1 2 3	UNPACKING BUREAUCRACY: An intersectional theory of gendered organizations Joan S. M. Meyers
4	Years of study have documented the reproduction of gender inequality in workplaces. However,
5	as Dana Britton's (2000) survey of the gendered organizations literature shows, how this happens
6	is less clear. Scholars have investigated the bureaucratic structure of industrialized capitalist
7	workplaces, but disagree about its effects. Some argue that masculinist assumptions and
8	advantages—such as depersonalization, rational-technical formality, and expertise-based
9	hierarchies of authority—are implicit in Weberian bureaucracies (e.g. Acker 1990). Others have
10	shown that women's increased participation in particular organizations or labor markets results
11	from the embrace of bureaucratic forms (e.g. Eisenstein 1995). In this paper, I contend that
12	organizational scholars—particularly feminist organizational scholars—lose much analytic
13	nuance by relying on "bureaucracy" as a category of organizational structure. Bureaucracy must
14	be analytically unpacked: the contradictory findings described above may result from collapsing
15	together different and even opposing processes. My analysis highlights the need for
16	disaggregating formality from hierarchy, and examining the way each affects the reproduction of
17	"inequality regimes" (Acker 2006a). To understand how inequality regimes reproduce gender
18	inequality, we must examine the intersection of different kinds of inequality in relation to these
19	historically intertwined aspects of bureaucracies.
20	I reveal the inequality effects of two bureaucracies whose different combinations of
21	hierarchy and formality create different levels of access to power and resources across gender
22	and ethnicity/race. The two organizations I call "People's Daily Bread Bakery" and "One World
23	Natural Grocery" were originally struggling, small collectives of primarily white, middle-class
24	drop-outs. Thirty years later both worker-owned companies are stable and provide a good

1 livelihood to their predominantly working-class and ethnoracially diverse members. With 100-

- 2 200 employees, both are too big for face-to-face decision making and have arguably become
- 3 Weberian bureaucracies (1978): deeply permeated by depersonalized positions, formal
- 4 documents that direct action and authority, and an explicit division of labor.

Although both companies originally made decisions together in their small groups, they developed differently as they grew. After the introduction of hierarchical management at the bakery in the early 1990s, gender and ethnoracial inequalities emerged: in 2003, whites dominated management, and men dominated the workforce as a whole. At the grocery, where day-to-day decisions were still made within semi-autonomous teams, there was much less inequality in access, earnings, and power. My data indicates that while formality has a positive effect on the ability of women and people of color to access good jobs such as those at these cooperatives, hierarchy constrains these advances. An *unpacked* concept of bureaucracy and an *intersectional* concept of gender are needed in order to understand the effects of bureaucracy on gendering processes.

In the sections that follow, I address Britton's (2000) critique that gendered organizations' focus on bureaucracy poorly predicts the salience of gender in distributing power and resources in an organization. I review previous theories of bureaucracy's effect on gendered organizations, finding them to largely conflate formality and hierarchy. Next I highlight two sets of findings: first, *inequalities* in the distribution of power and resources across gender and ethnicity/race within and between each organization; second, the levels of *hierarchy and formality* at each of the companies. I then analyze how the interactions of these bureaucratic features produce what Joan Acker identifies as "inequality regimes": "organizing processes [that create] systemic disparities between groups of organizational participants" in terms of

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1 "opportunities...security...earnings...intrinsic pleasures...and in respect" (2006a, 109-110). I

2 conclude with suggestions for future directions in research on bureaucracies and gender.

GENDERED ORGANIZATIONS: A BUREAUCRATIC ISSUE?

A school of feminist organizational scholars identify bureaucracy as inherently (re)productive of gender inequality. Some argue that bureaucracies' reliance on legal-rational logic naturalizes men's experiences, and that hierarchical structure uses this logic to disempower all those under its administration (Ferguson 1984). Others contend that an organization's division of labor reproduces hegemonic gender norms and hierarchies of power (Acker 1990). This understanding of bureaucracies was echoed in alternative workplace organizations themselves. which advanced flatter structure and more personalized forms of social control as not only more humane (Rothschild-Whitt 1979) or virtuous (Kleinman 1996), but as better for women members (Ostrander 1999). Yet non-hierarchical, collective organizational structures have also come under attack for reproducing inequality. Jo Freeman's (1984) seminal analysis of the reproduction of elite power in the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s shows how antibureaucratic "structurelessness" concealed middle-class white women's advantages of cultural capital, allowing them to shape the movement's agenda. Enlarging this insight, other scholars found anti-bureaucratic organizations to make people of color vulnerable to domination by whites (Sirianni 1993; Mansbridge 1980) and women vulnerable to men (Kleinman 1996). Siranni (1993) in fact concludes that participatory democratic power is inadequate to remedy larger social inequalities within organizations, and instead urges formal representative hierarchies. Ostrander (1999) finds the belief Sirianni articulates to have permeated social

movement organizations, where members have instituted formalized positional power as a

corrective to the subtle power advantages of gender, ethnoracial, and class elites in structureless collectives.

My own research, however, suggests that just as "bureaucracy" incorrectly collapses formality and hierarchy, "collectivism" incorrectly collapses informality with flat structure. For instance, while Ostrander (1999) points to positional hierarchy as a welcome and useful antidote to subtle organizational dominance by white men (and sometimes women), her findings indicate that problems faced by women and men of color and white women were due more to their inability to draw on formal policies to legitimate their claims than to flat power structures.

Freeman's (1984) closing remarks that formal but non-hierarchical organizations might more equitably distribute power seems worth investigating in light of these findings, as it seems to be the case that formal but non-hierarchical *social movement* organizations show less inequality than either informal or hierarchical ones (Polletta 2002). I argue this is also true of work organizations.

However, just as bureaucracy needs unpacking, so too do gender effects. Viewing gender as a discrete variable ignores how it is produced through other social categories: ethnicity/race, class, sexuality (Anzaldúa 1987; Collins 1990). That is, we never experience inequality simply as women, but are instead subjects situated within multiple and interpenetrating webs of meaning that vary in salience in different contexts. Because ethnoracialized practices have gender effects, just as gendered practices have ethnoracial and class effects, these interdependent relationships must be examined.

METHODS: IN THE STORE AND ON THE FLOOR

I entered the field as a neighbor and long-term customer of One World Natural Grocery with social ties to several employees. My interest in the project was sparked by a report from the

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2000 Western Worker Cooperative Conference that the CEO of People's Daily Bread Bakery complained about the conference's focus on participatory democratic control. According to him, participatory democracy was not only less efficient (and thus less profitable), but also privileged the skills and knowledge of middle-class employees and disempowered primarily working-class employees like the bakery's. He instead urged workshops to help integrate managerial control cast as more efficient in generating the profits that he posited as more valuable to working-class people than time flexibility or autonomy. Intrigued and dismayed (were autonomous working conditions only viable among an already elite segment of the labor market?), I began by questioning class effects on democratic form. Yet after preliminary investigation revealed similar class backgrounds of the two workforces, I found gender and ethnicity/race far more significant. My personal relations provided initial entry to the grocery; a bakery delivery driver I met at the grocery eased my entry into the next site. Between November 2001 and October 2002, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with employees at the two organizations. In 2002-3, I attended meetings at both sites, social gatherings, and conferences of worker owners. From July-September 2003, I engaged in intensive observation of both companies. During this period, I conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with employees of four teams at each site.³ I spent six weeks at each company, averaging five days per week and nine hours per day on site, where I would take constant notes as a non-participant observer or recollective notes in concentrated breaks when I was a participant, fleshing them out after a shift. I integrated myself as best I could into the social lives of employees, accepting and angling for invitations to after-work drinks, meals, and gatherings. In order to be as available for these activities at the bakery as I was at the grocery, I moved near the bakery for two months during the period I was engaged there in

intensive observation. Despite an initial distrust of their managerial structure, I was deeply drawn to the bakery and its members, and seriously considered their half-joking job offers.

Over the next year I conducted nine follow-up interviews and three interviews with former members of both companies, and continued to maintain my social ties, attend meetings, and visit both sites to research their archives (historical and current agendas and minutes, missions statements, employment documents, videos and photo albums, advertising, and internal financial documents that included wage, benefits, and profit-sharing data on all employees in the 2002-3 fiscal year). In all, I spent approximately 800 hours with the two businesses and their employees.

DISTRIBUTIONS OF POWER AND RESOURCES IN TWO DEMOCRATIC

WORKPLACES

Rare survivors of the wave of 1970s worker-owned cooperatives, People's Daily Bread Bakery and One World Natural Grocery have many similarities. Both worker-owned companies ⁴ are located in a Northern California region with a long labor history as well as a vibrant countercultural mix of anti-racist, women's, and gay liberation movements. Both businesses originally organized power through face-to-face, friendship-based relations often called "collectivist democracy" (Rothschild-Whitt 1979), and for years both paid very poorly. Unlike most of the estimated 5000 collectives that rose and fell during this period (Rothschild-Whitt 1979), both are now large, growing organizations whose employees' earnings are above county averages. Both are divided into semi-autonomous teams focusing on particular areas (i.e., office, maintenance, production, shipping, produce, cashiers, etc.), and the overall direction of both companies is, at least nominally, in the hands of employees themselves whose membership meetings have the power to approve or veto long-term and organization-wide policies and plans.

Both diversified ethnoracially, from 0-5 percent non-white founder to about 40 percent people of color in 2003, and both are almost exclusively populated with people from working-class backgrounds. Although one is a service-oriented business and the other production, the mission of both is to provide consumers with healthy foods that have a minimal environmental footprint. Unlike other studies of gendered organizations (e.g. Dellinger 2004), the similarity of purpose and sector minimizes the possibility that the organizational context is a significant influence on differences in the organizations' inequality regimes.

There were, however, significant differences between the two organizations in how resources and power were distributed. Ethnicity/race and gender had a far more profound effect on earnings and access to power (and autonomy) at the bakery than at the grocery, as the next section will show.

People's Daily Bread Bakery

In the early 1990s, the bakery instituted a hierarchical system of management. Employees regularly claimed their management structure to be responsible for the company's success and their indisputably excellent incomes: overall, nearly twice the average individual earnings for their county, with even non-managerial workers averaging more than the county median household income.

Table 1: Distribution of Power at People's Daily Bread Bakery

Workforce demographics ¹ Whites People of color Men Women White men White women Men of color Women of color	N = 95 (100) 57% 43% 85% 15% 44% 13% 41% 2%
Salaried management Whites People of color Men Women White men White women Men of color Women of color	N = 13 76% (10) 14% (3) 69% (9) 31% (4) 54% (7) 23% (3) 15% (2) 8% (1)

On the face of it, the institution of hierarchy seems to have benefited women. As can be seen in Table 1, "Bakery Workforce and Managerial Composition," there were twice the proportion of women managers as women employees. ⁷ As is typical of hierarchical companies, managers had much greater autonomy over their time and even their space—working on the floor, in their own office, or in other meeting areas. Thus, bakery women enjoyed a disproportionate share of power, autonomy, and flexibility, earning almost 150 percent of what men did on an hourly basis (see Table 2 below). This was partly a result of their greater share of managerial jobs. Two other things also contributed to this advantage. First, women completely occupied the skilled white-collar jobs of the office team, home to half the bakery's women employees. Second, almost all bakery women were white, and white bakery workers out-earned Latino and Black employees by about 25 percent.

¹ Sample excludes employees who worked insufficient hours in the year to be eligible for membership or were hired or terminated six months or more into the fiscal year. (total population in parentheses). Labor statistics are somewhat obscured by hiring contingent labor, particularly in production, who aren't eligible for profit-sharing and aren't tracked by the bakery. Anecdotally this labor force appeared to be almost entirely male and Latino.

Table 2: 2003 workforce demographics and distribution of resources over ethnicity/race and gender

	People's Daily Bread Bakery Sample: 95 (100)	One World Natural Grocery Sample: 185 (234)
Workforce demographics ²	. ,	. ,
Whites	57%	61%
People of color ³	43%	39%
Men ^{°4}	85%	43%
Women	15%	56%
White men	44%	30%
White women	13%	32%
Men of color	41%	13%
Women of color	2%	25%
Mean annual earnings ⁵		
All employees	\$61,374	\$40,155
Managerš	\$90,135	n/a
Non-managers	\$57,460	n/a
Whites	\$67,955	\$39,809
People of color	\$54,080	\$40,703
Men	\$60,999	\$43,400
Women	\$68,104	\$37,942
White men	\$67,461	\$43,409
White women	\$69,687	\$36,453
Men of color	\$53,854	\$43,381
Women of color	\$58,606	\$39,893
2003 county median individual earnings ⁶	\$30,083	\$37,498
2003 county median household income	\$54,614	\$57,833
2003 county mean household income	\$71,320	\$80,614
Mean hourly earnings ⁷		
All employees	\$32.46	\$30.14
Managers	\$46.18	n/a
Non-managers	\$30.22	n/a
Whites	\$35.93	\$30.55
People of color	\$27.83	\$29.49
Men	\$31.80	\$28.62
Women	\$36.67	\$31.41
White men	\$35.59	\$29.20
White women	\$37.10	\$31.81
Men of color	\$27.53	\$27.34
Women of color	\$34.06	\$30.91
2004 mean area hourly wage ⁸	\$19.16	\$24.37

² Sample eliminates employees who: worked less than 5 hours per week; worked insufficient hours to be eligible for membership; or were hired or terminated six months or more into the year. Total population follows sample size in parentheses. Note the bakery's labor statistics are somewhat obscured by hiring contingent labor, particularly in production, who aren't eligible for profit-sharing and aren't tracked by the bakery. Anecdotally this labor force appeared to be almost entirely male and Latino.

³ Grocery employees self-report ethnoracially, while the bakery's personnel office labeled all its workers centrally.

The grocery surveys and records transgender members, who are absent from this count.

⁵ Annual earnings include wages or salaries, profit-sharing (in cash and valued shares of the company), and dividends paid on accrued non-cash shares. The comparison is somewhat problematic, as grocery employees also receive a 20 percent discount on food and their healthcare benefits are more generous than the bakery's.

⁶ All county data in this category: U.S. Census

⁷ Hourly earnings are derived by dividing each employee's annual earnings by their recorded hours. (As required for profit-sharing based on input of hours, even salaried bakery employees track annual hours.)

⁸ Source: California Employment Development Department (2004).

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segmentation in the bakery.

A review of Tables 1 and 2 above show a noticeable ethnoracial dimension to the stratification of power and resources at the bakery. Management had roughly half the proportion of people of color as did the workforce as a whole. More than half the Latino population worked in the all-men production team, which had some of the lowest skill requirements, required the hottest and dirtiest labor, and had the most openings—but mainly due to its high turnover in the nighttime shifts. That is to say, people of color were disproportionately in positions with the least amount of power, autonomy, and flexibility. Because they had a lower share of managerial and skilled jobs, they also earned less than whites. This disparity of earnings was compounded by their shorter length of employment, and by their lower joining rates in the owning membership.⁸ This ethnoracial inequality intersected problematically with the seemingly positive gender effects in the bakery. First, production was increasingly hiring Latinos, and members of other teams described production as populated by "hard-working Mexican men." Growing Latino entry might have had something to do with the onerous nature of the work and diminished competition for these jobs: production employees' schedules changed from week to week, and they were required to be on call as back-up at least one of their days off. Though described as vital to bakery operations and thus profit, it created a gender filter. Such schedules were all but impossible for women with family responsibilities. Indeed, one of the only two women of color employed at the bakery, the office receptionist, was also one of only two workers given exemptions to work part-time. She claimed that her childcare responsibilities precluded any other kind of employment. Thus, the skewing of employment options for people of color intersected with gender to create a barrier for women of color. It also promoted increased gender

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Gender segmentation was most visible in the all-women office (located upstairs and out of sight of non-managerial employees) and the all-men production teams. However, it affected the rest of the business. The only team reflective of the total workforce gender composition was delivery, and delivery drivers worked off-site. Because only three non-office women were visible on-site, the bakery seemed overwhelmingly masculine. This seemed to affect the perception of women managers. If anyone recalled the former Latina production manager internally promoted by the CEO nine years earlier, it was to link her romantically with a volatile male co-worker. Sharon, a white woman, was the only woman manager of a blue-collar team. Both her team, shipping, and production, headed by the only Latino manager, Charlie, had high turnover rates. Yet only Sharon was targeted in shopfloor gossip as responsible for the turnover; production's rates were described as natural outcomes of unpleasant work. Furthermore, while both Charlie and Sharon's middle managers had most of the day-to-day interaction with employees, only Sharon's were described as compensating for her poor people—and particularly poor men management skills. Charlie's were described as "paper-pushers," despite my observations of the similar time spent on the floor and at their desks by middle managers on both teams. The widelyheld view that Sharon was "difficult" whereas Charlie was simply "overwhelmed" had a chilling effect on future women managers. The intersection of gender with ethnoracial segmentation thus not only constrained

opportunities for women of color in terms of access to these well-paying and safe working-class jobs, they also constrained access and promotion opportunities for white women and women of color. Because despite the seeming benefits in power and resources enjoyed by bakery women, their numbers had shrunk from a historic majority of the workforce to only 15 percent. Given the perception of Sharon as having issues with those she supervised, it also seemed unlikely that

- there would be many more women promoted to managing teams dominated by men. Thus,
- 2 although the bakery's hierarchy might have initially seemed linked to benefits for women, in fact
- 3 women had fewer opportunities at the hierarchical bakery than at the grocery.

One World Natural Grocery

At a surface level, again, women's earnings at the grocery might suggest that hierarchy is linked to benefits for women: as can be seen in Table 2, grocery women's annual incomes were only 87 percent of men's. A closer look, however, reveals that this was due to a choice to work fewer hours. Unlike the bakery's mandatory 40-hour work week, grocery workers had wide latitude in theirs. On average, women worked eight hours less than men at the grocery per week. In fact, grocery women's average *hourly* wages were, like bakery women's, 110 percent that of men's, largely due to greater seniority. This gender earnings gap was more noticeable among whites than among people of color, with white women taking home only 84 percent of what white men did. Among people of color, women's annual incomes were 94 percent that of men's.

Nor was this an artifact of a smaller number of employees. Women still formed the majority of the grocery's workforce, and were quite ethnoracially diverse. Although there was a somewhat smaller proportion of people of color at the grocery as at the bakery, they were far more internally diverse: not only Latino/as, but African and African American, Asian and Asian American, and Native American. Furthermore, this ethnoracially gendered diversity was found across almost all work teams, including blue- and white-collar work. The lack of obvious job stratification as well as the ability of employees to limit their hours helps to explain the narrower internal earnings differences at the grocery (see Table 2).

This is not to say that lesser pay stratification meant no stratification. There was some degree of correspondence between "good" jobs and dominant social status. For instance,

cashiers—with a higher proportion of people of color than in the store as a whole, although with a very representational proportion of women of color and white women—were much more physically tied to their place on the floor than other employees, were far more often disciplined for being late, and, because they handled cash, had to follow much stricter accountability procedures. At the other end of the spectrum, the somewhat more male and markedly whiter office team had almost no requirements in terms of scheduling or accountability, and could even do some work from home. However, these inequalities of autonomy and flexibility did not translate into resource differences as at the bakery. All grocery employees were hired at the same starting wage and received seniority-based raises. Thus, a cashier with a high school education hired five years earlier earned the same as the personnel director with a law degree hired at the same time.

Power differences are somewhat more difficult to assess, as most day-to-day power at the grocery was in the hands of the gender- and ethnoracially diverse work teams. Some decisions, however, were made by committees elected from the membership. The board of directors, a seven-member committee that controls the company's purse strings, was historically whiter with more men than the membership. Despite some members' agitation in favor of proportional representation policies, none existed for committee elections. However, the other powerful seven-member committee, the Intercooperative Coordination Committee charged with adjudicating inter-team space or practice disputes and storewide grievances, was reflective of the gender and ethnoracial make-up of the store: a majority of women, with particularly strong participation by women of color who comprise a quarter of the store's working membership.

Again, though, these differences in power were delinked from earnings disparities. Committee members, who arguably performed some managerial tasks, were no more highly compensated

1 than other employees. Committee service was compensated based on hours of work performed

2 (unlike the small monthly flat sums paid to bakery committee members), but it was simply paid

at the employee's normal hourly wage. For most committee members, committee service was a

small proportion of their work week.

Differences between the bakery and the grocery

Grocery workers did not make as much as bakery workers—even non-managerial bakery employees earned more than grocery employees annually. Bakery workers' financial advantage was compounded by the fact that the bakery is located in a cheaper part of the region than the grocery, which meant a regular bakery employee's earnings went further than a grocery employee's—seeming to support the bakery CEO's claims about managerial efficiency and its advantages for a working class population. However, a closer look reveals this advantage at the bakery was unequally distributed, and that it might not even be perceived as an advantage by employees.

The added annual earnings of bakery employees were primarily based on the bakery's mandatory 40-hour workweek. As can be seen in Table 2, *hourly* earnings were much more similar: when managers were excluded, bakery hourly earnings were less than 1 percent more than the grocery's. What benefit existed seemed to mainly be for white bakery men, who outearned white grocery men employees significantly—mostly because of their overrepresentation in management. For men of color, *under* represented in management, their earnings advantage over their grocery counterparts disappeared at the hourly level and was miniscule annually. ⁹ It is also unclear if the similar working-class populations *wanted* extra earnings more than they wanted shorter working hours. No one in the four grocery teams I shadowed and interviewed wanted more hours than they had. In fact, being able to reduce or augment hours depending on

- 1 outside life events was routinely described as a benefit of grocery employment. The small
- number of women bakery employees might suggest that the bakery's financial benefits couldn't 2
- 3 compensate for strict time commitments and rigid schedules (discussed below).
- 4 What becomes clear in elucidating the differences in power and resources across gender
- 5 and ethnicity/race and their interaction at these two sites is the key role played by management in
- 6 heightening inequalities. Thus, I now turn to this issue and show how a hierarchy of authority
- 7 exacerbates inequalities, and then how formalized and standardized practices can work to create
- 8 greater equality.

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HIERARCHY AND FORMALITY IN TWO BUREAUCRACIES

Both organizations clearly exhibited characteristics of a Weberian bureaucracy. Both were highly formal organizations governed by written documents: policies, procedures, rules, job descriptions, and meeting outcomes were all printed and circulated among employees. Unlike earlier collectives that explicitly recruited employees based on relationships with existing members or personalities, both organizations officially separate persons from positions, prioritizing applicants' skills over individual characteristics in recruitment and retention. The main difference between the two organizations was in hierarchy of authority, which resulted in a gendered and ethnoracialized division of labor and job-based pay differentials. This difference also affects the extent to which formality can neutralize pre-existing power inequalities. In this section, I will examine formality and hierarchy as interconnected mechanisms of greater or lesser inequality.

Authority: hierarchy and hybrid democracy

- 22 People's Daily Bread Bakery: Hierarchy. When I proposed an interview to Leslie 23
 - Johnson, a white woman who had been delivering the bakery's products for over fifteen years,

1 she urged me to first speak to CEO H. Morris Gubbins, a white man who had been at the bakery

2 a little longer than herself. She felt this would make my project go more smoothly than if I

3 contacted employees myself. While Morris told me in our first interview that the bakery had "a

very informal structure, so there's no real deference to anything," my entry and subsequent

research revealed a high degree of deference to managerial authority. As will become clear, this

also meant deference to white and masculine authority.

The bakery once made decisions as a whole, later delegating some responsibility to committees. In 1989, after a series of financial losses, they sought a consultant to help institute a more accountable system. Consultants who attempted to keep participatory democracy were rejected, and by 1991 the bakery had created separate systems of representative democratic *governance*, and positional and salaried *management*. The first CEO and the first board of directors were elected together, at which point the board assumed hiring and firing responsibility for the CEO, although they never exercised this power: Morris was still at the top of the expanded managerial pyramid in 2003. As CEO, he supervised salaried employees: nine teams' managers, the plant environmentalist, and the personnel director. Almost all team managers in turn supervised waged middle managers, and the middle managers of the largest team, production, also supervised lead workers who coordinated line workers' tasks (see Fig. 1 below). Although middle managers and lead workers had the most day-to-day contact with non-managerial employees and often made wage and firing recommendations, managers retained official hiring and firing power. ¹⁰

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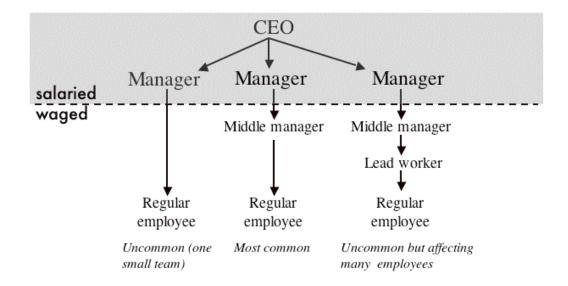


Figure 1. Variations in levels of hierarchy of authority at People's Daily Bread Bakery

3 Management officially streamlined decision-making and restored accountability.

4 Compared to pre-management tales of uneven production due to workers missing or refusing to

take shifts, managers' control over scheduling was total and enforced. Yet positional

management also created new productivity issues. As is typical in non-worker owned factories,

bakery employees slowed down to avoid "rate busting," or working at a level that might suggest

raising production quotas. Employees' responsibility to their managers rather than the company

as a whole created episodes of near-sabotage between teams. Disagreements between members

of different teams were rarely negotiated directly. In at least one instance I observed, multiple

layers of management from two teams became involved. Even so, skirmishes over the same issue

occurred weeks later.

Managerial power become ascendant not only in day-to-day matters but also in the governance of the company. Like similar businesses that attempted to retain workers' power with member council control over management (e.g. Comisso 1979; Hoffman 2001), the bakery's

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reorganization in the early 1990s also placed its board of directors over management. However the governance system was less muscular in practice than it appeared on paper. The bakery's bylaws required at least two non-managerial employees on its board, but over time the board came to be dominated by managers and middle managers. Part of the problem was managers' time flexibility. More importantly, managers were seen, as a group, as smarter and more capable, and thus more qualified as board members. This perception was heightened by hierarchy because they were the only ones who were visibly making and implementing decisions in the organization. A troubling loop emerged whereby managers seemed to inhabit their positions due to natural talents, and the hierarchical structure seemed the natural outcome of having an unequal distribution of talent. That managers were, with few exceptions, white and men became part of the loop, linking white masculinity to financial and leadership expertise. (Sharon, the only woman who didn't primarily supervise women, was grudgingly credited with good "business sense" only.) Disruption of this loop was difficult, as non-managers literally could not demonstrate decision-making skills. Hierarchical expert authority became a self-reproducing mechanism fed by larger social inequalities. One World Natural Grocery: Hybrid Democracy. In contrast to the bakery's streamlined hierarchy, the grocery's mix of decentralized participatory and centralized representative democratic management process could seem chaotic and inefficient. Centralized decisionmaking bodies accounted for few of the day-to-day policies and practices beyond starting salary, accrual of personal time and profit-sharing balances, healthcare benefits, and membership eligibility. Instead, the fourteen teams into which employees were directly hired made almost all day-to-day decisions regarding matters such as hiring and firing, raise allocations, scheduling and vacations, dress codes, and performance standards and evaluations. 11 These decisions

- 1 happened in discussions and majority votes or consensus, varying as the team chose. Matters that
- 2 couldn't be resolved within the teams, even with the help of various coordinating and consulting
- 3 committees—such as the storewide meeting facilitation Successful Participation Committee
- 4 (SPC) that also offered one-on-one member mentoring to draft agenda items; the
- 5 intradepartmental mediation Conflict Resolution Team (CRT); or the in-house, on-going
- 6 diversity training Anti-Oppression Task Force (AOTC)—might be brought to the monthly
- 7 membership meeting, the board of directors, or the Intercooperative Coordinating Committee
- 8 (ICC) for further deliberation and resolution. These multiple sites of power also invested
- 9 authority across gender and ethnicity/race.

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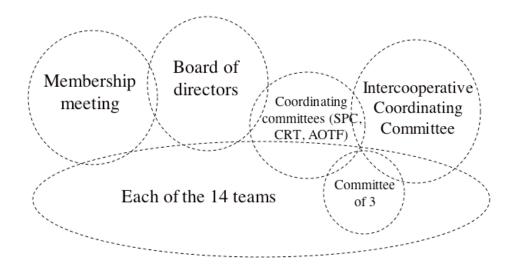


Figure 2. Overlapping and permeable layers of authority at One World Natural Grocery

As can be seen in Figure 2, jurisdiction was held in tension between the decentralized teams and the centralized elected committees. The membership meeting could veto board decisions if they were deemed to affect "current business practice," and the board could overrule membership decisions that fell under its purview of long-range goals. This multiplicity of power became visible when thefts of employee property occurred near the cooler and produce work

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areas. In a complaint to the ICC by a cooler team member, these thefts were attributed to an often-open door near the loading dock used by the two teams, but primarily by produce. The ICC made a policy that the door be left shut and vendors instead use the gated loading dock. The produce team expressed outrage at an external body controlling their physical space. Produce employees flatly told a white woman on the ICC that they wouldn't comply, causing a Black woman ICC member to suggest they give up trying (ICC minutes, 6/18/03). But another Black woman on the ICC suggested discussions with produce and cooler members in a meeting two weeks later where, recalling the founding intention of the committee as "thin and weak," she explained, "[The ICC] need[s] to have open communication with people about whatever our ideas are—so we can come up with ideas together. Because we're not just here to tell people what to do" (ICC minutes, 7/2/03). Meeting minutes three weeks later indicated a compromise had been reached. The grocery's multiple sites of democratic engagement eventually led them to a solution that everyone could live with, rather than one that would be regularly undermined. Here let me pause to address an obvious difference between the bakery and the grocery. Although both businesses needed to efficiently and consistently satisfy their retail or wholesale customers, the difference between industrial production and service sectors might create unequal demands for "technical efficiency" (Weber 1978). Is such efficiency more central to a tightly coordinated manufacturing process where, as the bakery's CEO insisted, "yeast waits for no one," than in a business that doesn't rely on interlocking production systems? Did the bakery require managerial hierarchy while more "inefficient" democratized power could only be used by organizations with looser coordination needs? Understanding the relationship between bureaucratic characteristics and inequality requires an acknowledgement that organizational

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specificity matters, that social categories are always produced within specific material and institutional practices (Ward 2004).

However, such questions assume a natural correspondence of hierarchy to efficiency. In fact inefficiency has been a historically consistent feature of hierarchy. Womack, Jones, and Roos (1999), for instance, point to the failures of the United States automotive industry, arguing that lower-level managers' need to appear successful led them to suppress unfavorable but nevertheless essential consumer data, inflating sales projections and ignoring consumer demand. Flatter structure has become a keystone of corporate efficiency claims in the last 20 years (Handel 2004). Furthermore, while few worker-owned large industrial production companies exist, decentralized management seems compatible with efficient production. For instance, the collectivization of a 240-member Welsh colliery with a sharply flattened managerial structure has resulted in higher productivity and safety (Hoffmann 2001). While bakery members cite a lack of efficiency and accountability as a primary motivation for their conversion to hierarchical management in the early 1990s, it is plausible that it is more the *ideology* of efficiency that adheres to hierarchical management. Certainly my observations of acts of resistance and petty sabotage between workers and managers that decreased productivity at the bakery suggest patterns of inefficiency resulting from hierarchy, while my observations of the grocery suggested that trust generated through participatory democratic management and lateral sharing of information created effective and efficient business practices.

Formality: written documents and standardized procedures

People's Daily Bread Bakery: Subordinated Formality. Like the grocery, the bakery evidenced a high degree of attention to formality and standardization. Rules, policies, and procedures were conveyed primarily through written documents including worker handbooks,

1 member orientation materials and quarterly reports, posted schedules, a quarterly newsletter, and

2 ubiquitous ergonomic posters. Policy enforcement was also formal: a high volume of written

reports of accidents and "near miss" situations; accidents followed up with drug testing (and

treatment for positive results); regular discussions of points of order and quorum-insuring role

call before every vote at quarterly membership meetings; and written documentation at each

stage of the progressive disciplinary policy for employees.

Such strong rationalization of policy was explained by workers and managers in two ways. The first involved *safety concerns*: internally, there was overt discourse about the need to protect bodily integrity as the most important resource working people possess; externally, visible and meticulous adherence to formalized safety protocols lowered insurance rates and thus increased members' share of profits.

The second was about *fairness*, about equalizing access to resources. This seemed a legacy of the bakery's earlier history of structurelessness and charismatic control. A former white male employee was described as "autocratic" or "our guru" by long-term members. I was told how he surrounded himself with a protective aura, giving him agency impossible for other members. As Ostrander (1999) noticed at the social justice organization she studied, the bakery's adoption of clear lines of authority and adherence to formal rules were intended to block the gendered and charismatic subversion of democratic practice.

Ironically, though, several employees hired after the transition to formal management labeled the bakery a "cult of personality" or "the *Mo*-operative," playing on the shortened form of the CEO's first name. It often seemed that formality was far less powerful than the authority created through managerial hierarchy. For instance, although the board generally backed Morris' proposals, there could be serious repercussions when they disagreed. Some managers reported

not wanting to run for the board again because going against Morris in the governance system made their jobs as his supervised employees more difficult. The acceptance of his lack of "people skills" contrasted sharply with the widespread criticisms of Sharon, the shipping manager. Morris himself acknowledged that "hurtful things aren't forgotten [by me]," although he seemed unaware that this dynamic permeated the organization deeply enough to undermine bureaucratic intentions of degendered and impersonal justice. In a conflict between the CEO and the membership, several non-board members said they didn't want to use formal processes to challenge Morris. This was partly in fear of drawing fire down on themselves, but partly of upsetting Morris so much that he quit, taking with him the financial acumen and leadership that employees discursively linked to his Ivy League education. Indeed, Morris' classed and gendered

Formality also had different effects across ethnicity and race. Managers decided—and standardized via the employee handbook—that basic English skills were required. This was visible in the minimal use of Spanish in the workplace: the only formal use of Spanish was in a section of the quarterly newsletter, OSHA signs, and simultaneous interpretation of membership meetings. Membership meeting agendas, board minutes, and the annual business plan were distributed only in English. The formal enshrinement of this rule, as well as its place among other formal rules, seemed to inhibit Latino empowerment, as the following shows:

cultural capital seemed to enhance his managerial status.

Becoming a cooperative member requires formal application. Although the standard written and oral questions posed to prospective members could be translated, almost all primary Spanish speakers described anxiety in having to stand up at a quarterly meeting and request membership. During my year of meeting observation, three Spanish-speaking applicants backed out at the last minute, thus forfeiting at least a quarter of member profit-sharing valued at

1 roughly \$2500 that year; all but one explicitly stated it was due to performance anxiety. The only

- 2 primary English speaker, a young white man, who backed out that year explained he had a
- 3 family emergency. This fear of English performance might account for the much lower rates of
- 4 membership among recent Latino hires than among white hires.
- 5 The formal rule also stymied coordination. With the influx of Spanish-speaking
- 6 employees, management decided that all managers should have basic Spanish skills and hired a
- 7 teacher to come onsite for mandatory classes. Two middle managers resisted, one going so far as
- 8 refuse to do his homework or improve the accent he almost proudly showed me to be
- 9 horrendous. The company handbook, he reminded me, required basic English. He said that after
- 10 he told the teacher, "I'm paid to sit here and listen to you. I'm not paid to participate," she
- refused to return and the classes were cancelled. The middle manager was reprimanded, but his
- 12 authority remained intact.
- The company's motives suggest a desire to level inequalities between dominant and
- subaltern language communities. However, how they enacted formalization echoed the
- dominant/subaltern paradigm: a Spanish teacher was brought on-site and class time was
- 16 compensated, but English classes had to be taken externally on employees' own time.
- 17 Formalizing bilingualism became a struggle over hierarchical power rather than the
- enshrinement of mutually agreed-upon strategies to enhance production.
- This is not to say that bakery employees were totally constrained by formal practices. In
- 20 fact, some *informal* ways of dealing with communication gaps were inventive and inspiring. One
- 21 of the four production crews—the crew most evenly divided between native English- and
- 22 Spanish-speakers, led by an bilingual Latino middle manager—developed its own strategy.
- 23 Agenda items were presented in either English or Spanish by a crew member and then translated

into the other language by a bilingual speaker. Not only did this convey the information to all,

2 but the on-the-fly interpretation allowed potential misunderstandings and problems to be quickly

identified and discussed on the spot. Those meeting were the most lively and engaged of any

team meetings I attended in the company. Nevertheless, this crew's methods were not instituted

across the production team as a whole as there were no mechanisms for incorporating formal

6 practices from the floor.

These examples reveal important aspects of the relationship between hierarchy and formality at the bakery. The investment of time and energy in the standardization and formalization of power did not seem to equally protect all members of the organization.

Charismatic power and hierarchical authority trumped formality on a regular basis, and it was often underwritten by the power of social inequalities of ethnicity/race and gender. The power of formal procedures and practices was largely subordinated to hierarchy; it was hierarchical authority that really shored up the bakery's distribution of power. In this respect, formality had a very different role at the bakery as it did at the grocery.

One World Natural Grocery: Protective Formality. Despite personal connections to grocery committee members, my experience gaining access to the grocery illustrates the non-hierarchical yet highly formal structure of the grocery. While I easily gained entry to the bakery through an individual appeal to the CEO, I needed to apply in writing to several grocery committees before I was called into the office to complete a series of written waivers assuring confidentiality. I was then given a letter of permission that I was required to produce at meetings on more than one occasion. The insistence on formal rules, adherence to organizational policies, and written documents made it clear that this was also a bureaucratic organization.

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In fact, One World Natural Grocery was permeated by documents. Although teams were relatively autonomous, each was required to have written policy binders accessible to all employees. Inter-team communication was mainly conducted via written notes in the team's logbook; intra-team communication often happened when one team member would put themselves on another team's meeting agenda. Hundreds of agendas, meeting minutes, news reports, and internal job postings lined the walls leading from the retail level to the offices, meeting spaces, kitchen, and lounge above—including a Spanish section where verbatim minutes of the membership, board of directors, and ICC meetings were translated and posted. Informal communications tended to be tightly linked to formal ones. A disagreement between members of different teams about products being stocked or use of space might come up on the floor or over lunch in the lounge, but would then be followed up by formal procedures. Jennifer Ruud, a white cooler team member, recalled store music playing so loud she couldn't hear the customers. She asked the customer service team to turn the music down, but it they didn't. She then wrote a letter to the team and got a reply thanking her for writing because "it was easier for [them] to point the finger at this person who's been abusing this for awhile." The interconnection of written and oral procedures allowed information and effective practices to move down from committees to the floor as well as up from the floor to policy-setting committees. Yet where formal rules and policies were not in place, personal power collected and stagnated. There were no organizational or team policies for who became a buyer (the person who placed orders and chose items for sale day to day), a position valued for its autonomous hours and reduced customer interaction. Jan Bridges, a white woman with some buying

responsibilities who had served on the ICC when the company began to examine the way

1 employees became buyers, explained the gendered dimension to the lack of formal procedures

2 for making someone a buyer:

Buyers, the guys pass accounts off to each other. They do. There's definitely an old-boy buyer thing going on. You know, like Fred [buyer for the most profitable team in the store], he's finding the young man of his choice to train up to his position. And the women just aren't even in the same realm, you know. I mean, I don't think he considered it, and I don't think he knows he's not considering it.

Without formal policies, white men dominated more powerful buying positions, as the process of conflating dominant social status with individual ability observed in other alternative organizations (Kleinman 1996) was also at work at the grocery.

However, such vacuums of formal practices were circumscribed by formality. When another white man doing the majority of his team's buying repeatedly resisted his team's attempts to limit his hours and make him accountable for buying practices, they fired him. Although he had portrayed himself as indispensable, Jan says he wasn't. "Not even close. One of the other buyers walked up, picked up his notebook, and started doing the job in 15 minutes."

That buying could be an "old-boy" position when no formal practices existed to democratize that site of power indicates that the difference between the grocery and the bakery was not the luck of collecting particularly power-cognizant individuals. Rather, the grocery's combination of formal documents with the decentralization of power protected the organization from unchecked charismatic power. The grocery's reliance on written documents created information that could easily be shared via a system designed to distribute power broadly. The ability of buyers to abuse and accrete power in the presence of "structurelessness" was limited by a protective wall of formalized and explicit practices and policies.

INEQUALITY REGIMES: BUREAUCRACY, ETHNICITY/RACE AND GENDER

All organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated
practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class,
gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations. (Acker 2006b)
Thinking in terms of Acker's "inequality regimes" allows us to see the interconnections
between organizational forms and organizational practices of inequality. Her theory, embodied at
the sites I studied, is that the actions taken by large organizations like workplaces are always
informed by gender, ethnicity/race, and class: e.g. that the actions of typical bureaucratic
business organizations exemplify hegemonic (that is, white and upper-class) masculinity. There
is also a reciprocal relationship. Because social differences are the basis for material and power
inequalities in the larger world, these differences reinforce hierarchy as the organizational
equivalent of a "natural" order of things, obscuring hierarchy's highly social emergence and
reproduction (2006b). As I have shown here, while both organizations were "bureaucratic,"
different power structures and their interconnections with formality created greater and lesser
inequality regimes.
At the bakery, formality's aims of fair protection were subordinated to their hierarchy,
resulting not only in gendered, ethnoracialized differences in power, but also in earnings. This
occurred in the interaction of larger structures of social inequality (e.g., the gender, ethnoracial,
and ethnoracially gendered segmentation of the labor market that endowed applicants and
employees with differently recognized skills and experiences) with the power- and resource-
differentiated hierarchical structure. The CEO had a personal mission to empower women,
visible in his hiring of women managers across white- and blue-collar work in the office,
shipping, and production teams. However, the translation of his desires into gender equality was

1 blocked by the distribution of power across a hierarchical management strata, as the production

2 manager and his assistant managers did the actual hiring. Their inability to successfully recruit

3 and retain women team members affected access by women of color to jobs at the bakery. To

some extent, the production team extended a dividend of shared masculinity to Latino job

seekers, allowing them access to remarkably safe and well-paid manual labor. However, this

access drew on "experience" which relied on the external ethnoracialized, gendered labor

market. Not only did this dividend not equalize power and resources for men of color, it

excluded women of color from the rewards that did exist.

The subordination of formality to hierarchy particularly made vulnerable Spanish-speaking women. These potential employees would have had to depend on the goodwill of coworkers to translate in the absence of formal practices of English-Spanish communication. While the "masculinity dividend" might create incentive for Spanish-speaking men to help one another, it created no similar incentives to help Spanish-speaking women.

Thus, a corollary to Freeman's (1984) observation that *structureless* may obfuscate cultural capital is that *hierarchical structure* may transform cultural capital into organizational capital. At the same time, this organizational structure strips organizational capital from those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy—they literally cannot make decisions—magnifying pre-existing gender and ethnoracial inequalities. Hierarchy thus reinforces social inequalities, and social inequalities reinforce the operations of hierarchy. As the bakery's hierarchical bureaucracy achieved legitimacy in part by reflecting business practices around them, it reinforced inequality as a natural fact of workplaces: managers have power over the managed, men over women, whites over people of color, and so on.

At the grocery, in contrast, formality and democratic decision making reinforced each other. Unlike the "structureless" cooperatives of earlier studies, the grocery formalized decentralized power with rules and documents. Lines of power were, for the most part, clearly spelled out, as were methods of grievance and redress. The grocery thus eliminated the historically dangerous aspect of structurelessness, in which those with greater cultural capital could gain power over those with less. This not only reduced the stratification of power across gender and ethnicity/race, but also the stratification of earnings.

The most obvious interruption of stratification came from decentralizing almost all decision making, which meant that "managerial" decisions were not more highly compensated. It also meant that employees regularly got to see "managerial" skills demonstrated by their coworkers across divisions of ethnicity/race and gender. The formal practices of recording, disseminating, and paying employees to read meeting minutes heightened these observations. The formal allocation of time control from managers to teams of workers themselves was appreciated by men and women alike, but seems to have allowed greater access to grocery jobs for women in particular. Given the nearly identical class backgrounds observed between the two locations, the grocery employees' preferences (and the oft-repeated complaints of rigid scheduling from bakery employees) suggest that control over time is as important as money to working-class people.

There was also a reciprocal effect on the organizational structure itself. In a workplace that formally sanctioned multiple (gender, ethnoracial, class, and sexuality) interests, the grocery's multi-node power structure became *necessary*. The preservation of possibility of conflict—for instance, the overturning of a board decision at a membership meeting, or the rejection of an ICC policy by a department—was demanded by a group that defined itself as

- 1 internally dissimilar. Thus, a mutually reinforcing relationship between decentralized but
- 2 formalized power and an internally diverse workforce was ever more firmly entrenched.

CONCLUSION: EQUITABLE WORKPLACES?

Gender inequality is an aspect of an inequality regime. Intersectional theory argues that class, race/ethnicity, and gender are never discrete categories of meaning or oppression, but are always constructed through each other. If we take seriously that gender is not inherent but created through our actions and institutions, then it makes sense that we are always doing gender in spaces overwritten with other discourses of social meaning. I have extended Acker's concept by looking specifically at the *interconnections* of ethnicity/race and gender, not by simply putting them side by side. The success of mainly white women at the bakery that partially rested on the backs of Latino production workers was tied to decreasing access for all women. The equality of access enjoyed by women at the grocery was tightly bound up with practices that aimed for broad inclusivity.

I have also demonstrated that it is inadequate to analyze only the steepness of a hierarchy to understand the functioning of an inequality regime, but instead that the links between independent aspects of bureaucracy reveal the workings of such regimes. Formality shores up advantages of power and resources for dominant groups and constricts possibilities for subalterns when combined with hierarchy. When combined with hybrid democracy, formality limits dominant groups' advantages and allows for greater claims on power and resources by subalterns.

All workplaces have tensions and problems. I do not mean to argue that One World Natural Grocery was paradise. Where formal practices were absent—such as in buyer selection—patterns of gender and ethnoracial inequality re-emerged. However, these isolated

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1 instances emphasized how formality could transform these pockets of inequality still left at the

- 2 grocery. Nor is this to argue that People's Daily Bread Bakery was inherently oppressive.
- 3 Particularly in an age of industrial off-shoring, safe and stable jobs and a livable income are
- 4 valuable to working-class people. Yet a mutually reinforcing relationship emerged between the
- 5 logic of narrowed interests evident in claims about the desirability of greater earnings above all
- 6 else, and a hierarchy of power which particularly excluded working-class women of color.

practices could come to seem so normal and acceptable to different groups of demographically similar employees such as those I studied. Why should they choose and reproduce such different kinds of bureaucracies with such different levels of inequality? Although these questions are

One question that still remains is *how* these differences in the two organizations'

beyond the scope of this article, I can provide a glimpse of my findings. At the bakery an overt

class language and logic disguised the predominance of masculinity and minimized the ability of

ethnoracial minorities to make legitimate claims, while the grocery's weak class discourse

allowed for the emergence of more explicitly gendered and ethnoracialized claims. These

differences seemed to provide the oil that greased the different bureaucratic machineries at work

16 in increasing or minimizing inequalities.

There are numerous varieties of workplaces in capitalist economies, and each offers particular insights to the reproduction of workplace inequalities. The worker-owned companies I studied open up new vistas on the effect of distinct bureaucratic characteristics on such inequalities. Future gendered organization scholars who investigate the effect of bureaucracy in non-worker-owned businesses or in more homogeneous workplaces than the ones I studied must do a similar unpacking. First, formality (which can protect minority interests) should be separated from hierarchy (which tends to promote a single set of interests, almost always be

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those of dominant groups). Second, gender must be viewed as productive of and produced within

- 2 other categories of inequality. These refinements will go a long way towards a more robust
- 3 understanding of how bureaucratic work organizations become sites that (re)produce gender

4 inequality.

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6 **NOTES**

1. Other than the general geographic region, the names of the two organizations, their settings, their employees, and some identifying details have been disguised to protect confidentiality.

- 2. While wary of sociology's history of trying to fit the concept of race into an ethnicity model (Omi and Winant 1994), here I follow Brodkin's (1998) use of the term to indicate the similar social constructions of difference and the way race and ethnicity repeatedly overlap in day-to-day life.
- 3. Each organization is divided into teams focused on particular areas of expertise. At the bakery, I shadowed members of the office, shipping, production (baking and packaging), and transport/deliver teams; at the grocery, the office, produce, housewares, and cashiers. I was thus able to contrast similar white collar, blue collar, and customeroriented teams. I also contrasted the team at each site regularly pointed out to me as having the most and longest-term internal conflict, as an organization's deep-seated problems are most visible in its conflicts.
- 4. Although only 70 percent of eligible bakery workers had chosen membership in 2003 (whereas membership was required of all grocery workers at roughly the end of their first year), I consider both businesses to be worker-owned and controlled because no bakery employees have been denied membership.
- 5. I conducted oral surveys with 70-90 percent of workers in each of the eight teams I observed intensively. To assess class background, I asked not only about self-identification but about employees' own and their parents' education levels, their family home and car (if any), and family occupations. While this is an imprecise measurement, it is an improvement over self-identification or income alone.
- 6. I do not quote mission statements as their online presence could compromise the organizations' anonymity.
- 7. Note that this discussion and table refer only to the salaried management strata. The trends in the waged middle-management strata were different: of the eight middle managers, all were men. Six were white and two were Latino.

- 8. Unlike most other worker-owned businesses, the bakery distributed just under half of the profits to all employees regardless of ownership. Thus, while membership meant greater earnings, it was not as sharp difference in income as at the typical worker-owned cooperative, including the grocery.
- 9. Because there were only two women of color at the bakery, one a manager and one in the higher-skilled office team, it isn't useful to compare with the population at the grocery.
- 10. When the bakery instituted management, it was separated from governance. A governance flow chart would show the (mostly waged) membership over the (stipended) board of directors who controlled the (salaried) CEO through hiring and firing power.
- 11. Hiring, time-card review, and, on some larger teams, scheduling was done by an elected and revolving threemember committee within each team.

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