

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

SELF-WORTH AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES
IN CONTEMPORARY BAY AREA WORKER COOPERATIVES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
AMANDA COOK

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
MAY, 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements.....	iii
I: Introduction.....	1
II: History of US Worker Cooperatives.....	3
A: 1790-1900: Industrial Revolution-Era Worker Cooperatives.....	4
B: 1900-40: Self-Help Worker Cooperatives.....	5
C: 1940-present: Worker Cooperatives Become Viable Long-Term Businesses.....	7
III: Literature Review.....	10
A: Workplace Democracy Theory.....	10
B: Worker Cooperatives' Impact on Worker-Owners.....	14
C: Conventional Workers' Perceptions.....	17
IV: Methods.....	18
Figure 1: Respondents' Demographic Information.....	21
V: Introduction to the Worker Cooperatives.....	24
A: Tierra Verde Housecleaning.....	24
B: Good Eats Bakery.....	27
C: Farmer's Bounty Grocery.....	30
VI: Empirical Findings.....	32
A: Self-Worth.....	32
i: "More than just a job".....	33
ii: Self-Care and Mutual Responsibility.....	34
iii: Controlling the Decision-Making Process.....	35
iv: Educational Component of Workplace Democracy.....	37
v: A Balanced Conception of Self-Worth.....	39
vi: Sociological Significance.....	41
B: Social Boundaries.....	41
i: Disentangling Socioeconomic Status from Morals and Ethics.....	42
ii: The Role of Consensus-Driven Decision Making.....	46
iii: Reduced "Injuries of Class".....	46
iv: Sociological Significance.....	47
VII: Conclusion.....	48
Appendix.....	50
References.....	54

Preface and Acknowledgements

Like most Berkeley students, I was introduced to concept of worker cooperation while eating a delicious slice of vegetarian pizza in the Gourmet Ghetto. However, my *sociological* involvement with worker cooperatives began during my junior year abroad in Grenoble, France. In an effort to make some new friends, I joined the university's sociology club, *Qu'on vive!* Towards the end of the first meeting, the members started to brainstorm ideas for the upcoming year's colloquia. Suddenly, they put me on the spot and asked what kind of colloquium I would like to organize. In a nervous attempt to save face and deflect their attention, I tried to think of something that was both sociologically interesting and impossibly obscure. "Worker cooperatives," I murmured, hoping that they didn't exist in France. Nearly every face in the room began to frown in confusion. I was home free! Then, just as they were about to move on to the next idea, a previously distracted club member looked up from his glass of Bourdeaux. Fishing an *Economie sociale* textbook from his messenger bag, he declared, "That's what I'm researching for my Master's thesis! We should work together!" There was no going back. We put our names down as the organizers for the May 2007 colloquium.

As May drew near, Thomas (the Master's student) and I planned the details of our worker cooperative colloquium. We traveled an hour by train to recruit a main speaker. We scoured the directory of local worker cooperatives to recruit additional speakers. We reserved the conference room. Then, things took a turn for the worse. A week before the event, France held the first round of its 2007 presidential election. There were only two weeks between the first round and run-off elections, and as fate would have it, the *one and only* debate between the two final candidates was scheduled (at the last minute) for the evening of our colloquium. Alas, faced with the prospect of zero attendance, we were forced to cancel. The upcoming wave of final exams prevented us from rescheduling. Canceling the colloquium was a disappointment for Thomas and me. Nevertheless, thanks to the lively discussions we had while planning the event, I had discovered my honors thesis topic!

It has been two years since the ill-fated Grenoble colloquium, and I have finally completed this research project on worker cooperatives. Looking back, I'm amazed by the number of people who have generously contributed to the success of this project. First and foremost, I am grateful to my respondents, who graciously shared their time and experiences with me. Another huge thank you goes to Jen Miller, a fellow sociology student with whom I conducted the majority of the interviews for this project. Working with Jen showed me that I, too, can experience the benefits of cooperation! I would also like to thank and acknowledge the faculty members and graduate students who have helped me during the various stages of my project: Victoria Bonnell, Kim Voss, Joan Meyers, Sarah MacDonald, Leah Carroll, Marcel Paret, Phillip Fucella, and of course, Thomas Vincent. In addition, I am grateful to my fellow thesis writers from Professor Bonnell's class, who never ceased to impress and inspire me with their projects and ideas. Another big thank you goes to the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship program, which allowed me to commit an entire summer to this research project. Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge my friends and family, who have patiently listened to me talk about worker cooperatives for the past two years. I'm very glad to have so many people with whom I can discuss my passions, frustrations, failures, and triumphs. Thank you all.

I: INTRODUCTION

A worker cooperative is a worker-owned, democratically managed business.¹ Charged with the complex role of worker, manager, and owner, worker-owners² do not fit cleanly into any of these well-researched groups. Worker-owners' unique relationship to the means of production has attracted a moderate amount of attention from social scientists. Much of the empirical literature discusses worker cooperatives' management dynamics and economic feasibility (Meyers 2006; Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Jackall and Levin 1984; Furgusen 1982; Russell 1982). The remainder of the literature focuses on the impact of worker cooperatives on worker-owners' lives (Hoffmann 2001, 2005, 2006; Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Bart-Schlesinger and Bart 1982; Almond and Verba 1963). In addition to the empirical literature, there is a well-developed theoretical literature on workplace democracy (Pateman 1970; Mason 1984). The theoretical literature emphasizes workplace democracy's potential to positively influence the way people see themselves and others. The weakness of the impact-focused empirical literature, aside from its scarcity, is its failure to engage with the theoretical literature on workplace democracy. As a result, the empirical literature lacks a common theoretical thread, making it difficult to gain a clear perspective on worker-owners as a broad social group.

My interview-based study aims to strengthen the empirical literature by engaging in a dialogue with workplace democracy theory. Notwithstanding the diversity of worker cooperative structures and worker-owner backgrounds, my data support the theoretical claims that workplace democracy can positively influence self-perceptions and perceptions

¹ Clarification: Worker cooperatives are sometimes referred to as producer cooperatives, collectives, collectivist organizations, or alternative organizations. While there can sometimes be a slight differences between these terms, they all refer to organizations that are democratically-controlled by their members (Rothschild and Whitt 1986: 2).

² Henceforth, worker cooperative "workers" will be referred to as "worker-owners."

of others. Given the abstract nature of “perception,” I use more specific concepts—self-worth and social boundaries—to analyze worker-owners as a social group. In this paper, I use *self-worth* as a measure of self-perception and *social boundaries* as a measure of perceptions of others.

To support my claims about worker-owners, I compare my data to the existing literature on conventional (non-cooperative) workers (Lamont 2000; Sennett and Cobb 1972). By sampling nineteen respondents from three different worker cooperatives, each with a different structure, I hope to reflect the diversity of US worker cooperatives as a group. (Hereafter, since not all of my respondents are worker-owners—two of them are cooperative developers—I will refer to my sample as “my respondents.”) My respondents, like the conventional workers from the literature, are internally diverse along educational, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. Both groups do predominantly blue-collar work. In spite of each group’s internal diversity, I argue that my respondents’ conceptions of self-worth and social boundaries are significantly different than those of conventional workers.

In general, my respondents differ from conventional workers in their more balanced conceptions of self-worth and more egalitarian ideas about social boundaries. The literature on conventional workers’ conceptions of self-worth shows a tendency to emphasize personal life more than professional life. When it comes to defining social boundaries—how a person sees herself or himself in relation to other people—researchers have found that conventional workers construct strong social boundaries between themselves and others according to economic status, ethnicity, and education. My in-depth interviews reveal a distinctly different trend among worker-owners and cooperative developers. First, when discussing self-worth, my respondents emphasize both personal and professional aspects of their lives. Second, my respondents do not draw sharp social boundaries between

themselves and others. Instead, some respondents offer structural explanations for social differences, while others disregard or downplay social differences. Overall, my data suggest that workplace democracy theorists are correct in their claims that worker cooperatives have the potential to foster more positive and nuanced ways of seeing oneself and others.

The next section provides a historical overview of the worker cooperative movement in the United States. After the historical overview, I summarize the theoretical literature on workplace democracy, the “impact-focused” empirical literature on worker cooperatives, and the literature on conventional workers’ perceptions. A methods section follows. Before launching into the empirical findings section of my paper, I offer a descriptive introduction to each of the three worker cooperatives from which I sampled respondents. The descriptive introductions serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they illustrate the organizational and demographic differences across the cooperatives. On the other hand, they introduce my argument that cooperative work experiences are fundamentally similar to one another. I divide the presentation of my empirical data into two parts: self-worth and social boundaries. Each of these sections compare my original data to the existing data on conventional workers, explaining the differences between the two groups using Pateman’s and Mason’s theories of workplace democracy. I conclude my paper with a reflection on my study’s limitations and its implications for future research.

II: HISTORY OF US WORKER COOPERATIVES

Most of the literature on US worker cooperatives focuses on cooperatives that have emerged since the 1960s. However, the United States has a history of worker cooperation that reaches back as far as 1790. In this section, I will divide US worker cooperative history into three broad periods—1790 to 1900, 1900 to 1940, and 1940 to present—discussing the highlights of each one (Jackall and Levin 1984). While the three periods have some common

features, it is doubtful they share many concrete ties. Given the fact that the first two periods' peaks lasted less than ten years and were followed by significant lulls, it does not seem that a US worker cooperative "culture" has been passed down over time. Instead, it appears as if each period reinvented the worker cooperative model to suit people's particular needs and desires. In this section, I will address each of the historical periods' peaks, placing a special emphasis on the current period, as it is the most relevant to my research.

A: 1790-1900: Industrial Revolution-Era Worker Cooperatives

The first period of US worker cooperation extends from 1790 to 1900, and is characterized by worker cooperatives that emerged from Industrial Revolution-era labor struggles. Up until the 1880s, worker cooperatives in the US consisted of small, informal groups of craftsmen, such as metalworkers and coopers. In the 1880s, the Knights of Labor, one of the first significant American labor unions, founded approximately 200 industrial and retail worker cooperatives (Jones 1984: 39). The union saw worker-owned cooperatives as a solution to two problems: unemployment and capitalist exploitation. Worker cooperatives offered employment opportunities to otherwise unemployed union members. The Knights of Labor worker cooperatives, both industrial and retail, allowed union members to benefit from fair working conditions. The retail worker cooperatives' customers, who were mostly union members and their families, benefited from fair prices. During the Industrial Revolution it was common practice for factory owners to operate high-priced general stores, which were often the workers' only option for purchasing food and supplies. The Knights of Labor retail worker cooperatives offered workers an economical and solidarity-based alternative to the company-owned stores. To a lesser extent, the Knights of Labor helped workers purchase some factories that would have otherwise been shut down (Jones 1984). To the delight of the union, these worker-owned factories were often just as successful, if

not more successful, than their conventional counterparts (Jones 1984).

The Knights of Labor worker cooperatives differed from contemporary worker cooperatives in many ways. First of all, the management structures of the Knights of Labor worker cooperatives, while varied, were minimally focused on participatory democracy. For instance, many of the cooperatives tied voting power to ownership shares, as opposed to contemporary worker cooperatives' commitment to the principle of "one worker, one vote" (Jones 1984: 42). Secondly, and most importantly, the cooperatives were tightly associated with a single organization: the Knights of Labor. As a result, their success was dependent upon the union's success. A shrewd alliance between industrial capitalists and the US government, combined with the emergence of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886, led to the Knights of Labor's rapid decline. By 1900, the union was virtually nonexistent. As the Knights of Labor vanished, so did the union-backed worker cooperatives, thus signaling the end of the first period of US worker cooperation.

B: 1900-40: Self-Help³ Worker Cooperatives

The second historical period of US worker cooperation, stretching from the early twentieth century until the 1940s, stands out as a time when worker cooperatives were used to support unemployed people. Aside from its peak during the Great Depression, the worker cooperative population during this period was negligible. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, it became common for the unemployed to do farm work in exchange for harvest surpluses, thus uniting a labor surplus with a harvest surplus (Jones and Schneider 1984: 57). Bartering networks among unemployed surplus farmers emerged, allowing struggling families to acquire a wider range of goods. Many of the informal

³ During the Great Depression, unemployed workers' organized efforts to improve their situations were called "self-help" organizations.

bartering networks were formalized into “self-help” worker cooperatives. In addition to formalizing and expanding the barter networks, these worker cooperatives allowed members to collectively negotiate labor trades with farmers. Also, many self-help worker cooperatives expanded their efforts into production work such as baking, canning, and soap making. Over 250 self-help worker cooperatives were formed from 1931 to 1938, many of which were in California (Jones 1984: 39).

From 1934 to 1938, the government lent financial and organizational support to self-help worker cooperatives, distributing a total of \$4,730,000 in federal and state relief aid money (Jones and Schneider 1984). The federal government, which funded self-help worker cooperatives from 1934 to October 1935, saw them as a way to “rehabilitate” unemployed workers by meeting their needs for material goods and social interaction. Once federal funding for self-help worker cooperatives was cut off in October 1935, some states decided to fill the void. By late 1937, the state of California had begun to fund self-help worker cooperatives (Jones and Schneider 1984: 59). Contrary to the federal government’s focus on the rehabilitative benefits of the cooperatives, California saw self-help worker cooperatives as a way to conserve relief money. As a result, the state government imposed strict rules on self-help worker cooperatives, dictating production quotas as well as prices (Jones and Schneider 1984: 62).

In spite of the government’s important role, self-help worker cooperatives were not standardized in their management styles or aims. While some of the cooperatives emphasized the importance of democratic control, other cooperatives were willing to sacrifice widespread participation in favor of increased productivity and revenue. In any case, when California pulled its funding in 1938, the self-help worker cooperatives had become too dependent on the state to survive on their own (Jones and Schneider 1984). By

that time, the US economy was emerging from the Great Depression, and many of the unemployed surplus farmers were able to find paid employment elsewhere. The decline of self-help worker cooperatives marked the end of the second period of worker cooperation in the United States.

C: 1940-present: Worker Cooperatives Become Viable Long-Term Businesses

The third, and current, cycle of US worker cooperatives began in the 1940s. Three things characterize this cycle: the emergence of worker cooperatives in the plywood industry, the counter-cultural worker cooperative boom of the sixties and seventies, and the gradual formalization of worker cooperative structures. After the Second World War, worker cooperation found its way to the plywood industry of the Pacific Northwest. By the mid-fifties, there were twenty-one worker-owned plywood cooperatives. By 1984, that number had fallen to fourteen, but given the historically short-lived nature of businesses in general and cooperatives in particular, this is quite a feat (Greenberg 1984: 175).

The large population of plywood worker cooperatives (and conventionally-owned counterparts) has made them a popular site for social science research (Craig and Pencavel 1992; Greenberg 1984). Ranging from eighty to 350 worker-owners each, plywood worker cooperatives generally employ a blend of direct and representative democracy.⁴ Compared to many other worker-owners in the US, plywood cooperative worker-owners are less focused on widespread social change, directing their attention towards the personal and economic benefits of worker cooperation instead. This is possibly due to the fact that plywood cooperatives emerged from worker buy-outs, whereas most of the cooperatives

⁴ By “direct democracy,” I am referring to opportunities for all worker-owners to discuss and decide upon the management of the firm. By “representative democracy,” I am referring to a situation whereby members elect a board of directors and/or a manager to make day-to-day and other minor decisions. These elected officials are meant to represent the interests of all members, and can be removed by the membership at any time.

established from 1960 onwards were built from the ground up.

The plywood industry plays a significant part in US worker cooperative history, but the true peak of US worker cooperation was from 1960 to 1980. In *The Cooperative Workplace* Rothschild and Whitt estimate that there were 5,000 US collectives at one point during this period (1986: 11). Worker cooperatives from 1960 to 1980 are quite similar to contemporary worker cooperatives. Both groups value frequent opportunities for democratic participation. Whereas the Knights of Labor worker cooperatives would only hold one general meeting per year, the cooperatives established from the 1960s and afterward typically meet at least once a month.

While worker cooperatives have maintained a certain level of ideological continuity since 1960, they have also changed significantly. Worker cooperatives during the sixties and seventies emphasized the importance of participatory democracy *over* the importance of making money (Rothschild and Whitt 1986: 98). Contemporary worker cooperatives, on the other hand, do not necessarily see collective decision making and profitability as mutually exclusive. As a result, contemporary worker cooperatives are generally more economically sound than their counterparts from the sixties and seventies.

The economic stability (and in some cases, economic excellence) of contemporary worker cooperatives has made them accessible to broad and diverse populations. Worker cooperatives during the sixties and seventies tended to offer such low wages that only a certain population (middle and upper class youth activists) could afford to join. Informal structures and friendship-based hiring also contributed to the homogeneity of worker cooperatives between 1960 and 1980. Friendship networks continue to play a part in contemporary worker cooperatives' hiring processes, but to a much lesser extent than before.

Since the sixties and seventies, the estimated number of US worker cooperatives has dropped from 5,000 to 300. Several of today's most prominent worker cooperatives were founded during the sixties and seventies. These cooperatives benefit from their long history and well-developed organizational cultures. However, re-evaluating their economic priorities and formalizing their organizational structures over time has played a significant role in their survival (Meyers 2006).

Scores of new worker cooperatives have been founded in the past two decades. Many of these cooperatives were started with the financial and organizational support of worker cooperative networks and incubator associations, which began to emerge around 1995. Currently, the US worker cooperative movement is experiencing a period of slow and steady growth. In the San Francisco Bay Area alone, there are over forty worker cooperatives, and the number is growing each year.

Despite the fact that the worker cooperative population peaked in the sixties and seventies, worker cooperatives have become more economically successful and stable since the 1990s. There are three major factors contributing to the success and stability of the contemporary worker cooperative movement: the development of regional and national worker cooperative associations, academic research on worker cooperatives, and the growing popularity of "sustainable" businesses.⁵ Another important change in US worker cooperatives is an increasing degree of diversity. In part, worker cooperatives' recent trend towards financial success and stability has made them more accessible to a diverse workforce. Several of my respondents and Joan S.M. Meyers (2006) argue that diverse

⁵ "Sustainable businesses" refers not only to environmental stability, but also to employment stability. Contemporary neoliberal business practices have generated a high degree of job instability for US workers. Worker cooperatives provide long-term employment, and are thus an attractive alternative to neoliberal job instability.

worker-owner membership has contributed to the success of contemporary worker cooperatives. Having a diverse workforce has allowed worker cooperatives to evaluate and meet the needs of a broader, more diverse, population. Thus, the relationship between economic success and increasing worker-owner diversity appears to be mutually reinforcing.

Finding causal links between the different periods of worker cooperation is difficult. There is little evidence to suggest that the Knights of Labor cooperatives of the 1880s directly influenced the self-help worker cooperatives of the Great Depression, and possibly less evidence to establish a link between self-help cooperatives and the cooperatives that surfaced during the sixties and seventies. The historical data on worker cooperation does not point to a great deal of coherent historical progression. In fact, it appears as if each new period of worker cooperation starts from scratch. However, a basic, common thread can be seen across the history of US worker cooperatives: the simple desire of workers to seek out an alternative to capitalist labor relations and to find a way to collectively control their livelihoods.

III: LITERATURE REVIEW

A: Workplace Democracy Theory

The theoretical literature on workplace democracy makes three essential claims. First, work is intrinsically valuable; work is more than a means to an economic end. The nature of a person's work impacts her non-work life, including her physical and mental health. Second, the literature claims that participation in group decision-making processes is an essential element of human education and development. Without the opportunity to participate in group decision making, the individual is deprived of the chance to actively construct her own existence. Third, democratic participation leads to more democratic participation. Specifically, participation in one area is likely to encourage participation in a

similar area. Given the formal and essential nature of workplaces and governments, participation in workplace decision making is likely to increase participation in the government.

Formal rationality, the defining characteristic of modern capitalism, aims to increase means-ends calculability; it helps reduce uncertainty about economic outcomes. Under formal rationality, the worker is transformed into a calculable unit of labor power. Conceptualizing the worker as a calculable unit allows capitalists, managers, and economists to reduce uncertainty about profits, but at what cost? What are the social costs of quantifying the worker?

Many social theorists claim that the extrinsic conceptualization of work carries a heavy social cost. They argue that work is more than a simple economic activity—that work is the way in which individuals construct their lives (Mason 1982: 190). Work has the potential to be a conscious, meaningful activity. However, under most capitalist working conditions, work has become a meaningless, alienating activity. Forced to submit to the orders of others, the worker has been stripped of the opportunity to play an active role in one of the most significant parts of her or his own life. As a result, most workers have come to think of their work life as a means to achieving freedom in their personal life, thus abandoning the hope of having a meaningful work life. Nels Anderson, in *Dimensions of Work: The Sociology of a Work Culture* (1964), illustrates this point:

[A worker's] attachment to the workplace is usually in proportion to his dependence on it and the money he earns there. That the workplace does not utilize his whole personality is of little concern; he would probably resist that because the major part of his personality finds expression in the nonwork sphere. It is in the nonwork sphere that he looks for the satisfaction which counts for him. What he wants mainly from the workplace is money. (30)

Despite the fact that many workers have come to accept the meaninglessness of work,⁶ there is strong evidence to suggest that work *is* meaningful, and that a person's work life significantly impacts his or her non-work life. Several compelling empirical studies have found a correlation between workplace satisfaction and physical and mental health (Wilkinson 2005; Jenkins 1971; Mariotti 1971; Palmore 1969). Specifically, these scholars have found a negative correlation between longevity and "job dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, occupational stress, excessively rapid and continuous changing of jobs, and an incongruity between job status and other aspects of the person's life," (Mason 1982: 129). In addition, many scholars have found a correlation between political activity (such as voting and running for office) and work conditions (Almond and Verba 1965; Pateman 1970). I will discuss this later on in this section. These empirical studies, and many others, show that it is potentially harmful to think of work as a merely extrinsic or economic activity. Thus, we must ask the following: how can work be made into something meaningful?

Scholars of workplace democracy offer a rather simple, logical response to the question of making work meaningful. If the meaninglessness of work stems from the fact that workers have no control over their work lives, then increasing worker control should make work more meaningful. Concretely, this means allowing workers to participate in decision-making processes at work. Ronald Mason argues, "If work is the means by which we create ourselves, and we cannot do that in our work unless we participate in the decision making related to our work, then workplace democracy is the appropriate solution" (1982: 190). Some studies have shown that giving workers a merely symbolic role in workplace decision making can yield positive results (Pateman 1970: 105). However, scholars of

⁶ Some scholars offer different perspectives on the meaning of work (Hochschild 2003). Simply put, not *all* blue-collar and lower white-collar workers see their work as intrinsically meaningless, but many do.

workplace democracy claim that the full benefits of workplace democracy might only be achieved by giving workers a more substantial role in workplace decision making. “Full benefits” is a rather vague term. Generally, workplace democracy theorists conceive of the “full benefits” of workplace democracy in terms of social justice. Workplace democracy theorists argue, for largely ideological reasons, that workplaces are inherently political and should therefore be treated as democracies rather than authoritarian regimes (Pateman 1970; Mason 1982).

Many workplace democracy theorists find the so-called “workplace connection,” the connection between workplace democracy and participation in the government, to be a particularly compelling point.⁷ As far back as Rousseau’s *A Discourse on Political Economy* (1755), theorists have argued that engaging in participatory democracy is an educational process. Simply put, one learns how to participate by participating. Furthermore, participation in democratic decision making encourages future participation in democratic decision making in the larger political sphere.

Despite the fact that some scholars believe in the inevitability of oligarchy in democracy (Michels 2008), many democratic theorists see widespread voter participation as a sign of a healthy society (J.J. Rousseau 1755; Mason 1982; Pateman 1970). In the US, low levels of government participation are most common among people with low socioeconomic status (Pateman 1970: 50). Advocates of workplace democracy argue that a major culprit for low voter turnout and other forms of political participation is the lack of opportunities for democratic participation in the workplace. In *Participatory and Democratic Theory*, Carole Pateman makes a strong theoretical and empirical argument in favor of workplace

⁷ In fact, it is my opinion that the “workplace connection” argument has somewhat overshadowed the more holistic arguments in favor of workplace democracy.

democracy. She claims that participation is cumulative in effect: the more opportunities one has to participate, the more feelings of political competence and efficacy one has (1970: 50). She also argues that the opposite holds true—that hierarchy and highly routinized tasks do not allow workers to cultivate a sense of personal and political efficacy (Pateman 1970: 50).

In *Participatory and Workplace Democracy*, Mason articulates the “workplace connection”:

Since the decision-making process of both communities is formal, participation in the workplace is likely to approximate participation in government in terms of mode, quality, and even intensity of participation....Like government, decisions in the workplace deal with primary⁸ values....[The] very close approximation of the workplace and government...is good reason to believe that participation in the workplace will have a powerful effect on participation in government. (1982: 84-5)

Thus, in order to cultivate a population of politically engaged workers, one must incorporate participatory democracy into the workplace. Given blue-collar and lower white-collar workers’ disproportionately low sense of political efficacy, workplace democracy in these areas could make a significant impact on US politics.

In sum, there is a great deal of theoretical and empirical support for workplace democracy. In addition to helping solve the problem of alienation, workplace democracy can increase participation in government and civil society. More generally, workplace democracy has the potential to positively impact how individuals see themselves (their sense of self-worth and political efficacy) and how they relate to others (their perception of social boundaries).

B: Worker Cooperatives’ Impact on Worker-Owners

The empirical literature on worker cooperatives approaches the question of worker-owners’ perceptions in a piecemeal fashion. Elizabeth A. Hoffmann focuses on dispute resolution, Joyce Rothschild and Allen Whitt discuss workplace satisfaction, while Melinda

⁸ “Primary” in the sense of “fundamental.”

Bart-Schlesinger and Pauline Bart address self-confidence. Separately, these findings give an incomplete analysis of worker-owners as a social group. Taken as a whole, the literature indicates some significant differences between worker-owners and conventional workers. In this section, I will situate the existing literature within my theoretical framework. I will modify and strengthen this framework later on in my empirical findings section.

Elizabeth A. Hoffmann's recent research applies Albert Hirschman's theory of "exit, voice, and loyalty" to worker cooperatives and conventional workplaces (2001, 2005, 2006). She finds that worker-owners deal with conflict and organizational decline differently than workers at conventional businesses. Hoffmann explains this difference by arguing that worker-owners have more organizational loyalty than workers at conventional businesses (2006). Organizational loyalty drives worker-owners to exercise "voice" more often than conventional workers, who are more likely to silently tolerate injustices in the workplace (2006). Hoffmann's research suggests that there are significant differences between how worker-owners and conventional workers relate to their workplace. Since Hoffman's work focuses exclusively on dispute resolution techniques and workplace loyalty, it does not address the broader meaning of worker-ownership with regards to perceptions of social boundaries and self-worth.

Most of the remaining literature on workplace democracy was written in the 1970s and 1980s. This literature does not account for worker cooperatives' recent demographic and structural changes, but it does offer some perspectives on worker-owners' perceptions. I have chosen to focus on the work of Rothschild and Whitt, and Bart-Schlesinger and Bart, as their findings come closest to addressing my research topic.

Rothschild and Whitt claim that the defining difference between worker cooperatives and hierarchical organizations is the prioritization of value rationality over formal rationality.

Contrary to formal rationality (which focuses on means-ends calculability), value rationality, also referred to as substantive rationality, prioritizes moral and ethical considerations (Rothschild and Whitt 1986: 49).

With regards to worker-owner self-perceptions, Rothschild and Whitt argue that “collectivist workplaces *do* lower alienation, providing engaging and meaningful work to their worker-owners,” but suggest that “expectations also are much higher, and the picture is rather mixed in terms of overall satisfaction” (Rothschild and Whitt 1986: 152, italics in original). In addition to suggesting that worker-owner satisfaction is “rather mixed,” Rothschild and Whitt claim that worker cooperatives are endemically stressful workplaces. “[Stress] is not a failure of particular collectivist organizations or of the individuals in them. Rather, it is part and parcel of the way collectives do things. It is the consequence of collective authority, equality, personal relations, and de-differentiation” (Rothschild and Whitt 1986: 158). Rothschild and Whitt’s mixed evaluation of worker-owner satisfaction contrasts with much of the worker cooperative literature. Later on, we will see how my research corresponds with their findings.

In a 1982 case study of a collectively run illegal abortion clinic, Melinda Bart-Schlesinger and Pauline Bart evaluate the collective’s impact on members’ self-identity. Bart-Schlesinger and Bart found that women had an increased sense of competency and control over their lives after working at the clinic. A key feature of this organization was its emphasis on task sharing, meaning that everyone was taught to do each task, including the abortion procedure (Bart-Schlesinger and Bart 1982: 145). The intrinsic value of supporting a political cause, paired with the educational component of working at a collectively run feminist abortion clinic, increased members’ sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Bart-Schlesinger and Bart’s case study supports workplace democracy theory’s three main claims.

However, given the narrow scope of their study, it is difficult to generalize their findings.

C: Conventional Workers' Perceptions

Drawing a comparison between conventional workers and worker-owners will allow me to see the salient differences between the two social groups. It will also permit me to see some overarching commonalities. For practical reasons, I have chosen to limit my comparison to two landmark texts on conventional workers: Michèle Lamont's *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000) and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972).

Lamont argues that "lower middle class" workers use moral and ethical discourse to construct a sense of self-worth. Workers use alternative (non-economic) definitions of success to construct a sense of self-worth in spite of their relatively low status positions. In general, Lamont's US respondents emphasize the importance of hard work, traditional morality (opposition to drugs and crime), and providing for the family (Lamont 2000: 21). Despite their emphasis on "hard work" when discussing self-worth, they see work as a means to achieving freedom and dignity in their personal lives, not as an intrinsically meaningful activity (Lamont 2000: 30).

In order to protect their sense of self-worth, Lamont's workers draw strong social boundaries between themselves and other people. Specifically, they use their alternative definitions of success to place themselves above (or on equal ground with) wealthy people, whom they often describe as having a weaker moral character (Lamont 2000: 112, 123). Conversely, when comparing themselves to the poor, Lamont's white respondents use their relatively high economic status as proof of their moral superiority, while her African American respondents offer some structural explanations for poverty (Lamont 2000: 131). Overall, Lamont posits that conventional workers have a strong tendency to draw social

boundaries between themselves and others. For Lamont's respondents, social boundaries protect workers' sense of dignity and self-worth.

Sennett and Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972) claims that the US class system can have a negative effect on blue-collar workers, as well as those who are transitioning from blue-collar to white-collar work. Sennett and Cobb see a tension between the concepts of dignity and legitimacy among working class people, for whom dignity is associated with white-collar work and legitimacy is associated with blue-collar work (1972: 28). The tension between dignity and legitimacy causes blue-collar and lower white-collar workers to experience "injuries of class." Injuries of class can be defined as the negative psychological consequences of conflating one's class status with one's self-worth.

The literature on conventional workers is very well developed. However, the literature on worker cooperatives is much more limited and more reliant upon case studies. Given the relative scarcity of contemporary research on US worker cooperatives, sociologists lack the data to make general claims about the nature and significance of worker-ownership. If we are to comment on the validity of workplace democracy theory and if we are to speak about worker cooperation's social benefits, we need to evaluate worker-owners as a broad social group.

IV: METHODS

The primary aim of my research is to explore how worker-owners and cooperative developers see themselves and other people. The empirical and theoretical literature on worker-owners suggests that there is something deeply significant about the experience of working at a cooperative. However, the existing literature does not fully articulate what is so "significant." Looking at how people see themselves and others is one of the most basic, fundamental pursuits of sociology. However, in order to discuss people's perceptions of

themselves and others in a concrete way, one must rely on a set of more specific concepts. For this study, I have chosen to articulate my respondents' perceptions of themselves and others in relation to the concepts of self-worth and social boundaries.

Self-worth can be defined as what a person values about her or his life and what her or his goals are. Included in the concept of self-worth is the notion of negative self-worth, or that in which a person does not take pride. Social boundaries can be defined as how a person distinguishes herself or himself from other people. The way in which a person draws social boundaries says a great deal about which social characteristics are most salient to him or her, be it money, race, occupation, education, or a combination thereof. In other words, social boundaries say something about the assumptions a person makes about other people. If a person does not draw very many social boundaries, it may indicate a more open-minded perception of other people—a hesitancy to put people into categories before having met them in person.

In order to obtain a detailed understanding of worker-owners' and cooperative developers' perceptions of self-worth and social boundaries, I chose semi-structured, in-depth interviewing as my primary methodology. My data collection instrument was a modified version of Lamont's interview schedule from *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000).⁹ Each interview ranged from one to two hours long and was conducted at a non-workplace location of the respondent's choice. Overall, my respondents seemed comfortable with the interview questions and were willing to offer detailed, forthright responses. Four of the Tierra Verde interviews were conducted with the help of a Spanish-to-English interpreter. I conducted the interviews between July 2008 and February 2009. A majority of the interviews (fourteen) were conducted with a research partner, Jen Miller. Miller and I

⁹ See the Appendix for my complete interview schedule.

worked together as research partners for another undergraduate sociology seminar. She and I conducted interviews together and discussed our research with one another, but we did not collaborate in a significant way during the analytical stage of our projects. For this reason, I use the first person when referring to my research.

I sampled my respondents, seventeen worker-owners and two cooperative developers, from three different worker cooperatives. In an effort to generate a representative sample of Bay Area worker-owners and cooperative developers, I selected respondents from three differently structured worker cooperatives, each of which serves a different market. I give a detailed description of the worker cooperatives in the next section: “Introduction to the Worker Cooperatives.” Here is a brief description of each worker cooperative:¹⁰

- **Tierra Verde** is an ecologically friendly housecleaning worker cooperative. It was started by a non-profit organization to benefit an underprivileged group: Latina immigrants with limited English abilities. Given the limited amount of worker-owner social capital, Tierra Verde employs a fairly hierarchical management structure, which includes a general manager, two receptionists, and a partially elected board of directors.
- **Good Eats Bakery** is an artisanal bakery worker cooperative. It was started by a non-profit organization to create sustainable jobs for semi-skilled and skilled people. Worker-owners are generally well educated and fluent in English. They use a non-hierarchical (flat) structure.
- **Farmer’s Bounty Grocery** is a large grocery store worker cooperative that operates according to a two-tiered system of decision-making. Small non-hierarchical departments make day-to-day decisions, while a large general assembly and a small elected board of directors make long-term decisions.

My sample reflects the diversity within and across each cooperative. Here, “diversity” refers to educational, ethnic, and class diversity. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of my respondents’ social backgrounds.

¹⁰ To protect my subjects’ confidentiality, I refer to all three worker cooperatives by pseudonyms.

Figure 1: Respondents' demographic information

	<i>Name</i> ¹¹	<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Race/ethnicity</i>	<i>Class ID</i> ¹²
Tierra Verde						
	Anna	Housecleaner	53	3rd grade	Latina	Middle
	Nellie	Housecleaner	35	HS degree	Latina	Middle
	Lucia	Housecleaner	38	HS degree	Latina	Working
	Maria	Housecleaner	44	HS degree	Latina	Working
	Celia	Receptionist	28	4-year degree	Latina	Mixed
	Betty	Coop developer	45	Graduate degree	White	Middle
Good Eats Bakery						
	Cody	Baker	29	Some college	White	Middle
	Nicole	Baker	35	4-year degree	White	No response
	Ian	Baker	32	4-year degree	Asian	Middle, Mixed
	Fran	Baker	24	4-year degree	Latina	Working, Mixed
	Gale	Baker	39	4-year degree	White	Mixed
	Abe	Baker	32	4-year degree	African American	Working
	Hugo	Baker	43	4-year degree	Latino	Working
	John	Coop developer	43	Graduate degree	White	Mixed
Farmer's Bounty Grocery						
	Alex	Cashier	30	Some college	Latino	Working
	Pete	Cashier	30	Some college	White	Working
	Nina	Cust. Service	32	4-year degree	Nat. Amer., Latina	Working
	Hannah	Cashier	37	4-year degree	African American	Working
	Jane	Cashier	34	Graduate degree	White	Working

¹¹ All of my respondents' names have been changed in the interest of confidentiality.

¹² "Class ID" indicates the respondent's class self-identification. The criteria for class identity vary from respondent to respondent; I did not impose a set of criteria for class identity.

While I do not have comparative demographic data for my respondents' "conventional" counterparts, I suggest that my respondents share many similarities with conventional US workers in general. Both groups are ethnically diverse, and both groups do mostly blue-collar work or lower white-collar work. Two significant differences between my respondents and conventional US workers are education and geography. Over half of my respondents hold at least a four-year college degree, and all of them currently reside in the San Francisco Bay Area, which is arguably the most iconoclastic, "politically-correct" region of the US.

Clearly, my respondents' educational and geographical backgrounds have contributed to their sense of self-worth and social boundaries. In fact, some of my respondents' backgrounds influenced their decision to join a worker cooperative. Therefore, I must address the oft-cited issue of "selection effect." If the "selection effect" applied to my research, it would mean that my respondents joined a worker cooperative due to a set of pre-existing perceptions, and that their experience in a worker cooperative has had little to no effect on those perceptions. Admittedly, several of my respondents were attracted to worker cooperatives for ideological or political reasons. However, my data show that this is not the case for everybody. In fact, over half of my respondents initially joined a worker cooperative for economic or other non-ideological reasons, such as scheduling flexibility. Therefore, while some of my respondents' views on self-worth and social boundaries differed from conventional workers *before* joining a cooperative, most of my respondents acknowledge that their views have changed since joining a cooperative. This suggests that workplace democracy can, in fact, have a significant effect upon people's perceptions.

The main comparative dimension of my study is between my respondents and conventional workers. Originally, I planned to highlight the differences between

respondents from each cooperative by doing an inter-cooperative comparison. However, once I began collecting data, I noticed an interesting general pattern. Notwithstanding the structural and demographic differences between the three worker cooperatives, nearly all of my respondents describe self-worth and social boundaries in similar ways. What is more, my respondents' perceptions of themselves and others contrast significantly with the existing data on conventional workers. In this paper, I acknowledge the vast differences between my respondents,¹³ but I argue that they are strikingly similar when it comes to defining self-worth and social boundaries. Thus, my empirical findings section will be a broad comparison between my respondents and the existing data on conventional workers.

Given the richness of the literature on conventional workers, I decided to base my comparison upon the existing data rather than collect my own. This permitted me to focus my interviewing efforts on worker-owners and cooperative developers, a much less-researched population. I chose *The Dignity of Working Men* and *The Hidden Injuries of Class* because they are landmark studies in the area of workers' perceptions. However, there are some notable drawbacks to using these two secondary sources. One of the major disadvantages is the lack of data on female, Latino/Latina, and Asian American workers. Another drawback is the fact that Lamont, Sennett, and Cobb sampled respondents from regional populations of blue-collar and lower white-collar workers, whereas my sample draws from three specific worksites. Practical limitations prevented me from generating a random sample of the Bay Area worker cooperative population.¹⁴

¹³ Refer to Figure 1 to see my respondents' demographic differences, and to the section "Introduction to the worker cooperatives" for a detailed description of the cooperatives' structural differences.

¹⁴ Chief among these practical limitations is the lack of a comprehensive directory of worker-owners and cooperative developers. In addition, in order to successfully recruit interview subjects from the worker cooperative community, I needed to establish relationships with

My study's theoretical aim is to examine the claims of workplace democracy theory. There is a lack of broad empirical data to support workplace democracy theory. As a result, the literature on worker cooperatives (and workplace democracy in general) is not as robust or cohesive as it could be. I hope that providing support and elaboration for workplace democracy theory will draw more attention to it. Despite the fact that workplace democracy theory has been neglected in recent years, I think it provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the fundamental differences between how cooperative and conventional workplaces influence people's lives.

V: INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKER COOPERATIVES

A: Tierra Verde Housecleaning

Tierra Verde's one-room office is buzzing with activity. To keep overhead low, the four office staffers—two receptionists, the general manager, and a housecleaning worker-owner who works at the office part-time—share a small workspace in Bridgetown, California. Monthly and yearly revenue goals decorate the walls, alongside colorful posters about more qualitative goals, such as improving meeting etiquette. The receptionists answer a steady stream of phone calls from prospective clients and *socias* (worker-owners), switching from English to Spanish with impressive fluidity. If a *socia* is lost or if there is a problem at a work site, these two receptionists, who are also worker-owners, do their best to provide assistance. At a nearby desk, Carla, a housecleaning *socia* who has recently taken on some office duties, practices her English by making reminder phone calls to tomorrow's clients. The three women clearly care for one another; whenever there is a lull, they chat about their personal lives, swapping recipes and giving one another advice on matters of the heart.

various organizational “gatekeepers.” If I had tried to do a simple random sample, I would not have been able to recruit as many respondents.

Towards the back of the office, the general manager, Betty, is planning the agenda for next week's *junta* (bi-weekly general meeting).

As the workday draws to a close, the housecleaning *socias* trickle into the office, replenishing their cleaning supplies and picking up the next day's *carpeta* (small pouch enclosing a schedule and maps to clients' houses). Some of the *socias* stay to chat with the office staff, while others are in and out without much more than a simple hello. After a long day of ecologically friendly cleaning—which has its physical advantages (no chemical rashes or respiratory problems) and disadvantages (more elbow grease)—the *socias* are exhausted. Most of them are eager to go home to their families, where they will spend their evening cooking and, ironically, cleaning. Despite the fact that they are business owners, these immigrant women lead difficult lives. However, as exhausting as their current lives may be, they all agree that working at Tierra Verde is a step up from their prior work situations. Their previous jobs had much lower wages, no medical benefits, overwhelming and unpredictable schedules, and no voice in management. At Tierra Verde, all of these aspects of work have improved. The *socias* may not be intimately involved with the day-to-day management of the business, but the decisions they make at *juntas* and board meetings ultimately dictate the cooperative's trajectory.

Tierra Verde is the third in a series of housecleaning worker cooperatives that were started by a local non-profit organization, called Mujer. Unlike the other two cooperatives, which have distanced themselves from the non-profit, Tierra Verde remains closely tied to its parent organization. Tierra Verde is Mujer's special project, for lack of a better term. After seeing that their business model is basically sound, Mujer is trying to perfect it, trying to push it to its limits. Once this has been achieved, they hope to replicate it over and over again, bringing more and more sustainable and empowering jobs to Latina immigrants.

While the other housecleaning cooperatives have settled into a stable complacency—not seeking to increase their client base, thus preventing themselves from increasing the number of worker-owners—Tierra Verde is in a constant state of change.

This deliberateness, this active pursuit of improvement, is mostly due to Tierra Verde's general manager. Betty, a middle-aged Caucasian woman with a Master's degree in city planning, never imagined that she would be the general manager of a housecleaning business. Previously, she had worked at Mujer, playing a key role in Tierra Verde's development. After a few years of business, she and the non-profit were not fully satisfied with Tierra Verde's growth. In order to improve the business model as much as possible, they felt that Tierra Verde needed someone with more experience on the "inside." Betty volunteered to take over as general manager. She imagined herself coming into the cooperative, streamlining the whole system, and leaving it in the hands of someone else after six months or so. It has been three years since Betty took the reigns as general manager, and she is still working towards that goal. So far, she has doubled the workforce, increased wages and benefits, and actively cultivated a broader client base. Now, she is intent upon creating opportunities for the *socias* to become more involved in leadership and office management roles.

To Betty's disappointment, seeking to increase worker-owner participation has led to some conflict at Tierra Verde. Since there is seemingly not enough room for all of the *socias* to "move up" in the organization, some feel that nobody should be able to do so. Rather than allowing Carla to make reminder phone calls, some *socias* would prefer to hire someone from the "outside," perhaps a second-generation Latina immigrant like the other two receptionists. While some of the *socias* feel very strongly about this issue, others are intent upon avoiding the conflict altogether. Betty is frustrated by what she sees as the

shortsightedness and selfishness of many of the *socias*. She wishes that they would see the cooperative as she does: a solidarity-based organization that aims to improve the lives of as many Latina immigrants as possible. However, given the real-life struggles and inequality that the *socias* have experienced, it is difficult for some of them to see her point of view.

In spite of these challenges, many of Tierra Verde's worker-owners have begun to shift their perspectives. My interviews with four housecleaning *socias*, one receptionist, and Betty suggest that Tierra Verde's workers share many similarities with my other respondents. In general, the *socias* are moving beyond individualistic or family-centered dispositions towards a more collective worldview. While their prior and current hardships have certainly not been forgotten, their experience as worker-owners seems to have had a positive effect upon the way they see themselves and others.

B: Good Eats Bakery

It is closing time at Good Eats Bakery. After the last-minute customers have been gently ushered out the door, steaming pizza boxes and rustic baguettes in hand, Sam retreats into the back office to change the music on the storewide sound system. To set the mood for cleaning, he selects a high-energy eighties compilation and turns up the volume. Re-energized, Sam, Lexi, and Hugo begin the process of closing the bakery for the night, each one gravitating towards different tasks. When asked how they divide up the work, Hugo, who has been washing dishes for about twenty minutes, replies, "Oh, you know, we just do whatever we feel like. We like to keep it fresh. You know, sometimes I'll do the dishes, sometimes I'll stack up the tables, whatever." Lexi and Sam offer similar responses, explaining that everyone knows what needs to be done, and so they all just do their part. Lexi vigorously mops the floors, while Sam takes a more leisurely approach to emptying out the trash, compost, and recycling bins.

After the floors are done, Lexi begins the final task of the evening: counting the cash drawers. Once Sam and Hugo have finished cleaning, they join her in the back office. According to the amount indicated on the cash register till, her count is fifty dollars over. She asks Sam to help her do a second count, but they are still fifty dollars over. They look over the till slip and count the money again, talking about how this has become a reoccurring problem over the past few months. No one at the bakery can figure it out. They even asked an accounting expert from the non-profit support organization to try to locate the problem, to no avail. After ruling out several possibilities, Hugo jokingly suggests that the cash register's computer is to blame. He reminisces about the bakery's old analog cash register, suggesting that high-tech devices do not belong at the bakery. Resigning themselves—yet again—to the fifty-dollar surplus, they lock the money in the safe, enable the security alarm, and make their way out the door. The accounting conundrum is soon forgotten, as the three bakers resume their light-hearted banter and joke telling in the parking lot.

Instead of subscribing to the dominant ideology of the food service industry—routinization, surveillance, and speed (Leidner 1993)—Good Eats Bakery has found a way for profits and freedom to coexist. However, things were not always so easygoing. The youngest in a series of incubator-model cooperative bakeries, Good Eats Bakery had a rockier start than its predecessors. Nevertheless, after a few high-stress, high-turnover years of doing business in the red, the bakery has begun to turn a profit. While it is somewhat unclear *why* the bakery has become more successful (there are myriad explanations, ranging from hiring, to baking technique, to customer service, and beyond), most of the bakers agree that the success has coincided with a more peaceful and stress-free atmosphere.

One of the reasons the bakery is able to function so well—and so informally—is that the current worker-owners are predominantly college-educated people with prior self-

management experience. Out of nineteen worker-owners, sixteen have at least a Bachelor's degree. As a result, there is little need to dedicate resources to formal training; if the bakers do not know how to do something, they are trusted to take it upon themselves to self-teach or ask for help. One of the pillars of the bakery is its commitment to volunteerism: nobody should be required to do anything, but everybody should try to do a fair share of the work.

Still, the bakery's recent success has not erased all of its problems. Now that the business is financially stable, a few of the bakers' attentions have turned towards more ideological concerns. Specifically, they would like to hire people who are more representative of the surrounding community, which is predominantly low income and African American. Several of the bakers I interviewed note that the informal structure of the bakery makes it difficult to integrate people from less-privileged backgrounds—people who have never been expected to self-manage or to participate in collective decision-making. Given the fact that they receive a staggering number of applications, the bakery's hiring committee tends to select the applicants with significant baking or cooperative experience. Instead of introducing a less-privileged person to the worker cooperative model, most of the bakers would rather hire someone who could almost immediately “fit in” and make a contribution to the bakery's financial success. Only a few of the bakers, those with prior experience as anti-discrimination activists, are committed to increasing the bakery's representativeness of the surrounding community.

Despite their hesitancy to subscribe to a more “activist” hiring policy (in contrast to Farmer's Bounty Grocery and Tierra Verde Housecleaning), the bakers' dispositions regarding self-worth and social boundaries are similar to those of my other respondents. That is, they evaluate their self-worth in terms of professional and personal satisfaction, and they tend to downplay the differences between themselves and others.

C: Farmer's Bounty Grocery

It is coupon day at Farmer's Bounty Grocery. A reggae music compilation plays in the background, perhaps in order to foster a relaxed ambiance in the surprisingly crowded store. To be sure, Farmer's Bounty's customers, a fairly diverse mix of "alternative" types (hippies, punks, hipsters, foodies, holistic healers, and beyond) have adopted a Zen-like approach to the ten-minute long checkout lines. For them, a ten-minute wait in line is well worth the twenty percent discount. Recently, Farmer's Bounty Grocery has decided to place single-use monthly coupons in the local phonebook. Two days each week are "coupon days," which means that shoppers are able to use their phonebook coupons towards a twenty percent discount on all store items.

Farmer's Bounty's worker-owners react to the crowded store in a variety of ways. A few seem rushed, but most of them mirror the customers' calm. In fact, many of the worker-owners practically blend in with the customers. Some worker-owners choose to don an apron, a nametag, or an inconspicuous back-pocket hand towel, but most are only distinguishable from the customers by their lack of shopping cart. Farmer's Bounty has a "strictly optional" policy when it comes to uniforms, nametags, or aprons. A young cashier, dressed in a mix of brightly colored Indian fabrics, pauses in the middle of a transaction to take a sip from a mason jar of chai tea. A gaggle of worker-owners stop to chat around the customer service desk, lightheartedly poking fun at a co-worker's recent appearance on a public radio show. Like Good Eats Bakery, Farmer's Bounty Grocery is generally devoid of the rushed and high-pressure atmosphere that typifies the service industry.

Behind the scenes, "coupon days" are not a Zen-like topic among Farmer's Bounty's over 200-person workforce. According to my respondents, the store is split fifty-fifty over whether to offer monthly coupons. Four out of five of my Farmer's Bounty respondents are

based in the cashiering department, which is particularly affected by the increased volume of customers on coupon days. For the most part, my respondents' concern is that the increased workload will cause more work-related injuries. Already, the cashiering department suffers from the highest injury rate in the store, repetitive stress injuries (such as carpal tunnel syndrome) being the most frequent.

Injuries, however, are not the only argument against the monthly coupons. A more ideological concern is that attracting more customers will reduce the "neighborly" feel of the store. Many worker-owners take pride in being able to develop personal relationships with repeat customers. However, if more and more new customers come to shop at the store, it is at risk of becoming yet another faceless health foods store.

On the other hand, the monthly coupons make Farmer's Bounty accessible to a broader, less high-income population, thus fulfilling part of its community-oriented mission statement. Generally speaking, Farmer's Bounty's high-quality organic, fair-trade products correspond with high prices. A twenty percent off coupon makes shopping at Farmer's Bounty much less cost-prohibitive. Since the coupons are only available to local customers, they are benefiting the immediately surrounding community, not the customers who drive in from fifty miles away.

Another pro-coupon argument is that expanding Farmer's Bounty's client base is good for business. A powerful minority of Farmer's Bounty worker-owners, many of whom have been at the store for decades, think of the store as a business "first" and a cooperative "second." Painfully aware of the growing popularity of natural food chains such as Whole Foods Market, some worker-owners are focused on outperforming the competition. Other worker-owners resist the pressure to compete with Whole Foods, claiming that Farmer's Bounty offers things that Whole Foods never can: worker-ownership and a non-chain

mentality.

The coupon debate at Farmer's Bounty Grocery is a good example of the kinds of controversies currently facing the store. Given the large number of worker-owners (over 200), and the fact that the store is divided into more than ten semi-autonomous departments, controversy over certain issues is inevitable. In spite of the seemingly never-ending stream of debates, Farmer's Bounty's worker-owners feel secure and satisfied with their jobs. Over the cooperatives' thirty-year history, Farmer's Bounty has cultivated a loyal client base and an elaborate management structure. More so than Tierra Verde Housecleaning and Good Eats Bakery, Farmer's Bounty Grocery is held together by a strong organizational culture. While the store may be shifting towards a larger, faster-paced format, it is unlikely that the unique benefits of being a Farmer's Bounty worker-owner—unparalleled health benefits, flexible hours, above-average wages, and a non-hierarchical work environment—will be endangered anytime soon.

VI: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

A: Self-worth:

When discussing self-worth, my respondents place equal emphasis on their personal and professional lives. Contrary to conventional workers, who focus their conception of self-worth on their personal life, my respondents have a more balanced view of what they value about their lives. While conventional workers tend to define work in extrinsic, instrumental terms, my respondents acknowledge the intrinsic value of work. More specifically, my respondents emphasize how their sense of self-worth is bolstered by being their own boss; being able to watch out for themselves, their co-workers, and their business; and having control over the decision-making process. In addition, my respondents' sense of self-worth is strengthened by the educational component of their work—the sense that they

are developing new skills and perspectives while at work. The intrinsic value of workplace democracy, paired with its educational benefits, makes work meaningful for worker-owners and cooperative developers. These findings support two of workplace democracy theory's major claims: work is intrinsically valuable, and workplace democracy is an educational experience.

i: "More than just a job"

All of my respondents acknowledge the intrinsic value of their work by describing it as "more than just a job." Many of my respondents underline the significance of their worker cooperative experience by mentioning the meaninglessness of previous jobs. Celia, a twenty-eight-year-old receptionist at Tierra Verde, describes her work experience as a cashier at a non-cooperative grocery store as "robotic":

I hated it. You're just a robot, you're just passing items through the scanner. You would have to say certain things to the clients...and it was just a robotic type of job. There was no interaction, no possibility to be yourself or let your character shine. There was no social mission behind the work at all. I wasn't doing a job that had any meaning behind it or that made me feel satisfied with my workday.¹⁵

Like many conventional workers, Celia disliked the routinized nature of her previous job. Her inability to control her work and to let her "character shine" resulted in a dissatisfying and meaningless work experience.

Contrary to the robotic and unemotional nature of many conventional work environments, my respondents describe the warmth and support of their cooperative. Abe, a thirty-two-year-old baker at Good Eats, feels "like the people I'm working with [at the bakery] are available in a lot of different ways, emotionally, they are all dedicated to resolving problems, to helping each other. They have that kind of resolution that makes the place

¹⁵ Interview, 11/16/08

work. And it feels very good, it's a very good environment.”¹⁶

In addition to the emotional benefits of worker cooperation, my respondents note the increased sense of pride they feel as a worker-owner. Pete, a thirty-year-old cashier at Farmer's Bounty Grocery, notices a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic pride as a worker-owner. He says, “Not having a boss at Farmer's Bounty has made me have so much more of a sense of pride as far as my work, whereas ten years ago, the sense of pride was more about kind of supplying my food and my shelter and a little bit extra for the things that mattered to me at that point.”¹⁷ Here, we see how the cooperative work experience, by promoting greater sense of control and freedom, allows people to recognize the intrinsic value of work. The extrinsic value of work—generating enough income to pay for living expenses—remains a part of the worker cooperative experience, but it is joined by a sense of satisfaction with the work itself.

ii: Self-Care and Mutual Responsibility

Working at a worker cooperative allows my respondents to be sensitive to their own personal needs, the needs of their co-workers, and the needs of the business. In many conventional workplaces, workers perceive their interests as opposing corporate interests. Worker cooperatives, on the other hand, promote the idea that business practices should be compatible with everyone's interests. Instead of becoming a battleground for individual and corporate interests, worker cooperatives adopt a family-like atmosphere of support, mutual responsibility, and, of course, cooperation. Approximately ninety percent of my respondents value the freedom to defend their individual interests at work. A slightly larger proportion of my respondents, ninety-five percent, emphasize their role as business owners.

¹⁶ Interview, 7/30/08

¹⁷ Interview, 12/7/08

My respondents value their ability to look out for their personal wellbeing, but they also highlight the importance of taking on new responsibilities, when necessary. In the sixties and seventies, when worker cooperatives were unstable, more radical, and less profitable, worker-owner “burn-out” was a very prevalent organizational concern (Rothschild and Whitt 1986: 155). Now that worker cooperatives are more stable and profitable, the risk of “burn-out” has not disappeared, but it has been reduced. Abe, a bakery worker-owner, articulates the balance between personal freedom and business obligations, “I think that everyone should be free to, in some measure, dictate the conditions of their labor. I think that is what a collective is about. But also, seeing where there are needs and be willing to make sure that that need is met.”¹⁸ Here, we see how individual choice and mutual responsibility come together to make work more meaningful. The balance between the two—freedom and responsibility—gives my respondents the feeling that they are active participants in their professional lives.

Along these lines, many of my respondents value the supportive work environment at their cooperative. The worker cooperative structure promotes the idea that everybody’s wellbeing is equally important. In accordance, worker-owners tend to look out for one another to make sure that nobody is overwhelmed. Cody, a bakery worker-owner, values the caring, family-like atmosphere at work. He remarks, “It feels like everyone has common goals because of the worker ownership aspect of it, and people really look out for each other more so than in other at a lot of other jobs I’ve had.”¹⁹

iii: Controlling the Decision-Making Process

Having control over the decision-making process is a way for worker-owners to look

¹⁸ Interview, 7/30/08

¹⁹ Interview, 10/10/08

out for their own interests, but also a way for them to meaningfully influence the trajectory of something larger than themselves: the cooperative. Ninety-five percent of my respondents emphasize the value of having control over the decision-making process. The cooperative decision-making process provides my respondents with feelings of equality, justice, and comfort. Hannah, a thirty-seven-year-old cashier at Farmer's Bounty Grocery, enjoys the equality of her cooperative's voting process, even when she does not get her way. She remarks, "We get to vote on everything, and one vote—no one can get any more votes than anyone else—so you actually have a say in what happens. You know, even if you were outvoted, at least you got to actually have a vote."²⁰ Another Farmer's Bounty cashier, Alex, is sometimes frustrated by the time-consuming nature of democratic decision making in the workplace. However, he values the cooperative decision-making process' ability to protect workers from arbitrary acts of authority:

It takes longer when you have a ton of people, it takes longer to get changes to happen, but I'd rather have the majority calling the shots than one person. It worked in my favor both times that I could have been let go (fired) from the cashier department. It worked in my favor that the majority of people think that I'm a good worker.²¹

Thus, having control over the decision-making process gives worker-owners a sense of justice at work.²²

Another benefit of having control over the decision-making process is having the freedom and security to express critical ideas. Gale, one of Good Eats Bakery's more politically active worker-owners, brings a strong critical perspective to the cooperative. Among other things, Gale hopes to make the bakery more accessible to the surrounding African American community. However, as she is quick to note, her critical perspective

²⁰ Interview, 12/6/08

²¹ Interview, 11/16/08

²² Elizabeth Hoffmann's research on worker cooperatives supports this finding (2006).

does not mean that she is dissatisfied with the bakery. In fact, one of the most meaningful parts of working at a cooperative is being able to speak freely:

I just want to be clear: I bring some strong critical perspectives, but...the job at the bakery is the best job that I've ever worked...One of the things that's unique about the bakery is that you actually have the space to bring strong criticism. And that, to me, is a good thing. That's not true in the other jobs that I've had. There, if you bring strong criticism, you're singled out and then you're gone (fired). That's not true at the bakery, so I feel like that's an amazing strength that the bakery has, that it enables conversations that you would be punished for in other contexts.²³

Here, we see how Gale's sense of self-worth is linked to social activism. The fact that she is able to be an activist at work—without the risk of being fired—is something she values very highly. Not all of my respondents are as concerned with social justice work as Gale, but the vast majority notice the intrinsic value of being able to bring critical perspectives and new ideas to work.

iv: Educational Component of Workplace Democracy

Workplace democracy theory claims that cooperative workplaces provide valuable opportunities for personal development. My data suggest that the educational benefits of workplace democracy bolster my respondents' sense of self-worth. Opportunities for self-directed learning and developing listening skills are the two major educational aspects of working at a worker cooperative. Both of these educational benefits increase my respondents' sense of control over their professional and personal lives. As we will see in the section on social boundaries, my respondents apply what they learn at work to their non-work lives as well.

As non-hierarchical organizations, worker cooperatives foster an atmosphere of volunteerism. Earlier, we saw how this sense of volunteerism allows my respondents to manage their workload. In addition to promoting a balance between personal freedom and

²³ Interview, 8/7/08

mutual responsibility, volunteerism in worker cooperatives allows my respondents to play an active role in their professional education. The formality of training structures varies among the three cooperatives I studied—with Tierra Verde on the more formal side and Good Eats on the less formal side. Regardless, in each of the cooperatives, there is a degree of choice over what worker-owners learn and how they learn it. Being able to control their professional development is empowering because it provides opportunity without obligation.

Another educational component of the worker cooperative experience is the opportunity to develop listening skills. In a worker cooperative, opportunities to develop listening skills are, in many ways, unavoidable. Contemporary worker cooperatives, especially those in the Bay Area, rely on consensus-driven decision making. When a consensus cannot be reached on an important decision, most cooperatives switch to a super majority or a majority vote, but this is seen as a last resort. The main difference between consensus-driven decision making and majority-rule decision making has to do with *competition*. As Jane Mansbridge demonstrates in *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1980), majority-rule decision making can take on a competitive tone, or an “us” versus “them” mentality that discourages people from trying to bridge differences. A competitive conception of democracy dominates most social groups in the US. When people think of “democracy,” they think of elections. However, in a worker cooperative setting, when people think of democracy, they think of listening to others and trying to reach a consensus.

Eighty percent of my respondents emphasize the importance of listening. Abe, a Good Eats baker, explains why he thinks listening and speaking are equally important parts of the decision-making process:

I think talking and listening are both very important parts of the process. [It would] make the collective experience difficult if people weren't listening to each other, if people weren't really skillfully listening. It's a skill to really listen to what someone else is saying, to take it in and understand where they're coming from to engage in a

dialogue.²⁴

Here, we see the practical necessity of listening. In a consensus-driven environment, listening is just as important as speaking.

In addition to the practical necessity of listening, there are some intrinsic benefits to listening to others. Cody, a Good Eats baker who used to work as a pastry chef, talks about learning to appreciate the value of listening. He notes, “I’m used to really top-down stuff, and having been a pastry chef for five years, I was used to being at the top....[But] I’m really learning to appreciate...how important it is to have a variety of opinions on something as simple as what makes a good scone, as opposed to just one person saying, “This is how you’re going to do it.”²⁵ Nellie, a housecleaning worker-owner at Tierra Verde, also sees the intrinsic value of listening to others. She remarks, “So we, the board of directors, take advice from all the *socias*. I like this, but sometimes it’s hard because one person wants to do something and the other doesn’t, but it’s good....I have seen now that this is better than other ways of making decisions.”²⁶

Overall, my respondents have learned to appreciate the importance of listening to others. Listening to others may seem like a universally valued skill, but I argue that most conventional workers do not take listening as seriously as my respondents. As we will see in the next section, my respondents apply their listening-oriented (open-minded) dispositions to the world at large, seeking to bridge social differences rather than emphasize them.

v: A Balanced Conception of Self-Worth

Up until now, I have focused on how my respondents’ professional life contributes to their sense of self-worth. This subsection will illustrate my respondents’ general sense of

²⁴ Interview, 7/30/08

²⁵ Interview, 10/10/08

²⁶ Interview, 11/3/08

self-worth. “Success” is an effective way to measure a person’s broad sense of self-worth. I asked my respondents to define “success,” and to say whether or not they feel successful. Like the conventional workers studied by Lamont, my respondents offer alternative definitions of success: definitions that are not related to money or power over other people. However, contrary to Lamont’s respondents, my respondents’ definitions of success include both the professional and personal spheres of their lives. Pete, a cashier at Farmer’s Bounty Grocery, feels successful because he leads a well-rounded life. He asserts, “Absolutely I am [successful]. While I might not be doing everything that I want to be doing, I’m doing as much as I can within my workplace, within my music and art place, within my everything.”²⁷

As I mentioned earlier, many of my respondents find meaning in their work because it can be used to promote a broader political agenda. Thus, for some of my respondents, there is not a great deal of difference between work life and personal life. Betty, a cooperative developer and the general manager of Tierra Verde, feels that her personal and professional lives are very “integrated.” She remarks, “I try to put my social values into my work, so it’s all very integrated for me. Working and living aren’t so different from each other, which is good, because I never feel put upon to go to work. You know, sometimes I don’t like it when the phone rings and I don’t want to talk, but I’m very happy having the work I have.”²⁸

My respondents’ balanced sense of self-worth contrasts rather sharply with findings about conventional workers’ sense of self-worth. Lamont shows how conventional blue-collar and lower white-collar US workers do not find meaning in their work:

[My respondents are] engaged in instrumental behavior: they are selling their work to the highest bidder while turning all their emotional commitments toward family

²⁷ Interview, 12/7/08

²⁸ Interview, 10/24/08

life....they are seeking satisfaction outside the workplace while deserting the political realm and accepting the inherent meaninglessness of their work....[Family is] a realm of life that gives them intrinsic satisfaction and validation—which is crucial when work is not rewarding and offers limited opportunities. (2000: 30)

In addition to “accepting the inherent meaninglessness of their work,” Lamont’s respondents are generally uninvolved in politics. Considering the fact that over forty-four percent of the US population identifies as “working class” or “lower middle class,” this is a rather disconcerting reality (Lamont 2000: 10). How can one expect to reduce social inequality when the people who are most affected by it are uninvolved in the political sphere? Furthermore, how can one expect to reduce social inequality when workers erect such strong social boundaries between themselves and other social groups?

vi: Sociological Significance

In this section, I examined evidence that supports two of workplace democracy theory’s major claims: work has an intrinsic value, and workplace democracy is an educational experience. Notwithstanding the vast differences between my respondents’ social backgrounds, the large majority expresses similar views about self-worth. My respondents take pride in both their professional and their personal lives. Contrary to conventional workers, my respondents embrace the intrinsic value of work, rejecting the idea that work is merely a means to achieve freedom in one’s personal life. In addition, my respondents find meaning in the educational component of working at a worker cooperative. As we will see in the next section, my respondents apply their workplaces’ open-minded ideals to the world at large.

B: Social Boundaries

Worker-owners’ unique relationship to the means of production corresponds with a lower tendency to draw social boundaries. “Social boundaries” can be defined as perceived divisions between oneself and others. Oftentimes, people draw social boundaries that

conflate socioeconomic status with moral characteristics. Sociologists like Lamont argue that low-status workers defend their sense of self-worth by constructing strong social boundaries between themselves and others. By thinking of themselves as morally superior to other social groups—rich and poor people, for instance—they are able to cope with their low social position. For example, Lamont’s white US respondents claim that poor people are “lazy” and “irresponsible,” while rich people are “dishonest” and “uncaring” (Lamont 2000: 54). My respondents draw fewer social boundaries. Unlike Lamont’s US respondents, most worker-owners and cooperative developers do not see sharp moral differences between themselves and people from other social groups.

In the first part of this section, I show how my respondents think differently about social boundaries. In the second half of this section, I offer a three-part explanation of my respondents’ low tendency to draw social boundaries. First of all, worker cooperatives’ consensus-driven decision-making processes promote a listening-oriented disposition that reaches beyond the workplace. Secondly, working in a non-hierarchical environment reduces my respondents’ tendency to take class “personally.” Finally, my respondents’ high tolerance for social differences makes them particularly well equipped for creating positive social change.

i: Disentangling Socioeconomic Status from Morals and Ethics

In general, my respondents are less likely to evaluate “people above” and “people below” according to moral measuring sticks. They argue that there are both “good” and “bad” people in every social category, that a person’s position in the social hierarchy is a matter of chance, not a testament to their morals and ethics. Hannah, a cashier at Farmer’s Bounty Grocery, comes from a lower middle class background. Before coming to Farmer’s Bounty, Hannah worked as a personal assistant in various high-level corporate settings. As a

personal assistant, she experienced many of the negative features of low-status jobs: being laid-off, feeling “invisible,” and feeling powerless. Given Hannah’s experience with hierarchical work environments, one might expect her to internalize a hierarchical mindset. However, Hannah refuses to generalize about people’s moral characteristics. She says, “I think we’re all basically the same people in a different set of circumstances. It depends on what you do with those circumstances that make you a decent person....There are plenty of not so nice poor people and there are plenty of really nice rich people.”²⁹ Hannah’s refusal to draw sharp social boundaries between herself and others is echoed throughout my interviews. If just a few respondents refused to draw sharp social boundaries, I would be unable to suggest that the worker cooperative experience affects people’s perceptions of others. However, given the widespread diversity of my interview sample, the fact that sixty-three percent and ninety percent of my respondents were hesitant to generalize about rich and poor people, respectively, is rather convincing.

When asked to compare themselves to upper class or wealthy people, sixty-three percent of my respondents refuse to generalize about their morals or ethics. Ian, a baker at Good Eats Bakery, is strongly averse to associating specific moral characteristics with wealth. He argues, “Wealthy, that’s just an adjective, it’s not a moral statement, it’s not an ethical statement, it’s not a personality statement. It just says that this person has a lot of money, but that doesn’t tell me anything about this person. It doesn’t tell me if he’s snobby or if he’s nice or if he gives a lot of money to charity.”³⁰ Anna, a fifty-three-year-old housecleaner, agrees. She says, “There are rich people that look down on people and some people who are rich who are very nice and respectful. They give money away to poor

²⁹ Interview, 12/6/08

³⁰ Interview, 12/6/08

people. There are both kinds.”³¹ Hugo, a forty-two-year-old bakery worker-owner from a working class background, says, “The wealthy people that I know well, personally, are, no, are pretty much like me. I mean we’re pretty close to level as far as values and things like that.”³² When asked to compare himself to wealthy people in general, not just those he knows personally, he mentions that wealthy people have more opportunities than others, but he does not describe wealthy people in moral terms. Almost all of my respondents argue that upper class people have more opportunities than other people, educational opportunities being the most commonly mentioned.

Ninety percent of my respondents refuse to generalize about poor people’s morals or ethics. In this way, my respondents are similar to Lamont’s African American respondents, who mention structural inequality as a reason for poverty and see little difference between themselves and poor people (2000: 144). Some of my more educated respondents mention lack of opportunity and structural inequality as the main reasons for poverty. For example, Betty, Tierra Verde’s general manager, has a Master’s degree and identifies as middle class. She says, “I feel that I certainly have more advantages than other people. I really, really value education and feel like the educational advantage [that comes with being middle class] is huge.”³³ A significant number of worker-owners see little difference between themselves and poor people. Anna, a housecleaning worker-owner, says, “Some poor people are caring and nice. I don’t feel different than poor people.”³⁴ Hugo, a bakery worker-owner says, “Wow, like I could be a few paychecks away from there myself.”³⁵

One might expect my more disadvantaged respondents—namely, the housecleaning

³¹ Interview, 11/10/08

³² Interview, 10/10/08

³³ Interview, 10/24/08

³⁴ Interview, 11/10/08

³⁵ Interview, 10/10/08

worker-owners—to draw stronger negative boundaries between themselves and wealthy people. However, as my data show, they do not. Notwithstanding the social and economic differences between the three sites, none of the cooperatives stands out as having more worker-owners who draw strong social boundaries. This could mean two things: either the worker cooperative structure encourages people to see the world in more egalitarian terms, or people with egalitarian views are more likely to join a worker cooperative. The first hypothesis is more persuasive, since well over half of the worker-owners joined their cooperative for economic or other personal reasons, such as scheduling flexibility.

Even though my respondents are hesitant to associate morals and ethics with socioeconomic status, they are not hesitant to criticize certain moral characteristics, such as “freeloading.” The non-hierarchical structure of worker cooperatives is particularly susceptible to the “free rider” problem: a crisis of collective action where certain people do not complete their share of the work. As such, freeloading is one of my respondents’ most commonly disliked moral characteristics. Ian, a bakery worker-owner, argues that freeloading can occur in any social environment:

I don’t like freeloaders. I don’t like people who want something for nothing...Freeloaders can apply to many different people. It can apply to anybody from the homeless person to the highest paid CEO who, after the company gets bailed out, they get to walk away with millions of dollars. It could apply to people at Enron, it could apply to people who turn to breaking into other people’s houses to steal metal pipes to take to the recycling plant. It can apply to people who come into the bakery and try to take money from the tip jar.³⁶

Thus, while most of Lamont’s US respondents (white respondents in particular) are quick to associate laziness and freeloading with poor people, my respondents recognize the presence of freeloading at every level of society.

³⁶ Interview, 10/10/09

ii: The Role of Consensus-Driven Decision-Making

Consensus-driven decision making at work promotes an open-minded disposition among my respondents. As we saw in the section on self-worth, my respondents value the importance of listening to others while at work. My respondents' hesitancy to draw social boundaries between themselves and others suggests that they also apply a listening-oriented (non-judgmental) philosophy to their non-work lives. This finding supports one of the major claims of workplace democracy theory: participatory democratic behavior in one social sphere is likely to promote similar behavior in other social spheres. In other words, experiencing the benefits of being open-minded at work has encouraged my respondents to be open-minded outside of work. Of course, it is very likely that my respondents' hesitancy to draw social boundaries is due to myriad factors, such as parental values, geographic origins, and education. However, given the wide variety of my respondents' parental values, geographic origins, and educational backgrounds, it seems that working at a worker cooperative is a significant factor in determining my respondents' unique open-mindedness.

iii: Reduced "Injuries of Class"

My data suggest that working in a non-hierarchical environment—not having a boss—reduces the “injuries of class.” Sennett and Cobb (1972) discuss how the US class system causes a great deal of psychological damage to blue-collar and lower-level white-collar workers. “Injuries of class” can be thought of as the negative effects of associating one’s class with one’s self-worth. Sennett and Cobb claim that blue-collar workers see their jobs as undignified because they lack freedom and control over their work lives (1972: 33). Lamont’s respondents react to injuries of class by criticizing people from other social groups. One African American worker, Art Armstrong, describes his bosses as uncaring: “Sometimes [my bosses] will do things that remind you, ‘Well, you’re a commodity to us,

and if we feel we're not getting anything out of you anymore, or we feel we can get more out of this person, you're out” (Lamont 2000: 126). Since high-status or wealthy people do not exercise direct control over my respondents' work lives, my respondents foster fewer negative feelings towards them in general.

iv: Sociological Significance

Worker cooperatives, in addition to promoting a well-rounded sense of self-worth, have the potential to promote broader social change. My respondents' willingness to listen to other people regardless of their social status is, unfortunately, a rare characteristic in US society. The US is famous for its culture of individualism, a culture that encourages innovation and growth, but often fails to recognize the bigger picture. American individualism is reflected in the US's meager social welfare system, which delegates many fundamental decisions about healthcare and pension plans to individual employers. Most contemporary sociologists agree that social inequality in the US is at root of myriad social concerns, such as crime, health, and political participation.

American individualism is also reflected in blue-collar and lower white-collar workers' views on self-worth and social boundaries. Most of these so-called “victims” of social inequality do not fight against inequality in their workplaces or in the political sphere. Instead, they accept the meaninglessness of work, retreat from the political sphere, and attempt to valorize their social position by criticizing people from other social groups (Lamont 2000). Conventional workers' perceptions of self-worth and social boundaries help them to cope with low socioeconomic status, but they do almost nothing to reduce social inequality.

My respondents are much less likely than conventional workers to isolate themselves within their personal lives. In fact, many of my respondents are actively involved in political

organizations and campaigns. Those who are not involved in the political sphere, at the very least, promote social justice on a day-to-day basis via their open-mindedness. My respondents' hesitancy to make assumptions about people based on their social status, and their willingness to engage in consensus-driven decision-making, makes them particularly well equipped to promote social justice in civil society and the government. In other words, I feel that my respondents have the potential to bridge differences between different social groups and negotiate more consensus-based solutions to social problems.

VII: CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have used broad-based evidence from contemporary Bay Area worker cooperatives to support three of workplace democracy theory's major claims: work is intrinsically valuable, participatory democracy is an educational activity, and active participation in decision making in one social sphere is likely to encourage active participation in other spheres. I demonstrated how my respondents' sense of self-worth is more balanced than that of conventional workers. Contrary to conventional workers, who tend to see their work as merely a means to achieve freedom and stability in their personal life, my respondents find meaning in their professional life by embracing the intrinsic value of work and the educational component of workplace democracy. My respondents' empowered, non-hierarchical, and listening-oriented work experiences discourage them from drawing sharp social boundaries between themselves and others. Specifically, my respondents are much more hesitant than conventional workers to associate moral characteristics with socioeconomic status. Finally, I suggest that my respondents' balanced view of self-worth and high tolerance for social boundaries makes them particularly well suited to negotiate equitable solutions to social problems and divisions. Since my research focuses mainly on perceptions and attitudes, more empirical research should be done to

evaluate worker-owners' and cooperative developers' actual role in civil society and government.

My research makes an important contribution to the literature on worker cooperatives, offering some generalizable findings about the meaning of worker-ownership and the importance of participatory democracy in the workplace. It also adds to the literature on workers' perceptions in general, suggesting how incorporating participatory democracy into the workplace might positively influence people's sense of self-worth and social boundaries.

APPENDIX: Interview Schedule

A. Questions about Work

1. To begin with, can you explain to me what kind of work you do?

How long have you been doing this kind of work?

2. How did you happen to get into this line of work? (Probe for lines of work abandoned, and why).

3. Why does your typical day look like?

4. What do you like most about in your job right now?

5. What do you like least?

6. Are you happy you spend your life as [current line of work]?

7. How would you describe the atmosphere among workers?

8. [If not address in question #4:] Are there areas of conflict and division at your work?

9. What should be different?

10. If you think about the difference between you and the bosses, are there any advantages you have being in your position rather than theirs?

11. Can you see any advantages the bosses have that you don't have?

12. Do you consider yourself to be a working class person, a middle class person, or... (something else)? (Probe for whether they define class in economic terms, in terms of competence, or some other way.)

13. If you would compare how things are now at work to how they were 10 years ago, have things changed? How? (Probe for racial tensions at work.)

13a. Could you describe your experience at co-op meetings?

14. Do you have someone you really like at work? What are the qualities you like in this person?

15. Without giving me a name, is there someone at work you don't like very much? Describe the person for me and why you don't like them. (Probe for concrete examples of the disliked person's behavior, examples of conflict with this person, etc.)

16. Would you say that you live to work, or work to live? (Probe for how they think of the relationship between work and other aspects of their life.)

B. Questions about Family, Community and Personal Life

1. What kinds of things do you like to do when you are not working? (What do you do in your leisure time? Do you have hobbies?) What is it you like about [hobby]? What do you do during vacations? What will you do after you retire?
2. Do you have children? How old are they? What do they do? How do you feel about that?
3. What are the values your parents gave you?
 - 3a. What kind of work did your parents do?
 - 3b. How did this influence your work decisions?
 - 3c. What do they think of your job at the co-op?
4. Did you try to impart these same values to your kids or have you brought them up with different values? What qualities would you like them to have? (probe for the specific meanings they place on each values they mention)
5. What kind of education do your kids have?
6. Do you have a partner or a significant other? Are you married? Tell me about your spouse. What does she do? What do you like most about her? Anything you dislike?
7. How long has your family lived in this community? Where did your family live before coming here?
8. How do you like working and living in this community?
9. Do you feel that you know more than most people around here? Do you feel that you are part of this community? (If yes, How? If no, Why not?)
10. How would you compare the way things are going in your community now compared to ten years ago?
11. Do you think there are similarities and differences in the cultures of the various groups that live in your community? [If race is salient in answer]: If you think about the culture of white people and the culture of black people generally, what would you say are the positives and negatives of each culture?
12. What is your own ethnic background?
13. Can I ask how old you are?
14. Would you please tell me the highest grade you completed in school?

C. Questions about Values and Friendship

1. Do you have a best friend? Can you describe him/her? What are the qualities you really appreciate in him/her?

2. If I asked you to describe to me in general in life the kind of people you like, what are the qualities that are most important to you?
3. Is there someone you admire a lot? (A hero? Someone you look up to, whom you can use as a role model?) What qualities do you particularly admire in this person?
4. Could you tell me, in general, what kind of people you don't like? (How would you describe the kind of people who get on your nerves?)
5. Does it happen to you sometimes that you feel inferior or superior to certain people? What kind of people make you feel one way or the other?
 - 5a. Are wealthy people different from you? Describe wealthy people in general, if you can.
 - 5b. Are poor people different from you? Describe poor people in general, if you can.
6. Would you say that money is very important to you? Explain to me how you think about it.
7. What would you do if you had a lot of money?
8. Would you say that one of your goals in life is to get rich?
9. Do you mind telling me what is your annual family income? About how much do you make?
10. Are you very spiritual? Do you have a religion? (What is it?) Are you very religious? Is your spouse very religious? Do you stress religion in raising your children?
11. How would you describe yourself politically? (Do you normally define yourself more as a liberal or a conservative?)
12. What would you define now as your goals in life?
13. Do you consider yourself to be successful? Why or why not? (probe also for their definition of success)
14. Is there a main source of tension in your life? (What do you worry about?)
15. For you, is intelligence very important?

D. Questions Relating to the Adjective List

Ask interviewee to select traits s/he likes and dislikes most from this list of adjectives.] (p. 20 *Dignity of Working Men*)

Honesty
Having integrity

Being hard working
Wealthy
Responsible
Intelligent
Kind
Generous
Poor
Lazy
Dishonest
Irresponsible
Selfish

1. Why do you dislike _____ so much? Probe.
2. Why do you like _____ so much? Probe.
3. If I ask you to use five or six words to describe yourself, what would you say? What kind of person would you say you are?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add before the interview ends?

Thank you very much for the interview.

REFERENCES

- Almond, Gabriel and Sidney Verba. 1989 (originally published in 1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Anderson, Nels. 1964. *Dimensions of Work: The Sociology of a Work Culture*. New York, NY: D. McKay Co.
- Bart-Schlesinger, Melinda and Pauline Bart. 1982. "Collective Work and Self-Identity: Working in a Feminist Illegal Abortion Collective." Pp. 23-49 in *Workplace Democracy and Social Change*, edited by F. Lindenfield and J. Rothschild-Whitt. Boston, MA: Porter Sargeant Publishers, Inc.
- Blauner, Bob. 1964. *Alienation and Freedom; the Factory Worker and his Industry*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Claeys, Gregory. 1987. "Justice, Independence, and Industrial Democracy: The Development of John Stuart Mill's Views on Socialism." *The Journal of Politics* 49(1): 122-147.
- Craig, Ben and John Pencavel. 1992. "The Behavior of Worker Cooperatives: The Plywood Companies of the Pacific Northwest." *The American Economic Review* 82(5): 1083-1105.
- Ferguson, Ann A. 1991. "Managing Without Managers: Crisis and Resolution in a Collective Bakery." Pp. 108-132 in *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, edited by M. Burawoy. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goldthorpe, John; D. Lockwood; Frank Bechhofer; and Jennifer Platt. 1968. *The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Hammer, Tove H.; Robert N. Stern; and Michael A. Gurdon. 1982. "Workers' Ownership and Attitudes Towards Participation." Pp. 87-108 in *Workplace Democracy and Social Change*, edited by F. Lindenfield and J. Rothschild-Whitt. Boston, MA: Porter Sargeant Publishers, Inc.
- Hoffmann, Elizabeth A. 2006. "Exit and Voice: Organizational Loyalty and Dispute Resolution Strategies." *Social Forces* 84(4): 2313-2330.
- , 2005. "Dispute Resolution in a Worker Cooperative: Formal Procedures and Procedural Justice." *Law and Society Review* 39: 51-82.
- , 2001. "Confrontations and Compromise: Dispute Resolution at a Worker Cooperative Coal Mine." *Law & Social Inquiry* 26(3): 555-596.
- Hochschild, Arlie. 2003. *The Second Shift*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Jackall, R. and H.M Levin. 1984. *Worker Cooperatives in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Jenkins, C. D. 1971. "Psychologic and Social Precursors of Coronary Disease." *New England Journal of Medicine* 284: 244-255.
- Kasmir, Sharryn. 1996. *The Myth of Mondragón: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-Class Life in a Basque Town*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Kleinman, Sherryl. 1996. *Opposing Ambitions: Gender and Identity in an Alternative Organization*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, Michèle. 2000. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Leidner, Robin. 1993. *Fast Food, Fast Talk*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mansbridge, Jane J. 1980. *Beyond Adversary Democracy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Mariotti, Marvin. 1971. "Worker Conditions and Manner of Aging." Pp. 163-184 in *Working and Aging*. Paris, France: International Center for Social Gerontology.
- Mason, Ronald M. 1982. *Participatory and Workplace Democracy: A Theoretical Development in Critique of Liberalism*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Meyers, Joan S. M. 2006. "Workplace Democracy Comes of Age: Economic Stability, Growth, and Workforce Diversity." *Research in the Sociology of Work* 16: 205-237.
- Michels, Robert. 2008 (originally published in 1915). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study Of The Oligarchical Tendencies Of Modern Democracy*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.
- Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives. 2009. "Worker Cooperatives in the Bay Area." Retrieved March 9, 2009. (<http://nobawc.org/article.php?id=87>).
- Palmore, Erdman B. 1969. "Predicting Longevity: A Follow-up Controlling for Age." *Gerontology* 9: 247-50.
- Pateman, Carole. 1970. *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Rollins, Judith. 1996. "Invisibility, Consciousness of the Other, and *Ressentiment* among Black Domestic Workers." Pp. 223-243 in *Working in a Service Society*, edited by C. L. Macdonald and C. Sirianni. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Rothschild, Joyce and J. Allen Whitt. 1986. *The Cooperative Workplace: Potentials and dilemmas of organizational democracy and participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Rothschild-Whitt, Joyce. 1982. "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Bureaucratic Models." Pp. 23-49 in *Workplace Democracy and Social Change*, edited by F. Lindenfield and J. Rothschild-Whitt. Boston, MA: Porter Sargeant Publishers, Inc.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 2004 (originally published in 1755). *A Discourse on Political Economy*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.

- Russell, Raymond. 1985. *Sharing Ownership in the Workplace*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- , 1982. "The Rewards of Participation in the Worker-Owned Firm." Pp. 109-123 in *Workplace Democracy and Social Change*, edited by F. Lindenfield and J. Rothschild-Whitt. Boston, MA: Porter Sargeant Publishers, Inc.
- Salzinger, Leslie. 1991. "A Maid by Any Other Name: The Transformation of 'Dirty Work' by Central American Immigrants." Pp. 139-160 in *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, edited by M. Burawoy. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Wilkinson, Richard G. 2005. *The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier*. New York, NY: Routledge.