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Participatory Bureaucracy: Addressing Gender Inequality in Worker Cooperatives

ABSTRACT

Worker cooperatives—firms owned and governed by their workers—have experimented with organizational structure in aid of greater equality. Gender theorists and cooperativists have argued that bureaucracy produces inequality, but bureaucracy has also demonstrably reduced organizational inequality. By unpacking "bureaucracy," both discrete and mutually reinforcing effects of authority and organizational formalization are revealed. Using a comparative study of two highly formalized worker cooperatives, the inequality effects of formalized hierarchical and distributed management are identified: while formalization of managerial bureaucracy amplifies biases and intensifies inequality regimes, formalized but distributed participatory bureaucracy mutes and transforms biases and creates more egalitarian outcomes.

KEY-WORDS

BUREAUCRACY, GENDER INEQUALITY, GENDERED ORGANIZATIONS, INEQUALITY REGIMES, WORKER COOPERATIVES

1. Introduction

Workplace gender inequality is persistent and pervasive: across race and class, women are less likely to be paid for their labor, earn less when they are paid, and have fewer occupational opportunities than men (Cotter, Hermsen and Vanneman, 2004; England, Levine and Mishel, 2020). While one approach to understanding this persistence has focused on its reproduction through individual-level bias and discrimination (e.g., Reskin, 1988; Ridgeway, 2011), gendered organizations theory (Acker, 1990) has looked at how the organization itself propagates gender as a socially salient and hierarchical set of roles, meanings, and practices (Rodriguez et al., 2016; Nkomo and Rodriguez, 2019) rather than as a "container" for oppressive and pre-gendered individuals (Calás, Smircich and Holvino, 2014: 20). If bureaucratic organizations—highly formalized and steeply hierarchical—reproduce gender inequality, it makes sense to examine antibureaucratic organizations—characterized by informal relations and flattened authority—as a potential egalitarian interruption (Ashcraft, 2001; Ward, 2008; Chen, 2009; Sobering 2016). This category often includes worker cooperatives, market-oriented enterprises owned and democratically operated by and for the benefit of their workers. Not only were worker cooperatives central to the antibureaucratic wave of the 1970s (Pateman, 1970; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Swidler, 1979; Mansbridge, 1980; Ferguson, 1984; Freeman, 1984; Staggenborg, 1988), but at times were specifically formed to address gender inequality (Taylor, 1983; Curl, 2009; Davis, 2017).

Yet despite extensive experimentation with antibureaucratic organization, worker cooperatives are still characterized by a significant degree of gender inequality (Miller, 2012) that, as elsewhere, manifests with and through the class and ethnoracial inequalities of worker cooperatives (Schlachter and Prushinskaya, 2021). Although the gendered organizations approach has been intersectionally updated to explore how organizations are more broadly constituted as inequality regimes (Acker 2006a; 2006b), its focus on inequality as an outcome of bureaucracy fails to account for either the ways in which bureaucracies can remedy inequality (Eisenstein, 1995; Wickham et al., 2008) *or* the ways in which antibureaucratic organizations can produce inequality (Sirianni, 1993; Roth and Sonnert 2011). Here, I offer an explanation for this seemingly inconsistent relationship between bureaucracy and inequality by comparing two larger worker cooperatives with similar histories but different organizational structures and different inequality outcomes that I call "People's Daily Bread Bakery" and "One World Natural Grocery"[1]. This comparison shows that while gender and other relational inequalities can arise from either formalized hierarchies or informal flat organizations, a formalized but flat *participatory bureaucracy* has greater equity potential, including the potential of gender equity.

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[1]   Names and some non-essential identifying details of both businesses and all people interviewed have been changed to protect confidentiality.

In what follows, I argue that the focus on workplace gender inequality as both organizational (produced by workplace practices rather than simply contained with them) and relational (created within relationships between people rather than resident in any of them) is well founded, but that the contradictory findings regarding inequality outcomes of bureaucracy result from the assumption that bureaucracy is uniformly Weberian (1978): an irreducible bundle of written documents, official rules and policies, and a complexly rationalized division of labor in a hierarchy of positional power designating career ladders of specialized jobs characterized by certified expertise. Real-life bureaucratic organizations, instead, vary widely across time and space in degrees of formalization, hierarchy, and credentialism (Gouldner, 1954; Adler and Borys, 1996; Lee, 1998; Ashcraft, 2001; Salzinger, 2003). Worker cooperatives have also bureaucratized—including one of the most thoroughly studied communities of worker cooperatives, the Basque Mondragón Corporation (Hacker, 1989; Whyte and Whyte, 1991; 1988; Taylor 1994; Kasmir, 1996; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Errasti, 2013; Bretos and Errasti, 2017)—but the relationship between bureaucratic variation and gender inequality is particularly salient in worker cooperatives given their explicit commitment to workers' interests, their history of willingness to experiment with organizational structures, and their longstanding opposition to inequality. Using ethnographic data collected over a four-year period from the study of these two worker cooperatives, a bakery and a grocery both located in a West Coast region of the United States, this article asserts the need for intersectional organizational analyses such as inequality regimes to understand how liberationist organizations reproduce inequality, but problematizes a critique of bureaucracy as inherently generative of inequality.

2. Understanding gender inequality in worker-owned firms

Kathy Ferguson's provocative *Feminist Case against Bureaucracy* (1984)—that bureaucracies produce gender inequality—leads to two areas of research: the organizational rather than individual contribution to gender inequality, and the egalitarian potential of nonbureaucratic organization. Yet for many who had witnessed the explosion of worker cooperatives in the countercultural collectivist era of the 1970s and early 1980s, this claim is complicated by the failure of antibureaucratic worker cooperatives to eliminate inequality despite liberationist intentions.

2.1. Gender inequality, gendered organizations, and the intersectional turn

By the 1990s, gendered organizations (Acker, 1990) became the dominant approach to claim that organizations produced gender inequality by, as Britton and Logan (2008) outline: routinizing practices, policies, rules, and structures predicated on beliefs about gender, such as the legitimacy of a greater "breadwinner" wage for men (Collinson, 1992), the preference for women workers in electronics manufacture (Salzinger, 2003), or the meteoric rise to power for men in women-dominated professions (Williams, 1992); shaping the interactions of men and women on a

daily basis, such as the interplay between hypermasculine lawyers and maternal paralegals in law firms (Pierce, 1995) or the differential responsibilities assigned to men and women in the same organizational rank or position (Ollilainen and Rothschild, 2001; Britton, 2003); and reproducing gender as materially consequential and binary whether in traditional corporate settings (Ely, 1995; Steinberg, 1995) or in alternative organizations (Kleinman, 1996; Ostrander, 1999).

While the focus on organizational causes of gender inequality proved useful, subsequent gender scholarship was also deeply influenced by the contemporaneous conceptualizations of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991)—which argues that gender is not only simultaneously experienced through other key inequality categories such as race or class, but that it is constituted by and constitutive of those other categories—and of social location as a *matrix* (Collins, 1990) of concurrent advantage and disadvantage. These interventions opened a door to examine how workplace gender inequality was co-produced through ethnoracial and class inequality processes (Kennelly, 1999; Bettie, 2003; Wingfield, 2009; Kang, 2010) as well as organizational processes of producing and making salient inequalities of dis/ability, migration status, sexuality, and other key inequality criteria not included in the race/class/gender triumvirate (Robert and Harlan, 2006; Ward, 2008; Scrinzi, 2010); and explored the ways in which gender produced both privilege and discrimination (Lee, 1998; Williams, 2006; Dennissen, Benschop and van den Brink, 2018). Yet, although Acker later addresses implied and direct critiques by reconceptualizing organizational inequality regimes as mutually constituted by ethnoracial, class, and gender hierarchies (2006a; 2006b), the single-category gendered organizations framework continues to circulate widely in analyses of organizational gender inequality (e.g., Kelly et al., 2010; Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012; Nichols, 2013; Mastracci and Bowman, 2015; Thébaud, 2016).

2.2. Bureaucracy and inequality

The other direction Ferguson's (1984) link between bureaucracy and gender inequality leads is to the gender egalitarian potential of nonbureaucratic—often explicitly antibureaucratic—work organizations (Iannello, 1992; Morgan, 1996; Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004). Acker's inequality regimes approach (2006b) contends that hierarchies not only reproduce mental class schemas, but do so in part by relying on and reinforcing beliefs about race and gender inequality: because bureaucratic hierarchies naturalize domination and subordination as social relations, workplaces make all kinds of inequalities seem normal. Despite the admonitions of some towards a "nimble" intersectional focus on *either* organizational structures *or* individual identities (Mooney, 2016), Acker proposes that individual experiences within inequality regimes legitimate and obscure these interconnected inequalities as natural ways of structuring organizations and social life (Acker, 2006a; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

One problem with this critique, however, is the persistence of inequality despite flattening workplace authority. Self-managing teams and participative management have mushroomed in the past 30 years (Smith, 2001; Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Handel and Levine, 2004), but workplace

gender equality has not decreased, and may even be facilitated by the absence of managers (Ollilainen and Calasanti, 2007; Dennissen, Benschop and van den Brink, 2018) and the evaporation of career ladders (Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012). Indeed, nonbureaucratic "structurelessness" (Freeman, 1984 [1970])—characterized by a lack of both hierarchy and formalization, or the use of written and standardized rules, policies, and procedures such as hiring criteria, job descriptions, or grounds for termination—unwittingly devolve power to men in mixed-gender organizations (Kleinman, 1996) and to white women in organizations conceived of as "women's" organizations (Sirianni, 1993; Scott, 2005). Antibureaucratic approaches also overlook the effectivity of bureaucratic rules and policies in blocking the operation of individual-level biases that contribute to gender inequality (Ridgeway, 2011). The chummy homosociality of the "old boys' network" (Kanter, 1977) and white managers' inability to see Black women as committed and competent (Kennelly, 1999) can be tempered by formal personnel policies and state regulations moderating managerial action (Reskin and Roos, 1990; Reskin, 2002; Wickham et al., 2008). Where these bureaucratic procedures are absent, inequality is more likely to be present (Roth and Sonnert, 2011).

Critical to disentangling these inequality outcomes is our understanding of bureaucracy itself. Weber's (1978) defining characteristics—the standardization and routinization of action through rules, policies and procedures documented in files; the separation of persons from positions; hiring and promotion on the basis of certifiable technical expertise; the specialization and division of labor into discrete positions; the linking of positions within a hierarchy of authority; and a career within an organization—are often used to identify the fact or degree of organizational bureaucracy even though Weber himself insisted that an ideal type was not a normative description (Courpasson and Clegg, 2006). We do not, for instance, regard contemporary corporations as nonbureaucratic despite findings that the lifelong single-firm career has evaporated (Tilly, 1997). While Weberian characteristics are important markers, bureaucracy should better be understood as the logics and discourses that organize power through a mesh of largely explicit rules that govern and rationalize actors' behavior, and create accountability and predictability for their actions. An organization may be deficient in Weberian characteristics (such as the lifelong career) but no less bureaucratic if, on the whole, its organizational structure embodies and advances these bureaucratic logics and discourses (Baron et al., 2007). Indeed, particular "deficiencies" may be reconceptualized as variation—variation that reduces the reproduction of inequality.

2.3. Worker control and inequality

The inequality effects of organizations are increasingly important to social justice-oriented organizations in general and worker cooperatives in particular. As liberationist projects, worker cooperatives have sought to understand what their workers need and want, and then to transform labor and even markets as much as possible to provide for those needs and wants (Gibson-Graham, 2003; Pérotin, 2013; Berry and Bell, 2018). These liberationist projects have varied

over time and space: liberation from oligarchy (Greenberg, 1986; Hernandez, 2006; Healy, 2011; Blasi, Freeman and Kruse, 2013), industrialization and rationalization (Webb and Webb, 1897; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Jackall, 1984; Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013; Hoffmann, 2016; White, 2018), capitalism (Marx, 1864; Gunn, 2004; Leikin, 2004; Huertas-Noble, 2010; Safri, 2011; Gourevitch, 2013; Ji, 2019), neoliberalism (Gibson-Graham, 2003; Vieta, 2009; Pérotin, 2013; Williams, 2013; Dufays et al., 2020; Zitcer, 2021), racism (Du Bois, 1907; Leikin, 2004; Gordon Nembhard, 2014; Berry and Bell, 2018; Prushinskaya et al., 2021), and sexism and heterosexism (Taylor, 1983; Mellor, Hannah and Stirling, 1988; Hacker, 1989; Loe, 1999; Sobering, 2016; Davis, 2017).

Yet significant challenges persist in terms of economic performance, the integration of democratic participation with empowerment, and the extension of benefits to workers across race/ethnicity, class, and gender (Russell, 1984; Hacker, 1989; Kasmir, 1996; Hernandez, 2006; Gordon Nembhard, 2014; Miller 2012). While the early warnings of cooperative "death or degeneration" may have dramatically overestimated the risk of death—worker cooperatives are no less likely to fail than similarly small non-cooperative businesses (Jones, 1979; Dow, 2003; Olsen, 2013)—the Webb and Webb (1897) degeneration thesis has proved more prognostic. Financial success and longevity have not consistently been correlated with lasting shop-floor democracy or reductions in workplace inequality (Taylor, 1994; Russell, 1995; Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Flecha and Ngai, 2014), although it has also seemed to be that stratified degeneration and egalitarian regeneration are perhaps more reversable and overlapping processes than once claimed (Bretos, Errasti and Marcuello, 2020; Arregi, Gago, and Legarra, 2022). Historically, though, more diverse, democratic, and egalitarian worker cooperatives have rarely thrived economically (Roediger, 1999, 1991; Pencavel, 2001; Leikin, 2004), leading to a broad—although not complete—consensus that cooperative workers must choose between less well-paid participatory democratic control, or the economic stability of weakly democratic bureaucracy and a stratified or homogeneous workforce.

Further, even when they (marginally) survive using a broadly democratic form of worker control, worker cooperatives have not provided a magic bullet to solve inequality. The informal, friendship-based, task-rotating, flatly "collectivist-democratic" (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979) organizations of the 1970s and 1980s—organizations that grew out of the intersection of youth counterculture and youthful liberationist left (Belasco, 1989; Davis, 2017)—were replete with race, class, and gender inequality visible in contemporaneous empirical studies' margins (e.g., Jackall and Crain, 1984; Ferguson 1991) and body (e.g., Mansbridge, 1980; Rothschild and Whitt, 1986; Mellor, Hannah, and Stirling, 1988). That is, justice-focused organizations that reject managerial hierarchies, expertise accorded by credentials, and the numerous rules, policies, and procedures that characterize bureaucracies have seemed neither to solve the problems of functioning in a capitalist economy nor ameliorating inequality.
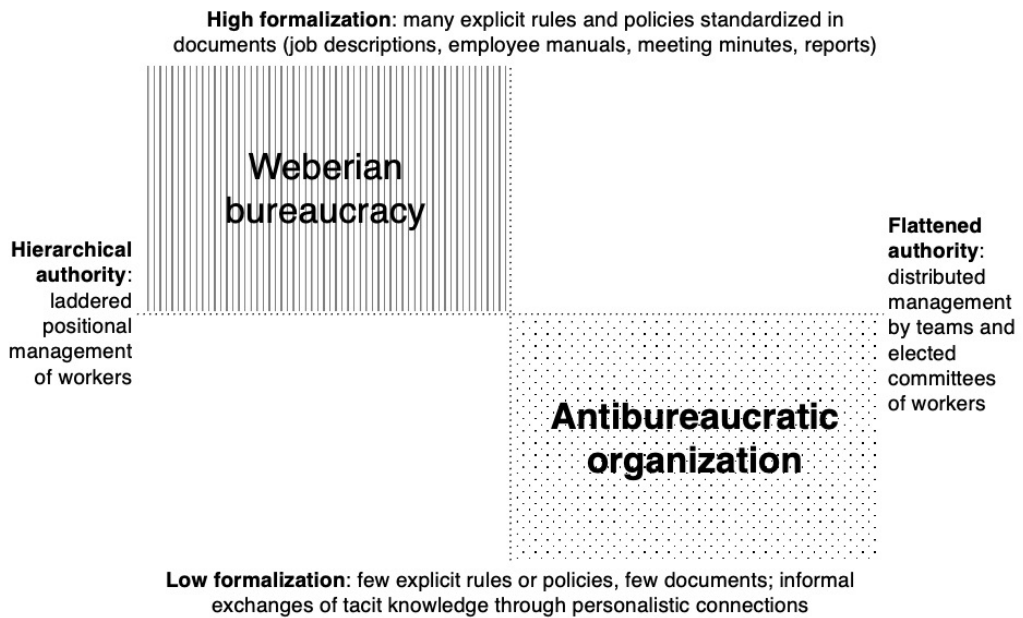
2.4. Bureaucratic variation: distribution of authority and degrees of formalization

Yet this pronouncement does not account for the democratic and egalitarian possibilities in bureaucratic variation, and particularly the bureaucratic variation among contemporary worker cooperatives. To understand this new generation it is useful to disentangle bureaucratic formalization from hierarchy, as can be seen in Figure 1. Here, the ideal-typical Weberian bureaucracy (highly formalized in terms of explicit and documented rules and policies to guide action, and steeply hierarchical in terms of the distribution of authority across layers of management) is contrasted to the ideal-typical antibureaucratic collective (fiercely informal in terms of resistance to standardized rules and routinization, entirely or nearly flat in terms of shared decision-making among all organizational members). While corporations are imagined to fit into the upper left corner—both rule-bound and top-down to manage their massive workforces—in practice many have distributed more decision-making power to work teams than in the past. Similarly, a new generation of worker cooperative studies suggest that contemporary worker cooperatives are less opposed to growth than those of the 1970s and 1980s, and more open to bureaucratic logics of job specialization, formal rules, and rationalized work processes (Berry and Schneider, 2011; Pinto, 2018; Borowiak and Ji, 2019; Spicer, 2020; Prushinskaya et al., 2021). Importantly, they are also less likely to exclude working-class and Black and Brown members, or reproduce internal inequalities (Schlachter, 2017; Berry and Bell, 2018; Pinto, 2021). In the current moment, the most rapid worker cooperative growth is in businesses primarily populated by low-income and/or immigrant workers (Palmer, 2020; Schlachter and Prushinskaya, 2021). As in previous generations, contemporary worker cooperatives remain committed to workers' democratic control, but there is more variation in how they structure it: from entirely flat and informal small collectives to complexly hierarchical and highly formalized organizations of thousands of workers (Prushinskaya et al., 2021). Worker cooperatives' common "double bottom line"—the commitment to social as well as financial goals—creates conditions and organizational practices that *un*intentionally lead to gender inequality, arguably a more common way in which inequality is reproduced (Martin, 2006). These class- and ethnoracially-diverse workplaces under worker control thus offer an important site to explore the relationship between bureaucratic variation and gender inequalities.

Indeed, bureaucratic variation may be the key to the seeming contradiction of both positive and negative gender inequality findings: the difference in the effects of the interaction of formalization and the distribution of authority within bureaucracies. Workplace inequality scholarship that focuses on bureaucracy rarely analytically decouples bureaucratic hierarchy from bureaucratic formalization. Most research on formalization's leveling effects assumes the existence of organizational hierarchy (e.g., Reskin, 2002; DeHart-Davis, 2009; Ridgeway, 2011; Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012; Correll et al., 2020), and most research on hierarchy's inequality effects either assumes or ignores the presence of formalization (e.g., Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994; Ashcraft, 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey

and Avent-Holt, 2019)[2]. A tight coupling is similarly assumed between flattened authority and a lack of formalization (Mansbridge, 1980; Ferguson, 1991; Ostrander, 1999). Recent scholarship has identified increased egalitarianism in strongly formalized but non-hierarchical social movement and arts organizations (Polletta, 2002; Chen, 2009; Leach, 2016; Giles, 2021), but non-market organizations operate under different constraints than market ones. This study, therefore, fills a gap in our knowledge of how formalization and the organization of authority interact to intensify or minimize inequality regimes at work.

Figure 1. Bureaucratic variation by distribution of authority and degrees of formalization

High formalization: many explicit rules and policies standardized in documents (job descriptions, employee manuals, meeting minutes, reports)

Weberian bureaucracy

Hierarchical authority: laddered positional management of workers

Flattened authority: distributed management by teams and elected committees of workers

Antibureaucratic organization

Low formalization: few explicit rules or policies, few documents; informal exchanges of tacit knowledge through personalistic connections

3. In the store and on the floor

Between October 2001 and June 2015, I collected data from the organizations I call "People's Daily Bread Bakery" and "One World Natural Grocery" using nonparticipant and participant observation, interviews, and content analysis. In the pilot phase, I conducted and coded 12 interviews with men and women between October 2001 and March 2003, ranging from 75 to

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[2] An exception is Scott (2005).

160 minutes long, and attended two gatherings at each of the cooperatives as well as two regional meetings of worker cooperative associations. I combined snowball sampling and purposive sampling at both sites in order to elicit as many different kinds of workers' viewpoints as possible (by gender, age, ethnicity/race, and job type). During the summer of 2003, I engaged in intensive observation at the two companies, averaging nine hours per day, five days per week on site for six weeks each. I shadowed a different worker each day over the twelve weeks, balancing gender where possible. I took both onsite and recollective notes, and conducted at least one semi-structured, informal interview with each of the 36 workers I shadowed daily. I attended numerous meetings, orientations, and social gatherings at both sites between the summers of 2003 and 2004, as well as local and regional worker cooperative association meetings. I analyzed meeting minutes and agendas, advertising, promotional materials, training and policy manuals, internal communications, and earnings and benefits documents with names redacted for the 2003–2004 fiscal year. I then conducted data analysis of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and archival materials, and between 2006 and 2015 conducted follow-up interviews and visits. In all, I spent approximately 800 hours in the field.

My approach to the people I observed and interviewed was reflexive in the sense described by Burawoy (1998): I shared my observations and concerns, elicited feedback (at times across sites), and used responses to adjust my approach and analysis. This process affected my focus, as I arrived interested in gender and hierarchy but, through the early-stage analysis process of coding (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), came to appreciate the centrality of race/ethnicity and class to gender, and the need to shift attention from hierarchy to bureaucratic variation. While I explicitly focus on the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in these cooperatives in ways that others might argue obscures other key local inequality characteristics and processes (Holvino, 2010), I actively recorded operations of sexuality, migration, age and citizenship status and processes, and use them to problematize the trinity of race/class/gender even if I did not collect similarly systematic data on them.

I approached the relational categorization (by gender, class, sexuality, etc.) of those I studied both as Durkheimian social facts—widely shared and regularly internalized beliefs about the coherence of social groups that then exert coercive power over the life chances of presumed group members—and as discursive constructions with a significant degree of organizational plasticity. Thus, on one hand, each cooperative's personnel records treated gender and race/ethnicity as static categorical labels in order to complete mandated state reporting, and these categories proved useful in evaluating pay, position, time, and tenure disparities. On the other, interviews and observation revealed how fixed or fluid such categorical labels were in practice in the grocery store or on the floor of the bakery, demonstrating the relational quality of these categories and suggesting the centrality of organizational processes, practices, and constructions of worker identity in making gender (and race/ethnicity and class) meaningful (Meyers and Vallas, 2016). However, to focus only on self-identification is to ignore the persistent force of social categories as *systems of power* shaping individuals' lives (McCall, 2005), as well as potent avenues for remedy of historic and increasing patterns of unjust reward and deprivation. On one hand, my choice to use

deceptively discrete categories such as "gender" to speak to similar (but not totalizing) constraints and opportunities affecting individuals may obscure other—possibly more effective—descriptors. It may also problematically reinforce the idea of gender as an individual quality rather than a categorization produced within social relations. Yet I choose here to err on the side seeming to treat gender as fixed and inherent in order to bring the issue of bureaucratic variation into conversation with discussions of patterns of existing workplace inequality.

3.1. The bakery and the grocery: The collectivist past and bureaucratic present

Despite their shared region and industry, People's Daily Bread Bakery and One World Natural Grocery grew from remarkably similar origins into decidedly distinct organizations. Founded 50 miles apart in the late 1970s by groups of (all or almost all) white, middle-class members of the youth "counterculture" who used family wealth as initial capital, and closely linked through a regional worker cooperative network, the bakery and the grocery drew on the educated pool of labor made available by a contracted global economy (Harvey, 1990), as well as shared ideological labor and social justice narratives, to create typical "collectivist-democratic" organizations (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Rejecting positional management and formalization, relying on friendship and perceived ideological homogeneity for recruitment and internal discipline, and rarely paying above subsistence wages, gender had little effect on the distribution of opportunity or wealth in these early days.

Fortuitous opportunities and a willingness to expand, that was atypical for collectives in the region, allowed each cooperative to grow in market, real estate, and membership in the mid-1980s. But recessions of the late 1980s created financial crises for the grocery and the bakery. Bakery members were forced to repeatedly vote pay cuts for themselves, and grocery members voted months-long hiring freezes that made work harder and more stressful. Members of both organizations recalled these periods with distress.

wAt the time of my study, both organizations were still owned by a supermajority of the workers[3]. The bakery had 110 workers and net revenues of 17.5 million USD; the grocery 234 workers and 25 million USD net revenues. The grocery had created more elected and appointed committees to coordinate work processes among and within its fourteen work groups, while the bakery had added levels of management to some of its nine work groups. Both offered profit sharing and generous health, vacation, and other benefits, as well as above-average wages for food retail and production work in the area. At both sites, these were widely perceived as "good jobs" (Kalleberg, 2011).

It turned out, also, that both organizations were highly—albeit differently—bureaucratic. I first thought I would be comparing the bureaucratic bakery to the antibureaucratic grocery. But the

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[3]   Grocery membership, with a 15 USD buy-in, was mandatory following a roughly one-year probationary period, and over 90 percent of grocery workers were members at the time of my study. Bakery membership, with a 1,500 USD buy-in payable in weekly deductions over three years, was voluntary after a similar probationary period, but only 70 percent of the bakery workforce had opted to become members.

process of gaining entrée to the grocery—submitting a request letter first to one and then another committee, completing required forms, and being required to present a letter of permission at meetings—quickly reoriented me. As the "Bureaucracy" section of Table 1 shows, characteristics of Weberian bureaucracy described above were now evident in both organizations. By the early 2000s, both the bakery and the grocery had transformed from early-1980s antibureaucratic collectives to organizations with strong formalization of rules and procedures in company and work group employment manuals, job descriptions, orientation and training materials, meeting agendas and minutes, and work group logs rather than the informal information-sharing and normative behavioral control of a friendship-based group; strongly rationalized and delimited arenas of authority—by work group, position, or elected body—specified in those formal documents, rather than nebulous group allocations of responsibility; and a distribution of jobs on the basis of recognized experiential and certified expertise rather than charisma or volunteerism. The main difference between the two versions of bureaucracy in these cooperatives was the strength of the division of labor and presence of hierarchy, and the separation or integration of democratic governance and management. At the bakery, workers were hired into and almost always remained employed as either a worker or a manager within specific work groups, with a CEO overseeing one to three layers of managers within each work group. At the grocery workers were hired into specific work groups but many took shifts in other work groups or transferred there entirely, and day-to-day management was largely distributed to the members of the work groups themselves, with some decisions made by the elected and regularly changing Intracooperative Coordinating Committee (ICC) or board of directors, or by voting within the monthly membership meetings.

As well as similar shifts towards bureaucratizing, the "Demographics" rows of Table 1 also show important workforce transformations: both cooperatives became ethnoracially diverse and primarily working class[4]. The "Inequality and exclusion" rows also show that the bakery and the grocery had developed similar levels of earnings egalitarianism across class background. However, the grocery had also achieved earnings egalitarianism in terms of ethnicity/race and preserved its gender egalitarianism, and had preserved its slight majority of women members. In contrast, as detailed in Table 2, bakery earnings were stratified by ethnicity/race and not only were women no longer a slight majority, but, as noted in the "Demographics" section of Table 1, the bakery was skewed towards men with only 15 percent identified as women.

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[4] Ethnoracial and gender classifications were drawn from the records each company shared with me: self-designated at the grocery (and representing a wide range of ethnicities, races, and genders), and designated by the personnel officer at the bakery (and limited to three ethnoracial categories and two genders). I created broad class categories—working, middle, or upper class—based on self-identification, self-reporting of education, family-of-origin wealth, education, and real estate, and self-reporting of parents' family-of-origin wealth and education for all workers I shadowed or interviewed and then extrapolated to the whole (except where grocery members accurately identified one work group as exceptionally middle class). My categorization did not always match workers' self-identification: most self-identified as "lower middle class," which almost always resulted in a working class designation using my criteria.

Table 1: Comparison of bakery and grocery changes between early 1980s and early 2000s

	Bakery	Grocery
Bureaucracy		
Rules & procedures	Weak → Strong	Weak → Strong
Written communication	Moderate → Strong	Moderate → Strong
Separation of persons from position	Weak → Strong	Weak → Strong
Technical expertise	Weak → Strong	Weak → Strong
Hierarchy	**Weak → Strong**	**Weak → Weak**
Specialization & division of labor	**Weak → Strong**	**Weak → Moderate**
Democratic governance & management	**Merged → Distinct**	**Merged → Merged**
Demographics		
Class	Middle class → Working class	Middle class → Working class
Ethnoracial	Homogenous → Heterogeneous	Homogenous → Heterogeneous
Gender	**Gender balanced → Gender skewed**	**Gender balanced → Gender balanced**
Inequality & exclusion		
Class	Egalitarian but exclusionary → Egalitarian & inclusive	Egalitarian but exclusionary → Egalitarian & inclusive
Ethnoracial	**Egalitarian but exclusionary → Unequal & inclusive**	**Egalitarian but exclusionary → Egalitarian & inclusive**
Gender	**Egalitarian & inclusive → Egalitarian but exclusionary**	**Egalitarian & inclusive → Egalitarian & inclusive**

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 2: Comparison of bakery and grocery earnings in early 2000s[5]

Earnings	Bakery *Sample 95 (110)*	Grocery *Sample 184 (234)*
Mean annual earnings (USD)		
All workers	61,374 (95)	40,556 (184)
Non-managers	57,460 (82)	n/a
Managers	90,135 (13)	n/a
People of color	54,080 (41)	41,227 (71)
Whites	67,955 (54)	40,134 (113)
Women	68,104 (14)	38,623 (102)
Men	60,999 (81)	43,400 (80)
Women of color	58,606 (2)	40,721 (44)
Men of color	53,854 (39)	43,382 (25)
White women	69,687 (12)	37,030 (58)
White men	67,461 (42)	43,409 (55)
2003 county median individual earnings	*30,083*	*37,498*
Mean hourly earnings (USD)		
1,5 mm	32.46 (95)	28.28 (184)
People of color	27.83 (41)	27.17 (71)
Whites	35.93 (54)	28.97 (113)
Women	36.67 (14)	28.08 (102)
Men	31.80 (81)	28.62 (80)
Women of color	34.06 (2)	27.19 (44)
Men of color	27.53 (39)	27.34 (25)
White women	37.10 (12)	28.76 (58)
White men	35.59 (42)	29.20 (55)
2004 county mean hourly wage	*19.16*	*24.37*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

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[5]   The People's Daily Bread Bakery sample includes all workers on payroll for 2003 except for those who quit or were fired less than six months into the year, or were hired more than six months into the year. The One World Natural Grocery sample has the same limitations as the People's Daily Bread Bakery sample but also excludes all "special members," or those who worked less than seven hours per week, a group almost entirely composed of white women with more than 10 years tenure.

3.2. Inequality regimes

The intensity of inequality regimes varied considerably. At the grocery, there were only small differences in job access, earnings, power, and job autonomy, and these were far less correlated with race/ethnicity and gender. Neither gender nor ethnicity/race affected the division of labor or earnings at the grocery: grocery women were part of work groups that did masculinized labor like maintenance and women staffed most warehouse shifts, while grocery men were either close to or the majority of some work groups that are commonly feminized, such as cashiers or housewares. While the grocery's board of directors was typically gender-balanced but disproportionately white, positions on its equally powerful Intracooperative Coordinating Committee were disproportionately held by women of color. Grocery women's annual earnings were 89 percent of grocery men's, but this was primarily due to grocery women's choices to work fewer hours; on an hourly basis, women earned 98 percent of what men did (see Table 2)[6].

It might appear that bakery women had it much better than grocery women: both in the workforce as a whole and within non-managerial workers, men earned about 90 percent of what women did (Table 2). In addition, women were overrepresented in higher-pay, higher-skill, and higher-autonomy management and professional positions (15 percent of the total workforce, but 31 percent of the 13 salaried managers and professionals). Office jobs, the most common work of bakery women, paid more than production jobs, the most common of bakery men. Yet this evident advantage hid intersecting inequalities of job access and wealth: women managers made 90 percent of men managers' average earnings, and women had a far lower likelihood of achieving bakery employment at all—largely because women were now entirely absent from production, the work group with the most frequent job openings. Indeed, employment conditions for "women" really meant "white women": because 85 percent of jobs held by people of color were in production, and because there were no women in production, only two women of color worked at the bakery. In this way, race and ethnicity combined with gender to produce more intense inequalities at the bakery than at the grocery.

The reason for such gender variation was not immediately apparent. Despite greater gender inequalities, bakery leadership actively and vocally supported gender equality; despite broader gender egalitarianism, grocery members regularly invoked sexist viewpoints in private conversations. That is, the different levels of organizational gender inequality were not a direct result of individual or collective discriminatory practices. Instead, as I will show in the next section, bureaucratic variations mediated individual beliefs to reproduce or reduce inequality regimes.

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[6]   I characterize these shorter hours (weekly averages of 28.85 for women vs. 36.06 for men) as *choices* due to the way it was presented to me in interviews and observations, and due to the fact that only grocery worker I encountered, a middle-class white woman with no child- or eldercare responsibilities, stated that she was working fewer hours than she wanted to.

4. Managerial hierarchy, distributed management, and formalization: Explaining inequality regimes

In this section, I identify the different kinds of bureaucracy enacted at each worker-owned firm and their inequality effects. As represented in Figure 2, the bakery's fairly traditional Weberian variation was composed of layers of managerial authority (overseen in theory if not practice by the membership as a whole) encoded and routinized through numerous and interwoven documented rules, policies, and procedures. In contrast, the grocery did not occupy either the Weberian bureaucracy or the antibureaucratic organization cell: it continued broadly distribute authority to participatory teams and representative committees instead of a managerial hierarchy, but this flattened authority was now highly formalized through a similarly dense web of documented rules, policies, and procedures, fleshing out an alternative *participatory bureaucracy* variation.

Figure 2. Bakery and grocery bureaucratic variation
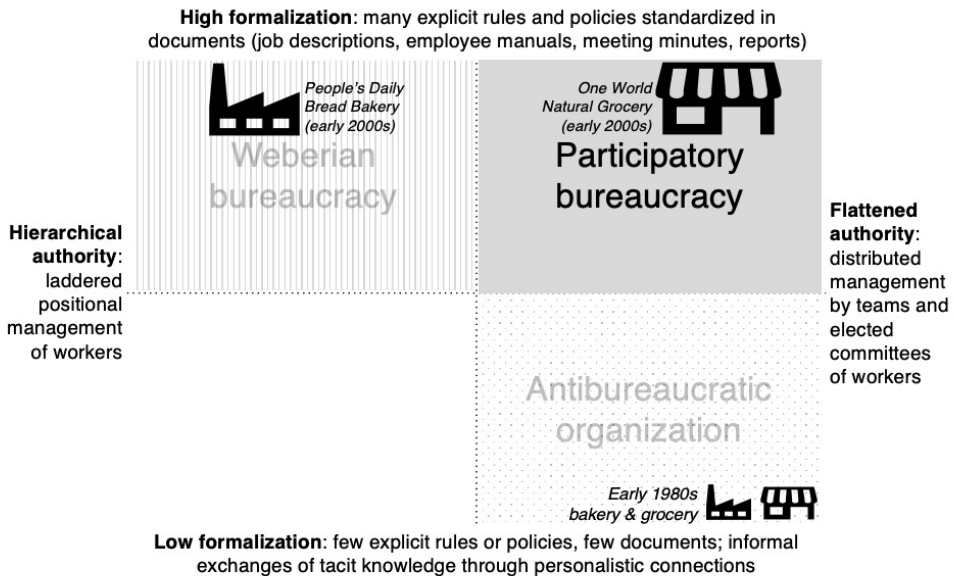
To help distinguish the difference between authority distribution and formalization but also illustrate their relationship, I first explore the gender effects of the organization of authority. I draw out the ways in which the bakery's managerial hierarchy obscured individual bias by and towards managers; then how the grocery's mixed representative and participatory distributed management neutralized the organizational consequences of these biases. In the last two subsections, I show how formalization of each arrangement solidified these differences, subordinating truly gender-neutral meritocracy at the bakery, and protecting less powerful members from more powerful ones at the grocery.

4.1. Hierarchical authority and gender inequality: People's Daily Bread Bakery

To say that gender inequality is produced by organizations is not to say that individual acts of discrimination or individual bias are inconsequential, but rather that organizational rules, policies, and procedures mediate the salience of such individual actions or beliefs to make them more or less consequential. When bakery managers hired employees for their work groups, individual bias affected recruitment and retention, but in ways that were not immediately visible to either applicants or managers themselves. "*Most men don't like to work in an office where it's all women,*" explained Pam Jorgeson, the white, middle-class financial controller and manager of the predominantly white office when I asked why its seven members were all women. However, she later described effectively forcing the last man in her work group to resign. This logic of applicant choice was shared by Charlie Navarro, the Spanish-speaking, working-class, Latino manager of the fifty-man, predominantly Latino production floor. While he quickly conceded the fallacy of, "*Women don't like hot and dirty work*"—the explanation almost always offered by bakery workers—because several Latinas had applied for and even briefly held jobs during his seven years as manager, he claimed excessive injuries by Latinas made him hesitant to hire them now. Greybo Sofer, the white, working-class woman who was the safety manager, had also offered injury as explanation in our initial interview, but a year later she created a spreadsheet going back more than a decade which revealed that not only were women—white and Latina—injured less often, but that their injuries resulted in less medical treatment and lost work time. Indeed, to keep workers' compensation costs down, Charlie should have avoided hiring white men, the most frequently and seriously injured. But Charlie's beliefs about how gender shaped occupational choice and risks resonated with the widely shared social beliefs about women's interests and physical vulnerability. More importantly, though, because organizational policies delegated hiring and firing to managers, Pam's and Charlie's implicit beliefs about gender suitability and jobs shaped recruitment and retention more than applicant choice or ability. That is, the organizational formalization of managerial hierarchy transformed hegemonic gender stereotypes lodged within individual managers into practices that resulted in less job access for Latinas and more gender segregation at the bakery.

Representation was less consequential: women's overrepresentation as managers did not lead to overall gender egalitarianism. While the proportion of women managers was nearly double the proportion of women employees, there were still three times as many men managers, and the women managers had a precarious position in and out of their work groups. On one hand, they were undermined by what Kanter (1977) described as *tokenism*: their persons rather than achievements were highlighted, and scrutiny was more intense. Further, the gendered organizational construction of the manager as a "strong, technically competent, authoritative leader" (Acker, 1990: 153) worked to their disadvantage, as was visible in the different perceptions of and reactions to production manager Charlie Navarro and Sherry Ferrar, the white, working-class woman in charge of the shipping work group.

As former production and shipping workers respectively, both Charlie and Sherry had come "up from the ranks" but were now primarily engaged in the typical office-based administrative work of managers, similarly relying on assistant managers to provide social and organizational lubrication between themselves and line workers. Yet Sherry was the only one who caught flak for it, even from other women. According to Anne Bronner, a white, middle-class, long-term member of shipping who was the only other woman in the work group,

> "[Assistant shipping manager] Toby can just tell us what to do and we'll do it. We don't need more instruction. Sherry's more of an office person. She probably wouldn't even know what I do if she came out here now".

Why was Sherry so absent from the floor that she didn't know what her work group members did? "*Young guys and her don't do so well together*," was Anne's diagnosis, but I never heard Charlie faulted for his comparable lack of shop-floor engagement or conflicts with his own young crew. Similar to the double bind others have noted when women occupy a masculinized role (Pierce, 1995), Sherry either transgressed gender behavioral norms and was seen as aggressively controlling, or transgressed the managerial role and was seen as irresponsibly absent. Because almost all lower-level employees were men, and because Sherry was regularly held up as an example of a "problem" manager, it seemed the underlying problem being voiced was the management of men by women. Although the high proportion of women managers led to high overall earnings for bakery women as a group, it did not increase their status or their share of influence.

The gendered attributes of management also affected women managers' role on the board of directors, a body that met monthly for a nominal stipend of 50 USD. While the masculinity attributed to men managers seemed to amplify board members' managerial authority, status, and respect, the femininity attributed to women managers seemed to reduce it. Managers were overrepresented on the board for two reasons: managers' flexible schedules and salaried ability to give up 10-20 job hours per month made it easier for them take on the time burden; and managers were almost universally described as smarter and more capable than other employees, largely due to the way the managerial hierarchical structure eliminated other employees' chances to display leadership. The visibility of managers' decision-making and implementation made them seem more skillful than other workers and thus better suited to directing the work of others and the company as a whole. In turn, managerial hierarchy seemed to be the natural outcome of unevenly distributed talent, which reinforced the idea that only managers should be making and implementing decisions. But this managerial advantage did not evenly adhere to men and women. Women managers filled the role of secretary on the board of directors, men the role of president. Men managers' roles as directors were described by work group members as proof of their value; women managers were patronized as "*mothering*". When Pam and CEO Herbert Gubbins would present reports to the quarterly membership meeting, there was equal joking about their personalities. *"First Pam'll tell us how good we're doing…and then Herbert'll tell us how terrible everything is,"* two white men in sales and delivery accurately predicted as the meeting began. But while Pam's assurances were written

off by them as maternal happy talk, Herbert's doom talk was described throughout the bakery as financial vision in the following weeks.

As others have found, managerial hegemony is far from assured (Vallas, 2003a). Bakery women's managerial edge did not lead the bakery as an organization to address gender inequality at least in part because the bakery's gender logics were woven into its organizational processes. Similar to other findings regarding members of subordinated groups in organizations (Vallas, 2003b; Castilla and Benard, 2010; Ray, 2019; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019), women managers' power was circumscribed by a gendered resistance to their authority or expertise, and a hegemonic gender binary legitimated hiring practices that limited women's employment. The structure of managerial hierarchy acted to obscure but heighten gender bias at the managerial and worker levels.

4.2. Distributed management and gender egalitarianism: One World Natural Grocery

The grocery's mixture of representative and participatory democratic governance and management practices increased gender egalitarianism in two ways: helping to construct family-friendly shifts, and exposing and undermining the legitimacy of individual bias. While several women noted their work groups' acceptance of scheduling requests allowed for fuller familial engagement, equally important were the deliberative processes of hiring, training, scheduling, distributing raises, and firing blocked the translation of individual bias into organizational practice.

For instance, each of the grocery's work groups used an elected and rotating three-person committee to hire its members, paying those committee members their regularly hourly rate, as standard at the grocery for all committee participation. In the eleven-member housewares work group, most of the senior members were older women with both gender and ethnoracial biases: three described hoping to hire young men to counter what one explicitly characterized as "*naggy old woman*" infighting, and one complained about recent hires being "*ethnic*"—code for Latinx, Asian American, and Pacific Islander when asked to identify the new workers. Yet few of these biases affected hiring during my years of observation: young men and women were hired in equal numbers, and fewer were white than Latinx. Descriptions of other work groups' hiring committees indicated that group deliberation undermined biases as hiring criteria, and instead generated legitimacy for skill or the grocery's ability to remedy social injustices as appropriate criteria. Jennifer Ruud, a white, working-class cooler worker, explained that she aggressively lobbied another work group to hire a white, working-class man who was her friend, but was mollified when told they had hired a "*genderqueer*" person of color who faced more significant employment barriers outside the grocery. The need to justify practices among different collectivities undermined easy acceptance of common biases and prevented them from being translated into organizational practices or norms.

The distribution of management functions across a broader swath of the workforce also changed interpretations of conflict from a personal deficiency to an expected deliberative process in ways that provided remedy for backlash that "angry women" often encounter in workplaces (Lewis, 2000).

One example was an interaction between Andrew Goetz, a white, working-class produce member, and Colleen Norris, a white, working-class cheese member of the cheese work group who had been elected to the seven-member Intracooperative Coordinating Committee (ICC), an elected group overseeing the physical plant and inter-work group dispute. After a series of loading dock thefts, the ICC had delivered a memo to the three work groups who used the dock—including produce and cheese—instructing them to lock its gate. At an ICC meeting, Colleen complained,

> *"Andrew started cursing me out, all pissed off…'Who do you think you are, the fucking police? What do you know about anything in produce or receiving? No, it's not gonna fucking happen. You should mind your own business and maybe you should join produce if you want to do whatever you want to do'."* (ICC minutes, 6/13/03)

Some ICC members were angry with Andrew's resistance to the ICC's authority. Gabriella Guinn, a working-class Black woman, replied, *"Fuck it, we tried, fine. Let One World get ripped off because produce doesn't care.".* But Alana Banks, a middle-class Black woman, initiated a discussion with members of the work groups who shared the dock, asserting that *"[the ICC] needs 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).

Grocery employees accepted blunt, angry, and sometimes painful disagreements as part of the democratic process. That is not to say that emotional repercussions were absent: some workers refused to work on the same committee or speak to each other for a protracted period. Mostly, though, conflict was separated from persons. Although the ICC had a higher proportion of women—particularly women of color—compared to other committees or most work groups (usually 70-90 percent), the ICC was not characterized as a group of "difficult" women, nor were individual members stigmatized for gender-transgressive behavior. Indeed, a loading dock agreement was negotiated, the thefts ended, and both Gabriella and Alana were re-elected to the ICC.

Grocery workers' experience of deliberation and being witness to leadership by working-class men and women across race and ethnicity had two effects. First, it normalized access to and use of power by those who have not typically been seen as legitimate leaders, and second it widened a normative view of leadership. When I asked grocery workers to identify "key" employees, they almost invariably named one or two of three white men who were current or former board members, confirming previous findings that socially privileged people in alternative organization have greater organizational prestige and power (Kleinman, 1996). However, almost all grocery workers then added someone whose work might go unrecognized elsewhere, typically a Black woman or Latina. For example, Jennifer, the cooler worker whose friend had not been hired, described Mariana Contreras, a Latina member of the cashier work group.

> "She's probably a staple, too. Just on a completely different level.…She's involved, I mean, she's not committee-wise involved, but…if she didn't work in the kitchen [through its self-appointed committee], the kitchen would be a mess. She really just has this insight that no one else has of how to make things work well. Especially in that situation where two hundred people share one kitchen."

While work organizations often delegate in-house domestic tasks to women, especially women of color, recognizing—and compensating—these human reproduction tasks *as work* is rare. Rather than describing Mariana's kitchen committee involvement as shirking her "real" job as a cashier, or overlooking these tasks as "natural" to her (ethnoracialized) gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007), Jennifer described Mariana's effort as *"a staple"* of the cooperative's operations. Prestige could, therefore, be earned through traditionally devalued "women's" tasks. As I note elsewhere, workers at each cooperative participated in reinforcing or leveling social inequalities through a claims-making process of what class, ethnoracial, and gender characteristics legitimately constitute an ideal-typical worker, naturalizing whiteness and masculinity as part of a strong class discourse at the bakery but problematizing race/ethnicity and gender as sites of potential workplace inequality at the grocery (Meyers, 2022). But it is not simply that Jennifer had a high personal regard for Mariana's work. Rather, the formalized democratic process of Mariana's application to the board for funded hours to manage the kitchen—a process documented in distributed verbatim meeting minutes that each worker was given paid time to read—funneled Jennifer's regard of Mariana's labor through a very different organizational configuration of what it means to be a worker.

To some extent these comparisons of the bakery's managerial hierarchy with the grocery's distributed management demonstrate how an organization's authority structure mediates gender inequality. Devolving decision-making to groups reduced avenues for a single individual's bias regarding hiring or scheduling to become organizational policy. As has been found in other cases where organizational practices were restructured intentionally (Goldin and Rouse, 2000; Kelly et al., 2010; Sobering, 2016) or unintentionally (Smith-Doerr, 2004; Kalev, 2009), democratizing control undermined common gender beliefs, minimizing the ability of gender logics to shape interactions among workers or attributions of value. Yet gender egalitarianism or inequality do not simply result from the direction or distribution of power; as noted earlier, flat organizations have also produced gender inequality. Inequality and egalitarianism both also require the bureaucratic formalization of these power arrangements, as the next section explores.

4.3. Subordinating formalization: Formalized managerial hierarchy

Formalization had both beneficial and detrimental effects on workers at People's Daily Bread Bakery. On one hand, the formalization of safety procedures better protected bakery workers' bodies than those at similarly-sized bakeries. Required financial orientations for all workers turned baffling annual business plans and financial reports into illuminating documents. On the other hand, the bakery's use of formalized rules and procedures obscured individual managers' bias, augmenting and ethnoracializing the unequal effects of gender on the hiring process.

Formalization of managers' definition of "*work experience*" was one process that appreciably contributed to gender inequality at the bakery. For instance, Linda Kemp, a white, working-class office member who described her job with ambivalence, speculated about her long-term prospects

for fulfillment at the bakery given her limited skill set. "*I liked People's because it was a co-op! They used to say they'd promote people. Now they want 'plug-and-play'. Because we've gotten so big, they say*". As evidence of her narrowed options, she described a former woman co-worker's resignation after being denied a transfer to shipping due to her lack of pre-existing forklift skills. Shipping manager Sherry's seemingly gender-neutral decision to include forklift certification in written job descriptions for her work group combined with the externally gendered labor market to all but ensure her a crew of men, many of whom resisted supervision by their first woman manager.

Approaching the external labor market as if it were not gendered also affected hiring in production. An inclusive policy on its face, production manager Charlie used "*physical work*" as a formal job qualification for hiring, and thus was able to recruit Latino workers with landscaping rather than food production experience. He explained these work histories revealed a similar ability to do "*hot and dirty*" work, which he contrasted unfavorably with Latina applicants' housekeeping work histories. Charlie's formalization of *"physical work"* ignored the heavy lifting (not to mention inherently "*hot and dirty*" quality) that characterizes domestic labor (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007), and invisibly—and thus unassailably—gendered his hiring process. In this way, the bakery's organizational formalization translated individual biases into seemingly impersonal criteria by obscuring managers' hiring processes. Formalization of managerial criteria naturalized masculinity as an attribute of most bakery jobs and segregated office work due to its incompatible femininity. Such formalization reduced job access for women applicants and current women employees alike, but particularly for Spanish-speaking Latinas whose skills were perceived as neither white collar enough for the office due to a lack of educational credentials, nor blue collar enough for production or shipping due to a lack of masculine work experience.

Given the bakery's democratic ideals and egalitarian origins, it seems surprising that members—especially women, and even more especially women managers—did not insist on more gender-egalitarian hiring policies. But, as others have noted (Roscigno, Garcia and Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007; Castilla and Benard, 2010; Berrey, 2015; Ray and Purifoy, 2019), the neutrality of formalized rules and policies veils biases. That is, it is not simply the existence of hierarchy or formalization that produces inequality regimes, but the intertwining of the two: when the bakery's managerial hierarchy produced these ostensibly neutral rules and policies, it reduced opportunities and venues to demand more equal access. The bakery's strong formalization protected the concentration of power in the hands of individual managers (even within the democratic board of directors), obscured individual actions, and made resistance more difficult.

4.4. Protective formalization: Formalized democratic control

The fact that One World Natural Grocery could enact democratic empowerment in a demographically heterogeneous workforce has a lot to do with how the grocery formalized its distributed and deliberative organizational structure. Workers' understanding of general business

principles and specific organizational issues was bolstered by their expected use of paid hours to read the near-verbatim committee minutes, such as the minutes documenting Andrew and Colleen's argument above. New employee orientations were supplemented by the year-long assignment of a mentor from outside a new member's work group who accompanied them to meetings to explain processes and norms. Both practices reduced inequality-producing advantages that members of dominant groups typically acquire through better-connected informal networks (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly, 2006). Middle-class advantages of more education and training in written documentation were minimized by the Successful Participation Committee, whose members helped workers research and write proposals to make organizational changes. And if formal rules were ignored, sanctions were applied: when a charismatic white, working-class board member was discovered to have circumvented a directive voted in by membership, he lost and never regained his board seat. Even though the membership largely spoke approvingly of the outcome of his actions, his rule-breaking permanently tainted perceptions of his leadership. Strong formalization of democratically generated rules and policies largely prevented the accrual of personal and charismatic power by socially dominant actors common to an earlier generation of "antibureaucratic" worker cooperatives (Mansbridge, 1980; Jackall, 1984; Kleinman, 1996).

It was in the few places where formalization had *not* been enacted that its importance in reducing inequality was underscored. This was the case with product buyers in each of the grocery's work groups, who were not paid more than other workers but had less customer interaction and could expect perks as minor as free product samples or as significant as overseas travel. They were also disproportionately white and men, which some members noticed. Jan Bridges, a white, working-class woman, pointed out,

> "Buyers, the guys pass accounts off to each other. They do. There's definitely an old-boy buyer thing going on. You know, like Burgundy [buyer for the most profitable work group], 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 don't think he considered it, and I don't think he knows he's not considering it."

Jan was agitating to formalize policies regarding selection of buyers between 2003 and 2005, but was unable to convince others before she left the cooperative a few years later. When I returned in 2015, it was clear that social inequalities were being reproduced organizationally in the absence of formalized selection policies. Two of the grocery members regularly identified as key players by grocery interviewees were the "*old-boy buyers*" she had spoken of. The perception of them as shrewd rather than fortuitously located in a high-profit sales category enhanced their likelihood of election to the board of directors. That is, the grocery's broad (but not total) egalitarianism was not due to a serendipitous collection of unusually enlightened grocery workers. Instead, it resulted from the distributed and (almost always) formalized democratic management. The formalization of egalitarian ideals created processes that, together, compensated for individual social disadvantage and undermined the translation of social privilege into organizational advantage. While this observation to some extent mirrors what others have discovered about the inequality-minimizing aspects of

bureaucracy (Sirianni, 1993; Billing, 1994; Eisenstein, 1995; Roth and Sonnert, 2011), here, it is not formalization alone but instead the formalization of widely participatory democratic processes that produced a more egalitarian organization.

5. Bureaucratic solutions

The continued inequality found in some worker cooperatives—including those committed to the liberationist goals of working-class empowerment and ethnoracial and gender equality, such as the two in this study—undermines claims that addressing individual-level bias and discrimination can reduce workplace inequality. Instead, this research supports the organizational focus of recent work on relational inequalities of class, gender, and ethnicity and race. However, as this study has demonstrated, it is not merely a case of "bureaucratic" inequality or "antibureaucratic" egalitarianism, but of the ways in which the formalization of the authority allows inequality or egalitarian regimes to emerge.

A close look at the different ways authority was structured at the bakery and the grocery illustrates a central insight of inequality regimes theory: greater hierarchy is associated with greater inequalities (Acker, 2006a). At the bakery, everyday expectations of unequal power allowed intersecting class, gender, and ethnoracial workplace inequalities to emerge, persist, and escalate through organizational mechanisms that reproduce the stratification of power and resources. In contrast, because the grocery's distributed and democratic workplace authority was jarringly different from typical expectations of the workplace, expectations about the social stratification of power and wealth were disrupted, and few mechanisms were available to produce inequality. In fact, conflicts inherent to the decentralized decision-making process created moments in which grocery members could recognize and resist inequality.

Yet focusing exclusively on hierarchy ignores the reproduction of inequality in informal and non-hierarchical organizations, including those with a social justice focus. Removing hierarchy does not remove all the practices and processes that generate inequality. Inequality grows where no formalized practices or procedures distribute authority; where skills developed through social advantages are seen as individual achievements and formally valued in terms of pay and authority; and where organizational practices are formalized to absorb rather than resist or disrupt the inequalities of the broader labor market.

That is, it is not the mere presence or absence of hierarchy, but its formalization. Bureaucratic formalization can interact with the structuring of power to undermine *or* intensify inequality regimes. At the bakery, formalization increased managers' control and amplified the subordination of those from marginalized social groups to those from dominant ones. At the grocery, rejection of hierarchy and its accompanying logic of superior and inferior talents created more support for women's work and its value, but required a dense web of formal rules, policies, and procedures to protect these practices and minimize the effect of unequal cultural capital.

Thus, this research makes two contributions. The first is the empirically supported conceptualization of a non-hierarchical *participatory bureaucracy*: a system of organizational rationalization, instrumentalism, and formalization of distributed management. Hierarchy is thus cast as a historical but nonessential aspect of bureaucracy, and managerial bureaucracy as simply one possible, historically prevalent variation of a larger type. After all, a hierarchy of laddered positions is hardly what separates Weberian bureaucracy from earlier monarchies or theocracies. While the participatory variation may be uncommon, it is nevertheless a functioning bureaucratic form.

Conceptualizing bureaucracy as varied produces the second contribution of this research: to clarify the relationship between bureaucracy and gender inequality. Using an intersectional framework to define and identify gender inequality, I have shown how, in the Weberian type of bureaucracy, formalized managerial hierarchy reproduces single-category conceptions of gender, offering little remedy for gender inequality due to the intersectional quality of organizational (and labor market) practices. In contrast, in the participatory variety of bureaucracy, formalized distributed management allows for a more complex and intersectional accounting for gender, creating more opportunities and legitimate roles for a wider range of those occupying socially—but not organizationally—subordinated gender positions. It is not that bureaucracy does or doesn't create gender inequality, but that specific bureaucratic variations amplify or muffle the individual and institutional processes that generate it. While hierarchy is a critical factor in this variance, so is formalization. The grocery's participatory bureaucracy offers an alternative to the inequality reproduced by informal decentralized collectives, but does so without giving up democratic control as a viable form of organizational governance.

My research claims are limited by the focus on only two organizations. Furthermore, these organizations were located in a region with a rich history and web of workplace democracy, making a variety of options seem possible when faced with crisis. However, this study is able to illuminate the *mechanisms* through which organizations with egalitarian claims can be thwarted by their formalized hierarchies, or can embody their ideals through participatory bureaucratic practices. If we are to usefully analyze inequality regimes, we must examine both organizational authority structures and the degree and distribution of organizational formalization of those structures. These refinements will help to build a more robust understanding of how contemporary work organizations reproduce or disrupt gender inequality.

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