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## Gender, the Labor Process and Dignity at Work

**Gender, the Labor Process and Dignity at Work**Martha Crowley, *North Carolina State University*

This study brings together gender inequality and labor process research to investigate how divergent control structures generate inequality in work experiences for women and men. Content-coded data on 155 work groups are analyzed using Qualitative Comparative Analysis to identify combinations of control techniques encountered by female and male work groups and their relationship to outcomes measuring workplace dignity. Results suggest that male work groups more often encounter persuasive “bundles” of control that enhance autonomy, creativity, meaningfulness and satisfaction, while female work groups confront more coercive arrangements, especially direct supervision, that erode these and other foundations of dignity at work. I conclude with implications of these findings relative to understandings of the labor process, workplace sex segregation and forms of inequality not so easily quantified in dominant approaches to stratification.

Gender stratification research has devoted considerable attention to processes underlying wage differentials for women and men. Women suffer economically, for instance, as firms devalue their work and reserve for men positions with authority, high pay and career advancement potential (Dinovitzer, Reichman, and Sterling 2009; Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Reskin and Roos 1990; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). To a lesser extent, this literature also highlights inequality in the work *experience*, particularly with respect to the exercise of discretion and authority on the job (e.g., Cockburn 1983, 1988a; Smith 2002). Women’s jobs offer less task variety and freedom from supervision and opportunity to solve problems, negatively affecting job satisfaction, pride in their work and perceived sense of control over their lives (Hodson 2001, 2004; Ross and Wright 1998). Yet with the exception of a small number of qualitative case studies, this literature tends not to explore in depth how divergent control structures shape the experience of work in women’s and men’s jobs, especially with respect

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to the full range of control techniques used by employers and the simultaneous application of multiple controls.

Research on the labor process is more explicit on control and what it means for workers generally, specifying key modes of control (direct supervision, task segmentation and rules, for example), and their effects on worker outcomes such as autonomy, alienation and effort (Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979; Hodson 1996; Schwalbe 1986). Building on this literature and integrating its Marxist elements with Weberian and Durkheimian perspectives on work and well-being, Randy Hodson's *Dignity at Work* demonstrated that workplace controls vary in the degree to which they allow workers to derive a sense of self-worth and self-respect from their jobs, producing measurable differences in outcomes such as autonomy, creativity, commitment and effort. Comparative research has demonstrated how complex combinations of multiple control techniques contribute to class variation in workplace dignity (Crowley 2012), but this literature is mostly quiet with respect to gender variation. Do overall approaches to control differ in differ female and male work groups? What are their implications for workplace dignity? The answers to these questions have important implications for understandings of both gender inequality and the labor process.

In this article, I integrate insights from workplace gender stratification and labor process literatures, and use content-coded ethnographic data to investigate control and dignity in female and male work groups. Using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), I identify "bundles" of control techniques encountered by work groups with high, low and very low percent female. I then assess their effects on an array of variables measuring workplace dignity. Reimmersion in the qualitative data—a second phase of the analysis—allows for elaboration on underlying processes and underscores women's use of agency to protect their dignity (Roscigno, Lopez, and Hodson 2009). I conclude with implications for both literatures, including understandings of how the day-to-day enactment of gender at work relates to broader organizational and institutional processes and inequalities (Acker 2006; Martin 2004).

## **Sex Segregation, the Labor Process and Worker Dignity**

Although job desirability reflects a range of considerations, such as pay, scheduling needs, perceived opportunity and socialization (England 2010; Reskin and Padavic 1994; Webber and Williams 2008), most individuals, regardless of gender, crave the same intrinsic job rewards, including autonomy, interesting tasks, a sense of accomplishment, and the feeling that they are productive, competent and contributing to the whole (Rowe and Snizek 1995; Tolbert and Moen 1998). These goals and desires are at least as strong for women as for men (Johnson and Mortimer 2011). Yet research has consistently shown that women's jobs offer less task variety, satisfaction, freedom from direct supervision and opportunity for problem solving (e.g., Cockburn 1988a; Ross and Wright 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993).

The labor process tradition offers a framework for understanding such inequalities, identifying a range of worker controls embedded in work arrangements and

specifying their effects on an array of psychological and behavioral outcomes. Robert Blauner (1964) was among the first to argue that differential exposure to worker controls (including bureaucratic rules and particular technological forms) shape workers' psychological well-being. Subsequent scholarship has called attention to deleterious impacts of these and other constraints, including direct supervision and task segmentation, for psychological and behavioral outcomes, and noted the emergence of controls based on alignment of worker and firm interests (most notably, career ladders and participative arrangements) with more beneficial effects (Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Crowley 2012; Edwards 1979; Hodson 1996, 2001).

The literature on workplace sex segregation provides key insights into why women's and men's work experiences may vary as a function of workplace control, highlighting how dominant ideologies, beliefs and values regarding women's and men's familial responsibilities and orientations (caretaking vs. breadwinning) and masculine/feminine capabilities, identities and orientations (e.g., feminine deference and vs. masculine aggression) promote men's entry into (and women's exclusion from) jobs offering more advantageous control structures, while channeling women into (and men away from) jobs marked by constraint.

First, firms *exclude* women from jobs associated with skill, autonomy, high pay and career ladders on the basis of what they are assumed to lack: intelligence, technological skills, physical strength, commitment, ambition, breadwinner status and emotional fortitude necessary to succeed in a "male" environment and/or advance in career ladders designed for men (Cockburn 1983; Reskin and Padavic 1988; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002; Wright 2001). As Reskin and Roos (1990) explain, organizational gatekeepers' taste for discrimination and use of male sex to proxy skill, commitment and productivity convert labor queues (employers' rank ordering of preferred workers) into gender queues (preference for men over women), allowing men to monopolize the most lucrative, skill-building and intrinsically rewarding jobs. Socialized beliefs regarding masculine capabilities and breadwinner orientations also contribute to "supply-side" processes, whereby men seek out jobs consistent with masculine identities and breadwinner roles, scrutinize female "interlopers," and occasionally target them for abuse (Bergmann 2011).

Second, *inclusion* processes steer women into positions reflecting or complementing their external roles. Employers draw upon (and sometimes bend) gender ideologies to support women's concentration in jobs men refuse to take, and they often build gendered expectations of women into work arrangements (Cockburn 1988a; Martin 2003; Reynolds 2001; Salzinger 2003). As Anne Phillips (1983:102) notes, "It is not just that capitalism needs some skilled and some unskilled workers, and that men have usurped the better jobs for themselves. Rather, jobs are created as masculine and feminine" (see also Skuratowicz and Hunter 2004). Once positions have been established, firms fill them with individuals whose external functions (or stereotypes) correspond to their requirements, often recruiting women for part-time hours, service/deference roles and routine jobs requiring only speed and dexterity, while reserving for men higher wage positions congruent with their presumed strength,

leadership and breadwinner status (Collinson, Knights, and Collinson 1990; Mills 2003; Williams 2006). These practices are complemented by supply-side processes, including men's avoidance of stereotypically female jobs and women's self-selection into "pink-collar" and part-time jobs compatible with feminine ideals/caregiving roles (Hartmann 1976; Reskin and Padavic 1994; Webber and Williams 2008).

Third, workers and jobs are subject to *gendering* processes, whereby sex composition influences the nature of work and vice versa. Cynthia Cockburn (1988b:38) explains: "People have a gender, and their gender rubs off on the jobs they do. These jobs in turn have a gender character which rubs off on the people who do them." Positions filled with women thus come to be regarded as "women's jobs" and workers in them, regardless of their sex, are treated in ways consistent with societal and more local notions of what it means to be a woman (Lee 1998; Muñoz 2008). Consistent with women's subordinate status in society, a sizable female presence is associated with downgrading of worker status, skills and advancement potential (Davies 1982; Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Female work groups are thus paid less, and often they are patronized or even infantilized, contributing to the use of demeaning and oppressive constraints that in turn reinforce the notion that extensive controls are appropriate and required (Acker and Van Houten 1974; Cockburn 1983, 1988a, 1988b; Coverman 1986; Rogers and Henson 1997).<sup>1</sup>

According to Charles Tilly (1998), these processes have important consequences for the nature of control in jobs occupied by women and men. They reflect and reinforce inequalities found in adjacent institutional and organizational spheres, mapping gender onto crucial intraorganizational boundaries, clustering women in jobs that deny them equitable returns for their contributions and setting up systems of social closure that reserve the most advantageous positions for men. One consequence, he argues, is systematic variation in the discipline/incentive systems found in women's and men's jobs: female work groups are disproportionately (though not exclusively) located in coercive *drive* systems, where they are subject to closer supervision, more continuous monitoring and shorter term (often hourly) pay schemes, and men are concentrated in zones of *loyalty*, where they enjoy greater discretion, more freedom from supervision and lengthier promotion ladders that secure effort via the promise of long-term gain (see also Bielby and Baron 1986; Edwards 1979; Kanter 1977; Reskin and Padavic 1994).

A handful of qualitative case studies have shown that gender composition of work groups is indeed linked to the organization of work in some contexts (e.g., Lee 1998; Muñoz 2008; Ong 1987; Salzinger 2003) and a few quantitative investigations have linked gender wage disparities and women's part-time employment to at least some controls, including direct supervision, task segmentation and on-the-job training (Coverman 1986; Ross and Wright 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002). Yet there has been less systematic investigation of overall structures of control (including complex combinations of multiple control techniques) and their implications for the experience of work across a broad array of work settings.

It is here that labor process theory is informative, providing a theoretical frame for understanding the nature and impact of control across a range of contexts, albeit with less attention to gender in particular. Benchmark studies documented a shift away from constraint-based techniques (i.e., direct supervision, task segmentation, automation and rules) toward methods based on alignment of worker and firm interests (especially career ladders and workplace participation), especially in male-dominated occupations located in monopoly-sector industries (Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979; Friedman 1977). Accordingly, early research in this tradition emphasized variations in control across industrial and occupational divides.

Growing awareness of variations related to labor relations and other contextual influences has prompted more direct investigations of specific controls applied in work settings under study. Recent comparative investigations thus have documented how six key forms of control, addressed below, impact worker dignity (Hodson 2001; Crowley 2012). This more direct approach is particularly salient for understanding workplace gender inequality, since firms sort women and men in the same industry and occupation into different jobs, reserving for men those with greater complexity, freedom from direct supervision and opportunity for advancement (Bielby and Baron 1986; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993).

### ***Direct Supervision***

Direct supervision, the oldest and simplest form of control, is still commonly used to control workers, particularly in the service sector, where firms increasingly enlist customers in monitoring employees (McCammon and Griffin 2000; Williams 2006). Although “facilitative supervision,” generally found in the professions, can encourage worker citizenship (Frenkel and Sanders 2007), direct supervision is frequently experienced as demeaning and tends to promote arbitrary decision making and abuse that hamper meaningfulness, satisfaction, cooperation and effort (Hodson 2001; Rafferty and Restubog 2011). In the service sector, visibility, sexualization of work and abuse of workers subject to customer control contributes to alienation, burnout and intent to quit (Deery, Walsh, and Guest 2011; Stein 2007).

Many employers regard women’s presumed socialization for deference as incompatible with authority, discretion and/or aggression expected in management and many professions, but as well suited to coercive controls such as direct supervision (Kanter 1977; Salzinger 2003; Williams 1995). Although many men experience this form of control, firms exhibit a clear tendency to exclude female workers from jobs with significant decision-making authority and actively recruit them into positions subject to direct supervision (Cockburn 1983, 1988a; Smith 2002; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). In manual environments, purposeful replication of external social relations, including patriarchal and familial ties, underscores managerial efforts to capitalize on subservience generalized from other institutional spheres (Lee 1998; Mills 2003; Wolf 1992).

Socialized beliefs regarding female subservience also increases women’s exposure to direct supervision via customers, who often serve as proxies for

management in service encounters (McCammon and Griffin 2000). Expectations for female subservience, including smiling, taking orders and submitting to customer abuse are *written into* many service and clerical jobs (Martin 2003). Women's appearance and temperament are thus regarded as uniquely qualifying them for frontline service expectations such as smiling, taking orders and submitting to customer abuse (Leidner 1991). In contrast, male socialization is regarded as ill fitted to the deference required in many such jobs (Skuratowicz and Hunter 2004), and many men resist even temporary assignment to duties perceived as "women's work" (Nixon 2009; Rogers and Henson 1997; Williams 2006).

### **Task Segmentation**

Task segmentation—the division of more complex functions into subtasks requiring speed and dexterity alone—has long been used to secure effort from employees (Taylor 1947). Narrowing the scope of work activities not only limits opportunity to withhold effort but also severely constrains problem solving, autonomy, meaningfulness and satisfaction (Braverman 1974; Hodson 1996, 2001). Limited task variation, furthermore, is a key factor in the negative consequences of low-status employment for workers' self-efficacy and self-esteem (Kohn 1976; Ross 2000).

Originally developed for use in manual production, this form of control is found in a broad range of settings, including many of the "pink collar" occupations where women are concentrated (Davies 1982; Kanter 1977). In the manual sector, women are funneled into jobs with task segmentation by managers touting their unique qualifications for the most fragmented assembly roles: their small hands, nimble fingers, high speed, attention to detail and "natural" patience for boring, monotonous tasks (Mills 2003; Salzinger 2003). Socialized beliefs regarding masculine capabilities, identities and orientations discourage employment of men in such positions (Ong 1987:152; Wolf 1992:116; Wright 2001:361), and some managers punish insubordinate men with temporary assignments to female production lines, where the perceived indignity of task segmentation calls into question their masculinity (Muñoz 2008).

### **Automation**

Scholars have largely rejected Robert Blauner's (1964) contention that technology would liberate workers from alienating work, noting instead that technology bifurcates jobs, deskilling those who operate machines while upgrading skills of those who program or service them (Vallas 1993). "Where the tasks are not just mechanized but truly automated, the worker is reduced to an often-bored observer of a part of the flow of production" (Gamst 1980:29). Dissatisfaction and meaninglessness often result—especially where automation is combined with task segmentation—in assembly lines, for example (Hodson 1996).

Socialized beliefs regarding masculine capabilities, identities and orientations promote male monopolies on positions servicing machinery, while females, who are seen as lacking necessary ambition for technological training, are placed

in jobs subject to automation (Hossfield 1990; Lee 1993). In short, “Women may push the buttons, but they may not meddle with the works” (Cockburn 1983:12). In a Mexican maquiladora, for example, managers fast-tracked men out of machine tending with technical training that served as a “male rite of passage” out of predominantly female assembly roles (Wright 2001:361).

### **Rules**

Rules pervade work organizations, crossing industrial and occupational divides and controlling workers through symbolism of close attention to their activities and threat of sanctions for noncompliance. Rules generate a great deal of effort among even self-governed professionals and direct almost every aspect of some jobs, scripting interactions with customers and specifying the sequence and pace of food preparation and delivery, for example (Courpasson 2000; Leidner 1991). Rules thus vary a great deal in their effects. They may enhance worker well-being by taking the place of more oppressive forms of constraint; alternatively, they may dictate the method or outcome of work to such a degree that little room for autonomy or creativity remains (Adler and Borys 1996). Where rules are the dominant mode of control, they depress autonomy, creativity, satisfaction, pride and effort (Hodson 2001).

Although there has been little direct investigation of gender differences in rule-based control, qualitative research on service and manual environments suggests that female work groups are frequently subject to rules not applied to their male coworkers. In many factories, for example, rules that tightly constrain female work groups’ movement and social interactions are not applied to male work groups (Lee 1998; Wolf 1992). Frontline service positions where women are often concentrated also entail significant rule-based constraint, as workers receive instruction regarding not only timely and accurate service but also appropriate demeanor, attitude and appearance (Austrin 1991).

### ***On-the-Job Training***

Benchmark labor process theories have long noted a shift away from constraint-based controls such as those listed above in favor of techniques that secure control by aligning the interests of workers and firms, especially in predominantly male environments. Although more costly, these methods secure voluntary consent while maintaining the dignity of employees (Friedman 1977; Hodson 1996). On-the-job training, for example, enhances effort and commitment via structured avenues for skill development, earnings growth and career advancement, especially in manual work (Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979) and the professions (Greenwood, Deephouse, and Li 2007).

Dominant ideologies about women’s and men’s familial responsibilities and orientations (caretaking vs. breadwinning) are key factors in women’s limited access to these opportunities. Employers equate male sex with capacity for (and interest in) long hours and long-term employment associated with on-the-job training, and they are often reluctant to entrust women, as presumed caregivers, with controls premised on a lengthy time horizon (Tomaskovic-Devey and

Skaggs 2002). Stereotypes of women as uncommitted thus become self-fulfilling prophecies as organizational gatekeepers route female applicants into “dead-end” and part-time jobs, where task segmentation, automation, direct supervision and demeaning rules impinge on worker dignity (Marsden, Kalleberg, and Cook 1993; Ong 1987; Ross and Wright 1998; Wolf 1992).

### ***Participation***

Participation in workplace decision making through provisions for bounded autonomy over work activities and/or formal solicitation of worker input is a second key means by which to secure voluntary effort from employees. Expanding choices, even within narrowly defined limits, can help firms secure employee effort and even goodwill, enhancing satisfaction, commitment and effort in part by communicating to workers that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Burawoy 1979; Hodson 2001). Resistance to participative structures highlighted in some research generally derives from its use in combination with constraint-based controls that undermine these ideals (Vallas 2003).

Similar to their exclusion from opportunities for on-the-job training, women’s exposure to participatory control is limited by the industrial, occupational and job segregation that excludes them from firms and work groups where it is used to garner worker consent (Friedman 1977; see also Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002). Employer stereotypes also play an important role, causing some managers to regard women as lacking interest, ambition or general fit with the requirements of flexible production (Wright 2001; Zanoni 2011).

## **Analyzing Control and Gender Inequality in Work Experiences**

Research on sex segregation and workplace gender inequality strongly suggests that women’s and men’s work experiences may vary as a function of control. Male work groups, especially those populated almost entirely by men, are more likely to encounter control structures based on persuasion, while female work groups confront control structures based on constraint. Furthermore, these disparate approaches to control should produce differences in outcomes pertaining to workplace dignity. Coercive control combinations are likely to impinge on worker dignity while persuasive bundles of control should have the reverse effect.

### ***Data and Measures***

This study investigates complex combinations of control and their emergent impacts on worker dignity in male and female work groups using data on 155 work groups culled from the population of published, book-length, English-language workplace ethnographies. An electronic and physical search of databases, libraries and bibliographies yielded approximately 800 ethnographies for potential inclusion in the study, 162 of which contained sufficient information

to code organizational and job-related data for at least one clearly identifiable work group (individuals performing the same job in a single organizational setting). A team of four researchers developed the content coding instrument, generating a list of variables and response categories representing core concepts in the workplace literature (organizational attributes, the labor process, workplace social relationships, worker resistance, psychological outcomes and so on) and revising it following trial codings of eight ethnographies.

All 162 books were then coded by the same initial team of researchers and participants in a year-long graduate research practicum and year-long graduate assistantships funded by the National Science Foundation. Although content coding inevitably results in loss of information (especially localized meanings understood only in context), aggregation of content-coded data allows for systematic investigation of complex phenomena not typically found in surveys or other quantitative data sources. To optimize the quality of quantitative data derived from the ethnographies, coders were trained to use a common coding protocol, relied on direct evidence presented in ethnographers' published findings, and recorded page numbers where data used in coding decisions were found (variables without sufficient data were recorded as "missing"). The coders worked individually and then met as a group to examine each case in detail. If a coder was uncertain about how to code a particular variable, then the entire team reviewed relevant passages and came to a consensus regarding the best answer. The data, coding instrument, coding protocol, ethnographic sources and publications based on these data may be viewed at <http://www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/rdh/Workplace-Ethnography-Project.html>.

The entire coding project generated data on 204 work groups from an array of industries, occupations and organizations, 155 of which (culled from 155 of the 162 books coded) included information pertaining to all variables in this study. Given continuity in the gender division of labor over time and an interest in identifying enduring patterns (Bielby and Baron 1986; Cockburn 1988a; Reskin and Roos 1990; Williams 1995:10-11), cases in this study were not limited to any particular time frame, although most (92% of predominantly female work groups, and 75% overall) were conducted after 1970. Because persuasive controls have expanded primarily in predominantly male work environments, inclusion of earlier cases maximizes constraint detectable in male work groups, thus allowing for the most conservative possible test of hypotheses.<sup>2</sup> Results of analyses limited to more recent years and regressions controlling for organization size and timing of the original case study indeed suggest that relationships between controls and dignity are enduring patterns not attributable to temporal variations in ethnographers' observations (see the Analytic Strategy and Results section for more information).

Because work groups are embedded in organizations, which are further divided into establishments, departments and so on, there exists no sampling frame from which to draw a representative sample. A broad range of industrial, occupational and organizational settings are represented in these data, as Table 1 illustrates. This is not to say that these work group-level data are representative of the occupational distributions of individuals. Cases are typical but

**Table 1. Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Locus of Work Groups in the Sample of Workplace Ethnographies (n = 155)**

	%
<b>Industry</b>	
Extractive and construction	5.8
Nondurable manufacturing	19.5
Durable and electronic manufacturing	12.3
Transportation equipment	7.1
Transportation, communication, and utilities	7.8
Wholesale and retail trade	10.4
Finance, insurance, real estate and business services	6.5
Personal services	7.8
Professional and related services	18.8
Public administration	3.9
Total	100.0
<b>Occupation</b>	
Professional	23.9
Manager	8.4
Clerical	3.2
Sales	3.9
Skilled	8.4
Assembly	25.2
Unskilled	6.5
Service	17.4
Farm	3.2
Total	100.0
<b>Organization Size</b>	
0 to 49	26.4
50 to 99	7.6
100 to 499	22.2
500 to 999	12.5
1000 to 4999	19.4
5000 to 500000	11.8
Total	100.0

not representative of women's and men's jobs, with some occupations under-represented and others overrepresented.

According to 2009 data published by the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 40 percent of employed women in the United States work in the 20 most common occupations for women, and some of these, especially teachers,

**Table 2. Codes, Notation, Means and Standard Deviations for Key Dependent and Independent Variables**

	Codes and Notation	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Dependent Variables</b>			
Autonomy	1-none 2-little 3-average 4-high 5-very high	3.0	1.3
Creativity	1-none 2-little 3-average 4-high 5-very high	2.8	1.3
Meaningfulness	Workers find their work: 1-meaningless 2-somewhat meaningful 3-fulfilling	2.0	.8
Satisfaction	1-very low 2-moderately low 3-average 4-high 5-very high	3.0	1.1
Commitment	Commitment to organizational goals: 0-no 1-yes	.6	.5
Effort	1-reticence practiced widely 2-conditional effort given 3-extra effort given freely	2.5	.7
<b>Independent Variables<sup>a</sup></b>			
Supervision	0-no (super) 1-direct supervision by a supervisor or work group spends at least 65% of work time with customers (SUPER)	.6	.5
Segmentation	0-job entails at least some complexity (seg) 1-job requires speed and dexterity only (SEG)	.2	.4
Automation	0-no (auto) 1-yes, machinery performs at least some part of workers' jobs (AUTO)	.2	.4
Rules	0-no (rules) 1-yes, written rules specification or targets dictate some of all of work activities (RULES)	.7	.5
On-the-job training	0-no (ojt) 1-extensive on-the-job training in workers' current position (OJT)	.2	.4
Participation <sup>b</sup>	0-no (particip) 1-firm assigns workers responsibility for the quality of their own work or formally solicits their input (PARTICIP)	.4	.5

**Note:** <sup>a</sup>The analytic technique employed in this study requires that independent variables be both binary and limited in number. <sup>b</sup>Participation usually entails peer surveillance, as well. Ethnographers observed discipline enforced by workers in 80% of work groups deemed participatory; the rate was even higher among work groups in manual (88%) and managerial (100%) occupations.

teachers' aids, retail managers and customer service representatives, are not represented in these data. Likewise, some of the most common occupations for full-time employed men, especially janitors and retail managers, are not included, and manual work is overrepresented for both women and men (see Padavic 2004). The data nevertheless offer significant variation in the types of women's and men's jobs represented and in the dependent variables, making it possible

both to draw some conclusions about male and female work environments and to analyze relationships between control and dignity at work.

Table 2 presents codes, means and standard deviations for dependent and independent variables. Dependent variables include an array of items associated with self-actualization and prosocial behavior on the job (see Hodson 2001). They include ordinal measures of *autonomy* (the level of independent worker input into work tasks), *creativity* (the degree to which workers use their own ideas to realize the goals in their work), *meaningfulness* (the degree to which workers regard their own work as meaningful), *satisfaction* (work groups' general contentment with intrinsic and extrinsic rewards) and *effort* (voluntary initiative on the part of workers) along with a binary indicator of *commitment* (a tendency for work group members to adopt organizational goals as their own). As noted above, variables were coded on the basis of ethnographers' reports. The following passage, for example, describes a work group's lack of commitment to organizational goals:

On one occasion, the press foreman requested that in the future more overtime be worked "for the sake of the company." The worker reaction to these proposals, although expressed in a friendly fashion, was firm opposition. To the suggestion that they work more overtime "for the sake of the company," they spontaneously replied, "We work to protect our standard of living and not for the benefit of the company." (Cole 1971:65)

Each mode of control is measured with a binary variable coded from descriptions of work procedures. Four of these operate primarily via constraint and tend to erode worker dignity. *Supervision* indicates that the work group is subject to direct supervision, either by a boss or via significant proportion of work time (at least 65%) spent with customers. *Segmentation* denotes that tasks lack complexity associated with people, data or things. *Automation* signifies that a machine performs at least some part of workers' jobs. *Rules* denotes exposure to written rules, specifications or targets dictating some or all of work activities. Two more advantageous forms of control help maintain dignity by aligning the interests of workers and management. *On-the-job training* indicates that workers receive extensive on-the-job training in their current position. *Participation* signifies that the firm formally solicits workers' input or assigns them responsibility for the quality of their own work. This form of control usually involves peer surveillance as well (ethnographers observed discipline enforced by coworkers in 80 percent of work groups subject to participatory control).

## Analytic Strategy and Results

Compared with traditional regression methods, analytic techniques able to account for the combined presence of multiple controls have greater potential to represent work settings as they are objectively organized and subjectively experienced by workers. My primary analytic strategy therefore employs QCA,

an analytic tool developed to assist researchers with statistical analysis of qualitative studies rich in detail but few in number (Ragin, Drass, and Davey 2006). The software calls on the researcher to identify a limited number of binary independent variables, and then deploys Boolean and algorithmic logic to identify all possible combinations and reduce them to the least amount of information necessary to predict an effect on the dependent variable.

This process identifies complex combinations of variables that influence outcomes of interest, condensed to the least amount of information needed for understanding processes at hand. QCA thus makes it possible to take advantage of the complex insights of qualitative, case-oriented approaches, while allowing derivation of parsimonious and generalizable conclusions analogous to those generated from quantitative, variable-oriented techniques. The result is a case-sensitive quantitative analysis that, in some cases, better represents (relative to variable-centered techniques) the complexity of causation in the social world (Ragin 1987).

QCA has been increasingly used as a tool to understand complex patterns of causation observed in case studies. Until recently, however, this analytic technique was used to identify configurations that produced or prevented a *single* outcome in *all* cases. Researchers have begun to employ a novel approach, calling on QCA to identify configurations of independent variables with a range of effects, allowing identification of complex combinations of circumstances impacting the *likelihood* (rather than the certainty) of *multiple* (rather than singular) dependent variables. QCA was recently used in this way to identify organizational, social and historical circumstances that combine to encourage striking and other acts of resistance (Roscigno and Hodson 2004), and to identify combinations of workplace attributes that simultaneously promote organizational success and worker dignity (Hodson and Roscigno 2004).

Relative to the questions raised earlier regarding control combinations, I use QCA to identify control configurations (“bundles” of control techniques) in work groups with varying percent female, including those with very low (less than 10%), low (10 to 39%), and high (at least 60%) rates of female participation (smaller sample size restricts subdivision of predominantly female work groups).<sup>3</sup> These subsamples (n = 77, 26, and 36, respectively) are useful for investigating how inclusion and gendering processes shape conditions in female work groups, and for illuminating differences in conditions almost exclusively available to men due to processes of social closure (see Bergmann 2011; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002) versus those where women have made greater inroads (see England 2010; Reskin and Roos 1990). I then investigate the distribution of female and male work groups into “coercive” versus “persuasive” control contexts, depending on the balance and presence/absence of controls based on constraint versus alignment of worker and firm interests.

Finally, I return to the entire sample of 155 work groups to compute dependent variable means for work groups exposed (vs. not exposed) to each typology. This technique allows for a standardized comparison of configurations—one untainted by selectivity and distortion that may result from reliance

on comparisons within predominantly female or predominantly male subsamples—and allows for examination of multiple dependent variables, rather than a single dependent variable as in more traditional uses of QCA. Subsequent reimmersion in the original ethnographies helps to illuminate how these processes manifest in women's daily lives; how women take part in constructing their own realities; and how coercive control structures can engender informal resistance intended to retrieve worker dignity.<sup>4</sup>

The control configurations are grouped into two categories distinguished by the presence and absence of different types of control. For each control typology, upper case denotes the presence of a given form of control, lower case indicates its absence, and “\*” signifies their use in combination. *Coercive* approaches are those in which a majority of elements represent the presence of constraint or the absence of controls that align worker and firm interests. For example, a typology labeled “SUPER\*RULES\*ojt\*particip” indicates simultaneous presence of two types of constraint (supervision and rules) and absence of both interest-aligning controls (on-the-job training and participation). *Persuasive* approaches are those in which at least half of the components represent an absence of constraint or the presence of controls that align the interests of workers and firms. For example, “super\*auto\*seg” indicates an absence of these three forms of constraint.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Control Typologies in Female and Male Work Groups***

Table 3 displays the control typologies identified among female and male work groups, a case study exemplifying each configuration, and the distribution of female and male work groups into coercive and persuasive settings. Male work groups tended to encounter more persuasive control packages. Of the nine control typologies identified among male work groups with very low (less than 10%) female participation, six are persuasive.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the male work groups in this category (53 of 77) were employed in these settings. They included managers, surgeons, engineers, truckers, chefs and participative assemblers, for example. Only 24 of 77 work groups with very low rates of female participation confronted coercive control typologies; they included assemblers, longshoremen and miners among others. A similarly large share of control configurations identified in the remaining male work groups (10 to 39% female) were persuasive, and 19 of the 26 work groups in this category were employed in these settings (they included school administrators, managers, physicians and firefighters, for example). The seven remaining work groups, including assemblers and meat processors, for example, were employed in work groups confronting coercive control structures.

These figures contrast sharply with those of female work groups. Of the six control types identified among female work groups, four are coercive. Three are composed entirely of attributes denoting presence of constraint or absence of interest-aligning controls and all four involve direct supervision. Furthermore, 21 of the 36 female work groups encountered one of these four coercive control

Table 3. Control Typologies Identified in Female and Male Work Groups, Example Ethnographies and Distribution of Cases<sup>a</sup>

Example Ethnography		Cases
<b>Male Work Groups</b>		
Less Than 10% Female		
<i>Coercive</i>		
SUPER*RULES*ojt*particip	Williams, Claire. 1981. <i>Open Cut</i> . Boston: Allen and Unwin. (miners)	15
SUPER*AUTO*SEG*ojt	Hamper, Ben. 1991. <i>Rivthead</i> . New York: Warner. (assemblers)	4
AUTO*SEG*RULES*ojt	DiFazio, William. 1985. <i>Longshoremen</i> . South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey. (longshoremen)	5
<i>Persuasive</i>		
super*auto*seg	Katz, Pearl. 1999. <i>The Scalpel's Edge</i> . Boston: Allyn and Bacon. (surgeons)	13
auto*seg*particip	Ouellet, Lawrence J. 1994. <i>Pedal to the Metal</i> . Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (truckers)	11
auto*seg*ojt	Fine, Gary Alan. 1996. <i>Kitchens</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (restaurant cooks)	8
seg*RULES*OJT*particip	Vincent, Claude L. 1979. <i>Policeman</i> . Toronto: Gage. (police officers)	7
super*seg*RULES*ojt*PARTICIP	Zussman, Robert. 1985. <i>Mechanics of the Middle Class</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press. (engineers)	10
SUPER*seg*RULES*OJT	Besser, Terry L. 1996. <i>Team Toyota</i> . Albany: SUNY Press. (participative assemblers)	4
10 to 39% Female		
<i>Coercive</i>		
SUPER*auto*SEG*ojt*particip	Fink, Deborah. 1998. <i>Cutting into the Meatpacking Line</i> . Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press. (meat processing)	4

(Continued)

Table 3. continued

	Example Ethnography	Cases
SUPER *AUTO *SEG *RULES *PARTICIP	Milkman, Ruth. 1997. <i>Farewell to the Factory</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press. (participative assembly)	2
SUPER *AUTO *seg *RULES * ojt *particip	Williams, Bruce B. 1987. <i>Black Workers in an Industrial Suburb</i> . New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. (production line)	1
<i>Persuasive</i>		
super *auto *seg *RULES *ojt	Wolcott, Harry F. 1973. <i>The Man in the Principal's Office</i> . Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.	6
super *seg *RULES *OJT *PARTICIP	Hodgson, Richard C. et al. <i>Managing in the Corporate Interest</i> . Boston: Harvard University. (managers)	4
super *AUTO *SEG *rules * ojt *PARTICIP	Edelman, Birgitta. 1997. <i>Shunters at Work</i> . Philadelphia: Coronet Books. (railway workers)	1
SUPER *auto *seg *RULES *OJT	Cherkovich, Carol. 1997. <i>Real Heat</i> . New Brunswick: Philadelphia University Press. (firefighters)	3
SUPER *auto *seg *PARTICIP	Cassell, Joan. 1991. <i>Expected Miracles</i> . Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (physicians)	5
<b>Female Work Groups</b>		
60 + % Female		
<i>Coercive</i>		
SUPER *AUTO *SEG *RULES *ojt	Reiter, Ester. 1992. <i>Making Fast Food</i> . Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. (frontline fast-food servers)	5
SUPER *SEG * ojt *particip	Cavendish, Ruth. 1982. <i>Women on the Line</i> . Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (assemblers)	7
SUPER *RULES * ojt *particip	Constable, Nicole. 1997. <i>Maid to Order in Hong Kong</i> . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. (maids)	2

SUPER*auto*seg*RULES*particip	Foner, Nancy. 1994. <i>The Caregiving Dilemma</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press. (nursing aides)	7
<i>Persuasive</i>		
auto*seg*ojt	Street, Annette Faye. 1992. <i>Inside Nursing</i> . Albany, NY: SUNY Press. (nurses)	13
super*auto*rules*ojt*PARTICIP	Barker, James R. 1999. <i>The Discipline of Teamwork</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (participative assemblers)	2

**Note:** <sup>a</sup> Upper-case denotes presence of the form of control in question, lower-case denotes its absence, and "\*" denotes combination. Some work groups matched more than one control typology. For this table only, I assigned these cases to the most detailed typology they matched. A few work groups matched equally detailed typologies. To place these, I matched them to categories similar in industrial and occupational character. In each of these situations, I selected among (and not between) coercive and persuasive control typologies. None fell in both coercive and persuasive categories.

packages, including nursing aides, maids, frontline fast food workers and assemblers, among others. Only two of the six control configurations identified could be classified as persuasive. They were found in jobs such as nursing, waitressing and sales.<sup>6</sup> Analyses limited to cases conducted in more recent years produced even more marked differences, consistent with diminished reliance on coercion in male but not female work groups. Cases initiated by 1975 (n = 95), 1980 (n = 65) and 1985 (n = 47) revealed rates of coercion in female work groups ranging from 56 to 57 percent (compared with 58% in the full sample) and rates ranging from 10 to 18 percent in predominantly male work groups (compared with 31% in the full sample).

### ***Coercive and Persuasive Control in Male Work Groups***

Table 4 reports dependent variable means for all work groups (regardless of sex composition) exposed versus not exposed to control configurations identified in predominantly male work groups and statistical significance of mean differences. Following Roscigno and Hodson (2004), I tested impacts of binary configuration variables using ordinal and logistic regression models also controlling for organization size and timing of the case study. Significance levels of configuration coefficients (which were nearly identical to those reported here) indicate that these relationships are enduring patterns that hold up over time.

The upper panel of Table 4 displays bundles of control identified in male work groups with very low rates of female participation. As expected, coercive control settings have a strong significant and negative effect on every dependent variable in the analysis. None of the persuasive control configurations apparent in these predominantly male work groups involve segmentation. With



SUPER*AUTO*seg	2.4	<	3.0 *	2.0	<	2.8 **	1.8	2.0	2.6	3.0	.5	.6	2.1	2.5				
*RULES*ojt*particip																		
<i>Persuasive</i>																		
super*auto*seg	3.7	>	2.8 ***	3.4	>	2.6 **	2.4	>	1.9 **	3.5	>	2.8 **	.8	>	.6 †	2.6	>	2.4 †
*RULES*ojt																		
super*seg*RULES	4.5	>	2.9 ***	4.3	>	2.6 ***	2.6	>	2.0 **	3.3	2.9	1.0	>	.6 ***	3.0	>	2.4 ***	
*OJT*PARTICIP																		
super*AUTO*SEG*rules	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.8	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	.0	.6	2.0	2.5			
*ojt*PARTICIP																		
SUPER*auto	3.1	3.0	3.6	2.7	2.4	2.0	2.4	2.0	3.6	>	2.9 †	.7	.6	2.9	>	2.4 *		
*seg*RULES*OJT																		
SUPER*auto*seg	3.2	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.9	.6	.6	2.6	2.4				
*PARTICIP																		

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 † p < .1, two-tailed tests of significant mean differences

**Note:** <sup>a</sup> Control typologies were identified for work groups less than 10% female (n = 77) and 10 to 39% female (n = 26). Means were computed using the entire sample of work groups (n = 155) and therefore are *not* limited to male or female work groups. Means labeled “Config” were computed by averaging the dependent variable scores for all cases matching a given typology. Means labeled “Other” were not exposed to the typology in question, and were computed by averaging dependent variable scores for all cases outside that typology.

few exceptions (where effects were in the expected direction but not significant), these configurations allow for greater dignity at work, as indicated by significantly higher levels of autonomy, creativity, meaningfulness and satisfaction. Relationships with commitment and effort were also evident, but not always significant. Half of the persuasive typologies observed among male work groups were associated with significantly higher rates of commitment, and another half had higher mean scores for effort.

The lower panel of Table 4 displays bundles of control identified in male work groups with somewhat higher female representation. Effects of coercive control structures were very similar to those identified in male work groups with very low rates of female participation. Interestingly, however, a far lower share of persuasive control structures offered significant benefits for worker dignity. Although they register as persuasive given the overall balance of constraint-based and interest-aligning controls, several entail constraints that erode worker dignity (e.g., supervision, automation and/or segmentation). Supplementary constraints thus appear to mitigate potential benefits of persuasive controls in these settings.

### ***Coercive Control in Female Work Groups***

Table 5 addresses control packages identified in predominantly female work groups. Similar to coercive male environments, the coercive control packages found in these settings had significant negative implications for worker dignity. Although SUPER\*auto\*seg\*RULES\*particip (a control configuration encountered by nursing aides among others) generated somewhat higher rates of meaningfulness (despite lower levels of autonomy), each of the remaining coercive control configurations was associated with significantly lower levels of every dependent variable in the analysis. For example, SUPER\*RULES\*ojt\*particip (a configuration encountered by maids and others) produced significantly lower rates of autonomy, creativity, satisfaction, meaningfulness, commitment and effort. Outcomes were even less favorable in the two remaining coercive control settings (SUPER\*SEG\*ojt\*particip and SUPER\*AUTO\*SEG\*RULES\*ojt).

Sallie Westwood's (1982) participant observation of machine operators (90% of whom were female) in a British clothing factory helps to illustrate how control techniques (in this case, SUPER\*AUTO\*SEG\*RULES\*ojt) operate independently and in concert to shape the work experience.<sup>7</sup> The combination of segmentation and automation, for example, removed autonomy and creativity from workers' tasks:

Each woman was responsible for making up part of a garment—no one made a whole dress, or a whole blouse. Instead, a woman might sew side-seams all day, every day, week in and week out. The work was highly repetitive and, as the women attested, very boring. Changes of style and seasonal variations rang a superficial change in the nature of the work, but whether the cloth was cotton or wool, sewing pieces together was the same. The individual worker had no control over what she would do.(19-20)

**Table 5. Mean Dependent Variable Scores for All Work Groups Exposed and Not Exposed to Control Configurations Identified in Female Work Groups, Significance of Mean Differences, and Direction of Significant Differences<sup>a</sup>**

	Autonomy		Creativity		Meaningfulness		Satisfaction		Commitment		Effort	
	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other	Config	Other
<i>Female Work Groups</i>												
<i>Coercive</i>												
SUPER*AUTO												
*SEG*RULES*ojt	1.4 <	3.1***	1.2 <	2.9***	1.1 <	2.1***	1.9 <	3.1***	.2 <	.7***	1.9 <	2.5**
SUPER*SEG												
*ojt*particip	1.5 <	3.3***	1.4 <	3.0***	1.2 <	2.2***	1.8 <	3.2***	.3 <	.7***	1.9 <	2.6***
SUPER*RULES												
*ojt*particip	2.1 <	3.3***	1.9 <	3.0***	1.7 <	2.1***	2.4 <	3.2***	.4 <	.7**	2.1 <	2.6***
SUPER*auto*seg												
*RULES*particip	2.6 <	3.1*	2.7	2.8	2.3 >	2.0†	3.1	2.9	.6	.6	2.5	2.5
<i>Persuasive</i>												
auto*seg*ojt	3.2 >	2.8*	3.0 >	2.6†	2.2 >	1.8***	3.2 >	2.7**	.6	.6	2.5	2.4
super*auto*rules												
*ojt*PARTICIP	4.6 >	2.9**	4.2 >	2.7*	2.6 >	2.0†	4.0 >	2.9†	1.0 >	.6***	3.0 >	2.4***

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05 † p < .1, two-tailed tests of significant mean differences

**Note:** <sup>a</sup> Control typologies were identified for work groups at least 60% female (n = 36). Means were computed using the entire sample of work groups (n = 155) and therefore are *not* limited to male or female work groups. Means labeled “Config” were computed by averaging the dependent variable scores for all cases matching a given typology. Means labeled “Other” were not exposed to the typology in question, and were computed by averaging dependent variable scores for all cases outside that typology.

The addition of direct supervision and demeaning rules further limited women's autonomy, and their application to female but not male work groups intensified feelings of powerlessness. One worker, Annie, describes how differential treatment of women relative to individuals in predominately male work groups employed in the same firm generated a sense of relative deprivation with respect to autonomy:

The men get away with murder in this company. Just for example, every night the women leave here one or other of them is checked by security. But the men, they get into their cars and off they go. . . . The men are not supervised like the women. . . . The men in the dyehouse, the cutters and layer-uppers are just doing their own thing most of the time, in my view.(71-2)

Exclusion from opportunities for on-the-job training also precluded women's advancement and confined them to positions subject to coercive control:

As machinists, the women were expected to clean their machines and to replace the needles should they become blunt or broken—but no more than this. . . . One of the young supervisors, Carol, was keenly aware of the male monopoly on skill: "They never train the girls for that kind of work. *The men keep it to themselves.*" (23, emphasis in original).

What is more, this particular combination of control techniques, particularly segmentation and emphasis on speed in rule-based production targets, has made it difficult for workers to achieve the meaningfulness they might otherwise have derived from their tasks—limiting commitment to the organization. A worker explains:

You can be really good and it makes no difference, it's speed they want. . . . I came here because I used to sew at home . . . and my husband's friend used to say I was really good so I should go to StitchCo because they made quality goods. . . . Then, we used to put our initials on the back of some of the labels because we were proud of our work. Now, I don't even put it on the tag of the work. Because we have to work so quickly the quality is gone. It's the same for the cloth and the cutting, it's rubbish. We make *rubbish* here now and . . . I wonder . . . who buys this stuff.(46-7).

Consistent with understandings of resistance as a means to reclaim dignity denied in formal production arrangements (see Hodson 2001), the women engaged in collective resistance to achieve their aims. For example, when the firm instituted targets the women believed to be unfair, their protest took the form of jobs poorly done. Their collective withdrawal of effort succeeded in securing for the women not only their immediate goal but also greater control over their time.

They consistently and deliberately got the packing wrong and spent their time chatting about the dispute. . . . Later in the week, the [shipment of

clothing] came back. Management [temporarily] suspended the [targets] ... and made an appeal to get the job done as quickly as possible. ... Amina responded: "Slow down everyone." We all grinned conspiratorially. ... [T]hey maintained this collectively and individually over the two weeks. ... The women had fought and won their own time back again.(53-4)

### ***Persuasive Control in Female Work Groups***

Female work groups are by no means devoid of intrinsic rewards. Although persuasive controls are observed less frequently in these settings, they enhance worker dignity where they are applied. For example, the two female work groups encountering super\*auto\*rules\*ojt\*PARTICIP (e.g., participative assemblers) enjoyed significantly higher levels of every dependent variable in the analysis. The remaining persuasive approach to control (auto\*seg\*ojt) was encountered by just over a third of female work groups. The absence of both segmentation and automation enhances worker dignity, but the absence of career ladders appears to somewhat mitigate the benefits. Although this typology is associated with significantly higher rates of autonomy, creativity, meaningfulness and satisfaction relative to comparison groups, the differences are smaller in comparison to those found in many predominantly male settings. Furthermore, no benefits are apparent in terms of commitment or effort.

Nurses in Annette Street's (1992) study encountered this persuasive configuration. As the following quote illustrates, the absence of segmentation and automation leaves room for autonomy despite constraints imposed by doctors' orders:

Although much of the nurses' role involves following doctor's orders for the patient, Ann is making independent decisions on the provision of physical care for her patient. ... The nurse needs to ensure that the patient has adequate air ... and ... [decides] when the patient needs assisted air intake or needs to be weaned off the ventilator. ... [She] is responsible for the technological interventions and the supervision of drugs and food/drink intake ... [and] regulates noise and visitors, often a challenging role requiring sensitivity and diplomacy.(185-86)

Although the authority of physicians narrows the scope of their autonomy, nurses are not passive in the face of constraint; they instead exercise creativity within these bounds to ensure the best possible care for their patients. An absence of segmentation and automation is crucial to their efforts. Here, Street (1992) describes a nurse's creative approach to getting the job done:

Bev had set the ventilator to the low level that her experience suggested was appropriate for the patient. A new surgical intern ... ignored her and ... set the ventilator to a higher setting ... remind[ing] her that [this was] "my patient." [Bev] was concerned that the [gentleman] would be rather uncomfortable. ... [and] decided to go over [the intern's] head. ... [S]he called the senior anesthetist on another pretext and then casually

mentioned: “We are maintaining the patient on level 10.” As she had predicted, the senior doctor replied: “Oh well, we can put him on 4 now, don’t you think?”... When the intern returned and queried the change, she told him that the senior anesthetist had changed the levels when he came into the bay.(234)

Their use of clinical skills to make a difference in the health and experience of patients allows nurses to derive meaning and satisfaction from their jobs.

Nurses recognize the value of their clinical skills, knowledge, experiences, and relationships when they are participating in the process of transformation of a person from illness to health or from illness to death... [N]urses ... spoke about the satisfaction [they felt] when they were able to recognize a potential difficulty before it was apparent through the regular diagnostic channels ... or the value of the nurturant activities despite the devaluing of this by a society interested in dramatic cures.(255-56)

Importantly, however, other aspects of the control structure mitigate some of the benefits of persuasive control. Although nurses in Street’s study freely offered additional effort in the provision of patient care, they were frustrated with a lack of input into hospital affairs and withdrew both commitment and effort in response to policies they found objectionable—a finding consistent with the absence of any significant positive effect of this configuration (auto\*seg\*ojt) on either of these outcomes. For example, they often refused to participate in written record keeping, which they interpreted as administrators’ emphasis on recorded rather than actual care. They ignored charts, entered minimal information and either busied themselves with patients or were deliberately absent at the end of their shifts, preferring instead to exchange information verbally upon handover or to ask questions as they arose. In thwarting the organization’s efforts in these regards, nurses asserted their claims to dignity at work.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, I integrate insights from the workplace gender stratification and labor process literatures, and use content-coded data from workplace ethnographies to investigate control and dignity in female and male work groups. Findings point to substantial gender variation in the nature and degree of workplace control, with significant implications for dignity at work. Male work groups, especially those with very low percent female, tend to encounter persuasive arrangements that enhance worker dignity, while their female counterparts confront more coercive “bundles” of control that erode the foundations of a dignified, meaningful and productive work life. Reimmersion in the case studies highlights women’s use of agency to preserve dignity in the face of constraint.

This study advances the literature theoretically in two key ways. First, it builds on established understandings of workplace gender inequality by exploring hidden disparities in the experience of women’s and men’s jobs and demonstrating

how the organization of work, especially workplace control, is a fundamental aspect of gender inequality. Prior research on gender stratification has shown that sex segregation has important consequences for tangible outcomes such as authority and wages, but has often been less explicit about variation in the organization of work and control strategies, particularly complex combinations of control generating gender inequalities in the work experience.

Investigating this issue through a labor process lens—especially while attending to complex combinations of control and their effects on worker dignity—sheds light on differences in the content of women's and men's jobs, giving dimension to established awareness that positions set aside for men are more lucrative by demonstrating that they are also more conducive to working with dignity. Although these hidden aspects of inequality are difficult to measure, they are highly important aspects of individuals' lives. This study thus reveals some of the concrete ways that gender is built into organizations and sheds light on important day-to-day activities that constitute and reproduce gender as an institution (see Acker 2006; Martin 2004; Ridgeway 1997).

Second, these findings inform labor process research by highlighting the significance of control combinations and by pointing to work group composition as a key consideration in the organization and experience of work. Scholarship in this tradition has long sought to explain how dominant modes of control change over time, vary across diverse industrial segments and affect worker sentiments and behavior, especially in manual and mostly male environments (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979; Hodson 1996). This study brings into view the use and effect of control combinations and demonstrates that they are hardly monolithic across status groups. Female work environments are notable for not only their disproportionate constraint but also the prominence of direct supervision—a mode of control long characterized in labor process research as waning over time, but which combines with other constraints to demean and deny opportunity to women. These findings thus bring into sharp relief the need to consider workers' status group membership when applying theories of control.

Admittedly, these data—while ideal for investigating variations across work groups in heterogeneous settings and augmenting both the gender work stratification and labor process literatures—are less helpful in disentangling the mechanisms at play. Some of these are clearly organizational; control structures that isolate workers, routinize their tasks and dictate the pace of production directly affect levels of autonomy and creativity, for example. Outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment and effort are likely more relational, although the precise mechanisms need elaboration. How do control arrangements influence interpersonal dynamics at work and to what degree do these interactions explain effects on worker sentiments and behavior? Do workers confronting oppressive control structures derive less satisfaction from their jobs and withdraw effort in part because they feel bullied, unfairly treated or disrespected by those around them? Are these processes subject to variations by workers' gender and/or by gender composition of work groups? And do the psychological effects of control affect interactions in other institutional spheres? Do they influence familial relationships, for example, perhaps contributing to interpersonal dynamics that help

maintain the “vicious circle” of women’s subordination at home and at work (Hartmann 1976)? Answering these questions will help to deepen our understanding of gender disparities in the labor process and may expand the scope of their known effects.

## Notes

1. Women do not passively endure such assaults on their dignity. Many participate in organized opposition to management or engage in acts of smaller scale resistance to construct a sense of dignity at work (Hossfield 1990; Ong 1987; Salzinger 2003).
2. Gender variations in control observed in these data are consistent with mainstream labor process perspectives, which describe persuasive controls as concentrated in predominantly male industrial/occupational sectors; likewise, reductions in coercion observed among male work groups correspond with benchmark theories describing the emergence and growth of persuasive control structures as concentrated in male settings (Coverman 1986; Edwards 1979).
3. Data on occupational and job-level segregation suggest that most employed individuals would fit into one of these categories. According to the Department of Labor, the top 10 occupations held by women (including part-time workers) are an average of 76 percent female. The average is 71 percent for the top 10 occupations of full-time women and 25 percent for the top 10 occupations of full-time men (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2011). Segregation at the level of the work group is likely even higher, since firms sort women and men in the same occupations into different jobs (Bielby and Baron 1986; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Likewise, female work groups present in these data were concentrated on the upper end of this distribution (two thirds were 90 + % female). Larger numbers of work groups in the 60 to 89 percent female range may have allowed for interesting comparisons, perhaps suggesting issues related to shifting gender composition or factors underlying a lack of change.
4. Unfortunately, these data cannot address variation *within* work groups, including how an individual’s experience might differ from observed patterns (Padavic 2004). Some of the dependent variables (especially autonomy and creativity) closely reflect work arrangements, while others (e.g., satisfaction and commitment) are more sensitive to relational dynamics (see Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2010). For example, the latter are likely reduced among women who receive negative attention from coworkers in predominantly male environments (Bergmann 2011; Kanter 1977). Likewise, preferential treatment for males in predominantly female jobs may enhance men’s satisfaction, while eroding that of women (Wharton and Baron 1991; Williams 1995).
5. To maintain focus on the labor process, data on use of specific control techniques were coded from detailed descriptions of work procedures, and settings were classified as coercive or persuasive based on the combined presence/absence of controls in combinations detected by QCA. Attention to multiple control techniques used simultaneously helps account for the overall nature of control without relying on an author’s characterization, which could conceivably vary by author attributes, worker characteristics, framing of the study or other factors.
6. Relatively few (16 of the 155 cases in the total sample) were mixed-gender (40-59% female). Rates of coercion in these settings were higher than in predominantly male work groups and lower than in predominantly female work groups, falling very close to the midpoint.

7. In recent years, globalization has made it possible for transnational corporations to shift production of nondurable goods such as clothing to less industrialized nations overseas. Ethnographers' accounts of conditions in these settings (e.g., Muñoz 2008; Wolf 1992; Wright 2001) indicate that the tendency to segregate jobs by sex and to apply more coercive controls to female work groups are as strong, if not stronger, in these places than in more industrialized countries.

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