to control allows for some autonomy without imparting other benefits. Cooks have the ability to interpret recipes – approximating ingredients and cooking ‘by the seat of their pants’ (pp. 24–25). Similar to truckers, however, their autonomy is bounded by other aspects of the work, especially the authority of head chefs who constrain and direct their activities. Thus, in contrast to the professions (and similar to persuasive manual settings), the expressive aspects of dignity in cooperative service environments is bounded by constraints on creativity – something that comes to the fore in interactions with chefs.

One cook modestly suggested that the fundamental difference between a cook and a chef is that ‘chefs can make something out of nothing, and a cook can’t’... Another added, ‘I think a chef has more of a feeling for cooking, and is more creative and artistic with food’... A third elaborated that creativity is not necessary for a cook: ‘If you want to be a cook... you don’t need to be creative; you need to do what you’re told to do.’ (Fine, 1996, p. 89)

Even more than truckers, cooks’ pride is mitigated by other aspects of control. Furthermore, they do not exhibit elevated rates of commitment or effort, and they experience stress associated

with routine sacrifice of self-esteem. Although they freely give extra effort to assist coworkers in times of need, their refusal to engage in these behaviors if they regard management as exploiting their fellowship underscores their disinterest in pursuing organizational ends (Fine, 1996, p. 38). Workers' efforts to detect such manipulations indicate that, like truckers, they maintain a certain level of distance from their employers to guard against exploitation and infringements on self-defined routes to dignity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study offers a comparative analysis of the bundles of control deployed in diverse organizational environments and links them to occupational variations in expressive, behavioral and emotional dimensions of workplace dignity. Prior comparative studies have demonstrated how dignity is shaped by individual modes of control, but have not explored emergent properties of multiple techniques deployed simultaneously and in combination, as workers actually confront them. Likewise, qualitative investigations have shown the effects of simultaneous exposure to multiple forms of control, but their findings cannot be generalized more broadly. This study merges these approaches with a comparative investigation designed around the recognition that social worlds are complex and involve interplay between causal forces – complexity that can be addressed using case-centered analysis and a qualitative reimmersion strategy allowing for detection of patterns in complex data and theoretical elaboration based on inductive reasoning. The findings underscore how complex control combinations shape work experiences through impacts on workplace interactions, and how workers use agency to maintain and defend dignity at work.

Analyses revealed a range of avenues for securing control in manual and service environments. Persuasive control structures offer some benefits to employees, but they are mitigated by supplemental constraints limiting both self-expression and pride. Furthermore, individuals in these contexts exhibit greater effort than is achieved through coercion, but they tend to do so in service to themselves and their coworkers rather than their employers, thus guarding against a level of identification with the employers that might blur the lines of self-interest.

Some manual and service environments also hosted coercive control structures that limited autonomy, creativity, commitment, effort and pride. Many of these impacts derive from the abusive behaviors that dehumanizing control combinations evoke in others. Some argue that it is not jobs themselves but their degree of 'fit' with individual needs that influences worker outcomes. Yet, in accounting for workers' well-being, individual preferences are outweighed by basic human needs important to most if not all people (Kahn, 1981). In other words, if some jobs routinely discourage effort, commitment and pride, it may be that they simply do not 'fit' human needs and capabilities – explaining why so many workers must 'leave their brains', their emotions, or some other aspect of their humanity at the door upon entering the workplace (Milkman, 1997, p. 166; Nath, 2011).

Does coercion extract effort? Coercive control combinations reduce opportunities for deviation, heighten visibility and expose productivity, but effort is generally conditional (dependent on additional pay, for example) at best. Service environments can leave room for workers to claim dignity in meaningful interactions with clients, but excessive constraint diminishes the possibility for connection by limiting creativity and amplifying economic aspects of the interchange (for example, scripted sales pitches alienate workers from clients and invite abuse). How can firms enhance citizenship in these environments? At minimum, they can take steps to minimize abuse – an unnecessary correlate of workplace constraint. Employers can focus efforts on training supervisors to resist what Philip Zimbardo (2007), designer of the Stanford University prison experiment, calls 'the Lucifer effect' – a transformation of character in which normal individuals mistreat others, most commonly in 'total situations' that overwhelm a sense of morality, justice and compassion.

Removing supervisors that succumb to this tendency would also help. In service environments, employers could take similar measures, including removal of customers who abuse employees. In addition, they could ‘humanize’ workers by allowing for more individuality in interaction (permitting more individualized approaches to appearance and suggestive sales, for example).

Professional workers face decidedly different challenges. Liberated from the most oppressive control combinations, professionals often can produce in the moment and gain satisfaction from doing so. For many, however, stress, isolation and emotional labor transform an intrinsically rewarding, if temporally demanding, job into an emotionally taxing work experience. Professionals’ devotion to work, which can in some cases border on pathological, derives at least in part from a blurring of lines between themselves and their tasks, and between their own interests and those of their employers. Myriad processes – including continuous assessment of success/failure in relation to allocated objectives, identity work in the context of identity regulation, and colonization of managerialist orientations – obscure these boundaries and help to extract an enormous amount of ‘voluntary’ effort from self-regulated employees (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Courpasson, 2000; Kuhn, 2006; Levay & Waks, 2009).

Lateralization of conflict among workers jockeying for status in an informal hierarchy further obscures relevant boundaries (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011; see also Courpasson, 2000). Because professional culture insists on a positive, agreeable and calm demeanor, frustration and anger are interpreted as signs of weakness. In the wild, injured animals feign wellness to avoid attracting attention of predators. Professionals ‘smiling and nodding while inwardly seething’ reflects a similar self-protective impulse (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004, p. 1193). Individualized and forced to repress worry, frustration, anger and even sympathy, many are unable to give or receive collegial support. Furthermore, they cannot voice objection to work intensification without violating norms of professional conduct.

Change may occur if professionals begin mobilizing their considerable coordinating capacities to collectively self-protect. Unfortunately, despite a long history of organized action addressing jurisdictional pursuits and external threats, professionals have relatively little experience defending against stress and burnout; furthermore, when threatened, some act to preserve their own status and autonomy without addressing conditions overall (Ackroyd, 1996; Ackroyd & Muzio, 2007). That the professions are populated by individuals who achieved their status by conforming to external expectations (and maintain it by ‘not making waves’) presents an additional barrier – one that has been amplified by rising professional job insecurity (Crowley et al., 2010; Fraser, 2001; Hodson, 2001). There may be some signs of hope, paradoxically, in the ‘armor’ of detachment emerging from increasing insecurity (Sennett, 1998, p. 25) and in workers voting with their feet in response to work requirements incompatible with familial roles (Barrett, 2005). However, professionals must adjust their behavior and normative expectations – revealing more about their frustrations and tolerating more complaint from coworkers – before coordinated action can begin.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors, but draws from data collected with support from the National Science Foundation under Grant 0112434. Any opinions findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Vincent Roscigno and Steven Vallas for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and Randy Hodson for orchestrating collection of these data and encouraging my research. This paper has also benefitted tremendously from suggestions made by Editor-in-Chief David Courpasson, Senior Editor Catherine Paradeise, and two anonymous *OS* reviewers. I am grateful for their careful reading of the paper, thoughtful recommendations for revision, and clear communication at each stage of the process.

Note

- 1 The data, coding instrument, coding protocol, ethnographic sources and publications drawing from these data may be viewed at <http://intra.sociology.ohio-state.edu/people/rdh/Workplace-Ethnography-Project.html>.

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