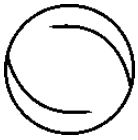

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Engaging and Misbehaving: How Dignity Affects Employee Work Behaviors

Kristen Lucas
University of Louisville, USA

Andrew S. Manikas
University of Louisville, USA

E. Shaunn Mattingly
Boise State University, USA

Cole J. Crider
University of Louisville, USA

Abstract

While there has been a growing body of research on workplace dignity, the majority of studies tend to focus on how dignity is experienced by organizational members, paying considerably less attention to consequences for organizations. In this study, we explore the influence of workplace dignity on employee work behaviors that affect organizational performance. Framing our inquiry with Sharon Bolton's yet-untested multidimensional theory of dignity, we analyze Randy Hodson's content-coded ethnographic data to reveal that increases in workplace dignity tend to predict increases in employee engagement, yet have mixed effects on counterproductive workplace behaviors. Following a post-hoc ethnographic reimmersion, we identify the critical role of safe and secure working conditions in enabling and constraining employees' ability to redress or resist workplace indignities with counterproductive workplace behaviors.

Keywords

autonomy, counterproductive work behaviors, dignity, economic vulnerability, employee engagement, meaningful work

Corresponding author:
Kristen Lucas, Associate Professor, University of Louisville, College of Business, Room 375, Louisville, KY 40292, USA.
Email: kristen.lucas@louisville.edu

At the heart of dignity is a steadfast belief that all people—simply by virtue of being human—have inherent value (see Brennan & Lo, 2007; Kim & Cohen, 2010). Consequently, there is a moral imperative to uphold individuals' dignity—or at least not infringe upon it. Yet, a growing body of research convincingly demonstrates that this moral imperative frequently is violated in the workplace. Some of the material and discursive conditions that violate employees' dignity include constraining organizational structures (Dufur & Feinberg, 2007), economic vulnerabilities (Apostolidis, 2005), marginalized occupational status and stigma (Ackroyd, 2007), problematic organizational cultures and worksites (Fleming, 2005), and abusive communication (Baker, 2014). Furthermore, when dignity is violated, it has damaging consequences for individuals. For instance, dignity violations generate a host of negative emotional responses—from indignation to anger, shame, sorrow, frustration, and anxiety—and can threaten individuals' overall sense of self-worth and identity (Cleaveland, 2005; Lucas, 2015). These threats, in turn, trigger identity work on the part of employees to regain a positive self-image (Chiappetta-Swanson, 2005; Otis, 2008) or simply demand persistence, emotional labor, or solidarity to cope with dignity injuries (Apostolidis, 2005; Mears & Finlay, 2005; Stuesse, 2010).

Although it is widely accepted that organizations play a central role in upholding or undermining dignity for employees, far less is known about the impact of employees' dignity on organizations. What is missing from the literature is the positioning of individuals' dignity as part of a broader cluster of phenomena in which dignity is not simply an individually experienced consequence of workplace conditions, but also a *cause* of employee behaviors that impact organizations.

This broader view of dignity interrogates important assumptions about costs and benefits of workplace dignity for organizations. Namely, the responsibility to uphold employees' dignity tends to fall to organizations, in general, and management, in particular (Bolton & Wibberley, 2007). However, the moral imperative for protecting workers' dignity exists alongside the widely held belief that putting into practice the policies and conditions necessary to uphold workers' dignity comes at a cost, essentially positioning workplace dignity as inherently at odds with organizational goals (Philpott, 2007). Consequently, demands for more dignified work and workplaces typically are resisted by management because worker-friendly initiatives are viewed as undesirable costs that must be absorbed by lower profits or passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices (Philpott, 2007). However, by recognizing the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship in which workers' dignity needs and organizations' business imperatives are complementary rather than competitive (see Hodson, 2001; Hodson & Roscigno, 2004), the possibility also exists that in addition to being good for employees, workplace dignity also may be good for business.

To this end, we investigate the broad research question: How does workplace dignity affect employee work behaviors? In this study, we examine the extent to which workplace dignity predicts employee behaviors that have the potential to impact organizational performance, attending to employee engagement (which improves performance) and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs; which reduce performance). Drawing upon an expanded, but yet-untested, conceptualization of workplace dignity (Bolton, 2007, 2010, 2011), we analyze content-coded ethnographic data to reveal that increases in workplace dignity tend to predict increases in employee engagement, but show mixed results for CWBs.

Theory and Hypotheses

Workplace dignity

Workplace dignity is defined as "the ability to establish a sense of self-worth and self-respect and to appreciate the respect of others" (Hodson, 2001, p. 3). Dignity is closely related to, but conceptually distinct from, phenomena such as *respect* (and disrespect), "a behavioral manifestation of

believing someone else has value" (Grover, 2014, p. 28; see also Rogers & Ashforth, 2014) and workplace *civility* (and incivility), "behavior involving politeness and regard for others in the workplace, within workplace norms for respect" (Anderson & Pearson, 1999, p. 454; see also Roscigno, Hodson, & Lopez, 2009a). In positive circumstances, affirming behaviors uphold dignity by meeting expectations of respectful interaction and bolstering feelings of self-worth; alternatively, in negative circumstances, disrespect and incivility threaten worker dignity by denying expectations of respectful interaction with others and undermining targets' feelings of self-worth. Workplace dignity also is tightly coupled with managerial practice, in that it can impact the extent to which dignity is upheld or violated (Bolton & Wibberley, 2007).

There are two key meanings embedded within the term dignity: inherent and earned dignity. *Inherent dignity* is the belief that all individuals are valued simply because they are human, and is akin to notions of recognition respect (Grover, 2014) or generalized respect (Rogers & Ashforth, 2014). Inherent dignity is upheld in the workplace when individuals are treated as valuable in their own right and not just as a means to an end. In this regard, there is an expectation for respectful treatment by bosses, peers, subordinates, customers, and other individuals salient to their work roles (Lucas, 2015; Sayer, 2011). In contrast, disrespectful and destructive communication (e.g., bullying, incivility, ostracism, and abusive supervision; see Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009) and reification (i.e., treatment as a bundle of human resources rather than a human being, see Islam, 2012) undermine individuals' inherent dignity. Additionally, there is an expectation that individuals will be given their due regard via objective, material conditions of the workplace—with things such as safe and healthy working conditions, just rewards, and secure terms of employment (Bolton, 2007). When workplace conditions place people in danger, unfairly undercompensate them for the value of their labor, exploit the precariousness of their position and/or their expendability, or simply treat them with a "second-class status," their inherent dignity is violated (e.g., Barrett & Thomson, 2012).

Earned dignity is based on the premise that through abilities and work efforts, individuals can make instrumental contributions that further increase their value to their respective organizations and their own appraisals of self-worth (Castel, 1996; Sayer, 2009). This meaning of dignity aligns with notions of appraisal respect (Grover, 2014) or particularized respect (Rogers & Ashforth, 2014). Recognition of competence and contribution, such as praise and expressions of appreciation, is viewed as dignity affirming; likewise, threats to competence and contribution, such as public reprimands and insults, are viewed as dignity violations (Lucas, 2015). But earned dignity goes beyond expressions of work quality, such that people also have a desire to demonstrate and build their competence. Therefore, training and education, increased responsibilities, new challenges, and opportunities for mastery can affirm dignity (Bolton, 2010, 2011; Lucas, 2011; Stacey, 2005; Yalden & McCormack, 2010). Conversely, conditions that impede individuals' ability to demonstrate their competence and make contributions have the potential to be undignifying (Ayers, Miller-Dyce, & Carlone, 2008; Hodson, 2007).

Put into the workplace context, these two meanings emerge as strong and competing dignity desires for being acknowledged as having a value beyond and apart from one's individual contributions, yet simultaneously, to be able to make and be recognized for those instrumental contributions. But given the instrumental and unequal nature of work, individuals' dignity is vulnerable, precarious, and almost always at risk (Lucas, 2015; Sayer, 2007, 2011). As such, much of the theorizing on workplace dignity centers on conditions that contribute to violations of workers' dignity or, alternatively, conditions that are necessary to ensure their dignity.

To this end, Bolton (2007, 2010, 2011) outlines a theory of dignity that captures the conditions of work and the workplace that are essential for human dignity. Specifically, she argues that workplace dignity should be thought of as a multidimensional concept as there are both subjective and objective factors that are necessary contributors to achieving dignity. These factors, she maintains,

serve as defining features of the dignity phenomenon, which otherwise is difficult to observe in workplace settings. First, subjective factors—which she calls dignity *in* work—include autonomy, meaningful work, respectful social relations, learning and development, and job satisfaction. These factors form the deep meaning and esteem that are gained from engaging in labor. Second, objective factors—which she calls dignity *at* work—include secure terms of employment, safe and healthy work conditions, just rewards, equality of opportunity, and voice. These conditions provide material and symbolic recognition to workers, acknowledging both their inherent humanity and instrumental value.

Central to Bolton's argument of multidimensionality is that it is productive to think of these dimensions separately, as individuals can have subjective conditions of dignity met without having objective conditions satisfied, and vice versa. Therefore, positioning these dimensions as indicators of dignity allows for a more detailed analysis of dignity and experiences of work situated within contexts of varying conditions. Thus, we position workplace dignity as recognized by two discrete clusters of factors: dignity *in* work (DIW) and dignity *at* work (DAW), each of which may independently and uniquely influence employee experiences of dignity and which, in turn, may motivate employee behaviors that have the potential to impact organizational performance.

Employee behaviors impacting organizational performance

While extant research has provided rich insights into the experience of workplace dignity for individuals, considerably less attention has been paid to consequences of dignity for organizations. The few studies that focus on organizational consequences underscore the importance of employee dignity for organizations. Most notably, Hodson and Roscigno (2004) examined the relationship between job-level practices (e.g., on-the-job training) and organizational-level practices (e.g., job security) on workers' dignity and organizational performance outcomes. They found that various combinations of positive job and organizational practices were beneficial for both worker dignity and organizational outcomes, such that employees' and organizations' interests often were simultaneously met by positive practices, particularly by increasing organizational citizenship and decreasing employee conflict with supervisors and managers. Likewise, ethnographic studies have shown that violations of dignity can harm organizations by being a possible trigger for organizational misbehavior, including resistance to patronizing organizational cultures (Fleming, 2005) and labor organizing (Stuesse, 2010). Despite the different ways in which these studies define and measure dignity (which will be described in more detail later), combined, they suggest workplace dignity may offer important benefits to organizations by increasing positive outcomes and reducing negative outcomes. Here, we focus on individual behaviors that are linked to performance-related outcomes.

Employee engagement. Workplace dignity may positively influence organizational performance by motivating employee engagement (or in the case of dignity violations, demotivating engagement). Employee engagement is defined as an active, work-related positive psychological state (Parker & Griffin, 2011) that is operationalized as the intensity and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy directed toward desired organizational outcomes (Shuck, Twyford, Reio, & Shuck, 2014). Employee engagement is different from organizational citizenship behaviors, as it involves behaviors that are focused on employees' main work responsibilities and not extra-role activities (Saks, 2006). As such, employee engagement can be expressed through outwardly recognizable behaviors such as exerting extra effort, performing work in ways that demonstrate personal pride in the outcome, demonstrating commitment to organizational goals, and so on (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Shuck & Rose, 2013).

Employee engagement often begins with a series of cognitive assessments of whether to engage. Kahn (1990) described three precursors to engagement: meaningfulness, psychological safety, and availability, two of which have strong ties to dimensions of dignity. Meaningfulness is concerned with a sense of worthwhileness and is tied most directly to the meaningful work factor found in the dignity *in* work dimension. Psychological safety refers to being able to engage without fear of negative consequences and is shaped strongly by the quality of relationships. Therefore, it has ties to the respectful social relations factor found within the dignity *in* work dimension. The third precursor, availability, refers to whether employees have the tangible and intangible resources to engage, including physical energy, emotional energy, security, and freedom from outside life constraints. Although the connection is weaker, some of the factors embedded in the objective dignity *at* work dimension (e.g., just rewards, voice) can provide the resources necessary to engage.

Employee engagement can be motivated by factors that have conceptual overlap with affirmations of workplace dignity. For instance, managerial citizenship behavior (which includes material and discursive demonstration of respect for workers and their rights) has been demonstrated to increase organizational citizenship behaviors, especially those closely linked to engagement (e.g., enthusiasm, cooperation, and effort; Hodson, 1999a, 2002). In contrast, specific conditions that have been demonstrated to impede employee engagement reflect dignity violations, including abusive supervision (Kisamore, Jawahar, Liguori, Mharapara, & Stone, 2010), bullying (Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2013), incivility (Giumetti et al., 2013; Reio & Sanders-Reio, 2011), and ostracism (Leung, Wu, Chen, & Young, 2011). To test the relationship between dignity and employee engagement, we propose:

Hypothesis 1a: Higher levels of DIW factors are correlated with higher levels of employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1b: Higher levels of DAW factors are correlated with higher levels of employee engagement.

Counterproductive work behaviors. Another way workplace dignity may positively influence organizational performance is by mitigating CWBs (or in the case of dignity violations, motivating CWBs). CWBs are a particular kind of workplace misbehavior that is intentionally committed and has the potential for harm to the organization, even if it is not specifically intended to be harmful (Robinson, 2008). We acknowledge the complexity of CWBs by noting misbehavior sometimes may be beneficial for organizations, employees, and customers, such as when employees engage in pro-social rule breaking to perform work more efficiently, to help co-workers, or to provide better customer service (Morrison, 2006). Here we focus on behaviors that may hinder organizational performance by affecting organizational functioning directly or by harming employees in ways that impede their personal functioning and effectiveness (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). Major categories of CWBs include abuse targeted towards others, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal (Spector et al., 2006). CWBs range in their potential for harm, from passive and relatively innocuous behaviors such as cyberloafing to active and deeply destructive behaviors such as sabotage.

Although CWBs ultimately are behavioral and may be influenced by individual differences (e.g., personality), they typically are positioned as emotional responses to job stressors and/or cognitive responses to perceived injustices (Fox et al., 2001). Therefore, contextual workplace factors are viewed as key antecedents. In terms of dignity *in* work, CWBs have been positioned as an expression of dissatisfaction against alienating work conditions (Ackroyd & Thompson, 2016) and as retaliation against numerous forms of disrespectful social relations, including abusive

supervision (Ogunfowora, 2013; Sulea, Fine, Fischmann, Sava, & Dumitru, 2013), bullying (Boddy, 2014; Devonish, 2013), incivility (Penney & Spector, 2005; Sakurai & Jex, 2012), and ostracism (Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Zhao, Peng, & Sheard, 2013). Similarly, Robinson (2008) explains, "employees reciprocate favorable work environments with productive behavior, and respond to unfavorable treatment at work with counterproductive behaviors" (p. 144). As such, CWBs may be triggered by dignity *at* work concerns, such as when employees resist poor material working conditions (e.g., unsafe environments, low wages; Karlsson, 2012) or resist management's failure to meet minimum standards of common workplace norms (Hodson, 1999b). To test the relationship between workplace dignity and CWBs, we propose:

Hypothesis 2a: Higher levels of DIW factors are correlated with lower levels of counterproductive work behaviors.

Hypothesis 2b: Higher levels of DAW factors are correlated with lower levels of counterproductive work behaviors.

Method

Hodson's (2004) Workplace Ethnography Project serves as the largest body of empirical data for examining dignity across a range of organizations. In this large-scale endeavor, Hodson and his team content-coded book-length workplace ethnographies for numerous variables related to the sociology of work, including core concepts (e.g., autonomy), background information (e.g., industry description), and grounded concepts (e.g., co-worker infighting; Hodson, Chamberlain, Crowley, & Tope, 2011). In addition to serving as the foundation of Hodson's (2001) book *Dignity at Work*, these data have served as the basis for additional analyses on dignity, including drilling down into the relationship between dignity and organizational success (Hodson & Roscigno, 2004), examining the influence of management incompetence on working with dignity (Hodson, 2007), and identifying impacts on dignity as related to worker control based on social class, gender, and manual/professional occupational status (Crowley, 2012, 2013, 2014). Furthermore, these data have been tapped into for research on allied concepts such as incivility (Roscigno et al., 2009a), employee abuse by customers (Korczynski & Evans, 2013), employee abuse by management (Hodson, 2010), management citizenship behaviors (Hodson, 1999a, 2002), bullying (Hodson, Roscigno, & Lopez, 2006; Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009b), and harassment (Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, & Hodson, 2008; Lopez, Hodson, & Roscigno, 2009).

Because the Workplace Ethnography Project was not undertaken for the specific purpose of studying dignity at work, there is no designated variable (or set of variables) to measure dignity. Instead, many variables within the dataset theoretically contribute to and/or result from workplace dignity. In fact, Hodson (2007) explained that he used "working with dignity" as an umbrella concept to summarize a range of insights gained from the ethnographies. For instance, in his most comprehensive treatment of workplace dignity, Hodson (2001) identified four key factors that threatened dignity, including mismanagement and abuse, overwork, incursions on autonomy, and paradoxes of participation. But in an earlier analysis (Hodson, 1996), he described dignity as being composed of task-related factors (job satisfaction, pride, insider knowledge, and effort bargaining) and co-worker-related factors (solidarity, peer training, and social friendships). Then in a later study examining the effects of management competence (Hodson, 2007), he positioned dignity as the absence of conflict with superiors and peers and the presence of employee engagement. In these and other studies drawing from the Workplace Ethnography Project dataset, researchers' specific variable selection has been guided by the research questions at hand and has included

Table 1. Designated Dignity Variables from Hodson's (2004) Workplace Ethnography Project.

Publication	Dignity descriptor	Category: variables
Crowley (2012)	Expressive, behavioral, and emotional aspects of workplace dignity	Job design: autonomy, creativity Organizational climate: abuse, ambiguity, stress Personal responses: commitment, effort, pride in work
Crowley (2013)	Foundations of dignity	Job design: autonomy, creativity, meaningfulness Personal responses: satisfaction
Crowley (2014)	Relational aspects of dignity	Organizational climate: abuse of workers, co-worker conflict Personal responses: hostility toward management, shame
Hodson (2007)	Working with dignity	Organizational climate: absence of conflict with management, absence of conflict with peers Personal responses: organizational citizenship behaviors
Hodson & Roscigno (2004)	Dignity	Job design: meaning in work Organizational climate: positive co-worker relations

conditions that could presumably lead to dignity or indignity, as well as responses or outcomes that could potentially result from people experiencing dignity at work. See Table 1 for details.

To Hodson's and his colleagues' credit, to have chosen only one narrow conceptualization of dignity would have dramatically limited the insights that have been gained. However, inconsistencies in how dignity has been conceptualized and measured across studies makes it difficult to gain deeper theoretical insights into specific nuances of dignity per se. Therefore, rather than choosing one of the previously published combinations of variables, we are guided by Bolton's (2007, 2010, 2011) multidimensional theory of dignity. Using Bolton's conceptualization of workplace dignity to analyze Hodson's Workplace Ethnography Project dataset, we aim to provide a theoretically grounded and empirically-rich examination of the relationship between dignity and employee behaviors that influence organizational performance.

Data

The data for this study came from Hodson's (2004) Workplace Ethnography Project. The dataset encompasses 204 ethnographic cases derived from 156 books, representing the entire population of book-length, English-language workplace ethnographies. However, 51 cases had missing variables. Therefore, we used multiple imputation (MI), which is a statistical procedure for handling missing data that is designed to minimize bias attributable to item nonresponse. In MI, complete datasets are generated by imputing two or more plausible values for each missing variable, the generated datasets are analyzed, and then the results are pooled for further analysis and inference (Rubin, 2004). MI has been demonstrated to be advantageous to methods such as listwise deletion and mean substitution because it maintains the natural variability in the missing data while preserving variable relationships (Eekhout et al., 2014; Rubin, 2004). Following the guideline of imputing the same number of datasets as the percentage of cases missing item responses (White, Royston, &

Table 2. List of Variables.

Dignity in work	Dignity at work	Employee engagement	CWBs
Meaningful work • Meaningful work **Autonomy** • Autonomy • Creativity • Freedom of movement **Respectful social relations** • Abuse by management • Conflict with managers • Conflict with supervisors **Learning & development** • Informal peer training • On-the-job training **Job satisfaction** • Job satisfaction	**Secure terms of employment** • Demotions • Firings • Restrict hours • Restrict pay • Job security **Safe & healthy work conditions** • Comfort of work area • Injuries • Physical demands of work **Just rewards** • Benefit package • Pay **Equality of opportunity** • Internal labor market • Racial division of labor • Sexual division of labor • Voice • Solicitation of worker involvement	• Commitment to organizational goals • Effort bargain • Extra effort • Extra time • Pride in work	• Absenteeism • Gossip (within-group) • Gossip (between-group) • Interference (within-group) • Interference (between-group) • Machine sabotage • Playing dumb • Procedure sabotage • Social sabotage • Subvert particular manager • Theft • Withhold enthusiasm • Work avoidance

Wood, 2011), we imputed 25 datasets using SPSS, which automatically detects the distribution and pattern of missing responses and imputes plausible values accordingly (Asendorpf, van de Schoot, Denissen, & Hutteman, 2014). The results presented below represent the pooled results.

Measures of workplace dignity. As a first step, we carefully reviewed the codebook to identify all variables that mapped onto Bolton's (2007, 2010, 2011) dimensions of dignity framework. We evaluated the definitions to ensure they fit the theoretical framework—dignity *in* work (meaningful work, autonomy, respectful social relations, learning and development, and job satisfaction) and dignity *at* work (secure terms of employment, safe and healthy work conditions, just rewards, equality of opportunity, and voice). For purposes of statistical analysis, all values were standardized and averaged, with exceptions noted below. See Table 2 for a complete list of variables used.

We calculated secure terms of employment by using the average of two standardized indicators. The first indicator captured the degree to which workplaces utilize control tactics that characterize insecure terms of employment, including *restricting pay, restricting hours, demotions*, and *firings*. We reverse coded the count of these control tactics—such that the lower the count the more secure the terms of employment—and standardized the result. The second indicator was an overall assessment of *job security*, which we also standardized.

For equality of opportunity, we used two indicators. The first indicator captured when organizations had divisions of labor based on race and sex. We created a variable that measured whether organizations exhibited neither a *racial division of labor* nor a *sexual division of labor*, either a racial or sexual division of labor, or both a racial and a sexual division of labor. The second indicator, *internal labor market*, reflected the degree of inclusivity according to the proportion of workers, from none to all, with clear paths for advancement opportunities. We standardized and averaged both indicators.

Measures of employee engagement. We assessed the first dependent variable, employee engagement, using a count of five variables from the dataset that reflect "going the extra mile" as manifested in behavioral engagement in one's work (Rich et al., 2010; Shuck & Rose, 2013). Given that engagement denotes a high-quality and high-intensity level of involvement, each variable had to be recorded as the strongest positive value to be included in the count. We deemed a mid-range score as an absence of engagement. The overall dependent variable (treated as interval) ranged from 0 to 5 ($M = 2.828$).

Measures of counterproductive work behaviors. We assessed the second dependent variable, counterproductive workplace behaviors, using a count of 13 behaviors, which represent all variables in the Workplace Ethnography Project that conceptually aligned with Spector et al.'s (2006) counterproductive work behavior checklist. The dependent variable was a count (treated as interval) of the number of these behaviors, ranging from 0 to 13 ($M = 5.088$).

Control variables. Because employees' decisions to engage in work and/or engage in CWBs are motivated by complex considerations, we considered other possible factors. Notably, the presence of unions, in interaction with other factors, has been shown to influence both dignity and worker resistance (Roscigno & Hodson, 2004; Stuesse, 2010). Therefore, we added in a control for unions. Additionally, blue-collar employees may face unique dignity threats not experienced by white-collar workers (Lucas, 2011). Therefore, we added controls for the primary classification of work at each organizational site (i.e., blue-collar, white-collar, and farmer).

Analytic procedure

We used general linear modeling (GLM) regression to assess the effects of the DIW and DAW factors on employee engagement and CWBs. GLM is a flexible generalization of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression that allows for analysis of dependent variables with or without normally distributed errors. We standardized all variables using z-scores prior to their inclusion in the GLM regression model. Then we visually assessed the variables for normality using normal Q-Q plots. In these plots, all observed values closely followed expected normality lines.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations of all study variables are shown in Table 3. We assessed multicollinearity and ruled it out because the variance inflation factors in both models were less than 2.5 for all variables. Combined, DIW and DAW factors explained 53.1% of the variance in employee engagement (adjusted r-squared = .531) and 15.6% of the variance in CWBs (adjusted r-squared = .156). The complete regression results are summarized in Table 4 and the results for each hypothesis are detailed below. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of significant relationships.

Hypothesis 1a predicted DIW factors would be positively correlated with employee engagement. Two factors, meaningful work ($\beta = .644$, $p < .01$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = .460$, $p < .01$), significantly influenced employee engagement. Because two of the five factors were significant, hypothesis 1a was partially supported. Hypothesis 1b predicted DAW factors would be positively correlated with employee engagement. One factor, voice ($\beta = .289$, $p < .01$), had a significant effect on employee engagement. But another factor, safe and healthy working conditions ($\beta = -.298$, $p < .10$), had a marginally significant effect in the opposite direction predicted. Because only one factor was significant and another was marginally significant in the opposite direction, hypothesis 1b was partially supported.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Dignity in work																	
1. Meaningful work	–.050	.994	—														
2. Autonomy	–.001	.893	0.70**	—													
3. Respectful social relations	.055	.837	0.26**	0.23**	—												
4. Learning & development	.000	.707	0.43**	0.39**	0.19**	—											
5. Job satisfaction	.000	1.000	0.62**	0.53**	0.36**	0.40**	—										
Dignity at work																	
6. Secure terms of employment	–.016	.821	–0.30**	–0.28**	–0.54**	–0.32**	–0.29**	—									
7. Safe & healthy work conditions	.051	.884	0.27**	0.44**	0.32**	0.15*	0.26**	–0.28**	—								
8. Just rewards	.042	.909	0.27**	0.42**	0.10	0.15*	0.22**	–0.21**	0.30**	—							
9. Equality of opportunity	.030	.828	0.15**	0.24**	0.18*	0.13†	0.07	–0.22	0.27**	0.25**	—						
10. Voice	.000	1.000	0.12†	0.20**	0.12	0.12	0.08	–0.05	0.22**	0.24**	0.12†	—					
Control variables																	
11. Union	.510	.500	–0.16†	–0.21**	–0.20**	–0.04	–0.10	0.14*	–0.39**	0.13*	–0.04	–0.08	—				
12. Blue collar	.593	.491	–0.35**	–0.47**	–0.16*	–0.13†	–0.25**	0.24**	–0.54**	–0.19**	–0.18*	–0.08	0.45**	—			
13. Farmer	.025	.155	0.10	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.08	–0.16	–0.13†	–0.12†	–0.11	–0.03	–0.19**	—		
Dependent variables																	
14. Employee engagement	2.828	1.719	0.62**	0.52**	0.27**	0.43**	0.54**	–0.26**	0.26**	0.16*	0.00	0.19**	–0.30**	–0.36**	0.02	—	
15. Counterproductive work behaviors	5.088	3.036	–0.16**	–0.07	–0.28**	0.08	–0.17*	0.17*	–0.19*	–0.10	–0.28**	–0.16*	0.05	0.17*	0.00	–0.12†	—

**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, †p < 0.10.

Table 4. Regression Results for the Dignity Model.

Parameter	Engagement	CWBs
Dignity in work		
Meaningful work	.644**	–.690†
Autonomy	.050	1.208**
Respectful social relations	.168	–.781*
Learning & development	.257	.834*
Job satisfaction	.460**	–.610†
Dignity at work		
Secure terms of employment	–.016	–.200
Safe & healthy work conditions	–.298†	–.213
Just rewards	–.018	.112
Equality of opportunity	–.184	–.670*
Voice	.289**	–.441†
Controls		
Unions	–.508*	–.473
Blue collar	–.432	.968
Farmer	–1.110	.667
Intercept	3.499**	4.947**
Adjusted R-squared	.531	.156

**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, †p < 0.10.

Hypothesis 2a predicted DIW factors would be negatively correlated with CWBs. As predicted, DIW factors had a significant effect on CWBs. Respectful social relations ($\beta = -.781$, $p < .05$) was significant and negatively correlated with CWBs, while job satisfaction ($\beta = -.610$, $p < .10$) and meaningful work ($\beta = -.690$, $p < .10$) were negatively correlated with CWBs, but only at a marginally significant level. Notably, autonomy ($\beta = 1.208$, $p < .01$) and learning and development ($\beta = .834$, $p < .05$) had significant effects in the opposite direction predicted. Because of the mixed directionality of significant relationships, hypothesis 2a was partially supported. Hypothesis 2b predicted DAW factors would be negatively correlated with CWBs. Equality of opportunity was the only significant DAW factor ($\beta = -.670$; $p < .05$), but another factor, voice ($\beta = -.441$; $p < .10$), had a marginally significant negative effect. Because only one factor was significant and another was marginally significant, hypothesis 2b was partially supported.

It is important to note that while each hypothesis received partial support, no hypothesis was fully supported. To summarize: increases in employee engagement were associated with the individual DIW factors of meaningful work and learning and development, as well as DAW factors of voice and safe and healthy working conditions. Decreases in CWBs were predicted by individual DIW factors of respectful social relations, job satisfaction, and meaningful work, as well as DAW factors of equality of opportunity and voice. But counter to the hypothesized model, DIW factors of autonomy and learning and development were correlated with increases in CWBs.

Post Hoc Analysis and Ethnographic Reimmersion

Our statistical analysis revealed that the DIW factors of autonomy and learning and development were significant predictors of *increases* in CWBs, which was opposite of the direction hypothesized. Upon closer examination, we reasoned that the positive relationship between learning and

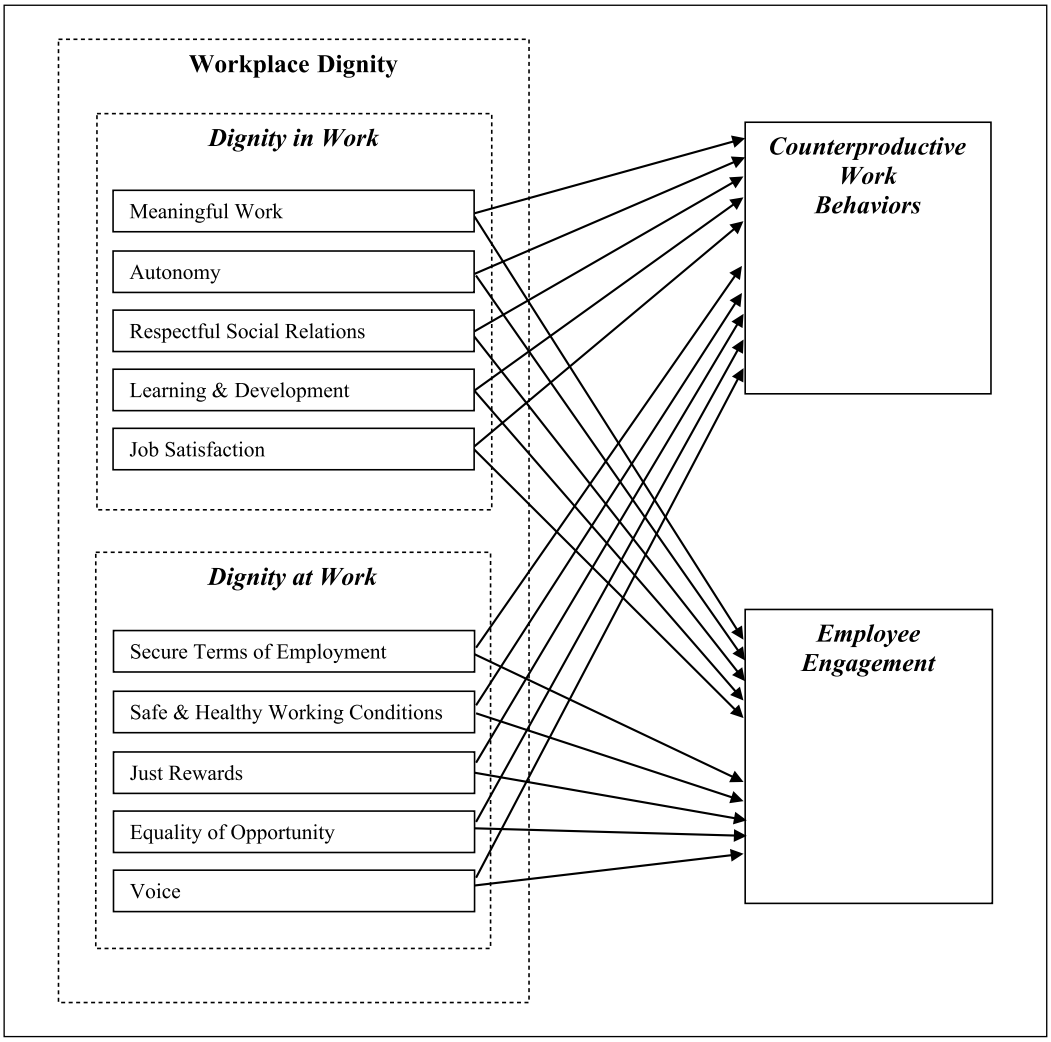

Figure 1. Hypothesized Model of Dignity, Employee Engagement, and CWBs.

development and CWBs could be an artifact of the available indicators of *on-the-job training* and *peer mentoring*. The kinds of jobs in which people receive on-the-job training may differ in important ways from situations in which employees benefit from a deeper commitment to learning and development that might be recognized by tuition reimbursement, regular professional development opportunities, or grooming for management. However, absent other variables in the dataset, we were not able to test for this possibility.

What was more intriguing was the relationship between autonomy and CWBs. While research has shown that autonomy may not always suppress negative behaviors—and in some cases may be linked to production deviance and CWBs (Fox et al., 2001; Wilson, Perry, Witt, & Griffeth, 2015)—from a standpoint grounded in dignity theory, greater autonomy should bolster dignity and therefore generate positive outcomes (e.g., Jensen & Raver, 2012). To explain, autonomy consistently is positioned as a cornerstone of dignity across theoretical traditions, ranging from

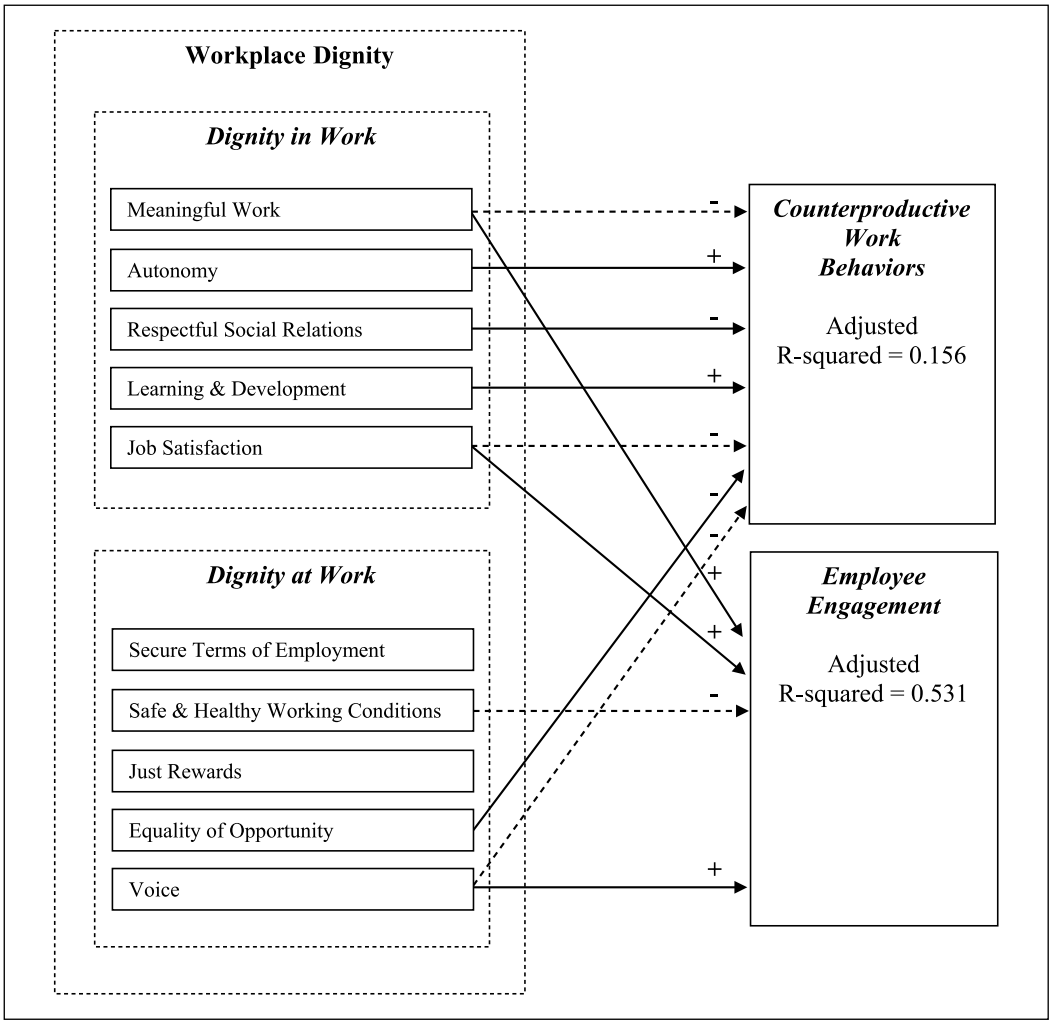

Figure 2. Significant Relationships for Dignity, Employee Engagement, and CWBs.
Note: Solid line = Significant at $p < .05$; Dashed line = Marginally significant at $p < .10$.

sociology to religion to philosophy to human rights and more (see Brennan & Lo, 2007; Hodgkiss, 2013; Hodson, 2001; Lee, 2008; Sayer, 2007; Tablan, 2015). Likewise, empirical research has demonstrated a strong connection between autonomy and dignity in the workplace, with autonomy serving as a source of dignity (Stacey, 2005) and limits on autonomy as a deep dignity injury (Lucas, Kang, & Li, 2013). Hodson (1996) explains that when organizations "violate workers' interests, limit their prerogatives, or otherwise undermine their autonomy," they retaliate with various resistance strategies for the very purpose of defending or regaining their dignity (p. 722). To this point, Karlsson (2012) shared numerous narratives of organizational misbehavior drawn from existing research to support his claim that, if people are denied autonomy, there will be a strong tendency to resist working conditions and to misbehave at work (see also Fleming, 2005; Hodson, 2001).

To explore the autonomy–CWB relationship in more depth, we engaged in a post hoc analysis. As a first step, we drew from qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) methods to detect whether there were additional dignity factors influencing the autonomy–CWB relationship. QCA is a technique based on Boolean logic that can be used to identify potentially complex patterns of interaction within case-based datasets (Ragin, 2014). In fact, QCA regularly has been used to analyze the Workplace Ethnography Project dataset (e.g., Hodson & Roscigno, 2004).

For our specific needs, we constructed a three-point fuzzy set that included each of the DIW factors, DAW factors, and CWBs. Each variable was coded with a 0 for very low/none, 0.5 for somewhat low to somewhat high, and 1.0 for very high/all. We then tested a subset of the data that reflected cases with high autonomy and high CWBs. We entered the subset data into the fsQCA 2.0 software program to test for significant patterns (Ragin, Drass, & Davey, 2006). Using Ragin's (2008) recommended thresholds (i.e., 0.8 relaxed threshold, 0.9 restrictive threshold), the DAW factors secure terms of employment and safe and healthy working conditions were necessary for high autonomy to lead to high CWBs (consistency = .88). As a point of comparison, we repeated the procedure with a subset of cases with low autonomy and high CWBs and that subset also showed the same pattern of requiring secure terms of employment and safe and healthy working conditions (consistency = .94).

Our post-hoc analysis indicated that while employees who exhibited CWBs tended to work in autonomous workplaces, autonomy itself was neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for CWBs. Instead, autonomy appears to provide employees with the latitude to engage in a range of CWBs to redress various dignity violations, but only when they are safe and secure on the job. In contrast, even when they have great autonomy, vulnerable employees who lack safety and security appear to be unable or unwilling to risk redressing dignity violations. Our ethnographic reimmersion illustrates this relationship.

Although there was no specific pattern as to what DIW and DAW factors mattered most, CWBs appeared to be motivated by initial dignity threats. Then, coupled with safety and security, autonomy enabled employees to engage in a range of CWBs to redress or resist those threats. For instance, the ethnography *Dishing It Out* described a poorly managed restaurant in a bad neighborhood where waitresses had very little dignity *in* work (a lack of meaningful work and a lack of respectful social relations from customers and management). However, they had significant job security. No matter how poor their performance, no one was ever terminated from her job, had her hours reduced, or was demoted. Even an employee who was fired for stealing money from the restaurant was quickly rehired. As a result of their job security, waitresses openly disrespected management and engaged in brash CWBs. They frequently engaged in procedural sabotage as a way to retaliate against poor management, such as willfully violating the dress code. One woman intentionally would untuck her shirt and let her slip show, even though she was known to dress "immaculately" outside of work. Other waitresses would wear nail polish, "forget" their name tags, leave their hair down, or wear large jewelry—despite these choices being explicitly prohibited. Waitresses and other kitchen staff also regularly and intentionally arrived late for work, skipped shifts, and lied about being sick, all with little fear of punishment. One waitress recounted, "I'd be scheduled for three, four nights, and I might show up for two. But I wouldn't show up on time …. Not 'boo' was said to me. Not 'boo'" (Paules, 1991, p. 64; elipses in original). She explained that bad behavior had no consequences:

> I'd respect them if they would have fired me. I don't respect them cause they don't. They should have fired me a long time ago. For calling out sick …. for the amount of times I'm late …. It's stupidity on their part. (Paules, 1991, p. 65; elipses in original)

In contrast, when autonomy was high but working conditions were unsafe or insecure (which are potential dignity threats), employees dared not risk engaging in CWBs. Instead, they were highly compliant with all rules and requests. The ethnography *On High Steel* detailed ironworkers' dangerous and precarious jobs. One wrong move on the job could get someone killed. Furthermore, ironworking jobs were scarce, subject to cancellation due to bad weather, or simply difficult to secure because of union regulations and influence. Even when jobs were available, they frequently were short in duration or had intermittently restricted hours. Given the precariousness of their work, CWBs were not tolerated and would result in offenders being fired instantly. One ironworker was warned by his boss at the time he was hired:

> I hope you didn't pick up bad habits on your last job. We're behind, here, and everybody has to put work out. Work, and I'll keep you here as long as I can. Goof off, and I'll throw you out tonight. (Cherry, 1974, p. 65)

Ironworkers took threats like these seriously. They regularly did whatever was asked, such as the ironworker who spent an entire winter performing unskilled menial tasks like "carrying rods" to keep his job. Moreover, they were explicit about their economic vulnerability being a key motivator for full compliance and for not "goofing off." Describing their precarity and their commitment, one worker elaborated:

> And a run of bad weather can wipe us out. More easily than slow times, in fact, because if we know there'll be no work, we'll look around for something else to do: tending bar, pushing a hack, loading trucks in a warehouse. If we can prove that there's no work, we can draw unemployment insurance. But bad weather happens one day at a time. Many people outside the industry seem to think it's seasonal, that we shut down in the winter. This isn't so; we work, or try to, twelve months a year. In bad weather we get sent home—but we go in every day. (Cherry, 1974, pp. 77–8)

As these two examples show, safety and security appear to be even more critical than autonomy in enabling CWBs. To this point, even workplaces with low autonomy could be plagued by CWBs when working conditions were safe and secure. For instance, the autoethnography *Rivethead* depicted auto assembly plant work as characterized by a lack of dignity *in* work (lack of meaningful work) and extreme limitations on autonomy (no creativity, little freedom of movement). But it also was work that was quite secure given numerous protections offered by a strong autoworkers union. Consequently, employees had free rein to misbehave without much, if any, repercussion. At times, CWBs were motivated by employees' attempts to break the monotony of the job by engaging in various distractions, such as making up games, playing pranks on each other, and "doubling up" (when one employee completed the work of two while the other left the assembly line to smoke, drink alcohol, take naps, or even leave the worksite altogether).

The most destructive CWBs at the plant, however, were motivated by management imposing further restrictions on workers' already limited autonomy. For example, management attempted to crack down on employees' misbehavior by hiring a new manager to enforce stricter rules. The lower level of autonomy immediately led to a significant backlash of CWBs, including procedural sabotage, machine sabotage, and subverting management. Even though the range of CWBs was limited to those that could be performed on the production line, the damage was extensive.

> With a tight grip on the whip the new bossman started riding the crew. No music. No Rivet Hockey. No horseplay. No drinking. No card playing. No working up the line. No leaving the department. No doubling-up. No this, no that. No questions asked.

> No way. After three nights of this imported bullyism, the boys had had their fill. Frames began sliding down the line minus parts. Rivets became cross-eyed. Guns mysteriously broke down. The repairman began shipping the majority of the defects, unable to keep up with the repair level. (Hamper, 1991, p. 206)

As this example vividly demonstrates, limiting autonomy did not reduce CWBs, but instead exacerbated them. As such, incursions on autonomy may serve as a dignity violation that motivates CWBs.

Taken as a whole, our ethnographic reimmersion revealed the interplay between autonomy, vulnerability, and CWBs. While autonomy granted frustrated employees the latitude to express a range of CWBs, they only were able to use their autonomy to exert resistance against dignity threats when they also benefitted from safe and secure working conditions. Absent safety and security, employees appear unwilling or unable to resist or redress workplace indignities. Implications of this finding will be discussed further in the next section.

Discussion

In this study, we sought an answer to the broad question "How does workplace dignity affect employee work behaviors?" By analyzing content-coded data from more than 150 workplace ethnographies, we were able to demonstrate that increases in workplace dignity—especially with meaningful work, job satisfaction, and voice—are positively related to increased employee engagement. However, increases in workplace dignity showed mixed results in terms of mitigating CWBs. On one hand, respectful social relations and equality of opportunity predicted significant decreases in CWBs. But on the other, autonomy (when coupled with safe and secure work) and learning and development predicted increases of CWBs. Below we outline our contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

Contributions

This research makes three important contributions. The first contribution is that this study provides empirical evidence of the effects of workplace dignity on organizations. Whereas previous research almost exclusively has examined organizational conditions that lead to dignity violations and/or negative effects of indignity on individuals and how they cope, this study centered on how dignity can affect organizations. Namely, the results show that bolstering workplace dignity can improve overall organizational performance by increasing employee engagement and, in some cases, decreasing CWBs. As such, it means that not only is dignity good for employees and their personal wellbeing, but it also can be good for organizations. Instead of viewing dignity as a cost to be imposed by regulations or voluntarily incurred for altruistic reasons (see Philpott, 2007), organizational leaders may be wise to view workplace dignity as a worthwhile business investment.

The second contribution is that this study is the first known empirical examination of Bolton's multidimensional theory of dignity. Bolton has argued repeatedly (2007, 2010, 2011, 2013) that dignity should be viewed as comprising different dimensions—including subjective conditions of the work itself from which employees can draw meaning, and objective/material conditions of the workplace by which employees are treated within the employment relationship with varying degrees of worth and dignity. This study provides some initial insights into Bolton's theorizing. To begin, nearly every proposed dimension in Bolton's theory had a (marginally) significant relationship with employee engagement or CWBs, which could be an indicator of having accurately identified important dignity factors. However, at the same time, none of the hypotheses was completely supported (and some were only minimally supported or partially refuted), meaning that the

dimensions are internally disparate. If the intention of Bolton's theory is to identify internally coherent dimensions of dignity, then more refinement will be necessary—whether that is sharpening existing factors, adding or deleting factors, or reconfiguring the existing factors into more than two dimensions.

Additionally, Bolton (2007, 2011) has claimed that greater insights into employment could be gained by viewing dignity as a multidimensional concept in which subjective dignity *in* work and objective dignity *at* work dimensions exert unique influences. Again, while this study can only offer preliminary speculation, looking at the relationships associated with DIW factors versus DAW factors, there is some support for the premise that a multidimensional approach can reveal more nuanced insights. For instance, results show that in terms of increasing employee engagement, people's subjective dignity needs (e.g., meaningful work, job satisfaction) appear to be more important than their objective terms of employment (e.g., just rewards). This is not to say that material reward is unimportant. Instead, employees may derive a greater sense of identity and worth—and therefore, *dignity*—from the work they do and not just the reward they receive from it (see Sayer, 2009). To put this finding into practice, organizations could craft jobs that are more intrinsically interesting and meaningful, assign tasks so that meaningful work is distributed between employees, and provide other opportunities for individuals to contribute to projects in which the importance and meaningfulness of their efforts are observable and acknowledged (Oldham, 2012; Sayer, 2009).

The third contribution of this study is that we surfaced the role of safe and secure working conditions in enabling and constraining employees' ability to resist or redress workplace indignities with CWBs. The initial statistical model demonstrated that increases in autonomy were associated with increases in CWBs (and that there was no significant relationship between safety and/or security and CWBs). However, our post-hoc fuzzy set analysis and ethnographic reimmersion revealed that, while autonomy grants employees freedom to express a range of CWBs when their dignity is threatened, ultimately, they require safe working conditions and secure terms of employment to do so. While employees whose work was safe and secure could redress or resist a variety of dignity threats with CWBs, employees with unsafe or insecure work could not. Instead, they tended to comply with organizational demands as to not further exacerbate their physical and economic vulnerabilities.

The interconnection between autonomy, safety and security, and CWBs simultaneously makes an interesting theoretical contribution and raises troubling practical concerns. CWBs have been positioned as a route for individuals to resist against unfavorable working conditions (Ackroyd & Thompson, 2016; Robinson, 2008). Therefore, it should follow that individuals with the least favorable working conditions (e.g., unsafe and insecure work) should be most motivated to engage in CWBs. Yet, the reverse was true: those who were the most physically and economically vulnerable were the least likely to engage in CWBs. From a theoretical standpoint, we raise the possibility that while all unfavorable working conditions may motivate people to want to engage in CWBs, there appears to be a baseline of working conditions necessary for CWBs to occur. In this sense, just as employees make cognitive assessment of safety before engaging in presumably productive ways (Kahn, 1990), employees may make a similar cognitive assessment before engaging in CWBs.

From a practical standpoint, needing safe and secure conditions before engaging in CWBs means that CWBs will likely only occur after working conditions have met a basic threshold of material wellbeing. At the individual level, the most physically and economically vulnerable employees—those who presumably have the most to gain from expressing resistance through CWBs—are the least likely to engage in such risky behavior as they also are the people who may have the most to lose. Consequently, the ability to engage in CWBs is itself a product of relative privilege—the privilege that comes with a job that provides safety, security, and (some) autonomy.

And without the privilege of CWBs, vulnerable employees are likely to face a range of ongoing dignity threats, such as disrespectful social relations, limits on employee voice, and so forth. Furthermore, the relationship between CWBs, safety, and security has practical consequences for organizations. As Ackroyd and Thompson (2016) explain, misbehavior can be productive for the labor process by serving as a pathway for employees and employers to negotiate tensions of control and resistance. Therefore, when employees are deterred from CWBs, it may ultimately quash adjustments to existing processes and adoption of new practices that could lead to better long-term outcomes and performance.

Limitations and future directions

The ethnographies that were the basis of this study provided rich descriptions of work and workers, insights into the specific socio-political-historical contexts in which they were embedded, and explanations of employees' behaviors, meaning-making, and more. The ethnographies not only provided the basis for the content coding from which important patterns could be identified, but also enabled the explanation of surprising findings to be grounded in original observations. Despite the obvious strengths of this unique dataset, there were some limitations. Most notably, the original studies were not undertaken for the express purpose of gaining insights into workplace dignity. Therefore, there may have been relevant dignity issues that existed within the respective worksites that were not included in the final ethnographic reports because they were outside the scope of the research projects. Likewise, Hodson and colleagues' (2011) original intent in coding the ethnographies was not to identify dignity variables per se, but instead to measure the sociology of work more broadly. As such, the quantitative coding may not have fully captured all of the dignity factors that appeared in the ethnographies.

Another data limitation worth noting is an issue of valence. Following theory, dignity at work should be measured by positive indicators. However, three of the key factors—respectful social interaction, secure terms of employment, and safe and healthy working conditions—were measured by negative indicators and then reverse coded as necessary. Therefore, rather than assessing the presence of respect, security, and safety, the data actually were measuring the *absence* of disrespect, insecurity, and hazard. This kind of valence issue is endemic to the phenomenon, as dignity is a concept that frequently is understood and measured by its absence rather than its presence (Lucas, 2015). To address this potential problem, future dignity research should be more explicit in measuring both positive and negative conditions.

In terms of future research, we recommend testing whether these results can be replicated. At a minimum, a new data collection can be undertaken from a sample of organizations using established instruments on dignity in work (meaningful work, autonomy, respectful social relations, learning and development, and job satisfaction), dignity at work (secure terms of employment, safe and healthy work conditions, just rewards, equality of opportunity, voice), employee engagement, and CWBs. Additionally, other organizational variables could be included (e.g., diversity, leadership, organizational communication, climate) to examine the role of possible mediating or moderating relationships, and more outcome variables could be collected to test for additional organizational consequences (e.g., turnover, customer satisfaction). These additional variables will be vital for expanding the relatively simple model here to a more complete and nuanced one.

Conclusion

As evidenced by themes of dignity implicitly running through decades of organizational ethnographies, it is clear that scholars and employees alike have long been concerned about dignity at work.

Researchers have documented a range of subjective qualities of work and objective terms of employment that have characterized, for better or worse, a whole host of working environments. By situating these conditions into a comprehensive workplace dignity framework and then examining their connections to patterns of various employee work behaviors that can impact organizational performance, we have provided preliminary support that workplace dignity is important and beneficial not just for individuals, but also for organizations. Additional research that refines theoretical models of workplace dignity and empirically examines working experiences from the perspective of employees *and* organizations can contribute to the vital task of building more dignified and higher-performing workplaces.

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Author biographies

Kristen Lucas (PhD, Purdue University) is an associate professor in the Management Department at University of Louisville. Her research interests center on workplace dignity, with a focus on how dignity is affirmed or threatened by day-to-day communication. Her work appears in outlets such as *Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Management Communication Quarterly*.

Andrew S. Manikas (PhD, The Georgia Institute of Technology) is an assistant professor in the Management Department at the University of Louisville and an experienced management consultant and project manager. His expertise is in operations management, with a commitment to increasing organizational efficiency and performance.

E. Shaunn Mattingly (PhD, University of Louisville) is an assistant professor of strategy at Boise State University. He has published research on mergers and acquisitions, institutional legitimacy, entrepreneurial expectancy, and research methodology. He is primarily interested in research that examines individual cognitions related to opportunity recognition, employee alignment with strategy, and entrepreneurial persistence.

Cole J. Crider (MBA, University of Louisville) is a doctoral student in the Entrepreneurship Department at University of Louisville. His research interests include firm creation, knowledge acquisition, entrepreneurial cognition, and social networks.