

ABSTRACT

ROBINSON, ROBERT. Construction Workers' Reactions to Structural Alienation and Inequality. (Under the direction of L. Richard Della Fave.)

Using a participant observation approach, this study documents specific examples of structural alienation in the lifeworlds of 35 residential construction workers (in North Carolina and Virginia) who perform finish work—such as painting and floor refinishing—on expensive houses. It includes a look at what these workers think about the inequalities that they see and help to create within the society. Despite the fact that they get to see how some of the richest individuals in this society live, the workers in this study believe in the legitimacy of inequality and in the premise of the equity principle--that individuals deserve unequal rewards depending upon how much they produce within the society. There were a number of ways that the workers coped with the structural alienation and relative deprivation that they experienced on the job. Many of these workers experienced economic conditions where they were just trying to survive and they mainly focused their attention on this aspect of their lives. Other ways that they coped included attempting to maximize their position within the status hierarchy of the job, exhibiting pride in their work and craft skills, and focusing their attention on what they were doing when they were not working--such as interacting with family, friends, and members of their status groups who share common consumption patterns with themselves.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' REACTIONS
TO STRUCTURAL ALIENATION AND INEQUALITY

by

ROBERT ROBINSON

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University at Raleigh
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

RALEIGH

2001

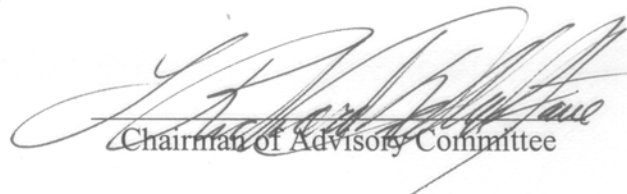
APPROVED BY:



Randall Robinson



Lisa A. Ellwood



Chairman of Advisory Committee

BIOGRAPHY

Construction:

Over 20 years of experience painting and refinishing floors, as well as minor experience in most of the other construction trades.

Education:

Piedmont Virginia Community College, Charlottesville, VA. A.S. Business Administration. 1989.

Longwood College, Farmville, VA. B.S. Sociology. 1993.

Interests in Sociology include: stratification, criminology, social theory, social ethics, and teaching the sociological imagination to others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to the following people. First, I would like to extend special thanks to my wife, Sherry. She has given me enormous support over the years that I have been working on this project. I cannot and do not want to imagine what it would have been like to attempt to complete this project without her support and understanding. I would also like to thank all of the workers who have participated in this project. Their cooperation and candor were much appreciated. Rick Della Fave deserves many thanks for the long hours that he spent helping me refine my thoughts into the finished product found in the following pages. I would also like to thank Risa Ellavich and Randy Thomson for serving on my committee and providing me with critiques that made this a better work. Thanks also go out to Russell Crescimanno who helped me work through the emotional ups and downs of thesis writing, as well as helping me develop the ideas that I had. Joseph Rayle and Lynette Dromsky also helped me think through some of my ideas and provided me a space to work on this thesis. They provided me much emotional support as well. Thank you. I would also like to thank my mother for her unwavering belief in my abilities—it helped me keep my confidence. I would also like to thank my father for teaching me how to paint and for stressing to me the importance of thinking for myself. Finally, I would like to thank some of the many undergraduate professors who had a special influence in helping me learn how to think about the world critically—Marietta McCarty, Bill Burger, Lawrence Hlad, Ken Perkins, and Lee Bidwell.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
BIOGRAPHY.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FOREWARD.....	1
INTRODUCTION	3
Research Question.....	6
Methods.....	12
WORK STATUSES, WORKING CONDITIONS, AND WHAT THE WORKERS PRODUCE.....	19
Work Statuses.....	20
Structural Alienation.....	31
WORKERS' REACTIONS TO ALIENATION, EXPLOITATION, AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION	56
The Legitimacy of the Distribution of Income and Wealth.....	56
How Workers Cope.....	71
CONCLUSION.....	89
REFERENCES.....	98

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' REACTIONS TO STRUCTURAL ALIENATION AND INEQUALITY

Autobiographical Foreword

I have been doing work in the construction field since I was eight years old when my father began bringing home shutters for me to scrape and sand in preparation for painting. From the time I was 12, I spent much of my spare time from school working on construction projects, first as a painter's apprentice and then later as a painter. Painting and floor finishing have been my main way of making a living for over 20 years now. I have also lived around others who do similar types of work. I earned a decent living for a while but realized that my body would not be able to do this kind of work for all of my professional life.

I went back to college to earn a degree that would help me enter a less physically demanding and damaging profession. As I attended college and took various sociology courses I noticed that many of the working conditions, which I just took for granted, on the job site are actually considered problematic by many sociologists. The theories of Marx and Weber (among others) opened my eyes to a new way of interpreting what I was experiencing on the job sites.

My perspective has also been expanded because I have spent much time working on expensive houses and working with others who do so as well. I have been struck by the stark differences between these expensive homes of the owners and the homes of some of the poorer workers. If I had not had the opportunity to work on these houses these differences would not be as salient in my mind. In what appears to be contrary to

what Marx predicted, the workers I have been around are not revolting against the conditions in which they find themselves within this economic system. Instead, they appear to be coping within the system--but at some cost.

Through my schooling I have learned to appreciate the theoretical stance of sociology and its attempt to explain human interaction and the social forces that affect individuals' life chances scientifically. Most workers do not have the advantage of using this knowledge because they do not have access to this material. They put their own theories together from the perspectives they have available to them. Over the course of this study, I will utilize the theories of Marx and Weber, and other sociologists who branch off of this line of reasoning, and compare them with the life views of the workers whom I study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study looks at construction workers who work on expensive houses. For the purpose of this study such a house and property are worth over \$500,000. Houses worth over a million dollars will be referred to as very expensive. It also looks at the conditions they work under, the ways they cope, the ways they see the world around them, and the ways they interact with their fellow workers. I am especially interested in how these construction workers react to structural alienation and exploitation that occurs on the job and with how they view the economic inequality that exists in our society.

The workers whom I studied perform finish work such as painting and floor finishing, among other trades, on expensive houses. I study these workers for three reasons. This particular type of construction worker has not previously been studied. I have direct access to them since I currently work in the field and have done so for many years. Finally, because they represent a theoretically meaningful sample, i.e. they have an unusually close-up, concrete view of some extreme inequalities.

It is important to see how these workers experience and interpret the alienated and exploitative reality of their work situation, since they may not perceive it as such. This is possibly the case even for these workers who construct something that they themselves can never possess. They literally help to create the inequalities that the owners of these houses enjoy. Despite this pronounced relative deprivation, I do not see these workers rebelling. In fact, it looks as if they see it as natural and simply a part of the human condition. I documented in detail exactly how the workers react to these conditions. I

suspect that their seeing these inequalities really has little negative effect on their attitude toward the distribution of wealth in this society.

It also appears that these workers do not view their labor as being alienated. An alienated person is one who is told what to do, how to do it, and when and how much of it to do. It seems as if many of these workers actually want to be cued rather than having the freedom to decide. Using Marx's (1978) structural definition of alienation, a worker can be objectively alienated and yet not perceive it as undesirable. His consciousness may be diverted from the problematic conditions of the system under which he operates to a point where he focuses his attention on other things, such as his family, obtaining higher prestige in his field, making more money, or, in some cases, survival.

In our society there is a dominant ideology that legitimates existing inequality. It stresses the necessity of the unequal distribution of wealth. It is based on the idea that economic outcomes are determined by individual efforts and talents and that the opportunity for economic advancement is widely available. I expect to find that these workers do not have the necessary information and conceptual understanding to make an informed assessment of how the economic system works. They seem to perceive the problem as being part of the human condition rather than a product of our particular economic system. While I saw oppositional behavior toward specific owners and bosses, these instances do not question the legitimacy of the system as a whole, only the legitimacy of the particular individuals placement within it.

I hypothesize that the workers believe that their skills and work performance are rewarded equitably as a consequence of comparing themselves to others around them on the job. If this were the case, most would adhere to the dominant ideology, and those

who do not would at least consent to it. I expect that most workers would get caught up in the day-to-day workings of the job, operate within prevailing rules, and attempt to succeed within them. They would take pride in their work and their contributions to what is being created. Success here means that a worker can maintain an expected income and status.

I expect to find instances where workers work in close cooperation with one another, while there are others where they are in competition. This competition would be most evident in the bidding process and the competition for wages and statuses on the job. Such competition would benefit employers and the owners of the houses since it distracts workers from questioning their relations with their bosses and the system at large. In such a situation, workers would focus their attention upon satisfying personal needs and desires, such as securing material goods for their families and networks of friends. Consumption patterns would sift workers into different status groups with which they would identify themselves. This would get them to focus on distinctions among those with whom they are in close contact rather than the larger class structure. In these instances, workers would focus on particular cultural differences among themselves, making it difficult to see themselves as a united working class.

I have collected the data for this project since 1994, focusing on work life using a participant observation approach. The research population consists of nonunionized construction workers, mainly painters and other tradesmen who engage in the finish end of the construction process of expensive houses. The data I gathered came from everyday interactions on the job and from extended informal discussions with workers and contractors. Over the course of the project I developed extended case studies of

some of the workers and contractors. I have worked in this field for over 20 years. I know the work and can speak the vernacular that tells other painters that I, too, am a professional painter. By using face-to-face interaction in order to view these individuals' lifeworlds, I am able to empathize and understand the subjective meanings through which they interpret their world.

This exploration provides a conceptual understanding of capitalism's effects on the structure of the workplace and, subsequently, on these workers' relation to their work. This is a perspective that most workers do not have. I looked for patterns by reading back through my field notes and making notes on notes.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. This chapter outlines the research question, describes the workers and houses they work on, and the methods used for this project. Chapter 2 describes their working conditions, their roles on the job site, and what they produce. Chapter 3 describes their reactions to the conditions both on, and to a more limited extent, off the job site. It looks at their consumption patterns and the ideas to which they are exposed. It also looks at both the cooperative and competitive interactions among the workers and their division into status groups. Chapter 4 puts forth my conclusion and ties the findings back to relevant theoretical frameworks.

Research Question

The main point I wish to explore in this study is how construction workers react to elements of structural alienation and exploitation that occur on the job, especially when it comes to their views about the legitimacy of inequality in our society. When Joe is told by his boss to spend two weeks glazing windows so that his boss may make a profit, he is experiencing both alienation and exploitation. Joe is experiencing structural

alienation because he is told what he is going to do, how he is going to do it, when and how much of it to do, and who is going to receive what he produces (Marx 1888). He is also experiencing alienation because he is performing such a small role in a much larger process (Marx 1888), the construction of a residence, and his human needs and desires are not a consideration in determining the actions upon which he will focus his attention. For example, it is not a determining factor that Joe might be completely bored by doing such a monotonous task for such a long period of time. This is because Joe is distanced from the decision making process. Exploitation is occurring because someone else is making a profit from his labor (Marx 1978). Even though these conditions exist for Joe, he still believes that it is a legitimate way for the production process to be carried out. As he says, "As long as they pay me good, I don't care what they get me to do." The second part of Joe's statement acknowledges that he is accepting alienation in his work. The first part of the statement touches on the issue of exploitation and illuminates the fact that Joe does not recognize it as such. It also emphasizes his standard of comparison for wages. At the time, Joe was being paid thirteen dollars an hour for his labor, and he was comparing his wage with that of other workers with whom he was working and other individuals within his social network with whom he normally interacts.

A further alienating condition exists for the particular group of workers I studied. These workers produce expensive houses, yet most of them live in modest housing. These individuals have an unusually close up view of the inequalities that exist in the society. Before looking at how workers react to these inequalities, it is important first to look at the workers' experiences and interpretations of alienation and exploitation, because they may not see them as problematic. This could even be the case when

workers construct something that they themselves cannot possess, even though the possibility of feeling alienated in this situation is more acute. The specific group of workers I chose to study is composed of individuals who work on the finish end of some of the most expensive houses in North Carolina and Virginia. Thus, these workers come face to face with some of the most glaring inequalities that exist within the society. This experience represents an important viewpoint that many other individuals from the working class do not have, because like Joe, individuals tend to socialize with others who share similar lifestyles (Kelley and Evans 1995) and most other workers do not work, relax, or socialize at the homes of those who consume the products that they produce. These workers are also literally helping to create the inequalities in status that the owners of these homes enjoy. The workers are involved in the creative process of producing something they cannot and probably will not ever be able to possess themselves, simply because they do not have the money (and in some cases the inclination) to do so.

I am studying this group because I want to know what they think about the unequal distribution of wealth in this society and the opportunities it affords some individuals—such as the opportunity to own a million dollar home. These workers are not rebelling. This may be occurring for one of two reasons. The workers may believe that the unequal distribution of resources is legitimate. Or, they may believe it is not legitimate, do not know of anything that they can do about it, and simply consent to the system. This study provides a clearer idea of what these workers' particular belief systems are. These workers are an interesting sample. They are among a small group who get an opportunity to observe and directly create the opulent conditions in which the rich individuals in our society live. The experience of relative deprivation is occurring—

especially for the poorer workers who live in, and often do not even own, very modest housing. For example, when Steve helped to build a house where the library room alone, because of its cherry paneling and marble fireplace, was worth more than his entire house and possessions he experienced relative deprivation. Steve was helping to create something that he himself will probably never be able to own.

This study also examines the interaction between alienating conditions and ideological hegemony. I argue that the capitalist system is so ingrained in the thinking of these workers that the system itself is rarely challenged. These workers, like the blue-collar workers studied by Burawoy (1979) and Lane (1962), cope within the economic, prestige, and power structures of their particular jobs and do not attempt to change the basic structure of the economic system. The final chapter explains why these reactions have serious implications for these workers. The ways the workers react limit their ability to achieve freedom. Freedom, in these terms, refers to the ability to be aware of possible alternatives to the present social arrangements and to have the opportunity to choose among them (Mills 1959). When the workers cope in the ways that I describe, it automatically enhances the power of those with money and limits the potential power of the workers to act as a politically active group calling for change.¹

This research is important because it can lead to a more thorough understanding of construction workers' lifeworlds. While other research projects about construction workers have focused on the culture (Applebaum 1981, Reimer 1979, Mills 1972,

¹ While these workers may not see these conditions as problematic, many theorists from whom I draw do. Later in the thesis, I discuss that it is normative for the workers to express themselves through the limited milieu that they experience on the jobsite and through what they consume. Marx (1959), Fromm (1965), and Mills (1959) all see this as problematic because it does not allow the workers to fully express themselves as creators and because they are not in control of the creative process.

LeMasters 1975) or the organizational structure (Mills 1972, Reckman 1979) of the trades, they have not focused on the issues of alienation, relative deprivation, exploitation, legitimation, and freedom in the workers' lifeworlds. Clegg's (1975) work examined the subjects of alienation and power, but his work was done on the construction of a bus station and parking garage by unionized workers. It also did not look at the belief systems of the workers involved in the process. Research studies focusing on alienating working conditions for blue-collar workers have mainly been conducted on workers in the manufacturing and/or automobile industries and highlighted the monotonous nature of the work (Karlsson 1991, Merton 1970, Blauner 1964, Juravich 1985, Nichols and Beynon 1977). The individuals in my sample are different from the workers in these studies because residential construction workers usually work on the premises of the homes that are created. These workers get a first hand glimpse of how rich people live. Fantasia's (1988) work focused on union workers involved in strikes. None of the workers in my sample belong to a union or have been involved in a strike. This is an important difference because, while unions have seldom advocated attacking the legitimacy of capitalism itself, they have provided a basis for an ideology that challenges the pure free market version of capitalism. Thus, the workers I am studying do not have a legitimate institution from which to draw such ideas or to provide them a basis to organize as a group and question free market capitalism.

Because of the lack of much previous research in this area and on these types of workers in particular, the hypotheses I have generated for this study emerged from several theoretical approaches woven together. I have generated many of my research questions about this group through reflecting upon the earlier experiences I have had on

construction jobs and through the use of abstract theories that deal with the issues of alienation (Marx 1978, Della Fave 1991, Weber 1946, Schwalbe 1986), relative deprivation, exploitation (Marx 1978, Della Fave 1991), the legitimacy of the dominant ideology (Della Fave 1986, Sohn 1998, Ritzman and Tomaskovic-Devey 1992, Kluegel and Smith 1986), and freedom (Mills 1959, Fromm 1965). Because these issues--especially freedom--have not been examined much within the context of construction workers, their jobs, and their lives as a whole, this study sheds light on how examples of these abstract concepts are manifest in the everyday world of these workers.

For instance, much construction work is physically demanding, nasty, and dirty. These types of tasks are not distributed equally among all members of the society. Instead, some individuals specialize in these trades. Construction workers receive relatively low status (Blau and Duncan 1967) and financial rewards, even though they provide the essential service of supplying one of the most basic of human needs. The first aspect of this study (Chapter 2) will look at the roles that construction workers occupy and theoretically examine the issues of alienation and exploitation. It will also document some specific examples of how these conditions are manifest in the workers' everyday work lives. The second aspect of the study (Chapter 3) will examine how workers react to these conditions. The third aspect (Chapter 4) will look at the implications of how the workers react.

I believe that the most appropriate way to approach this study is by working side by side with the workers and recording the interactions and conversations that they have with one another and with those for whom they work. This vantage point provides an important perspective to explore the issues included within this study and provides a clear

look at the meanings that these workers have towards the situations in which they find themselves (Spradley 1980). An important aspect of this study is the attempt to find if these workers believe that their labor creates and reproduces the inequalities that exist in society, and more generally, what their understanding of the larger economic system is.

Workers do not have easy access to much information about the economic system (Simon 1982, Herman and Chomsky 1988) or about the jobs on which they are working except what they themselves see firsthand. How do workers fill in any missing information they lack about the economic system as a whole or the jobs they work on in particular? What assumptions do they make? How does this understanding affect their lives? Is there discontent, and if so, how do they react to it? I answered these questions by watching how workers act and react to their work conditions.

Methods

[We should proceed] on from the elementary fact of how men are arranged, to the more vital fact of what they are doing by means of these arrangements (Small 1905, p. 120)... Our intelligence about human society may be measured by the extent to which we understand in detail that individuals and societies live and move and have their being in many-sided action and reaction with each other (Small 1905, p. 138).

I would like to add to Small's (1905) point by saying that these actions are often brought about through adhering to particular rationalities and thought processes. This study observes how real world participants interact with one another in everyday life with a particular focus on work life. The work role is an important facet of identity in the modern world (Lane 1968, Trice 1993, LeMasters 1975). I believe that the best way to learn more about alienation, especially at this stage of conceptualization, is by studying the work world as it is played out and by using a participant observation approach.

My research population consists of non-unionized construction workers, mainly painters and other tradesmen who engage in the finish end of the construction process of expensive houses. Included within the study are homes from 7 exclusive communities and other exclusive areas in North Carolina and Virginia. Some of the houses are worth over a million dollars. Other individuals, such as owners, realtors, interior decorators, and architects, have been involved in interactions with these workers during the course of their work. They are included in this study also. There were 35 different workers, 32 of which were men, and 20 other individuals who have been involved in the interactions that have been incorporated into the findings of this work. The workers range in age from 16 to 75. I also have worked with a number of different groups of workers and contractors who are from distinct status groups and regions and do not know each other.

I am studying these individuals by working alongside them on the jobs and taking extensive field notes. The data for this project are descriptions of the discussions, interactions, and relationships that occur around and during the construction of residences as well as from some extended informal discussions with workers and contractors. I use this method because I believe that using conversations as the basis for field notes can be much more in depth and varied, depending upon the worker and the situation, than can structured interviews (Clandinin and Connelly 1994, Oakley 1981).

Most of the field notes have been taken after the interactions are over and I had time to write them down. Because of the nature of my work relationships, I have had the opportunity to take a lot of “breaks” on the job in order to move out of the view of other workers, to record my notes. I have also taken notes during phone conversations. I always had a clipboard with loose-leaf paper near me or in my truck. I recorded the notes

in this fashion because I believe that carrying a tape recorder or taking notes in the field would be awkward and may also change the workers' actions and comments. I can also be certain that the event itself was authentic. I have been taking field notes of my interactions in the construction industry since 1994.

I have considered the ethical implications of this type of research and the importance of not harming the research subjects. Most of the workers did not know that I was doing social research. I did not announce my presence as a researcher unless I believed that it would allow me to gain more in depth understanding of how they feel about the issues I am writing about, or if they were interested enough in me to ask for more details of my life other than about what my skills were on the jobsite. I also disclosed my identity as a researcher if I believed that any of the information that I recorded about a worker might be potentially damaging. I have made certain to maintain the confidentiality of the workers included in this sample. One way that I have accomplished this is by using pseudonyms for all of the workers. I have also left out all details that I believe would have disclosed any individual's identity. My work in a number of different geographical regions also makes it difficult, even for the workers themselves, to recognize which worker I am referring to in particular incidents. Writing about what these workers have in common also further hides their particular identities because of the similarities. I also attempted to write about them in a positive light because I believe that their view of the work world is legitimate, has not been expressed enough in the sociological literature, and needs to be considered.

I am qualified to research this population in this manner because I have done this type of work on these types of houses for many years. I grew up in this realm. Since

painting and other finish work have been my primary way of making a living over the course of my life, I know the culture. I know how to perform the work, and I can speak the vernacular that conveys to other painters that I am a professional painter. This allows me to interact with the workers, contractors, and owners within this context so that they feel comfortable and act as they normally do on the jobsite. This is important because, as other researchers note (Applebaum 1981, Reimer 1979, Williams 1992), blue-collar workers do not normally trust “learned men” who are doing studies about them. Social scientists researching construction workers must be able to use the vernacular of the construction workers in order to gain rapport. Other researchers have noted that a participant observation approach yields the most valid data from this group (Applebaum 1981, Burawoy 1994, Reimer 1979, Williams 1992). The rapport also becomes necessary to allow for a more in depth understanding of the work realm in which these workers must operate. Being able to work beside these workers during the work process has allowed me to experience the conditions in which they work.

I must claim the bias of being socialized into the culture that I am studying. I can relate with the lifeworld of the construction workers and can effectively communicate with them and present their experiences in this project. Some may argue that my enculturation into this group makes me susceptible to the same biases that are held by the members of the group I am studying. This enculturation strengthens rather than weakens my research, however. This group of workers has little power in the larger societal context, and their perspective is often not considered. I provide the opportunity for it to be heard. I also do not have many of the “blind spots” that members of this group experience. The theoretical stance that I outline provides the perspective that drives this

project. This perspective is drastically different from that of many of the workers whom I describe.

Another strength of this study is that it attempts to achieve *verstehen*. I immersed myself in the daily lives of those I studied. I wanted to document firsthand how these workers live, talk, and behave, and what captures their attention. It is important to empathize and understand the subjective meanings of the people one is studying (Spradley 1980). This research tradition was followed by some individuals in the early Chicago School of sociology such as Henderson (1902) and by the entire discipline of anthropology. Sociology and anthropology researchers such as Liebow (1967), MacCleod (1987), Anderson (1992), Williams (1992), Sennett and Cobb (1973), Applebaum (1984), Spradley (1970), Gans (1982), and Sykes (1958) all attempted to provide the viewpoint of those whom they were studying. Feminist researchers such as Smith (1990) explain the importance of understanding the perspective of the individuals one is studying, especially of groups whose perspectives are not normally considered. Weber (1946) stressed that the main goal of sociological research is to reach *verstehen*. Lane (1962) explains that an objective study of a group cannot be undertaken until the culture of that group is understood.

Goffman's (1963) concept of the context of co-presence is important to consider as well. This occurs when individuals have a similar focus of attention and definition of the situation upon one particular time and space. Location becomes important to consider, because it provides a context and setting of interactions. For Goffman, these time-space relations are fundamental to the production and reproduction of social life. Each person is positioned within the system via the roles that he or she plays. Weber

(1946) saw it as a web of social networks being created and recreated. It is these webs of interactions that I study and describe. Here, the participant observer can see the intersection where social structure shapes interactions and their meanings because structural arrangements based on power and position are reinforced through the dynamics of social interactions.

I believe that the most appropriate and useful way to study these relationships is through watching interactions. It is particularly important to study alienation in this manner because the workers' experience of it has not been studied. Also, alienation is not just an abstract concept. It is important to understand that it is different for individuals of different status groups. In depth understanding requires participant observation because alienation is an intricate process that varies across jobs and individuals. By conducting this research through a participant observation approach and looking at interactions between individuals, I can get an idea how actions and beliefs allow forms of domination and power to occur and continue. Actually participating in the field gives the researcher a feel for what experiencing alienated work conditions on a daily basis is like.

Over the course of the project, field notes about some of the workers and contractors have developed into extended cases. All of these workers eventually learned that I was doing a study about construction workers and provided verbal implied consent for me to use examples about them in this thesis. The extended case method approach provides useful data because it includes individuals with whom I have spent a lot of time and have come to know well. It also provides a longitudinal look at the participants. This was particularly useful in seeing how much individuals moved between different

worker statuses and how their attitudes changed depending upon the circumstances in which they found themselves. Burawoy (1991) explains that the extended case method is appropriate when the researcher wants to see how the larger society is affecting the individual's lifeworld. He explains that it is the most appropriate form of research to use when reconstructing theories of advanced capitalism. This is true because the method uses face-to-face interaction over an extended time in order to view the individual's lifeworld and see how it is being affected by other elements of the larger society (Burawoy 1991). Case studies provide a solid basis for understanding the intricacies of the situation in which actors find themselves (Stake 1981, Patton 1990). Case studies also provide a better understanding of individual workers.

I have kept a research journal similar to the fieldwork journal that Spradley (1980) describes. This journal contains not only field notes but also my personal experiences, ideas, and the theoretical developments that I have made over the years as well. Many of my notes are also similar to Kleinman and Copp's (1993) discussion of notes-on-notes and Spradley's (1980) brainstorming techniques, which I used to analyze and interpret the data (see also Wilcott 1995). I have also employed memo-writing techniques similar to what Charmaz (1983) suggests in order to elaborate on ideas that have grown out of the data that I have gathered. I approached the research with working hypotheses. I then tested these hypotheses by looking for negative cases. If negative cases occurred, I modified my working hypotheses to take these instances into account. I also looked for patterns (Spradley 1980), narrative threads, tensions, and themes (within and across individuals), and compared them with personal experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 1994, Carr 1966) as I read back through my field notes.

Chapter 2: Work Statuses, Working Conditions, and What the Workers Produce

The community of masses of human beings has produced an order of life in regulated channels which connects individuals in a technically functioning organization, but not inwardly from the historicity of their souls (Jaspers 1975 p. 167).

This chapter is made up of two sections. The first examines the different work related statuses that painters occupy. The second focuses on some of the different working conditions that exist and the expensive houses that are produced, with the major emphasis being on the different levels and types of alienation and exploitation that exist for the workers included in this study.

Mead (1934) explains that business relations provide one of the easiest ways for people to associate because both parties receive benefits from the interaction. The individuals within this project are interacting within the context of business relations. The primary reason that the workers are involved in the relationships is the need for money; the primary reason that the owners are involved is the need to have work done. Business relationships are essentially *gesellschaft* and are based upon impersonal business rationalities (Tönnies 1957). This type of interaction allows for secondary relationships to develop. These types of relationships allow for more distance between individuals, which makes it easier for people to treat each other's labor as a commodity without considering other aspects of the person, thus allowing the opportunity for alienation to occur. Marx (1959) said this was one of the primary shortcomings of capitalism. This project focuses on relationships that are influenced by the rationalities of capitalism because these rationalities direct many of the economic actions in this society and is all encompassing (Weber 1946).

Work Statuses

Rationalities also provide a basis for people to discriminate between workers. For instance, it is rational for an individual to assume that a painter who paints in a neat manner is more valuable than one who always slops paint on surfaces that should not be painted. During this project, many of the workers and contractors have expressed what they consider to be the most important attributes that make up a quality professional painter. This discussion is included because it is important to have knowledge of what some of these traits are in order to know the attributes that give power to construction workers within the context of the work realm. A description of the work related statuses is provided first, followed by a discussion of some of the other qualifications that give workers power within the work realm. The ways in which workers act and interact affect what tasks they perform and what statuses they occupy within the work environment. The possession and implementation of different skills give the workers different amounts and kinds of power within the labor relationship. The more power a worker has within the work realm, the more power he has in influencing how alienated his own labor is within that context.

This study classifies painters into 5 different work related statuses—apprentices, journeymen, foremen, small contractors, and large contractors. The description of these different statuses begins with the apprentice status because it requires the fewest qualifications. It will then proceed on to higher level work related statuses by describing the additional elements one must possess in order to occupy such statuses. This discussion follows this format because status is exclusionary (Weber 1946). In order for an individual to occupy a position within a certain status group, the individual must

exhibit certain characteristics that the group deems necessary for membership. Many status distinctions lie in the attributes that the workers do *not* have.

Unskilled laborers can fill apprentice statuses because the jobs they perform are comprised of relatively simple tasks. Much of the thought for these workers is rationalized. That is, apprentices are doing the most alienated work because they are told exactly what to do. There have been a number of instances when these painters' helpers have been handed a particular grit of sandpaper and told to sand certain surfaces using a specific technique. They have also been told to set up ladders and scaffolding, scrape loose paint, caulk cracks, putty nail holes, mix paint, clean paintbrushes, and wash siding and windows in a particular way. These workers have to be able to follow somewhat simple instructions, usually within strictly defined parameters. An apprentice even has to be shown how to clean a paintbrush properly the first time he does so. Knowledge of the craft is not necessary. However, by performing these tasks the worker is afforded an opportunity to learn elements of the craft. Any worker can fill this status as long as he does not have physical limitations. This is because little skill is needed to perform the tasks effectively even though much of the work is strenuous, tiring, and dirty. These workers are the painters' helpers who do the preparation or "prep" work to make the surface ready to be painted by the professionals. This type of work is normally tedious, but requires little concentration and knowledge beyond the initial learning stages. There have been jobs where painters' helpers did this type of work the entire time that they were on the job, with no opportunity to get to do the "glory" work of actually applying the finish. In some painting crews, long apprenticeships occur until the worker can show that he has the eye necessary to be trusted to properly apply paint. For instance, I spent

years in the profession before I ever actually painted. One contractor told me that he had spent 10 years as an apprentice in Europe prior to being allowed to apply finishes. He was the extreme case within the sample. As one contractor, Hank explained, “anybody can paint. Not everybody can be a painter.” I have heard a number of variations of this quote. This is because craftsmen realize that it takes a lot of training, knowledge, and skill to be a good painter. Painters realize that the majority of the painting process is in the preparation. Hank said, “90% of painting lies in the prep work.” Other painters have claimed painting requires even higher percentages of preparation work-- 95% and 99%.

The next level is the journeyman. A journeyman performs more skilled aspects of the trade. Workers who perform these tasks require a more intricate knowledge of the craft and attention to detail. These workers are truly painters because applying paint is part of their job. The more one knows about the craft the less he has to be told what to do and the more valuable he becomes to his boss. For example, the first time one paints with a brush, he has to be shown how to hold it, how to dip it, and how to use it in different situations. He even has to be shown which type of brush is appropriate for which projects. Another example is that one should approach the project differently when he is painting two surfaces that are painted the same color than when he is “cutting in” one area into another such as windows or two surfaces that are different colors. One must know the craft well to direct one’s own attention and produce quality work. Painters who can do this are valuable to contractors because then the contractor does not have to tell his workers everything that has to be done and how to do the tasks. The worker has to know the proper procedures necessary to do a job well. On most projects,

and especially on nicer houses, painting a wall is not as simple as just putting paint on the wall.

Many journeyman painters often perform the tasks that apprentices do, plus some. They may have to move furniture or other obstacles, cover surfaces that are not being painted, remove things such as switch plates and pictures, be able to notice and patch imperfections in the surfaces they are to paint, know what particular types of products and tools to use in different conditions and on different surfaces, caulk, putty, spackle, sand, dust off, prime, sand and dust off (and possibly vacuum off or tack off) the surface again, and mix paints prior to painting the wall. To achieve higher levels of status, the worker needs to be able to do these things well. The painter also needs to learn how to perform these tasks quickly. In order to do so, it is imperative for the painter to know in which instances it is appropriate not to be as particular. The painter must also know in which order the surfaces should be painted in order to maximize efficiency. Painters must know which techniques allow them to paint faster because this makes their labor more valuable to the contractors for whom they work. Speed is important to the bosses of these workers because this allows them to make more profit.

Painting and other construction trades are crafts, and there is much variation of craftsmanship that exists across journeymen. I am only attempting to provide a picture of some of the qualifications necessary to be a painter, and to outline that it is a trade that requires a number of skills. It is important to note that journeymen painters do have varying skills because the next chapter includes a discussion of the issue of quality and how workers react to the specific conditions that they experience on the job site.

A foreman, the next higher work related status, guides the actions of others by directing their attention to the task at hand and coordinating how it is to be performed. To fulfill this job effectively, it is important for the worker to have an intricate knowledge of the trade and exhibit interpersonal skills with other workers. The foreman has to communicate with other workers and have his ways of doing things accepted by those who work under his direction. To be effective at this job, the foreman has to be able to teach others how to do things and be able to coordinate action. This is not always an easy task to accomplish with a crew of talented painters. One reason for this is because there are different ways of approaching the same task. In order to perform his job well, the foreman has to be able to control workers diplomatically without belittling their ways of doing things. This is because status distinctions across painters within a crew, as with other trades within the construction industry are often very small (Applebaum 1981), and if one painter tries to assert authority without consent from the other workers, conflicts can result. I cover the implications of these interactions in the next chapter.

Small contractors are individuals who work for themselves. For the sake of this study, I refer to them as contractors. They may employ only themselves or up to 20 workers. The successful contractors within this study have two common attributes. One is a willingness to devote a large amount of time and energy to the work process, whether he is on or off the jobsite. He may have to spend much of his time figuring estimates for jobs. The other attribute is the ability to interact professionally with individuals from within the construction work world and with individuals from outside that world as well. This is because the contractor is responsible for finding his own work rather than having someone else supply it for him. Some contractors do a lot of their business directly with

the owners of the houses. In these instances the contractor must be able to communicate effectively with the owners. He may have to spend a lot of time talking with clients and potential clients about the specifics of how the job is to be performed.

Subcontracting work from other contractors is rather common within the construction industry. For instance, a general contractor often subcontracts out specific tasks such as painting, plumbing, electrical work, and sheetrock work to contractors who specialize in these trades. There have been a number of instances where a larger painting contractor has “subbed” out certain tasks of a large job to other painting crews--such as exterior painting or trim work. Most of the time a contractor must deal directly with some owners in order to have enough work to keep him busy. None of the contractors within this study have subcontracted all of their work from other contractors.

While I classify them as holding a higher status, the standard of living for a contractor is not always higher than for an individual who works for someone else, however. Five of the workers within this study have crossed back and forth between the status of journeyman {and/or foreman) and contractor over the course of this project. All of these individuals have commented that this occurred because of how difficult it was for them to succeed as a contractor. It requires much more than just being a good painter. It also requires business skills. All of these individuals commented that they had a difficult time negotiating for new jobs. They either were unsuccessful at this process or found it to be so time consuming or stressful that they preferred to work for someone else who performed these processes. Three claimed that figuring jobs was their largest problem. Two commented that they did not want to be concerned with getting the appropriate licenses and insurance to conduct their businesses. One ran into problems

because he was caught not following OSHA regulations. I have also heard contractors complain about the increased complexity of filling out federal income tax forms when one is self-employed.

In this study, the highest status workers are the large contractors. These individuals have large businesses that employ more than 20 people. There are five such contractors who are included in this study, two are painting contractors and three are general contractors. All of these contractors concentrate on coordinating the action of other workers in order to make money for themselves. None of them work on the jobsite with their workers, except in rare instances.

There is the possibility for large contractors to make a lot of money. This is because these contractors can extract the surplus value of the labor from the large number of workers whom they employ. I discuss this process in more depth at the end of this section. Three of these large contractors have made enough money to be able to own homes that are exquisite enough to be included within this study. In comparison, only one of the smaller contractors, and none of the foremen, journeymen, or apprentices have a home that is nearly that expensive.

The workers who can communicate best with individuals from different social locations have a better chance for success because they are rewarded more by the system. When interacting with the owners of these nice houses, the contractors must focus much of their attention upon operating within a framework of symbols that allows for communication between members of two otherwise distinct social groups—that of the workers and that of the owners of the houses. They have to be able use economic metaphors because the workers and owners are interacting with one another through their

economic interests. One of the easiest ways for people to communicate is within the economic realm (Mead 1934). This is because it is inherent in the economic transaction that both parties have needs that they are attempting to meet (Mead 1934). And individuals within all status groups must deal with economic interests. The entrepreneur must be able to direct the action of other workers effectively to obtain a high quality job to satisfy the owners of the houses. These individuals typically work hard, direct the action of others, and reinvest back into the business. I talk about the issue of reinvestment in more detail in the next chapter. The ideals that drive this type of action are very similar to what Weber (1958) describes as the Protestant work ethic.

Another important variable in determining action is how the worker views the labor of other individuals. If the individual wishes to direct the action of others he is more likely to become a foreman or contractor. Foremen gain the advantage of having more prestige on the jobsite and probably higher wages as well. The contractor can make a profit off the labor of other workers. This type of action is rewarded by the capitalist system because contractors may gain profit off the surplus value that their workers produce. Surplus value comes about from the difference of what the employer pays the worker and the value of the work that the worker produces. The worker's wages are determined by the market value of his labor, not by the value of what he produces (Marx 1978; Della Fave 1991). And the relationship is one-sided, because if the worker does not make a profit for the contractor then the contractor either lowers the worker's wage or fires him. I talk more about this issue of surplus value when I discuss the issue of exploitation later in this chapter.

Some Attributes Valuable Workers Possess

As I alluded to earlier, one variable that distinguishes the contractors from other workers is the willingness to think about work much of the time. Some individuals do not mind taking their work home with them. Others try to forget about the job as soon as they leave the premises--many try to forget while they are on the job. These types of variables appear to play more of a role in determining who runs their own business and who does not, than does actual skill level of the trade in question. Some painters and workers at paint stores told me about two painting contractors who had almost no painting experience; but both had previous experience owning other businesses. While many of their more experienced painters appeared to have problems working for them (and often did not work for them for long), these contractors were still able to keep a number of less experienced painters on the payroll, and maintain businesses that catered to mostly middle class individuals. However, they were also able to acquire some jobs working for individuals who owned nicer homes as well.

There are examples where the opposite occurred as well. There are a number of painters in my sample who are excellent craftsmen yet have neither the desire to tell other workers what to do nor the desire to run their own businesses. Their time away from work is too valuable to them. They wish to have "free time." As Larry, a journeyman painter, put it, "I don't want to be thinking about the job all the time. Life's too short, I want to go fishing, too." Larry also explained that he did not enjoy telling other people what to do. It causes him too much stress. Some workers, like Larry, just do not attempt to excel at work. They do what they are told and they settle for a lower position within the wealth and status hierarchy. And this is occurring for Larry despite the fact that he is,

in my opinion, the best painter I have ever met. They do not receive all the rewards offered by the capitalist system. But, they are not concerned about making a lot of money or having a lot of prestige. This is similar to how Weber explained the Lutheran ideal; “everyone should abide by his living and let the godless run after gain” (Weber 1958 p. 83).

Many of the discussions I have had with contractors have been about what they consider to be a valuable worker. It appears that an individual’s painting skills is the most important attribute. Being able to properly “cut-in” a straight line and to be neat is extremely important. Knowing the appropriate procedures within the craft and implementing them is also an important skill. Many contractors want workers who can think for themselves about the particulars of what to do during the workday. The most valuable workers have a great knowledge of the trade. Here is how Carl, a small contractor, described what he considered to be the perfect worker. “It’s really a load off of my mind when I can just tell somebody else what needs to be done and let them worry about it. I can get on with other things myself then. For me, in my trade, most workers are a waste of time because they slow me down more than what they’re worth to me. You know. Somebody’s really got to know what they’re doing in the trade, and know the way I like to have it done. Otherwise I’ve got to keep looking over their shoulder. Might as well be doing it myself if I have to do that.”

Other than painting skills, attitude towards the work appears to be an important attribute. Contractors want workers who are able to keep their minds focused on the job and not have personal issues affect their work. One must also possess the inclination to do this type of work. The worker must be willing to focus his attention on the work at

hand in order to be able to do it effectively. Some workers can do this for many hours. Some do it as little as possible. Some workers, because they are more concerned with their personal lives than their job, cannot keep their personal lives from interfering with the work process. The inability to focus attention on the job can keep one from becoming successful or acquiring a higher status within the work realm because he is not going to be as valued a worker as is one who can focus his attention on the job.

There were a number of instances where this kept quality craftsmen from making a lot of money. Here is an incident where it hurt one particular worker directly. At the time, Howard was a 26-year-old who lived with his girlfriend and infant son. Howard had been painting since he was 18 and was a good painter. He drank a lot of alcohol when he was off the job, however. He also sometimes got in fights and was incarcerated. Sometimes he would miss days of work because he was in jail. Other days when he was at work he would often spend much of his time talking about his personal affairs. Eventually, Howard's boss decided to fire Howard after a number of incidents had occurred. As Tom, a small contractor explained, "I don't know if he [Howard] is going to be on the job when I need him or if he can keep his mind on his work when he is." Another similar instance happened with Steven. He also drank a lot of alcohol off of the job, and he often did not show up at work when he had bad hangovers. Or, when he did show up on the job when he had a hangover, he often had difficulty being able to effectively do his job because of how bad he felt. Sometimes, he openly complained about how bad he felt, and he knew that he could not pay close attention to the tasks at hand. His boss was also concerned that some mornings after nights of particularly heavy

drinking, Steven smelled liked alcohol on the job. Eventually, after a number of incidents, his boss fired him even though he was a quality painter.

It is not just alcohol that causes these types of problems however. George, a small contractor had complained a number of times that one of his apprentices, Dale, “is not very motivated.” George complained about how Dale could not be depended upon to show up to work every day. Dale claimed that he did not want to work full-time and that there were days when “more important things come up.” Dale did not go into specifics about what those more important things were. Although George was expanding his business, he did not consider giving Dale more responsibility, more money, and more prestige because as George said, “Dale has not earned that right. Dale’s smart and talented at what he does, but even when he’s on the job he doesn’t give it his full attention. He’s always off thinking about something else.”

Structural Alienation

The second issue I wish to cover in this chapter is a discussion of the working conditions and alienation. There are differing levels of alienation in the work that workers do. When I use the term alienation, I mean simply the worker’s lack of control over what is produced, how it is produced, and to whom it is distributed. Marx and Engels (1888) explain that in capitalist societies the worker becomes distanced from his work because he plays a limited role in a much larger process. In the description of worker’s roles in the earlier section, I explained that the workers who performed the simplest tasks, the apprentices, are usually told exactly what to do. The apprentice, or journeyman painter for that matter, who is sanding doors and frames with a particular grit of sandpaper in a particular manner, just as he is told, is performing alienated labor. This

is an example of rationalized action, an important aspect to consider when one is examining issues of structural alienation. Action for this type of person is driven by what Weber (1946) called purpose-rationality.² In these instances action occurs via prescribed algorithms or value systems that have been determined by other people. The alienated worker is just following orders and doing what he thinks others expect of him.

Rationalized action can dominate all of work life for some workers. Fromm (1955) has a succinct definition of an alienated person:

He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts—but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, and whom he may even worship (p. 119).

As I will discuss in much more detail in the last chapter, I found that many workers want to be cued about what to do and do not want complete freedom (see also Fromm 1955 and Lane 1962). Using Marx's structural definition of alienation, a worker can be alienated and not perceive this alienation as undesirable. As I stated in the example about Joe early in the first chapter, it is possible that if a worker is getting paid what he considers a decent wage, he is content to do exactly what he is told. Mills (1959) called this type of worker a cheerful robot. This type of action is problematic for some theorists, however. Marx (1959) believed that all normal human beings have the capacity to be more intellectually aware than what they currently are allowed. Alienating conditions are problematic because they limit this ability and keep the workers from

² Weber (1946) argued that within capitalist and socialist societies, all action would inevitably become more and more rationalized. Rationalized action is action which is determined by others. Within Weber's scheme, those in power would come to dominate all of life, the worker would become a cog within a machine where even though his labor is specialized, it is a skill that is easily acquired and routinized so as to make the worker easily replaceable. People other than the producers (workers) determine what is to be produced, how it is to be produced, and to whom it is to be distributed. The rationalities of the work process are made so as to minimize costs and maximize output.

realizing their full potential and being what Marx (1959) considers complete individuals. An idea I discuss in Chapter 3 is that the consciousness of the workers is diverted away from these problematic alienated working conditions. Instead, the workers focus their attention on other things such as being successful and attaining higher prestige and more money within their occupation, what they are doing when they are not on the job, and, in some cases, simply surviving.

Examples of Alienation

This section looks at the constraints within which the workers in my sample have operated during the labor process. It will show concrete examples of the different facets of alienation and exploitation as they occur during the work process. It is a look at what workers have control over and what workers do not have control over within the wage negotiation and labor processes. I provide descriptions of how workers are alienated from the larger economy, from what is created and to whom it is being distributed, how it is created, and how much work there is to do. This section also explores elements of exploitation that occur on the job site.

From the Larger Economy

Workers do not have control over the larger economic system. This is important to consider because there are economic vicissitudes that occur within the industry. These occur because of seasonal shifts and conditions within the larger economy. The building industry slows down in the winter. Many workers have noted that jobs are not as plentiful in the winter as they are in the summer. For one thing, it is impossible to do much exterior painting work in below freezing conditions. I have recorded 10 different instances where workers were discussing the difficulty of finding enough work in the

winter. Some have also noted being too busy in the summer. Some of these workers do not really like these fluctuations. Though, some workers have learned to structure their lives in such a way as to optimize them. For instance, I know of a few workers, mostly contractors, who focus on doing projects for themselves during slow periods. An important note that ties in with what I discuss in the next chapter is that these workers are responding to the conditions in which they find themselves rather than changing the conditions themselves.

Economy shifts also cause a change in the construction industry. During times of slow economic growth and recessions there usually is a corresponding slowdown in construction. The economy has been strong over the course of this study. This seems to have helped to keep most of the skilled workers in my sample as busy as they want to be, at least during the summer months. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to study the relative strength of the economy and the effect on the construction industry. Thus, I did not gather data in this area to be able to venture a conclusion on the relative strength of the economy and its effects on jobs, opportunities, and alienation. I do see this as an interesting topic of study in the future, however.

It is also important to understand the local labor market (Schulman and Anderson 1993). There are geographical areas that have a large number of expensive houses being built, with other nearby areas having very few. There are many areas that do not have many of these kinds of houses present. The focus of this project has been on the areas where there are a relatively large number of nice houses being built. Within these areas, the local market of available jobs for workers has been fairly strong during the years that I have been collecting data. This decade has been fairly prosperous for the wealthy

individuals in our society; thus, they have had a lot of money to spend on their luxurious houses.

From What is Created and Where it is Created

The workers normally do not have much say in what is created, because the people who have hired the workers' services determine that. This is limited to those who have the money to be able to have the job done. This is an example of alienation because most of the time what is created does not depend upon the worker; it depends upon what jobs there are to do. Only four of the workers in this study—all of whom are contractors, three of which are large contractors—have expensive houses. Most workers do not have the money or the credit necessary to be able to afford to produce an expensive house.

The most expensive house I worked on is a 9800 square foot mansion including the 2000 square foot “servant’s wing” which is located on a 300 acre, \$8 million estate. It was one of six homes owned by a childless couple. The contractor for whom I worked told me that this couple owned a similarly valued estate in Europe. One of the journeymen painters who worked on this job resided in a 10 by 40 trailer with five other people. He did not own the trailer that is located in the middle of a 40-acre trailer park, which is comprised of 300 other trailers packed closely together. While working on a 5200 square foot house that was owned by a retired couple, I worked beside a worker who was homeless at the time. Over the course of the project, he was living out of his van, staying with friends, and living in and moving between houses that he was painting for another wealthy individual.

Many of these nice houses gain their character because of the inefficient use of expensive materials. For example, many of these houses are not shaped like simple

rectangles with simple roof systems that optimize the amount of useful space with the amount of materials used. Many of the architectural designs are for aesthetic reasons rather than usefulness. There are many examples of extravagant elements within the houses included within this study. Many of the houses are extremely large, have large entrance foyers, large glassed in areas, stained-glass, expensive wood moldings, built-in bookshelves, cathedral ceilings, chandeliers, marble or expensive tile and/or exotic wood floors, marble fireplaces, expensive tile walls, special windows and hardware, copper roofs, extravagant kitchens (in one, the appliances alone cost more than \$30,000), expensive plumbing and electrical fixtures, Jacuzzis, hot tubs, and one had an indoor pool. Two had home movie theatres. Some of these houses are part of large estates that include many other buildings as well (one had stables that cost over \$80,000). They may have long paved driveways, expensive landscaping, tennis courts, scenic views, swimming pools, fountains, ponds, expensive lighting – some of the nicer houses have the lighting shine upon the house itself. Four of the communities that have houses included within this project are built around golf courses. All of these extras help to create an ambiance and feeling of leisure and well being at the home. Many of the workers view these elements as extravagant especially considering all of the elements of these houses, which include the furnishings, the land, and the area in which it is situated. As one worker stated, “These houses are more like museums than they are homes.”

For most of the workers with whom I have worked, affording this type of home is beyond their imagination. Many of them are happy just to have a roof over their head. Workers’ homes often are much simpler and constructed upon the premise of meeting the necessities and basics of life. I have documented some examples where the workers were

happy to simply have the basics met on their own homes. Examples include workers expressing their excitement over having a working toilet again, getting a coat of paint put on the walls, and having insulation installed.

Construction workers go to where the work is. These nice houses are built in the place where they are going to be occupied. Some workers may be able to do some of the work where they want; such as if they have shelves, shutters, or anything else that is movable upon which to work, but most of the work has to be done on the premises. Thus the workers do not have much choice in where they go to work. And sometimes these houses become part of the landscape that they must drive by on their way to other jobs that they work on in the future.

From Those Who Own the Houses

Workers are often alienated from what they create and from those who own the houses. In a highly stratified society such as ours, status is highly exclusionary (Weber 1946). Ownership of these houses is an excellent example because at the very least one has to have money to buy or own such a house. Most of these houses are in exclusive communities. All of the communities in this study have ordinances that need to be strictly obeyed. One cannot reside in the community unless he acts within accordance of its guidelines. Examples of these community guidelines are what style the house may be, the type of siding and color the house may be painted, what type of flowers may be in the yard, and if one can park work vehicles in the driveway.

Other aspects of the community keep the residents insulated from other members of the society. There are physical boundaries around many of these houses and communities. For example, four of the communities included in this study have

guardhouses used to prohibit most people from entering the community. This leads some workers to believe that some individuals from the higher status groups do not trust them. The guardhouse is one of the more telling places where this occurs. As one worker put it, “They don’t let you in if you don’t have a legitimate reason. They’re trying to protect themselves from people like us.”

I was involved in an incident that highlights the prohibitive nature of the guardhouses. One day when I was entering a community, I had to stop and check in with the guard. The guard was asking me questions about who I was doing work for, where I was working, and how long I was going to stay. When I commented that I was probably going to be working until after dark, she replied to me sternly, “No, you’re not! You’re not staying here after dark. You have to leave before dark. You can’t be here then.” I shook my head and said “okay.” I had never been told about that policy previous to this incident, and definitely not in the memorable tone of voice that she used. She said it in a loud voice, I guess to stress her authority, in a manner where I knew I should not question the policy to her directly at the time. This interaction made me realize that I was welcome in the community only in the capacity as a worker, and that workers are only allowed into the premises to serve as workers at certain times. Not just anyone can freely enter in and out of these communities. I do note that the guard’s actions were alienated because she was merely relaying a rule that she was told to enforce.

And my boss, a small contractor, had an interesting reaction when I relayed this incident to him. The first thing my boss said was “Man, fuck her. What’s she going to do? Throw us in jail for working too late? I don’t care what she says. They want this job done, and the only way we’re going to get it done is if we work late.” The guard’s

reaction made me nervous and unsure if we should stay too late. Though we stayed until well after dark, we ended up leaving a lot earlier than we would have on another job that did not have the deadline. As you can see, my boss did not accept the authority of the guard at face value. He felt that another rationality should take precedence in the reasoning process, mainly, the rationality that placed emphasis upon completion of the job. This was a rationality about which the owners of the house were particularly concerned. The owner stopped by the jobsite late in the afternoon to work up plans to show to the community's landscape committee. We discussed two topics with her. First, she told us what she was doing. Second, she was telling us of her concern that the entire job was not going to be done by the deadline. While she did not ask us specifically about the floors, my boss assured her that the floors were going to be completed days before the final deadline. We were in more of a pinch for time with the contractor because he needed us to be finished with the floors so that he could get other subcontractors back in the rooms to finish their work. We never talked directly to the owner about the community policy excluding construction work after dark. Though, I imagine the owner was most concerned about getting the job completed.

When I look at the interactions between the workers and the owners of the houses, it is obvious that I am looking at interactions between individuals who do not normally interact with one another except through business relationships. It is the process of building a house that is bringing these individuals together in the first place. Individuals from divergent status groups such as I describe do not normally interact with each other. Sometimes they appear to be almost totally socially isolated from one another. In these instances, I am studying the interactions between individuals from a higher stratum with

individuals from a much lower stratum. These individuals come from such different social locations that there is a large gap between the lifestyles of these individuals as well. I have seen instances where they have an incredibly difficult time communicating with one another.

One area where I see that this is extremely telling is in their attitudes towards the houses in which they are living. As I stated earlier in this section, the workers are often happy just having the basics met by their own homes. I have seen individuals from these higher status groups go into terrible fits of rage when they do not think the drapes are right or if the \$10,000 marble fireplace mantel and hearth is not quite the shade they expected.

Some owners can be really nice to work for. But they do not necessarily *have* to be. I have found that the workers who are lower status must take the certain perspectives of higher status owners as part of their jobs, whereas the owners do not have to take the attitude of the workers. I noted this when I was looking at deference patterns that occur on the job site. Many owners are considerate of the workers' perspective anyway, but they do not *have* to be considerate of it. This is evident in the fact that many of the owners are not. Workers often notice owners who hold the rationale that status and money provide a type of power and the right to exercise that power. An example would be the owner who is only concerned and focused upon what is going on in his or her own world, without taking the attitude of the workers into account. Some owners go on and on about their "problems." Sometimes the owners treat their encounters with workers through the rationality that they have bought the workers' time and the workers are there to serve them. Money provides them the right to do so--they have bought the worker's

time, not vice versa. I have seen an owner complain to a worker that he could not afford to put a copper roof on his house. The worker, a 45-year-old journeyman painter did not even own his own residence. He rented a low-income apartment. The worker was respectful to the owner while the owner was talking with him. Later, the worker told me that he thought that the owner “did not have a clue of what it’s like to live in the real world. I’m sorry, but I don’t feel one bit sorry that he can’t afford a copper roof.” When there are such divergent interests it is very difficult for these workers to sympathize with the point of view of the owners, especially when the owners do not even take the time to know the workers’ situation. And the owners often do not understand the workers’ situation. Barry, a small contractor, told me of an incident with a different owner that sheds light on how little some owners understand the financial situation of most construction workers. This owner suggested to Barry that instead of painting his own tin roof, he should buy a copper roof instead. Barry’s comment noted that it was interesting that the owner “couldn’t or didn’t do the math to realize that there was no way possible that I was going to be able to afford that type of expense for just a roof.”

Construction workers’ occupations occupy lower status levels within the larger status hierarchy (Blau and Duncan 1967). These workers think that many of the owners do not consider the workers to be as good as them. The following two incidents highlight that some of the workers perceive that they are looked down upon by the owners of these houses. These workers believed that the owners in these two incidents think more highly of their pets than they do of the workers.

Gary, a small plumbing contractor relayed an interesting incident when he was engaged in a conversation with a number of other workers. Gary told us about another

job that he worked on with another painting contractor. The painter was finishing up the touch up aspect on the rather large job (one that had lasted for many months) for a particularly exasperating client. Apparently the wife was especially difficult to work for. The painter accidentally spilled some paint on an expensive Persian rug. He told the plumber later that he yelled, "You damn dog" after he grabbed the poodle that was in the room and smeared some paint on it. When the owner came running into the room, the painter explained that her dog had knocked over his can of paint. The owner did not seem particularly upset and said that it was okay; she could just get the rug cleaned. The plumber told us that considering all of the previous incidents on the job, he figured that the owner would have had a much different attitude had the painter admitted that he had spilled the paint. He also said that the painter would not have acted in this manner had he been working for an easier client. A couple of the other workers commented that the painter had done some quick thinking and was smart to do what he did. The plumber's apprentice commented that he could tell that the owner of the house thought more of her dog than she did of the workers. While talking about this subject, Gary told us about another project where the master bedroom had a white carpet. The owners had been extremely concerned that the workers take off their shoes before walking in the room. He said the owners did not "trust" that the workers would be considerate enough to make sure that their shoes were clean. He was called back a month later to look for a leak in the master bathroom and saw that the carpet had already been "trashed" by the two large golden retrievers who were allowed to walk on the carpet with their muddy paws. He noted the irony that he was still asked to remove his shoes before walking on the carpet.

These workers also perceive that they would not be allowed into the higher status groups unless they change some of their own attributes. Many of these attributes cannot be changed unless they have a lot of money. It takes similar consumption patterns to create common experiences to provide a basis of communication with one another. And it takes money to consume what many individuals in the higher status groups consume. The houses are one example of what they consume. For instance, there is a minimum lot value of \$150,000 in one of the communities within which I have worked. There is also a minimum value that the house that is built on the lot has to cost. In this particular community it is a \$250,000 house. In one of the other communities included in this study the minimum value is a \$500,000 home. It is obvious that these prices are much more than most workers are going to be able to afford.

Rich people can afford more expensive hobbies and diversions as well. Two examples are flying private airplanes and taking expensive vacations. It takes common consumption patterns to occupy similar status situations within the society (Weber 1946). If both individuals have not engaged in similar activities all that can occur is that one of the individuals can talk *to* not *with* another individual about it. Workers often engage in less expensive diversions than do the rich individuals for whom they work. Most of the workers do not eat out at the more expensive restaurants in the area, as do some of the owners of these houses. Though, the wives of two of the workers wait tables at a couple of these restaurants. This further highlights the fact that the workers and those in their status groups mainly serve members of these higher status groups. Many of the workers talk about fixing their own cars and sometimes help each other do so. This is something that a lot of the owners of these houses do not do. In fact, there have been a couple of

instances where the workers who work on their own cars have commented that they could not work on the cars that many of the owners own because of how complicated the computer and other systems are on them.

I discuss more of the diversions in which the workers engage in the next chapter. The main point I wish to make here is that the owners of these houses rarely interact socially with the workers because they do not share common diversions and interests. There are only two types of instances where I have noted owners of these houses interacting socially with the workers. One occurred when there were parties for the workers at the end of the project. The second involved the contractors who owned nice houses themselves. There have been a couple of times where I have heard that they have played golf with a couple of the workers, and a couple of times when they have attended a party with the workers, or have thrown a party and invited some of the workers.

There have been a few owners whom the workers really respected. The main characteristic that these owners have in common with one another is that they take the time to talk with the workers about more than just the work that needs to be done. They may make an effort to get to know the workers some. They all show appreciation for the work that the workers are doing for them. These owners also acknowledge that the type of work that the workers are doing is difficult. Some have even given some of the workers bonuses. In essence, these owners think about more than their own needs and consider the perspective of the workers as well. According to most workers these types of owners are extremely rare. Workers take notice and comment about the nice owners for whom they have worked. As one worker noted, "The owner of this place is pretty

cool. He talks with you just like an ordinary guy. There ain't many of them like that, though. Hell, even his wife is stuck up."

There is also a social distance that occurs on the job, even though this is where there is the best opportunity for interactions to occur. Workers often do not communicate directly with the owners of the houses, because the workers are usually told what needs to be done by superintendents who act as liaisons between the workers and the owners of the houses. I include in the next chapter many instances of interactions between workers that occur because of decisions made by the owners of the houses. Many times the owners of the houses are not even present during discussions about how the work is to be done. A representative of the general contractor normally takes care of the direct face-to-face interactions and relays the information to the individuals who are actually doing the work. This occurs especially often on new construction jobs. In fact, I have not even seen or met the owners of the houses on most of these jobs.

From How it is Created and How Much There is to Do

There is often a hierarchical power structure on these projects. The decisions are often made by architects, bank officials, building inspectors, realtors, and owners—individuals who are often not even present on the jobsite. They often do not deliver these orders to the workers directly. Orders are usually handed down through bureaucratic channels and are given to the workers by other workers who are of close to equal status. Because of the closeness in social status between workers there is a good chance that there will be compliance. While the relationships are still *gesellschaft* in nature (Töennies 1957), they are between individuals who often interact with each other frequently. Informal social controls can play a greater role in the compliance with

prescribed action. When the person who makes the ultimate decision is not present, there is less chance for a discussion of the appropriateness of an action that is most beneficial to the individuals directly involved in the productive process.

The owners of the houses are the ultimate decision-makers when it comes to the materials that are to be used and in how they are to be applied. One owner of a house did not want to have latex paint put on the outside of his house. He insisted on oil paint. As he said, “that’s just what I’ve always used and I think it’s better.” This occurred despite the fact that the painting contractor explained that the latest research on the matter has proven that latex paints last longer especially in sunny locations. The owner’s preference is given priority over the knowledge of the professionals who really know. This is because the owners, as this contractor put it, “write the checks.” This is similar to what occurs in stores when a salesperson knows that product X is a better buy but the customer insists on product Y. It is the customer’s money. The worker is forced to apply the material, however.

Similar instances arise around stain colors on floors. On three jobs that I have been on, the customers wished to have dark stain colors applied. These darker stains sometimes take days longer to dry, depending upon atmospheric conditions. On all three of the jobs there was a time constraint also. The floor man was forced to apply the polyurethane over the stains before it was ready because of the time constraint. As Tony, a flooring contractor, explained, “the floor man often gets the pinch on the end of some jobs like that. I’ve seen those who have a say demand that the acrylic [the latex polyurethane finish coat] be put on before it was ready. Not just realtors or rental agents, either. Even the actual owner of the house! When they call me back because it’s peeling

it's on them. I told them.” Here, the contractor was forced to sacrifice quality because of decisions made by the owners and time constraints that other individuals placed on the job.

Different levels of alienation exist when it comes to how much say the workers have in how the product is created, however. This is the part of the production process where the workers have the most input and most control over alienation. There are varying degrees of control that workers exhibit, however. Apprentices usually have the least control, journeymen the next least, foremen the next, then contractors. There are varying degrees for individual workers as well, however. For example, I have experienced a wide range of alienation on different job sites. There have been times when I have walked onto a job, was handed a dusting brush, a paintbrush, paint, and told to paint a specific door, window or whatever, in a specific manner. In these instances I did not have much say in what was going to get done or how it was going to get done. One contractor even told me how to dip my brush in the paint (even though I had already been painting for over 15 years). There have been other times when I have walked onto projects with the responsibility of getting it painted, being told little more than the colors and when it was ready for me to paint. In these instances I made most of the choices on the job site of how it was going to be painted. As a foreman of a paint crew and independent contractor, I also made many of the decisions of who was going to paint what and how it was going to get painted. As a worker at this level, my labor was even less alienated because I was directing the actions of others. However the guiding rationality of the finished product was still that of the owners or architect. They were the ones who chose what was going to get painted and what color it was going to be. When I

worked on my own home my labor was not alienated because I was directing what I wanted done, how I wanted it done, and because it was getting done for me. This is also the case for the contractors who had their own homes built or remodeled for them. (Note: my home is not one of the nice homes included in this study.)

The workers are alienated from themselves as well. When they work can be another way in which they are experiencing structural alienation. When workers are performing their jobs they are selling their attention at a particular time. This is a cost that workers incur when they sell their labor power to others. Time is a finite nonrenewable resource. When one focuses his attention on what someone else wants to have done, he cannot use that particular time to focus upon his other wants and needs. Workers typically sell their time for money. This is not an exchange of similar commodities. There are many times when workers have to work on weekends or other times that are inconvenient to them. This can occur when the job needs to be completed by a particular time. Sometimes workers sacrifice time with their families because of work demands. This has occurred when there were closings for real estate transactions, when open houses were scheduled, etc. I have recorded many instances when workers have worked on weekends and all night long in order to get a job completed by deadlines that others have set. One worker told me that he considered working on a holiday, such as Christmas Eve and Christmas, with the perspective of “well, sometimes you got to put up with bullshit like that in order make money.” I have also seen the opposite of this occur, though. Sometimes contractors can determine when they are going to do a job depending upon when they can get to it. Sometimes the owners of the houses are willing to wait until it is convenient for a particular worker or contractor to do the job for them.

Workers or contractors have this type of power when there is a relatively short supply of workers with their skill. They have more market power and more say in determining when they are going to do a job.

It is also a form of alienation when workers compromise their health. There is a wide range of different types of paints that can be used by painters. Some are much less noxious and toxic than others. Sometimes workers are forced to work with the more noxious materials because of their lack of input into the discussion, or because the more noxious materials are the more appropriate ones to use. This lack of input sometimes occurs because the owners do not take the attitude of the workers into consideration. I recorded where Larry, exclaimed, “Hell, most people don’t care what I have to breathe, they ain’t here. They don’t even have a clue what we’re doing anyway.” Often nothing is said at all, though. The attitude of just grin and bear it usually comes to the fore. As Larry said, “The fumes we breathe is just part of the job.” Conditions often are not optimum. Often there is no good way to use a fan without getting dust into the finish or without having the finish “set up” too quickly³. So, a lot of times adequate ventilation is not provided. Workers often do not have the luxury of allowing the dust in the house to properly settle for a couple of days or in vacuuming it up and mopping the floors to the point where a fan could be used because of time and money constraints. So the finish gets put on with no airflow. These conditions are not considered out of the ordinary. Workers learn to get used to it, while it is a type of project most people would not even

³ Some of the finishes dry particularly slowly. Even if they are properly strained and the surface is properly prepared prior to application, dust can settle on them before they dry and make them feel rough. And when a painter is applying most finishes, he needs to maintain a “wet edge” while they are being applied so that they do not “flash.” Flashing is when there is an uneven sheen or color appearance after the finish dries. Air movement can make it difficult to maintain a wet edge especially on large surfaces.

consider doing themselves. In fact I have heard some comments made by owners, when they came on the job site, such as “how are you working in here? How do you deal with that smell? Do you do this all the time?” These comments from these owners do show that not all of the owners are inconsiderate when they are confronted with the working conditions that workers must endure. However, it does highlight that the financial aspects of capitalism are behind this type of problem. As I stated earlier, capitalist relations are typically *gesellschaft*, which allow individuals to relate to one another through secondary relationships. These types of interactions allow individuals to treat each other’s labor as a commodity. And with the specialization that occurs in work relationships, individuals may be completely unaware of the conditions within which other workers work.

Often, workers do not wear respirators when they are using extremely toxic chemicals. I noted five different workers who often do not use respirators when spray painting. I hear a common response from them when they are asked about why they are not using a respirator. It usually includes a shrug of their shoulders and a quote that reflects the attitude, “I’m going to die from something, anyway.” Or, “the thing just gets in the way of the work I’m doing.” I have worked with a respirator before. And it does get in the way, because it cuts down on visibility and is awkward at times. The machismo attitude of “I’m healthy, my body can handle it,” is in play numerous times. And this machismo attitude makes sense within the working conditions that these workers operate. The working conditions are less than optimum. They are often harsh and difficult. It takes a stronger character to operate efficiently within these conditions. If one concentrates on the negative aspects of the job, he probably will have more

difficulty doing his job than if he focuses on what he has to do. If safety devices slow down the work process, the workers are less productive. And one cannot stop every time he gets a sliver in his finger; or else work will never get done. Thus, getting the work done takes precedence over the health and comfort of the worker. I discuss the machismo attitude in more detail in the next chapter.

Construction work does take its toll on the body. I know a large number of workers in their early 30s and 40s with muscular, skeletal, and neurological problems. Bad backs, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and knees seem to be some of the most common ailments. Bursitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and arthritis are all common ailments as well. Many of the workers move into other fields or they take on more supervisory roles within the construction industry when they get older and their bodies are not as strong.

Exploitation

Next I turn to the issue of exploitation. Within the capitalist scheme, workers' labor is treated as a resource to be used to create profit for the owners of the means of production.⁴ The supply and the demand for the skill in question determine wage levels. Wages are not determined by the value added to the product by the worker. The worker is at a disadvantage in the negotiation process because he needs to sell his labor power in order to maintain his standard of living—which is often a tight struggle from paycheck to

⁴ Marx (1978) argued that the inequalities in capitalist societies are created by the exploitation of workers by capitalists. He argued that this exploitation comes about through a lopsided agreement where the propertyless worker is forced to exchange some of his time for some of the money held by capitalists. Wages are set by forces in the labor market and not by the value added to the product by the worker. Capitalists keep the surplus value—the value added to the product minus the wage paid to the worker—which the worker creates through his labor. The worker is at a disadvantage in the negotiation process because he needs to have a consistent source of income in order to provide for his own sustenance. The capitalist has an advantage in that he may hire different workers, or simply not have the work done if wages get too high. Marx argued that only collective action on the part of the workers could even begin to balance out these inequities.

paycheck (Della Fave 1991). In some instances this can be struggling to keep a roof over one's head and food on the table because wage levels can be at subsistence levels or below (Della Fave 1991). Many of the workers, especially the apprentices, make little money. One of the journeymen painters within this study made so little money that he was homeless and had to live out of his van and stay with different friends for some of the time. The worker is also at a disadvantage in the wage-negotiation process because he is competing with other workers. This is because an owner often has in mind the wage and benefit demands of other workers with similar skills. The owners of these expensive houses have a further advantage in that they do not have to have the work done if the price gets too high. They simply will not build the addition or extra bathroom, or will simply have a smaller house built.

When someone is forced, for someone else's benefit or gain, to do something that he would not normally do when given a free choice, exploitation is occurring. The workers need jobs. Exploitation comprises the surplus value that the capitalists gain from the labor output of the worker. The worker creates the profit (and in this case, a house) for the owners to enjoy. When someone has no other access to money, he has to earn money through selling his labor in order to survive. Sometimes workers do things that they otherwise would not do if they did not feel the need to have more money. Since the worker has only his labor power to make money to provide for himself, the worker is at a disadvantage in the negotiation process (Marx 1978, Weber 1946, Della Fave 1991). The owners have more power in the relationship in so far as the worker is replaceable. Only in a case of a labor shortage does the worker gain an advantage, and that is usually short-lived (Della Fave 1991).

I have found that there are examples of exploitation occurring on the job site and that workers may have little access to the type of information necessary to have an informed perspective on the overall value that their labor adds to the project. Thus, workers often will not know that exploitation is occurring at all, let alone to what extent it is occurring. For example, most workers do not know the total value of the house and how much the owner spent on labor and materials to have it built. Thus, the workers also do not know how much money the owner makes if he sells the house that he had built. It would also be difficult to document exactly what percentage each particular worker had contributed to the entire process. Because of this, I have seen few documentable examples of exploitation that are obvious to the workers. As I will point out later in my discussion of freedom, this lack of information in itself is important to note and understand.

Exploitation is occurring at two levels. Thus far, I have been discussing how it occurs with the owners of the houses themselves. It also occurs with the contractors who hire the workers. As I discussed in the section about different roles that workers perform, contractors can profit from the surplus value that the workers produce with their labor. I also talked about the difficulty that some workers had in maintaining the status of contractor because they had trouble negotiating for work and/or telling other workers what to do. This shows that there is some value in these elements of the productive process. Not everything that the contractor makes is surplus value off of the workers' labor. Marx (1978) appears to underemphasize the importance of this process while economists appear to overemphasize the importance of this process. Della Fave (1991) argues that the wage agreement is structured in such a way as to favor the capitalists. The

capitalists will not hire workers unless they can keep costs low enough to make a profit. The game is rigged to favor the capitalists because the money is coming from somewhere other than the workers.

I do have one clear example of exploitation to document. This one was possible because one worker completed all of the work. A worker, Joseph, whom I know from other jobs, told this experience to me. Joseph was living in and working on a guest cottage on a large farm. Over the course of a few years he spent much of his spare time from his full-time job fixing up the cottage while he was living in it. Joseph received \$8 an hour for his labor. When the construction work on the cottage was finished, the owner of the farm decided to sell the cottage and a few surrounding acres for about \$100,000. Joseph told me, “the way I figured, I was paid about \$15,000 for my labor. Add to that about \$20,000 for materials. All this added about \$60,000 to the value of the cottage, leaving \$25,000 profit for [the owner]. I would’ve liked to have bought the cottage before it was fixed up for \$40,000 -- that’s about what it was worth -- and done the work myself. But, you know, it wasn’t available. I asked!” Joseph also told me that the owner would not consider lowering the price for him even though he had done the work, and even though Joseph had asked a couple of times. “He [the owner] knew that some Yankee, or rich city folk, would come down here and buy it at the price he wanted to get. It took a few months but that’s exactly what happened.” Joseph felt cheated and at the same time admitted that the owner had the right to act in such a manner. “He can do whatever he wants to do with that [selling the house]. Money talks, and all he cares about is makin’ as much money as he can. That’s okay, I ain’t workin’ for him again. I

know how he is. He even charged me rent while I was living in the place!” When I last saw Joseph, he was working for a different large estate owner.

What Joseph is saying, in essence, is that the owner of the house had a legitimate right to act in the manner that he did. Joseph is not questioning the right of the owner to make money off people who work for him; but he is questioning how much money this particular owner has made at his expense. Joseph is questioning whether this particular exchange is equitable or not. He is not questioning whether the concept of equitable exchange is fair or not. I did not ask Joseph what he would have considered an equitable exchange. But, I wish that I had asked. It probably would have sparked an interesting discussion. I discuss this issue of legitimacy in much more depth in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Workers' Reactions to Alienation, Exploitation, and Relative Deprivation

This chapter focuses on what workers think about who determines what they do on the job. It also examines how they react and if the workers are conscious of their alienation. These are variables. Looking at it from the standpoint of workers' attitudes towards their jobs, the extremes range from "my job sucks, I don't get to decide what or how anything gets done," to "I'm really happy with my job. My boss pretty much lets me do what I want, when I want." First, this chapter explores what the workers think about the legitimacy of the distribution of income, wealth, and power within the society. This discussion includes how the workers compare themselves with other workers and how they compare themselves with the owners of the houses. The second section explores the issue of how workers cope with the work conditions that they experience. This section includes a discussion about how workers jockey for the limited amount of power that exists. They do this, in part, by trying to maximize their craft skills and image. This creates competition among the workers. While I discuss the issue of competition I also look at the issue of cooperation. There is also a discussion about the roles that pride and machismo play within the interaction arena among construction workers. And a discussion of consumption patterns and status groups includes what the workers focus on off of the job

The Legitimacy of the Distribution of Income and Wealth

The next step I take in this project is to describe how workers interpret and react to the conditions I have outlined in the last chapter. I document the meanings workers ascribe to their conditions. Spradley (1980) explains that this is an important aspect of this type of research. In the story about Joseph, I began the discussion with the question,

“do workers believe that the inequalities in power on the jobsite and in the status of homes in which different people live are legitimate?” This section delves much further into this question.

Many sociologists argue that workers comply within this system because of the widespread belief in the equity principle (Della Fave 1986, Sohn 1998, Ritzman and Tomaskovic-Devey 1992).⁵ The equity principle is the belief that people receive monetary rewards based upon what they contribute to the society. It also assumes that different people deserve different levels of rewards depending upon how much they contribute to the society. Della Fave’s (1986) theory argues that workers see the equity principle as legitimate. This can occur at a number of different levels, however. This study looks at how they compare themselves with those with whom they work and the owners of the houses upon which they work. As Lane (1962) points out, all that workers need to see in order to accept the legitimacy of the current structure is that certain channels of opportunity for upward mobility exist for some individuals. The workers can see this in the fact that some contractors, especially large contractors, can earn a fairly

⁵ I draw much of my theorizing from Della Fave’s (1986) discussion of the equity principle and legitimacy of this principle. The equity principle is the belief that workers in society receive wages and benefits based upon what they contribute to the society. Rewards should not be equal because different people contribute different amounts (Davis and Moore 1945). As Della Fave (1986) explains, almost everyone in this society believes that this is a legitimate way for income and wealth to be determined and distributed—it is normative. Della Fave (1986) believes that this widespread legitimacy of the equity principle has come about first because relationships at the face to face level of the workers’ lives do appear to be equitable and fair (Blau 1964). However, most people are around others of similar status as themselves (Kelley and Evans 1995) so they do not typically see the range of inequalities in personal wealth that exist. Della Fave (1986) argues that workers fill in the missing information about the larger society by assuming that the exchanges are equitable there as well. For example, workers assume that the owners of these nice houses deserve to have what they have even if they do not know how the owners made the money to be able to afford these houses in the first place. Della Fave (1986) also notes that workers may not think that the distribution of wealth is fair but have a resigned acceptance of the system. Burawoy (1978) and Della Fave (1986) say that workers who believe and act in this manner are consenting to the system.

decent living. The workers also can see that some of their children can experience upward mobility through education and entering higher status and higher paying jobs.

The construction workers I am studying are distinctive in this society because they see directly that they are producing something that they cannot own themselves but others are awarded because of access to more money. These workers see just how wide a range in living conditions there is across members of the society. When I began this study, I believed that this added perspective might make these workers more likely to question the legitimacy of inequality than other workers who do not see the range of inequalities that exist. They not only see the homes in which rich individuals live and get the opportunity to interact, whether directly or indirectly, with rich individuals, they also actually create these homes.

However, I found that most of the members of this group of workers believe that the distribution of wealth and income within our society is equitable. They appear to adhere to the dominant ideology. Kluegel and Smith (1986) make the argument that most Americans adhere to a dominant ideology. This ideology stresses the importance of the unequal distribution of wealth. The dominant ideology also includes the belief that economic outcomes are determined by individual efforts and talents and that the opportunity for economic advancement is widely available in the society (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Within the dominant ideology, the ideal of individualism makes individuals blame themselves for any shortcomings. For example, Stephen a journeyman painter stated, "I deserve the life and job I got. I didn't go to school, and I had the chance. My folks would of paid my way. It's my fault." This type of attitude occurs because the

workers do see some individuals from their status communities achieve better jobs because of education or skill level.

Following the reasoning of these arguments, and what I have seen in the field, most of these workers believe that they live and work within a fair system. The workers are not rebelling against the system. I also have found that they do not have the necessary information and abstract conceptualizations to make an informed assessment of the economic system. It appears that construction workers do not often consider abstract concepts. They operate mainly in the concrete world of experience.⁶ I say this because these workers concentrate on talking about concrete things that happen in their lives. I have heard very few conversations about abstract issues such as the larger economic system.

Thus, this project considers the question, “How do workers manage and cope within a system of unequal rewards?” Within the research sample, there has not been any oppositional behavior by workers towards the larger economic system. There has been oppositional behavior towards specific owners and bosses on the job; however, these instances do not question the legitimacy of the system as a whole, only the legitimacy of particular individuals’ placement within the hierarchy. Kluegel and Smith (1986) argue that not only is it possible for an individual to hold inconsistent beliefs about inequalities, but that many Americans do. Kluegel and Smith (1986), Lane (1962), and Parkin (1971) all say that the perceiver often does not even realize he holds, let alone can he resolve, these inconsistent beliefs. Sohn (1998) argues that workers do hold different

⁶ Marx’s (1978) aim in writing Capital was to get members of the working class to think abstractly about their work and the economy because he believed that this is the only way for anyone to fully understand the inherent problems of capitalism.

beliefs towards the legitimacy of the equity principle depending upon the level of abstraction; workers have a tendency not to question legitimacy at the abstract level but are more inclined to do so at the concrete level.

This study explores how the workers compare themselves with other workers and elements that they see on the job, as well as how the workers compare themselves with the owners of the houses and the more abstract economic conditions within the society. The owners of the houses represent a group that is outside the direct experience of the workers except in cases when they are on the job site, and even then, only when they deal with them directly.

Comparisons With Other Workers

One major factor that legitimates the unequal distribution of income is the fact that there are some workers who do not produce as much as others. In an equitable exchange, those who produce more should get paid more. Many of these less productive workers are perceived as being lazy. As one worker stated, “many of the *great American workers* are lazy as shit. And useless. They can’t putty a damn nail hole. They don’t have any skills or inclination to do good work, or even work at all for that matter.” Within this rationale, these workers at the bottom of the production scale should not be rewarded as highly as workers who do produce a lot. There have been no instances where a worker has disputed this claim. These comparisons provide the structure by which the worker can assess the value of other workers within the larger society.

Excluding the contractors, there is not much of a difference in wages between different workers, especially compared to the difference that does exist with the owners of these houses. In chapter 2, I described what skills more valuable workers possess

based upon what contractors and other workers had to say on the matter. Contractors told me that they typically paid more money to workers who produced more and were highly skilled. I also saw that workers who had more skills tended to gain higher status on the jobsite. The main skills that helped workers produce more were craft skills and the ability to focus their attention on the job. How fast one can paint also plays a large role. The main instances where this appeared especially evident were during the wage negotiation process. The wage of a new worker was often determined by comparing his skills with the skills of the other workers who were already employed by the contractor. This happened within the wage negotiation process a number of times when I was joining a crew and a number of times when other workers were joining a crew. These comparisons were continually being assessed throughout the relationships of the workers with the contractor and the other workers he had working for him.

These comparisons can create competition between workers. I have noted a number of times when workers raced one another, especially when wages and status were based upon the comparisons of skill level and speed of the workers. I was involved in some of these races, early in my painting career. They took the form of painting the surface I was working on, such as a door or window, as quickly as possible when another painter was working nearby on a similar surface. Two of the contractors I worked for used these instances to assess how fast their painters were. There does not seem to be any fixed law that governs the extent of competition that exists because it depends upon the circumstances. I say this because it is possible that this type of competition could decrease or increase as well. I have seen competition decrease for most of the higher status workers such as foremen; however, this depends upon the amount of power, status,

and money that is available. When these are scarce resources, the competition may be great. On one crew, when one possible foreman position was available, there was a lot of competition between the three workers who were competing for that position. When any one worker attempted to assert his will one or both of the other workers often challenged him. They often criticized the appropriateness of the activity he suggested, and would sometimes complain to the other workers on the crew. This occurred on the crew of a large contractor who employed about 25 workers at the time. Of these three painters, two had been in business for themselves and the third had seniority because he had worked for this particular contractor for a longer period of time. Each was trying to make an impression on the boss so that he would be the one who was promoted.

The workers also see that the workers who know the most usually are paid more than those who know less. This is especially apparent in the difference in wages between apprentices and journeymen because apprentices typically get paid less. If the worker puts his knowledge into effect by telling others what to do, he may become a foreman. And, as I said in the last chapter, workers are valued more if they do not have to be told what to do by their bosses.⁷

The fact that these workers compete with each other shows that they are at least consenting to the system of unequal rewards. They are trying to maximize the rewards that they themselves receive. These issues are particularly salient in the minds of these

⁷In retrospect, I feel that this section is weaker than what it could have been. While I talked with contractors about what attributes they rewarded their employees for, I felt uncomfortable asking specifically how much each employee was being paid because it would have emphasized my role as researcher. This made my analysis about the distribution of income about the workers incomplete and lacking. I was still able to analyze large differences in wages and status, but the finer distinctions remained outside of my focus.

workers. Even the workers who do not compete still realize what attributes are rewarded by the contractors. A number of workers who described themselves as “lazy” still accept that they are not going to make much money. They have the attitude that they are not going to work hard because they want to save their energy for when they are not on the job. As one apprentice said, “I ain’t going to bust my ass just to make a lot of money for someone else. I’ve got a job where I can take it easy. So, I’m going to. I know they ain’t going to pay me as much as someone else. I don’t care, I make enough.” Of the workers who classified themselves as lazy, some were apprentices and some were journeymen. None came from any of the higher status categories of foremen, small contractors or large contractors. Some workers considered the contractors they worked for as lazy, however.

Most contractors are seen as deserving higher economic rewards because of their investments of time and money into the business, however. Contractors are unique among workers in that they invest some of their money and resources, such as time and effort, back into the business. They may spend a lot of their money investing in tools, many of which can be quite expensive. These workers often see that they can be rewarded for such action; they will have more capital to use on future projects. For instance, a contractor may spend some of the profit he makes on his jobs to invest in buying more ladders, scaffolding, drop cloths, paintbrushes, putty knives, air compressors, spray pumps, cherry pickers or boom trucks, and work vans. These tools provide the contractor and his workers with more things to work with when on future jobs. Journeymen painters may invest in less-expensive tools, such as putty knives and paintbrushes, as well. Having a lot of tools allows the worker to complete many jobs

more effectively. These tools make the worker more valuable to other contractors and the owners of the houses.

Many small contractors tend to focus a lot of their attention upon this aspect of the work process. For instance, these workers spend much of their time thinking about what tools they consider to be the most important to purchase next. Many focus on things that are going to make them more productive within the work process. These individuals are going to consider it more important to spend money on tools rather than upon diversions and what they would consider frivolous consumer products. One small contractor, George, told me that he spends all the money he earns over seven dollars an hour, which he uses to live on, on tools which he uses to do his job better or make his job easier. For example, he says, "I look at a spray pump as an investment because it helps in getting the job done faster. Having this pump can help me be more competitive when bidding against other companies." I have had many conversations over the years with George, and the main emphasis of a many of these discussions has been about this and related subjects. This is because these are the topics that are salient in George's mind.

Depending upon the scale at which the worker plows assets back into the business, some of the workers may even build themselves up to be large contractors. Some of these contractors accumulate enough capital in order to be members of a very different social group than many of the workers at the lower end of the economic spectrum. As evidence for this, three of the large contractors and one of the small contractors own houses that are included in this study.

Comparisons With Owners

As I have noted, and will discuss in more detail later, workers make up different status groups. These status differences are not just based upon production, but are based upon consumption patterns as well. Status group differences can be even greater with other members of the society as a whole. This can be especially true about an individual who earned his money by being a banker, lawyer, accountant, doctor, inventor, or investor when compared with construction workers. I believe that, especially in instances with owners such as these, some of the workers will interpret that the economic exchanges they engage in are equitable because they still do not know the intricacies of the avenue through which the owners have amassed their wealth. Based upon their belief in the equity principle, they may abstract that the owner deserves what he has. Sohn (1998) argued that individuals tend to believe that equity exists in the abstract even more than they believe that it exists in the concrete. Since the workers typically do not know how these owners have amassed their wealth, it is an abstract concept for the workers. And also, as Della Fave (1986) explains, the worker may base his assessment of the relative worth of the owner on the owner's impressiveness at the manipulation of physical or social space.

While I have witnessed that some workers do challenge the range of inequalities that exist and say "No one deserves to have that much money," I have rarely, if ever, witnessed the validity of the equity principle itself being challenged. There do seem to be many workers who have a resigned acceptance of the unequal economic conditions that exist. They may not like it but they accept it. Burawoy (1979) and Della Fave (1986) note that when workers think and act in this manner they are still *consenting* to the

system. Later, I explore the issue of some workers being discontent at particular instances where the system does interfere with their well being in some way that they believe is unjust. An example would be an instance of a worker not getting paid what he considers his fair share. Another example is the worker who encounters problems within the healthcare system when he is ill and has no health insurance. In this case, the worker may complain about the inadequacies he has seen directly within the health care system. However, these individuals, despite their discontent, do not attempt to change the whole system.

There are a few workers who do not believe that the distribution of income and wealth are legitimate. One day Richard, a landscape worker who was just starting his own business after earning a bachelor's degree in agronomy, and I had a conversation specifically about my thesis. I told him that my thesis was about construction workers who work on expensive houses. He immediately began talking about how workers were treated by the owners of these houses and by people in power. He stated that there are two types of people "those with money and power and those without." Richard noted that he felt he could not date women from the upper socioeconomic status group, and he perceived this as social exclusion. He also relayed a story to me about working on another job where the crew and foreman were rewarded for getting a particular job done quickly. The owners gave the foreman a \$5000 bonus to distribute however he saw fit. The foreman kept \$4000 and the rest was split between the 13 workers. Richard did not think that the arrangement was fair, but the foreman had the legitimate authority to distribute the money however he saw fit. Richard also told me a story about a discussion he had with a lawyer. He said that they were sitting down having an informal discussion

when he asked the lawyer a hypothetical legal question, the lawyer said, “I get \$75 an hour” and ended the inquiry. Later on in the discussion, the lawyer asked Richard some questions regarding agronomy. Richard said, “I charge \$75 an hour for consulting work.” Richard said that the lawyer’s reaction showed that he felt that Richard was being a “smart ass.” Richard did not explain exactly what the response was. The fact that Richard would respond to the lawyer in this way shows that he does not completely accept the status distinctions that are normally accepted in society. He does know that power differentials do exist and that most individuals within the society accept them as legitimate, though.

I then asked Richard what he does to deal with his knowledge of inequality. He said, “Just grit your teeth and bear it. Everybody needs to make money.” He also told me that he has never had the opportunity to discuss these ideas with anyone else. He said that he thought that they are not acceptable for normal conversation. This is very important to note. It shows that while some workers may not believe that the system is legitimate, they believe that most other workers believe that it is legitimate. If these workers do not discuss these issues with one another they will never realize that they have common interests around which they could unite as a group. Another worker, a journeyman painter, Howard, commented during a conversation on this issue that, “someone from above can be an asshole because they’ve got money. If you don’t want to do things the way they want them done, they’ll just hire somebody else. And if I don’t act nice to them.... But I need the money. I may not find another job.” Howard’s comment sheds light on the fact that the owners of the houses, because of their power, do not have to be nice to the workers. They may take the workers’ attitude into account but

they do not *have* to. So, while certain workers may not believe that the inequalities in power are fair, they do not do anything to change the way the system operates; thus, these workers are consenting to the system. They do not even think of organizing.

Most of the workers believe that they are rewarded equitably for their labor, at least when they compare themselves with other workers. Where the workers seem to question equitable exchange the most is in the element of profit. It is not that they do not believe that profit is justified, in fact in some instances it is considered completely legitimate. This is especially the case when they think about contractors who work beside the workers. They are viewed as earning their money. Oftentimes these contractors are looked upon as friends as much as they are bosses. Workers seem to have more of a problem when someone is making money because of financial investments, where money makes money—when it is not made from working for it. Within the context of a conversation one time, I asked Glen, a journeyman carpenter, “What do you think about making whatever wage you make per hour compared to a lawyer making \$85 to \$150 per hour.” After thinking for a moment Glen replied, “If he got me out of trouble, he can be worth a lot more than that.” In short, what Glen is saying in this case is that he thinks it is fair that different labor power is worth different amounts of money. An issue that garners more debates however is the issue of profit. Glen questions whether it is fair for someone who has a lot of money to be able to make more money simply because of investments. He and two other workers who were engaged in the discussion began to comment that it was not right for people to make money just because they have money. As Glen commented and the others agreed, “It doesn’t seem fair that

we have to go out and work hard for what we got and others can just sit around and let their money earn more for them.”

A number of the jobs I have worked on were larger estates, which included working farms. Absentee owners owned four of these farms. These estates were second or third homes and the owners lived elsewhere. Three of these owners knew next to nothing about farming, and all four were using the farms as tax shelters, and hired a farm manager to handle all of the day-to-day business. These are instances that many workers consider examples of moneymaking money.

George, a small contractor, expressed his displeasure about what he considers a non-debatable fact that most people “other than those that win the lottery or something akin to that, make money with money. It fucking takes money to be able to be successful. You know I would be building houses now if I had money. I wouldn’t be working for other people. I’d be buying land, building houses on it, and selling them. I know more than most of the people I’m working for. And they’re the ones making big money off of what I do. And they don’t have to bust their asses.” All workers do not react this way though. Another worker said matter-of-factly, “It takes money to make money. You make money off of other people’s labor. Let others work for you and make money from their labor.” This worker does not personally do this and does not plan to any time in the future. He also does not ever plan on having much money. He is just trying to get by. Despite all of this, he still expresses the notion that money makes money in a matter-of-fact tone. He did not say it in the same disapproving tone that Glen and George did.

Some workers are not concerned about making a lot of money. Four of the workers told me that they used to be concerned about making a lot of money. But they decided it was not worth the hassle. They consider other things to be much more important. Now, they only do the jobs they want to do when they want to do them. Two noted that they did not have to get on the job until after noon if they did not want. One noted that he could start earlier and leave earlier if he wanted. They all noted that when they were younger and trying to make a lot of money, people were able to run their lives way too much. Hank, a small contractor in his mid 50's explained, "It just wasn't worth the stress that came along with the striving." He is an extremely devout Christian who thinks there are many things that are much more important than money, such as fellowship. Hank explained, "we run too hard in this society for money, which is not that important anyway. We need to focus on the world that Christ talked about. When we seek the kingdom of God everything in our lives works itself out. All we need to know is in the Bible. All the knowledge that is important is in the Bible."

In summary, most of the workers with whom I have worked did not say anything about the differences in wealth that exist. I did not learn exactly what many of these workers feel about the situation because they tended to discuss issues that affect them directly. The wealth of those for whom they work appears to affect these workers much less than do the specific things they encounter on the job; such as what materials they have to work with or what they have to do. It appears that most workers consider that the disparity in wealth is just a natural part of their environment that they must accept. As one journeyman landscaper explained, "it doesn't do any good to complain about it. Complaining doesn't change anything except to make me depressed. So why talk about

it?” Workers do not often question the system as a whole. As another worker said, “it’s not practical to do so. It will only take away your energy to do other things.” Some do not even like to discuss the negative aspects of their jobs because as one noted, “it just makes me pissed and there’s nothing I can do. So, why talk and think about it?” And remember that Richard noted that he does not believe that it is socially acceptable to talk about the system even though he privately questions it himself.

The more common response that I have heard from workers when they see a concrete disparity is, “it must be nice” to have the amount of money to be able to afford the consumer items that catch their eye. Because of my desire to see *what* workers talk about on the job, I only spoke directly with a few workers about the disparity in wealth that exists. In order to get a deeper understanding of their beliefs in further research projects, it probably would be more beneficial to question them directly about this issue. This questioning would afford me the information necessary to assess what information they have and do not have about the economic system and how people acquire wealth. The fact that these workers would need prompting is an important finding in itself.

How Workers Cope

This section examines how workers cope with the conditions that I have described. Przeworski (1985) argued that workers do not rebel against the economic system because they attempt to maximize their short-term goals. While the workers do not seem to make a conscious decision to cope with the conditions instead of rebelling against capitalism, many of the ways that workers cope seem to be oriented towards maximizing short-term goals. In this section I explain first that some of these workers are just trying to survive. Second, I look at how workers attempt to maximize their own

personal locations on the job. Within this discussion I examine pride, craft skills, the image that different painters portray, and the role that machismo plays in the construction work world. Finally, I summarize this section with a discussion of status groups.

As I stated earlier, even though there are alienating working conditions and exploitation occurring, most workers appear to either accept them as legitimate or simply consent to the conditions. In his study, Burawoy (1979) found that most workers get caught up in the day-to-day workings of the job. Like Burawoy (1979) and Lane (1962), I have found that the workers operate within prevailing rules and attempt to succeed within these rules. For one thing, many workers are simply trying to make a living, and some are even just trying to survive. I have already talked about the one worker who was homeless. I have also recorded instances of workers who were working just to put food on the table and to pay their bills. Six of the workers, whom I have talked with extensively, two apprentices and four journeyman, fit this definition. More of the workers whom I have not interacted with extensively may fit this description as well. I did not gather enough data on them to know for sure.

Here is an example of a worker who is just trying to survive. Greg a small painting contractor told me of a journeyman carpenter whom he was helping to find work. Greg told me that this carpenter had said that he needed work so that he could buy food for his children. His wife was going through chemotherapy for breast cancer and they were “flat broke.” Though Greg had little extra money himself, he carried a “care package” of food to the carpenter and his family and helped to find him some work. When I asked Greg how he himself was doing financially, he stated, “I don’t know if I’m making any money, but I’ve been busy as shit.” The main point I wish to make here is

that workers in these conditions simply do not have the time to devote to trying to help change the conditions of workers overall. It takes all of their effort simply to take care of themselves and their network of family and friends.

The easiest way for workers to earn money and/or maximize their rewards is to perform in a manner that the owners and contractors expect of them. Some workers attempt to maximize their location within the job by deferring to the needs of the owners and contractors. Weber (1946) and Habermas (1984) call this instrumental action. Those who are in power (and have money to spend) reward certain actions. Adherence to an instrumental rationality calls for the workers to defer to the needs of those who have money to pay them. Many of these workers are simply doing what they think is expected of them. Some of these workers try to maximize their own position and get caught up in the races that they have with other workers. Some of the workers just try to get by and are content with lesser rewards on the job. While workers within this second group do not try to maximize their position, they still must perform some of the functions that are expected of them in order to continue to have work.

Most workers do not question the status hierarchy that exists. Normally their challenges are about who occupies which positions within the hierarchy. They are not questioning the legitimacy of unequal statuses and the unequal rewards that are bestowed upon individuals who hold different statuses. Negotiation processes occur only when the statuses of the individuals are close to one another or if the person who is higher status allows the lower status individual to be heard. For example, as I stated earlier, an owner can be inconsiderate to workers if he chooses because he usually can find other workers to do the work for him. The value of money as a generalized commodity provides the

owners power to act in this manner. As I described in the exploitation section of the last chapter, the fact that they have money and the workers do not, gives the owners an advantage in the negotiation process.

Workers do try to gain some power in their interactions with the owners. The owners of the houses are the ultimate decision-makers when it comes to the materials that are going to be used and in how they are to be applied. Workers often express, amongst one another, their dissatisfaction about having to do certain activities such as applying certain materials. Sometimes this is based upon subjective standards such as color schemes. For example, on one job Carl, a flooring contractor, commented, "I can't believe they're pickling this floor." I have complained at times, when I have become particularly irritated at having to paint some beautiful wood such as cedar and redwood. To me, it is such a waste; the grains of these types of woods should not be covered by paint. In my mind, the owners should have used pine or fir in such instances. There have been a number of instances where painters expressed their opinions to one another about the colors of paint that the owners had decided to use. They say things such as, "I'd never put this in my house." This puts the worker in the quasi-powerful position of being able to judge his patron. While it does not give the worker actual power it provides him an opportunity to vent some of the frustration of not having power.

I have also seen times where workers complain to other workers about being treated as inferior by other individuals for whom they work; yet, they still consent to being treated that way when interacting directly with these individuals. One journeyman painter, Pete, told me about how "pissed off" he was at an architect for the way the architect treated him when he was working on the architect's home. He was very

adamant in his condemnation of how the architect did not take his attitude into account when he was “just doing his job.” The architect complained to Pete’s boss about Pete’s noisy work. Even though Pete was extremely upset at the architect, when the architect stopped by the jobsite we were working on later that same day, Pete walked over and shook the architect’s hand and said “Hi. How are you doing? Nice to see you again.” When I asked about it later, Pete commented that he was just “kissing his [the architect’s] ass, because that’s what I’ve got to do. I don’t want [my boss] to get pissed at me.”

Even though some of these workers may swallow their pride when they are interacting with these owners, pride is an important element in how these workers cope and respond to their conditions. It appears to me that construction workers have a tendency to say what they think to each other. And if a worker does not highly value the rationality that he should accept what he is told to do, he will, as Steven put it, “tell somebody off in a heartbeat” if that person says something that the worker does not like.

Many construction workers take pride in the position that they represent within the work realm. They take pride in their work and their contribution to what is created (Applebaum 1984, Reimer 1979). Some of these workers have a sense of pride in working on these nice jobs. I have heard a number of workers brag about working on jobs for rich and famous people. One foreman even bragged about the fact that he had set one famous person’s house on fire while burning paint off of it. This is something he probably would not have been so proud of had it been a home of a less famous person. (He had been a contractor at the time and was proud that he was even able to get the job in the first place.) Many of these workers take pride in the skills they have and need to have in order to work on such nice jobs. One small contractor often bragged to those

around him about how well he performed his trade and why he was called to work on these nice houses. Many also spend a lot of time talking about all of the nice amenities of the houses upon which they are working.

Some workers find that taking pride in what they do is important. Once when I was talking with a worker about the difference in life styles between rich individuals and poor individuals he stated, "Man, I ain't worried about what everybody else is doing. All I know is that in order to get by you just got to find something you can do. You got to have something to be good at." Having pride in the work allows these workers to focus on the fact that they can do something that a lot of other people cannot do, instead of focusing on the negative aspects of the job. In other words, they focus on the aspects of the jobs that they have control over and de-emphasize the aspects of the jobs that they do not. I will talk about this focus a little more in the discussion about machismo.

Many of these workers are also proud simply because they construct something. Many enjoy this type of work. It is satisfying to build something that did not previously exist or make a house or room look nicer by painting it. It is easy to see the difference that one's labor makes on the environment. George commented, "I love construction work. There's nothing else I would rather do. This type of work is like play to me. I only hate doing the paperwork side of my job. If I could hire someone to do that aspect of it, I would." George's attitude is not uncommon among construction workers. I have also heard workers explain that they like that they get to be outside much of the time, instead of being "cooped up" in an office. Many have the attitude that if they have to work, it might as well be something they enjoy doing, because as Steven says, "there's bullshit in every job."

Some of these workers believe that their labor is important in making this society run economically and that workers who deal with practical hands-on production are the backbone of our society. As Randy, a foreman in a large company put it, “GNP comes about from what I’m doing. Not what some candy-ass dweeb is doing in accounting, typing on his little computer.” This derogatory term for white-collar workers emphasizes that Randy, like many other construction workers, believes that white-collar workers are not “real workers” or “real men”. This shows that there are differing beliefs about the nature of the economy, because economists would argue that white-collar workers might be creating more value in the society than blue-collar workers do.

On a related note, many of these workers realize that their craft skills are as rare as they are important. Almost all painting contractors talk about how they cannot find enough good craftsmen in the trade, and that they “would be willing to pay good money” if they could find the right craftsman⁸. Apparently it is this way for many of the construction trades. Randy, who is a foreman for a large general contractor who also has a personnel department that screens job applicants complained, “sometimes they say, ‘he looked a little scruffy so I didn’t send him in.’ I said, ‘look, I don’t care what he looks like. Hell, I don’t care if he coughs up a lung. If he’s a good mechanic I want to give him a chance. Let me judge if we need him. Don’t you go and do it based on his looks.’” Randy adheres to this rationality because he knows that sometimes true craftsmen can

⁸ I realize that this may appear contrary to much of what I have said earlier about workers not getting paid well. When contractors are talking about their willingness to pay quality workers a lot of money, it is relative to what they pay their other less qualified workers. The fact that I only have one classification for journeymen painters limits the understanding of the discussion, because it encompasses such a wide range of talents. In further studies I hope to be able to distinguish between these different levels of quality in a more systematic way than just saying that I thought that the worker was an exceptionally good craftsman. I did not do so in this study because I found that it would have been too cumbersome and subjective considering the methods that I used.

look very “raggedy.” Some of the best painters I know would be considered disreputable if they were judged upon their looks and how they dress. These tradesmen are more concerned with practical matters on the job rather than presenting a particular image. As one contractor put it, “within the trade, when it comes time to get the job done, knowing how to paint and being reliable are much more important than looks.” I have also recorded similar quotes from a number of other contractors and foremen.

The criteria are different when a contractor is concerned about what his clients think. Gary, a small contractor, was particularly concerned about the image that he and his workers portrayed to his clients. I heard Gary tell his workers on a number of occasions that they ought to dress a little better and cleaner. This occurred mainly on jobs where Gary believed that the owners of the houses or the general contractors disapproved of how the workers were dressed. Gary could not care less on some of the other jobs. This, along with the fact that he openly admitted it to his other workers and me, shows that Gary was not worried about the image that his workers portrayed to him.

Sometimes conflicts can arise around this issue. There was an incident on one job where Bill, a foreman for a large painting contractor, Clyde, challenged how Clyde wanted him to dress. This incident, that on the surface may even seem trivial, sheds light on the power relationship between the owners of the houses, the contractors, and their workers. There have been a number of times when the issue of workers taking off their shirts would come up; this occurs quite often for painters in southern states where they work in 90 and 100-degree weather. When it gets hot, many workers remove their shirts to stay cool. On one job, Clyde said that even though there had been no complaints from the owners, he believed it was best if his workers did not remove their shirts. He

believed that the owners of the house did not approve. A couple of workers became vocally angry at this request. Bill was especially perturbed, “why don’t they get their asses out here in this heat, then. I’m goin’ to take my shirt off, I don’t give a shit.” Bill proceeded to do so in the hot part of the day. Clyde became aware of this the next day (because he had not been present on the job during the hot part of the day of the incident) and did not pursue the issue with Bill directly. Clyde told me that he did not think that Bill’s actions were justified, but that it was not worth firing him over. He simply had Bill work on another job. As far as I am aware, it was what Clyde perceived to be the attitude of the owners of the house that was honored. The owners, whether they cared or not, were no longer served by Bill because he refused to act in accordance with how Clyde wanted him to act on this particular job.

This story also reveals how the workers react to their conditions. Bill was drawing the line on where the interests of the owners of the house were going to take precedence over his comfort. While Bill worked in the heat, the owners of the house were either inside their air-conditioned house, or walking to or from their car, which was also air-conditioned. They were not experiencing the conditions that the workers were. Thus, in Bill’s mind the owners, and Clyde, did not have a legitimate request.

Probably the most illuminating aspect of the incident lies in the skills that Bill possesses. Bill is an exceptionally good and fast painter and able to act as a foreman on the job. Those who have a keen eye and can paint fast are highly valued. These skills brought Bill added power in the relationship between himself and Clyde. This is especially true in Bill’s case because of his exceptional talents. Clyde was also very concerned about having quality painters work for him. He spent much of his time

teaching different painting skills to all of his painters, because he said that was the only way he could get what he considered to be good painters. And this teaching of workers does not appear to be rare among contractors. The extent to which Clyde did train his painters does seem to be an exception, though. By the time Clyde has what he considers to be a good painter, he has often spent a lot of time training him. His capital investment in his workers is higher. Bill was also more valuable than most other painters were, and he would have been very hard to replace. The fact that Bill was a hard worker made him even more valuable. He had what Clyde called “a hustling type of attitude of let’s hurry up and do it.” These types of workers often become bosses for themselves. The workers who learn how to use this attitude for their own profit can make good money for themselves. In fact, Bill often did do some jobs “on the side” and eventually did go out on his own and become a contractor himself.

Since very few workers have this level of skill, workers like Bill can bargain for the best jobs. They have more market power within the relationship. They have more autonomy in their lives because they can demand more in exchange for what they produce. As Clyde said, “anybody can slap paint on a wall. Not many people are painters! Ninety-five percent of being a painter is knowing what prep work needs to be done, how to do what, and doing it. Too many people think that because they’ve painted at a couple of backyard painting parties, they know what they’re doing. I tell you, no--it takes an eye to know what to look for in different situations. And it takes talent and know-how to do them right.” As the previous incident suggests, there is a range of actions that workers accept, however. Some workers will not stand to be put down. They have a lot of pride in themselves and their work and see that they deserve a certain

level of status and power within the relationship. This is especially true for quality craftsmen who can easily find other work because there is a scarcity of other workers who possess their level of skills. A good craftsman can experience much less structural alienation than the other less skilled members of their professions. As Bill put it, “we don’t have to take as much shit, because we can call the shots more. We can work. There’s other work out there.” Their skill and knowledge provide them with market power in the economic realm. If they do not need that particular job they have negotiating power within the relationship.

Not all workers have exceptional skills and the ensuing benefits that these skills provide. Many of the workers do not have the market power to demand better working conditions. Next, I wish to discuss how most workers deal with the conditions with which they find themselves and the issue of machismo. Many workers accept that they are not going to be completely happy with their jobs. Many tend to “suck it up” and cope within the conditions they find on the job. One time, when a nineteen-year-old apprentice was discussing the downside of the job he held, another worker quickly chimed in that, “that’s just the way it is. You don’t always get good jobs. You need to work hard at what you’re doing – at least you’re making money.” This second worker, Ernestine, a black cleaning lady, was much older and poor. Ernestine noted that she had seen a number of economic shifts, and that “you often doesn’t get to do what you want to do.” This represents what I consider to be a normative stance. Workers recognize the constraints of the economic system, see how they must adapt within those constraints, and adjust their actions accordingly.

At the same time, many of these same workers also believe that the owners of the houses do not consider the needs of the workers. One account relayed to me by an older black man who was cutting grass for an owner of a house located in a high prestige subdivision sheds light on how these workers react. He was not allowed to use their bathroom. He interpreted their refusal as “they didn’t think I was good enough.” The worker completed his job and did not complain to the owners of the house or to his boss, however. He said that he “just carried on.” This represents a rather common response of “just grin and bear it,” when one is confronted with uncomfortable conditions.

Some workers carry this to the extreme of abusing their own bodies. Some may often put themselves in dangerous situations in order to earn more money or prestige within the workgroup, or simply because they believe that this is what is necessary to get the job done. Some do so knowing that they are endangering themselves. The spray painters who did not wear respirators are clear examples. An apprentice talked about the risks he took when he crawled around on roofs all day long. He commented, “Man, you got to work through the pain and take some risks. Somebody’s got to do the job and nobody’s going to give you anything for sitting on your ass.” One journeyman painter told me, “I’ve seen many pounds of dust of lead paint come off of a house without a single worker ever wearing a dust mask, let alone all the stuff that OSHA wants you to do.” Overall, painters’ attitudes towards working with dangerous materials do appear to be varying across time, however. I have not noticed much of a difference over the course of this study, but workers appear to be more health-conscious now than they were when I first started painting.

The workers typically do not complain when they are working in harsh conditions. This fact has made it somewhat difficult to gather much data on this issue. I have used some personal experiences as data for this, however. I have not had the same continuous exposure to some of the more noxious materials such as oil polyurethane, oil paints, and lacquer based paints and varnishes since I have been in graduate school.

When I work with any of these materials now, they seem to affect me more than what I had noticed when I was working with them on a more regular basis. During the course of this project, I have recorded my feelings about quite a few instances of how bad working with these materials made me feel. There were a few times when I had to work with these materials for most of the day with little ventilation. Sometimes I suffered headaches and “hangovers” for a couple of days. I know other workers must experience these same feelings, yet they often do not say much about it, other than maybe to say that they have a “poly head” or that they “really caught a buzz” after they finish working with the material. These ways of expression de-emphasize the negative effects of working with these materials. My focus on the negative aspects of working with these materials may make the effects seem worse. I think it may have been easier earlier in my painting career when I was trying to ignore them like many of these workers do.

Machismo may play a beneficial role in these instances, considering the circumstances. For instance, pain is also something to ignore. A worker told me about a time when he was doing some sheetrock work and cut himself with a utility knife. “I cut the end of my finger off one time – clear to the tip of the bone. I stopped working for about a half-hour in order to clean it and wrap it up some. And then I went back to work.” As he put it, “the job needed to be done.” It often is not practical to stop and bandage cuts as they

occur on the job. Construction workers get cut and hurt often. There have been many times that I have cut myself and simply kept on with my work. If the bleeding was bad enough I may have wrapped it in a rag or napkin and kept on working. If I got a splinter and could not pull it out easily within a minute or two, I would leave it in until a more convenient time. Even though it was sometimes painful, I was taught early on in my painting career that “real men” just ignore the pain. One spray painter I worked with often would keep a sewing needle stuck through the side of his pants so that he had easy access to it when his spray tip became clogged. One time when he was reaching down to get the needle, it got jammed into his thumb and broke. He fiddled around with it for a few minutes, saw that it was buried too deep to easily get out, and left it. A couple of years later, the needle is still in his thumb. Considering the many painful instances that occur on the jobsite, it becomes beneficial to learn to “be a man” and ignore the pain. The work gets slowed down less when one is working from this rationality.

The final issue I wish to discuss in this chapter is about status groups. As I have stated earlier, construction workers make up different statuses based upon the roles they fill on the jobsite. Status distinctions also occur based upon what they do off the job as well. The vast majority of the conversations that I have heard during my study have been based on what the workers were doing on the job and the specific things they had going on in other aspects of their lives as well. Workers talk a lot about their family and friends. They also focus a lot on diversions. Hechter (1987) argued that groups form because individuals desire to consume a common good. This is similar to Weber’s (1946) argument that status groups form around common consumption patterns. Many workers form groups around the non-job related informal interactions they have with

individuals who have similar interests as them. Some of these relations begin on the jobsite. For instance, a group of individuals who enjoy fishing may spend time fishing, talking about fishing, or engaging in other activities they enjoy. Other diversions include hobbies such as horseshoes, chess, card games, hunting, eating out, bowling, shopping, watching sports, playing golf, throwing darts, fixing cars, etc. I have also seen workers form associations based on religious beliefs and volunteer organizations such as the rescue squad and fire department. The ways that these workers act off the job creates opportunities for workers to interact and form groups. In this study, however, most of my emphasis has been on activities at the jobsite.

Since construction workers do not interact much with individuals from outside of their class, they have a tendency to compare themselves with others who are of close status with themselves. They focus on the distinctions between individuals in these groups and unite with those with whom they have closer ties. It is possible that two groups can have almost exactly the same needs and consumption patterns except for the fact that they are in conflict with one another for the same jobs. Members of one group may focus on why they think they are better than the other group. For instance, I have seen painting crews criticize the work of other painting crews whom they compete with on a regular basis. They are in competition with these other crews because they are in the same geographical area and work on the same types of jobs. Individuals from these different groups may have many of the same interests and could even possibly become friends if they associated with each other; but they are not because they do not know each other. Instead, they view each other as competitors.

It is almost paradoxical that the cooperation among a certain group of workers and the cohesion that forms around it puts them in competition with other workers of similar status. Many individuals in work crews do consider each other friends and do not compete much with each other. Instead, a lot of camaraderie can be built up when workers work together, especially when they accomplish difficult tasks together on the job. Applebaum (1981) explained that tasks on construction projects demand a lot of cooperative action and that there is often a camaraderie built up through the cooperative action that is necessary in dangerous situations. I have found this to be the case as well. For example, it often takes a number of workers to put together a scaffolding system sufficient to provide them protection while painting steep roofs. It takes intricate cooperative action to accomplish such a task. A sense of shared accomplishment can occur when workers complete difficult projects together. A camaraderie can be built up among a group of workers the more projects they complete together.

While there are instances when workers work in cooperation with one another there are other instances when they work in competition with one another. This competition is most evident in the bidding process and in the competition for different wages and status roles on the job. Often, when workers focus their attention on considering how much they deserve to earn, it is in relation to other workers in their field. I have already discussed instances where workers have competed for money, status, and prestige. The economic system itself divides the workers because it provides an opportunity structure with competition as a central tenet.

Sometimes workers also compete for space. For example, the finishing stages of the job often occur near a deadline, and a general contractor may be forced to have all of

the subcontractors on the job at the same time. This can slow down the efficiency of the production of painters and floor refinishers in particular, and all of the subcontractors in general. For example, it is hard to paint a door in a hallway when other workers are constantly walking by. Tensions can run high in these instances. I have seen fistfights almost break out a couple of times. And I have seen workers walk off of the job. Often the subcontractors are not reimbursed for this inconvenience unless they figured it into the original bid. Often, the subcontractors are forced to negotiate things like who can be where and when.

As I described earlier, the labor process is exploitative, yet the workers do not focus their attention on this dimension. When the workers are competing with one another it is benefiting the capitalists more than it is benefiting the workers. The workers are not questioning whether the market is a fair means of distributing the value of production between capitalists and laborers. I discuss this point in more detail in the conclusion. I found that most of the workers in this sample are primarily interested in, and focus their attention upon, satisfying personal needs and desires and securing material goods for themselves and their network of family and friends. These appear to be the most salient issues in their minds because these are the topics of most of their conversations. This is similar to Przeworski's (1985) argument that workers focus on maximizing short-term goals. This focus of attention further sifts the workers into different status groups within which they identify themselves. The workers do not identify along class lines; rather they identify along status lines. They identify with the

individuals with whom they have things in common.⁹ Weber (1946) and Parkin (1979) argue that workers are divided into and identify themselves with different status groups. Weber (1946) explains that a status group is a group of individuals who share common consumption patterns and interact directly with one another. It is easy for workers to communicate and interact within these groups but difficult for them to communicate and interact across groups.¹⁰ There are many different status groups within the working class. This makes it difficult for the individuals of the working class to recognize themselves as a united group.

⁹ Race is another important issue that is not discussed in this thesis. It is an extremely important element in status relations between workers that I would like to study in future projects.

¹⁰ Mead's (1934) discussion of communication and significant gestures plays a role in my theoretical approach. Mead argued that true communication could only come about if those in the discussion were able to share significant gestures. For Mead (1934), significant gestures are symbols, whether spoken or unspoken, that call out the same response in the minds of all of the individuals involved. Members of different status groups have different experiences around which to create significant gestures. When individuals, such as those from highly divergent status groups, do not have shared experiences to draw upon, they have more difficulty communicating with one another. Mead (1934) noted that one of the easiest ways for individuals to communicate is within business relations, because each party is getting something tangible out of the relationship.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In summary, this study documents specific examples of workers experiencing structural alienation and relative deprivation as part of their working conditions. This study also explains that while all workers experience structural alienation as Marx (1959) predicted, each worker experiences different amounts and types of structural alienation depending upon the work status that he occupies on the jobsite. Lower status workers experience more structural alienation than do higher status workers. But, these workers do not necessarily *feel* alienated. In fact, many want to be told what to do on the jobsite and seem willing to carry out the most routine and monotonous work as long as they get paid a wage that compares favorably with what others receive.

Most of these workers appear to consider the distribution of resources to be equitable and fair, even though they see and directly create the inequalities that exist in the society. They consider most of the inequalities in society to be legitimate. There are a few exceptions to this, however. Sometimes workers questioned the placement of particular individuals within the status hierarchy. The workers seem to accept the legitimacy of inequality in wages, and even the concept of profit; however, some do question the legitimacy of people making money simply because they have money to invest. "Making money from money" does not have the universal acceptance that inequality in wages does. However, even when the workers do not consider these inequalities as legitimate, they still at least consent to the system, i.e. they still participate in the work and refrain from any kind of active opposition.

The workers attempt to optimize their positions within the trade in which they work, and/or they focus on the easiest ways to get through the day on the job and on what captures their interests when they are off of the job. Workers who possess the most skills are able to gain more market power for themselves because their skills make them more valuable because they are harder to replace. Most workers cope within the economic system and attempt to satisfy their material needs (Della Fave 1991). They also compare themselves with others in similar social situations, and this tends to minimize the feeling of relative deprivation (Della Fave 1991). They engage in these actions rather than attempting to change the economic system and the conditions of workers as a whole.

This response is similar to that of most other workers in this society; it is not unique among the particular type of workers I have chosen to study. Previous research studies by Burawoy (1979), LeMasters (1975), Lane (1962), Applebaum (1981), and Reimer (1979) all found that their research subjects focused much of their attention on what they did at work. The culture of the workers in this study is similar to that described by Applebaum (1981), Reimer (1979), and LeMasters (1975), and the organizational structure of the workers is similar to what Reckman (1979) described in his study of carpenters. None of these researchers noted an articulate opposition to the system, let alone a revolutionary attitude among the workers. This project was looking to see if such an attitude existed in the research subjects, given the added element of seeing first hand that they are creating inequalities in prestige for the owners of the expensive houses; but this appears to have little negative affect on the attitude of these workers towards the economic system.

Marx (1959) argued that all workers operating within a capitalist system experience structural alienation, and Weber (1946) argued more broadly that this occurs anywhere purpose-rationality determines the actions of all workers. This study documents how these concepts are manifest in the everyday work world of these workers. Marx (1959) himself understood that workers, forced with alienating and exploitative conditions, might be unhappy with their lives and see their employers as their adversaries. His objective in writing The Communist Manifesto, Capital, and other works was to help workers realize the true source of their difficulty and to inspire them to overthrow the system responsible for it. He did not think that workers would develop any such understanding without the benefit of such consciousness raising.

Before a revolutionary consciousness would come about, Marx (1959) argued, the economic system would have to succumb to its own internal contradictions and collapse or fail in some way. It is obvious that since the Great Depression the economic system has not failed—in fact; it remained relatively strong throughout the timeframe of this study. The recent large drop in the value of the stock market has happened so near to the end of this project that it has not had a noticeable affect on the workers in this sample as of yet. In fact, even economists are unsure of what it portends, even in the short run. Considering the fact that many of these rich owners are heavily invested in the stock market, it is reasonable to assume that they may not have as much money to build as much as they have in the recent past. This, in turn, would effect workers' livelihoods.

Weber's (1946) discussion about status also provides important insight. The workers in this study focus on the salient issue of status similarities and differences. Status distinctions are easier to recognize than are the differences in the more abstract

notion of class. The skills that are necessary to complete the jobs these workers are on, vary across different work statuses. Succeeding within these statuses can provide autonomy and market power on the job for an individual, and the worker can feel relatively secure that he can maintain a certain income and status level in other areas of his life as well. In other words, autonomy occurs when an individual's work provides him the financial means to secure living conditions within which he is content. I have seen, as did Lane (1962), that workers typically refer to this condition as freedom. The workers focus their attention upon meeting the requirements to fulfill the certain statuses they wish to occupy, not upon analyzing the economic system and choosing between alternative ways of distributing wealth. Many workers call themselves free when they have provided for many of their wants and needs. When Steven did a little jig at the end of a particularly difficult week at work and sang, "I'm free. I'm free. Now I can go fishin' this weekend. Nothin' to bother me," he was really referring to autonomy. In a moment I will describe in more detail why freedom is distinct from autonomy. One reason why I think this study is important is because I believe that the workers' focus of attention upon succeeding within the work realm contributes unwittingly to the reproduction of inequality. By working within the parameters they are given, their actions legitimate the economic system that is built upon the premise of inequality (Burawoy 1979, Willis 1981, Della Fave 1986).

Throughout this thesis I have been discussing how most of the workers spend much of their time operating in the economic realm. Most of the time they are interacting with each other for the purpose of taking care of economic interests, not because they genuinely desire to engage in these interactions, but because they must. The result is that

they are alienated from themselves, their work, and others. The dominance of the economic system has made most people focus on achieving autonomy rather than attempting to improve or challenge the basic premises of the system. And most people are not striving for freedom. The workers in my study are not unique. I expect that most workers are behaving this way. As Vidich and Bensman (1960) explain, most workers choose the part of the economic system in the larger society where they, personally, believe that they can most effectively operate. They are striving for autonomy. But this autonomy represents power within a ring of opportunity.

Next, I wish to discuss the issue of freedom in further detail. C. Wright Mills (1959) has a succinct definition for this complicated concept. “Freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them—and then the opportunity to choose.”¹¹ There is no credible source of alternative information available to workers that would lend them the opportunity to consider alternative ways of distributing income and wealth (Herman and Chomsky 1988, see also Simon’s (1982) discussion of bounded rationality), and there is little in the culture to motivate workers to scrutinize the assumptions that they hold about the

¹¹ In this sense, freedom is a highly idealist and rationalist concept. Marx (1959) argued that if the worker’s “own activity is to him an unfree activity, then he is treating it as activity performed in this service, under the dominion, the coercion and the yoke of another man” (p. 74). This is a description of rationalized action because it is action that is determined by someone else (Weber 1946). Mills’ (1959) definition of freedom emphasizes the importance of critical thought to achieve freedom. One has to be able to think beyond the constraints of one idea or way of doing things and use reason, the contemplation of many rationales, to achieve freedom (Habermas 1984). Hegemony is occurring when there are not many alternatives to choose between (Gramsci 1971, Mann 1981). Mills (1959) reminds us that the ability to choose is an important element of freedom as well. Most of the workers in my study have commented that they are working to make money. These workers are following the rationale of earning money by selling their labor power and do not believe that they have any choice in the matter.

inequalities that capitalism creates (Della Fave 1991, Mann 1981, Parkin 1972). This seems true for these non-unionized painters. And as Mills (1959) says, sociological imagination and critical thought—things that are essential for the possibility of freedom—are not taught enough (see also Jenks 1979, Hurn 1993).

In this study, I have found that the workers themselves do not challenge the legitimacy of the system itself. Two of the main points that I make are similar to the two obstacles to a change in economic relations that Mann (1981) saw. The first is that there is a divided working class. Workers focus on the differences and competition among themselves instead of the things they have in common that would produce a united working class. Second, the idea of the democratization of the economy is something that must be learned and not something that spontaneously occurs (Mann 1981). When workers operate within the confines of a capitalist system, because of the hegemonic effect of its influences, they cannot be free as a “class for itself.”¹² Their consciousness is diverted, and they have little chance for freedom.

There are some workers who are critical of the system, yet still operate within its matrix. As Della Fave (1991) notes, even though the workers do not have all of the information necessary, they still have to decide on how to live their lives. Here is an example of a quote from a worker who intellectually holds a critical viewpoint of, yet lives his life within, the capitalist system:

You know, this whole system maybe ain't what it could be, but it's all we got. People think the way they think. As long as they keep on striving to get “better off” they ain't gonna notice nothin' that's goin' on with

¹² Marx (1978) explained that a “class in itself” is one where the individuals of the class merely act within the confines of their situation and may act in ways that run contrary to their interests. Individuals within a “class for itself” realize what they have in common, recognize themselves as united, and act from these interests.

anybody else 'cept in if they compare fav'ribly. Every worker would have to stop workin' at the same time—every worker in the world. I don't know about you, but I don't trust that they're all gonna do that. There's too many people who are too hungry to stop. They can't stop workin'. So we make do with the system we got. I try to help out those close to me. I'm not sayin' I don't care about other people. I just can't help them. I just don't know them.

It is difficult to have a critique of a system without having the information necessary to assess alternatives adequately, or without an organization through which workers could coordinate their activities on a large scale. Though this worker has the sense that something is wrong with the economic system, he cannot conceptualize a way to address the problem on a systemic level. The context that he is more concerned about operating within is that of the immediate concrete world of experience. In other words, he has adapted by addressing and taking care of more tangible needs of individuals rather than the requirements of some abstract notion of justice. Though in many instances these are very commendable aims (such as if his helping to feed people in need), by acting only on these aims he and the rest of his fellow workers remain bounded within the parameters of experience that those in power determine.

Small (1905) argued that cultures need to be assessed based upon how civilized they are. For Small (1905), less civilized cultures have forms of domination and exploitation that favor those in power, and more civilized cultures recognize and meet the needs of all of the individuals within the group or society. In a civilized society, everyone—not just those who are rich and powerful--has an equal chance to attain higher goals (Small 1905 p. 354). When one is struggling just to survive, higher goals are often given up in order to focus on day-to-day survival techniques. This type of theorizing reemphasizes the relation between the empirical and moral aspects of the world much as the classic Greeks did (McCarthy 1978). Though modern Western science has attempted

to separate these two aspects, many philosophers of science have argued that all conceptualizations of the world are based upon assumptions that are bound up by values (Feyerabend 1993, Harding 1991).¹³ For instance, Western societies justify the pursuit of science through the belief that greater knowledge of how the world works will help better the human condition.

From this perspective, I think it is important to see both why freedom, as defined by Mills (1959), is relatively rare and how it might become more common. Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action offers a promising avenue in this direction. Although in Small's (1905) terms our culture may be more civilized than most, the findings of this study suggest that workers' lives are greatly constrained by relations of power and domination, thus limiting the workers' ability to experience freedom.

Weber (1946) argued that Western societies were heading towards a system where individuals become more and more driven by purpose-rationality. Habermas' (1984) discussion of communicative action explores the possibility of societies and individuals proceeding beyond Weber's (1946) prediction. I consider this an important pursuit because action driven by purpose-rationality indicates a loss of freedom since the dictates of purpose-rationality favor the accumulation of wealth—and efficiency—at any human cost. Habermas (1984) sees that impersonal economic forces create entrapping lifestyles for individuals. Communicative action is freeing because it occurs when everyone's perspective can be taken into account during the decision making process.

¹³ It also is not beneficial to attempt to separate the empirical from the moral aspect of the world. As Feyerabend (1993) argues, scientific knowledge should not be limited by what those in power deem to be legitimate; scientific research also needs to include the perspectives of oppressed groups (Harding 1991, Smith 1990, Mills 1959).

This would constitute an extension of the democratic process over the economy itself.

I have found, within this study, that there are many elements in these workers' lives that are influenced by forms of domination and power. In further studies I would like to implement Habermas' (1985) discussion of communicative action to study interactions between workers, contractors, and the owners of these nice houses. I believe that this type of study would provide a glimpse of how forms of domination occur at the interactional level. Habermas focuses much of his attention on the inclusion (or exclusion) of discussions about the legitimacy of the validity claims that different actors engage in when they are deciding on which actions to take. I believe that this current study has helped me lay the groundwork for which actions are alienated and exploitative, but I would like to find out in more detail how and why they occur. Habermas explains that freedom may come about only when individuals critically examine the legitimacy of the values that drive their actions. Since I argue that most workers do not do this, I would like to look more deeply into and examine which rationalities are accepted and used to determine action and exactly how and why. The most enlightening aspect of such a study would be learning which rationalities workers assume to be valid and which ones are discussed or debated.

At the conclusion of this study, it appears, not surprisingly, that those who have more money have more power to determine which rationalities will be followed. But, as I explained earlier, many workers are not driven to make a lot of money; thus, they are less influenced by its power. I am interested in studying the nuances and the implications of the range of workers' behaviors. Perhaps Habermas' (1985) conceptualizations can help to delineate which rationalities, attitudes, and behaviors provide more opportunity

for freedom and which ones contribute to the reproduction of forms of domination and inequality.

REFERENCES

- Ambercrombie, Nicholas and Bryan Turner. 1982. "The Dominant Ideology Thesis." in Anthony Giddens and David Held Classes, Power, Conflict. University of California Press.
- Anderson, Elijah. 1992. Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Applebaum, Herbert ed. 1984. Work in Market and Industrial Societies. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- _____. 1981. Royal Blue: The Culture of Construction Workers. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Blau, Peter. 1964. Exchange and Power in Social Life. New York: John Wiley.
- Blau, Peter and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. The American Occupational Structure. New York: The Free Press.
- Blauner, Robert. 1964. Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis. 1976. Schooling in Capitalist America. New York: Basic Books.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1979. Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burawoy, Michael et al. 1991. Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in Modern Metropolis. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burgess, Ernest W. and Robert E. Park. 1967. The City. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 1983. "The Grounded Theory Method: An Explication and Interpretation." Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings. Robert M. Emerson ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Clandinin, D. Jean and F. Michael Connelly. 1994. "Personal Experience Methods." Handbook of Qualitative Research. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln editors. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

- Clegg, Stewart. 1975. Power, Rule, and Domination: A Critical and Empirical Understanding of Power in Sociological Theory and Organizational Life. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Cohen, Albert K. 1955. Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Cohen, Albert K and Harold M. Hodges. 1972. "Characteristics of the Lower-Blue-Collar Class." in Status Communities in Modern Society. Holger R. Stub ed. pp. 161-190.
- Collins, Randall and Michael Makowsky. 1984. The Discovery of Society. Third ed. New York: Random House, Inc.
- Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." American Sociological Review. 10: 242-249.
- Della Fave, L. Richard. 1980. "The Meek Shall Not Inherit the Earth: Self-evaluation and the Legitimacy of Stratification." American Sociological Review. pp. 955-71.
- _____. 1986. "Toward the Explication of the Legitimation Process." Social Forces. pp. 476-500.
- _____. 1991. "Not So Free to Choose: Unequal Exchange and Normative Support for Inequality." Presented at the Third International Justice Conference, Utrecht, The Netherlands. Unpublished paper.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1953. The Division of Labor in Society. New York: Free Press.
- Edgerton, Robert B. and L. L. Langness. 1974. Methods and Style in the Study of Culture. San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, Inc.
- Emerson, Robert M, ed. 1983. Contemporary Field Research. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Fantasia, Rick. 1988. Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Farkas, George, Paula England, and Margaret Barton. 1988. "Structural Effects on Wages: Sociological and Economic Views." Industries, Firms, and Jobs. George Farkas and Paula England eds. New York: Plenum. pp. 93-112.
- Feyerabend, Paul. 1993. Against Method. New York: Verso.

- Fielding, Nigel G. and Jane L. Fielding. 1986. Linking Data. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Foster, Howard G. 1974. Manpower in Homebuilding: A Preliminary Analysis. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fromm, Erich. 1965. Escape From Freedom. New York: Avon Books.
- Gans, Herbert. 1982. The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans. New York: The Free Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Glaser, Barney J. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. Behavior in Public Places. New York: The Free Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. Prison Notebooks. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith eds. New York: International Publishers.
- Gries, John M., James S. Taylor, et al. 1924. Seasonal Operation in the Construction Industries: The Facts and Remedies. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1984. The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Harding, Sandra. 1993. Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Hechter, Michael. 1987. Principles of Group Solidarity. Berkeley: The University of California Press.
- Henderson, Charles Richmond. 1902. Social Settlements. New York: Lenthilhan and Company.
- _____. 1904. The Social Spirit in America. Chicago: Scott Foresman, and Company.
- Herman, Edward and Noam Chomsky. 1988. Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon.
- Hurn, Christopher J. 1993. The Limits and Possibilities of Schooling: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- Jaspers, Karl. 1975. "On My Philosophy." in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre. Walter Kaufmann ed. pp. 158-232.
- Jencks, Christopher. 1979. Who Gets Ahead? New York: Basic Books.
- Juravich, Tom. 1985. Chaos on the Shop Floor: The Worker's View of Quality, Productivity, and Management. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kelley, Jonathon and M. D. R. Evans. 1995. "Class and Class Conflict in Six Western Nations." American Sociological Review. pp. 157-77.
- Kleinman, Sherryl and Marth A. Copp. 1993. Emotions and Fieldwork. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Kluegel, James R. and Eliot R. Smith. 1986. Beliefs About Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Kuhn, Thomas. 1970. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kunda, Gideon. 1992. Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-tech Corporation. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. 1980. Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lane, Robert E. 1962. Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does. New York: The Free Press.
- LeMasters, E. E. 1975. Blue-Collar Aristocrats: Life-Styles at a Working-Class Tavern. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Liebow, Elliott. 1967. Tally's Corner. Boston: Little, Brown and Co
- MacCleod, Jay. 1987. Ain't No Makin' It: Leveled Aspirations in a Low-Income Neighborhood. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Mann, Michael. 1981. Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1959. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Martin Mulligan, translator. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1888/1967. The Communist Manifesto. New York: Penguin Books.

- _____. 1978. The Marx-Engels Reader. Robert C. Tucker ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- McCarthy, Thomas. 1978. The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1934. Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist. Charles W. Morris ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merton, Robert K. 1968. Social Theory and Social Structure. New York: Free Press.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1959. The Sociological Imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, Daniel Quinn. 1972. Industrial Relations and Manpower in Construction. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Nichols, Theo and Huy Beynon. 1977. Living With Capitalism: Class Relations and the Modern Factory. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Oakley, A. 1981. "Interviewing Women: A Contradictions in Terms." In Doing Feminist Research. H. Roberts ed. (Pp. 30-61). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Parkin, Frank. 1979. Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. 1990. Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- Paules, Greta Foff. 1991. Dishing It Out: Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Piore, Michael. 1994. "The Dual Labor Market: Theory and Implications." Social Stratification pp. 359-62.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1985. Capitalism and Social Democracy. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Reckman, Bob. 1979. "Carpentry: The Craft and Trade." In Case Studies on the Labor Process. Andrew Zimolst, ed. New York: Monthly Review Press. Pp. 73-102.
- Reimer, Jeffrey W. 1979. Hard Hats: The Work World of Construction Workers. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

- Ritzman, Rosemary and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey. 1992. "Life Chances and Support for Equality and Equity as Normative and Counternormative Distribution Rules." Social Forces.
- Roemer, John. 1982. A General Theory of Exploitation and Class. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schulman, Michael and Cynthia Anderson. 1993. "Political Economy and Local Labor Markets: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis." pp. 33-48. in Joachim Singelmann and Forrest A. Deseran eds. Inequalities in Labor Market Areas. Westview Press.
- Schwalbe, Michael. 1986. The Psychosocial Consequences of Natural and Alienated Labor. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sennett, Richard and Jonathon Cobb. 1973. The Hidden Injuries of Class. New York: Vintage Books.
- Simon, Herbert. 1982. Models of Bounded Rationality. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Small, Albion. 1905. General Sociology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Small, Albion and George E. Vincent. 1894. An Introduction to the Study of Society. New York: American Book Co.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1990. The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Sohn, Tae-Hong. 1996. Rethinking Legitimacy: The Variability Model of Legitimacy and Comparative Analyses of the Equity Principle and Functionalist Ideology. Unpublished dissertation. Raleigh: North Carolina State University.
- Spencer, Charles. 1977. Blue Collar: An Internal Examination of the Workplace. Chicago: Vanguard Books.
- Spradley, James P. 1980. Participant Observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stake, Robert E. 1981. "Case Study Methodology: An Epistemological Advocacy." Case Study Methodology in Educational Evaluation. W. W. Welch ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Research and Evaluation Center. Pp. 31-40.
- Sykes, Gresham. 1958. The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Töennies, Ferdinand. 1957. Community and Society. Charles Loomis translator. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Trice, Harrison M. 1993. Occupational Subcultures in the Workplace. Ithaca, New York: ILR Press.
- Vidich, Arthur and Joseph Bensman. 1960. Small Town in Mass Society. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.
- Weber, Max. 1946. From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills eds. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1958. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Talcott Parsons trans. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Williams, Melvin D. 1992. The Human Dilemma: A Decade Later in Belmar. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Willis, Paul. 1981. Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wolcott, Harry F. 1995. The Art of Fieldwork. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press.
- Znaniecki, Florian. 1934. The Method of Sociology. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc.