BRINGING THE FAMILY TO WORK:
WOMEN'S CULTURE ON THE SHOP FLOOR

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In the past several years, feminist anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians have produced a new literature on women's work outside the home. Inspired by Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*,[1] many of us focused our attention on the labor process, examining the ways in which women workers responded to the demands of a particular production process, the process of deskilling, or a particular pay system in a given set of blue-collar or white-collar jobs.[2] Attempting to overcome the emphasis on management's use of technology to degrade and deskill work, which in Braverman's book seems to overwhelm an essentially passive work force, we isolated strategies of resistance and ways in which women workers actively dealt with their work situation.

This, in turn, led to the full examination of informal relationships on the shop floor, in the office, department store, or hospital, and to an analysis of women's work culture.[3] In some respects this was a rediscovery of the informal work group first studied by Elton Mayo and his colleagues in a series of experiments at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in the 1930s.[4] But rather than viewing management/worker conflict as a result of miscommunication to be solved by more attention to universal aspects of human relations, the new feminist research has paid greater attention to the way in which work groups and management/worker relationships are shaped by the historical development of an individual industry or occupation and by the ways in which management policy has responded to a particular phase in the development of capitalism.

Although the Hawthorne studies and many subsequent analyses of the informal work group (such as those by Donald Roy and Michael Buroway)[5] focused almost completely on the shop floor

and basically ignored the gender of the workers being studied, the fact that the workers we were studying were also women became something that demanded attention and analysis. Perhaps because our culture assumes that women are primarily daughters, wives, and mothers, researchers could not discount the impact of these family roles on women employed outside the home. Women's employment seems inextricably linked to their position in the family,[6] and employment may not have had a liberating effect on women because of these family roles. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, for example, argues that workroom socializing (such as the sharing of oranges and chocolates in a turn-of-the-century garment shop) underwrote a romanticized dream that women would marry and leave the paid labor force.[7] Sallie Westwood makes a slightly different point in her study of a contemporary apparel plant in England.[8] She also examines women's informal socializing and describes the rituals surrounding weddings and engagements that take place at work or among work friends after hours. Westwood argues that women's work culture offers a context of resistance to management, but does so through celebrations that confirm a traditional vision of femininity (which is essentially patriarchal and assumes the subordination of women). Both these authors take the position that the informal work group was essentially conservative, fostering either complacency at work or traditional family and gender roles. On the other hand, Karen Sacks has argued that it is precisely a set of values and social connections forged in the working-class family that made it possible for a group of female black hospital workers to stage an effective walkout and begin a union drive in a southern city.[9]

My own research follows very much in the tradition of Sacks's analysis, emphasizing the nature of female resistance at work. In previous papers, I have focused primarily on women's strategies on the shop floor which relate most closely to the labor process itself, to the piece rate system of pay and to management's control of the work situation. In this article, however, I will explore a set of strategies that grow out of women's roles as wives and mothers and link work and family. I talk about these strategies as "bringing the family to work" or "humanizing the workplace." These are shorthand phrases for two processes: the first is the organization of informal activities often focusing on the female life cycle (such as birthday celebrations, baby and wedding showers, potlucks and

retirement parties); and the second is the use of workers' common identities as women, wives, and mothers in interworker communication. Through both processes, women workers make friends of strangers and bridge cultural and age divisions within the work force.

Although Sacks's research highlights an example of family values and informal socializing feeding into resistance, I would argue that this does not always happen. Whether these strategies of "bringing the family to work" become part of a strong work culture "in resistance" depends on the entire work context. This includes workers' strategies generated directly out of the labor process or the system of pay on the one hand, and management's overall counterstrategies on the other. Where management is concerned to build a loyal work force, keep a union from gaining a foothold in a plant, or even co-opt the nature of the informal work group itself, women's informal activities may suit management's purposes rather than those of workers. In both cases (a resistant and a procompany work culture), these strategies building on women's family and gender roles provide some of the "glue" that holds participants in a work culture together. Because women workers are hired as individuals without regard to their age, marital status, and personal connection to other workers, women must build relationships between strangers into relations between coworkers who have common interests. Depending on the overall work context, these relationships can become part of an overall effort to counter a set of management policies, or they may feed into management's efforts to dampen down worker/management conflict.

THE COMPLEX NATURE OF WORK CULTURE

In this article, I take the position, following the work of Nina Shapiro-Perl,[10] that although a work situation may generate resistance, it may also generate adaptation and consent. The formation of a work culture involves a complex set of relationships between cultural meanings or ideology on the one hand, and behavioral strategies or practice on the other. It also involves both management policies and worker responses to those tactics and strategies.

Susan P. Benson and Barbara Melosh have outlined these dual characteristics of work culture as follows. According to Benson and Melosh, work culture includes

the ideology and practice with which workers stake out a relatively autonomous sphere of action on the job. . . . A realm of informal, customary values and rules [work culture] mediates the formal authority structure of work places and distances workers from its impact. Work culture is created as workers confront the limitations and exploit the possibilities of their jobs. It is transmitted and enforced by oral tradition and social sanctions with the work group. Generated partly in response to specific working conditions, work culture includes both adaptation to and resistance to these structural constraints.[11]

In my own work, I have focused on "strategies" as a term to characterize the way in which women work at both an ideological and a behavioral level to actively cope with management policy.[12] In some strategies, women act to redefine management's view of a situation, primarily by manipulating cultural meanings, as for example, countering a floor lady's explanation of how easy it is to "make money" on the piece rate system. Other strategies, although communicated through a system of shared meanings, involve behavioral tactics such as keeping careful track of one's own output as a way of dealing with the piece rate system and management's manipulation of it. Usually, however, strategies involve an interaction between cultural meanings and behavior. For example, a system of informal work rules that helps workers to share work equally and dampen down competitiveness involves both a set of norms and purposive behavior actively sanctioning those who disregard the norms, bringing them into line. In outlining strategies that bring the family to work, I will examine behavior as well as cultural meanings. Both are important in creating ties between workers otherwise divided by age, marital status, and ethnicity.

Work culture is only relatively autonomous; it emerges in relation to management strategies. Management has a set of goals radically different from those of workers: increases in output for the same wage, reduction of turnover, the decrease of conflict between management and workers, or the creation of a work force loyal to the company. How plant managers, supervisors, floor ladies, and personnel managers implement these goals through a series of strategies depends on the industry, the production process, and the economic climate. However, management will probably manipulate cultural meanings or replace a work force's set of

meanings with an alternative set. Or management may institute its own set of activities, particularly in the informal sphere, thus replacing the activities spontaneously organized by women. The relationship between worker strategies and management tactics can be seen in two contexts – one in a New England apparel plant studied in 1977 and the other in a series of apparel and electronics plants studied in the Southwest in 1982-83.

The data for the first part of this article are derived from my experiences as a worker in an apparel plant in New England in 1977 when I was engaged in a research project on "Women, Work, and Ethnicity in an Urban Setting."[13] During a period of five months (interrupted by a work stint in the plant's warehouse and by a two-month layoff), I was trained to "set sleeves" on little girls' dresses and toddlers' T-shirts. As a participant-observer, I was able to observe women's strategies for dealing with the piece rate system of pay, was socialized into a worker (rather than management) view of the production process, participated in the enforcement of informal work rules, and was a part of several informal work groups. In Rhode Island, most women worked in ethnically mixed, linguistically segregated workplaces in declining industries often located in old textile mills. In the unionized plant where I worked, "bringing the family to work" took place through informal friendship networks, union-sponsored activities (like the Christmas party and a weekly lottery), and management-condoned events (that is, those organized through the department with the help of the floor lady). The major function of these activities was to build ties between workers of diverse backgrounds.

In the Southwest, we have been studying women workers in newly built electronics and apparel plants, in a context where industry is relatively new to the economy and where wages for women are often higher than those available in the service sector where many working-class women are employed.[14] We gained our information through formal interviews with plant managers and women workers. Thus we did not participate in women's work culture, but only asked about it during interviews held in workers' homes. Although we were never able to observe birthday parties, showers, potlucks, or the exchange of pictures, we ascertained when such events were held and who organized them. They seemed to function, like such events in Rhode Island, to bring women of different backgrounds together. However, in several

cases, these activities seemed orchestrated by the management for the purpose of building a loyal work force.

Due to the different natures of each project (one based on participant observation and the other on in-depth interviews), the data have led me to emphasize two different but related points. In Rhode Island, through working "on the shop floor," I was able to actually see women's strategies of resistance in action and to attend the occasions where women's life cycle events helped women to cross ethnic boundaries, particularly between Portuguese and non-Portuguese women of French Canadian, Polish, Italian, and other backgrounds. Elsewhere, I have published a fuller account of how strategies of "bringing the family to work" fit into an overall culture of resistance. Although I and other members of our research group in the Southwest were able to visit factories and get a "feel for the atmosphere of a particular plant," our data were gathered through in-depth interviews with working mothers. I have been placed in the position of inferring that much of the same "bridging" takes place through potlucks, birthdays, and showers that unite Hispanic, Anglo, Southeast Asian, and black women. But what is so striking about the data from the Southwest is how women's work culture is being shaped by management strategies, particularly in the context of an anti-union climate in two of the plants we studied. Further discussion of the New England and southwestern data will clarify the relationship between resistance and co-optation in these two contexts.

CELEBRATIONS ON THE SHOP FLOOR IN RHODE ISLAND

The Rhode Island apparel plant where I worked in 1977 had been established in the 1930s by a manufacturer of children's wear who moved his production facilities from New York to New England to take advantage of the work force available from widespread mill closings in the textile industry. The plant was unionized in the 1950s and taken over by a large conglomerate in the 1970s. As the older women workers retired, rather than moving production facilities South, the management hired recent Portuguese and Latin American immigrants. The personnel manager described the sewing departments as "predominantly Portuguese." "They are the

backbone of our sewing operation," he explained. In this plant, as in virtually all apparel plants, the work force was 80 percent female, and workers were paid by the piece. Beginning workers made the minimum wage of $2.35 an hour in 1977, those working at 100 percent efficiency made the base rate of $3.31 an hour, and experienced workers may have made as much as $4.00 an hour. Strategies for coping with the piece rate system and management's manipulation of it were an important part of women's work culture.

In addition to the Portuguese workers mentioned by the personnel manager, there were a number of women of other ethnic backgrounds: Polish, French Canadian, Italian, Irish, and English. Ethnic and age divisions were reflected in the informal and relatively stable groups of workers who met together during the lunch periods and the two breaks each day. For example, there were several clusters of Continental Portuguese, as opposed to those from the Azores, who clustered around their machines, drinking coffee and eating sweet rolls during the morning break. Also there were several groups of Polish workers, many of whom were first-generation immigrants. Women of second- and third-generation French, Italian, Irish, or English backgrounds often formed mixed groups. And finally there were clusters of young, unmarried high school graduates. (In our department, this group included two girls of French Canadian descent, a second-generation Portuguese, and a girl who said she was of several different ethnic backgrounds: "Heinz 57 Varieties," as she put it.)

In these groups, a fair amount of anti-Portuguese sentiment was often expressed, ranging from statements such as: "There are too many Portuguese being hired now," to an incident where a male warehouse worker complained that one of the Portuguese women "smelled bad." One Polish coworker, while riding to work with me, told a "Portuguese joke," which forty years ago would surely have been a "Polish joke" with the same story line, but with Polish immigrants portrayed as dumb and inept.

There were inter-ethnic tensions around the piece rate system as well. Employers hired Portuguese women because of their reputation as hard workers, but non-Portuguese workers often accused them of "rate busting." For example, one worker commented that the Azorean woman who sewed the elastic waistbands on dresses "ruined that job for everyone." In other words, she worked so fast

that the piece rate was lowered, and workers had to increase their output to make the same pay. "She didn't miss a dime," and "she makes more money than anyone else on the floor," another worker commented. For their part, Portuguese workers often felt discriminated against and said that American workers did not work hard enough.

The divisions apparent in the structure of break groups and the attitudes expressed in them were crosscut when women gathered together to celebrate life cycle events that often focused on their family roles as wives and mothers. Marriages and the birth of children were celebrated with showers, usually organized by a group of friends. These women collected a small amount from members of the woman's department or other acquaintances. They then bought presents, wrapped them, and presented them as a surprise during the lunch break. Retirements were celebrated in a more extensive way with pastry for morning break and a special lunch at noon time. Retirements and sometimes showers were organized along department lines, often through the help and certainly with the knowledge of management (such as the department floor lady). Especially in the department-organized functions, but also when friends initiated the activity, monetary contributions and the singing of a card cut across ethnic lines.

Leslie's baby shower provides a good example of how such non-work time events integrate workers of diverse ages and ethnic backgrounds. It was organized by her two friends, who collected the money from a wide range of women, as well as from her department coworkers. Later that week they bought the gifts – a car seat, a high chair, and a baby carriage. Then during one lunch break, the friends brought the huge, wrapped boxes down the center aisle and placed them by Leslie's machine, waiting until she returned from the ladies' room. Half way down the aisle, she realized what was happening. Perhaps a little embarrassed by all the attention, Leslie hesitated and was at a loss for words; one of her friends began helping her open the gifts. One of the Portuguese women picked up the yellow ribbon that came off the first package and pinned it on Leslie. She exclaimed, "Oh, Jesus," on opening the gifts, and finally pulled out the card to look at it. She thanked everyone, and newcomers to the crowd peered over others to see what the gifts were. "Let's see what we got you," the woman who served morning coffee said, while Leslie's floor lady

looked on. More admirers came by as Leslie's two friends began to stuff the gifts back in their boxes. The buzzer rang, ending the lunch break and sending everyone scurrying back to their machines. Although organized by the clique of young high school graduates, Portuguese women in Leslie's department clearly had contributed to the gifts and stood by admiring them.

In our own department, Rose's retirement party was an all-day event, and our work was almost interspersed between the breaks, rather than the other way around. During the morning break, the floor lady presented Rose with a corsage, and we all had doughnuts and homemade coffee cakes. Rose also received a card with $60.00 from the department collection and another $60.00 from workers in other departments. Lunch brought another round of partying (including hamburgers ordered from a fast-food restaurant) and a visit from Angela, Rose's best friend who had retired several months earlier. After lunch Angela made the rounds of the department, stopping by each machine and talking to each of her ex-coworkers, whether English or Portuguese speaking. Her general comment on leaving was that she "missed all my girls." The mood of the whole day was one of departmental festivity. Despite the underlying tensions between Rose, Angela, and some of their Portuguese coworkers—which had surfaced several times over the spring and summer months—the retirement party was an occasion for crossing ethnic lines and expressing, despite a language barrier, feelings of solidarity.

On other occasions, women brought their family lives into the work situation by showing pictures of their families to those who worked at nearby machines, sharing news about an illness in the family, discussing vacation plans, and recounting an important event such as a wedding or confirmation. The showing of pictures, usually during morning or afternoon breaks, was one way in which women were able to communicate across ethnic lines. For example, several weeks after the summer vacation Vivian brought her wedding pictures to work. They were taken during her trip to Portugal where she married the man she had been engaged to for several years. During the morning break she showed them to our floor lady and her clique. Then she returned to her own Portuguese-speaking group and turned the pages for them, explaining who the godparents and various relatives were. Several Portuguese women came over from adjacent tables when Vivian

opened the album, so she began her explanation over again. Sharing the wedding pictures gave non-Portuguese workers a glimpse of Portuguese culture and cemented relationships with Portuguese coworkers. It seemed an appropriate follow-up to the wedding present the department had given Vivian two weeks before.

When Lucille's sister died, we all heard immediately, guessing that something was wrong when she failed to show up for work one Tuesday morning. A sheet was circulated for each to sign and put down a contribution (usually $0.25 or $0.50). Then the money was collected to pay for flowers. When Lucille returned to work the following Monday, as she came around to each worker delivering their repairs, she thanked each one, greeting many with a kiss, even those who did not speak English well. Such department-wide expressions of support brought workers of different ethnic backgrounds together.

The celebration of special events and the sharing of family pictures were ways in which women workers "humanized" their workplace, bringing their family life into the industrial setting. Almost all the collections were for life cycle events (weddings, baby showers, retirements, and deaths), some of them specifically celebrating woman-centered activities (such as a marriage or the birth of a baby). These celebrations involved a concrete set of activities that brought women together during nonwork time (breaks and lunches) within the workday. In addition, the events created a set of shared cultural meanings centered on workers' experiences as women. In an ethnically diverse workplace, such shared meaning cannot be assumed. In fact, the meanings surrounding the roles of bride, wife, mother, or widow are very different for Azorean and Continental Portuguese women than for U.S.-born women of other ethnic backgrounds. Many Portuguese women probably had not participated in a baby shower before coming to the United States (and perhaps not before becoming involved in one at their place of work). Similarly, a village wedding in the Azores or on the Continent will be surrounded by a different set of rituals and customs than a wedding in a New England French Canadian parish. The sharing of pictures is perhaps the best example of the ways in which women make concrete these different versions of what it is to be a wife or mother and help build an expanded cross-cultural definition of these roles. In bringing family life into the workplace, at both a conceptual and behavioral level,

women workers make connections with others. They make strangers into acquaintances and within the circle of one's break group, they make acquaintances into friends.

In a work setting where the piece rate system drove workers apart and where ethnic divisions were clear, with inter-ethnic tensions just beneath the surface, these events helped to consolidate relationships. On balance, I would argue, they fed into a women's work culture characterized by resistance, rather than one dominated by loyalty and consent. In the first place, the piece rate system and its manipulation by management generated an informal set of work rules and strategies for coping with the piece rates that were passed on to new workers. In the second place, the plant is unionized. Although the union in 1977 was not as active as it might have been in creating a cohesive body of workers through informal events, and although Portuguese participation in the union seemed low, the union's presence did provide a formal method for grievances and an arena for communicating company tactics to workers in other parts of the plant, warehouse, and knitting mill. Finally, the recent acquisition of the company by a conglomerate brought in a less paternalistic management, at the same time alienating many of the floor ladies, who perceived the new managers as "not knowing what they were doing." Thus, although many showers and retirement parties were organized through the departments and with the consent of the floor lady, these activities were not linked with any overall management/employee program, and a floor lady was often perceived as "one of the girls" rather than allied with the "bosses." Thus, the presence of the union and the identification of floor ladies with their subordinates, along with the "bridging function" of women's informal celebrations, supported a work culture in resistance.

Thus it was not surprising that, in 1979, women workers from the sewing plant participated in a wildcat strike. During the fall when the contract was being renegotiated, there were at least ninety local issues that remained unresolved, including a number of grievances concerning piece rates. Just three days before the vote on the contract, a wildcat strike erupted. Workers from the knitting mill and warehouse apparently spearheaded the strike, but a number of sewers who called in sick the first day participated in a picket line for the next two days and even defied a back-to-work court injunction on the last day of the wildcat. Workers voted

down the national contract by an overwhelming 834 to 118 votes, although it was accepted on a national level. Local members were disenchanted with the union, which since 1979 has worked hard to regain the support of the workers. However, worker resistance was also focused on the company that had been stepping up its tactics to squeeze workers' wages and employ more temporary workers, eroding union strength. Because I was not employed by the company at the time of the strike, I could not ascertain exactly how informal group structure related to militancy, but the participation of both Portuguese and non-Portuguese women sewers in the strike is consistent with the kinds of resistance and attempts to create solidarity across ethnic boundaries I witnessed two years earlier.

WOMEN'S WORK CULTURE IN THE SOUTHWEST

My recent research on women workers in the Southwest demonstrates the place of the "family" aspects of women's work culture in a very different economic context, one of "Sunbelt Industrialization." The city's economy is based primarily on military and government jobs and the city's position as a commercial center. Within the last ten years, the city has begun to attract branch plants of large corporations, primarily in apparel and electronics. Recently, several plants have been built with modern equipment, richly carpeted offices, and the latest in computer technology. They seem very different places to work than small jewelry, textile, or apparel plants located in old textile mills. More importantly, several plants are involved in management experiments. These experiments range from introducing "quality circles" (where workers suggest changes in the production process), to the use of "flex-time" (where workers can opt to start work any time between 6:30 and 8:00 A.M), to the reorganization of the plant work force into production teams that help make decisions about hiring, firing, shift schedules, and vacations.

There is a wide variety in the products produced in these plants with apparel workers producing surgical sutures, jeans, and leather jackets, and electronics workers engaged in the production of silicon wafers, computer terminals, digital phone equipment, home heating thermostats, and parts for jet engines. We interviewed women who were employed in semiskilled production jobs

and who were also working mothers. Wages among the apparel workers we interviewed ranged from $4.00 to $7.00 an hour with an average wage of $5.50 an hour. Electronics workers earned an average of $5.75 an hour, with the exception of one unionized plant where women were earning between $9.00 and $11.00 an hour. The work force was composed predominantly of Hispanic women native to the Southwest, who spoke English as their first language. Anglos (white Americans of a variety of backgrounds) were the second largest group, and there were small numbers of blacks, Southeast Asians, and native Americans in the work force.

Although it has been difficult to obtain exact figures on each company, most plants seem to have a female labor force that is about 55 to 65 percent Hispanic. In apparel plants, where women are sewers or make surgical sutures, the labor force is 80 to 90 percent female; and in the electronic plants, the proportion of female workers may be as low as 60 percent, depending on the numbers of technicians, engineers, and other male-dominated jobs that are part of the production process. Only two of the electronics and apparel plants in the city are unionized. Examples from three companies will illustrate the ways in which management is seeking to penetrate the structure of the informal work group and co-opt the celebration of women's events. In all three settings "bringing the family to work" takes place in the context of management's efforts to build a loyal work force.

WOMEN'S WORK CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF BUILDING A LOYAL WORK FORCE

In plant A, an electronics plant, women workers place components on boards as part of the assembly of electronically regulated thermostats. In a work force that is predominantly female, and with a substantial proportion of Hispanics, informal activities (such as potlucks and birthday parties) not only help to bridge ethnic differences, but also fit in well with management's attempt to build a loyal work force in the context of a philosophy of participation. In this plant, unique in the whole company, the management is fostering a climate of openness and trust, making as few distinctions as possible that would result in status differences. For example, there were no reserved parking spaces for management, no time clocks, and equal benefits for production

and salaried employees. In the management philosophy, there were no "hourly" employees, only salaried workers, though production workers were paid on a weekly basis. The plant held quarterly "all-employees meetings" where managers presented information about the business and financial aspects of the company, what was happening in the plant, and what new products were being introduced. Employees were able to vote on the plant holiday schedule, the starting time for the day shift, and a number of other plant policies. Finally, the plant manager had monthly "coffee talks" with a dozen employees randomly selected from throughout the plant. These talks lasted a couple of hours and included an open-ended exchange of views on the work situation and management policy.

In the context of this experimental plant, the aspects of women's work culture that "humanize the work place" and bring family roles to work functioned not only to bind women together and break down ethnic boundaries, but also to blur distinctions between employees and management. In addition to structural changes in the organization of work, participative management involved organizing informal gatherings inside and outside work and sponsoring company picnics, dinners, sports teams, and nights at the baseball game. Thus birthdays, showers, and collections for hospitalizations became integrated into building a work force loyal to the company and to management philosophy. In the plant, we interviewed two women in a department with a supervisor particularly involved in creating strong relationships between himself and his women workers, as well as between the women themselves. Mary described how they had decided to deal with birthdays.

Ya, we were talking about that today. We voted on that again. It depends on each individual department. And we were baking cakes before. But now we just voted on it today where we are all going to put in a dollar a month. And then that way this would be used for the birthdays. The birthdays of the month. We are just going to include everybody's birthday in one month. One birthday. . .and by putting in a dollar a month we'll have money left over for flowers if people are in the hospital. Or if we want to buy a gift for somebody that's getting married.

Juanita explained the supervisor's role:

My supervisor's very nice to get along with. . .you don't find very many supervisors that come and sit down and eat lunch with you and act like he's not even a supervisor, you know. . .the other day he walked in and says,

"Guess what, I'm going to get lunch for all of you tomorrow. . . . My son got or-dained Friday and we had so much food left. . . . I'm taking food for my crew tomorrow.". . . And he brought all kinds of meats and potato salads for us and stuff like that.

The department potluck (where women serve different dishes at lunch in an area of the cafeteria) seemed to be the southwestern hallmark of women's family lives brought to work. Mary re-marked that even the supervisor's birthday was an occasion for one potluck. "Sometimes if it's a supervisor's birthday or something, then we would try to have a potluck [for him] during lunch. Then we would bring stuff. Because we have the micro-waves and we have plug-ins and refrigerators. . .we would all have potluck. And we would buy him a gift or we would just have a cake and potluck or something."

In this same plant, potlucks and showers are supplemented by activities planned by the "Company Team Committee." This com-mittee, which included two representatives from each depart-ment, received funds from the company to plan the annual picnic and a yearly open house, as well as other events that took place off company time and involved women and their families in social or recreational activities. At the time of our interviews, women workers were enthusiastic about their jobs, their relatively high wages, and job stability. Although we may have interviewed com-pany loyalists (we were given names solicited by the personnel director through supervisors), nevertheless, these women saw no incompatibility between their informal relationships with other women, their supervisors, and their support of the company as well. The lack of resistance may have derived from the newness of the plant, careful screening of applicants to weed out potential union activists, relatively high wages for women workers, and management's efforts to create an atmosphere that emphasized in-formal activities, as well as the company's participative philosophy and strong benefit program.

PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT, CO-OPTING THE INFORMAL GROUP AND BLOCKING A UNION DRIVE

Plant B, a plant which manufactures surgical sutures and re-sembles apparel firms in terms of some aspects of the labor pro-cess, also had a "high-involvement" philosophy. Like plant A,

benefits for production and nonproduction employees were equal, and all employees were guaranteed pay for a forty-hour week, even if they occasionally missed a day.[15] In addition, the plant manager maintained an "open door" policy where any worker could talk with him about issues of concern. However, unlike plant A where the structure of departments was traditional (such as a large group of workers directed by a supervisor), plant B has gone a long way toward co-opting the informal work group and integrating it into the labor process itself. The labor force in 1982 was 90 percent female and 65 percent Hispanic; beginning workers made $4.80 an hour, and more experienced workers made between $5.20 and $5.80 an hour. Each department was divided into "production teams" of twelve to fourteen workers. Each team had a facilitator (rather than a supervisor), and the facilitators met weekly with the team members to discuss shift schedules and productivity. Team members were rotated on an individual basis between first and second shift – the exact scheduling worked out within the team. Two team members interviewed prospective employees and future team members, and if the evaluation they brought back to the team meeting was negative, the person usually would not be hired. "Team support" was an important aspect of employee evaluations, along with attendance and quality and quantity of production. After a two-month probationary period, and for each six-month period thereafter, team members were asked to evaluate the behavior of a team member on the job. The evaluations were discussed in the team meeting with weaknesses and deficiencies explored, and the worker was asked to deal with them more effectively. Team meetings were also a place where one's production figures were examined and where each worker talked about how well she was doing in relation to her expected efficiency percentage.

In Plant B, birthday celebrations and potlucks were organized either through a whole department or within a production team. In one department (composed of several teams), the Quality Control woman organized the birthday celebration or the potluck because she was not working on a production quota and was relatively free to walk around and talk to individual workers and collect money. In another department, the team organized these activities. One worker, Linda, said: "Not too long ago we had a birthday box and we all collected a dollar or two dollars and we bought

them a cake and then somebody's responsible for buying him a gift and at the end of the team meeting then they cut the cake and open the gift." Because the plant is relatively new, a whole reper-toire of company activities had not yet been established. However, the firm had sponsored a Christmas Dance, a summer picnic, and several safety banquets.

In 1982 and early 1983, employees in plant B were involved in a union campaign that raised the issue of whether management poli-cy had steered women's work culture in the direction of company loyalty and in opposition to union membership. The local manage-ment was decidedly anti-union and would not have located in the city we studied if it had been a community with a "strong union environment." The management felt that with a third party (that is, a union) the high-involvement design would lose flexibility. Work rule restrictions were "a big problem with unions," and manage-ment felt that relations with the labor force were too structured when there was a union. There is evidence that aspects of the high-involvement design were geared toward keeping the union out of the plant. For example, trainees were carefully screened for "attitude" when they were initially trained at the assessment center. Some workers were uncomfortable with the team meetings, feeling that they degenerated into discussions about per-sonal problems. Others suggested that personality conflicts played a part in team evaluations. As Josie said: "I don't really care for the evaluation but. . .because there's a lot of. . .say somebody didn't like you; they would give you a bad evaluation and say that they didn't think you were doing your job. . .just so you'd get fired."

During the fall of 1982, after a union organizing committee was formed in the plant and after a number of union cards were signed, the personnel administrators began to use the teams as "union-busting tools." A sociologist conducting research on the team system for his Ph.D. dissertation made this charge at a public meeting call-ed by a citizen's monitoring committee to hear complaints and con-cerns regarding the union drive. In a lengthy statement, he made a number of charges.

For this purpose, facilitators (supervisors) are expected to remain in control of their teams while employees are made to feel that the system is "open" to their suggestions and decisions. . .teams are used as part of a strategy to "isolate" pro-union employees from their fellow team members. The "isolated" in-dividual can then be dealt with in some fashion: he or she can be fired for not

having "team support" (one of the "objective criteria" for termination at [plant B], or for a poor "attitude" or other factors ostensibly unrelated to union support. Yet [the personnel administrator] plainly told me that union support is a factor in termination "although we can never admit it."

The sociologist cited two cases of workers being fired on absence-related reasons as "trial balloons" to see "what the union would do when their supporters were fired." In two other cases, workers were fired for punching into the computer for each other (equivalent to clocking in) while similar offenses by non-union supporters had gone unpunished. The plant manager was quoted as saying that "it would be a good symbolic gesture, a good way to scare other pro-union employees. Even if we have to give their jobs back, it would be worth the hassle to fire them to see what the union would do and to see if it has a desired effect on the work force." For some union supporters, the team meeting became a context in which workers began to ask questions of management and put forward pro-union views. One facilitator stopped meeting with a team because of the strong pro-union views of the members. This same team then organized its potlucks and birthday parties through a friendship network, without the facilitator's help or the team meeting as a context for organizing these events.

In some teams, workers were divided into pro-union and anti-union factions, and this often led to conflict when peers were evaluated in a team meeting and to a split in informal activities. As one pro-union worker explained her situation:

And we all went into a meeting every Monday. And if you had a gripe, you know, you told everybody. If you didn't like somebody you told everybody. . . . Like say five people didn't like you 'cause you didn't go eat [at a local restaurant] with them. You know, they'll say that in the team. And forget it, you're on the worst list now, you know, not doing what they want you to do. You see, the majority rules. If you don't go along with them, you're not in a good standing anymore.

This same worker reported that all but one of her work friends with whom she ate and spent breaks were union supporters. "We're always divided, union and non-union." The union drive had an important effect on plant socializing. In the one or two teams that were pro-union, the team remained a strong informal group. For other pro-union workers who were more isolated in their teams, socializing took place outside the team. One woman who felt especially isolated said that "if you're labeled union, you're no good. If you're non-union, you're good." Union members, she con-

tinued, were sometimes excluded from activities "unless you made your own thing, which we did. . .to show them that we could do it, too, you know. No matter what we believed in, we could still do it." Even so, the management made it difficult for union members to socialize informally with each other or to talk with other employees who had not yet made up their minds about the union. Facilitators often broke up informal conversation groups or went on break with union supporters so that they could overhear or prevent positive talk about the union.

As the union drive accelerated and as a date for an election was set, management stepped up its efforts to keep the union out of the plant. As one worker described it: "For a while there they took us into meetings everyday. For two weeks, to talk about the union. But it wasn't about good talk. They wouldn't let us talk on our behalf. They'd always show films like about strikes. . .like violence. . .and all bad things. They would scare the people. And they would never let us come in and show good things or talk about it, you know, what we could offer." Eventually, the union lost in a two-to-one vote. However, they filed over 300 charges with the National Labor Relations Board to protest unfair labor practices and reinstate workers who had been fired. In late December 1983, seven months after the election, a settlement was reached. The company agreed not to engage in unlawful surveillance of union supporters, not to threaten employees with discharge for engaging in union activities, and not to discriminate against union supporters in a number of areas. Discharged employees were to be awarded back pay.

In the case of plant B, management restructured production around small groups or production teams. Facilitators in many cases attempted to create a situation where the team became an informal work group, eating together, celebrating birthdays, and having potlucks. In team meetings, workers would be encouraged to evaluate each other's productivity and their participation within the group. As a supervisor put it:

In the ideal situation, the employees would know exactly what their job was. Their job was to get the product out the best way they could and if they had time to sit down and talk about things, they'd do it. But if they felt that a person was not pulling their weight and making the department look bad, you know, then they'd jump on him. . . . Like this new group that I've got. . . . They're coming to me and saying, "Hey, she's not pulling her weight. She's walking around, she's doing this. Hey let's talk about it in a meeting. Let's confront her with it."

In the context of the union drive, such peer group pressure was encouraged not just around production issues, but also to convince neutral workers not to support the union and to isolate pro-union employees from social support. In the context of the team structure in plant B, women's life cycle celebrations helped to reinforce a loyal company-oriented work group.

WOMEN'S WORK CULTURE IN SUPPORT OF A UNION

"Humanizing the work place" can, of course, be incorporated into a union's program and become part of building strong relations among workers in the context of union membership. This happened to some extent in the apparel plant where I worked in New England, but the possibilities for union use of women's informal celebrations to build stronger ties among workers is best illustrated in one of the unionized plants we studied. In this case, plant C, which produces jet engine parts, the union—rather than the company—had an entertainment committee and publications committee. The union sponsored picnics, retirees' dinners and other social functions, and put out a newsletter. Friendship networks within departments sponsored showers and birthdays. As one worker explained:

I'm getting ready to have a baby shower now. Every time someone dies or there's an illness in the family or, say, one of our people goes out on sick leave, or there's going to be a baby born. . .even if it's a guy we throw them a shower. . . . We threw this guy a shower not long ago and we have another one coming up. . . . Usually a couple of the women organize it. We have potlucks at Christmas; every Christmas we exchange presents. We have potlucks for Thanksgiving. Sometimes we have potlucks for the heck of it.

To counter management's new emphasis on worker involvement, union members placed themselves on the new "quality circle committees" in order to make sure that the contract was not being violated and to urge workers to put suggestions in the suggestion box. In this way, workers would be paid for suggested changes that benefited the company, rather than the company getting them "free" through the "quality circle" mechanism. In this plant, recreational teams and company-sponsored events were mainly for salaried employees and the union-sponsored and union-controlled activities for production employees. Thus, baby showers, birthdays, and potlucks took place in the context of

union membership which built relations between coworkers, rather than pulling workers into closer relations with management.

In conclusion, my research in Rhode Island revealed an important set of links between women's home lives and work situations. By bringing the family to work, women could make connections among themselves and mitigate the distance that age, marital status, and ethnic background created. In the Southwest, much the same process took place where divisions between Hispanic, Anglo, black, and some Asian workers characterized the work force. However, our interviews in the Southwest led me to see the functions of "bringing the family to work" in relation to management policy in general. In some cases, these aspects of women's work culture were "co-opted" by management in order to help build a community of loyal company employees. In other, rare cases, celebrations around family roles were still a part of women creating links with other women in order to "stake out an autonomous sphere of action on the job," distancing themselves from management policy. In this new era when participative management strategies are even being extolled on the pages of popular national magazines, it is important to carefully analyze the relationship between these new management tactics and the work lives of women who are affected by them.

NOTES

1. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

2. Louise Lamphere, "Fighting the Piece-Rate System: New Dimensions of an Old Struggle in the Apparel Industry"; Nina Shapiro-Perl, "The Piece Rate: Class Struggle on the Shop Floor. Evidence from the Costume Jewelry Industry in Providence, Rhode Island"; and "Proletarianizing Clerical Work: Technology and Organizational Control in the Office," all in *Case Studies in the Labor Process,* ed. Andrew Zimbalist (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 257-76, 277-98, 51-72.

3. Susan P. Benson, "'The Clerking Sisterhood': Saleswomen's Work Culture" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1982); Barbara Melosh, *"The Physician's Hand": Work Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); Nina Shapiro-Perl, "Labor Process and Class Relations in the Costume Jewelry Industry: A Study in Women's Work" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1983); Ann Bookman, "The Process of Political Socialization among Women and Immigrant Workers: A Case Study of Unionization in the Electronics Industry" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1977).

4. Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); F.J. Roethlisberger and William Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939).
5. Donald Roy, "Restriction of Output in a Piecework Machine Shop" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1952); Michael Buroway, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
6. Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978).
7. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
8. Sallie Westwood, *All Day, Every Day* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1985).
9. Karen Sacks, "Computers, Ward Secretaries, and a Walkout in a Southern Hospital," in *My Troubles are Going to Have Trouble with Me: Everyday Trials and Triumphs of Women Workers,* ed. Karen Brodkin Sacks and Dorothy Remy (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 173-92.
10. See Shapiro-Perl, "Labor Process and Class Relations."
11. Benson, "'Clerking Sisterhood.'"
12. In "Fighting the Piece-Rate System," pp. 257-76, I focused on isolating strategies of resistance having to do with the piece rate, with informal work rules, and with "outguessing" management policy.
13. This project was funded by the Center for the Study of Problems, National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Maryland. Grant No. 1 RO1 MH27363.
14. This project, "Women's Work and Family Strategies in the Context of 'Sunbelt' Industrialization," was funded by National Science Foundation, Grant No. BNS 8112726. Interviews with Anglo women were conducted by myself, while Gary Lemons interviewed their husbands. Patricia Zavella interviewed Hispanic single parents and Hispanic working wives, while Felipe Gonzales interviewed Hispanic husbands. Peter Evans conducted interviews with plant managers.
15. In plant B, however, workers must keep their absences below 4 percent or face disciplinary action. There are clear rules about calling in tardies and absences, and employees are expected to make up time missed during the same week of an absence in order to keep their absence rate below 4 percent. Attendance is also an important part of evaluations for pay raises.