ABSTRACT

McTAGUE, TRICIA. Cultivating Consent, Reaping Resistance: Identity-Based Control and Unionization at a High-End Natural Foods Company. (Under the direction of Michael Schwalbe).

In this study, I examine managerial control and worker resistance at two upscale retail grocery stores that were parts of a national chain. Despite management’s efforts to elicit worker consent by crafting an image of environmental responsibility and using team-based work systems, workers at these two stores sought to unionize. Based on in-depth interviews with twenty former workers and organizers, I examine the conditions that led to the emergence and ultimate failure of the organizing drives. I argue that management used an identity-based control strategy that involved “green” rhetoric, emotion-management rituals, and symbols of counter-cultural values. I show how this strategy elicited consent by affirming workers’ self-conceptions, but then broke down when workers experienced contradictions between the company’s image and managerial behavior. Dissatisfaction stemming from these contradictions led to organizing campaigns, in which workers invoked the company’s teamwork rhetoric and green rhetoric to legitimize their efforts. The environmentalist identities that were the initial basis for consent thus became the basis for challenging company policies and practices. Both organizing drives failed, however, because of managerial recalcitrance, high turnover, and weak support from established unions. This analysis extends Edwards’s theory of control regimes by sketching a distinct identity-based form of control that draws on cultural symbols important to both workers and customers. My
findings also point to the need for unions to adopt new strategies—organizing communities and whole industries, rather than single workplaces—if they wish to bring young, low-wage workers in the retail sector into the labor movement. I also discuss the need for further efforts to change the legal context that allows management to effectively impede unionization campaigns.
Cultivating Consent, Reaping Resistance: Identity-Based Control and Unionization at a High-End Natural Foods Company

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandmother, Peggy McTague.

I carry your heart with me always.
BIOGRAPHY

Tricia McTague grew up in an Irish-Italian, Catholic, working-class family in Old Bridge, New Jersey. In fourth grade, she dressed up as Charlie Chaplin for Halloween—a sure sign of things to come. She did both her undergraduate and graduate work at North Carolina State University and was an active member of the Student-Worker Alliance at NCSU, a group of students who advocate for workers and workers’ rights. In the fall of 2010, she was hired as an assistant professor of sociology at Missouri State University.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It doesn’t take a Ph.D. in Sociology to realize that an individual’s accomplishment often reflects the efforts of many other people. Likewise, the completion of this dissertation, and the degree attached to it, would not have been possible without the patience and support of my family, teachers, and friends. I thank my parents, Pat and Tom McTague, for all of the sacrifices they made and for their unconditional love and support. My grandparents, Peggy and Bob McTague and Rita and Patrick Marinaccio, were also hard-working people who went without so their kids could have a better life, just as their immigrant parents did for them. Thus, this dissertation has been generations in the making and an honor I share with my family, both past and present. Dustin Dorsey, my partner, deserves a heap of thanks for his patience and unwavering support. Thank you, Dustin. I love you with all my heart. My chosen family, Amy and Becky McClure and Joy Piontak helped keep me sane throughout. I’d also like to acknowledge my teachers, especially Michael Schwalbe, for teaching me how to write and think like a sociologist, encouraging me to do my best and be myself, and tolerating me when I tried to rush, instead of trust, the process. I am grateful to committee members Jeff Leiter, Michael Schulman, David Zonderman, and Don Tomaskovic-Devey for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions. I’m also grateful for the generous feedback from my fellow classmates in Michael Schwalbe’s writing class—Katrina Bloch, Alison Buck, Brandy Farrar, Amanda Gengler, Kendra Jason, Kris Macomber, Amy McClure, Sarah Nell Rusche, Kylie Parrotta, Heather Shay, Tiffany Taylor. Most of all, I thank the members of
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CHAPTER 1

MANAGERIAL CONTROL AND WORKER RESISTANCE: INTRODUCTIONS

In my junior year of college in Raleigh, North Carolina, I needed a job. Like many other college-aged folks, I turned to the service industry, which boiled down to a choice between waiting tables or working retail. Previous experiences with sexual harassment from bosses, coworkers, and patrons had soured me on restaurant work. So retail it was. I applied to a chain store called Pier 1 Imports, which employed few men. They sold dishes, candles, and furniture. The 20 percent employee discount was also attractive, as was the option to wear casual clothes. The other workers had piercings, tattoos, and crazy-colored hair. This appealed to me as well, since I thought it would mean a less-corporate, more relaxed workplace.

When I started the job, the most satisfying work was setting up displays. It was fun to mix-and-match colors and textures. There were basic guidelines for setting up displays—like arranging the merchandise from tallest to shortest, thereby creating a cascading effect—but for the most part we had creative license. The shelving was humble; just wood planks held together with pins. Management would mark down damaged merchandise by 75 to 90 percent, and then we got our discount on top of this. If we made a $1000 sale we received a five percent commission. The pay was low, and the store was in an affluent suburb, which meant lots of snooty customers. But I liked the people I worked with (most were around my age), made some good friends, wasn’t experiencing harassment, got to wear sneakers and cargo pants, and brought home
some pretty dishes, candles, and furniture for cheap.

At some point—around the time I started to see commercials for Pier 1 on TV—things began to change. The company was getting bigger and working on creating a high-end image to compete with stores like Pottery Barn. There were other changes too. We all had to undergo a new training program complete with videos and a workbook. There was a heavy emphasis on teamwork. Management initiated a WOW! campaign that called for wowing customers by Joeding over backwards to please them. They wanted more from us in terms of customer service and cleanliness, while taking away a lot of job perks at the same time.

We were given detailed maps from regional on how to set up displays. We weren’t allowed to wear shirts with writing on them; sneakers, logos, and piercings were also out. I remember having to buy several new pairs of pants—on my $6 an hour wage. Moreover, we were supposed to wear dress shoes. The poster in the breakroom had a picture of a woman wearing heels! This was completely impractical, not to mention unsafe, since we had to climb ladders and scaffolding to reach heavy wicker chairs and settees that were stacked on top of one another. Our commission was gone. Instead we would receive WOW! bucks, which were $5 gift certificates to Pier 1. We also had to push the Pier 1 credit card.

These changes were intended to standardize all Pier 1 stores. If you walked into a store in Hawaii, it was supposed to look exactly like the Raleigh store. I remember grumbling about the new changes to my coworkers, who sort of shrugged off our loss of
perks, declining autonomy, and increased pressure to sell. Many of them hadn’t been there since before the changes, due to the high turnover, and they didn't seem to be as upset as I was. Why weren't we saying no to these changes?

My stint at Pier 1 ended when I was given a position as a teaching assistant. I had been promoted to assistant manager six months earlier, but now the company was eliminating assistant manager positions in order to reduce hierarchy and costs. Assistant managers would be downgraded to “associates” and paid less. When I was first approached about the promotion to assistant manager, I studied the training materials and learned how to use the teamwork rhetoric. I didn’t believe in it, but I could talk the talk.

During my first month as an assistant manager, I eagerly raised my hand to answer questions during our store meetings. I was the youngest assistant manager and felt I needed to prove that I knew my stuff. Some of the associates whom I managed were older and equally experienced. After a couple of months my gung-ho attitude evaporated. As an assistant manager, I had to deal with the annoying customers who asked to speak with a manager. I was cursed out, hung up on, and generally berated on what seemed like a daily basis. I still worked hard but I became bitter and tried to find ways to avoid dealing with customers. To add insult to injury, I was now low person on the totem pole of management, whereas before I was probably considered the best associate on the floor.
It was primarily this work experience that sparked my interest in teams, managerial control, and worker resistance. Looking back, I wondered why there wasn’t more resistance to the encroachment on our wages and work. Why didn’t we put our collective feet down? Did the other coworkers see the same contradictions? Did they notice that Pier 1 was asking us for more effort while at the same time taking away Joeefits? *Why didn’t I try harder to organize with my coworkers?* What was management’s motivation for using teams in the first place? Are there any unionized workplaces that use teams? Do workers at other workplaces notice the same contradictions that were glaringly obvious to me? I hoped to answer some of these questions through my professional academic work.

*Green Grocer: A Case-Study Opportunity*

Fast forward a few years to a conversation I am having with a friend about veganism. He informs me that Green Grocer (GG, a pseudonym), a high-end natural foods chain store, is just about the biggest union buster around. Green Grocer? But I shop there all the time, I thought to myself. Haven’t they received national awards for being a good employer? At least that’s what I remembered seeing plastered on the store window. How could this be? I was so disappointed. I always thought I was supporting a company that treated its workers well and sold food that’s good for the environment and for people’s health.
When I got home, I started digging. I found the Green Workers Unite website outlining the struggle at GG and the union busting practices the company was using. I also learned that the award for being a good place to work is not decided by workers, but instead companies nominate themselves, and only about 100 even apply. As I continued scouring the Green Workers Unite website, I found out that the company uses teams—or claims to. At this point, I started to seriously consider selecting GG for my dissertation project. It seemed like an opportunity to make sense not only of my own work experiences, but also to contribute sociological knowledge about control and resistance.

As touted on the company website, Green Grocer has come a long way from its humble beginnings as a mom-and-pop natural foods store. The founder and present day CEO reportedly used his life savings and borrowed money to fund the opening of the first GG store in the late 1970s. Unable to afford rent, he lived at the store, using the dishwasher hose to bathe. Through merger and acquisition of 15 formerly distinct groceries, the company now owns and operates a chain of almost 300 stores in North America and the United Kingdom. In the 1990s, GG targeted community grocery stores and small (two to three establishments) local chains. During the early 2000s, the company expanded into Canada and the U.K. and bought out another national natural foods chain, the largest yet. Over the same time period, GG’s stock twice split 2:1 and the company launched its own brand of products. Today, the company employs close to

1 The time frame is not specified in order to prevent identification.
Around the same time the company’s stock split, workers at a store in the Midwest initiated a union organizing campaign and launched the “Green Workers Unite” website to get the word out and provide support for workers seeking to unionize their stores. There followed several other organizing attempts around the country, including a solid effort by workers at a store in the Southwest. From the workers’ website, I learned that GG and its CEO are staunchly anti-union. In response to a farmworker advocacy group’s request for GG to sign a pledge in support of improving working conditions and wages of farmworkers, GG instead, put together a slick brochure for its customers, basically saying that there was no problem. Authorship of the brochure\(^2\) was attributed to a workers and farmers alliance, which was actually a front organization for corporate agricultural interests. The workers and farmers alliance is also closely associated with a right-wing public relations firm.

These questionable company practices remain hidden from the average customer who walks through its doors. A very different image is projected—one that portrays GG as a socially conscious, perhaps even progressive, company that puts environmental responsibility and human health before profits. Before even setting foot into Green Grocer, it’s clear that this is not a typical supermarket. At one typical store, a tiny green island in the concrete parking lot holds rooted cherry tomato plants and a small pumpkin patch. The sign indicates that this patch of soil is designated for the

\(^2\) Data on the company’s campaign against farmworkers are derived from newspaper articles and worker interviews.
“Children’s Community Garden.” Near the entrance doors, an impressive array of color splashes, courtesy of the racks of hanging potted flowers and plants, welcomes customers into the store. Many of these for-sale plants are labeled “organic” or “local.” A quick look at the price tag lets customers know that they are at a high-end natural foods grocery store. Rain barrels, sold for $100 each, are stacked against the outside wall along with GG brand bagged compost made of waste from stores as far as 750 miles away. The sign encourages shoppers to participate in GG’s recycling efforts by buying these items.

Inside the automatic doors hang several plaques awarded to Green Grocer for being one of the best companies to work for. Next to these, a large chalkboard calendar of community events hangs on the wall. Other flyers announce cooking classes, a workshop on “Immune Support for Back to School” for parents who want to learn how to support their family’s natural immunity using herbs and supplements, and “Introduction to Infant Massage,” advertised as a method for natural relief of baby’s gas, constipation, and colic.

The marketing signs along the aisles and at the prepared foods section are written neatly on small chalkboard signs. Brochures on GG’s commitment to local farmers are stashed around the store. More conspicuously, cardboard cutouts of smiling local farmers wearing overalls stand in front of product displays. Banners hanging from the ceiling over the in-house café read, “Feel Good About Where You Shop.” An entire aisle of bulk bins, as found in co-ops (or cooperative grocery store as described in the
next section), is an opportunity for customers to buy food without extraneous packaging. The workers—some wearing pink and green hair, Mohawks, piercings, and neck tattoos—look like those you might expect to see in a real co-op. A voice coming from the loud speaker echoes throughout the store and asks, “Will a team member from Seafood please pick up line two? Team member from Seafood, you have a call on line two."

Novice shoppers can be overwhelmed by the amount of literature in the store. Just about every product label tells a story about how the food was grown, how the brand started, the company’s environmental, health, and community values, and the nutritional Joeefits of the product. Many of the animal-based products come with stories about what the animal’s life was like. A carton of eggs might describe how Henrietta the hen spent her days free ranging in idyllic pastures, eating organic feed, and laying happy eggs. Product labels entice customers with the latest buzzwords—cage-free, cruelty free, vegan certified, antibiotic-free, free range, made with organic ingredients, organic certified, natural, unbleached, whole grain, trans fats, omega fatty acids, and so on.

A separate section of the store houses vitamins, supplements, herbs, and homeopathics, as well as an extensive array of pricey bath products. But Green Grocer isn’t just a health food store. It’s also a high-end grocery boutique that carries exotic fruits, artisanal cheeses, fine chocolates, and fancy wines. What other grocery store has a professional masseuse and massage chair on site?
As I learned more about GG and the unionizing efforts, my curiosity grew. I couldn’t help but see the similarities between this case and my own work experiences. Both Pier 1 and GG employ young and part-time workers, and both sell high-end products to affluent customers. As I began to read-up on teams, however, all of the sociological research that I could find looked at teams in manufacturing workplaces (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, and Kalleberg 2000; Appelbaum and Batt 1994; Barker 1993, 1999; Vallas 2003; Graham 1995; Grenier 1988) and, less frequently, in professional workplaces (Ollilainen and Rothschild 2001). Still, there was nothing that spoke to my experiences at Pier 1; that is, nothing on the use of teams in the retail sector. As a sociologist of work, I wondered how the use of teams in retail was similar to and different from the use of teams in manufacturing.

To begin with, retail is full of part-time workers, young folks, and women, unlike the traditional manufacturing sector. Maybe retail workers are less likely to organize because they won’t be around long enough to build a movement. Maybe managers use high turnover to their advantage by recruiting anti-union workers to replace pro-union workers. College-student workers might also tolerate unfair labor practices because they anticipate leaving the job after college and starting a career. Conversely, student workers and/or part-time workers probably have less to lose in comparison to full-time, career-oriented, skilled workers. They don’t have a pension, they might not have dependent kids, and they probably don’t have to worry about losing Jessefits, because many college-aged workers are still covered by their parents’ insurance. Also, retail
jobs don't usually come with health insurance, so there's really nothing to lose there. On the other hand, college student workers might be exposed to critical perspectives in their coursework (as I had been) and thus be more likely to recognize exploitation.

Retail managers might also use teamwork for different reasons than managers in manufacturing. In team-based manufacturing, the end product is a tangible commodity. A team may work together to paint a car on the assembly line. When problems arise, members collectively solve the problem, ideally without coercive direction from management.

Retail is different. While workers do some physical labor, the primary production in retail is the emotional labor used to sell products. Management tries to extract genuine feelings and emotions from their employees, especially at high-end retail stores like Pier 1. They want workers who will sell products to customers. How do they get workers to do this? At Pier 1 they used coercive, covert, and surveillance strategies, such as secret shoppers to make sure workers performed the necessary emotional labor. Managers also want workers to voluntarily use their own personalities and emotions to build rapport with customers so that people will spend more. But how do they get workers to buy in? What strategies do they use to get workers to want to sell?

Another similarity between Pier 1 and GG is that the quality of our work lives deteriorated as the company expanded. Likewise, the union organizing campaign at GG began shortly after the company experienced rapid growth. Both retail chains also
relied heavily on team rhetoric while increasing expectations for worker productivity. This suggests that company growth spurts are accompanied by changes throughout the organization.

In his influential study of organizational size, Blau (1970) theorizes that as the number of employees increases, so does the degree of differentiation, which he defines as the subdivision of work into various components. As the number of workers grows, so must the number of supervisory positions. However, when the organization reaches its productive capacity, the rate of differentiation declines, a process that Blau attributes to the imperative to reduce overhead (i.e. supervisory personnel). This increases the span of managerial control because they are responsible for overseeing more workers. Large corporations tend to amass homogenous groups of workers who are in the same position in the hierarchy, performing the same kind of work. Blau assumes that these counter-veiling tendencies reflect the need to coordinate work in accordance with an economy of scale, while also satisfying the need to reduce overhead (i.e. supervisory positions).

Organizational sociologists have been theorizing about size, and routinely including it as a variable in their statistical models, for decades. While we know that firm and establishment size is important, we don’t know exactly why. Blau focuses on the “needs” of the organization, without accounting for the various interests and political struggles among workers, managers, departments, and establishments within  

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3 A review of the relevant organizational literature follows below.
the firm. What are the number of employees and level of differentiation indexes of? How is size related to the power of large corporations and struggles at work? Moreover, this kind of ahistorical account assumes capitalist conditions, but does not explain how they shape economic behavior (see Burawoy 1979).

This case study provides an opportunity to learn about the social processes linked to accelerated growth and size, how local managers carry out decisions made at the top of the corporate hierarchy, and how workers respond to managerial control strategies. Workers don’t always follow managers’ rules, of course. They can reject managerial ideologies and collectively resist as the workers did in the Midwest and Southwest stores. In this way, the GG case allows for an analysis of the dynamics of control and resistance. In other words, it presents an opportunity to learn about how changes imposed from above play out on the sales floor.

My decision to study Green Grocer case was based in my own experiences, the sociological literature on teamwork, and what I gathered from the workers’ the company’s websites. Thus, I had some preconceived notions of what I would find. For example, I expected to find that team-based systems raise hopes for workplace democracy that are not fulfilled, and that workers’ disappointment leads to resistance. As the research project progressed, I came to realize that there was much more to the story than I expected.

Teamwork, it turned out, played an important part in the struggle for control at

\[4\] A review of the relevant teamwork literature follows below.
GG, but it was not the only reason workers sought to unionize. In fact, teams were just one part of the company's hybridized control project, which sought to encompass workers and customers. GG's control project relied heavily on cultivating a green, or environmentally responsible, company image. Environmentally conscious workers and customers were encouraged to see their interests as aligned with company's. GG used what I call identity-based control to provide both groups an opportunity to affirm their green identities.

There were other equally important pieces of the analytic story left to account for. While use of this control project has been largely successful, its effectiveness was not absolute. The attempts to unionize at the Midwest and Southwest stores indicate that there were weaknesses in GG’s control project. Under what conditions did workers begin to see holes in the company’s green image? By what social processes did workers collectively redefine and resist GG’s control project? And how did the company respond to workers’ collective resistance? I set out to answer these questions through this case study. In the next section, I review the literature that puts teamwork, as a control strategy, in historical context. Teamwork, after all, is just one strategy for gaining consent. How have control regimes changed over time?

MANAGERIAL PROBLEMS

Before I turn to a discussion of changes in control regimes over time, it is first necessary to better understand the problem from managers' perspective. According to
Burawoy (1979), the central problem faced by managers is the securing of unpaid labor and realization of surplus value:

...[T]here is no prior specification of the productive activities; instead, management attempts to extract as much labor from workers as possible. The hourly rate or piece rate is fixed before the worker enters the factory gates, that is, before the expenditure of effort. Furthermore, the worker receives the wage long before the capitalist has had the opportunity to realize the value of the product of that labor. How can the capitalist know beforehand at what level the wage per unit of product will exceed the price it can fetch? (P. 26)

Burawoy points out that markets are essential to capitalism. He explains that the realization of surplus value occurs later and is removed from the point of production. Managers have no way of knowing how much to pay workers in order to turn a profit because this depends on worker outputs, which are static rather than fixed.

If factory managers have difficulty determining worker output in the production of tangible commodities, then it makes sense that this problem would be exacerbated in interactive service work, where the end product is a happy customer. How can retail managers ensure that workers are performing at an acceptable level? At GG, workers were instructed to “satisfy and delight” their customers. How do managers know that customers have left the store feeling satisfied (let alone delighted) by the end of the service transaction?

Moreover, foremen, in particular have had to deal with problem of declining authority in the workplace (Joedix 1956). The diminution of authority was accomplished by reallocating tasks to specialized personnel that were once assigned to foreman. Both Joedix and Burawoy note that the foreman's role has gradually shifted
from one of control to one of service. Thus, foremen have all of the responsibility but little authority. In the retail context, the equivalent of the foreman is the departmental manager or “team leader” whose former duties have been parceled out to customer service desks and human resources departments. The team leader assumes responsibility for departmental sales, but often has little control over larger economic conditions, like the tightening of family budgets. Moreover, low-level retail managers are directed to enforce rules created and imposed from upper management.

Other managers experience different problems depending on their position in the hierarchy. Shop management is responsible for securing surplus value, while upper management is interested in realizing surplus labor. In other words, extra local managers positioned at the top of the hierarchy are primarily concerned with protecting profit. For example, managers outside the shop considered output restriction to be unacceptable, while management inside the shop either looked the other way or participated in it. When shop managers allow the labor process to drift in accordance with making out, they can increase costs and reduce quality. Upper management can exercise control over these factors only by imposing rules—rules that turn out to be incompatible with the organization of the labor process. According to Burawoy, the enforcement of obsolete rules serves as a “ritual affirmation” of managerial authority. The occasional introduction of rules or the enforcement of dormant rules, reminds workers, as well as shop managers, that they are indeed subordinates and that their autonomy is conditional. In the retail context, a store that does not meet quality
standards or meet the sales goals set by upper management would be subject to this kind of reprimand that reasserts the relations in production.

In summary, managers are often motivated by different concerns and confront different problems depending on their position in the hierarchy and their relationship to the labor process, including distance from the production site. Sometimes this causes conflict between managerial groups with outwardly competing interests. Burawoy contends, however, that intra-managerial conflict is the exception, rather than the rule. Most conflict is spread laterally rather than vertically, meaning that workers often struggle with one another, rather in solidarity against management.

THE EVOLUTION OF MANGERIAL CONTROL

Labor process scholars have focused their attention on understanding the dynamics of control and resistance in the workplace. One particularly influential piece of scholarship is Richard Edwards's *Contested Terrain* (1979). In this book, Edwards explores the dialectical relationship between managerial control and worker resistance since the late 1800s. Managers, Edwards argues, are perpetually trying to solve the problem of control. As workplaces change, new control strategies are needed to keep workers in line. As managers devise new strategies for control, they inadvertently create new opportunities for resistance. Each control strategy backfires to some degree, but managers use what works and toss the rest.
Technological control, for example, was managers’ attempt to deal with the problems of output restriction and unionization. Both were unintended consequences of the concentration of capital that brought large numbers of workers under one roof (see also Blau 1970). This promoted worker solidarity and provided an opportunity for the rise of the industrial unionism that crossed occupational lines. Managers realized that brute force was often countered with equally militant worker resistance. Thus, instead of relying on foremen to enforce production standards through the drive system—close supervision, abuse, profanity, and threats—managers sought a less antagonistic, less visible means of exercising control. Heavy-handed control tactics also exposed competing class interests between workers and bosses. Moreover, managers could not trust that foremen would use their authority to the Joefit of the company instead of for self-interest.

Capitalists thus began to use machines to set the pace of work. In doing so, they sought to eliminate worker discretion in the production process and keep foremen in check. Everyone knew what they were supposed to be doing because work was directed by machines (i.e., the assembly line and continuous flow production). Furthermore, solidarity-building was stifled. Workers were tied to their machines and thereby isolated from each other. Still, they found ways to resist, especially the sit-down strike, whereby workers on one part of the line could effectively shut down the entire production line. Other worker tactics included sabotage and wildcat strikes. In short, technological control strategies backfired in a major way.
Managers learned much from their experiments with technological control, and these lessons informed the next regime—bureaucratic control. Bureaucratic control strategies encouraged workers to internalize the goals and values of the company. These were essentially divide-and-conquer strategies. Under this control regime, punishment was institutionalized but, more importantly, positive sanctions were formalized into promotion and evaluation. Workers were lured by the prospect of mobility and now had a basis for long-term loyalty and identification with the company instead of with their coworkers. Edwards calls it an “elaborate system of bribes” (1979:145). Workers expressed less of themselves and more of the company—“We the firm, not we the workers” (1979:148). Bureaucratic control challenged workplace culture and alienated workers from each other. It allowed for an indirect path to the intensification of work.

But bureaucratic control also had its drawbacks. Many workers remained suspicious of management’s goals, never fully embracing them. Secure, long-term workers also looked for ways to improve the working conditions they would face for years. Bureaucratic control could thus fuel demands for workplace democracy. Because they would be at the same company for their entire careers, they had a stake in making it a better place to work. Firms ran into another problem because they could not guarantee good wages and security forever. After all, capitalism requires an ever-increasing extraction of surplus labor. Long-term employment meant that workers
expected raises, and managers could not readily dismiss long-term workers who typically developed skills crucial to the production process.

Compassionate Capitalism

Edwards typology of control regimes also includes welfare capitalism, company unions, and the human relations model. Beginning in the 1920s and coming to fruition after World War II, these experiments were capitalists’ responses to two big problems—industrial conflict and the rising burden of non-production staff. By this time, capitalists learned that the use of brute repression created serious instability. They also realized that they had acquired an army of highly paid managers and office workers. Capitalists needed to deskill once-elite supervisors but still retain their loyalty. If workers could be induced to self-regulate and keep each other in line, then expensive managers wouldn’t be necessary.

Edwards says that welfare capitalism sought to “harmonize” the interests of labor and capital and secure worker loyalty by doling out perks to selected workers. Anyone who was active in the union sacrificed these rewards. Managers thus attempted to convince workers that the corporation cares, thereby undercutting militancy without sacrificing control over the labor process. Companies paid for community housing, schools, playgrounds, and even Americanization programs for recent immigrants. They also launched retirement plans and health programs. Stock plans were supposed to bring worker and capitalist interests in line. Welfare capitalism also helped the
corporation cultivate a positive public image. Yet welfare capitalism failed, according to Edwards, because it was expensive and ineffective. Massive strikes at International Harvester, GE, and US Steel ensued, despite the implementation of welfare programs.

Another experiment in managerial control took the form of the company union. Company unions paired seemingly democratic practices with bureaucratic rules and policies, like the in-house grievance procedure. Edwards points out that such procedures rarely resulted in favorable verdicts for workers because management set the rules that worker-councils could only enforce. Company unions heightened worker expectations for fairness without delivering the goods. As such, the inconsistencies between managerial promises of democracy at work and the lack thereof shortly became too great for workers to ignore. Once workers got a taste of workplace democracy, they wanted more. According to Edwards, this failed experiment taught managers how to deal with workers’ problems on an individual rather than collective basis through formal grievance procedures. Conflict shifted from the shop floor to the manager’s office, thereby legitimizing managerial authority through rule making.

The human relations model pioneered by Elton Mayo rejected the Taylorist assumption that workers and employers had fundamentally competing interests. Instead, proponents of the human relations model saw the potential for creating a mutually Joeeficial relationship. Mayo and his supporters began with the assumption

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5 Edwards argues that company unions were capitalists’ response to Wilson’s War Labor Board demands for worker organizations. Companies rushed to form their own employee representation plans before unions beat them to it.
that workers and managers can peacefully cooperate in production. They asserted that individual workers were not simply rational economic actors but complex beings with multiple motives and values that required a positive working context. As such, workers were allowed more control over work because these conditions allowed workers to reach their full productive potential, thereby Joeefiting both worker and employer.

The human relations model bears striking resemblance to the modern day team-based system, in which work groups democratically make decisions about how the work is done. Both models claim that manager-worker relations are not inherently unequal and that giving workers some latitude results in higher productivity. In other words, the human relations model shares with teamwork the premise that managers and workers can both win at the same game. Perhaps most importantly, each one is intended to cultivate workers’ identification with the company and to produce strong organizational commitment.

Most studies of teamwork and organizational commitment, find that management succeeds in using teams to elicit consent (Graham 1995; Grenier 1988; Barker 1993). Workers essentially consent to their own exploitation in three ways. First, workers are manipulated into following the rules through the process of rationalization (Barker 1993). In other words, they follow the rules for the sake of following the rules (or so it seems). Workers also sometimes police each other more harshly than management. Second, managers exercise control through the normative pressures created through the team system (Graham 1995). Workers put forth extra
effort to meet production goals because they don’t want to let the team down. Third, workers internalize managerially imposed team ideologies. As a result, they self-regulate and identify more with the company than with each other.

Studies by Getman (1999) and Vallas (2003a, 2003b) showed, however, that workers recognize the contradictions of team-based production systems. Scholars are not the only ones who see that management is not willing to live up to its promise of a democratic workplace. Furthermore, workers are more likely to question unfair labor practices when these promises go unfulfilled. Teams essentially raise expectations for workplace democracy without being able to meet them.

Edwards’s control typology provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of control and resistance at Green Grocer, in a historical and capitalist context. Each control regime informs the next. As Edwards points out, past control strategies that may not entirely solve the problem, but are effective in some ways, can be carried into the next regime. These partially successful control strategies become “ancillary rather than central to control” (1979:130). Thus, in this study, I use Edwards’s framework to make sense of the hybrid control project at GG that drew components from different past managerial experiments—bureaucratic control, welfare capitalism, company unionism, and the human relations model. At the same time, GG managers developed new strategies to deal with the problem of consent. However, as Edwards points out, these strategies did not always ameliorate struggle on the shop floor and sometimes produced unintended consequences that incited
resistance. In other words, control is not inevitable, and managerial strategies can sometimes backfire.

The lessons that have grown out of these control efforts constitute a “cultural toolkit” that managers today can draw on to quell worker dissent. According to Swidler, “culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life...which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems” (1986:273). In this sense, the elements that make up control regimes can be assembled in new ways to solve problems as they arise.

Past control projects provide cultural tools that companies can borrow to solve new problems. However, companies can also draw from the wider cultural environment. Firms appropriate cultural symbols to attract customers, either by responding to existing consumer demands or by creating it by convincing consumers that they need a particular product or service through advertising and marketing. In GG’s case, the company both reflected and shaped public concern over health and the environment. Thus, the environmental movement provided another cache of cultural signs and symbols to draw from. In the next section, I situate GG in its wider cultural context. To be sure, concern over sustainability and people’s health did not begin at GG. Thus it is necessary to understand how this social movement began and how companies like GG have transformed these concerns into a niche market.
BORROWED CULTURES

Making sense of Green Grocer’s business plan requires an examination of the cultural projects it borrows from. To begin, we can look at the origins of the organic movement. Michael Pollan (2006) points to People’s Park, California, as the birth site of the organic movement. On April 20, 1969, a group called the Robin Hood Commission commandeered an empty lot owned by the University of California and turned it into a park. They pulled up the asphalt, laid sod, planted trees, and installed a vegetable garden. These “guerilla gardeners” sought to grow “uncontaminated” organic food.

Back then, the rejection of pesticides was a statement against the military-industrial complex, since pesticide producing companies like Dow and Monsanto also produced napalm and Agent Orange, chemical weapons used by the U.S. during the Vietnam War. Pollan explains:

...much more was at stake than a method of farming. Acting on the ecological premise that everything’s connected to everything else, the early organic movement sought to establish not just an alternative mode of production (the chemical-free farm), but an alternative system of distribution (the anti-capitalist food co-ops), and even an alternative mode of consumption (the “counter cuisine”). These were the three struts on which organic’s revolutionary program stood; since ecology taught “you can never do only one thing,” what you ate was inseparable from how it was grown and how it reached your table. (2006:143)

Soon, guerilla gardens sprang up all over the country and eventually led to the rise of community gardens and food cooperatives.

A food cooperative, commonly referred to as a “co-op,” is a member owned and operated grocery store. These are non-profit organizations; what would be profit in other organizations is returned to the member/owners. Decisions about what to buy
and how to run the business are made democratically. Co-ops reflect local tastes and are often the center of community life, which means they are important to community culture. They often carry natural and organic foods and try to keep money in the community by creating food webs that support local farmers.

Another outgrowth of the organic movement was ethical consumption, which emerged in the 1980s (Gabriel and Lang 2005) and drew attention to the fact that human consumption patterns are unsustainable, threatening the survival of the planet and humans. Criticism of consumerism split into a radical call for “voluntary simplicity” (buying less stuff) and a more popular message that asked people to consume carefully and differently (e.g., buying energy efficient appliances, hybrid cars, and fair trade coffee). It is this latter call that GG has tried to answer. Or has tried to appear to answer.

The growth of consumer activism led in turn to the rise of the ethical corporation. Johnston identifies the citizen-consumer hybrid concept, which has gained popularity among academics and activists, as a contradiction in terms. The hybrid concept “implies a social practice – voting with your dollar – that can satisfy competing ideologies” (2008:229) of consumerism (an idea rooted in individual self-interest) and citizenship (an ideal rooted in collective responsibility to a social and ecological commons). This neoclassical economic model assumes that all consumers have the same options, and that if consumers are provided with enough good information they will make the right choice. In this view, corporatism and consumerism hold significant promise as means of protecting the environment. Johnston, in contrast, raises
important questions about the consequences of relying on ethical consumption to solve our environmental problems. She contends that “voting with your dollar” ultimately puts the burden on consumers instead of creating and enforcing governmental regulations that protect people’s health and the environment.

Corporations like Green Grocer have responded to the rise of ethical consumption by providing consumers with an opportunity to feel good about where they shop. What was once a means of opting out of the military-industrial complex is now a niche market “where specialized goods and services allow consumers to achieve distinction through carefully crafted identities and lifestyles” (Johnston 2008:240). Hence, deliberate attempts to opt out of industrial food systems have been turned into marketing opportunities. That is, the organic movement has been co-opted.

Green Grocer has co-opted the organic movement by appropriating symbols associated with environmentalism. The company’s green image allowed citizen-consumers a way to resolve the dilemmas of ethical consumption. The store’s “feel good about where you shop” signs helped cultivate an atmosphere where customers could feel like they were contributing to the greater environmental good as long as they shopped at GG.

Moreover, as the company grew, it eliminated competition by buying and driving out locally owned grocery stores. The company has successfully achieved market domination and is considered a leader firm among natural foods retailers. Green

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6 I return to and fully explain this point in the next chapter.
Grocer’s monopolistic position grants it considerable normative power. The original meaning of environmentalist symbols can be obscured and detached from the actions that were once associated with them. In chapter three, I will show how the gap between rhetoric and reality grew along with the company’s share of the market. I will also discuss how the contradictions of “Big Organic” manifested on the sales floor.

So far I have identified two cultural sources that Green Grocer draws from—past managerial control regimes and the environmental movement. However, I have not yet addressed how borrowing is accomplished. Below I review the organizational literature on how culture is transferred and transformed both between and within firms.

Cultural Production between Firms

Swidler’s idea of a cultural toolkit overlaps with what is called “new institutionalism.” Drawing on Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) work, institutionalists contend that, “...meaning is socially constructed among large numbers of organizations through the creation of shared practices and the collective attribution of rationality or justice to those practices” (Strandgaard and Dobbin 2006:897). In other words, organizational actors solve problems by borrowing or copying solutions found in the wider environment. Solutions or “best practices” are often chosen based on their perceived legitimacy, rather than efficiency. For example, banks signal legitimacy to depositors and partners through accreditation with the Federal Deposit Insurance
Corporation (FDIC). These federally insured banks conspicuously display accreditation symbols on their websites, teller windows, and anywhere else depositors might look.

Both the cultural toolkit idea and new institutionalism focus on the importance of symbols, rituals, ceremonies, and myths for solving problems. New institutionalists, however, place emphasis on an organization’s use of these tools as a response to influences and pressures from outside the organization—customers, regulators, public opinion, watch groups, suppliers, competitors, etc. These tools are borrowed not only from past managerial cultural projects, but also from the wider environment. For example, the proliferation of human resource departments within companies was a response to the civil rights movement and the post-civil rights act regulatory environment (Dobbin and Sutton 1998). By virtue of having a specific department dedicated to equal opportunity at work (often managed by a person of color), companies show that they are working towards eliminating discrimination, even if progress is negligible. This example highlights the possibility that formal policies can be decoupled from behavior inside the organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Organizational survival is often contingent upon a firm's ability to carve out an organizational identity that is distinct from its competitors. Uniqueness is accomplished counter-intuitively, by adopting and adapting established elements from the organizational environment—a process that institutionalists call isomorphism. Strandgaard and Dobbin summarize these dual processes as two sides of the same coin.

On one hand, we know that actors in organizations copy practices and justificatory rhetorics, that they observe in the environment in the hope of
symbolizing, and effecting, the prime legitimate goals of modernity: rationality and justice. Culture and practice in organizations are sometimes intentionally and conspicuously imported from the environment. On the other hand we know that actors in organizations create unique practices, and justificatory rhetorics, to distinguish their organizations and to symbolize, and affect the goals of rationality and justice. Culture and practice are intentionally created anew and celebrated by actors within organizations. (2006:898)

In this way, the formation of identity through uniqueness and the construction of legitimacy through uniformity are achieved in tandem. Managers use recognizable symbols and rhetoric to attract (in the case of customers and potential workers) or fend off (in the case of regulatory agencies and watch groups) various audiences. At the same time, organizations compete for customers and potential employees by using various rhetorics and symbols to signal their uniqueness. This can be tricky, because managers must show that their companies are different in a way that customers and potential employees will recognize and value.

Cultural Production within Firms

New institutionalism provides concepts that are useful for understanding the dominant culture, since it focuses on the actions of managers and professionals. However, it is less helpful in figuring out how workers (particularly low-level workers who compose the largest group of people in the organization) contribute to organizational culture and behavior. Workers, of course, do not passively embrace managers' cultural projects. In order to understand the full range of worker behavior, we can look to the negotiated order perspective (Strauss 1978; Fine 1984; Maines and
This perspective proposes that social organization cannot be fully understood without examining the interactions of people inside them. Organization, in this view, is not possible without some negotiation between organizational actors.

Negotiation, whether implicit or explicit, occurs when rules and policies are vague or exclusive, when there are conflicts, when there is uncertainty, and when changes are introduced. Organizational actors then negotiate, meaning they "give and take, make bargains, stake claims, make counter-demands, and so forth" (Maines and Charlton 1985:278). Present negotiations depend on past negotiations and their sedimentation—the degree to which they become formalized, ritualized, or otherwise taken for granted. Structural conditions can place constraints on negotiations. When the structure changes, organizational actors might renew or revise these negotiations. In the workplace, top managers, local managers, and workers use sense-making tools from their cultural toolkits to understand structural changes and renegotiate work life. Thus, the negotiated order approach fits nicely with Edwards’ conception of the workplace as contested terrain—the site of persistent struggles for control.

To understand how managers make use of cultural tools, I borrow the sociological social psychology concepts of identity, subcultural identity work, and identity making. By identity, I am referring to the meanings people give themselves and others. Identities are “indexes of the self” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996) which are collectively created, used, and changed in interaction between people, rather than fixed or static personality traits that exist inside individuals. Even in the case of
personal identity, individuals need others to interpret signifiers. Subcultural identity work refers to the work people do together to create the signs, codes, and rites of affirmation that become shared resources for identity making. As Schwalbe and Schrock point out, “identity making is simultaneously culture making” (p. 121) and identity making involves “purposes, strategies, and sometimes the overcoming of resistance” (p. 115).

In the workplace, managers often use identity making to align workers’ identity with the company. However, it is important to remember that there is always room for something to go wrong. Workers can use these identity-making opportunities to reject, not affirm, the identities that managers are hawking. This highlights the process of negotiation in identity making—how people can reject the imposition of identity by dominant groups.

Taken together, new institutionalism and the negotiated order perspective provide a framework for understanding cultural production between and within firms. Each theory has its strengths and weaknesses. New institutionalism is better suited for explaining how firms borrow from each other and the wider culture to establish an organizational identity. The negotiated order perspective complements this organizational theory by focusing on cultural production inside the firm, thereby making room for worker resistance. Linking these theories is Swidler’s idea of a cultural toolkit. That is, both perspectives point to the importance of signs and symbols that enable organizations and people to solve problems.
The literature discussed here is not used to derive hypotheses. While I was quite familiar with teamwork and organizational theory literatures, I did not set out to test their ideas. However, I also did not entirely delay the literature review either, as a grounded theorist might. As explained above, I was so eager to make sense of my own work experiences that I could not resist seeking out sociological research on teams. Thus, I proceeded in a semi-inductive way. I began this project knowing what others found, but tried not to let their ideas dictate my analysis. After repeated review of the data, I identified patterns based in workers’ actual experiences, and then revisited the literature to make sense of these emerging themes. In other words, I tried to use the literature where it fit, instead of allowing the literature to use my data. Thus, I used the literature as a source of ideas for interpreting inductively-identified patterns.

METHODS

Everything about the GG case intrigued me: the acknowledgment of contradictions by workers and subsequent unionizing efforts at a retail store that uses teams, the use of teams to prevent unionizing, and the use of the team rhetoric by workers to push for a fairer workplace. This case had the potential to illuminate the conditions under which retail workers co-opted managerial rhetoric and use it as a resource for organizing. I approached Michael, my dissertation chair, about doing a study of unionizing at GG. We discussed the possibility of participant observation at a local Green Grocer store. I hoped thereby to observe how teams operated and the
process by which workers either accepted or rejected the team philosophy. I outlined my interests in a letter, presented the letter to the manager of a local GG store, and then waited for a response.

After a couple of weeks went by, I called to follow up on my request. The manager to whom I gave the letter was busy with a customer. The next time I called, I was routed to voice mail, as I was again when I called again a couple of weeks later. I kept calling and they kept sending me to voice mail oblivion. Apparently, this wasn’t going to work. GG was never going to call me back. Such is the way of qualitative work sometimes. Disappointed and dejected, I gave up after a few months of unreturned calls.

Back to the drawing board. Michael and I devised a new plan to interview worker-organizers (members of the union organizing committees) at the Midwest and Southwest stores. I chose to interview worker-organizers for several reasons. First and foremost, the names of worker-organizers were publicly available, as they were posted on the union website. Moreover, the IRB stipulated that I was not allowed to interview current employees, thereby ruling out anti-union workers and managers with strong loyalty to the company who were likely to remain employed at GG.

Tracking down worker-organizers and traveling across the country was a challenge. By the time I conducted my interviews in 2005, about three years had passed since the organizing drives had taken place. Time and financial constraints prevented me from finding and interviewing workers with neutral or anti-union sentiments. No
doubt, these workers would have had a different interpretation of the events that transpired during the unionizing efforts. Thus I missed an opportunity to investigate what kept workers from actively participating in the organizing drive. Additionally, the company’s refusal to answer my letters and return my phone calls had made it clear that they did not want managers to participate in my study.

Regrettably, I was also unable to secure interviews with the union that GG workers affiliated with. My emails and phone calls were not returned. Thus worker-organizers’ praise and criticism of the union affiliate must be interpreted cautiously. It is important to note that three worker-organizers later became professional union organizers. As such, their assessment of the union affiliate is based on their subsequent professional experiences. Recently, however, I gained side-access to the union through a personal contact and plan to interview then-president of the local Midwest union as part of a follow-up study.

The next step was to contact worker-organizers and ask them for interviews. Since all of their names were publicly available via the website, I tried to use online phone books to find mailing addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers. This was not easy. Many of the college-aged workers had scattered across the country and were not readily identifiable in online databases. Eventually, I sent requests for interviews to 21 worker-organizers who were involved in the organizing efforts at the Midwest and Southwest stores.

By late spring of 2005, I had a lot of returned letters and few leads. Finally I got
in touch with one of the organizers who initiated the drive and also maintained the workers’ website. He was able to put me in touch with many of the people on the list, thereby creating a snowball sample. The next hurdle was to convince people to let me interview them. We suspected that some of the workers would be wary of giving an interview to a strange academic who lived on the other side of the country. It’s understandable that members of the organizing committee would be distrustful, since they had been subjected to many attempts to thwart their unionizing efforts. They were also used to being contacted by strangers with interview requests, some of them with good intentions, some not.

To make myself appear more credible, I developed a website that included a description of my past and current academic research, my teaching portfolio and philosophy, contact info, and a short summary of my dissertation project. I figured that my community-based research would signal that I work well with social change groups. I also posted a picture of myself smiling, so people could connect a friendly face to the letters they received. Last but not least, I posted a clip of my dog catching a Frisbee. This proved to be a successful strategy. I asked each interviewee if he or she had looked at my website. Most had checked it out, if only to look at my picture and make sure I was who I claimed to be. Others said they liked my inequality-focused research. One person said he was impressed with my teaching philosophy. And a couple actually mentioned the clip of my dog. Of the 21 people to whom I sent letters requesting an interview, I was able to get in touch with 17 worker-organizers. All 17 contacts agreed to be
interviewed.

In the spring of 2005, we also created an interview guide consisting of semi-structured questions (see Appendix). The questions focused on people’s work experiences and on what happened during the organizing drives. At the beginning of each interview, I offered the usual assurances about confidentiality and asked each interviewee to sign two copies of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form, one for me and one for them. I explained that the questions I had in front of me were intended to be a guide for our conversation and that tangents were good things. This was part of my semi-inductive method. I told them that I was interested in learning about what they thought was important, even if it wasn’t a topic that I specifically asked about. Much of my data are derived from these tangents. After each interview, I went home and wrote notes about rapport, unspoken data, emergent themes, and new parts of the story that I should explore in future interviews.

I ended up with 20 interviews with former GG workers (see Table 1). The IRB stipulated that research participants could not be currently employed at GG, in order to protect workers from being blacklisted at the firm. I interviewed 13 members of the Midwest organizing committee, and 4 members of the Southwest organizing committee. Additionally, I conducted one preliminary interview with a former GG worker in the Southeast to test my interview guide. The last two interviews conducted were with former workers who had recently stopped working at a non-unionized GG store in the Southeast. The purpose of these last two interviews was to get a sense of how the
Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>Vocational</td>
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<tr>
<td>First job</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food service</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Retail</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Respondent does not “claim” a racial or ethnic identity.

**Refers to professional organizer/friend who was never employed at GG.
company's control project had evolved since the early 2000s when the organizing drives were underway.

The interviews averaged two hours in length. All of the interviewees were white, consistent with the racial make-up of the regions in which the stores were located. The sample consisted of 7 women (2 of whom self-identified as lesbian), 11 men, and 2 female-to-male transgendered individuals. Ages ranged from 16 to 33 at the time of the organizing drives. Only one male interviewee was married with children. The median age of interviewees was 23.7

While some started out as part-time employees, all but one of my interviewees worked full-time at some point during their tenure at GG. I also interviewed a professional union organizer who provided guidance and leadership at the beginning of the Midwest organizing drive.8 Most of the data in this study reflects the experiences of worker-organizers in the Midwest, which makes sense given the fact that this organizing effort was more successful, lasted longer, and had more committee members than the short-lived Southwest drive. In fact, Bobby, a worker-organizer, commented that if I interviewed four people from the Southwest, then I had “probably talked to the entire organizing committee.”

I also observed three citizen advisory committee meetings held in an affluent neighborhood in a Southeast city, where GG planned to open a new store. At these meetings, citizens voted on whether or not to rezone a parcel of land from residential to

7 One worker was significantly older than the rest, skewing the mean to 25.
8 This interviewee was employed by a health service workers union, not GG union.
commercial. The purpose of these observations was to better understand the relationship between communities and the company. During meetings I jotted notes and attempted to write down quotes verbatim. When I arrived home, I wrote extended fieldnotes and notes-on-notes in order to identify and explore emerging themes. Other data were drawn from newspaper articles, the company website, the Green Workers Unite website (including message boards and open letters from the organizing committee), worker-organizer resignation letters, the employee handbook, organizing materials (lists that chronicled where each worker stood on the issue, pamphlets, and copies of speeches given during rallies), and proposed union contracts.

All interviews were transcribed and coded line-by-line, as were fieldnotes and archival data. Gradually, after reading and re-reading the data, I began to identify emergent themes and moved from descriptive to analytic coding. I wrote analytic memos about the patterns I saw. Moving up a level of abstraction, I then wrote integrative memos to tease out the relationships between analytic codes.

Because my initial interest in this subject was based in my own work experiences, I relied on reflective writing to identify similarities and differences between my experiences and those of worker-organizers. I see my experiences, standpoint, and position as a young white woman and former retail worker as Joeeficial to building rapport and developing analyses. At the same time, my experiences and identification with workers at times made it difficult for me to put myself in managers’ shoes. Moreover, I had to put forth extra effort not to romanticize the folks I studied or
take their accounts at face value. It was tempting for me to live vicariously through workers’ experiences of collective resistance, especially since I regret not making similar attempts to organize when I worked at Pier 1. Fortunately, my dissertation advisor pointed out these tendencies and helped reel me back in.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Before I discuss the unfolding dynamics of worker resistance, I begin with an examination of the standing control project at GG. In chapter two, “Cultivating Consent: Identity-Based Control at Green Grocer,” I explain how managers used rhetoric, ritual, and visual cues to elicit consent and discourage dissent. Managers drew from past managerial projects to create a new hybrid of control. I discuss how managers cultivated workers’ pre-existing environmental identities in a way that defined worker and corporate interests, as well as sustainability goals, as harmonious and complementary. I also examine workers’ perceptions of managerial attempts to advance their definition the situation.

Following this examination of GG’s control project, I explore its contradictions. In chapter three, “Contradictions Emerge,” I begin with a description of how organizational changes shook the foundation of consent and created conditions ripe for resistance. Tremendous company growth was attended by efforts to standardize policies, practices, and products at stores across the nation. Workers then began to experience a loss of autonomy, increased pressure to sell, and were asked to complete
tasks that were inconsistent with the company’s stated values and workers’ green identities. I show how workers collectively redefined the situation, challenged managerial legitimacy, and launched a union organizing campaign.

In chapter four, “The Rise and Fall of the Union at Green Grocer,” I discuss the difficulties of organizing youth workers in the retail sector. I then explain how worker-organizers devised strategies to overcome these challenges, with varying degrees of success. Worker-organizers used managerial rhetoric and ritual to make the case for unionizing. Managers responded swiftly with an anti-union campaign, engaged in unlawful union-busting, and eventually waited out the union at these high-turnover workplaces. I also discuss workers’ perceptions of the union affiliate’s effectiveness and how gendered organizing strategies created conflicts among committee members and the union affiliate.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss the sociological implications of my research for understanding the dynamics of control and resistance. I explain how the company has created a powerful cultural control project that encompasses workers and customers alike. I attempt to specify the conditions under which collective resistance emerges and offer a refined definition of resistance. Lastly, I discuss the lessons learned from this case study as it applies to organizing low-wage, youth workers in the retail sector.
CHAPTER TWO
CULTIVATING CONSENT:
IDENTITY-BASED CONTROL AT GREEN GROCER

When I began this project, I wanted to learn about how managers use the team concept to exercise control. My interest in this subject was based in my own experiences as a retail worker at Pier 1 Imports, a high-end home furnishings chain store. During my two-year stint at Pier 1, I was subjected to managers’ persistent attempts to convince me that I was part of a team. Despite their insistence that we were all one big happy family, I noticed that some family members had more of a say than others, and that the more they told us we were a team, the less it felt like one. Over time, our autonomy eroded, as did what I thought were the best parts of the job—being able to wear to work the same clothes I wore everyday, keeping my nose ring, and getting sales commissions. I became increasingly frustrated with the contradictions between the team rhetoric and my actual experiences at work.

So before I started doing interviews with workers at Green Grocer, an upscale natural foods retail chain, I had some ideas about what I would find. I expected workers to tell me that they were just as frustrated with the gaps between what managers said about teamwork vs. how they really organized work. I had these expectations despite warnings from my teachers about the perils of “having an axe to grind” when doing qualitative research, since it could keep me from seeing what was going on in the setting. It turns out that my teachers knew what they were talking about. From my interviews and subsequent study of transcripts, it became clear that teamwork was just
one strategy for controlling workers. The bigger story here was that managers were creating a hybrid control project by selecting elements from past control regimes as well as current social movements.

In this chapter, I'll show how managers used rhetoric and identity-making to attract customers, fend off public criticism, and solve the problem of worker consent. In the case of Green Grocer, managers relied heavily on identity-based control to gain worker buy-in. However, weaknesses and contradictions emerged, as they often do, leading some workers to grow increasingly suspicious of managerial claims.

The Demands of High-End Retail Work and the Problem of Consent

Like other industries (Vallas 1999), the retail sales industry is increasingly bifurcated into low-end and high-end stores. Customers expect few and unenthusiastic interactions when they shop at big box and fast food restaurants, but have different expectations when buying at boutique shops (Williams 2006). In the latter case, workers are expected to cater to customers’ desires. Upscale retail stores sell high-end products, but they also sell privilege. Managers need workers to want to sell, despite the low pay, low prestige, and indignities that characterize grocery work:

Work in fast food, grocery, and other low-end service jobs is, or can be, difficult, demanding and unrewarding. Fast food and grocery work is high-stress, low-status, and low-wage work. It is work that, on the one hand, is subject to routinization, close surveillance, and management control but, on the other, calls for high levels of self-motivation and investment from workers. (Tannock 2001:41)
In the case of service work, managers need more than basic consent. Not only do they need workers to show up, they need them to believe in what they are selling. Managers need to convince workers to use their emotions and personalities to sell goods and services to their customers. This kind of work requires service workers to tap into intimate parts of themselves so that customers perceive sales interactions as authentic. Sociologists have consistently pointed out, however, that the capitalist context makes it difficult for workers to conjure genuine displays of emotion (Hochschild [1983] 2003).

As an upscale grocery store, GG put a premium on customer service, as reflected in their core values: “We go to extraordinary lengths to satisfy and delight our customers. We want to meet or exceed their expectations on every shopping trip. We want to serve our customers competently, efficiently, knowledgeably and with flair.”

George, a Grocery worker at the Midwest store, explained:

Customer service was always the number one priority. And so they really pushed the whole customer service thing. If there was somebody who needed help, we’d go out to their car. We’d put the stuff in their car. We’d just do anything in those eight hours shifts that a customer could possibly want. Somebody else in grocery actually drove somebody’s car home and back again. I forgot what it was but it was something ridiculous. It involved frozen Tofurky. It was something weird. But, you know, you go beyond.

To these ends, workers were required to watch videos that portrayed various customer service scenarios. These videos provided scripts for interacting with customers. Workers were further instructed to initiate friendly conversation, greet each customer
with a smile, walk customers to the product, and drop whatever they were doing if asked a question.

The workers I spoke to, like other grocery workers (Tolich 1993), found that customer interactions were rewarding, but they were also taxing. That is, their performance of emotional labor produced both stress and satisfaction, as George, a Grocery worker explained:

I kind of liked it, being the person that I am, because I like interacting with people. I don’t mind much, you know. I liked helping people out. If they were asking me something or looking for something, I would go and show them. And I’d tell them, “You know, you’d really rather buy this. This one tastes better. This one’s cheaper. This isn’t so good.” So they always encourage you to really have the best customer service ever. But it always had this undertone of you better sell—you better get them buy something. My team leader would always say, if you’re buying this, recommend the other product, which I would never do. Because I hate coming off as somebody, (yells loudly) ”More money please!” You know, like “Let me lick the bottom of your shoe for a dollar.” It’s like—they always had this push the sales, push the sales thing.

Other workers in this study shared George’s ambivalence. They commonly referred to the rewarding parts as “helping,” thereby framing their work as a form of altruism. GG customers certainly needed help to sort through the overwhelming amount of information about the products in the store. The more alienating emotions resulted from the tension between selling and helping.

GG customers were quite demanding and had high expectations for customer service. George compared his experience with customers at GG to his interactions at his current workplace, a locally owned grocery store:

People don’t come in that store, a family run store, with the same expectations they have going into GG, and I think the same would be true for a co-op.
Whereas at Green Grocer they are constantly asking you questions. They constantly want you to be there for them. I mean, the people who shop at Green Grocer are not fun people to serve. They make you personally responsible, you know, if the cheese is not there. You know, like if the Gruyere from England isn't there, it's like, oh my god! The world comes to an end! And it's my fault, you know?

Similarly, Jamie, a Produce worker, described GG customers as exceedingly demanding, especially in contrast to other grocery stores and co-ops:

At the beginning, I really tried to follow what they told me in the orientation time like, you know, greet them with a smile and you know, I really bought into that and I would get sort of geeked out by it. Like, I would say hi to everyone and I got to know the regular customers. And it can be really fun. It also can be really tiring and I recognize the difference, I mean, between the co-op and GG. It seems like at GG, there’s a lot of like “Put on your hap-hap-happy face and say hello to everyone.” And at the co-op its like, if you have a question, everyone is going to be really nice to you and they smile at you but they’re not going to be like “Hi, can I wipe your butt?”

Workers were expected to cater to customers and they frequently encountered challenges to their dignity. By using the rhetorical strategies described below, managers tried to compensate for the customer abuse, low status, and low pay, experienced by GG workers.

MANAGERIAL RHETORICS AT GREEN GROCER

Companies, groups, and individuals use rhetoric, or what C. Wright Mills (1940) calls vocabularies of motive, to convince themselves and others to accept their proposed version of the truth. Rhetoric includes spoken and written words that shape our understanding of existing social arrangements. Mills explains that vocabularies of
motive are used in social situations as “cues and justifications for normative actions” (1940:906). Thus, rhetoric is an embodiment of ideology.

Rhetoric, then, in its broadest sense, is a strategy for persuading others to share a given definition of the situation. Sometimes rhetorical accounts can seem harmless or even progressive. Yet, these positive frames can have an ugly underside. As such, my analysis of managerial rhetoric in this study follows Kleinman’s advice to “pay attention to the part that language can play in reproducing inequalities, even when the words seem Joeign or positive” (2007:13).

Mills also points out that stable vocabularies of motive are “unquestioned answer[s] to questions concerning social and lingual conduct...Institutional practices and their vocabularies of motive exercise control over delimited ranges of possible situations” (1940:907-911). In this way, rhetoric can guide behavior and color our understanding of past, present, and future action; however, rhetoric is not a failproof means of eliciting desired behaviors. While rhetorical strategies often go unchallenged, it is important to recognize that the acceptance and rejection of all or part of any rhetorical strategy is a social process—a negotiation. In other words, rhetoric is not unilaterally imposed or received.

Green Rhetoric

Reminiscent of past experiments with welfare capitalism, managers at Green Grocer put considerable effort into crafting a socially and environmentally responsible
image for the company. Managers used a *green rhetoric* to fend off public criticism and to attract environmentally conscious customers and workers. The Green Planet philosophy, found on GG’s website, demonstrated the company’s desire to be perceived as an ethical company:

We believe companies, like individuals, must assume their share of responsibility as tenants of Planet Earth. On a global basis we actively support organic farming — the best method for promoting sustainable agriculture and protecting the environment and the farm workers. On a local basis, we are actively involved in our communities by supporting food banks, sponsoring neighborhood events, compensating our team members for community service work, and contributing at least five percent of total net profits to not-for-profit organizations…

Our whole business is about making a difference — in the lives of our Team Members and the customers we serve, and in the communities and environments in which we operate. The message is that GG is a different kind of company, one that cares about the environment, workers, and the community—a haven in the heartless world of profit maximization. By extension, people who shop and work at Green Grocer can be environmental stewards, too. To shop and work at GG is to live out one’s environmental values, and, just as important, a way to signify those values to others. In this way, the use of green rhetoric is a form of identity making. Managers sought to affirm and align customer and worker identity with the company.

As such, green rhetoric is intended for public consumption, as was its predecessor, welfare capitalism. GG projected good citizenship by holding “community giving days” or “5% Days” several times throughout the year (where five percent of that day’s net sales are donated to local organizations), sponsoring Society for the Prevention of
Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) fundraisers and local farm tours, and by donating to food banks. These events were advertised on a large chalkboard calendar, at the customer service desk, and on the GG website.

Green rhetoric also served to obscure the contradictions of consumption and citizenship as described by Johnston. GG provided “a seamless shopping experience where hybrid citizen-consumers can express ethical concerns by eating delicious prepared foods and beautifully-displayed produce in a fun shopping environment” (2008:250). GG presented customers with an opportunity to ease a troubled conscience without having to think about the contradictions of ethical consumption. For example, customers were not prompted to consider reducing their consumption or to think about how some cannot afford to save the world through shopping. Perhaps this is why GG’s customers were willing to pay markedly higher prices. GG’s image as a “more polished co-op” thus provided class-based affirmation to affluent customers.

*Teamwork Rhetoric*

Much like their human relations predecessors, GG managers used a *teamwork rhetoric* to convince workers that their work was meaningful and valued by the company. In other words, they wanted workers to feel that this wasn’t just another grocery store. They wanted workers to feel like their work was special and important, despite low pay, low autonomy, and low status. Again, like previous managerial
projects, teams were portrayed as a means of harmonizing the interests of labor and capital. Team rhetoric was featured prominently on the GG website:

**We Support Team Member Excellence and Happiness**

Our success is also dependent upon the collective energy and intelligence of all our Team Members. In addition to receiving fair wages and Jooefits, belief in the value of our work and finding fulfillment from our jobs is a key reason we are part of Green Grocer…

Achieving unity of vision about the future of our company, and building trust between Team Members is a goal at Green Grocer. At the same time diversity and individual differences are recognized and honored…We strive to build positive and healthy relationships among Team Members. "Us versus them" thinking has no place in our company. We believe that the best way to do this is to encourage participation and involvement at all levels of our business. Some of the ways we do this are:

- Self directed Teams that meet regularly to discuss issues, solve problems, and appreciate each other's contributions.
- Increased communication through Team Member Forums and Advisory Groups, and open book, open door, and open people practices.
- Labor gainsharing and other Team Member incentive programs.
- Team Member Stock Options and Stock Purchase Plan.
- Commitment to make our jobs more fun by combining work and play and through friendly competition to improve our stores.
- Continuous learning opportunities about company values, food,
nutrition and job skills.

- Equal opportunity for employment, with promotion mostly from within the company.

Managers thus sought to define their relationships with workers as non-hierarchical. Green Grocer differed from other retail stores—management wanted workers to believe—because it valued employee input and included workers in decision-making. This framing bears a striking resemblance to Edwards’s description of company unions and their promise of workplace democracy. Workers were supposed to believe they could readily approach any manager with problems or suggestions for improving store operations. Borrowing from the bureaucratic control regime, managers held out the promise of upward mobility, a promise that could be realized by workers who conformed to managerial expectations.

Managers further reinforced their rejection of antagonistic manager-worker relationships through the use of job titles. Workers at Green Grocer were not employees, they were Team Members. Likewise, the produce department was not called such. Instead, it was called the Produce Team. Managers were Team Leaders, store managers were Store Team Leaders, and so on. Not coincidentally, co-ops also use the language of membership and try to solve problems democratically.

GG management wanted workers to feel committed to GG because of the possibilities their jobs afforded for fun, self-development, and economic gain. Kelly, a
Grocery worker at the Midwest store, described her first impression of the Green Grocer philosophy:

They would say that the quality of the food was better than anywhere else and that the quality of work, the working environment, is better than anywhere else. That because it’s a team you have a lot of impact on what’s happening in the team and that it’s not a hierarchical system. Everyone is sort of on the same footing. They don’t say it like that, but that’s what they’re trying to make you feel. Like you should be really excited to work there and that you should feel really special and honored to be able to work there.

The team rhetoric, then, claimed to value each worker as a person, not just as an employee. Workers in turn were supposed to feel lucky to be employed by such a company. Similarly, Laurie Graham (1995) found that the team system, coupled with an extensive hiring process that included several rounds of written exams and performance tests, encouraged auto workers to feel like working at Subaru was a privilege.

All in all, the message sent by managers to workers and socially conscious customers was strikingly similar to those made during the periods of welfare capitalism, company unionism, and human relations. By pairing these rhetorics with charitable acts, Green Grocer presented itself as a Joeevolent company in which the interests of corporations, ethical consumers, and workers are harmonized. More specifically, the message sent was that GG is a great company that allows customers and workers to save the planet by shopping and working in a fun, aesthetically pleasing environment. That is, GG was a place where the ideals of citizenship and consumption were made compatible, as were the interests of labor and capital.
CO-OPING CO-OPS: VISUAL CUES

GG cultivated an organizational identity through green and team rhetorics. It also projected a green image by mimicking non-profit cooperative grocery stores. Not only did GG borrow words like “member,” but it also appropriated symbols and signs from counter-cultural projects and reassembled them to attract the ethical consumer. Throughout a typical store, there are many visual cues that evoke the co-op image. Marketing and promotional signs are written on chalkboards in a fun, informal font. Brochures on GG’s commitment to local farmers can be found in every department. Cardboard cutouts of smiling local farmers wearing overalls stand in front of product displays. An entire aisle of bulk bins, as found in co-ops, presents an opportunity for customers to buy food without extraneous packaging.

These visual cues, replicated throughout the chain’s stores, are intended to attract both workers and customers. Workers in this study typically came to the store for the first time as customers. Rebecca, a wine buyer at the Midwest store, described her first shopping experience at GG as “wonderful.” She explained how the store layout and visual marketing strategies were inviting and reminiscent of cooperative grocery stores:

When I first shopped there, I thought it was wonderful. They do a good job at every store I’ve been to of corralling you into the store. It’s a really pleasant, kind of modern, but touchy-feely environment. I don’t know, kind of clean. It has essentially that kind of earlier seventies vegetarian co-op feel, even though when you see the prices, it’s not the same. You know, it kind of draws you in if that’s the kind of stuff that you enjoy.
Thus, visual cues not only attracted customers, but job seekers also noticed these symbols. Other workers, like Jackie, were drawn to GG’s image as a more polished co-op:

Well, it seemed like a very fun place to work. It really kind of mimicked a co-op but it was bright and clean and new and happy...It was pretty standard to I guess most of the companies that I’d worked for. I’d worked for the Applebee’s so it was very formatted and corporate in that sense, but the thing that was different is that they really did emphasize a lot of the individuality of that location. At that time, they were pushing things like, “Well, we sell locally made pasta and locally grown vegetables and that’s what makes us different.” That type of thing.

Thus, managers used ethical rhetorics coupled with visual cues to juxtapose their grocery store with low-end, presumably less-ethical, national supermarket chains that carry cheap, generic mass-market, processed foods.

Another visual cue came from workers’ counter-cultural dress and self-presentation. In contrast to mainstream grocery stores, GG workers did not have to wear a company uniform. They were able to wear T-shirts and jeans or whatever they would normally wear. Thus, GG workers looked a lot like those you’d find in a co-op, complete with crazy-colored hair, piercings, tattoos, and gender blurring styles of dress. Justin, one of the two transgendered people in this study, said that he sought employment at GG not only because of his interest in natural foods, but also because of the latitude provided by the dress code:

I went there initially because I was raised with like natural foods...And also at the time that I started working, they had a really minimal dress code policy, where a lot of other places didn’t. So if you had blue hair and a lip ring, you could still work there. So that also attracted a lot of people.

Workers themselves embodied counter-cultural themes found in co-ops and thus
provided another visual cue that reminded customers of co-ops.

In the same way that individual and collective identities are defined in relation to an “other,” companies also carve out organizational identities in relation to other organizations in their industry and in the wider economy (Strandgaard and Dobbin 2006). As such, GG’s high-end retailer role was defined in relation to mid-tier grocery stores like Harris Teeter and low-end food retailers like Food Lion. They also claimed to be a different kind of company in a broader sense by valuing the planet and people over profits. If the reference category here is other national grocery chains, then GG indeed appeared to be more ethical. It is important, however, to keep in mind the full spectrum of food distribution organizations and compare GG against these standards and ethics. Alternative models of distributing food include cooperative grocery stores, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), community gardens, and local farmers’ markets. These models, based in various social movements, provided the cultural resources that GG used to signify its ethicality.

IDENTITY WORK THROUGH RITUAL

Teamwork is typically used in manufacturing firms where workers solve problems that arise in the production of a tangible commodity. Workers might rotate tasks, particularly the least desirable ones, or decide on rules for getting the job done. Retail is different. While workers do some strenuous physical labor (e.g., unloading delivery trucks, moving and stocking gallons of milk, standing on their feet all day), the
primary production in retail is the emotional labor used to sell products. Management tries to extract genuine feelings and emotions from their employees, especially at high-end retail stores like Green Grocer. They want workers to voluntarily use their own personalities and emotions to build rapport with customers to increase spending. But how did managers get workers to buy in? What strategies did they use to get workers to believe in the company and want to sell its products?

At GG, managers used team and green rhetorics toward these ends. Managers gave these rhetorics emotional weight by using workplace rituals such as voting, team-builds, appreciations, food-tastings, and nutrition classes. These rituals were opportunities for identity-making, as described by Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock:

In this case one person takes the lead in creating not only an image of the organization but, more importantly, an image of the kind of people who belong to such an organization. This is an example of real identity-making: leaders telling members—who share an identity as members—what it is that their belonging signifies. (1996:121)

Rituals served to reinforce managers’ definition of GG as democratic and environmentally responsible. By extension, these rituals encouraged workers to see themselves as environmental stewards and facilitated identification with and loyalty to the company.

Monthly store meetings and pre-shift team (departmental) meetings were identity-making opportunities. As workers described them, store meetings sounded a lot like religious revivals. During meetings, workers were required to participate in praising each other and the company, or, in their words, “talk about how GG is so great.”
According to Bobby, managers “go around and have everybody say what they like most about Green Grocer.” At each store meeting a worker was chosen as “team member of the month.” Store meetings, and sometimes team meetings, ended with “appreciations,” which are public recognitions for exceptional work. As Linda describes below, store meetings required considerable emotional labor, especially since the meetings took place early in the morning before shifts began, or late at night after an eight-hour shift of trying to please demanding customers.

They [meetings] seemed so much like a camp. I mean not really like a church group, but we did all of the appreciations and everything. It [the appreciation ritual] was a thing at the end of the meeting, after the business was sort of done. Whoever was leading the meeting would ask if there were any appreciations. The idea is that you can stand up and say ‘I want to thank Sarah for doing such a fantastic job on the bulk department yesterday. It looked great.’ And then everybody claps and it would go on and could be anything from, like, somebody worked for somebody when they were sick to “We mopped the floor really well.” (sarcastic tone). Or anything you could possibly think of, and yeah, then everybody clapped. And we usually did it at team meetings and at store meetings. I don't know if all of the teams did that but we usually did.

Attending to non-economic motives for work, managers used appreciation rituals to make workers feel that their work was appreciated and important. These rituals had the potential to induce workers to see the company as the kind of place where everyone is valued and appreciated. Appreciations also obscured power differences between workers and managers.

Workers were continually socialized to appreciate the Joeerits of healthy, natural foods. GG occasionally held classes on the difference between conventional and natural foods, and why natural foods are better.
George: There was a basic overview of whole wheat versus bleached flour. Just very basics and there was a nutritional section. I think there was actually a half day session that people could go to that was all about fats and oils, and trans, saturated, and non saturated, overview of the chemical structure—and I was always a chemical buff when I was younger so I totally loved seeing all of that.

By occasionally offering nutrition classes, and by holding team meetings at the beginning of each shift to discuss new products, managers imbued the products they sold with moral value. Again, these rituals reinforced managers’ definition of work at GG as different and morally significant. By implication, workers and managers were part of a company that helped people live healthy lives by eating natural foods. Managers emphasized the similarity in values between the company as a whole, managers, and workers: we are all part of the same effort to protect the environment and improve people’s health.

Food-tastings were another workplace ritual. During daily shift meetings, department managers treated workers to featured products. Managers opened a product, asked everyone to taste it, and then talked about it with team members. These practices allowed workers to learn about and experience new foods, which could come in handy during sales encounters.

George: ...it is kind of *infectious*, an environment where it’s like, “Wow. There’s this new product in the store.” And Green Grocer has these great policies where you can actually open up a product and eat it, because you have to know what it tastes like. You know, you have to be able to recommend it to a customer. So GG would say, “Go open it up and eat it.” Or a customer wants something, you know, *cares about something*, wants to know what it’s like, you know, open it up and eat it. So it’s this atmosphere of like we support you if you care about the product. We’ll let you eat whatever you want. And that encouraged this thinking, *this encouraged the attitude that you really care about your job too and everybody*
shares that. Everybody’s interested in what they are doing. It’s like “Oooh, look at this new product.”

Food tasting rituals had the potential to align workers’ shared passion for natural foods with the company’s purported environmental values. As a result, workers were able to sell products with sincerity and enthusiasm. In this way, workers’ environmental ethic was co-opted. Their care and concern for the environment and customers’ health was transformed into a profit-making strategy.

Voting rituals—in which workers voted on whether or not to allow new hires to join the team (department) after a probationary period—were another means by which workers were co-opted. The voting was informal and usually taken by a show of hands. This practice was supposed to give workers a say over who was hired to work on their teams. If a new hire was not pulling his or her weight, or had a personality that rubbed incumJoeets the wrong way, workers could democratically decide against the hire. Voting rituals, however, were primarily symbolic, since in practice new hires were rarely voted off the team. But by involving workers in the hiring process, managers defined the workplace as participatory and workers as valuable and active participants at work.

Another ceremonial aspect of the team system at GG was the Team Member Advisory Group (TMAG), which appeared to provide a voice for each worker. In practice, TMAG was essentially a company union. Each team had a TMAG representative in addition to having a storewide TMAG representative. Team members were supposed to be able to bring concerns and grievances to the TMAG representative, who would in
turn raise these issues with management. Jamie served as the TMAG rep for the Midwest store. In an interview, she described TMAG practices:

There was a mailbox next to a blank piece of paper with you know, it was locked, or you know at least closed and so you could put anonymous comments [in the box] and it was in the break room, so it wasn’t for customer comments, it was just for employee comments. So you could put a comment there or, it was supposed to be that every department had a representative and you could, you know, tell them things, like if your boss did something wrong, that you thought. Or whatever. If you slipped and fell and they [managers] said, ‘You'll be fine. Shake it off’ (fake happy talk). Something like that, not an assistant, just a regular old team member [could participate in TMAG]. And then every once in a while there would be a head TMAG person for the store and so all the little TMAGers would have a meeting and talk about anything important. I mean when I took it over they had been trying to get a basketball hoop in the back of the parking lot so people could play basketball on their breaks. Generally the TMAG people would organize the ‘all store party’ for all the team members. And then in theory, like once a year the head TMAG from each store regionally would come together and have a meeting.

TM: Oh really?

Jamie: Yeah, in theory.

TM: So it didn’t really happen?

Jamie: Well, it did happen once when I was the TMAG store representative person.

Green Grocer managers claimed that this team-based practice reduced hierarchy and gave workers a voice in decision-making, thereby foregoing the need for a union. Note that TMAG reps did not press for better wages or safety in the workplace, as real union stewards might. Thus managers symbolically and superficially included workers in decisions over the labor process, without actually redistributing power. As in the company unions described by Edwards, management created workplace rules, while
TMAG representatives could only enforce them. As a form of bureaucratic control, the in-house grievance procedure individualized manager-worker conflict.

Another seemingly democratic practice was the “shared fate” incentive program called “labor gain sharing payouts,” which are calculated as “sales per labor hour.” This program involved extra-local managers setting department sales goals and labor budgets for a given period. If a department reached the sales goal without using the entire labor budget, then the remainder of the labor allotment was divided among those workers. In other words, the most efficient teams were supposedly rewarded with payouts from unused labor budgets. Managers thus created normative pressures to increase worker output. Workers who did not try their best to meet sales goals were letting the team down. Furthermore, asking workers to engage in “friendly competition” with their coworkers made them be less likely to compare their paychecks to those of managers.

GG also held “team builds” that were supposed to encourage teamwork and solidarity. The idea was to get workers to work together to achieve a goal. On mandatory team-build days, workers took time away from their jobs to go on an outing with their teams, usually to do an outdoor activity, as Josh explained:

Teamwork is a huge ethic of Green Grocer. I assume you’ve heard of the Team Build?

TM: Yeah, can you tell me about that?

Josh: Team-build is basically an annual event where everybody on your team will go and do an event that will make you a stronger team, I guess. It’s fairly straight-forward in that...the idea is to go do an activity and the year before I
started, they went white-water rafting, everyone together. The first year they did a ropes course; I forget what my excuse was that year. The next year they did something similar, and then we did community service the year I actually went.

During team-builds, managers and workers were supposed to engage in an activity or solve a problem together, thus framing their relationship as non-hierarchical, a la Mayo and his disciples.

In these ways, managers used rituals to reinforce their definition of the workplace as democratic and environmentally responsible. These strategies can also be seen as efforts to gain consent, infuse work with meaning, pre-empt unionization, and co-opt workers’ environmental ethic to increase the bottom line. Management thus tried to give workers the impression that their work was important and that Green Grocer was different. They wanted to create an organizational culture in which caring, or the appearance of caring, was valued. Management tried to show that they cared about workers, and, in turn, workers were supposed to show care for customers by going above and beyond normal expectations for sales floor service.

RECRUITING GREEN WORKERS: SELLING FROM THE HEART

Managers sought to hire workers who cared about the environment in hopes that they would extend that care to customers and loyalty to the company. On the GG website managers posed the question, “Why work here?” and provided the answer: “Green Grocer is a Company That Walks Its Talk.” According to its website:
We recruit the best people we can to become part of our team. We empower them to make their own decisions, creating a respectful workplace where people are treated fairly and are highly motivated to succeed. We look for people who are passionate about food (my emphasis). We also look for well-rounded human beings who will help build our locations into profitable and Joeeficial members of their communities.

GG purposely looks to employ workers who care about health and the environment. Green Grocer thus offered job seekers an opportunity to do meaningful work that affirmed their green identities.

Opportunities for finding meaningful work are scarce, especially for people between the ages of 16 to 25—those most likely to be employed in low-level positions at GG. Tannock (2001:5) uses the phrase “stopgap jobs” to describe low-end service and retail jobs. “These jobs generally do not lead anywhere in terms of career opportunities; nor do most young workers expect these jobs to become sites of career employment. They are temporary way stations, more or less discontinuous with individual career paths.” GG’s green rhetoric was thus alluring to potential employees because of the promise it held for making a difference and self-expression. Julie, sixteen when she first sought employment at GG, was also drawn to the co-op image and to the prospect of working with other counter-culture youth:

I expected it to be like working in a natural foods co-op. And I thought that everybody would be laid back. I thought the customers were going to be really cool, a bunch of hippies, you know. I thought it was going to be an interesting job because I was interested in organics. GG was actually my first job I ever had. I was living in [a small town nearby]. There isn't really very much like employment opportunities for like younger people. So GG was just kind of the closest place. But I never really knew anything about it. I knew it was a corporation, but, you know, like fun. A bunch of sort of like punk rock, hippie
kids worked there. I was really young so I thought, “That’s cool.” You know? That’s why.

Jamie, a self-described “produce geek,” was also excited about working at GG, which she saw as an opportunity to work with local farmers and counter-culture youth. She was the ideal worker from management’s standpoint because of her enthusiasm and interest in natural foods:

TM: What did you like best about GG when you started there?

Jamie: I mostly liked working with young people who were granola or hippie or punk or cool, as opposed to the married couple that I was working for before. And I really like working with produce. I have totally become a produce geek. Like, I love produce. So learning about produce and all the different kinds and I mean I was really, really motivated to learn stuff. So in the beginning that was my favorite part. Kind of how a grocery store works too. Like I thought it was freaking amazing that every single morning we would build this wall of broccoli and put up this wall of lettuce and like every single morning it was remade and every single night it was taken down, put in the cooler, and then the next morning the outer leaves were taken off of every single head of lettuce and retied and it was like an amazing process. I mean it was one of those things like, I didn’t think I was naïve about how you get your food, but to actually like work in a grocery store, I still think is pretty cool.

T: Just the coordination of it all?

J: Yeah. And what it’s like to work with local farmers versus getting things off a huge truck and what it’s like to unload four pallets of vegetables. So yeah, mostly just the produce geekiness stuff was what I liked at the beginning mostly.

Recruiting people like Jamie, who already cared about natural and organic foods, made it easier to align worker identities with the identity of GG.

GG also attracted vegans like John. Management accommodated his request not to work with meat, placing him in the deli:
They asked me like why I wanted to work there, and I said, you know, because I was into natural foods. I was a vegan and my friends worked there...When I got hired, I told them I wouldn’t work with meat, so I got the job that didn’t really have to deal with meat. My team leader, when he hired me, he was fine with that. I made all the dips and spreads and sometimes packed some of the salads.

Kelly was also drawn to GG based on her desire to live a healthy lifestyle that included eating natural foods:

TM: Did you know about organic foods and stuff like that?

Kelly: A little bit. Um, but I mean, not really. I mean, I had little inklings and I think I actually did start [at Green Grocer] because one of my roommates ended up working at GG later. She sort of, I think, prodded me a little bit where she thought that it would be a fun place to work and so she suggested it and said we should be eating more healthy stuff and so if you work there you’ll probably get a discount and then it will be good for the whole household.

In summary, workers’ interests in natural, organic, and local foods, healthy eating, veganism, and the chance to work with counter-culture youth, brought them to their jobs at Green Grocer. Managers at Green Grocer sought to hire this kind of person. Noticeably absent from these accounts of why they applied for jobs at GG is any mention of teamwork or the quality of the work environment. Instead, workers were lured by the promise of working for a company that appeared to embrace green values, youthful rebellion, and to allow freedom of expression through dress.

Just as customers can feel like they are doing environmental good by shopping at GG, workers can also think of themselves as environmental stewards by virtue of their employment in a green company. Therein lies the potential for exploitation of environmentalist identities. Workers may be tolerant of managerial abuse, low pay, and affronts to their dignity if they feel they are contributing to greater conservation
efforts. The seeking-out of workers with green identities, and the tying of their environmental ethic to the company, facilitates exploitation in the workplace. Moreover, if workers subscribe to management’s definition of workplace decision-making as democratic and non-hierarchical, employment as a privilege, and low-level work as meaningful, then workers might be less likely to notice contradictions in what managers say about their values versus how managers act on them.

WORKER PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGERIAL RHETORIC

In the process of identity-making, there is always room for something to go wrong. The meanings that managers attach to rhetorics, symbols, and rituals do not always stick. Workers can reject the meanings proffered by managers. At Green Grocer, workers pushed back against managers’ control projects.

Workers who liked the sound of “teamwork” during hiring and orientation, soon came to see it as a gimmick that obscured the hierarchical relationship between managers and workers. In other words, workers’ rejected managers’ definition of the workplace as democratic. They also did not believe that management truly valued their work, or that managers and workers were on equal footing. Jordie, a Grocery worker and member of the organizing committee, explained how his positive impression dissolved after he began work at GG:

TM: So what was your first impression of the core values when you first started working there? And the GG philosophy and all that?
Jordie: I thought it sounded really cool. I mean it was very progressive and very sort of socially conscious and open minded and sort of a cooperative kind of atmosphere even though it’s a for profit company. So yeah, it felt very comfortable to me. But I think that’s the façade and what they’re really like is very different.

Most respondents were able to recite the company’s core values when I asked about them. These articulations lead me to believe that the company was able to communicate its definition of work at GG. It is important to note, however, that managerial definitions were not passively received. Workers knew how management defined their work, but did not always accept it. When workers realized that teamwork was more rhetoric than reality, they weren’t seriously disappointed. They tended to brush it off or laugh it off, as did Jamie, George, and Kelly:

Jamie: I was thinking about the whole idea of team and at first I liked it because I had always been an athlete so the idea like the concept of team really made sense to me. But it’s not like I played on a team that was like part of a, you know, like it wasn’t part of a farm team, or another team that was in the minors, or another team that was in majors that like, “sold lots of products!”

George: The biggest thing that made the team not-a-team was the lack of power to decide anything that happened on the job. Everybody kind of knew actually that it was bullshit. We had our fun with it too. I remember me and Frank actually- we had these team buttons where like you know it was “Team member” (says in a fake enthusiastic voice) and then you’d have your name. And our thing was that we were all interchangeable. So like Frank had a sticker with a name on it. And I was Forge and he was Gank. No, I was Gank and he was Forge. And we walked around like that forever and we would just switch buttons.

Kelly: (laughs) It [team] came to mean different things but I don’t think, that word, I always thought was sort of funny because I don’t know, I think when I started I thought that the whole team idea was kind of smart and good and you know, if nothing else different, touchy. The team member, I always think, is sort of a joke because you’re not really a member of the team. You’re employed by a company and so, you know, I think it was supposed to feel like a co-op or something, but its not co-op and so I think that the people who shop there really
want to feel like it’s a co-op and I think that the member thing is supposed to make it feel like you belong and sort of have some ownership over it but its very clear when you work there that you don’t have ownership over much. Which I think I just sort of accepted because I was like, it’s my job. Fine. And I didn’t want to have any more responsibility than I had, so that was fine. And I think it was more like, whatever, you can call me whatever you want (laughs) but I know that I’m just here to stock the shelves and go home. (laughs)

Kelly rejected managerial definitions of democracy at work. She suspected that the “member” rhetoric was a managerial strategy for mimicking co-ops, whose primary users are called “member-owners.” Because there was a real cooperative grocery store in this city, she and other workers had a point of reference. Also, instead of seeing themselves as part of the team, working side by side with management, they acknowledged their low status: “I’m just here to stock the shelves and go home.” In other words, workers contrasted managerial claims with the real social relations of production. Rebecca did not subscribe to the team ideology either:

TM: Was there a discrepancy the impression that GG wanted to give about teams versus how they actually operated or the teams actually worked?

Rebecca: Yeah. Like I said, I think the way GG talks about it is kind of loose. I don’t know. I mean, the thing that sucks about it is the whole store is one team together, and we work together, and it doesn’t what you’re doing if you’re the store team leader, or the CEO or the little schmuck on the floor stocking apples. You’re all in it together and whatnot; you know, that’s just pep talk. It’s the same thing as a football coach saying “Yeah team! Go, go, go!” I just think that the main discrepancy is that when the store started, in one store it was probably a group of excited hippie, yuppie people saying “Yeah! We’re going to make this great!”

In Rebecca’s view, teamwork at GG might have been well-intentioned and it might have worked on a smaller scale. However, she quickly dismissed teamwork as impossible to achieve in a complex company with over 300 stores. By calling the team rhetoric “pep
talk,” she alluded to the emotional labor required during cheerleading-like rituals, and dismissed teamwork as corporate hype. In other words, she rejected managerial definitions of work at GG as non-hierarchical. Similarly Linda explained her feelings about meetings and appreciations:

I remember just sitting there and wishing I wasn’t there. And I’m a pretty touchy feely kind of person. Like I get into that. But I didn’t necessarily think it needed to happen at work. (laughs)

TM: You didn’t have the Green Grocer spirit?

Linda: I don’t think I did (laughs) and the things that I, you know, I always felt like the bad kid in the back of the classroom, like talking and laughing when you’re not supposed to and wanting to leave. You know, counting down the minutes until you could be done with it so (laughs).

TM: Was that the whole time you were there or maybe when you started did you ever think this is sort of a good way to organize things? I don’t know.

Linda: Yeah, I think I did. I don’t think I ever liked meetings. I think that I always kind of thought that was over the top. They did some team things that made sense and it seems like a nicer way to do things but then it didn’t take very long to realize that it isn’t a different way of doing things. It’s just different words for the same things and so I didn’t really think too hard about it but I definitely, it wasn’t too long before I was like, team leader, it was one of those things where you just kind of say it because I would have never called the team leader my “manager of the grocery department” because that wasn’t how anybody talked, but I knew very well that when I said team leader I meant manager. At some point it just, I didn’t think about it, but it was no different than any other job.

Linda thought teamwork sounded like a good idea, but she also thought appreciation rituals were hokey. Instead of feeling special and appreciated, she felt manipulated. Managers came across as paternalistic, which is not surprising in view of the fact that most of the workers were under 25—and younger than most managers. Despite
managerial efforts to elicit loyalty and camaraderie, these rituals left her feeling “like the bad kid in the back of the classroom.” In her case, the solidarity-building rituals fell flat.

While Linda used the team language as she was supposed to, she also translated “team leader” into “manager,” thereby rejecting managerial definitions of their relationships as non-hierarchical. At the end of the quote she dismisses the team language as the kind of rhetoric found in any retail store—a sentiment I heard from many workers, including George.

The actual idea of you know, you work as a team, I think I did intuitively—not that I wasn’t enthusiastic about it, but at the same time I didn’t think it was—it didn’t make me suspicious of anything. Like I heard—for example, Wal-Mart—I heard they got the same principle going on only much worse. I heard they got cheering songs and shit like that and that would have made me suspicious, you know, if it would’ve gone to that extreme.

The team rhetoric did not offend these workers, but nor did it resonate with them, especially after they began working at GG. Management thus did not always succeed at imposing their definitions of work as meaningful, and of manager-worker relations as non-hierarchical.

Low-Level Managers’ Sense Making

In recruiting low-level managers (assistant team leaders and buyers), upper management emphasized the autonomous character of the team-based system. It is important to note that assistant team leaders were eligible to vote during union elections, just like other workers. Jeff and Bobby, both from the mountain region, held
low-level management positions and had already worked in other natural food stores. They were trying to make careers for themselves out of natural food retailing. Jeff’s first impression was that GG offered a great deal of autonomy:

Well, they really sell the company as being—I started as a buyer in the bulk department, and so they basically tell you that it’s like running your own business, and that they just support you and you make a lot of the decisions and stuff and get a lot of freedoms. The pay didn’t start out great, but it went up pretty quick so I didn’t think the pay would be that bad, and the Joeefits didn’t seem too bad. Originally I had high expectations for the company... I had worked for a couple of companies before, so I really wasn’t sure. I worked for one company [on the west coast] that was really tightly run and really well run, so I was hoping it would be more like that. But I’ve also worked for [another natural foods retailer], which is probably the worst run company I’ve ever worked for. They’re just really disorganized and the people at the top had no idea what they’re doing. So I like the Green Grocer approach of “you have your own area and we support you” and I thought I would have a lot of freedom and I was hoping that the management would be good and let me do what I needed to do.

Despite some reservations based on his previous work experiences, Jeff expected that he would be granted the leeway to do his job well. Using the rhetoric of “running your own business,” upper management gave the impression that low-level managers would act as entrepreneurs, as in Edwards’ conception of “simple control.” Before the advent of large firms, the owners of small firms worked alongside employees, many of whom were family members. According to Edwards, “the entrepreneur watched over the entire operations of the firm. He supervised the work activities directly; he maintained a close watch on his foremen; and he interceded immediately with full power to solve any problems, overriding established procedures, firing recalcitrant workers, recruiting new ones, rearranging work schedules, reducing pay, handing out bonuses, and so forth” (1979:25). Thus, low-level managers were initially optimistic about the chance to
run their own departments. In the next chapter, I'll discuss how these employees came to be disappointed.

_Lifers_

The workers I spoke to identified another group of people—"lifers"—who had extraordinary commitment to the company and aspired to management. Lifers reportedly believed that Green Grocer was special and exemplary in its contributions to the greater good. Josh explained:

> By believing in Green Grocer that means a lot of BS. The environmental aspects, the core values. Basically, the environmental stance, the involvement in the community, the making a difference in the world through pushing the organic lines, etcetera—lifers believe that Green Grocer provides an environment where they can grow professionally for the rest of their lives until they retire, which in some cases may or may not be the case.

It is difficult to disentangle lifers' belief in the company's values and their strategic use of the managerial rhetoric to signify that they are management material. What I can say is that workers who wanted to become managers had to use this rhetoric to show that they were serious about moving up (see also Jackall 1988), just as women may adopt more masculine styles of dress and communication when they try to advance at work (Pierce 1995). Lifers, as Josh and Billy described them, displayed a wholehearted belief in the company's core values. Signaling a subscription to this ideology through talk was a precondition for advancement, according to Steven:

> You have to know your GG stuff in order to get a higher-up position, which I thought was interesting. I was part of a couple interviews, later on, and anytime anyone got interviewed, like, core values were a big part of interviews.
Billy, a buyer in the specialty department, was frustrated by managerial pressures to “transform yourself”:

TM: What was your impression of that core value opportunity?

Billy: At the time, I thought they were okay. Like everybody that probably has worked there more than a year, has probably found out it’s just crap. I mean, unless you buy into it, and you put your lips on somebody’s butt. Then great. You’re going to climb the ladder real quick. Unless you do that, then there’s no reason to think about it necessarily.

TM: So in what ways did you have to like kiss butt in order to get ahead?

Billy: You just had to do everything correct. I mean, you had to be on top of your game. And you had to be able to just transform your mentality to the people that were above you. Most of the time that was just crap, which was what I hated. Because you have to transform your way of thinking to these people’s way of thinking that were so caught up in the corporate life, and in their visions. That’s what sucked. That’s the biggest thing.

Lifers’ commitment to the company was a response to what Edwards calls bureaucratic control, which encouraged workers to internalize the goals and values of the company. Under this control strategy, positive sanctions are formalized into promotion and evaluation. As such, lifers were enticed by the chance for upward mobility. Their loyalty lay with GG and their identity became enmeshed with the company. This is what Edwards referred to as the tendency to claim, “We the firm, not we the workers” (1979:148). Lifers had (apparently) internalized company values and were an example of successful alignment between worker identity and the company.

Managers’ efforts to convince workers that their work was meaningful often failed. The workers I spoke to defined themselves in contrast to lifers, whom they
believe settled for a career at GG because they couldn't secure a “real career” for themselves.

Josh: Green Grocer really likes people that are “lifers”—[people who are] committed to the company till death. They really embrace that and I think it’s really stupid because it’s a grocery store. They turn it into this overwhelming lifestyle. Like, people refer to people as lifers if they start as a bagger or cashier or whatever, and work their way up to team leader. They consider themselves lifers. They’re going—they really believe in GG’s message, which is cool because the core values of GG are positive; being involved in the community and making a difference in the environment, but they take it to a degree that I think is kind of silly—saying that you’re committed to a grocery store. There’s a stereotype around them. It’s generally middle-aged people who embrace that term, none of the kids do or younger people that work there. I call them middle-aged but the thirty-plus crowd, because at this point, they haven’t found a career—this is me being judgmental—and now they’ve found an opportunity at Green Grocer and they’ve embraced that. To each their own.

Time and again, these workers countered managerial claims that GG was different by asserting that GG is “just a grocery store.” In this way, the more critical workers that I spoke to negotiated definitions of their work. They had a more critical perception of the social relations of production and rejected managerial claims that each worker is valuable.

Critical Perspectives on Rhetoric

Not all workers saw the team rhetoric as Joeign or positive from the start. Abby, the woman who initiated the Midwest unionizing effort along with her partner John, came to GG with a critical perspective. She had been involved in anti-corporate activism, which gave her a set of tools to interpret managers’ claims. Later, she and John helped others to describe the managerial hypocrisy they observed. She was from a city
where GG had bought a local cooperative grocery store. She summed up the problem with GG very nicely:

It's [GG] always had a particular sort of place in my brain as just a really disgusting company, just because they have done such an unfortunately effective job of really co-opting progressive politics and sort of making people think that if you shop there you're doing a good thing, when in reality they've really destroyed local food webs, I mean aside from their just sort of search and destroy business model and overtaking co-ops and doing all of that stuff, they're also, they don't even live up to the standards they say they do. I mean they're not helping local farmers, they're really not helping, they're not helping any of that stuff. So I've never, so I've always been very critical of the company, and of people that are aware of what they're doing I guess, so, yeah. And the team thing too, I mean yeah, I also knew that they were very anti-union, and then again using that whole concept of team management as some sort of like guise to you know fool people into thinking that they have a voice when they don't. And that kind of duplicitous employment practice is just really disgusting to me.

Abby's view of GG as a predatory company that displaces cooperative grocery stores made her skeptical of GG's rhetoric. Unlike her coworkers, Abby's environmental ethic and prior experiences with GG positioned her to view managers' claims with suspicion. She saw the rhetoric not as something to shrug off, but as a bald-faced lie. These experiences were particularly important in catalyzing the unionizing efforts at GG, as I'll show in the next chapter.

Ironically, workers did end up experiencing teamwork, but they were careful to point out that it would have happened with or without the team rhetoric, as George explained:

I think when I started working there, you know, you're kind of psyched about the whole thing but you do have, you do have an inkling that it's a lot of rhetoric. That a lot of the team, a lot of the 'We're a team, we're a team, we're a team' is something they—I can't even say how I reasoned to myself why they had this team rhetoric, which is kind of interesting I would say, but um, I don't think
there was anything specific about the team where I felt like, ‘Ooh this is great.’ Later on, when you started interacting with all of these people so much in your department, that’s when you actually started feeling that, ‘Yeah, there’s a team environment there.’ But that’s only something you would find out later and until then there really wasn’t anything I could have seen even from the beginning on to be the actual Joeffit of having this team structure. So it really wasn’t any great expectations that I had about the team structure.

Thus, it appears as though most, but not all, of the workers I interviewed thought the team idea sounded good, but they weren’t particularly excited about it. The idea of working at a store that uses teams was not the main draw.

Workers were more excited about the opportunity to work at store that was committed to environmentalism. After working there for a while, they began to see the team rhetoric as a gimmick. Because workers had low expectations for working in teams, they weren’t significantly disappointed when they realized it was more rhetoric than reality. Rebecca, a Specialty worker, described the first few months of work at GG as a honeymoon period:

At the beginning I thought “Oh, this is great; a nice new environment.” But when the environment doesn’t actually, in real life, aspire to what it’s supposed to, of course you’re going to get disappointed and jaded from that. It’s like when you’re first married to somebody; you’re all in love and we’re going to spend the rest of our life together, and then they snort, and sneeze, and snore, and pick their nose.

Despite managerial rhetoric and rituals that were supposed to elicit consent and identification with the company, the workers I spoke with rejected the teamwork ideology. These workers dismissed the team language as corporate hype, something they were likely to encounter in other retail jobs. Any positive expectations of teamwork at GG dissipated when the actual work began. The rejection of the team
rhetoric by these workers illustrates the process by which people sometimes resist the way a situation is defined by powerful others.

**Summary of Worker Perceptions**

Most of the people I spoke to tended to brush off the team rhetoric after discovering that it was not a real way of organizing work. However, there were some workers who were skeptical of managerial ideology from the beginning. These workers arrived equipped to interpret managerial actions differently. Abby, for example, had seen GG displace the co-op in her hometown. Additionally, her experience with anti-corporate activism meant that she interpreted signs more critically than her coworkers.

At the other end of the spectrum, workers who wanted to move higher up the job ladder outwardly embraced the definition of their work as meaningful and the workplace as democratic. Their participation in manager-imposed identity-making reflects the power of bureaucratic control as Edwards describes it. Upward mobility was contingent upon workers’ ability to signal that they were loyal and identified with the company.

In summary, workers interpretation of managers’ accounts depended on their aspirations and the understandings they brought to the job. Those who didn’t plan to make a career at GG were less willing to accept managerial definitions of their work as important. They didn’t have to compensate for the fact that they worked a low-wage job at a grocery store. Lifers, in contrast, hoped to make a career for themselves and
therefore had more to lose in rejecting managerial definitions of reality. They were therefore more susceptible to bureaucratic control, which offers positive rewards for those who (at least outwardly) conform to the company’s cultural project.

CONCLUSION

Understanding how managers exercise control over workers requires an examination of the larger problems managers are trying to solve. Managers need to create a cohesive program that serves different purposes. They need to simultaneously attract customers and clients, gain workers’ consent, and preempt criticism from the public. Firms also need to carve out an organizational identity that distinguishes them from competitors. Counter-intuitively, firms establish uniqueness by using recognizable signs that also connote legitimacy.

To solve these problems, managers draw from the larger cultural environment, taking elements that hold promise for achieving their goals. In the case of Green Grocer, this cultural toolkit included rhetoric, ritual, and symbols from past control regimes, as well as counter-cultural social movements. More specifically, these signs and strategies were borrowed primarily from previous experiments in welfare capitalism, company unionism, and the human relations model. GG also co-opted symbols from the organic movement in hopes that these symbols would resonate with consumers and workers.

Green Grocer was largely successful in wooing socially and environmentally conscious customers and workers. GG provided customers with an opportunity to ease their troubled consciences without having to sacrifice privilege and convenience, or
having to challenge the status quo through a radical social movement. The company presented youth a rare opportunity to find work that was meaningful and allowed for self-expression. By presenting themselves as a good company doing good things, those who shopped and worked at GG could also think of themselves as good people doing good things. GG provided a context where environmental identities could be affirmed on both sides of a market transaction. In affirming workers’ identity through rhetoric, symbolic practices, and ritual, managers tried to solve the problem of consent. While team-based control fell flat, the affirmation of green identities gave managers a handle on workers’ hearts and minds.

Traditionally, sociologists have focused their attention on the conflicts between workers and managers. As this case shows, the old dyadic version of the social relations of production is incomplete because it does not recognize how customers are implicated in control projects. At GG, the company encouraged customers to raise their service expectations, which generated feelings of entitlement. Antagonism and class-based tensions on the sales floor, however, coexisted alongside a harmonious framing of worker and customer relationships. Both groups saw themselves as environmental stewards. In this way, GG’s control project encompassed both workers and customers. This suggests that corporate power has a far reach that can effectively shape public consciousness. While the company’s control project was largely successful, it still contained weaknesses. In the next chapter, I explain how company growth set off a
chain of events that revealed contradictions and eventually led to organizing efforts at the Midwest and Southwest stores.
CHAPTER THREE

CONTRADICTIONS EMERGE

Organic and natural foods are not just for hippies anymore. According to the Organic Trade Association (2007), organic food sales in the US doubled from 1999 to 2003, the same period during which the events I describe take place. Moreover, multidivisional firms like Kraft and General Mills have acquired organic brands and stepped up marketing efforts. As such, organic foods have been mainstreamed, at least to the extent that they are available to those who can afford them and live near supermarkets that carry organic food. Rapid growth in the market for organic and natural foods led to major expansion of the GG chain in the 2000s.

For the most part, the workers I studied felt that GG walked its green talk, if not its team talk—at least until the company began to make some big changes that coincided with its expansion. Just prior to the organizing campaign, Green Grocer opened or acquired over 100 stores across the U.S., launched its own brand of products, and twice saw its stock split 2:1. GG began to enter into exclusive contracts with large-scale industrial organic producers. Company growth was attended by concerted efforts to standardize day-to-day operations in all of its stores.

As discussed in the last chapter, GG used rhetoric, symbols, and ritual to align worker and organizational identity. The company hired workers who cared about the environment and sustainable foods, then further socialized workers to take on green identities. Workers were encouraged to see themselves as an integral part of a different
kind of company, one that cared about the planet, people’s health, and local foods. Also, workers were led to believe that the company valued diversity and cared about their opinions. Any problems that might arise could be adequately dealt with through teamwork.

However, as the company increased its market share, contradictions arose between the company’s stated values and workplace practices. Workers began to experience a stretch-out, loss of autonomy, and increased pressure to sell products. That is, workers started to lose control over the labor process. What made this loss of control so painful for workers was that workers had internalized their roles as environmental stewards, but were now asked to participate in what they believed to be unsustainable practices. Managers issued the new directives, while workers had to carry them out. In addition to dealing with challenges to their green identities, workers also began to experience dissonance between managers’ diversity and team rhetoric and their everyday workplace experiences.

As I’ll show in this chapter, workers did not simply obey the new rules but actively negotiated them. The sociological implications of these negotiations are that studying organizational change must include the counter veiling actions of low-level workers in addition to managers’ actions and ideologies. The production of workplace culture is a two-way street. Identity-making rituals and feel-good rhetoric would no longer be enough to smooth over contradictions and quell worker dissent. In fact, these identity-making and solidarity-building exercises served to highlight inconsistencies
and provide opportunities for workers to resist individually at first, and then collectively.

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE, MAKING A PROFIT**

As GG grew and increased its market share, workers noticed a renewed emphasis on profit making, which coincided with increased use of team rhetoric and rituals. Prior to the company’s expansion, workers found it easier to take seriously GG’s philosophy of “making a difference,” whereas after the changes, workers began to feel that their role was simply to help make a profit. The more managers invoked the team ethic, however, the less team-like the workplace felt to those who worked there.

Kelly: I think they wanted a lot of camaraderie, which I think oddly enough, in the beginning when I started working there, there was a lot more of, just because of the people that were in management positions—because they didn’t really care. They weren’t necessarily concerned about Green Grocer as a company as much as people that worked in the store. But as time went on and the people in those positions changed it became much more about what regional wants and what national wants and how we measure up to those standards of how much money we’re making. And so the more they talked about being a team, and being more explicit about that, the less it actually felt like that...As people left, the people who were hired were not of the same, I don’t know. It was a different sort of person--people that were much more likely to have been transferred from the regional office. People that were a lot more financially driven. And so the whole feeling of the place looks different actually. The people that were working there physically looked different and certainly talked differently. I don’t think it was necessarily anything tangible or measureable. It just was more like you could feel it and little things changed. It became a lot harder to negotiate breaks, which were never an issue. Small things started to be a lot harder, a lot more of a pain really.

Workers found that scheduling became more difficult and noticed more regional managers prowling their store. Workers also experienced greater pressure to sell
products. As these pressures mounted, workers like Kelly began to feel inauthentic. It also became more difficult to brush off the team rhetoric and its inconsistence with workplace practice. Tension between control and resistance mounted, and workers grew increasingly suspicious of what they once considered a hokey, but Joeign
teamwork rhetoric.

Kelly: Things became much more about margins and budget and things that I’m sure other people were thinking about, because it’s always somebody’s job to do that. The difference was, it was never necessarily my problem, just like a Grocery peon, to worry about the margin because my job was to stack the shelves basically. Then, suddenly, it was my job. It became my job to make sure that if somebody was buying chips, I told them that they should buy salsa. If somebody was buying cereal, I made sure they bought milk. Like, that hadn’t been my job, but as time went on, it was expected that in order to help the team, I should start making sure that people were buying more than they expected to buy when they came into the store [my emphasis]. And so, some of it was the Green Grocer language but some of that, I mean the shifty [shift manager] and the team leader and all of those things had already been in place. But they started to take on new meaning, I think. But it was really subtle and I don’t think we were supposed to know about it. (laughs)

Managers tried to make workers feel like they weren’t team players if they did not push products on customers. Sociologists call this kind of peer pressure normative control, suggesting that it leads workers to consent to their own exploitation (Barker 1993, Kunda 1992; Graham 1995; Grenier 1988). In this view, the normative power of teamwork facilitates the internalization of managerial ideologies, as previously private and restricted parts of the self become available to employers. Workers thereby assume responsibility for disciplining themselves and, in some cases, police each other more harshly than management would otherwise (Barker 1993).

Yet, the workers I interviewed did not passively conform to normative pressures
but instead actively negotiated, or resisted, their implementation. Kelly, for example, resisted normative control and refused to push customers to buy products they had not intended to buy.

TM: So how did it make you feel? Did you actually—if a customer was looking at the vanilla ice cream, did you steer them towards the GG brand?

Kelly: (interjects decisively) Never. I never (laughs)—it's just so not my style or my personality. I was just like if someone wants to buy salsa with their chips, they are going to buy salsa with their chips and its not my job as a stocker to tell them that they should do that. There was always this sort of threat of like this secret shopper program, and so if your customer service wasn't good enough and you got a secret shopper it would reflect on you and the team and the whole deal. But I just could never care enough to make myself do that because I thought it was totally intrusive.

Despite the renewed emphasis on teamwork and increased pressure on average workers to increase the company's bottom line, the workers I spoke to did not concede to managers’ demands. As their work lives became less satisfying, these experiences heightened the contradictions between rhetoric and reality.

*How the Stretch-out Undermined Team Rhetoric*

Capitalism requires a constant squeezing of workers in order to meet ever-increasing demands for productivity and profitability. In his work on New England factories, Zonanderman (1992) examines managerial attempts to increase output, including the “stretch-out,” in which women weavers or “mill girls” had to tend four looms instead of two, without increased wage compensation. “Textile mill owners were constantly looking for ways to increase the productivity of each machine and worker,
because there were few major technical improvements in the industry during the 1840s. Increased production became dependent on increased output from each worker” (1992:33).

In service work, the stretch-out takes a different shape, but the principle behind it is the same: workers increase their output without an attendant raise in pay, leaving the company to pocket additional surplus value. For example, Hochschild (2003) found that as airlines increased the number of passengers on flights, it became increasingly difficult for flight attendants to give passengers the care and attention that their jobs required of them. The stretch-out at GG was achieved by demanding more work from team members and buyers in successful sub-departments. It is important to note that buyers often acted as assistant managers but were eligible to vote in the union just as a team member would. As the company grew, and as departments succeeded in meeting ever increasing sales goals, there were more customers to deal with and more products to keep stocked. Despite these heavier demands, no new workers were hired in these departments.

The stretch-out was legitimated by telling buyers that managing a sub-department was “like running your own business.” Buyers were ostensibly given considerable autonomy—but without adequate staffing. Buyers and workers in these sub-departments thus felt overworked, stressed out, and unable to take pride in their hurried work.

Bobby, from the Rocky Mountain region, explained how staffing was unevenly
distributed throughout the Grocery team, which included three sub-departments (Dairy, Frozen Foods, Bulk Goods) and the larger and more profitable Grocery-proper (shelved goods). When Bobby started at GG, there were 23 to 24 Grocery-proper team members and 6 Dairy workers. By the time he left GG, there were 32 to 35 workers in Grocery-proper but Dairy still had only 6 workers, despite a significant increase in sales and high product turnover. Even though Dairy was a sub-unit of the Grocery department, the Grocery team leader would not share workers with him:

Bobby: So that was the team atmosphere. Everything was supposed to be done for the Grocery department and Dairy, frozen, and bulk just had to make it on their own. And again, if it's a team atmosphere, why do that? And you know, Grocery is obviously the largest and it did have the most floor space and sells the most product then Dairy, then frozen and bulk are pretty close. But it was like pulling teeth. Like, if I had a guy call in sick and I'd go to Grocery [proper] and I'd be like, "Hey I need a guy." I mean when you're only working with 6 guys, and when one of them doesn't show up, it doesn't take long—I mean, you can lose a guy in Grocery and you could be like, "Okay, we've still got 10 guys." Plus 2 buyers who, if they decided to, could go do something. Whereas in Dairy, you know, [losing] one guy when you are working a two-person shift...And it was like, the person they would give you, if they gave you somebody, would be the guy who didn't speak English, had never worked in Dairy before, and was new. That would usually be the first person that they would give you. And of course I never liked that so I would say something. That didn't do me any good.

In short, contradictions between what upper managers said about teamwork and their actions became apparent to buyers. Workers could see these contradictions, too.

Rebecca, the specialty wine buyer at the Midwest store, also experienced understaffing despite meeting new profit-making goals set by regional managers. In other words, her reward for hard work and success was more work and less relief:

So I met all those goals, but it got to the point where just physically, I couldn't keep up with it by myself without working overtime. And I kept saying that I
really need someone else to help me with this, but the cheese department did so well that they kept needing people in the cheese department. So I said if I can at least get an assistant to help move the stuff around—because you’re always stopping and bringing stuff out. You have no time to be in the back to do your paperwork. So I think for about a year and a half, I just asked for an assistant or somebody to have one shift to work with me...We weren’t supposed to go overtime, because it’s bad for your team if you take those extra labor dollars. So they say, “Don’t go overtime, but still meet all these quotas.” Considering a lot of things, I mean, that was overall the thing that bothered me most—I got to the point where I needed help and I was asking for help, and they said “Yeah, well, that’ll be the next thing that we do. We’ll get you an assistant.” And they’d keep putting it off and putting it off until finally I’d had it.

As Rebecca notes, working overtime—paying time-and-a-half for working over 40 hours—is a cardinal sin in retail, because it eats up the surplus value of hourly wage labor. Like Bobby from Dairy, Rebecca was overworked and never got the assistant she needed to do the physical work of getting the product onto the shelves, much less complete the administrative tasks required of buyers. Instead, they assigned workers to the more profitable cheese department. The most salient problem for buyers was the lack of response to their requests for help with their workload. Such requests were ignored by team leaders. Instead of feeling like part of a team, buyers felt more like an island.

These problems were compounded by the visual marketing demands of high-end retail work. At GG in particular, product display was crucial for making customers feel good about shopping there. Workers could not simply plop a crate of wine on the sales floor. Every product had to be placed according to a visual marketing plan that changed frequently based on which products were to be “featured” or marked “on sale.” In practice, this meant that an entire shelving unit might be moved to an endcap (the
shelving at the end of the aisle, usually reserved for “on sale” items) only to be moved back into the regular shelving the next week. Rebecca explains how the demands of high-end retail work exacerbate the effects of the stretch-out:

TM: Did you feel like you had less time to do more things?

Rebecca: It’s not that I had less time to do more things. I had more things to do, with the same amount of time. It’s because the department was succeeding, because I had put so much work into it. It was succeeding; sales were higher, volumes were higher—

TM: So people were buying more and you’d have to put more stuff out?

Rebecca: Right. And just moving stuff around and making displays look pretty. The thing GG always wants everybody to do is make everything perfect there for the customer. When you come in the store, the perfect ideal would be to have everything fronted, everything filled, all the produce in really good shape; nothing rotting anywhere, the cheeses present a nice presentation, the case-stacks of wine be something you run into and say, “Oh!” You see things—so it’s an exciting floor, you know what I mean? So they wanted perfection all the time.

These experiences highlighted the contradictions in the meritocratic aspect of the team rhetoric: “We strive to create a work environment where motivated Team Members can flourish and succeed to their highest potential. We appreciate effort and reward results” (GG website). But instead of feeling “empowered, rewarded and appreciated,” the stretch-out left both Bobby and Rebecca feeling overworked, isolated, and underappreciated.

Both Rebecca and Bobby felt like they were not part of the larger team. Buyers had kept up their end of the bargain by meeting sales goals and keeping products stocked. Upper managers, however, left them high and dry. As such, the contradictions
between the teamwork rhetoric and reality of their work experiences led to resentment:

Rebecca: So I guess at the end, before I left, I just felt very, very isolated and very lonely. It didn’t feel like a so-called team at all. It felt like I was on my own team, like I was the only person in the store who even knew what products there were in wine because nobody else knew what we had in. So, that was irritating.

Bobby: I mean that’s what clouds the issue at GG. I mean, we have a job to do. Our job is to keep the shelf full, you know. They also say I need to make margin. Fine. I can do that. But don’t tell me we are a team if we’re not gonna be a team. You know, don’t try to butter me up and say, “We’re gonna do all this stuff,” and “Oh we really care about how you feel and stuff,” because they don’t. Okay, maybe the individual person does. But that doesn’t matter when everything is tied up in the bureaucracy that is Green Grocer. I mean, it’s a big company. It’s a corporation.

TM: So it sounds like what you were saying a little earlier that there was a lot of competition even within the teams or there was not a sharing of resources.

Bobby: Yeah, that would be a good way to put it. (laughs) Not a sharing of resources.

TM: (laughs)

Bobby: No, they wanted you to be a team when it came to doing stuff for Grocery or whenever they wanted to have a team meeting. They wanted you to come in and sit in there and participate like you are part of the team. But when the actual work was getting done, you would never find anybody anywhere near that. That’s why when we grew—I mean, we didn’t need the 35 people in Grocery [proper] that we had. We just needed the people that were there to work together and more efficiently and to do their job. And there was so much of this going around trying to be a team that it takes a lot of time out of your day.

As buyers experienced a stretch-out, the team rhetoric wore thin and the affirmation rituals could not compensate for overwork. Workers came to see the time spent in team meetings as time that could be spent catching up on work. Moreover, the promise of teamwork added insult to injury and served to highlight the gap between rhetoric and
reality, making workers feel deceived.

These tensions came to a head when Bobby refused to go on a “team build.” As described in the last chapter, team builds were group outings that were meant to build solidarity between workers and managers.\(^1\) However, when workers returned to the store, they were confronted with a pile of work that had accumulated during the time spent on the team build. Bobby explained:

In my three and a half years there, I only went to one. They take you to a place where—the one I went on was rafting. So the object is you know, get everybody in the raft to work together, things like that. You know. It was fun. I got to go rafting. But did it make us a better team when we got back? No. I mean we all just took a day off and when I got back there was nobody working the Dairy so the next three days I spent trying to clean up the mess from the one day that we went on this team build. So, you know, to me, that’s why after that I refused to go on them. I actually got written up for not going.

TM: Really?
Bobby: Yeah.

TM: So what was that conflict like? How did that work out?
Bobby: I got written up for being “grossly insubordinate” actually.

TM: Wow. That’s pretty strong language.
Bobby: Yeah, gross insubordination. That’s what I got written up for because I didn’t want to go on this team build so I didn’t go. And they hadn’t written me up yet. Then we had a team meeting because every other pay period you could have a team meeting. So it’s six o’clock in the morning and they decide they want to go around and have everybody say what they like most about Green Grocer. And I’d been working there about two and a half years at this point. ...So it’s six o’clock in the morning and I—you know, here we are. We switched team leaders. They’ve been feeding me all this bullshit about they’re going to do all

\(^1\) Team build activities usually included rafting, picking up litter, and running outdoor obstacle courses. Worker compensation was equivalent to an eight-hour shift.
this stuff and it never happened. And now they want to play this game where we’re all going to do this happy feel good stuff. Which doesn’t matter. You know, if you want to do something that matters, go help me stock the Dairy. Or you know, show me. Because this talking stuff hasn’t worked for two and a half years at this point and frankly I don’t think it’s going to. So they get around to me and I’m you know, obviously fed up with it so I’m like, “Yeah, I’m not playing.” Then they’re like, “No really what do you—” and I’m like, “No. I don’t want to play.”

While Bobby wasn’t keen on teamwork from the start, he had mostly ignored it or half-heartedly participated. But when his workload became intolerable, he couldn’t bring himself to “play” along. Bobby’s use of the word “play” shows how he came to see team-based emotion management as a superficial performance, filled with “happy feel good” talk that clearly did not match his experience in Dairy.

The open conflict between Bobby and the Grocery managers shows how emotion management rituals can backfire when workers turn rituals into opportunities for resistance. The fact that this conflict took place in front of the entire Grocery team—upper managers and low-level employees alike—made it possible for others to question the sincerity of managerial motives, especially since Bobby was held in high esteem by the workers he managed. He was known for being a hard worker and a fair manager. As such, his actions did not go unnoticed. Bobby continued to describe the conflict with the team leaders during a team meeting:

And so then they got mad at me because, being the Dairy specialist, you know, I should have been supporting the team leadership. So anyway we go out on the dock and they want to confront me and I’m like, “You know what, I don’t want to do this right now. I’m obviously upset. You guys are obviously upset.” And so then they just start going off on me and I’m like okay, you want it? Here it is. And I told them you know what had been bothering me straight up. Held nothing back and told them, “You guys sit around. You do nothing. You won’t give us any help, and you play favorites. They let other people sit around and do
nothing. They know nothing about my department. I could leave today and they would know nothing. They wouldn't be able to do anything. They would be in shambles" Which I proved when I left. But I started naming of all these points. Then they wrote me up for being "grossly insubordinate."

As the conversation became more heated, managers moved the conflict to the loading dock. Thus managers attempted to quarantine the conflict as they were instructed to do in the managers’ handbook. But workers had already witnessed Bobby's challenge to managerial authority and it could be said that the damage had already been done. A redefinition of the situation was emerging and this laid the groundwork for others to question the legitimacy of team rhetoric and ritual.

CONTRADICTIONS ON THE SALES FLOOR

Many environmentalists and small farm advocates worry that the expansion of industrial organic, or what Michael Pollan (2006) calls “Big Organic,” will lower food quality, weaken standards, and hurt small family farms. As organic becomes industrialized, the movement begins to lose touch with its 1960s roots at People's Park. Back then, it was a political statement and way of living that was intentionally anti-capitalist, anti-war, local, and environmental. All parts of the mainstream agricultural industry were rejected. Today, “organic” has reduced the problem of sustainability to the substitution of inputs in an otherwise conventional industrial

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2 In April 1969, local residents and activists gathered at People's Park in Berkeley, California to reclaim land owned by the University of California—Berkeley. The land, which had been purchased by the university for dormitory construction, had been vacant for some time. Volunteers proceeded to tear up the asphalt and transformed the former parking lot into a newly cultivated organic community gardening area, which remains to this day.
model. Industrial organic growers use biodiesel to run their farm equipment, reduce their use of pesticides, and replace genetically modified feed with organic feed. Everything else is the same. The animals are still confined in cages with little room to fulfill their species being (rooting in the case of pigs, scratching in the case of chickens), monoculture is the norm, and fossil fuel transports food from one end of the country to the other.

Under industrial organic, the direct connection between consumers, farmers, and the land on which their food is grown breaks down. In contrast, local food reflects the tastes and values of the local community. Also, local buying is important for a community’s economic sustainability, since that money stays within the community instead of being diverted into the pockets of multinational agricultural corporations. Pollan essentially concludes that the organic movement, now called industrial organic, has devolved into the kind of business they originally opposed. In other words, industrial organic has co-opted and commercialized the organic movement.

Green Grocer’s entrenchment in industrial organic became apparent when the company entered into exclusive contracts with giant agricultural firms.³ Corporate managers began to standardize stores across the nation and workers soon noticed managerial involvement in their everyday work lives. These changes left both local managers and workers with less decision-making autonomy. They felt the most satisfying and rewarding parts of their jobs slipping away. At the same time, greater

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³ Data are derived from departmental buyers first-hand experiences.
pressure was put on teams to increase their sales. Jackie explained how this pattern played out in the Deli:

Oh, corporate was always annoyed with the Deli. It could never have enough output. That was at the point that they were really trying to control everything a little bit more. Like they were really pushing—after I started working there, they really started to deemphasize the different parts, I guess what you could say the individual identity of the [Midwest] store. They started carrying fewer local products. They started wanting us to take more things from regional, like in prepared foods especially, instead of preparing all the stuff ourselves. Like, we had a cook who made all this fabulous food and he’d have his own recipes. Well, it went from that to them pushing more recipes on us, for us to make, all of the sudden. I remember one day I came to the back office and this woman from regional was telling me how the hot case utensils were all wrong. We really needed to be using a different type of slotted spoon. And I was just like (laughs). It was moving in that direction. It just kind of got progressively more intense. And policies would change. They were kind of fluid, like for a while the individual stores still had more control over their policy, like dress code, things like that.

Not only were workplace practices homogenized across stores but products were standardized as well. Jackie noted that local products were replaced by those on national and regional lists. This change conflicted with workers’ green ethic because shipping products across the country meant increased fossil fuel use, the disruption of local food webs, and less support for local farmers. As such, the contradictions of industrial organic began to emerge in the Midwest and Southwest stores.

At the Midwest store, there was, perhaps, no greater cause of worker frustration than the apple wall. Produce workers lamented the impracticality of the apple wall—the result of top-down decision-making that essentially devalued workers’ tacit skills. Before the changes mandated by upper managers, apples were displayed in bins so that workers could see exactly what needed to be refilled. Customers could pick up, feel,
smell, and knock to find that perfect apple. The new arrangement, designed by extra-local managers, required the stacking of apples into a slanted wall. Workers found this quite challenging—apples are not uniform and their waxy skin makes them hard to stack. When customers tried to pull an apple from the wall, others would tumble down. The rule at GG was that any food that touches the ground has to be thrown away. Linda, the Produce buyer, explained:

[Our team leaders] had gone out to San Francisco and had seen the store out there, and had looked at all the displays and came back with all these pictures, and the apple wall was one of the things. Because sure, it looks very impressive. But I think if they would have taken the time to ask the people in San Francisco that had to stock those stupid apples five times a day—because some moron each day would take something from the third row and it would all fall down, and then you’d have like 50 apples that you’ve have to pull because they’d be bruised or cut—they probably would have decided that that wasn’t the best thing to do. And it took forever. Like if you had to set the apple wall up in the morning, it could take an hour. They don’t stack perfectly. You could be almost done and then they all fall down, and you have to do it again.

Jamie, the self-professed “produce geek” from the Midwest store, agreed that the new set-up was problematic:

I mean it was kind of like easy to see for us what was empty and what needed to be done and I thought it just made some sense. Like you [customers] pick what you want. And they changed it. And we had to make pyramids and everything had to be stacked a certain way. And we learned how to stack it from the people [at the regional headquarters] and sometimes it was kind of attractive. They were like grand feats of engineering and they’re also like sometimes waxed and then they’re slippery and they fall down.

While the apples might not have looked as pretty under the old apple display, the system made sense for customers and workers alike. Here, the team rhetoric becomes problematic. If work were truly democratic, then there would be no apple wall. More
importantly, the old arrangement minimized waste.

Linda: It's a waste of time. *It's a waste of product*, you know [my emphasis]. All of a sudden you're out of a certain kind of apples, because you had it fallen down so many times during the day. It had nothing to do with how it was built up that morning. It's just people, you know? People like to go through and touch and find the perfect ones, and when you do that, maybe the perfect one is down here, and then it all comes falling down. Apples are kind of expensive. *You could get apples from local farmers if maybe you weren't doing the apple wall* because you weren't losing so many [my emphasis].

Jamie: And it's really frustrating to be working in the department and doing something and then the apple wall falls down. And you're like, "*Oh look let me throw out 10 pounds of organic apples* [my emphasis]. Super (sarcastically)." Yeah, so most of, like, three quarters of the workers hated the apple wall and wanted them to be bins like it was before. It always just seemed stupid and it was like, "It's the way we do it. It's the Green Grocer way." And its like, if 75 percent of the people here don't want it to be this way then can't our team, as a team, decide not to have—sorry, I'm like, "Argh! I hate the apple wall!"

Workers had internalized their role as environmental stewards as management intended, so when the company began to institute decidedly ungreen practices, workers noticed these inconsistencies. As Linda said, "Apples are kind of expensive. You could get apples from local farmers if maybe you weren't doing the apple wall, because you weren't losing so many." The repetition of these wasteful acts was tough to deal with, given workers’ conservationist ethic. Not only were workers required to do the dirty work of throwing away food, they had to set up an entire wall only to see it topple down a few hours later.

The inherent contradictions of industrial organic surfaced as GG began making exclusive deals with giant organic processing firms. Each department had its own buyer whose responsibility was to place product orders. Despite the high turnover at GG,
workers managed to sustain relationships with local farmers, and this was something they took pride in. Linda, the Produce buyer from the Midwest, explained her efforts to support local foods and local farmers. She tried to maintain the relationships between GG and local farmers that her predecessor had worked hard to cultivate. About a month into Linda’s tenure as Produce buyer, her manager asked her to buy more from the regional distribution center and buy less from local farmers:

TM: When you were working as the buyer, did you order from local farmers?

Linda: Yeah. I did, because Luke, who had been there before, had built up really good relationships with four or five local farmers. When he was training me, he did really emphasize, you know, "Whenever you can, get produce from these guys" The local farmers then would kind of base their planting amounts on what all of their different vendors were saying. So I tried to stick to that, but after I’d been doing it for a month, a month and a half, that’s when Melanie suggested to me that I just go with the specials that the distribution center was giving us and don’t worry about the local farmers. That’s when I got pissed. That’s when I was like, "What is going on here?” Because that is on the core values, right up front. You know, "We are dedicated to supporting our local farmers," and I was just told by the assistant store manager that I should stop ordering from these guys who had just planted specifically for us...She would not even talk to me face-to-face and it became notes in my mailbox about, "Stop ordering from this local farmer. Do we really need three varieties of carrots? How about just one?"

After trying to gently persuade Linda to buy from firms that had exclusive contracts with GG, her manager began to closely monitor her purchase orders. Linda thus experienced both a loss of autonomy and a challenge to her environmental ethic. Changes in buying practices created inconsistency with the company’s stated values, her own morals and green identity, and a worker culture that valued local farmers and local foods. Despite teamwork rhetoric that claimed to provide workers with a voice—the open door, open communication policy—Linda had no say in buying decisions. She
also now had to deal with unhappy customers who could no longer buy their favorite foods.

Workers at the Southwest store experienced similar challenges to their autonomy and contradictions between the company’s claim to carry local and natural foods and their decisions to replace them with mainstream products. Bobby described a disagreement with president of the region over this issue:

They used to have—and they took these down—but they used to have pictures of like the people who owned Horizon Dairy and you know Stoneyfield and all these. They were kind of hanging around the store. It’s like, you know they're really pushing stuff. But then the president of this region, he and I spent about six months every time he came into the store we were fighting about bringing in Tropicana orange juice. Like I told him, Tropicana is a mainstream item. You can get it any grocery store in town. There’s no reason to carry it. It’s not organic. It’s not all natural, of course they say it is. Why don’t we push Horizon, why don’t we push Organic Valley? Why don’t we push Uncle Tom’s, which they wouldn’t let me bring in and that was my main point because I had asked to bring this in because I had a lot of requests for it. And it was organic and it was cheaper and yet I had to bring in—evenually I had, I gave it [Tropicana] one facing each on the shelf and that was it.

As Bobby saw it, not only was GG not living up to its promise to support local farmers, but the president of the region was undermining his tacit knowledge and hard work in figuring out what appealed to local tastes. National managers made decisions without knowing how difficult it would be to carry out those decisions locally. This burden was left to buyers, who now had to figure out how to carry what customers wanted while carrying what regional and national managers wanted—without enough space on the sales floor or in the backstock area to do both. It is important to note that despite strong pressures, Bobby still resisted his manager’s directives when he limited the shelf space
dedicated to the mainstream orange juice. This shows how workers can negotiate
decision-making and shape workplace culture.

Perhaps more importantly, the conflict between Bobby and the president of the
region is emblematic of the underlying contradictions inherent in a model of ethical
consumption that relies on choice. Customers can wind up at the check out line with
conventional foods and still feel like they are doing good, thanks to the store’s “feel
good about where you shop” atmosphere. The shift to offering conventional products
makes good business sense, in that providing a wide range of products to choose from
will most likely increase spending. These changes, however, were inconsistent with the
company's environmentally responsible claims.

The changes described above brought underlying contradictions to the surface
and led to a period of renegotiation between workers and managers. The concentration
of wealth in the form of Big Organic created inconsistency with green rhetoric and
subsequently team rhetoric. Prior to these changes, the workers I interviewed saw the
team rhetoric as annoying but essentially harmless. In contrast, the promise of working
towards the greater environmental good was something that resonated with workers.
So when the company instituted wasteful and unsustainable practices, workers
certainly noticed, and this sparked some isolated manager-worker conflicts. These
conflicts exposed power differences between managers and workers, leading workers
to see the team rhetoric as hypocritical. Wastefulness, because it conflicted with
workers’ green ethic, further inclined workers to define the situation as unjust.
Workers were particularly unhappy with another policy change—the decision to stop allowing workers to buy discarded food for cheap. Organizers told me that this policy change hurt workers who depended on discarded food. Jamie explained:

When I started there, there was an area in the back of the store where product that was you know, if the cartons were really dented, products that were spoiled and couldn't be sold to customers could be sold to employees really cheap. So like day-old bakery. Expired stuff. Dented stuff. Whatever. You could get it for like 10 cents, 25 cents and like they eventually took that away from us. So then not only couldn't we get stuff cheaper, which is really nice to be able to do because at 7 bucks an hour you can't really afford much at GG, but then all the product that was just past expiration or you know the product was fine but the packaging was damaged, we had to throw out and you know, for environmentally conscious people that was a really hard thing to be told we have to do. So that was another sort of—it felt very sort of hypocritical at that point.

Taking home “perfectly good food” for cheap was a huge relief to workers’ budgets. Without the supplemental food, their food budgets were stretched thin. There was also a moral issue here: wastefulness was an affront to workers’ green identities.

This inconsistency was exasperated by GG claims to make natural healthy food more accessible for everyone. Not only that, but workers themselves had to do the dirty work of throwing away the food on a daily basis. This was hard for them, as Jamie explained:

At the end of the night, if they had five pounds of mashed potatoes, no one could have a bite of them. They had to just get thrown away. They didn't give them to a food bank or anything.

TM: Did they put it in the dumpster?

Jamie: Yeah. So, I didn't work in the Deli, but that's hard. Like, that's hard not to be like (makes chomping motion and sound), you know? “I'm throwing away five pounds of potatoes. Boy, I'd like a bite,” and people were really pissed about that.
On top of this, management cited stealing as the reason for the change in policy. They claimed that workers were stealing six-packs of beer placed at the bottom of paper bags and then covered with slightly damaged food from the cull. But workers knew that the company had already instituted this policy in their other stores. In other words, stealing at this particular store was not the reason for the policy change. Routine bag checks at the end of their shifts insulted workers and reinforced distinctions between managers and workers, despite GG’s claim that “Us vs. Them thinking has no place at Green Grocer.”

Workers framed the throwing away of food as wasteful and therefore unjust. They did this by talking to one another, which led to the common use of the phrase “perfectly good.”

Kelly: Yeah. A lot of people were really angry. Because, I mean, people had been buying and taking it home for years so everyone knew that it wasn’t beyond edible. I mean it was perfectly good stuff. And so it was pretty similar to the dress code where a lot of people talked about it to each other but also to management and it was decided that, “Well, we gave you a chance and now you screwed up, so now we can’t trust you to do this anymore and end of discussion.” You know, “The numbers are down which tells us that people must be stealing. And it must be people doing it in this way.”

Workers collectively framed the issue by talking about it behind the scenes and developing a shared language—a process that is similar to what Fantasia (1988) found in his study—that collective resistance was preceded by the creation of a shared definition of the situation. In this case, the changed food policy was the “trigger event.”
UNDOING DIVERSITY

At the Midwest store, workers enjoyed a loose dress code that allowed them to wear just about whatever they wanted as long as it wasn’t “skimpy or blatantly offensive,” according to Jordie, a Grocery worker. As discussed in the previous chapter, the opportunity for self-expression was a major factor in youth workers’ decisions to seek employment at GG. From management’s standpoint, counter-culture dress was perhaps another tool for invoking the slightly funky co-op image. Many workers wore clothing associated with rebellion and adorned their bodies with tattoos, piercings, and crazy-colored hair.

At the Southwest store, the dress code was more restrictive and had been in place since the store opened. Workers there had never enjoyed the comparatively lax dress code characteristic of the Midwest store. Slowly but surely, however, workers at the Midwest store began to notice that managers were hiring people who presented themselves more conservatively:

John: Yeah. It’s much more dronish...At that point, they were even starting to change their hiring practices a little bit, so they weren't hiring people who had tattoos and piercings as much. They were hiring more normal-looking people. By the time they sort of instituted all of those policies, they were already phasing people out as it was. They slowly started taking away all of the non-traditional Joeefits that you get.

Then, in 2002, as regional managers became more involved with everyday work life, a new dress code policy was issued at the Midwest store. Under the old dress code, workers were allowed to have one facial piercing. Within the limits of the policy, Jordie got his eyebrow pierced just prior to the new rule change:
It was a pretty loose dress code and then they came back with you can’t have any facial piercings. You can’t stretch your ear lobes. You can’t have tattoos. You can’t have the ends of your pants can’t be frayed, your clothes can’t be ripped, you can’t have any visible pictures or wording on your t-shirt. You could have tattoos, but you couldn’t have offensive tattoos and no one was willing to stand up and say what was going to be deemed offensive and what wasn’t. You could only have natural colored hair. So it was very much like a big change and it felt very homogenizing. I was in a situation where I got my eyebrow pierced while I was working there, because I knew I was allowed to have one facial piercing. And then they’re coming back and telling me that I can’t have it, and I need to wear a retainer, and blah, blah, blah.

As a high-end natural food retailer in the middle of expansion and standardization, it seems that GG tried to appeal to its new affluent customer base by tightening its dress code. The policy change seemed to reflect a desire to distance or differentiate the company from the co-ops they once emulated.

GG tried to capture the emerging interest in buying organic and natural foods by promising “exceptional customer service.” Pink and black dreadlocks (Abby’s hairstyle) and tattooed faces do not exactly conjure an image of deference and servitude. These are anti-authoritarian symbols that could make some customers uncomfortable.

Workers suspected that the dress code changes were part of an effort to make them embody servitude.

Josh: You want that image of the team member to come across to the customer as "Yes, we're team members!" You're supposed to smile. It was about being as professional as much as you can while wearing jeans and a T-shirt, kind of thing.

Jamie: But yeah, there were a lot of things that were seemingly making it a little bit more conservative. A little bit more trying to at least in theory, their reasoning behind it was like to be a high-end retailer, if we’re gonna sell expensive food, we should all look preppy or something. I don’t know if people are like, “Should I spend fifty dollars at Green Grocer? No, that person had a tongue ring. I better not go there.” (sarcastically).
It thus seems that through the new dress code, managers asked workers to be employees first and people second. Workers did not acquiesce but instead resisted manager imposed-identities and asserted that they were more than just docile workers.

Jordie: They are trying to present an image of aren’t we nice, white, clean cut, happy little workers and you know we’re like, “No. We’re the hippie freaks. Like (laughs) fuck off!” You know?

Workers saw the dress code as an issue of dignity and respect. They noticed that these changes contradicted company rhetoric about valuing diversity, individuality, and uniqueness.

For transgendered people and gender non-conformists, dress is an integral part of the performance of gender. To put restrictions on presentation is to threaten gender identity. Jordie was so offended by the new dress code that he came close to quitting, although later decided to stay so he could be part of the organizing drive. In his resignation letter to regional management, Jordie wrote:

I don't think I could ever make you understand just how much the dress code issue hurt me. I have spent my life trying to like, or at least not hate, myself because of all of the many ways in which I am considered socially unacceptable and the constant rejection I feel from the world around me. My guess is that no one reading this letter and certainly no one who created that dress code knows what it is like not to have a gender identity that is recognized by your culture. So in a place where this freaky little trannyboydyke [sic] found friends and found people who almost understood and people who accepted, there suddenly was the threat of losing my job, my means of supporting myself, because of my social unacceptability. There was an all-store mandatory meeting in which we were officially told of the changes. I find it ironic that during this meeting I ran out crying because there stood my STL [store team leader] telling me and other valuable TMs [team members] that we were too socially unacceptable in our appearance to be worthy of employment with GG and at the same meeting, my team voted me an outstanding team member.
Here again, instead of compensating for dress code changes that made Jordie feel like an outsider, the identity-making rituals that took place during store meetings only served to highlight inconsistencies.

Jordie was not the only person to notice contradictions between managerial values and the new restrictive dress code. Abby was upset that she and her coworkers could no longer express their political views via buttons and T-shirt slogans:

I mean, the change in the dress code and physical appearance policy was a perfect example, because it was like, you look in the employee handbook, and it's like, "We value individuality and diversity and you can present yourself how you want to present yourself." And now it's like you can't have any facial piercings unless it's a side of the nose piercing, because those are the only ones that are socially acceptable. And you can't have any unnaturally colored hair, and you can't wear any logos on your clothes or political messages. We were like, "Can we wear rainbows on our shirts to symbolize queer pride?" and they were like, "No." So there were lot's of things like that, just really obvious duplicitous things.

The dress code change was a clear indication that the company did not walk its talk regarding diversity and individuality. Moreover, managers exacerbated these tensions by imposing the new rules unilaterally, which underlined the lack of democratic decision-making at work. Workers were not allowed to participate in decisions about the dress code, despite the open-door policy and democratic rhetoric. Abby, who wore pink and black dreadlocks, and piercings in the center of her upper and bottom lips, was notified of the policy change by her supervisor during a “tense conversation”:

Abby: It was really fucked up, the way that they presented it to us. They basically, like kind of gave us this written notice and then we had sign it, saying that we read it. I don’t think it said, "You’re going to comply," but it was like, "You have read this policy and this is when it’s going into affect." People were really mad about it... We had a store meeting about it, where Josie (the store manager) presented this new policy. It was a really ugly meeting. Some people
raised their hands and they were like, "I don't want to take my piercings out. What am I going to do?" And she was like, "You need to find another job then. If you're not going to comply, you need to go somewhere else." Yeah. That was about it.

Kelly: And so I think early on my impression was that it was constant two-way communication. They would say that we could give them feedback on and I think that they would say, even if they don't bring it up as an agenda point of a meeting, we would be able to talk to them about it. And they would be open to sitting down and having a conversation and hearing anything that we had to say about anything really. But then regional said, for instance, "We have this new dress code and this is how it's going to be now." And everyone said this is a perfect example of something that we're supposed to have the option to give feedback on. And they said, "Well, it doesn't really work like that. This is above us." They sort of just packed it up and said, "No this is the way that it's going to be" and "Sorry. Actually, you can't, because we need to follow in line with all of the other stores." So I don't know if there's anything else that motivated so many people.

Workers thus tried to use the open-door policy to resolve the dress code and cull policy changes. This was the first time many workers had any direct interaction with upper management, as Jordie explained:

It was really just sort of realizing exactly how management felt about the workers and how hypocritical they were and that really they could do whatever the hell they wanted to the rules and we wouldn't have any say. I know that dress code seems like a really stupid thing to get upset about but it was, it was the first time that we had any real interaction, or the first time that I had any real interaction with upper management and it was a new regional director and it was a much more heavy handed and more corporate oriented regional director and it just really felt like this is just gonna get worse. And its just gonna get worse and worse and worse.

The storewide changes in the dress code policy marked the first time that workers tried to use teamwork to solve workplace problems. Workers’ attempts to realize industrial democracy were rebuffed by managers, who were not willing to discuss these changes, other than to say that workers who did not comply would be written up or fired.
In this way, managers’ use of coercive control in implementing the new dress code significantly contributed to the unraveling of the identity-based control program at GG. It laid bare the real power differences between workers, store managers, and corporate managers. Workers realized that managers could change the rules at whim and without their consent. They described managers’ actions as constituting a “lack of respect” for workers. Managers’ unwillingness to negotiate the policy further highlighted contradictions between what the company claimed to be and what it was. Workers saw the dress code issue as emblematic of these contradictions, thus it became the catalyst for collective resistance.

THE EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

As negotiated-order scholars have pointed out, changes in the organizational structure lead to a period of renegotiation (Maines and Charlton 1985; Fine 1984). Present negotiations depend on past negotiations and the degree to which they have achieved sedimentation. Both stores experienced changes associated with the company’s growth, albeit differently. While the Southwest store was newly constructed and had not yet established a distinct local culture, its Midwest counterpart had a long history of operating under the corporate radar. In other words, national managers allowed the Midwest store to “do its own thing,” as Linda explained:

We’d always sort of been the oddball store. We didn’t really fit into all of that stuff. I don’t know exactly why. All I know is that people always talked about [our store] as being sort of the outlier of Green Grocer. Because I think a lot people didn’t necessarily care about Green Grocer in the way that a lot of people
in other stores did. There wasn’t as much of a sense of like, “I will live and die for Green Grocer because it is the best grocery store that has ever existed,” which my sense is that, in a lot of other places, that’s more of the feeling they’ve achieved. And I think part of it is the community because when they were even talking about putting a Green Grocer in, they already had people protesting at the site and into the months after they opened. So I think there was always this, “We’ll just kind of let them do what they do, which is be kind of weird and kind of out there, and it’s fine because they’re not hurting anybody.”

Thus, the Midwest store had its own store identity that was more closely tied to the city’s reputation for radical politics, instead of aligned with the company’s organizational identity. Regardless of whether extra-local managers really saw the Midwest store as an outlier, workers had adopted this narrative and continued to reproduce it.

After the company’s expansion, corporate managers implemented new policies, like the dress code change, which could be interpreted as an attempt to rein in the misfit store. The workers I studied were angry about these changes and wanted to resist. But why would such a seemingly trivial issue like the dress code provide the spark that led to collective resistance? The answer has to do with the interactional opportunity provided by the implementation of unpopular storewide policies that allowed all workers to share the same experience. Like the advent of large-scale factories that brought workers together under one roof, these storewide policies brought workers together experientially and physically. Policy changes were presented and contested during all-store meetings, which provided an opportunity for workers to talk to each other about their common grievances and construct a definition of the situation that undermined company rhetoric and managerial authority.
The separation of workers into teams, each with its own authority chains, previously kept workers from building working relationships with their coworkers. Workers thus dealt with these contradictions individually and did not know what other workers were experiencing. It was not until managers attempted to change the dress code and stop selling discounted food that workers learned from one another how widespread the gulf was between word and deed.

TM: Can you identify a specific incident that got you thinking the union would be a good idea?

Kelly: Well, when John talked to me it was like dress code was in the works, When we talked it wasn't actually in place but it had been noticed that it will take effect whenever so that was being talked about a lot. I think it [the idea of unionizing] came through conversations that I had with people. I don’t think, no I don’t think I thought about it too much. I think I did a little bit in like the more of the policy thing than a philosophy thing if that makes sense, I think it was more of an after-conversation. Through conversation I came to think about a lot of those things, not necessarily before that [my emphasis].

Previously, when workers had grievances, they dealt with them on their own. But because the dress-code policy was storewide, the problem couldn’t be attributed to bossy team leaders. Problems were no longer team-specific. The implementation of an unpopular storewide policy meant that everyone experienced it together and began to talk about it. Workers began to feel that they had to do something about the direction GG was taking.

Justin: So that was one of the things that became like a major point of attention, when like they changed the dress code policy, not so much because we were whiners and we were like, "Oh, we can’t have blue hair anymore." But like just the idea of the direction the company was going in. That was becoming just a lot less autonomy with each store and a lot more of branding; a lot more of corporate, like getting their fingers into how each store operated. So they were
like, "Oh, yeah. We're changing this policy and this policy, and this because this is a national change. This is a national program." We're like, "Well, what else is going to change? We came to work for this business because we liked these things about it and we liked the people that we worked with how the business ran. But if all those things changes, and then what? You know? Are we just going to like lose our jobs because we don’t want to stay here anymore? Or we’re not going to like what the company becomes?”

Justin’s use of the word we as in we the workers, and they in reference to managers, provides evidence that workers not only made clear distinctions between managers and workers, but were beginning to form a collective identity and culture of solidarity that would soon enable collective resistance.

The undoing of diversity, affronts to worker dignity, diminishing control over the labor process, and management’s refusal to live up to their promise of a democratic workplace, were not the only reasons workers cited for organizing. While contesting the dress code change was the impetus for unionizing, bread and butter issues would soon become important too. As workers shared stories, they learned of pay inequalities between departments. The organizing drive allowed them to see this unevenness, whereas before it was hidden by team-based segregation.

Workers believed that pay inequalities were a direct consequence of the “shared fate” incentive program called “labor gain sharing,” in which payouts are calculated as “sales per labor hour.” Extra-local managers set department sales goals and labor budgets for a given period. If a department reached the sales goal without using the entire labor budget, then the remainder of the labor allotment was divided among those workers. In other words, the most efficient teams were supposedly rewarded with
payouts from unused labor budgets.

Despite company claims that “as productivity increases, then all the people at our stores prosper,” workers told me that labor gain sharing created wage disparities between departments. Since the products in Meat and Seafood and Specialty were expensive and the work was not labor intensive, these teams had less trouble meeting their goals and had leftover money in their labor budgets for team member payouts. Also, since the teams were small, the payouts were divided up among only a few people. Labor-intensive departments, such as prepared foods, hardly ever met their sales goals and therefore did not receive payouts. Thus, workers in the Specialty and Meat & Seafood reaped the Joeefits of labor gain sharing, while labor-intensive departments like Prepared Foods and Grocery did not see their work efforts reflected in their paychecks. Another contributing factor to pay inequalities was the lack of job reviews in non profitable teams. Workers were supposed to be evaluated by departmental managers every six months, at which time pay raises were negotiated. John reported, however, that he and his Deli coworkers had not completed job reviews in years. Workers believed that the failure to conduct job reviews in non-profitable teams was systematic—a claim denied by managers.

Until they started sharing stories, workers outside of prepared foods had no idea that Deli workers were neglected. When Jamie found out, she thought it was wrong that there were such a big difference in pay, raises, and payouts.

TM: So what was the biggest surprise for you?
Jamie: I think the differences in wages. I thought it would be more consistent between departments for people doing the same I-have-no-skills type of job. It surprised me that I was getting raises like that and other people in other departments were getting like none or 25 cent raises every time. So that didn’t seem very fair...It seemed like a hard working person who is doing a good job from any department should get the same amount of raise because it’s a grocery store. Like it’s not—it’s just a grocery store.

The workers I spoke to saw no skill differences between the jobs performed in different departments. Therefore they saw no justification for unequal opportunities for raises, payouts, and wages. They argued that there were no high-skilled jobs at GG but that they are all simply grocery store workers.4

Workers also grew suspicious of the seemingly objective formulas used to derive payouts. These formulas were created by upper management and served to mystify the gain sharing process. Even a buyer like Rebecca wasn’t sure how these calculations were made. Since workers couldn’t figure out how gain sharing works, they didn’t know if they were getting their fair share. Workers suspected that informal relationships with regional managers affected the allotment of the labor budget. Some stores and teams were favored over others and received a bigger allotment, making it easier to define their performance as profitable or “successful.”

When I asked workers to propose a more equitable way to distribute labor payouts, they said that the committee wanted to share the surplus among all GG

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4 Later, when approaching co-workers about unionizing, organizers were sure to point out these disparities. Committee members would ask, “Do you think it’s fair that specialty workers get payouts but you don’t, no matter how hard you work?” It’s no surprise that almost all of the underpaid workers in the prepared foods department at the Midwest store were union supporters, while support among the well-compensated Specialty and Meat & Seafood workers (i.e. those with the highest payouts) was rare.
workers in the store, instead of dividing it by teams. Later, they would make this proposal at the bargaining table. The organizers proposed that labor payouts be equally divided among all GG workers in the store. They argued that this would decrease the competition that divided workers and would cultivate teamwork at the store level with everyone pitching in to help each other out, not just within their own team. In other words, they argued that storewide labor payouts would make them a true team.

Manager's use of divide-and-conquer strategies is not new. At GG, managers drew from the lessons learned during the technological and bureaucratic control regimes. One such principle was that separating workers both physically (laterally) and hierarchically (vertically) makes control easier. Edwards says that one of the Joeefits of continuous flow production (from managers’ standpoint) is that workers are tied to their machines, limiting their ability to talk to one another and build solidarity. At GG, workers didn’t know about problems in other departments because they were divided into teams with distinct authority chains. Separating the store into teams also allowed managers to use different pay scales without workers knowing how unequal things really were. In this way, teams allowed managers hide pay inequalities and the extent of inconsistency between rhetoric and reality. The dress code change created a structural opportunity for workers to talk to each other and share stories of injustice. In other words, it enabled the formation of worker solidarity across departments.

Word of the organizing drive at the Midwest store would soon reach the Southwest store. However, the latter drive would not even reach the election phase, and
support for unionizing would not spread beyond the Dairy sub department. Workers at the Southwest store were not provided with the same opportunity to build solidarity. There were no storewide policy changes to bring workers together as the dress code change had done in the Midwest. Workers remained segregated in their departmental teams.

Moreover, the Southwest store had less to lose, compared to the Midwest store. Many of the policy changes that occurred in the Midwest were already in place when the southwest store opened. In other words, the worker culture in the Midwest had achieved sedimentation while its counterpart had not. Workplace culture in the southwest appeared ready-made and durable. Workers there did not have a sense of alternatives to the organization of work. Only after the Midwest store began its organizing drive did the Southwest workers begin to organize for change.

CONCLUSION

Managers hoped that care and concern for the environment would be extended to customers during sales interactions. But as the company grew, contradictions emerged. Managerial efforts to control workers through the teamwork rhetoric and emotion-management rituals sometimes backfired. The contradictions between what management said about teamwork and workers’ material experiences were too great to ignore or reconcile. In many cases, rhetoric and rituals had the effect of highlighting workplace inequalities, rather than obscuring them. As I’ll show in the next chapter,
workers used the teamwork rhetoric to propel their union organizing efforts, in part by calling for GG to live up to its own purported standards.

The contradictions of teamwork and industrial organic created the background for the emergence of collective resistance. Initially, workers *individually* resisted managerial strategies to control their work. Kelly may have played along in front of managers, but refused to pressure customers to buy extra products. Bobby took a stand in front of management and other workers by refusing to play along with management’s rituals. Linda persisted in her efforts to maintain relationships with local farmers, despite managerial pressures to buy from companies with whom GG had exclusive contracts.

The division of work and workers into distinct shops meant that workers ended up with a very localized experience. They worked only in their assigned areas and did not have much interaction with workers in other departments. In other words, workers were alienated from each other. Because they worked intimately with only a few other workers inside their department, they missed the chance to create the kind of solidarity necessary to challenge managerial control on a wider basis.

When corporate managers instituted storewide policy changes, they inadvertently sparked collective resistance. As workers began to share stories, they realized that the problems they faced were not theirs alone. On top of the other problems in the store—wastefulness, bag checking, buyers’ loss of control over purchasing, and dress code changes—workers also began to discover troubling pay
inequalities between departments.

Ironically, management’s identity alignment project was perhaps too successful. Workers noticed when the company’s words and deeds did not harmonize. Nor could they ignore decidedly ungreen practices, such as wastefulness and the cessation of buying foods from local farmers. Instead of warding off unions and worker dissent, the team rhetoric highlighted inequality at work when workers tested the team system. As such, this case shows how workers negotiated the imposition and exploitation of identity. It also shows how workers can use identity-based control rituals to undermine control

In the next chapter, I’ll discuss the barriers to unionizing retail workers and how organizers in the Midwest won a union certification election. I will also continue to examine the dialectical nature of control and resistance and use this understanding to make sense of the union’s eventual demise. Just as workers identified weaknesses in the control program at GG, so did management keenly observe and exploit vulnerabilities in worker solidarity.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE UNION

Worker resistance culminated in union organizing drives in the Midwest and Southwest stores. Dissident workers drew on activist experience and ties to union organizers, cultivated solidarity through work-based friendships, and hijacked managers’ rhetoric and rituals in their efforts to unionize. Managers, in response, used rhetoric to mask inequality, offered cosmetic concessions, and eventually resorted to heavy-handed strategies, such as firing workers and hiring a union-busting firm. Consistent with Edwards’s framework and the negotiated order perspective, the struggle for control was dynamic—each action provoking an adaptive response by the other side. To understand how this struggle played out, it is necessary to consider the wider context of the slanted U.S. legal system, the difficulty of organizing in retail, and the stereotyping of youth workers. All of these had consequences for the ultimate collapse of worker resistance.

*Situated Unionizing*

Understanding how the unionizing effort unfolded requires taking a closer look at the legal environment in the United States that favors corporations over unionizing workers. According to a study by Kate Brofenbrenner (2009), “89 percent of private-

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5 By hijacked I’m referring to the political sense of the word: to introduce an amendment deleting the contents of a bill and inserting entirely new provisions.
sector employers, when faced with employees who want to join together in a union, force employees to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union propaganda; 64 percent interrogate workers about union activity; and 77 percent require that supervisors deliver anti-union messages to workers they oversee.” As such, the beginning of a unionizing drive, before management learns of workers’ intentions, is a critical period. Once managers find out about budding plans to unionize, they typically launch an anti-union campaign that includes illegal practices. Workers can legally contest these actions, but often, by the time they have their day in court, the damage has been done, and the momentum of the drive has fizzled. Organizers are thus faced with the challenge of recruiting participants and building a solid movement without alerting management.

Time is of the essence for another reason. Retail is characterized by high turnover, which means that workers must organize stores before presently employed workers become formerly employed workers. At Wal-Mart for example, 70 percent of employees leave within the first year, according to a survey conducted by the retail giant itself (PBS 2004). Trend data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also show that high turnover is endemic to retail work.

As has occurred every month since the series began in December 2000, the seasonally adjusted quits rate was highest in the accommodation and food services industry (4.2 percent). (2008:3)

Turnover includes worker-initiated quits and employer-initiated layoffs or firings. In some cases, one firm will eliminate jobs while another opens new positions. But most
turnover takes the form of a large-scale game of musical chairs, with workers as circling players and jobs as chairs.

...this worker reallocation occurs over and above job reallocation. There are enormous amounts of both job and worker reallocation in the U.S. — the annual job reallocation rate is about 20 percent; the quarterly worker reallocation rate exceeds 40 percent. In other words, almost one job in five is destroyed or created every year, while one of every 10 jobs, four will be occupied by new people within a quarter. (Lane 1999)

In other words, workers are reshuffling across the same set of jobs. Thus, in the case of retail, workers tend to trade one crappy job for another.

Workers may appear to have the advantage in this labor market because they can quit and find work elsewhere. On the other hand, employers can hire new employees to do the same low-skilled job for less money. Looking at the bigger picture, employers as a group win because they don’t have to improve working conditions or wages. When workers are unhappy with their work, employers can respond with the old standby, “If a man is dissatisfied, it is his privilege to quit” (Jacoby 1985). Workers who deal with dissatisfaction by quitting are likely to find themselves in the same situation they were trying to escape.

While short-term workers make up the majority of employees in retail, we need to remember that they are not the only type of workers in the store. A sizeable minority of workers may have their sights set on moving up in the company and are thus subject to bureaucratic control—what Edwards calls “an elaborate system of bribes.” These workers need to signify their commitment to the company as a precondition to promotion. It stands to reason that these workers might present a hard sell in
organizing drives, since the desire to unionize is not exactly what companies are looking for in long-term workers and managers.

We also need to closely examine stereotypes of youth workers. These stereotypes make unionizing difficult because they keep established unions, employers, and workers from taking youth organizing efforts seriously. For example, Tannock (2001) points out that in debates over whether to raise the minimum wage, conservatives rely on “happy teen worker” stereotypes—the idea that most minimum wage earners are teenagers seeking pocket money to buy fashionable clothes and gadgets. Liberals, on the other hand, argue that we should raise the minimum wage because low-wage earners are adult, mostly women workers, who need the money to support their families.

Tannock argues, however, that both conservatives and liberals are beginning with faulty assumptions. Teen and college-age workers are seen as undeserving of a living wage. But youth workers are often contributing their wages to family income pools, or spending their wages supporting families of their own. Youth workers pursuing a college degree are also facing unprecedented financial burdens. Unlike their parents’ generation, employers increasingly expect to hire workers with undergraduate degrees. The rising cost of tuition coupled with the decreasing availability of college grants, create a situation in which youth workers often amass heavy debts before they even leave college. Minimum wage jobs hardly cover the cost of living, much less the cost of a college education.
Tannock points out that workers spend as much as one fifth of their working lives in these types of stopgap jobs. A growing number of youth workers never make it out of low-wage service jobs. They flounder or get stuck working in stopgap retail jobs well into adulthood. Thus perceptions of youth workers as “alienated youth” or “happy teen workers” serves to silence, marginalize, and naturalize their exploitation. These perceptions of youth workers can present another potential obstacle to organizing. Employers, unions, and older long-term workers may dismiss unionizing attempts based on perceptions of them as trouble-making teens or interlopers.

It was in this context that GG organizers sought to unionize. Workers told me that within a year, half or more of the store’s employees had turned over. Clearly, the odds were stacked against them. In fact, it is a wonder that Midwest workers took their organizing drive as far as they did, in light of the unfavorable legal environment, the high turnover rate, the lure of upward mobility, and the stereotyping of youth workers as trouble making and/or interloping teens. In the rest of the chapter, I’ll show how workers dealt with these constraints—with varying degrees of success—as well as how they tried to establish a union and secure a contract in spite of the do-good variant of control used by GG to squash dissent.

LAUNCHING THE ORGANIZING DRIVE AT THE MIDWEST STORE

When organizers set out to unionize the Midwest store, they were well aware of the company’s staunch anti-union stand. The CEO made several well-publicized
critiques of unions, which expressed an over-my-dead-body attitude toward organizing at his company. Organizers knew that they were undertaking a formidable challenge and predicted a swift response from managers. Based on these expectations, the union developed a plan to beat the odds. As the organizing drive unfolded, it took many twists and turns. Managers used both carrots and sticks to stop the unionizing efforts. At times, managers’ strategies backfired, creating key opportunities for organizers to openly challenge their authority. As such, the struggle for control was dynamic, with each side anticipating and responding to the other’s actions.

Quick-and-Quiet Organizing

One of the most successful strategies used at the Midwest store was quick-and-quiet organizing. Because John and Abby (lead organizers and romantic partners) were friends with Joe (a full-time service-worker union organizer who did not work at GG) they knew it was important to organize quickly and quietly before management found out and initiated an anti-union campaign. Organizing without alerting management was not easy. John and Abby selected a few trusted workers to approach about the possibility of unionizing. Workers notified each other of meetings by passing cryptic messages on the sales floor, at the smoking table, and in the parking lot. These workers were receptive and, in turn, slipped notes to co-workers who were trusted friends or who seemed likely to be supportive of unionizing. They tried to put together a

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6 These remarks were so widely publicized that reporting them here would compromise confidentiality.
committee of well-liked and respected workers from each team, thinking they could spread their message within their teams and influence others. The movement grew but remained under management’s radar.

The folks I interviewed described the union drive as intense, consuming, exciting, stressful, exhausting, and ultimately disillusioning. Interviewees told me that they ate, slept, and breathed unionizing prior to the election and that their friendships helped sustain them during this period. Organizing meetings took place late at night, after the store closed at 10:00 p.m., thereby enabling all workers to attend. They met for several hours at John, Abby, and Joe's small apartment, often after working a full 8-hour shift. Others stayed up late for meetings even though they had to be at work at 6 a.m. the next day. Their friendships and the solidarity they developed though working together helped organizers deal with the demands of organizing.

Jamie: I mean it was also helpful that a lot of the people that I worked with, and were for it, were close to me personally. And then as we worked together more, we ended up being closer. So that’s a pretty good reason to go to many meetings really late at night, if all your friends are there.

Workers were thus cultivating solidarity and building a collective definition of the situation as unjust and unacceptable. They were also coming up with a plan of action and carrying it out. The covert organizing committee had managed to collect the requisite number of blue card signatures without management finding out.

When the committee had enough votes to call for an election, it brought its request to management. Not only was management surprised, but so were those workers who were not aware of the drive until its official announcement. Some of these
workers felt betrayed, but organizers did not trust them to keep the drive a secret.

Justin eventually came around to the union side, but only after the election:

I felt kind of betrayed or whatever, because they were my friends. I was like, “Weren’t we just hanging out last night? And you just never said anything to me about it?” And I was really upset. And they were trying to explain, you know, “We did this because you’re our friend. Because if you found out and we didn’t know how your job was going to fall, that you could end up losing your job and that sucks. So that’s why we didn’t tell you.” I just got pissed and made a really big deal about it.

Justin’s case shows how the quick-and-quiet organizing strategy had some unintended and unwanted consequences. His friendship with Jamie, a Produce worker and early member of the organizing committee, suffered after Justin learned about plans to unionize. Their close bonds were not enough to override the uncertainty that is part and parcel of unionizing in retail. Including Justin in plans to organize the store was just too risky.

Tensions ran high after organizers publicly called for a union election. This led to confrontations that included screaming, crying, and hurt feelings between supporters and non-supporters.

George: So it was kind of a laid back atmosphere in the department, but unionizing changed that, because people split into supporters and non-supporters. And all of the sudden, the atmosphere in the store became very tense. Emotions in general were running really high in the store. People would just breakdown crying. There were two super close sisters working one in Grocery [an assistant manager] and one in Bulk [a low-level employee] and they pretty much started to really dislike each other and started to drift apart. Because one of them supported it and the other one didn’t. But up until that point, no it was just always like a really fun place to work.

The organizing drive definitely created destructive tensions, in part because of the close
bonds between workers. Those friendships that survived the initial fallout sustained organizers, but in some cases workers paid heavy emotional costs.

Making sense of how the organizing drive unfolded requires an understanding of the challenges of organizing in the current labor-legal environment. Workers rightly anticipated that management would try to shut down the drive as soon as they heard about it. Had workers been organizing in another context—one in which they could openly seek the participation of all eligible workers without fear of managerial retribution—they might have been able to approach all of their coworkers from the beginning. Since this was not the case, they had little choice other than to include only those workers who were safe bets (e.g., close friends and those not tied to management). In this context, they drew on the resources available to them—their close friendships and the solidarity that evolved through working together day in and day out—to build the union. At the same time, relying on these relationships had some unintended consequences that took a heavy emotional toll on workers, posed significant challenges to the organizing effort as a whole, and inadvertently alienated some would-be supporters.

Moreover, a subgroup of six gay, lesbian, “gender queer” (those who presented themselves in gender non-conformist ways), and transgendered workers had established close-knit bonds, presumably based in their shared outsider status.
The Company’s First Response: Kill It With Kindness

Before management knew it, organizers formed a committee and had a sizeable number of workers on board with plans to unionize the store. Once workers had announced their intentions, they did not have much time to revel in the success of their quick-and-quiet organizing strategy. The two months between telling management and waiting for the election proved to be consuming and stressful for workers. The company quickly launched an antiunion campaign. First, managers tried to coax workers into siding with the company, using familiar control strategies. Later they used more traditional capitalist sticks along with their rhetorical carrots.

The company’s initial response to the organizing drive was to try to kill it with kindness. Workers described managerial efforts to convince them to call off the organizing drive as somewhat naïve. Managers bought hundreds of dollars’ worth of flowers and displayed them on the customer service desk and in employee-only areas. Attached to each bouquet was a note declaring managers’ appreciation for workers.

George: I remember we were saying that they didn’t take it seriously the first couple days. Either they hadn’t contacted the right people or headquarters was kind of slow in responding. They bought us flowers. That was the funniest thing that came out that day. They actually had the first initial response of, “Lets buy flowers,” like hundreds of dollars worth of fucking flowers. They put them up in the back and, of course, at the customer service desk, with a little card or something saying, “To the workers from Green Grocer.” It was just creepy in so many ways.

Thus, managers relied on old solidarity-building strategies to dissuade organizers. They used tokens of appreciation to show how much they valued the work of their employees. Workers, however, were not convinced.
Another early response was to fire the store manager and bring in regional managers. In doing so, managers tried to define the problem as individual rather than systemic.

George: [The store manager] was then very quickly ushered out because their mantra became “Oh, the store leader was what was wrong with the store and, you know, we’ll give you a new store leader.”

Workers were not appeased by the firing of the store manager. According to Joe, the store manager was being “punished for corporate policies that were really the problem.” Thus workers resisted managers’ attempts to attribute problems to one bad apple (i.e., the store manager). The dress code, job dialogues, differences in labor payouts between departments, discarded items policy, and inconsistent applications of store policy were all catalysts for the organizing drive. Instead of addressing these issues, GG tried to smother the drive with flowers.

The imported regional managers also tried to dissuade workers from organizing. These new managers spoke to workers during business hours and attempted to show care and concern. Abby explained:

Well, the first response was to send regional people in to talk to people, like one-on-one. They didn’t pull people out. They just went up to individual people on the floor and were like, "Hey, who are you? So how do you like working here? Any problems? What’s going on? Blah-blah-blah, whatever," which is totally illegal, by the way. You know, that kind of like friendly stuff.

Managers approached workers in a nonthreatening way, attempting to show concern for worker well-being. Workers, however, were not swayed, and considered these gestures too little, too late.
Managers also tried to quell dissent by emphasizing teamwork. They attached letters to workers’ paychecks and held a series of meetings touting the Joeefits of teamwork. The first set of optional meetings were called “town halls.” After that, workers were required to attend them. Abby, George, and Jackie explained:

Abby: Then they set a couple of meetings for—they were not mandatory—over the weekend. And people [workers] went and it was like people from Regional. I don't even think the word "union" was brought up at those meetings. They had some weird name [town halls], where you could just like go and get your concerns out or ask questions or whatever. I think the first meeting—and it was a very Green Grocer thing to do—basically telling us why we liked working at GG. "These are all the things we do for you and obviously you must be happy here because look at all these things that you get."

George: It wasn't about why unions are bad in the beginning. It was never that overt. It started out as a worker appreciation or something about how teams work. Something along the lines of how we work and how we operate. They talked about the GG philosophy and the team philosophy.

Jackie: We had these bizarre meetings where they were like, “There’s been talk of a union. We’re all really happy. We’re here to hear about your concerns.” They were just like, “Oh, don’t worry about a union. You don’t need a union. We know your store manager was the problem so we got rid of her,” that sort of thing, which was really funny. Yeah (laughs). It was definitely that teams were better and that unions couldn’t really promise anything.

The company drew from its cultural toolkit to persuade organizers to call off the drive. More specifically, managers amplified their team rhetoric, referred to anti-union meetings as town halls, and touted teamwork as a system that precluded the need for a union. Moreover, managers attempted to shape workers’ emotions and perceptions by telling them how they were supposed to feel about teamwork. Namely, workers should feel happy and appreciated, not to mention grateful, for the opportunity to work for a
“different” kind of company.

Managers’ first response was thus to emphasize GG’s image as a caring and democratically-run company. Toward these ends, they used tokens of appreciation, emotion-management rituals, and team rhetoric, and attempted to define the problem as easily solved by getting rid of the store manager. This case shows that there are limits to cultural control. Once company practices are shown to be inconsistent with stated values and collectively defined as unjust, then the foundation of consent is shaken. Symbolic gestures, previously seen as annoying yet harmless, are now interpreted as further evidence of duplicity. Not only did emotion management rituals fail, they made matters worse. In the next section, I’ll show how managers’ initial strategy, particularly their use of team rhetoric, backfired when workers co-opted the team rhetoric and used it to make the case for organizing.

*Turning Rhetoric on Its Head*

Much to managers’ dismay, the kill-it-with-kindness strategy was not effective. Organizers saw through the team rhetoric and claims to care about workers. What’s more, organizers countered with their own rhetoric. In an open letter⁸ posted on a website run by worker-organizers and dedicated to the unionizing effort, the organizing committee made its case:

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⁸ The open letter was also made available to the media via the worker-run website. Several news stories made reference to it and other web-based material.
Indeed, many of us enjoy our jobs and would like to continue working for the company. However, we want to make Green Grocer the kind of store it professes to be in its philosophy and core values. In our decision to unionize, we are upholding the shared company vision - not betraying it, as management might claim. We are empowering ourselves to become full and equal participants in determining the conditions in which we work.

Read GG’s philosophy for yourself, and you will see that far from workers' unions being contrary to their philosophy, they fit perfectly. Only when workers have a legally-guaranteed voice in their work environment can they truly be happy and excel.

Changes directly affecting us are made without input from us. This stands in gross contrast to the Green Philosophy, which states: “Us versus Them thinking has no place in our company.” Examples: dress codes, job descriptions, changes in discount policies, etc.

At-will employment and a huge turnover rate grant us no job security. How can we, as explained in the Green Grocer Philosophy, “believe in the value of our work and find fulfillment from our jobs,” when we can be fired for any reason?

There is a lack of respect for us, as complaints or issues are handled with disrespect or simple denial. What about the “open book, open door, and open people practices?” Please.

We all have had experiences that prove that the “team” system is flawed and that we do not have control - as the “team” rhetoric implies.

The organizing committee at the Midwest store thus used the Green Grocer philosophy to make the case for unionizing. Organizers essentially turned company rhetoric on its head and pointed out the contradictions between what management said about team member happiness and actual labor practices. That is, they co-opted the company’s team rhetoric to redefine the situation. They also offered their own definition of the situation—that unionizing was not antithetical to the GG mission but aligned with it.
Framing organizing as complementary to the GG philosophy was an important strategy, given the high organizational commitment of some workers and the intertwining of organizational identity with personal identity. Organizers recognized the potential for would-be supporters to take criticism of the company personally. Thus, instead of bashing the company with harsh criticism, they defined unionizing as consistent with the company’s participatory and do-good image. Anyone who embraced the company’s professed mission of self-empowerment should, according to the organizers’ argument, also embrace the union.

Moreover, the participatory way in which the organizing committee structured decision-making highlighted the absence of democracy at work. Joe explained:

People had had enough of the whole language of being a team member and being some kind of different employee than an employee at another grocery store. So, we were able to create our own culture within the workplace that truly was a team, because people could participate in the process; anyone that wanted to could be involved in the committee and participate in the decisions about what the committee was going to do, what kind of literature we were going to write, and how it was going to go down and that whole process.

The committee constructed the union as a means of achieving real teamwork by playing off managers’ claims of democratic decision-making. They contrasted the lack of workers’ participation in the labor process with their own model of organizing. Through unionizing, workers could actually have a say in how work was organized.

The organizers’ hijacking of team talk demonstrates that rhetoric is not unilaterally imposed or received. It shows how these strategies can backfire, thereby

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I more fully describe the importance of this strategy below.
creating the potential for collective worker resistance. Thus, this case departs from other studies of cultural control (Kunda 1992; Graham 1995). Workers used managerial rhetoric not only to resolve internal conflicts and “get along” at work, but also to challenge the basis of managerial authority. As Edwards predicted, cultural control projects have weaknesses that workers can use to shift the struggle for control in their favor. Through unionizing, team and democratic ideals can be more fully realized, which can further undermine managerial legitimacy.

**Textbook Union Busting at a “Different” Company**

Three days after workers demanded union recognition, the company's union busting strategies began to mimic those commonly used across the U.S. Managers did not abandon subtle union busting tactics, rather they added scare tactics. Jackie described the shift in managerial tactics:

> Those initial meetings, their whole point was to talk up Green Grocer. Then next, there was a meeting to totally try and talk down the union.

In conjunction with projecting a caring managerial persona to coax workers to vote against the union, managers tried to induce fear by spreading anti-union myths. Under the existing control project, managers had crafted a caring and moral image for the company, leading undecided workers to expect caring managerial behavior. It seems, then, that managers had locked themselves into a prescribed response, since outright intimidation might swing some workers in the wrong direction. Managers were thus faced with the challenge of maintaining a moral identity while eliminating the
possibility of unionizing the store.

The company’s first order of business was to replace the old store manager with a new one. According to the workers I spoke to, the new store manager did not attend to the business of running the store but instead focused on union busting. Shortly thereafter, the mandatory meetings began. These meetings were scheduled so that known organizers ended up in the same meeting. Managers thus tried to quarantine organizers and dissent. Organizers were not there to point out contradictions or ask critical questions that might puncture managerial definitions of the situation. However, once organizers figured out that management was purposefully scheduling them to attend the same meeting, they did the best they could to plant themselves in each small group meeting. In doing so, organizers were able to challenge managers’ accounts and present their own.

Captive-audience meetings consisted of six to eight workers who were paid to attend. Managers cited cases of union fraud and corruption, mafia ties, union staff salaries, and reiterated that teams precluded the need for a union.

Abby: Then probably a week later, they had the first actual captive audience. [The regional president] read from a script, you know, the whole anti-union spiel thing. They were sort of like picking apart the Local\textsuperscript{10} [a pseudonym] and looking at some of the contracts. You know, "You're going to be starting from scratch and you might not even get any of these things anymore." That kind of thing. You know, doing the things that companies always do, like looking at the salaries of staff organizers and the fact that they get like a car allowance. Just like silly things like that.

\textsuperscript{10} The Local is a pseudonym for the food workers union that GG workers affiliated with. I describe the affiliation process later in the chapter.
Linda: They did show some newspaper clippings about unions and saying bad things about unions. But then it was apparent what they were doing. They were trying to badmouth unions. You know, they certainly didn’t say, "You’re going to lose your job." Although one of the things that they loved to say was, "Unionization is going to hurt the business and the store will have to close." They said that all the time. So you had all these people thinking that, "Oh, my god. Of course, I’m not going to get fired. But I’m just going to lose my job because the store is going to go under." That was the big thing that they always said, "If you do this, horrible things are going to happen and we’re going to have to close the store."

Workers suspected that these scare tactics came from the anti-union consultants hired by the company. By bringing anti-union consultants into the mix, managers gained access to a preexisting set of union-busting strategies. Managers’ toolkit was thereby linked with past managerial control programs, from which they could pick and choose tools to smash the union. In this case, they relied on formulaic union busting strategies, such as spreading anti-union myths and inducing fear. However, as I’ll show in the next section, organizers anticipated managers’ next move and prepared accordingly.

**Inoculating Workers Against Anti-Union Myths**

Organizers expected the company to use typical union busting strategies. Thus, they proactively prepared workers for management’s response to the organizing drive. At worker-run meetings, organizers discussed the anti-union myths, illegal firings, and mandatory meetings that management would use to try to foil the election. The organizers’ predictions were dead-on, and workers were able to recognize and resist many of management’s union-busting strategies. Abby explains:
Again, I think we did a really good job of inoculating people against that stuff. So, to a great degree, I would say it worked and people really felt empowered. People would come up to us and they'd be like, “Oh, it’s so funny. They said exactly what you said they were going to say.” So it was great in that way. But of course, some people were afraid and some people—it did get to them or it did sort of make them believe GG. I mean, it was surprising. I was glad that anti-union campaigns or union-busting campaigns really do unfold in the same way. And they really do rely on the same tactics and strategies and lies and whatever. It was kind of funny to like see GG do everything that we said they were going to do.

Organizers’ ability to correctly predict how managers would respond to their unionizing efforts was aided by their friendship with Joe, a professional organizer. More specifically, Joe told them about an autobiographical book, *Confessions of a Union Buster* (Levitt 1993), that lays out common union busting tactics. Organizers aptly devised the inoculation strategy to counter managers’ cookie-cutter responses to unionizing. While the inoculation strategy did not work in all cases, it allowed some workers to see managerial responses as contrived. Organizers thus were able to contest managers’ definition of situation before they even presented it.

*Identity-Based Control Backfires*

GG’s fear-based approach to union busting did not fit with their image as a progressive and democratic company. Organizers told me that these overt means of dissuading workers from voting-in the union backfired in a major way during captive-audience meetings.

Jordie: At the beginning they said you know, “We just want to present you with another side and you make up your own mind and blah blah blah.” And then it was, “Unions are bad bad bad bad bad bad.” And then the last picture was “Vote
No.” (laughs). And everybody was like, “Oh, this is a non-biased, we’re-supposed-to-make up-our-own-minds presentation? Good job (sarcastically).” And clearly they had not considered that this is not your typical group of people looking to form a union. Like, this was probably a much more educated, progressively minded, and a much more politically minded group of people. They had completely misjudged their audience when they put that presentation together. We just all walked out of there laughing our asses off. I think I even said to one of the regional people, “Good job. Well, you just scored some major points for my side, so I’m going to have a relaxing weekend.”

Abby: They had this meeting about what unions are, supposedly, and then the very last slide said, "Vote No." Apparently somebody in one of the meetings saw that slide, raised her hand and was like, "Well, thanks a lot for saying that. I certainly know that I’ll be voting yes now, because you’re telling me how to vote." And so they were like, "Oh, crap!" So then, of course, at the next meeting, that slide had been taken out. You know, there was a lot of bumbling around and not really knowing what to do. Those meetings really, I think overall, like either pissed people off or just made them feel really insulted.

Jackie: People freaked out. People who either they didn't know what they felt, or even didn't really support the union, were like, "By the way. Fuck you for telling me what to do." They lost some serious points with that. So the next time, they didn’t make the same mistake, and be so direct about, you know?

Before the unionizing drive, managers put considerable effort into cultivating a progressive image for the company. Using team rhetoric, they defined the workplace as a place where workers were “empowered” and could “use their voice” to “have a say” in decision-making. Critical thinking and worker individuality were thereby encouraged. So when managers tried to combine this rhetoric with textbook union-busting, contradictions emerged. As Abby put it, “They bit themselves in the ass.”

Managers were unprepared for workers to use their voice in this particular way—to question managerial definitions of the situation. Workers were encouraged to “make up their own minds,” but only as long as they came to the same conclusion as
managers. Thus, these data support Edwards’s assertion that teamwork raises expectations for democracy at work—expectations that managers are unwilling to live up to. These contradictions provided an opening for impromptu resistance to take shape at captive audience meetings. Furthermore, workers’ dissident reaction to the “Vote No” message shows how situations are jointly defined through interaction. The team rhetoric backfired when workers noticed contradictions between managers’ directive to vote against the union and their claims to value worker initiative and empowerment.

ORGANIZING OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES AT THE MIDWEST STORE

Organizers at the Midwest store faced an uphill battle. Nevertheless, they made significant progress early on in the union drive. As the election neared, the struggle intensified and new challenges arose. High turnover and team based-segregation were among the problems that organizers needed to address. The committee’s relationship with the Local was often difficult to manage. There were also disagreements among committee members over organizing tactics. Under identity-based control, some workers interpreted criticism of the company as an attack on their environmental ethics, and proved difficult to sway. Organizers devised strategies to deal with each of these obstacles. Thus, the struggle for control was dynamic as each side, in turn, anticipated and strategically responded to the other’s actions.
Dealing with Turnover and Team-Based Segregation

As noted earlier, GG was no exception to the pattern of high turnover found in retail workplaces. When I asked Jackie how long the average person worked at the Midwest store, she said, “Within a year, easily half or more of the store could be different depending on when you stopped in.” Steven, from the newly established Southwest store, told me that a similar pattern could be found there as well:

I’ve seen over 100 percent turnover in the last year. However, I still have 20 people out of a team of 35 people who are still there, who were there last year. So that’s because that one third turned over so many times, that it accounted for all of us. Yeah, GG has a higher turnover rate than probably most companies.

Workers at GG had a short shelf life, so to speak.

It was in this context that the organizing committee attempted to convince their coworkers to join their efforts to unionize.

Jackie, who later became an organizer for a service-workers’ union, said that the organizing committee dealt with turnover by staying visible and convincing people to at least come to a meeting.

I wouldn’t say that we like had a strategy for dealing with it [turnover]. I think it innately was part of our campaign because it was such a huge part of GG. We just posted a lot of notifications, you know, made sure that we talked a lot about meetings that were coming up and really, really, really pushed meetings. There were a lot of people that worked there for like a week and we didn’t really talk to them. That was just like the nature of the beast.

Workers were not allowed to talk about the union at work, which made getting workers to come to the meetings even more important. She also discussed another common strategy—keeping a list of all the workers and where they stood on the union issue.
Fortunately for the organizing committee, a core group of workers threw themselves wholeheartedly into the organizing drive. Two of these organizers, John and Jackie, were from the Deli. Ordinarily, Deli workers are among the shortest of short-term workers. However, at the Midwest store, most Deli workers had stayed at GG for several years, which is rare in retail. The solidarity formed during this time was partly responsible for getting the union started in the first place. John explained:

We all liked each other, so people kept working there. They all happened to be people who weren’t just passing through. So we had like four people who had been there at least for five years, a couple of people for like three years, which is really rare. They generally try and get rid of anyone after two years if they haven’t moved up. Because then they’re making too much money for doing a peon job. So we all knew each other pretty well. And we all thought it was a bunch of bullshit.

This core group of organizers was not the shortest-term workers, but they were not the longest-term either. Getting these fed-up workers on board was not the problem. It was convincing the rest of the store that organizers anticipated would be the hard part.

The high turnover did not help the union’s cause, as Jackie explained. Workers had doubts about the ability to create a sustainable organizing drive in this context.

Some of them, a few people didn’t know if it would actually work in practice. There was always a concern that there was so much turnover at the store that it wouldn’t really matter. That’s something that came up.

Thus organizers had to figure out how to convince those who would be gone in six months to put an effort into unionizing. On the other hand, it stands to reason that these workers might have less to lose compared to workers who were trying to make a career out of their jobs at GG. George summed up this paradox:
I guess it's kind of a two-edged sword because you've got people who are young who can dispense of their job more easily, but they will actually care less to about a union. So it's not a simple issue of you either have people supporting it or not supporting it.

Short-term workers could go either way. They could be apathetic to the union cause or they might figure that they don't have much to lose.

In addition to the high turnover, workers had to find a way around the segregation of workers into teams. The Front End team (the cashiers), one of the largest departments, had the highest turnover, making them particularly difficult to reach. They were also younger and geographically isolated from the rest of the store. Front End workers didn't have much time to talk with their coworkers because they were tethered to their registers. They interacted with customers, not coworkers. To make matters worse, they had a "psychotically" anti-union manager, according to Linda. The Front End manager threatened workers to stay away from the union, or else they would not get any shifts. Front End workers also took their breaks in the Juice Bar area instead of in the breakroom where other workers ate their meals. Not only were there few interactions while working, but they were also separated during down time.

The Front End was one of the largest departments, so this group of workers represented a key voting block. However, as Linda points out, the turnover in this department was probably the highest in the store. Reaching Front End workers thus posed a challenge. Organizers also needed to figure out how to convince them to care enough about unionizing to vote yes.
Organizers came up with a clever strategy to reach these isolated, shortest-term workers. Abby switched from Produce worker to Juice Bar barista. Because the Juice Bar is located next to the cashier stands, she was able to talk to Front End workers. Baristas also worked with cashiers to fill drink orders. The barista made smoothies, coffee drinks, and health juices, then the cashiers rang them up. This was an opportunity for interaction between cashiers and baristas.

Abby: That’s one of the reasons that I ended up switching teams. We were having a hard time getting in the Front End, because there was so much turnover. The people in the Front End were much younger than the rest of us, or then the rest of the store, I should say. And you're like cashiering all day, so it's just hard to get to talk to those people. People that worked in the Juice Bar could just make the drinks and do all that stuff, and then there had to be a cashier there. So I moved over there precisely because we needed someone to get to the Front End people and it totally helped our campaign.

Moving Abby from Produce to Juice Bar was a smart move. It allowed the committee to connect with Front End workers and build solidarity through the labor process.

Interaction alone, however, did not induce Front End workers to side with the union. Organizers still had to convince these shortest-term workers to get involved in the union despite threats from their manager. What did Abby say to the cashiers? She explained:

Definitely if somebody like really didn’t give a shit. Or were just like some of the younger people who just wasn’t going to be there for very long, we certainly didn’t try to like get them to be this like total staunch labor activist. It was kind of like, "Hey, if you care about the people that you work with, can you just sign this card." I mean, it wasn’t like we were going to totally indoctrinate them into

\[1\] It's unclear whether managers knew about Abby's plans or not. They may have allowed her to switch teams because Produce was split evenly between supporters and non-supporters. Perhaps they figured moving her would shift support in the company's favor.
like the entire reality of unionizing. It was kind of like, "This is the reality. This is fucked up. This is how we can change it. You don't have to like, do a lot of work, but can you just like—Will you just sign this card and will you vote yes, to help your coworkers?"

Anybody who worked in the highly dysfunctional Front End knew that things were "fucked up," as Abby said. The organizers relied on workers’ material experiences to know that. The challenge, then, was not to convince people that they were being treated unfairly; workers could see that for themselves. Instead, the challenge was to get them to sign a card and vote yes in spite of managerial threats to limit their hours or give them crappy hours. Organizers did this by lowering expectations for union involvement. Organizers were realistic about the potential for involvement among shortest-term and often apathetic workers. If they could get Front End workers to sign a union card and vote yes, then the organizing committee considered that a success.

To get shortest-term workers to sign the card and vote yes, Abby asked them to "do it for their coworkers." In other words, she invoked an ethic of care to make the case for unionizing. As explained in chapter two, workers sought employment at GG in part because they wanted to make a difference. Workers’ environmental identities factored into their decision to pursue work at GG. These identities were rooted in an understanding of how human lives are tied to the environment. Once workers started their jobs at GG, managers further cultivated these identities. Thus, workers were socialized to think about connections between people and the planet. Asking workers to “do it for their coworkers” was a short leap to make.

To better understand why a shorter-term worker would bother organizing when
s/he might be gone in six months, it's helpful to look at Kelly's case. Kelly was a part-time Grocery worker who was studying to become a teacher and planned to quit GG after graduation. Kelly was not directly affected by the dress code change. She didn’t wear torn jeans, didn't have non-sanctioned piercings, and usually got the shifts she wanted. Her work experience was atypical in that it was a good one. Why did she contribute to the union drive when she planned to graduate and move in a few months?

Kelly: I think that all the politics aside, it just seemed like there was no other way to achieve any sort of fairness. It was like, they had gone too far and there was really no going back and so the only way to even the playing field was to make it legal. Because, basically, we weren't going to let it happen...It wasn't like I was personally affected by these things. It was more just watching all of these people around me, it was just like a general sense of unfairness and just sort of outrage. I think that I just felt like if people were going to be doing it I wanted to be involved because it seemed like a really important thing to do that would also help people after I left. Like who ever filled my shoes then could come into this.

So despite the fact that she had a good work experience and would be leaving the job soon, Kelly joined the organizing committee. She did so because she cared about her coworkers. Kelly knew that workers were being abused and treated unfairly. She didn't want to stand by and watch it happen, so she joined with others to legally protect workers through unionizing. Also, Kelly recognized that someone else would have to do her job after she left.

Organizers thus crafted an ethic of care to pitch the union to short-term employees. This resonated with workers who were sensitized to issues of environmental justice. What started as a campaign to hold the company to its environmental promises was then tied to workers’ legal right to unionize. We see, then,
that through *the process of unionizing*, workers cultivated a sense of collective identity and a shared framework for making sense of the situation. That is, as Fantasia’s (1988) work shows, class-consciousness did not necessarily precede collective action.

Convincing Lifers

Short-term and shortest-term workers were not the only workers in the store. Some people sought to make a career out of their jobs at GG. How does a group of students and other perceived interlopers convince lifers (long-term workers) to risk unionizing, when the organizers themselves probably won’t be around to deal with any of the potential fallout? What right did these “kids” have to try to organize the store?

This was another challenge.

TM: And you were a student and you were just working part-time but you were interested in it? Why were you interested in it if you were only going be there for a little while?

Kelly: (laughs) Um, you know, that’s a good question. A lot of people asked that question. Not why I was interested, but how dare I get involved in this. There was someone on our team—he and his wife both worked at GG and they had a son who was probably two. And all of their income came from GG as well as their health care. And so he just stopped talking to anybody who was involved. He was really, really bitter and his attitude was, “It is not your place to make these decisions because you’re going to graduate and you’re going to quit this job and you’re going to go away and I want my job as it is.” You know, that sort of like, “You crazy young liberals shouldn’t be involved in making decisions about my work environment.” Which is fair. I mean, he’s right. I didn’t stay. I’m sure he still works there. I left.

Organizers had to contend with coworkers’ ageist perceptions of them as rabble-rousers, or what Tannock (2001) calls “alienated youth worker” stereotyping. Older
workers resented youth organizers’ unionizing efforts. Reluctant coworkers saw the organizing efforts as attempts by “kids” to “stir shit up, then leave,” according to John. It is worth noting that older, long-term workers were among those kept in the dark during the quick-and-quiet organizing phase. These workers were already feeling left out, betrayed, and distrustful of youth organizers.

Other workers who qualified to vote in the election had their sights set on managerial positions. For example, Justin, who was in charge of new-employee orientation, was poised to move up in the company. He was among those workers who were not included in early efforts to build the union. Although Justin later became a strong union supporter, he voted against the union in the election:

I felt like supporting the company over supporting the union. It offered me more job security, in a situation where they were trying to figure out where we all fell. And because these kids were people that my bosses knew I ran around with, I wanted to make sure that it was very clear that I didn't support it. So I was really vocal about not supporting the union. And when it actually came down to the vote, I supported what they were doing more than I thought I should let on. I felt like I had somehow obligated myself to voting no, just because I had told everyone I was going to vote no. I made this really big deal about it. So I voted no in the election, but we ended up winning anyway, which was great.

To signal commitment to the company, Justin needed to distance himself from his friends on the organizing committee. His opposition to the union was not based on belief in the virtues of teamwork or the company’s potential for making a difference, but based on a desire to protect his opportunities for advancement. As such, it is important to recognize that siding with management does not always mean that workers buy into team rhetoric. This finding counters Barker’s (1993) assertion that workers internalize
managerial ideologies and thereby consent to their own exploitation. Workers’ participation in rituals and use of rhetoric does not necessarily mean they accept the ideology attached to them. Participation may be simply a self-protective performance. This is particularly true when uncertainty is high and managing one’s impression on others has significant consequences, which in this case refers to promotion and job security.

_Keeping the Local at Arm’s Length_

By the time workers at the Midwest store sought a union with whom to affiliate they had already established an organizing committee, spoken to their coworkers, and devised strategies for winning the election. They decided to affiliate with the Local (a pseudonym)—a national union that represents both manufacturing and service workers. Organizers further defined the union as worker-run by keeping the Local at arm’s length during the drive. In doing so, organizers were able to gain the trust of would-be supporters.

Abby: We really tried to keep them out of the picture as much as possible. Which I think is good anyway, because a worker-run organizing drive is always more effective and stronger than one that’s driven by an outside union. I think that also kind of made people more comfortable and probably have less questions, because they trusted us. And we were clearly like interested parties who also weren’t going to screw ourselves over.

By doing the work of organizing themselves, they were able to head off the spread of anti-union myths that outsiders would be responsible for determining their work lives.

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12 Details about the Local are intentionally vague to minimize identifiability.
In fact, organizers originally intended to create their own independent union. When they approached the regional labor council—a coalition of various labor unions and concerned citizens—about their idea, organizers were told that the council’s endorsement of the campaign was contingent upon affiliation with the sanctioned union.

Abby: It ended up being this really tricky situation where we didn't even want to affiliate with the Local. We thought they were so incompetent, but basically we were kind of forced into doing it by the regional labor council there. Pretty much we were told that if we didn’t, we wouldn’t have their support. Because we wanted to go independent, or we wanted to try to find another union...John and I got a pretty ugly education in the reality of union politics too.

John and Abby were unhappy about being compelled to choose the Local, or forgo council support. They clearly did not want to lose support from both the labor and local communities. As it turned out, the council mobilized support only during the drive. After the election, organizers did not hear from them again.

Another reason organizers did the majority of work themselves, and sought to create an independent union, was their negative experiences with the Local. Abby, John, and Joe were not impressed with the Local. They found that union reps were unskilled and unequipped to deal with the questions posed by workers. Joe, a friend of Abby and John, was not a GG worker. He was a paid organizer with a different union, but he often acted as a consultant to the GG campaign. Eventually the Local contacted Joe's employer and asked that he back off from his role as consultant. Joe explained that tensions ran high at union meetings:
They didn’t like that I would challenge them when we were having meetings. This one rep basically told somebody that they asked a stupid question. He didn’t say that, but they were like, “What happens if we don’t like the union after a year? What happens if we’re not satisfied with what we’ve got and we want to get rid of the union?” The rep said, “Well, you don’t even need to ask that question because you don’t even have the union yet,” which was false on two counts. Because of course they did have a union, even though it wasn’t officially recognized. The union is people working together to make changes in their workplace, which is what they were doing. So I had to say, “Well, here’s how it works. There’s this process; it’s a legal process just like filing for an election. You do this.” Things like that would come up and so my relationship with them was not good.

This was not the only time organizers were dissatisfied with reps’ response to workers’ questions. Abby describes similar incidents:

They couldn’t even answer just like basic questions about like, “What does it mean to unionize?” We quickly stopped even telling them about the meetings. We just had them without them. At one of the early meetings, somebody was like, “Well, do you have some information that I can take home with me to look over?” One of the guy’s response was, “We’re not here trying to sell you something. You either want to make your work life better or you don’t. I mean we’re not salesmen here.” Just really like good-intentioned, but not effective at all. One of them wouldn’t give us his cell phone number because he didn’t want us to be “calling him at all hours of the night,” is what he said. We’re like, “Dude, we wouldn’t call. You’re not even that helpful. It’s just that once in a while, there might be something we need.” They were just really incompetent. At the time, we were furious.

Thus, organizers were not happy with the help they received from the Local. Not only did they believe that reps were “incompetent,” they also felt that the reps’ demeanor was authoritarian (“you don’t need to ask that question, because you don’t even have a union yet”) and paternalistic (reportedly making workers feel stupid for asking questions). It was also insulting for a rep to refuse to give his cell phone number for fear that organizers would “call him at all hours of the night.”
Organizers told me that the Local’s strategies and the reps themselves were “not a great fit” with their particular organizing situation:

Jamie: I don’t know what types of groups they were used to organizing, but we seemed very different from them. I don’t know how to explain it. One of the main guys always sort of thought that we were hippie freaks. And I don’t know. I wished that they were more like us. Like younger and understood some more about our situation.

Abby: There was often like tension between us. And I’m sure they were thinking that we were little like arrogant snot-nosed punks, which, I mean, we kind of were, but we also knew what we were doing.

Workers and reps had a difficult time relating to each other. As Jamie points out, the age difference between reps and workers was a barrier to finding common ground. As Jamie described, reps also saw youth workers as “hippie-freaks.” Organizers thus had to contend with the “alienated youth worker” stereotyping not only from management and older co-workers, but also from union reps. Combined with reps’ authoritarian style of presenting information and answering questions, worker-organizers felt as if they had moved from one paternalistic environment to another. That is, they felt patronized at work and in the presence of union reps. Keeping the Local at arm’s length was thus necessary, unfortunately, to maintain respect.

Age was not the only difference between reps and workers. The woman chosen by the Local to be the main rep was perceived as unprofessional and heedless of health issues.

Billy: One of our reps was an alcoholic and she smoked like 20 packs of cigarettes a day. There was a bar there [at the venue where union meetings were held] and she would get drunk. They needed to probably have a younger person involved in this. It was just not a good fit. That was my biggest problem. Sit down
and have a person that's actually going to be able to work with these people, and that's what I felt they didn't really do.

It's no surprise that these health conscious workers did not relate to heavy-drinking their chain-smoking rep.

As noted earlier, several workers on the organizing committee were queer and many were women. The union reps were white, heterosexual, and middle aged, although one rep was a woman. Unionizing strategies that might have worked in other workplaces did not work at GG. Jordie explained:

One of the reps from the Local had that pompous white man demeanor (laughs). I don’t know how else to describe it (laughs). You know, which particularly doesn’t sit well with a group of people that was mostly women, pretty much all feminist, mostly queer, like very much progressive, and here’s this middle-aged, white, straight guy telling us little kids what to do.

As such, the Local did not do much to counter the perception that unions were a place for men, let alone create the impression that unions welcomed queer folks. Jamie described her initial impression of unions that came from her experience as a carpenter's apprentice:

So I went to the first meeting, and I guess, before, I really didn’t know much about unions. I had looked into maybe doing an apprenticeship so I looked into union carpentry. What I got out of that experience was—it was like trying to have me, a female, who looks like a dyke, walk into an old boys club and have them be like, “come on in.” So I was a little bit intimidated.

Jamie’s experience with the Local reinforced her perception of unions as a place for straight, white men.

Justin also had his doubts about reps being able to speak for his concerns as a queer transgendered person:
Depending on who runs that Local or who your rep is or whatever, you just don't know people personally, what they're going to do or what they're going to think is important and you don't think it's important. Or what we think is really important and they don't. I think Domestic Partnership Joeefits are really fucking important. Well maybe my rep doesn't know anything about that or care.

Thus, workers understandably had a difficult time relating to reps, and vice versa. The social distance between middle-aged heterosexual white male reps and young queer workers was simply too great to bridge. The Local's saving grace was allowing workers to run their own campaign.

*Kinder, Gentler Union Busting: Neo-Hippie Caricatures and Rhetoric*

The company also used neo-hippie rhetoric during the organizing drive to dissuade workers from unionizing. Borrowed from the organic movement, the neo-hippie rhetoric intertwined team talk with what workers referred to as a “touchy-feely” style of resolving problems. Management tried, in other words, to convince workers that any conflict could be overcome by open communication, love, and trusting one another. Abby described the challenges of organizing in that kind of environment:

One of the men that worked in Produce, who I tried to talk to, I mean, it just wasn't going to go anywhere. He has that kind of personality or characteristics that I personally can't deal with. It's that kind of like new-acey, again, like that Green Grocer love. Like, “We don't need a union. People just need to find their voice and use it. We're empowered. We just need to, blah-blah.” You know, that kind of thing.

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13 Workers requested another rep and, after much resistance, the Local set up a meeting between Abby and the organizing director. However, when Abby arrived at the meeting, she realized that the organizing director and her present rep were the same person. This put Abby in the awkward position of explaining to the rep why GG workers wanted to replace her. Abby told me that she felt “set up” by the Local.
Managers used neo-hippie talk to frame the problem as an individual one and to gloss over the power differences between bosses and workers that made open communication impossible to achieve. Likewise, in Kleinman’s study of a holistic health center where similar rhetoric and rituals were used, she found that women staff workers “felt uncomfortable thinking of Renewal as a location of class conflict. Such a definition meant that Renewal was an arena of distrust rather than trust, of callousness rather than care” (1996:109). Thus, if workers bought into this rhetoric, they might feel selfish for even considering a union drive.

The company hired a high-level manager—a walking paradigm of the neo-hippie style—to diffuse attempts at unionizing. His name was Chuck Y. or, as he preferred to be called, “Crunchy.” Workers told me that his name was a play on the granola-hippie stereotype. Crunchy, they added, lived and breathed for GG.

George: (laughs) They sent in this guy named Crunchy. He was from somewhere out West. He came off as a very, very eccentric, eccentric person. Hard to describe even. Long hair, really super fake, but just so in your face about it. Incredible really. And always smiling. Always smiling.

Crunchy, with his long hair and perma-grin, presented himself as a neo-hippie. Having worked his way up through the ranks at GG, he also fit the lifer stereotype to a T.

Justin: He worked at the first store and for Green Grocer for like 20 years or something. He totally had no life. The Associate Store team leader told me that he would read the handbook at home, before he went to bed every day. Cover to cover. He knew it back and forth. Like, the only thing that I could compare it to is my own religious upbringing. So if Green Grocer was a church, Crunchy would have been like the theologian on staff and [the Associate Team Leader] would have been the minister. Right? The minister is the guy that you talk to. The theologian is the guy who went to seminary and knows exactly what Act I,
Chapter 3, Verse 2 says, specifically word-for-word. He could probably give you the Greek translation. Do you know what I mean? Crunchy was that guy for Green Grocer, and that’s fucking weird. He knew exactly what his job was, and he was doing it. Like it was Crunchy’s job to know this company and to be able to win any argument. He was such a dick. I just wanted to strangle him.

Jamie: Crunchy had only been in our store because we were being bad kids and not following the rules.

Apparently, management picked Crunchy because he possessed a seductive charisma, or so they thought. In fact, organizers did not relate to him at all and cringed at the mention of his name. Workers suspected that the company brought in Crunchy with the intention of busting the union. Not only did workers not relate to Crunchy, but one worker, George, purposely sought out a confrontation with him.

George: So there was this great scene when I got into this hour-long argument about unionizing, which spread around the store like wildfire. You know, everybody was like, “He flew at Crunchy in the back. They totally went at each other!” It was in the back stock area where people constantly walk past. And I’m usually a fairly non-confrontational and calm guy. But he was, you know, some people just really strike a chord when they are so sugar coated. They say the wrong things but they just keep sugar coating it and you just really want to set their pants on fire, you know (laughs) and that’s what I really wanted to do.

TM: Can you tell me a little bit about that confrontation?

George: He was taking the side of how GG would provide for the worker—that GG does provide for the worker. And I was saying, “That’s fine and dandy even if it is, but I want the security of a contract.” Then it kind of became a very futile argument. It was just like an hour-long ping pong match between two people who wouldn’t budge with me saying basically, “Yeah, you know, we still don’t have any say and we want that say in contract. In a friggin’ contract!” And he’s like, “But you don’t need a contract.” And from then on it would just bounce back and forth. So, it basically came down to the power of the worker as we saw being available to us and the power of GG that would like take that away from us and how we just weren’t given what we were supposed to have as sovereign workers.
The lengthy argument between George and Crunchy took place in front of other workers. As such, George was able to visibly challenge managers’ assertion that teamwork precluded the necessity of a union. Word of the conflict quickly spread through the store. The public nature of the conflict enabled other workers to see for themselves that it was possible to challenge existing power relations. George’s actions thereby provided a model for worker resistance and helped to redefine the situation.

George heavily emphasized “the principle of the contract” as a justification for organizing. George, like other workers I spoke to, would have been happy if GG took the policies listed in the employee handbook and solidified them into a legally-binding contract. Thus, George framed organizing as entirely consistent with the existing company philosophy—an argument that held some appeal for GG lifers. Organizers used this argument to claim that unionizing was just an extension of the company’s core values.

Organizing Under Identity-based Control

As discussed in chapter three, the company went to great lengths to induce worker commitment. Through rhetoric and ritual, managers encouraged workers to identify with GG. In doing so, managers cultivated consent and warded off resistance. In criticizing the company, organizers thus risked being seen as working against the greater environmental good.

The intertwining of personal and company identity clearly posed a challenge to
the organizing committee. Organizers realized that criticism of the company would be
taken personally by some of their coworkers. When I asked Abby if the committee did
any picketing, she said:

I think we only had two sort of rallies outside the store before the election. Actually, it's funny that you say the word "picket," because the first time, I think that there were a bunch of picket signs and I think it rubbed some people inside, some people who were mostly anti-union, the wrong way. So for the second one, we were like, "Okay. No picket signs. Let's call it a rally. Let's have balloons." And so we really tried to present it like—and some people, I'm sure as you know, like really do get into that whole, like GG culture thing. They take it very—they take offense to people sort of coming down on it.

After the first picket, organizers realized that they needed to tread lightly to win over
their coworkers. Their collective actions needed to be framed in a celebratory way,
rather than as criticism of GG. So instead of picketing, they rallied. In doing so, the
organizing committee tried to define unionizing as an extension of the company's
purported environmental ethic.

While the organizing committee agreed on most issues and strategies, there was
some disagreement about how "militant" or "edgy" their approach should be. Justin
explained:

We were pretty much all on the same page, but I think there were some people
that wished we were doing something a little edgier. I think some of us would
have liked to have seen a more direct action style. They would have been totally
down if we had like, fucking got naked under some sandwich boards that had
semi-obscene anti-GG shit on them, and then just went streaking through the
store one day. They would be have been like, "Let's do it. Why don't we fuck
them up?" And then John and Abby, and most people, were a little bit less than
that. And then there were some people that were like, "No, no, no. We need to be
like way more professional than that." I think they felt like, "You catch more flies
with honey than vinegar" kind of a thing. You know, we're already kind of
borderline, potentially really turning people off, feeling like we're endangering
them, embarrassing them. I thought naked sandwich boards would have been really fun, but maybe not like really useful. So we did a little bit of arguing about like how we should present ourselves.

While some members of the organizing committee leaned toward more direct action and open criticism, others felt such organizing tactics were too aggressive.

Linda: I really backed off towards the end because, I mean, I still supported the union, but I did not like the behavior of some people on the Organizing Committee and some people on the other side. I didn’t want it to become this, “Rrrrr, rrr, rrrr” [makes growling noise], because it’s not very productive. Yeah. I don’t know. It’s kind of mean. It doesn’t do anything.

Jamie: Sometimes I felt like they were a little bit more about protests and more direct action stuff, which I think definitely has its place in certain situations, but I was always a little bit more leery of coming across as the crazy pissed off workers. Just because I didn’t think it was going to be the best for drumming up support for the people who were on the fence. For the people who were already like “Hell yeah union!” yeah, getting out and getting a little rowdy is probably good. But not for the people who are like, “I don’t know. Green Grocer sent me this nice pamphlet and these people are yelling at me.” So I feel like there were a lot of different perspectives, but we worked that out in our meetings.

Justin, Kelly, and Jamie’s comments demonstrate the challenges of organizing in the context of the company’s identity-based control program. Because some would-be supporters saw criticism of the company as a criticism of their environmental ethic, organizers needed to find a way to voice their opposition to the company without alienating their coworkers.14

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14 Other public actions taken by the organizing committee include writing all of their own printed and web-based material, setting up a website for the media and GG workers at other stores, obtaining coverage in the local independent newspaper, giving radio interviews, and designing and producing pins, buttons, shirts and other campaign paraphernalia.
Gendered Organizing

Union organizers typically gain new members by approaching them over and over again until they join the union. Usually, it’s union reps who do the approaching, but John and Abby were able to convince the Local to let worker-organizers do it themselves. Some workers were not comfortable, however, with the idea of approaching coworkers repeatedly, especially if they already turned them down before. Kelly remarked on Joe’s tendency to push workers beyond their comfort zones.

He would very strongly voice his opinion and so he definitely put himself in a position of leading a lot of things. And it was really hard sometimes because he would take some sort of general union organizing philosophies or tactics that he’d used in the past that didn’t necessarily work at GG because of the culture there. You know, or the culture that they had tried to create. And so yeah, I know that he made me uncomfortable a lot of times because he would push people in ways that they weren’t necessarily ready for or comfortable with. I would take a handful of names to call people to talk to them, but he was always pushing people into taking more, which can be good. But showing up at someone’s door to me is a little intrusive, especially if you haven’t even called them. But he was often much more aggressive and part of that made sense because he had been doing this for a long time and he had a lot more experience and he was a lot more comfortable with that, unlike people like myself.

Kelly felt bullied by Joe, who subscribed to a traditional masculine style of organizing. John told me that he knew committee members were not talking to the folks they were assigned to, but he decided not to press the issue. Joe, on the other hand, prodded committee members to be persistent. There was clearly tension between two different styles of organizing.

This tension arose from the patriarchal context in which the drive took place. Women are often pressured to do things they don’t want to do. For example, when
women say no to sex, it is not rare for men to coerce or pressure women into it. Even though women say no, men justify coercion through rhetoric—“She said no, but she really meant yes.” Similarly, women were coerced, both as recruiters and would-be supporters during the union drive. Instead of respecting women organizers’ wishes, male organizers pressured them into recruiting others. As would-be supporters, women’s “no” was not taken as a definitive no and respected as such. Thus pressuring women to do things they did not want to do during the organizing drive paralleled larger patterns of not respecting women’s decisions more generally.

Women organizers told me they did not appreciate the “militant” or “aggressive” styles of Frank and George. These two men undertook several covert actions during the drive. Among other kinds of prankster-like behavior, they dug for information in places they weren’t supposed to look. At the Southwest store, Steven undertook similar stealth missions. These men were markedly aggressive about their allegiance to the union.

Jamie seemed to think that “in your face” tactics would not work at GG. She was a worker with high organizational commitment. In other words, she really wanted to improve the company and the lives of everyone in the store. Before the union vote, Joe told Jamie that winning the election would be “better than sex.” After they won the vote, Jamie said she felt very disillusioned.

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15 This description is purposely vague so as to protect the workers in this study. Interviewees asked me to turn the tape recorder off during this part of the interview.
Obviously I was really excited when we won but—they announced the vote in this teeny little room and then we all ran out and I remember there were regional management people getting really pissed at people. And I was not saying anything. I was just smiling, and one of the team leaders from the Front End, she was like, “Get that smile off your face!” and I was like “What? You’re crazy.” I remember it was really hard for me, because it was hard to have it be so us against them, you know? When in general, I was personally hoping that what we were doing was making it better for everyone. Like even for management, so that they would know what the rules are and that like we had a contract that every worker had to follow and had stuff to back it up. So I remember being really excited about it, but it also sucked that it had to so like, “We won. You lost.” Even at the victory party, I was there for a little while and it seemed more like a quiet “Let’s all take a step back and think about this” sort of victory than an “In your face, let’s get drunk.” sort of victory.

TM: So everyone had sort of the same reaction as you?

Jamie: I’d say no. I’d say everyone else was like “Woo hoo! In your face! Fuck you! Yeah!” I remember Joe said that if we win it would be better than sex and then after we won he was like, “Wasn’t that better than sex?” and I was like “No. No way. I—personally, no.”

TM: (laughs)

Jamie: Anyway, I think they made it so two sides against each other as opposed to coming together. We had done all this work like as a collaborative group and you know, we met late at night and we were working towards something, and then have it be like “And we beat you!” I don’t know.

Far from the experience being “better than sex,” she felt mournful. While everyone else was celebrating, Jamie sensed increasing tensions in the store. She noticed the looks on the faces of managers and anti-union workers’ and felt bad for them. She didn’t want to rub their nose in it. She just wanted to make things better for everyone.

Linda was not fond of “militant” tactics, either. She believed that her coworkers would listen to her because she was well respected. She was a “rule follower” and a
hard worker who joined the union to “hold GG accountable” for not living up to its public promises.

Linda: I think a lot of the smaller reasons why people wanted to unionize did get pushed aside as the effort got into full swing. I think it became more about dress code and pay, whereas it had started more about holding Green Grocer accountable for their actions and not letting them be hypocritical. And maybe it’s too vague to just say, you know, “We want to hold Green Grocer accountable.” I don’t know. I just kind of felt like it, towards the end, was the focus on just two really specific issues like that. It could be interpreted as a very selfish, petty, purpose. That was hard. I knew that wasn’t why we were doing it. But that was what the media, of course, grabs onto, and that’s what management grabs onto. “You all just want raises. You all just want to have dreadlocks and nose rings and facial tattoos.” That wasn’t the spirit of the effort at all...People, I think, just lost sight of why you’re doing it. You’re trying to do this for the betterment of the company and you’re trying to do what the majority wants. I think people just got so caught up in their side winning, whether it’s what the majority wants or not.

Linda was a buyer and saw firsthand the decline in buying from small farms. She felt that GG presented a false image to the public. Linda also told me that people “knew that I was a hard worker and that I wasn’t just doing this to get a raise at all.” In other words, Linda was interested in taking the moral high ground. Eventually, Linda backed off from the union drive, which she believed was becoming too militant.

Women organizers generally took a less militant and more practical approach. Jamie, Kelly, and Linda were people whom their coworkers respected as hard workers and rule followers. Linda told me that people would come to her when they had a question about the union and wanted a balanced answer:

I didn’t do any of like the direct stuff. I don’t know. I think I started as somebody who was pretty well-respected in the store and a lot of people felt comfortable talking to me. Just because maybe I wasn’t as assertive with—I hate to call it recruitment, but it kind of is, I suppose. So a lot of people that were on the fence, or were adamantly against it, felt comfortable coming to me and talking to me. I
would have conversations with those people. I helped with—There were a
couple of letters written and I helped with some of that. I don't feel like I had that
active of a role in it. I think other people feel like I had a pretty active role in it. I
think I was just unique in that I had kind of been in management as the Buyer. So
I think I just had maybe a unique perspective and people respected that. Maybe
they believed me when I said stuff and they knew that I was a hard worker and
that I wasn't just doing this to get a raise at all.

Thus, the traditional, masculine style of organizing did not always work, at least in this
context. When skeptical workers had a question about the union, they felt comfortable
coming to Linda because she was a respected worker and they knew she would not try
to coerce them into joining the union. Her approach to organizing was still effective,
even though it did not fit with the masculine logic of wearing people down until they
said yes.

Moreover, women sometimes did emotion work when approaching workers.
Kelly told me that she would often accompany John when he approached their
coworkers about the union.

I would label myself more like support staff. I talked to a few reporters but
generally was just there and I would go with someone else. I would help them
sway them—make them more comfortable. But in general, I didn't do a lot of the
leading. Yeah, I don't really like public speaking, so I didn't do any of the
speaking at rallies or the radio interviews or any of those things.

John took the lead and did the talking while Kelly “made them feel more comfortable.”

This pattern parallels gendered patterns found in society at large. Women often act as
the grease that keeps interactional wheels running smoothly.

Historically, labor unions have used exclusionary practices, like the seniority
system, that have disadvantaged women and people of color, keeping membership low
among these groups. Those women working inside the labor movement struggled for acceptance and inclusion in a male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered organizational culture. While women’s labor union participation has increased and efforts are underway to organize the feminized service sector, the service sector is still considered “nontraditional” by some labor leaders (see Friedman 2002). Thus it seems that labor unions are still holding on to blue-collar organizing models instead of creating new strategies for women and service workers. At GG, this traditional approach manifested in masculine recruitment efforts that defined aggressive tactics as more effective than sincere conversations between workers.

Bonacich and Gapasin (2001) have also identified problems with using old organizing strategies on immigrant apparel workers. They argue that the primary tactics used to reach these marginalized workers (e.g., employing organizers who speak the same language as the workers, developing worker-activists among the union members, developing ties between unions and community organizations, and constant house visits) are helpful, but these tactics are not enough. Like the retail youth workers in this study, apparel workers are often temporary or short-term. Moreover, workers not only shift from job to job within a particular industry, but some switch industries, too. As such, they argue that, “the fluidity of their work lives makes organizing around the job a temporary activity, at best... We believe that the old systems of organizing, based on the ability to win a contract in a particular plant, may be obsolete for many hundreds of thousands of workers.” (350). Based on the changing character of low-
wage work, and the reality that companies can make good on threats to move production elsewhere, they emphasize the need for an entirely new approach to organizing the unorganizable. Bonacich and Gapasin recommend a “worker-centered approach”—to organize workers geographically (where they live), instead of organizing at and battling against an individual firm (where they work).

_Last-Ditch Union Busting_

Prior to the election, the company tried to convince workers to vote against the union by putting money into the store and into workers’ pockets. Managers fixed broken equipment in the Deli, raised Deli workers’ wages by $1 per hour, and assured workers that they would receive consistent raises in the future.

John: For a year nobody in the Deli could get a raise, until we started unionizing, and then they magically gave us all a $1 raise.

A few days before the election, several workers received pay bonuses. Workers told me that they had not done anything special to deserve these bonuses, but simply did their jobs as they always had.

Kelly: Weird things just started happening. Like May and I got bonuses for making the Bulk department look really good. We each got a $50 bonus, which was just weird. The regional manager was there and mentioned that we had a really great looking Bulk department and he’d seen so many. And the next day I got a check and it was sort of, I don’t know. It just wasn’t, I mean it seemed like a buy-off. Because May and I both had been talking about union stuff.

Instead of taking last-minute improvements as signs of good faith on the part of management, workers saw them as attempts to buy-off union members.
Another last-ditch anti-union strategy was to bring in the CEO to speak to workers during a “town hall” meeting. The CEO used a Star Wars analogy in his speech, reportedly asking workers to “resist the dark side of the force.” He tried to gain sympathy by talking about his dream of creating a natural foods store and making natural foods available to everyone. He asked workers not to “contract into fear” but instead “expand into love.”

Kelly: He told the whole story about how he started it and how he lived in the apartment above the first Green Grocer. And how he had this dream and this vision about making organic natural foods accessible to all people and how he’s been so successful and he wants nothing more but for all of us to feel like we could talk to him. It was starting to go very quickly into “why we love Green Grocer” and “everyone should tell a story about why they love Green Grocer.” I mean, not exactly that, but it just reinforced everything that management wanted basically.

Abby: And so maybe you already heard this, but like [the CEO] likened our union effort to the "dark side" and told people not to, "go to the dark side. Don't give in to fear."

Linda: And then [the CEO] came for his special crying meeting with us. Oh, my god. It was so ridiculous. I was, again, just disappointed. You know, because this was the guy that started it. I was like, "All right. Maybe he's coming to actually listen to what we have to say, because we could maybe resolve the whole thing right now." But no. Yeah, he cried. He talked about his dream and how we were ruining his dream. Again, you know, that he would close the store before letting it be a union shop. It was very emotional. I think we ended up with more people voted for the union after that actually. I mean, come on. Can it be anymore fake than coming in and crying? "Oh, please, don't. It's my dream (mockingly)."

The CEO thereby extended the neo-hippie rhetoric to dissuade workers from voting for the union. He claimed that “love” would be enough to settle the conflicts between managers and workers. By voting for the union, workers would be giving in to fear and working against the do-good mission of the company. He further displayed the touchy-
feely neo-hippie image by crying and showing emotional vulnerability. Workers, however, interpreted his emotional displays not as a reflection of sincerity, but as contrived and manipulative, or as Linda said, “fake.” In this way, the CEO’s attempts to draw on workers’ green identities and to evoke sympathy and support backfired.

The meeting was advertised as a “town hall” and workers were told that there would be an opportunity to talk about workplace issues generally and unionizing specifically. There was, however, no dialogue. Workers were not allowed to point out problems with store operations; they were permitted only to ask questions with no challenges or follow-ups allowed.

Abby: It’s kind of funny, like sometimes Green Grocer just ends up like sort of biting itself in the ass, because eventually it’s going to come out. Do you know what I mean? It’s like [the CEO] comes and it’s like, "We’re going to have this feel-good, informational meeting, and I’m going to tell you all these things and you can talk. But you can only talk if you have a question. You can’t make any statements." So there’s like all these things and people are kind of like, "Wait. What?" Then there’s this one point where one of the people, she was actually a very anti-union person, and she was married to the Assistant Store Team Leader, and she basically kind of called him out on the fact that people weren’t allowed to make statements and just ask questions. And he just kind of like shut her up. I think, again, it’s like—that’s only going to work for so long. You can only dupe people for so long and then you’re just going to be exposed. Do you know what I mean? I think it was not an effective way of handling that situation.

John: They all dodged the questions in different ways. So people started getting irritated. Even when the anti-union people were asking questions, they weren’t giving straight answers. So people were just getting agitated. I think that when people are basically told that you have your choice between doing something bad and doing something good, it’s just so condescending and paternal.

The Jeopardy-like forum, in which all statements needed to be phrased in the form of a question, belied claims that workers and managers were on equal footing. Managers’
assertion that problems could be solved with open communication rang hollow. The lack of participatory dialog was a concrete indicator that managers were all talk. When it came time to walk the walk, the rhetoric did not hold up, and workers could see that their thoughts and opinions didn't matter much to the company.

Finally, after months of battling management, workers at the Midwest store held a successful union election, with a vote tally of 65 to 54 in favor of unionizing. Word of the union victory quickly spread to other stores. By this time, Midwest workers had set up a website called Green Workers Unite. John and Abby began to receive emails and forum messages from workers around the nation who wanted to unionize their stores too. One such message was from Jeff at the Southwest store.

ORGANIZING AT THE SOUTHWEST STORE

Unlike the Midwest organizers, the Southwest organizers did not have activist experience or social ties to union organizers. As a consequence, they did not employ the quick-and-quiet strategy that would have allowed them to gain supporters without alerting management. They organized publicly and management was quick to take anti-union action. Moreover, Southwest’s organizers were concentrated in one department, Grocery, and more specifically in one sub-department, Dairy. While they were able to gather an impressive number of worker signatures, they fell short of the number needed to petition for an election. Out of 400 workers, only 70 signed blue cards.

Management reacted more swiftly at the Southwest store than it had at the
Midwest store. Before most workers were exposed to the organizers’ message, they heard managers’ anti-union accounts. When the CEO spoke as part of the anti-union campaign, his message changed, too. He did not beg, plead, or cry. Instead, he implied that the Midwest store soon would be closed. He also told workers that his visit was scheduled in advance and that their unionizing efforts were nothing more than a mere blip on his radar screen.

Josh: He didn’t even shout at us. He was like, “Don’t think that your petty drive got my attention. This meeting was scheduled long before you guys ever started your union drive. I’m not here because of you. I’m not worried about your union drive. I know it won’t happen.” I mean, how do you respond to that?

The second time around, his approach relied less on touchy-feely rhetoric and more on intimidation. After hearing the CEO’s no-nonsense account of the dangers of unionizing the store, many workers who had signed cards rescinded their support and asked for them back. Managers also raised some workers’ wages, preemptively responding to one of the workers’ main grievances. This tactic effectively bought out the union effort.

In contrast to the Midwest store’s successful unionizing efforts, the organizing drive at the Southwest store never got off the ground. Another difference between these drives was that Southwest workers wanted more help and guidance from the Local, while the Midwest workers were more interested in making the drive their own.

Bobby: I didn’t really think they did everything they said they were going to do and I didn’t really feel like they were supportive. But we knew nothing. We just knew we weren’t happy. So they obviously have done this a lot. This is their job, you know. They should know what to do, how to do it. They could have been a little more involved, a little more helpful. They kind of put it all on our shoulders and, you know, we are already working 40 hours a week.
The Southwest workers lacked the social networks and activist know-how that would have made them more savvy organizers. Thus this particular organizing committee needed help from the Local to build a solid union. Organizers told me that they never received this help.

The company persuaded workers that a union was unnecessary by unveiling a new Joeefits plan. Bobby, a Dairy buyer, recounted the seemingly democratic method of choosing the new Joeefit plan. Workers were surveyed to see which Joeefits were most important to them. Responses were tallied by management and used to create a ballot. Workers then selected 20 items to be included in the new plan. However, according to Bobby, even though workers were able to vote on specific Joeefits, the ballot offered fewer Joeefits than before.

They let us vote for our Joeefit plan. That was their solution to the union. It was the biggest scam. The biggest scam. And it was beautiful. They marketed it. They suckered everybody into it. And it didn’t matter what you said, people were just like, “Well, they’re letting us vote. We get to pick. You can’t complain now.” And you know what? They took a survey that they conducted on what Joeefits people wanted and then they took those and put them on a thing to let people vote. And then they took that and let us vote again. Nobody ever got to see the results except for the people who were doing the—you know, all the stuff went in. It all got mailed to corporate. Corporate took care of it all.

According to Bobby, workers at his store were happy that they could vote, even though they ended up losing some of their stock options in lieu of dubious Joeefits such as pet bereavement, which Bobby saw as “something you [did not] need to have.” Managers effectively framed the Joeefits plan as a sign of democracy in action—democracy that precluded the need for a union. While workers may have understood the Joeefits vote as
a sign of the company’s good faith, Bobby told me that the GG Joeefits package not only offered less than the previous plan, but it also offered less than existing plans at mainstream grocery stores in the area.

In addition to raising some workers’ wages and introducing a new Joeefit plan, the company took other measures to convince workers that a union was unnecessary. Steven, one of the most vocal union supporters at the Southwest store, was made head of the worker advisory group (or company union) and the Green Mission Task Force. This task force was made up of workers with the stated goal of making workplace practices more sustainable. Steven explained:

I think that was one of the main things that really took off that pressure to like, “Let’s do this,” because one of the main things that everybody cared about was the cause that they were working for—it generally being a cause. I think this store, the store I’m at, is the absolute best in the company when it comes to being, living the Green Mission, because we compost the majority of our waste. We actually bail our own plastic and cardboard and sell it ourselves. Every time I really challenged them on something they would spend the money. Like, “This is one of your core values. We need to do this.” I think we ended up spending like $250,000 to set up the Green Mission in my region. It’s not really justified from a business standpoint and they still did it. I think a lot of it was that I shoved them so hard with the union, that they really had to wring true on everything else.

The company persuaded Steven, the most vocal union supporter, to give up on unionizing by bringing him into the fold. Instead of seeing the investment in baling equipment as a money-making venture that would eventually cover the initial cost of purchasing the equipment, he saw this as a sign that the company was living up to its promises to include workers in decision-making and contribute to the greater environmental good. Not coincidentally, the company instituted environmentally sound
practices only when it turned a profit. In doing so, GG was able to re-align Steven’s green identity with the company's green organizational identity.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AT THE MIDWEST STORE

After the union won the election at the Midwest store, managers’ gloves came off. The company sent out anti-union letters and emails, ordered workers to remove the baristas’ tip jar, disbanded the company union, took away the logbook (a notebook in which anyone could express an opinion), and got rid of the table behind the store—the only place in the store where workers could meet and talk. Justin describes the shift to heavy-handed union-busting:

It was really all pre-vote post-vote. [During the] pre-vote [period], the President, and the Vice President, they were in the store. They were like, "What's up? Hey, can I help you with that box?" The day before the election, one of the Vice Presidents tipped in the tip jar. And then after the election, they took away the tip jar and told us that we were never allowed to have it, and then we had to file an unfair labor practice thing. The tip jar thing was representative of power and how it all changed. So I think they just got to a point where they didn't have to be nice to us anymore. Now we were the enemy and they would talk to us like we were the enemy. They were suspicious of us all the time. Not just the organizers, but workers in general. Everything was about prevention against us—how to keep us from being lazy, or stealing, or not showing up on time, or whatever.

Managers no longer tried to woo workers from unionizing with rhetoric and tokens of appreciation. Instead, the struggle for control took another turn and the company's strategies became more heavy-handed.

Workers were also subject to surveillance and illegal firings. Eventually, through firings and turnover among young employees, the union effort lost its momentum.
Jamie: And I thought there was going to be this new wave of people as some of the organizers were coming from GG and like move up in the ranks from union stewards to higher in the union, that it will bring new ideas. I was involved in it still, but by that point a bunch of other people were gone and a lot of it was either people got fired or left and a lot of people moved across the country.

Initially, the unjust firings only proved the union’s point that workers could be fired at will. Abby and Julie were the first fired, a few months after the election, when Julie drank a misordered latte made by Abby that otherwise would have been thrown away. Eating and drinking misordered food was against official store policy but was a common practice at GG. Hence, the company violated labor law because companies are required to continue both formal and informal established workplace practices. Abby and other union supporters marched through the store telling customers that she had just been fired for drinking a latte. Most workers thought this was an unjust firing, but, in the end, the union lost its founding and most active member. Soon after, Abby and John moved to the West Coast together and the union lost another key member.

It was during the bargaining period that the union began to fall apart. Green Grocer and its union-busting firm stalled the bargaining process. Jamie had hopes that bargaining would take the shape of a free exchange of ideas. After her first bargaining session, she felt disillusioned.

And then when “negotiations”—in quotation marks—started, it felt so crappy...And it was really, really disappointing to me. I had taken this seminar in college about mediation taught by this Quaker professor. I thought it was going to be kind of like that—we would talk about the ground rules and then go back and forth. But we never got anywhere and they would set up these times for these meetings and then they would cancel them.
Workers discovered that they were no match for GG’s union-busting team. While they were prepared for management obstruction prior to the election, workers told me that they didn’t expect contract negotiations to be as difficult and draining as they proved to be. This long and frustrating process resulted in much disillusionment.

The Midwest workers knew a lot about how to deal with an anti-union company in the pre-bargaining stages but were at a loss when it came time to bargain. Workers received help from the Local with the contract negotiation, but the help was of limited value.

Jamie: I felt like we needed a lawyer on our side. A lawyer who wore a suit all the time and someone who really could be like, “Okay, you people on the other side of the table, this is bullshit.” Like, not give in and get things to go smoother. I feel like we needed as many union reps or lawyers as they did. We were not trained and they could have trained us. I feel like there was something that needed to happen but didn’t at that stage. I mean, we were by no means close to getting a signed contract, but we were at least meeting with them occasionally and trying to bargain. I feel like we could have got them on not bargaining in good faith, but that would involve a lot of work and not just, you know, the people on the organizing campaign who aren’t lawyers and haven’t been trained how to do anything.

The two Local representatives were not lawyers, hence they were not adept at bargaining. When faced with legal questions, union reps were unable to answer them on their own. In these situations, the reps called their legal department, thereby slowing the process even further.

Workers were also dissatisfied with the post-election support—or lack thereof—from the regional labor council. Prior to the election, the council held rallies and
drummed-up community support for the drive, whereas after union certification, the
council’s support fell off.

Jamie: But we sort of lost momentum and without the backing of the Local. I
don’t know like if a larger organization of the AFL-CIO could have gotten behind
it. I really think more could have been done. Especially when we had already
gotten so far. It really seemed like it could be a precedent in a big way and at
some point the ball was dropped. And I don’t want to blame specifically the local
union but it also seems like the council, who gave us such support pre-election, I
assumed that it’s a large enough organization that they could have given us some
more support.

After the momentum of the initial drive dissipated, the few organizers that remained at
the Midwest store tried to win over new employees, but they simply could not keep up
with the high turnover. Team members rarely interacted with workers from other
departments making it difficult to maintain storewide solidarity.

Given the high turnover in retail, compounded by the fact that many workers
were part-time and transient young people, it is not surprising that management killed
the union. Joe described some common union strategies for dealing with turnover:

To combat that, you can’t let people on the committee burn out. You have to
bring new blood on in the committee once in a while. You have to constantly be
finding issues to be organizing around that you can engage new people with.
You have to assign somebody who’s supportive and knowledgeable to talk to the
new people and say, “This is what’s going on and this is why we’re doing this,”
and basically just go through the process like you would in the beginning of the
organizing drive in getting people to be supportive. But even new people—you
can still lose people even after the vote; they may become less supportive. You
have to do that regularly so that people feel that the union is doing something.
That kind of stuff just didn’t happen.

Common union strategies for dealing with turnover include bringing in new organizers,
finding new, salient, and winnable work issues, and making the union visible.
Unfortunately these strategies didn’t produce any obvious victories for the Midwest workers. Management just kept chipping away at the union until it fell apart.

Workers were faced with the challenge of keeping the history of their struggles alive if they were going to sustain the union. John explained:

Once you don’t have something for a little while, you stop caring about not having it. And then with the turnover, new people would come in and they didn’t know what they don’t have. So things lose their like salience very quickly.

Jackie echoed John’s point that people who come in don’t know what they don’t have.

I think a lot of it was just the turnover and it’s a pretty difficult thing to explain to people who weren’t there for the organizing drive, so there is that pressure as well.

Justin, “the last worker standing,” who stayed at GG longer than any other member of the organizing committee, described what it was like to approach people during after the election.

The turnover rate, I think, went up really dramatically, so it was like new people all the time. So it would be like I’d talk to somebody and then two weeks later they’d be gone and there’d a new person and you had to start all over again. So there were a lot of people who had no base knowledge about unions, our unions, our store, what was happening in our store, like about any, nothing. It was like starting from the total beginning. They kind of felt like it wasn’t their fight, I think. They felt like, you know, "Maybe you guys in the past were pissed about the dress code," but they never knew any different. That was always how the store had been for them, so there was nothing for them to be pissed about. The kids with green hair didn’t get hired and the kids without green hair did get hired. And then they didn’t care that a year ago if the green haired worker got pissed. I mostly just got a lot of ambivalence, or a lot of like, "This is totally not my problem," every time.

By this time, only two members from the original organizing committee still worked at GG. As workers left, knowledge of past grievances left with them, as did the solidarity
that took months and years to develop. Any gains or wins became fairytales, not firsthand experiences.

The GG union had a difficult time getting the company to schedule bargaining sessions and went five months without a negotiation meeting. After a year of trying to secure a contract, Justin learned that a worker-led decertification campaign was underway. Justin suspected that managers were behind it:

It seemed very strange to me that they just happened to know when they could decertify and what that meant and what decertification was and how to run a decertification campaign.

At the same time, the company leaked information about a new health Jœefits plan. Despite the lack of detail about how this plan would improve upon the current one, decertifiers touted its superiority:

Justin: They made this really big deal about, "Well, the health care plan is great. It's too bad you can't have it since you have this union." So their big, huge push was, "We want the really good health care plan that the company was getting" that we're not allowed to have because of the union.

Justin pointed out that this argument made little sense, because workers could choose the new plan through collective bargaining. After the company released the details of the new plan, Justin examined it and came to the same conclusion as his counterparts in the Southwest region—that workers were getting fewer Jœefits under the new plan.

When he told decertifiers about it, he was met with resistance:

So we were trying to explain that to them and like show them what we had done and they were just like, "La-la, la-la-la. La la." All their workers love it. "The company loves it. We love it. We want it. And it's your stupid union that won't let us have it." And we also tried to explain to them that the company, saying that we weren't allowed to have it was bogus. Like we could have it if we wanted it.
At this point, the Local sent a rep from their national organization because Justin refused to work with either of the two previous reps. He was pleased with the new rep’s performance. Justin and the new rep immediately filed unfair labor petitions, but it took a year for those filings to be resolved. The National Labor Review Board (NLRB) eventually ruled in the union’s favor, which reignited efforts to get the company to sign a contract. Justin and the Local were elated and planned a reorganizing drive. However, immediately after the NLRB decision, store leaders told Justin that the union had been decertified.

And I turned around I walked back into the bake house and I started working, and like 30 seconds later, the Store Team Leader walks in and he’s like, “I need to talk to you. I just wanted to let you know that Green Grocer has decided to withdraw recognition of the union.” And I was like, “What are you talking about?” And he’s like, “Green Grocer no longer recognizes your union. You don’t have one anymore.” I was like, “Do you understand that, I don’t mean to like treat you like you’re stupid. But do you understand that you can’t actually do that? Like that it’s against the law?” He’s like, “I don’t know anything about it. The lawyers did it and I’m sure that everything that they’re doing is perfectly legal.”

The decertifiers had apparently collected signatures from over 50 percent of workers at the Midwest store. According to Justin, the company argued that this reverse card check strategy was perfectly legal and cited a nurse’s union decertification ruling one-year prior to make its case. Justin disagreed, however, and told me that managers used illegal decertification practices. Managers and decertifiers campaigned on company time and on company property, collecting signatures in the break room and on the sales floor. Meanwhile, Justin was relegated to the sidewalk outside the store. Moreover, one

16 Justin says that he never saw the list of signatures and therefore doubted its credibility.
of the main decertifiers, a shift manager, held meetings at her house. Thus, Justin argued that her actions violated labor laws that prohibited managers from soliciting signatures.

The union filed yet another unfair labor practice petition regarding management’s role in collecting signatures. Justin described his experience working with the NLRB:

The NLRB was like—they kind of fought it for a while. I think they fought it for maybe a year, the decertification. But eventually the NLRB sided with Green Grocer and they decertified. Like I went and had interviews and stuff with the NLRB Rep and everything like that. I mean it took a long time, just from what she told me. She’s like, “I’m the only person who’s working on this. I work with all these people, but I’m the only one who’s working on this particular project.”

Thus it seems that understaffing weakened the NLRB’s ability to process these filings. As a result, the waning struggle to keep the store unionized further devolved. In the end, the union never secured a contract, Justin moved to the West Coast, and the union was decertified.

CONCLUSION

Making sense of the organizing drives at both stores requires seeing them as situated actions. This means considering both the wider and local contexts in which these organizing efforts took shape. For example, quick-and-quiet organizing strategies must be understood in light of the lack of protections for workers seeking to establish unions. Federal labor law stipulates that workers have the right to unionize without
interference from managers, but these laws are not strongly enforced. Under these conditions, workers could not extend trust indiscreetly, and thus began their efforts without being able to build storewide solidarity from the beginning. This weakened the overall effort and gave managers an inroad to undermining solidarity.

The high rate of turnover in retail is another major obstacle to unionizing workers in this sector of the economy. This was certainly true at GG. The low turnover among Deli workers at the Midwest store was an exception to the rule, and provided a foundation for unionizing. In contrast, high turnover was found throughout the Southwest store. Thus the sedimentation of solidarity in the former case, and lack thereof in the latter case, had significant consequences for the success of each organizing drive.

As shown in this chapter, the struggle for workplace control unfolded dialectically. GG’s identity-based cultural control usually deterred workers from unionizing. This control program, however, also opened opportunities for resistance. Managers coupled team rhetoric and neo-hippie rhetoric with emotion management and appreciation rituals to forestall dissent. The Midwest organizing committee hijacked these rhetorics and rituals to contest managers’ definition of the workplace as democratic and GG’s image as a caring company. Instead of seeing unionization as antithetical to the company philosophy, most workers understood unionizing as complementary to the goals of the company. Thus, organizers were able to avoid the pitfalls of organizing in the context of cultural control. While workers were unable to
overcome bureaucratic control in the case of longer-term workers wishing to move up in the company, they were able to frame unionizing as an extension of the company's mission. Moreover, when managers combined textbook union busting with kinder, gentler identity-based dissuasion, these contradictions were too great for workers too ignore and the Midwest workers won their election.

The Midwest union, however, was no match for the company's power to stall during the bargaining phase. In theory, workers should have been able to level the playing field by affiliating with the Local. But the Local’s masculine, authoritarian, and paternalist style did not sit well with this particular group of women and transgendered youth workers. Moreover, managers learned from their mistakes in the Midwest, and accordingly changed their strategies when dealing with the Southwest drive. The company abandoned the kill-it-with-kindness strategy, reacting more swiftly and heavy-handedly. Managers then solidified their control by introducing a new, seemingly democratically chosen Joeefit plan, bringing resistant workers into the fold by giving them leadership positions, and initiating the Green Mission Task Force to reaffirm GG’s commitment to the environment.

In the next chapter, I’ll identify the contributions of this case study to the sociological literature and labor scholarship. I’ll argue that the GG unionizing efforts can be understood as a best-case scenario for organizing in retail, on account of the high commitment of organizers, cross-store interest in organizing, and GG’s do-good image. I’ll also identify lessons learned from this case study, arguing that unions need to devise
strategies to fit retail culture and the composition of the retail workforce.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Before I began this project, I regularly shopped at Green Grocer and felt good about it. As a labor scholar and workers’ rights advocate, I of course noticed signs posted on the front door that described the awards the company won for being a great place to work. (Little did I know that these awards were based on company self-nominations, instead of recognitions by unions and workers.) Around the same time that I became a GG shopper, I started a new job as a graduate research assistant on a project that sought to create direct marketing opportunities for local hog farmers. Food was beginning to take on a new meaning for me. While I didn’t understand all the intricacies of the food system (and still don’t), I began to care about how and where the food I ate was grown and processed.

My new environmental consciousness led me to problematize previously taken-for-granted daily practices. Brushing my teeth became an opportunity to conserve water. My bicycle, once a purely recreational object, was transformed into a political statement against reckless fossil fuel consumption and the wars waged to maintain it. Getting to my fourth floor office, by stairs instead of elevator, became an opportunity to reduce my carbon footprint. Taken together, these occasions for resistance mirror feminist consciousness as described by Bartky (2000):

Feminist consciousness is a little like paranoia, especially when the feminist first begins to apprehend the full extent of sex discrimination and the subtlety and variety of the ways in which it is enforced...The revelation of the deceptive character of social reality brings with it another transformation in the way the
social milieu is present in feminist experience. Just as so many apparently innocent things are really devices to enforce compliance, so are many “ordinary” sorts of situations transformed into opportunities or occasions for struggle against the system. In a light hearted mood, I embark upon a Christmas shopping expedition only to have it turn, as if independent of my will, into an occasion for striking a blow against sexism...What if, just this once, I send a doll to my nephew and an erector set to my niece? Will this confirm the growing suspicion in my family that I am a crank? What if the children themselves misunderstand my gesture and covet one another's gifts? Worse, what if the boy believes that I have somehow insulted him? The shopping trip turned occasion for resistance now becomes a test... A didactic role will be thrust upon me, even though I had determined earlier that the situation was not ripe for consciousness-raising.

Whether she lives a fairly conventional life or an unconventional one, ordinary social life presents to the feminist an unending sequence of such occasions and each occasion is a test. It is not easy to live under the strain of constant testing. Some tests we pass with honor, but often as not we fail, and the price of failure is self-reproach and the shame of having copped out. To further complicate things, much of the time it is not clear what criteria would allow us to distinguish the honorable outcome of an occasion from a dishonorable one. Must I seize every opportunity? May I never take the easy way out? Is what I call prudence and good sense merely cowardice? On the occasion in question I compromised and sent both children musical instruments. (P. 18)

Like feminist consciousness, environmental consciousness brings with it endless opportunities to resist, as well as many questions that don’t always have easy answers, especially at the grocery store. Questions like: Do I buy the local apples or the organic apples? Should I buy the fair trade or shade grown coffee? Is it okay to buy the bananas that my doctor tells me will help me deal with my low energy, even though they were produced by Dole and shipped from far away places? What about buying the local Santa Sweet tomatoes that are on sale but picked under slave-like working conditions?

GG allowed me to avoid the messy moral dilemmas and tests that come with environmental consciousness. I was able to sidestep all of these uncomfortable and
complex moral dilemmas simply by shopping at a GG. And if I did stop to think about these contradictions, the “feel good about where you shop” signs and symbols throughout the store reassured me that no matter what I bought, I was still a good person as long as I was spending money at GG. Thus, the reason many of us find shopping at a “different” kind of company so appealing is because it offers us a way out.

Commodifying Morality: How Did We Get Here?

Under what conditions does morality become commercialized? Or, as Josée Johnston asks, “How did we get to a point where consumers are responsible for ‘saving’ the world by shopping?” As Johnston explains, in the absence of governmental regulation and a way for collective groups to have a real say in decision-making, environmental problems and solutions in large part become the burden of citizen-consumers.

While formal opportunities for citizenship seemed to retract under neoliberalism, opportunities for a lifestyle politics of consumption rose correspondingly. Neoliberal governance actively promoted the idea of consumer choice in the market as a worthy complement to and even substitute for the citizenship ideal of democratic participation. With the deregulation of the market and the devolution of welfare states, consumer authority was valorized from both the right and the left of the political spectrum... As states deferred responsibility for environmental regulation, consumers became increasingly responsible to self-manage environmental risks through consumption decisions. (2008: 246)

As government responsibility recedes, corporations fill that gap in accordance with the capitalist imperative to perpetually seek new markets. Environmental responsibility shifts to the individual, whose economic decision-making is expected to reflect self-
interest and selflessness. Their actions must support both the common good and the capitalist imperative to spend. Citizen-consumers who are looking for a way to resolve these competing expectations can find it at GG.

Against this economic-political backdrop, GG was able to craft a cultural project (or marketing plan) that encompassed both workers and citizen-consumers. They sought to create a cultural continuity between the sales floor and the society at large. Workers were encouraged to see themselves as environmental stewards, thereby eliciting consent, providing the potential for identity-based exploitation, and preempting resistance. Likewise, citizen-consumers were presented with a way to ease their troubled consciences by shopping at environmentally-responsible GG. Green Grocer’s project, then, has a far reach that has effectively shaped popular consciousness by speaking to people’s desire to be seen—and to see themselves—as good people.

Cultural control projects like the one GG managers devised encompass both workers and customers. Their effects extend beyond the point of sale to shape the social relations of production more generally, as Leidner explains:

Although service routines are designed with quite specific purposes in mind, they exert a general influence on the society. Because of the routinization of interactive service work orders the behavior of service-recipients as well as of workers, “the long arm of the job” (Lynd and Lynd 1929) stretches out to affect community life quite directly. ...The standardization of human interactions does encroach on social space not previously dominated by economic rationality. It shifts the meanings of such fundamental values as individuality and authenticity, raising troubling issues of identity for workers and customers...When the principles of routinization are extended to interactive service work, an additional dimension of cultural influence becomes available to employers. Because routinized service work orders the behavior of service recipients as well as that of workers, employers’ strategies for controlling the labor process
themselves affect the cultural milieu. The Marxist argument that consciousness is shaped at the point of production is applicable here, but service recipients as well as paid workers are present. Service workers are enmeshed in production on their own time, and the boundaries separating production, consumption and sociability breaks down. (1994: 229-30)

The simultaneous domination of public and private realms makes consciousness-management hard to escape. Exercising citizenship comes to be seen as a matter of participating in capitalist market relations, rather than participating in democracy.

GG has essentially co-opted the organic movement and transformed people's concern with sustainable means of producing healthy foods into a niche market. The company wants to be seen as providing an alternative to conventional food. As such, it seeks to create an impression on workers and customers that it is “different.” But is GG all that different from supermarket chains that sell conventional foods? Its business plan, its name brand products, and its multi-state chain structure are characteristic of a typical supermarket firm.

Moreover, as workers discovered, company practices do not always match stated environmental values even though the company's green image obscures this reality. The company borrows language (team members), symbols (chalkboard font), displays (bulk bins), and community involvement programs reminiscent of welfare capitalism (farm tours and nutrition classes), from cooperative grocery stores. Thus, GG's organizational identity as a “different,” high-end, more polished version of a co-op depends on its appropriation of recognizable symbols from the wider cultural environment.
While we typically focus on worker-manager relations in production, Leidner points out that customers have their own set of interests and are an important third party to consider:

The involvement of service-recipients in the work process replaces the two-way struggle between management and labor with a triangular pattern of shifting allegiances and interests among workers, managers, and customers. (P. 41)

At GG, customers were recruited to participate in managerial control projects mostly by extending the surveillance of workers. Managers also pitted customers and workers against each other by using the threat of the secret shopper—a service evaluator posing as a customer. This encouraged workers not only to serve the customer according to managers’ directives, but also to treat the customer with suspicion. These findings, however, must be interpreted with caution. Unfortunately I was unable to secure interviews with managers. Thus, I do not have data on whether managers purposefully use these strategies, nor can I determine how managers made sense of various contradictions. Drawing from managerial theory allows me to infer managerial logic and motives, but they remain unspecified due to data limitations.

While customers often side with management, there is also the potential for workers and customers to work together through social movement unionism as described by Lopez (2004), whereby consumers are recruited to support unionizing workers through grassroots community organizing. Green Grocer’s claim to be a caring, ethical company meant that it held promise for a social movement union campaign. Perhaps if community members had known of the company’s unsustainable and
exploitive workplace practices and pressured the company to do the right thing through boycotts and pickets, GG workers might have been able to gain some leverage in their struggle with the company. Both workers and consumers shared an environmental ethic that, at the very least, would interpret the company’s behavior as problematic. And after all, broadly speaking, workers are also consumers and consumers are also workers (Williams 2006).

Recently, the company received negative press\textsuperscript{17}, from both progressive and mainstream media, based on the CEO’s public criticism of health care reform, which did not sit well with its liberal customer base. This sparked a call for a boycott of GG and a few union-sponsored protests at GG stores across the country. The boycott, however, quickly fizzled. How, then, can we make sense of citizen-consumers’ failure to sustain these efforts? What does the public’s weak response to calls for collective action mean for the possibility of supporting workers’ organizing efforts through social movement unionism?

The manipulation of consciousness can influence public support for worker organizing, just as it did during the welfare capitalism era. Customers who depend on GG to affirm their identities as environmental stewards may not sympathize with workers whose collective actions challenge the green corporation’s legitimacy. They might also use youth worker stereotypes to dismiss unionizing efforts and calls for corporate accountability. And since the alternatives to ethical consumerism all involve

\textsuperscript{17} Not cited to avoid identifying information.
radical changes, it makes sense that affluent citizen-consumers would not want to fundamentally alter a system that apparently works in their favor. This point about the lack of alternatives deserves attention because it is part of the context in which companies like GG operate. Indeed, it is a context that exists largely due to GG’s active role in buying out and displacing community grocery stores, or what worker-organizer Abby called, “a search and destroy” model of achieving market domination. In doing so, the company effectively and profitably limits consumers’ options.

_Self, Identity, and Emotion: Cultivating Consent_

To whatever extent the contradictions described at the beginning of this chapter pose moral dilemmas for citizen-consumers, the effect is arguably multiplied for workers. As Leidner explains, “For workers, the routinization of interactive service work makes individuality, authenticity, and identity everyday concerns” (1994:179). In comparison to citizen-consumers, GG workers are better positioned to see holes in the rhetoric. Not only do they know more than the average shopper about how to tell the difference between products that claim to be natural and those that actually are, they can also see when the company is failing to live up to its promises. Moreover, their work requires more than basic consent. Unlike manufacturing, retail workers are not working together to create a tangible commodity. Instead, the end product is a happy customer, which means that retail workers mostly perform emotional labor. Thus, elaborate and complex control programs are required not only to elicit consent, but also to enable
workers to manufacture the genuine displays of emotion that high-end retail work demands.

Some of these inconsistencies are hidden or resolved the through habit and routines that stabilize social life more generally. Specifically, Leidner’s work shows how workers use routines and scripts created by managers to deflect and adapt to the hidden injuries of low status-work (Leidner 1994). As for the remaining contradictions, firms use control projects to keep business running smoothly.

At GG, the company put together a control program that relied on rhetoric, ritual, and symbolic practices. Team rhetoric advanced managers’ definition of GG as democratic and participatory. Green rhetoric advanced managers’ definition of the company as valuing people and the planet over profit. Identity-making rituals, solidarity building rituals, and emotion management rituals aligned workers’ identities with the company’s organizational identity and discouraged dissent. Symbolic practices, like voting and open-door policies, were supposed to make workers feel like they were on equal footing with managers.

Taken together, these strategies encouraged workers to see GG as a place where their interests in environmentalism were harmonized with those of managers. In his ethnography of Tech, a large American high-tech corporation, Gideon Kunda (1992) explored the use of cultural control to elicit consent from engineers—a relatively privileged group of salaried workers with high job security. The challenge there was to steer engineers’ creativity in a profitable direction. Tech managers used similar
strategies to induce identification with the company, including constant exposure to a managerial rhetoric that deemphasized hierarchy. Kunda concluded that, under these conditions, the self becomes a contested terrain:

Central to this view of the member role is the blurring of boundaries between self and organization... It involves “the whole person” and is based on powerful emotional ties expressed in “zeal” or at least “enthusiasm.” The role is linked to...a moral and ethical existence associated with the appropriate role performance. The ideal state is one of “self-control” and “self-discipline. Thus Tech’s organizational ideology clearly articulates a system of normative control. Extensive involvement is specified; encouraged by organizational forms and a variety of promised outcomes, members are expected to invest heavily not only their time and effort, but also their thoughts, feelings, and conceptions of themselves. The consequent removal of a clear demarcation between self and organization is presented as the basis for effective organizational action. (1992:91)

As at Tech, basic consent was not enough at GG. Managers at both companies sought access to workers’ hearts and minds. Similarly, in her influential study of flight attendants, Hochschild ([1983] 2003) found that the repeated performance of emotional labor could lead workers to experience “fractured selves.” Through ritual, rhetoric, and symbols, managers at GG attempted to induce emotional attachment to work and the company. Work was imbued with moral value and its significance was elevated as a contribution to the greater good.

Status and Identity Rewards

Having spent three years working in retail, I know how seemingly small things, like being able to wear one’s own clothes to work instead of a homogenizing uniform, become important when opportunities for self-expression are scarce. Working at Pier 1,
a high-end home furnishing chain that sold contemporary funky furniture, was something I could feel good about. When I told people where I worked, they often said something like, “Oh, I love that store. They have such cool stuff.” The coolness factor helped defray some of the embarrassment that came with the question, “What do you do?” Yes, I worked a crappy dead-end job in retail, but at least it was at a cool store.

Other marginal workers also look for status anywhere they can find it. Vicki Smith’s work on temporary workers shows that working for a prestigious firm, even as a contract worker, can compensate for crappy, low-paying work:

A few interviewees were unable to specify who their employer was. And even if it were easy to identify precisely who one worked for, a final layer of complexity originated in symbolic attachment: workers mentioned how they achieved status by association with CompTech and therefore would tell people that they were employed by CompTech regardless of who formally employed them (both managers and workers reported this phenomenon).

Status by association was captured in the comments of one white woman, who years earlier worked as a clerk typist, file clerk, and warehouse worker, but had been out of the labor force raising children for 14 years. She told me that her temp job was "the best she’d ever had" and that she would work at CompTech "forever" on temporary status. She described what employment at this company symbolized for her:

... And they called me one day and said, "Would you be willing to work at CompTech?" And I said, "Oh, that would be great," because it’s so, well, I mean it’s reputable. I mean everyone knows CompTech. And I said "I would be honored," 'cause I, I’m the kind of person that if somebody asked me in a cocktail lounge or somewhere, "Where do you work?" and they don’t know what it is or never heard of it, it's kinda, oh, you know, you have to explain. But you say "CompTech" and they know right away.

She derived personal dignity and status by association by virtue of temporary employment at CompTech, a sentiment repeated by other interviewees as well. (1998:420)
The same kind of status was conferred upon GG workers. Not only were they working at a high-end grocery store that sold delicious, exotic, and gourmet foods, but they could also reap the status rewards of working for a company known for being involved in the community and for caring about the environment—a status protection that low-end workers at other groceries do not have available to them. As such, my findings parallel those of Smith, who concluded that “temporary workers’ sense of group solidarity were [sic] fractured and their interests were more likely to coincide with the interests of their managers than with their temporary colleagues” (1998:421).

The associational status claimed by the temporary workers in Smith’s study is also found here, arguably to an even greater extent, given the moral value attached to work at GG. The fact that some workers were offended by criticism of the company during the organizing drive underlines this point. Even so, the emergence of collective resistance at GG indicates that many others did not believe that workers’ and managers’ interests were in sync. Thus, status rewards are not always enough to discourage dissent. In the next section, I discuss how my findings contribute to the sociological study of control and resistance and argue for a dialectical understanding of these dynamics.

*Toward a Dialectical Understanding of Control and Resistance*

My findings have important implications for the emerging debate over whether workers reject or accept team ideologies. Steven Vallas (2003a) has offered fruitful
critiques of existing “hegemonic theories” of workplace change that see managerial ideologies as unilaterally imposed and wholly accepted by workers. These theories, Vallas argues, do not account for the ways that workers negotiate the meaning of their work and the conditions under which they labor.

Hegemony theorists have often pointed toward the yawning gap that team systems betray between managerial rhetoric and organizational reality (Graham 1995; Grenier 1988). What these theorists have failed to note, however, is that they are not alone in detecting this gap nor in viewing it as evidence of managerial hypocrisy. Workers listen to presentations and read memoranda that herald the rise of self-direction, but then witness the introduction of best practices, grade recipes, and other initiatives that deny them control over machine operations. Exposed to rituals that affirm the importance of their involvement in decision-making processes, hourly workers nonetheless confront situations in which equipment is selected and maintained in ways that fail to reflect their own knowledge and inclinations. Because these experiences produce ongoing suspicion and distrust regarding management’s priorities, they in effect inoculate workers against managerial interpretations of their work situations. (2003:221)

Hegemonic theories thus conceptualize workers as passive recipients rather than active agents. In his study of four paper mills where managers introduced new machinery along with a weak team-based cultural control project, Vallas found that workers used the team rhetoric to challenge managerial authority. He concludes that workers do not internalize these ideologies, pointing to evidence of worker resistance in the very studies that claim they do.

My findings support Vallas’s assertion that scholars are not the only ones who see through team rhetoric. The workers I interviewed did not passively adopt managerial ideologies and definitions of their work. Many saw through the team rhetoric from the start. They made distinctions between company teamwork and real
teamwork that would have come about regardless of rhetoric and rituals. Real teamwork, workers told me, emerged out of practical necessity and camaraderie. Thus, team-based control strategies alone did not provoke the kind of wholesale internalization that hegemonic theorists claim it does. However, it did not induce resistance as Vallas might predict it would. It is also important to note that managers at the paper mills instituted weak, short-lived cultural control projects. Shortly after they were formed, most teams dissolved and attendance at meetings dwindled. In contrast, the cultural project at GG was elaborate and included appreciation rituals, mandatory team meetings at the beginning of every shift, and ubiquitous visual cues that reinforced the company's message. This suggests that in comparison to GG managers, mill managers were less concerned about transforming identities.

The green rhetoric, however, was more convincing and, for the most part, corresponded to actual workplace practices, at least in the beginning (especially at the Midwest store). Moreover, managers were able to tap into workers' existing environmental orientations and nascent green identities. Managers sought to hire people who cared about health, local and natural foods, and sustainability. Once they were hired, identity alignment was cultivated through rhetoric and ritual. Early on, workers were more likely to see themselves as part of a collective effort to protect the planet and people's health. Thus, my findings seem to support hegemonic theorists' understanding of ideological control in this regard.
While Vallas’s recent contributions have added to our understanding of control and resistance by making room for worker agency, there are some problems with this line of inquiry. The central question in the debate has been framed this way: Do workers internalize managerial ideologies or do they resist managerially imposed definitions of their work? That is, control and resistance are conceptualized as dichotomous and mutually exclusive. However, in this case study, workers both internalized and resisted managerial ideologies. In fact, it was workers’ internalization of the green rhetoric that led them to resist when workplace practices did not match the company’s stated values. Changes in cull policies, the reduction in buying from local farmers, and the decision to increase the number of mainstream products, belied GG’s promises. Workers’ environmental identities cultivated by the company meant that workers would notice the inconsistencies between word and deed.

When workers found that the company was not living up to its environmental promises, they attempted to use the team system to resolve these contradictions. In doing so, workers began to experience contradictions in the team ideology, too. Rhetoric and ritual could not shore up the damage. Instead, these rituals backfired and became opportunities to negotiate workplace policies and practices. Workers hijacked company rhetoric and used it to openly take a stand against decidedly ungreen practices.

In light of these findings, it makes sense to rethink the either/or categorization of control and resistance and move toward an understanding of them as intimately
connected and reciprocal. This means paying attention to how workers’ sense of who they are, their identities, both enables and constrains collective resistance. These findings are particularly relevant to our understanding of service work, as Vallas alludes to here:

In the end, broader research may find that the hegemony thesis retains a limited validity, but only under highly specific circumstances—as, for example, with the subaltern office workers in Smith’s study, whose jobs placed them under the purview of professional and managerial clientele. (2003:221)

While Vallas raises important questions, it is important to realize that this set of “highly specific circumstances” applies to an increasing number of workplaces. As the manufacturing sector continues to decline and the service sector grows, so does the demand for emotional labor. Workers are increasingly asked to tap into intimate parts of the self in order to produce the kind of emotion states that customers, clients, and managers demand (Hochschild [1983] 2003; Kunda 2006). This type of work necessitates a distinct form of control to which sociologists have not paid sufficient attention. Edwards’s (1979) influential typology of control regimes, while still relevant, does not reflect the experiences of interactive service workers. As Leidner explains:

Some organizational programs for standardizing workers amount to a different form of worker control altogether, distinct from direct, technical, and bureaucratic means of control. While interactive service organizations may use all of those means as well, those organizations that attempt deep transformations of workers are trying to make external controls unnecessary by persuading workers to control themselves. (P. 39)

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18 Part of the reason why the debate has been framed this way might be the recent trend of applying quantitative techniques to qualitative data (Hodson 2001; Vallas 2003). Perhaps coding data as 0 or 1 encourages researchers to think about control and resistance in binary terms.
This gap in the literature presents an opportunity to extend Edwards’s theory to understand the dynamics of identity-based control and resistance in contemporary workplaces. There have been several major shifts in the U.S. economy since the late 1970s, when Edwards’s *Contested Terrain* was published. Women’s labor force participation, while already on the rise, rapidly accelerated, as did the disappearance of factory work. Meanwhile, the demand for service work has grown along with industries like health care, child care, elder care, food services, education, and of course retail. Because these jobs—nurse, day care worker, domestic, nursing home aide, teacher—often require intensive emotional labor, they necessitate a different form of control—one that embeds control within the self.

My analysis applies not only to workers at Green Grocer, but to any workplace where there is potential for identity-based exploitation. For example, the care work performed by nurses, nannies, domestics, teachers, and mothers is often dubbed a “labor of love.” By defining work in this way, the boundary between women’s paid and unpaid work is blurred. Care work is elevated and justified on the basis of intrinsic rewards, like making a difference in a child’s, patient’s, or student’s life, rather than extrinsic rewards, like a living wage and retirement Joeefits. Care workers often develop strong emotional bonds with care recipients. Thus, they may be unwilling to demand higher wages or changes in working conditions that might compromise the care they provide to clients. England (2005) calls this an “emotional hostage effect.”

Owners, employers, and managers...can be confident that adverse effects of their decisions on clients will be reduced by workers’ willingness to make personal
sacrifices to maintain high-quality care. For instance, workers may respond to cutbacks in staffing levels by intensifying their effort or agreeing to work overtime. This perspective suggests an equity problem of taking advantage of altruistic motives. (P. 390)

Workers at GG found themselves in a similar “prisoner of love” situation. For example, to avoid overtime pay, both Jamie and Linda often clocked out and worked without pay so they could get their work done. Buying from local farmers was something that Linda, the Produce buyer, cared deeply about. Because she saw herself as a hard worker and environmentally responsible person, she wouldn’t let local farmers suffer, even at her own expense. Just as employers and citizens impose the burdens of child rearing on care workers, both the GG and its customers impose the cost of securing local, sustainable, and healthy foods on workers. Green Grocer workers consented to this because they cared about environmental issues. While this caring opened them to identity-based exploitation, it also gave them impetus to resist.

*Cultivating Collective Resistance*

Can we specify the conditions under which collective action is likely to arise? Ultimately, predicting group-based resistance is difficult. All collective actions are the product of interaction that jointly redefines the situation. Some workers will come to see work arrangements as unfair in the midst of collective action. Pre-existing individual attitudes, beliefs, and identity (i.e., feminist, environmentalist, etc.) do not necessarily lead to solidarity-based action. Instead, collective resistance emerges as workers negotiate meanings with other each other and with employers (Fantasia 1988).
However, we can still identify and analyze patterns and circumstances that are favorable for the emergence of collective resistance.

Sociologists have identified social networks (or worker solidarity), the task structure, and the availability of a worker-controlled (i.e. autonomous) space as factors that enable collective resistance. The way work is organized and configured can also provide a foundation for the emergence of resistance. For example, Edwards points out that the advent of large corporations brought many workers together under one roof and made sit-down strikes possible, while the structure of assembly line work allowed dissenting workers to effectively shut down the entire production process. In his study of a paper plant, Vallas found that worker-controlled spaces (e.g., break rooms) were important for cultivating an alternative version of reality.

Fantasia likewise found that worker-controlled spaces, like break rooms and cafeterias, allow workers to cultivate an alternative definition of the situation. Similarly, the introduction of storewide policy changes at the Midwest store and, more concretely, the all-store meetings needed to shore up inconsistencies in managerial word and deed, brought workers together physically and experientially. This gave workers, who were otherwise segregated, a chance to exchange stories and ultimately formulate an alternative definition of the situation. As such, it seems that the development of cultures of solidarity and collective action requires a worker-controlled space where workers can formulate their own version of reality.

My findings also show how collective resistance can be a response to major
organizational change. In this case, company growth undermined GG’s claims to be “different.” As GG increased its market share, it entered into exclusive contracts with giant agricultural firms. In other words, it sought to reduce transaction costs and increase profits by conforming to an “economy of scale” model that pairs large retailers with similarly-sized food distributors. In practice, this meant that the company dropped its local small-farm suppliers and turned to giants such as Kraft and General Mills.

Changes between GG and other firms (or farms), led to shake-ups within the company. Company growth posed new problems, namely, the need to eliminate uncertainty and exercise control over each store in its empire. GG thus began to standardize policies and practices in all of its stores.

All in all, these changes compromised the foundation of consent and made possible the emergence of collective resistance. Instead of seeing GG as a different kind of company—one that cares about workers, local farmers, the community, the environment, and people’s health—workers began to see the company as a typical supermarket, and more broadly, as a typical corporation. Workers thus experienced power shifts and contradictions on multiple fronts. They lost control of the labor process and experienced a devaluation of the green identity that came with working for GG.

Dropping local farmers and reallocating shelf space in favor of conventional products was a direct consequence of the changes instituted by those at the top of the corporate food chain. Meanwhile, workers at the bottom of the chain had to do the dirty
work—throwing away perfectly good food, explaining to local farmers that the company dropped them, telling customers the store no longer carried their favorite local foods, and selling customers on the virtue of natural foods while not being able to afford it themselves. Experiencing a loss over control of the labor process is difficult in itself. But when the work directly conflicts with who we are, it is even more painful, as Leidner explains:

> When their job makes them behave in ways that do not coincide with their preferred identity, they must determine whether it will still be possible for them to hold on to the belief that they really are the kinds of people they want to be and the kinds they are constrained to be at work. (1994:188-9)

At GG, workers were continuously socialized to believe in the virtue of their work. When companies call on workers to invest intimate parts of themselves in their work, they raise the stakes and create conditions ripe for organized challenges to managerial authority. In this case, changes instituted from above had hidden injuries for those below who experienced identity conflicts.

> Collective resistance emerged when workers could no longer deal with the authenticity crises and moral dilemmas triggered by management’s policy changes. For workers at the Midwest store, these changes meant they could no longer trust the company to follow its own rules. Workers thus dismissed affirming rituals and rhetoric. Instead, they turned to coworkers to figure out the meaning of these changes. At all store meetings, at the outside break table, in the parking lot, and over beers, workers shared their stories and jointly defined managerial actions—and what these actions required them to do—as immoral and unjust.
The interpretive framework that workers devised to make sense of GG’s policy changes aided the emergence of collective resistance. If we want to understand collective resistance as a social process, it is necessary to examine the construction of the interpretive frameworks that shape group behavior. At GG these new frameworks emerged out of the labor process. It was through the labor process that each worker-organizer experienced contradictions in both team and green rhetoric. Workers pre-existing environmentalist leanings shaped their interpretations of these contradictions, but their collective analysis eventually went far beyond the understandings they brought with them to GG.

Similarly, Nancy Naples’s (1998) study of activist mothering among low-income Black and Puerto Rican women showed how women’s identities as mothers of children in the school systems spurred the emergence of political consciousness. Subsequently, it spread to an issue-based activism in which they understood their personal troubles as public issues, and then took on city hall, so to speak. Likewise, in my master’s thesis research, low-income Black women mobilized first based on their concern for their children’s health (McTague 2002). Overlapping networks of kinship, community and church folk provided the ordinary basis for activism. Since then, the activist mothers I studied have moved on to other social justice issues.
Conceptualizing Resistance

Recently there has been resurgence in the study of the subjective element in social change (Scott 1985; Kelley 1994; Collins 2000; Hodson 2001; Vallas 2003). Scholars who take this approach reject the exclusive focus on structural constraints or over-socialized interpretations of human behavior. While political activity is typically recognized when it is visible, public, and official, Collins and Kelley contend that the invisible, private and unofficial actions in everyday life are just as political as more overt forms of resistance. They argue that defining resistance in terms of formal political activity, such as voting and membership in political parties or movements, overlooks the everyday acts of resistance that challenge the status quo.

Meanwhile, other scholars, such as Adolph Reed Jr. (2001), have been highly critical of this tendency to find resistance everywhere. He argues that the concept of resistance is now used so indiscriminately that it is rendered nearly meaningless. Reed contends that a focus on individual acts of resistance devalues the conscious and courageous struggles for change made inside movements. If resistance is everywhere, then there is no need to establish social movements that work for change in governmental policies and economic structures.

This debate over how to define resistance raises several questions. Do the behaviors found in oppositional cultures qualify as acts of resistance? Do individual acts matter if they are not connected to social movements? What is the difference between coping with oppression and trying to change conditions at the root?
One of the broadest conceptualizations counts survival itself as a form of resistance. Collins (2000) argues that challenges to oppressive institutions would not have been possible without Black women’s struggles for group survival, struggles that involved creating positive self-conceptions in the face of demoralizing and controlling stereotypes of Black men and women. According to Collins, oppressed people may not directly challenge the structures themselves because, “in many cases, direct confrontation is neither preferred nor possible.” (2000:204). For example, Black women domestic workers often lead their employers to believe that they are grateful for the hand-me-downs they are given by employers in lieu of a living wage. While they may play the role of the “mammy” or “mule” in the presence of their employers, they resist these self-definitions and create alternative self-concepts among other African American women.

The flight attendants in Arlie Hochschild’s ([1983] 2003) study also appeared to acquiesce to the demands of the airlines and passengers; however, behind the scenes in the flight attendants’ safe space, they mocked and bad-mouthed customers in opposition to institutional rules. The flight attendants resisted seeing themselves as subservient, deferent, and "less-than" their customers. According to Collins, such safe spaces are protection against internalized oppression. Alternative value-systems allow oppressed groups to “live with the contradictions inherent in viewing themselves as worthwhile individuals in a devalued occupation” (2000:207).
Historian Robin D. G. Kelley (1994) employs a similar framework in his work on resistance, one based on political scientist James Scott’s (1985) concept of “infrapolitics,” which is defined as “the daily confrontations, evasive actions and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movements.” Kelley argues that these everyday acts have a cumulative effect on power relations. Oppressed groups challenge hierarchical arrangements by constructing a “hidden transcript,” which he defines as a “dissident political culture that manifests itself in daily conversations, folklore, jokes, songs, and other cultural practices”(8). The hidden transcript is often veiled, subtle and disguised. This definition of resistance includes strategies such as slowdowns, theft, leaving work early, and quitting on short notice. While these “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) may appear individual, they can have a collective basis. Black women housekeepers, Collins notes, often kept lists of employers who were especially exploitative.

Kelley also claims that other Black workers’ resistance was not always connected to labor organizations but surfaced in leisure activities, in spaces such as dancehalls, bars, and barbershops. In these places, African Americans could build a collective identity and share experiences of oppression through the latest dance, over drinks, or through stories and joke telling.

In contrast, I contend that defining resistance so broadly renders it meaningless. To begin, participation in an oppositional subculture should not be equated with resistance. Members of an oppositional subculture use symbols, such as dress, speech,
and music, to show that they are at odds with mainstream culture. The mistake, in other words, is to equate music\textsuperscript{19} and dress with political activism. As Adolph Reed (2001) succinctly states, “Cultural production can reflect and support a political movement; it can never generate or substitute for one.”

Like Reed, I am wary of elevating stylistic resistance to the status of a social movement. He criticizes leftist academics who settle for oppositional dress and dance instead of the direct challenges that attempt to transform institutions. Exalting the status of hidden transcripts also implicitly discounts the overt acts of resistance that require greater courage. It also privileges the role of the academic who acts as interpreter of hidden symbols, explaining, as Reed puts it, “what the drums are saying.”

Moreover, “living with contradictions,” as Collins puts it, is not the same as challenging oppressive systems at the root. I argue that these behaviors are best defined as \textit{accommodation}—strategies for coping with oppression and alienation. While these strategies may protect oppressed individuals by allowing them to create alternative self-definitions, accommodation ultimately holds up systems of oppression.

Behaviors that appear to challenge the status quo often reproduce inequality, as was the case in Ezzell’s (2009) study of women athletes in the male-dominated sport of

\textsuperscript{19} For example, in Roscigno and Danaher’s (2001) study of the massive southern textile mill strikes during the late 1920s and 1930s, they argue that songs written and performed by ex-mill workers helped to frame the actions of workers, their families, bosses, politicians, and the middle class. Roscigno and Danaher contend that mill songs \textit{facilitated} the formation of a collective identity, but they also point out that newly founded radio stations provided political opportunities for collective action. Since radio was not yet controlled by regulation and local elites, ex-mill workers had access to this form of media.
rugby—a group that appeared to challenge norms of passive femininity. He finds, however, that women rugby players identified with and aspired to play like men rugby players. When these women encountered stereotypes of women rugby players as lesbians, they engaged in defensive othering. In other words, they distanced themselves from other women rugby teams and perpetuated the same stereotypes against women rugby players who were not on their team. Ezzell concludes that the women he studied ultimately reinforced patriarchy, instead of resisting and rejecting homophobic stigma. Thus it may be tempting to define unconventional behavior as resistance. However, it is important to look beneath the surface to see if these acts constitute attempts to fundamentally alter power dynamics. To resist is to challenge organizational legitimacy by redefining the situation, to seek a redistribution of rewards like wealth and prestige, and to attempt to reorganize the patterns of activity that make up institutions.

A review of the literature has demonstrated the need for a refined definition of resistance that is distinct from other responses to oppression. At GG, many workers dressed in themes associated with the rebellious punk and hippie subcultures. They also sported tattoos and unconventional hairstyles, such as dreadlocks and Mohawks. While the majority of organizing committee members dressed in punk and hippie styles, so did some of the most outspoken anti-union workers, according to the folks I interviewed. In fact, a man who my interviewees described as a “punk poster child” led an anti-union contingent of workers from the meat department. Based on these
findings, stylistic participation in alternative subcultures does not predict worker resistance.

The reason these forms of self-presentation are weakly linked to behavior is because they are often vague. Dress styles lack the kind of value articulation that would allow for a clear interpretation of these symbols. Acts of resistance, on the other hand, are intentional and deliberate attempts to fundamentally alter power dynamics. While individual acts of resistance can help redefine the situation and inspire others, they are often fleeting and easily ignored. For example, Bobby’s public confrontation with managers during a team meeting challenged their authority and provided an alternative model for interpreting teamwork. Power was momentarily shifted, and the seeds that would later lead to collective action were planted. But Bobby’s actions alone did not amount to a call for radical changes in the power structure.

Other responses to control are more representative of alienation than resistance. For example, workers told me that hiding in the cooler and above the bulk bins were ways to avoid demanding customers. While this solution allowed individual workers to temporarily cope with the stress of performing emotional labor, it did not challenge work rules and expectations. Again, covert acts like these fail to articulate their meanings. Thus, shirking is not effective resistance to the status quo. Rather, it is a way of accommodating oppressive systems.

In contrast with individual acts, collective resistance is rooted in a shared set of values and cannot be dismissed as easily. The significance of group action is legitimated
by the participation of others, thereby magnifying its effects and solidifying its meaning. When workers walked out on the CEO during the pre-election town hall meeting, the meaning of their action was clear. Union workers publicly rejected the existing power structure and refused to participate in it. Moreover, the walkout was part of a larger movement that sought to change power dynamics through unionizing. This was a challenge that went beyond any individual action.

A better definition of resistance would allow us to differentiate it from accommodation. Oppositional cultures can protect a person from physical assaults or attacks on their self-esteem. However, these oppositional cultures do not automatically pose any real threat to unfair policies and oppressive institutions. This is not to say that studying the ways in which people struggle to maintain dignity and cope with exploitation in their everyday lives is not worthwhile. Intentional, acute, everyday acts of resistance matter, but do not have the same impact as collective resistance. Perhaps the most dangerous consequence of finding resistance everywhere is that doing so masks the reality that U.S. labor has become progressively weak and vulnerable. Confusing grudging accommodation with resistance also minimizes the urgent need for a sustainable social movement that protects workers.

_Sociological and Practical Lessons Learned_

The GG organizing effort had all the elements that could have made it a long-term success. Midwest workers demonstrated exceptional motivation and commitment
throughout the organizing drive. The organizing committee included people with valuable activist experience. Once the Midwest workers voted for the union, GG workers at stores around the nation contacted them to express interest in organizing their own workplaces. Moreover, the company’s do-good image and supposed support of local communities meant that conditions were ripe for citizens to become allies. Despite these advantages, the Midwest workers never secured a contract. A sociological analysis of what went wrong holds several practical lessons for would-be organizers.

Part of the problem is a lack of federal protections for workers who try to unionize. More precisely, the problem lies in weak enforcement. Brofenbrenner finds that the use of union-busting tactics has intensified in recent decades.\(^{20}\) From 1986-1987 to 1999-2003, the incidence of employers who used 10 or more union busting tactics during the election and pre-election periods more than doubled. Illegal union-busting is the norm rather than the exception. Similarly, in a study of gender and racial segregation in U.S. private-sector establishments, my colleagues and I found that Equal Employment Opportunity laws were essentially paper tigers. Not only are firms rarely sanctioned for noncompliance, but racial segregation was actually more pronounced at firms that had contracts with the federal government and therefore subject to closer monitoring than non-contract firms (McTague, Stainback, and Tomaskovic-Devey

\(^{20}\) Tactics include hiring management consultants, captive audience meetings, and supervisor one-ones and have been used fairly consistently over time. However the use of more coercive tactics—plant closing threats and actual plant closings, discharges, harassment and other discipline, surveillance, and alteration of jobeffits and conditions—has increased over the same period.
Likewise environmental laws are also weakly enforced, which leaves citizen-consumers with the burden of protecting the environment, hence a growing market for ethical consumption (Johnston 2008). Taken together, the weak enforcement of environmental, civil rights, and labor rights laws indicates that government responsibility and intervention has receded, leaving workers, minority groups, and the planet vulnerable.

In this context, the GG organizing committee, like so many others, fought an uphill battle against the company on two fronts: the use of intimidation during the pre-election phase and stalling during the bargaining phase. First, the organizing committee spent a great deal of energy on the quick-and-quiet organizing strategy. Workers were correct in anticipating a swift managerial response and their strategy was largely responsible for winning the election. However, the use of this strategy strained workers’ friendships, since those left out of the loop felt resentful. By the time they sat down at the bargaining table, they were physically and emotionally exhausted. The organizing committee then encountered a second front—stalling on the company’s side. Thus the GG case fits the larger pattern of unrealized contracts. Even when workers succeed at forming a union, 52 percent are still without a contract a year after they win the election, and 37 percent remain without a contract two years after the election (Bronfenbrenner 2009). Stalling effects were exacerbated by the high turnover at GG, thus posing another obstacle to securing a contract.
All in all, the GG case illustrates the need for labor law reform, or at least the strengthening of labor law enforcement. Currently, Congress is considering the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), under which “the NLRB would be required to automatically certify the union if the majority of the employees in a unit signed authorization cards designating the union as their bargaining representative” (Brofenbrenner 2009:25). The act also proposes stronger penalties for non-complying firms during election and first contract negotiation phases. Thus the EFCA would enable the NLRB to prioritize federal court injunctions for unlawful labor practices, triple back-pay, and raise company fines up to $20,000 for each violation, over the pre-contract period. Moreover if negotiations stalemate after 90 days of trying to reach an agreement, then 30 days of mediation followed by arbitration would be required.

Thus, EFCA’s passage would enable workers like those at GG to organize without putting all of their energy and resources into the pre-election battle. Worker-organizers would not have to organize on the sly or worry about alienating their coworkers and friends by telling a select group of trusted workers. Of equal importance, the act would keep companies from dragging their feet during the bargaining phase and allow unions to build on the momentum of winning the election instead of fizzling out. Moreover, the passage of this act would shorten and streamline elections and bargaining, thereby Joeefiting workers at high turnover workplaces like GG.

In addition to labor law reform, it seems that unions may need to find new strategies for reaching unorganized workers. Older, established unions are often unable
to form constructive ties with young retail workers. In recent years, unions and class-based social movements have made strides in mobilizing youth. Examples include United Students Against Sweatshops and the AFL-CIO Union Summer program. However, unions have yet to address the needs of youth as workers. In a recent report on unions in the U.S., Schmitt and Warner (2009) found that only 5.7 percent of 16-24 year olds were unionized.

Because I did not interview anyone from the Local, criticism of the union affiliate must be interpreted with caution. However, within these data limitations, I can safely say that workers believed they were treated paternalistically. Workers at GG told me that they felt union reps stereotyped them as trouble making, rebellious teens and didn’t take them seriously. They also reported encountering the same paternalism when interacting with union reps as they did with managers. Whether or not reps actually stereotyped GG workers, and treated them accordingly, is not clear. However the fact that workers felt this way indicates that there was a problem with the Local’s tactics. Workers had a difficult time relating to older, middle-aged reps who appeared to subscribe to an authoritarian, masculine style of organizing that made women workers feel uncomfortable. Thus their relationship with the Local was often a source of stress, instead of support. Moreover, some women organizers, who were active early on, felt alienated and their involvement subsequently waned.

To avoid the same mistakes, labor unions will need to rethink old strategies devised to support older male factory workers. The Union Summer program has made
strides in reaching out to youth and training them to be union organizers. Tannock (2001) notes, however, that when youth participants were dispatched to union offices, they often reported feeling alienated and superfluous. Union officers, it seemed, didn’t know what to do with them or how best to use their skills and experiences. As such, simply hiring young organizers will not solve the problem. More holistic approaches are necessary.

Based on his study of youth workers’ experiences with fry house and grocery store unions, Tannock argues for “all-ages” unionism. He points out that unions, especially grocery unions, have made a habit of essentially sacrificing stopgap workers to employers in exchange for protections for older workers, leading to a two-tier wage system. The fry house union in his study can serve as a model for organizing stopgap workers. While imperfect, the fry house union eschewed the “top-down” business unionism used by the grocery union in favor of a more participatory or “bottom-up” model (see Milkman 2006), wherein youth workers served as stewards and were active in contract negotiations.

While I don’t recommend abandoning factory workers, I do think that unions must adapt to changing workforce dynamics, especially the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy dominated by stopgap work. New strategies are needed to meet the needs of workers in these circumstances. Milkman (2006) argues that unions should focus on mobilizing public support by attracting the media and filing high profile lawsuits. Likewise, Bonacich and Gapasin (2001) suggest that unions would better
serve workers by not focusing exclusively on securing a contract. They question the method of organizing one establishment at a time and instead advocate for community-based and sector-wide organizing through Workers’ Centers. Although they refer to garment workers centers, it seems that this approach might work for low-wage retail workers, too.

The method of organizing, under this model, would involve the recruitment of union members in a variety of settings: places of work, neighborhoods, churches, through radio and TV, and so forth. The workers so recruited would be full-fledged union members—not associate members, or non-members until they won a contract. (Associate membership programs create unequal strata within unions, and leave the most disadvantaged workers without power in their own union.) The union would hold regular meetings at convenient locales—Workers’ Centers—where popular education, leadership training, and direct action plans would be developed. ...Each Center would send representatives to a coordinating body that would make decisions for the union as a whole.

Ideally, the Centers would help workers develop committees in each factory, so that all workers in that sector would know about the union, and would be encouraged to join. These factory cells would become important units in the union, collecting and sharing information about working conditions, and serving to enforce any contract that was signed. The union, so constructed, could also engage with government agencies on various issues, like the setting and enforcement of labor standards in the industry. (Bonacich and Gapasin 2001:9)

This approach seems well-suited to addressing the needs of low-wage interactive service workers. Unions would seek to organize interactive service workers in retail and food service establishments within a given geographical area. Workers would not have to wait until a contract is won for full membership, thereby accommodating short-term workers. Moreover, because these workers change jobs frequently, often moving between firms and industries, their union participation would not be linked to
employment at a particular workplace. A service workers’ center might also design programs specifically for youth workers or perhaps push for a citywide living wage.

In this study, I’ve shown how identity-based control presented both opportunities and obstacles to unionization. I’ve also demonstrated that youth workers are no exception to this pattern, and therefore caution against assuming that this group is not invested in the work they do. Moreover, these findings are relevant to unions attempting to organize under identity-based control, which provides both an impetus for collective action and the possibility that criticism of the company could be interpreted as an attack on workers’ green identities and environmental ethics. Additionally, because women mostly perform this type of work, unions will need to rethink the use of masculine organizing styles and seek out new models that resonate with women workers. I believe the Worker Center model holds great promise for building a sustainable movement among low-wage interactive service workers. Based on the analyses presented here, my second recommendation is to pass the EFCA act, which would protect short-term, low-wage attempting to unionize. The struggle at Green Grocer illustrates exactly why reform is necessary. The worker-organizers were exceptionally dedicated and resourceful, enabling them to win the election despite the company's anti-union campaign. Still, the high turnover, company union-busting, and managerial feet-dragging during the bargaining phase was too much for these exhausted workers. It should not be the case that the only workers able to exercise their
right to unionize are those who are the dedicated, resourceful, and lucky enough to make it through the first contract.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

How did you come to work at GG? (Get the story.)
   ❑ Probe: Did you have friends who worked there? If so, what had they told you about the place?)

Did you go through some kind of orientation?
   If so, what was it like?
   What did they tell you about GG?

What did you do when you first started at GG?
   What part of the store did you work in?

Did anything surprise you about GG?
   Was it in any way different from what you expected? If so, how?

What did you like best about GG when you started there?
What did you like least?

Were you part of a team?
   How did that work?
   What did you like about the team arrangement?
   Was there anything you disliked about it?

Was there any discrepancy between what GG said about teamwork and how the store actually operated?

How did the idea of a union first come up?
   ❑ Probe: When did you first think about it or hear about it?
   ❑ Was there an incident that got you thinking that a union would be a good idea?

[Note: Try to pin down approximate dates to create a timeline for each organizing effort.]

Who did you talk to about the possibility of a union? What did they say?

When the idea of a union first came up, were you enthused about it? Or were you skeptical?
   ❑ Probe: Why?

Did you have any prior experience with unions?
   ❑ Probe: Any friends or family members belong to a union?
When you first started talking about a union with other people, how did they respond?

How did management respond when they heard about the effort to organize a union?
  - Probe: What did they say? What did they do?

Who took the lead in the organizing effort?
  - Probe: What did you do?

How were you involved?
  - Probe: What did you do?

Was there an organizing committee? If so, how did it work?
  - Probe: How often did it meet?
  - How many people were involved?
  - What did the people on the committee do?

Did you get any outside help? (e.g., the Local) If so, what did they do?
  - Probe: Was there anything you would have liked them to do differently?

Did you get to a point where you thought, "This could really succeed"?
If so, when was that?

Did you ever get to a point where you thought, "This isn't going to work"?
If so, when was that?

What made the organizing effort hard?
  - Probe: Were you getting resistance from management?
  - ...from co-workers?

Was there any conflict among members of the organizing committee?
  - Probe: Any conflict between members of the committee and the outside help?

Did anything surprise you about how the organizing effort unfolded?

Looking back, is there anything you would do differently if you could do it over?

Visited my website?

Demographics: age, gender, education, ethnicity, parents’ education and occupation, prior work experience, when started at GG, how long work for GG, etc.
List of probes:

What do you mean by that?
What did you do then?
What did ___ do when you said/did that?
Can you give me an example?
How so?
Was it always this way?
How did you feel about that?
“I like grad school” Q: What do you like about it?