

## Part II

# Institutions and Organizations

# Social Control in Organizations

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Until the mid-20th century, sociologists regarded social control as both a necessary part of ensuring democratic order in society and a central analytic concern that could integrate theoretical puzzles from disparate subfields and across multiple levels of analysis (Janowitz, 1975). Over the past half century, research on social control has increasingly come to focus on social deviance, crime, and conflict. The study of social control, however, continues to be a dominant object of inquiry in organizational analysis, raising questions about power relations and social inequality. Early organizational scholarship afforded social control a prominent theoretical place as a driver of organizational performance. The rise of agency, cultural, and punishment-and-society frameworks renewed interest in social control under the rubrics of contract, meaning, and disciplinary techniques, respectively. Socio-legal theory, combined with institutional theory, added yet another layer of research on social control in corporations (Edelman, 2016). Scholars also combined socio-legal theory with interactionist and social-structural perspectives to yield research on the microdynamics of conflict management in organizations (Morrill, 1995).

Two primary questions animate this chapter. First, what do scholars mean when they invoke the concept of “social control” in organizational research? Second, how have scholars analytically framed research on social control in organizations? To answer these questions, we draw on a heuristic from Saguy & Stuart (2008) to identify three different ways of studying social control in organizations. The first and longest line of theory and research focuses on social control as an *independent variable* to explain variations in organizational behavior. The second frames social control as a *dependent variable* explained by features of institutional, organizational, and social contexts. The third considers social control as a *constitutive dynamic* of normative life in organizations. We review some research that best fits this typology. Given the space available, our treatment is neither exhaustive nor representative. Some researchers employ two or more of these perspectives within or across different projects. Although most research on social control in organizations examines capitalist or government bureaucracies, we expand our purview to include other types of organization. Our goal is to give readers a taste for broader trends in the study of social control within organizations, ranging from early to more recent work.

## Defining the Concept and Scope of Social Control in Organizations

In an early treatise on social control, Ross (1901) used the concept to mean “all of the human practices and arrangements that contribute to social order...that influence people to conform” (see Black, 1984:4). This broad definition focuses on the *social* aspects of control in organizations and the ways in which even financial aspects of running a business – such as accounting and budgeting – may have ancillary social dimensions.

We can describe social control in terms of different mechanisms that influence social behavior. Mechanisms vary in terms of their materiality (e.g., machines) and their formality (e.g., official policies or narratives). They also vary in their scope, meaning what is targeted (e.g., physical behavior and/or cognitive processes, beliefs, and norms) and whether control is preventative, reactive, or facilitative. Different mechanisms of social control can coexist in complementary or contradictory ways, can intertwine into hybrid forms, or can come to replace one another in historical succession through contestation or trial and error. In research on social control, different definitions signal underlying theoretical agendas and traditions.

Many treatments of social control draw attention to the social psychology of compliance and the motivational paradigm of why people behave as they do. Along these lines, perhaps the earliest and most pervasive mechanism of social control in organizations is relational control, which flows through social interactions in interpersonal networks to compel compliance. Sometimes called “simple” or “entrepreneurial” control (Edwards, 1979), this mechanism can feed off individual charisma (Weber, 1946) or can attach to personal capacities to punish noncompliance, both of which emerge in the give-and-take of interpersonal power relations. Relational control can also play off favored social categories based in social class, gender, sex, race, ableness, or religion, as long as these categories link to well-regarded interpersonal status and/or access to other valued resources. The desire to please a highly respected or charismatic superior illustrates one side of relational control, whereas bullying, threats, firing, and violence (even leading to death) underscore a darker, coercive side. However, social superiors are not the only actors who can mobilize relational control. Social subordinates can resort to upward relational control in the form of open resistance and revolt or of covert, tacitly coordinated actions like sabotage and subterfuge (Baumgartner, 1984; Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Morrill et al., 2003).

Variants of rationalist control are among the most well studied types of social control, focusing attention on the efficient design of control mechanisms and the economics of compliance. Rationalist technical control influences behavior through the design of efficient work techniques and machines in the labor process. These include scientific management in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and electronic surveillance of work outputs in the late 20th and early 21st. Such methods determine the pace of work, weaken social relations among workers (and between workers and overseers), and ultimately determine monetary compensation. Rationalist bureaucratic control, by contrast, influences behavior through layers of rules and policies that structure hiring, contracting, and careers (Edwards, 1979). Through the lens of agency theory, social control becomes an alignment of incentives and interests via contracting between those engaged in directives (principals) and those carrying them out (agents) (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

While technical and agency control play off the motivating animus of material interests, rationalist bureaucratic control secures compliance via beliefs in the legitimacy of organizational rules and policies (Weber, 1946). As such, bureaucratic control spills over into another mechanism, cultural control, under which compliance is achieved through internalization of the norms of what it means to be a committed employee (Kunda, 1992).

A final form of social control operates through expert knowledge that links motivation to normal and abnormal categories (Foucault, 1977).

An alternative to the motivational paradigm conceptualizes social control as interactionally accomplished reactions to breaches of normative boundaries, specifically “how people define and respond to deviant behavior” (Black, 1984:4). Rather than conceive of social control as a means to an end (such as productivity or solidarity), the focus here is on documenting the range of mechanisms through which organizational members express complaints and grievances in organizations, including negotiation, doing nothing, discipline, gossip, avoidance, and mobilizing law (Morrill, 1995). When conceived as an emergent dynamic of social interaction, motivations, interests, networks, and power relations all remain in play, but in constantly shifting constellations (Emerson, 2015; Morrill & Musheno, 2018).

### **Social Control as an Independent Variable in Organizations**

Organizational scholars have devoted the most attention to research on social control as an independent variable, especially its “impact on human conduct” (Black, 1984:5). In this line of research, scholars primarily ask: How does social control contribute to individual and organizational performance while reducing undesirable behavior? How effective is social control? What are the anticipated and unanticipated consequences of social control?

Research on the impact of relational control is somewhat diffuse. It often takes a historical or ethnographic bent, although some scholars use social network analysis to study contemporary dynamics. A classic example of the first tendency is Edwards’s (1979) *Contested Terrain*, which tracks transformations of US workplaces over the late 19th and the first three-quarters of the 20th century through changes in social control. According to Edwards, owners exercised relational control (which he calls “simple” or “entrepreneurial” control) via workers’ interpersonal loyalties. Just as often, whether in small shops or the subunits of larger organizations, relational control transformed into “arbitrary command rule by foremen and managers, who became company despots encumbered by few restrictions on their power over workers” (Edwards, 1979:33).

Research on contemporary relational control also focuses on interpersonal networks and obligations, referred to as “non-contractual relations” (Macaulay, 1963) or “relational work” (Zelizer, 2012). In these studies, the scope of relational control includes not only performance (especially the prevention of shirking), but also malfeasance committed by organizational members against their own organization and/or members of relevant social networks.

One can read Granovetter (1985) as both a theoretician and an advocate for the virtues of relational control. He argues that relational control of some sort nearly always operates in organizations, even amidst elaborate formal authority structures designed to deflect opportunism, because “concrete personal relations and the obligations inherent in them discourage malfeasance, quite apart from institutional arrangements” (1985:489). Yet, relational control need not be restricted either to being reactionary or to operating through structures of interpersonal obligations in networks. As White (1992:9) argues, “control is both anticipation and response to eruptions” in social contexts, and it is through stories told about the relationships between people that projects of control are realized (1992:65). Through these dynamics, scholars describe how managers in very diverse contemporary organizations, such as university laboratories (Huising & Silbey, 2011) and financial derivatives

organizations (Riles, 2011), engage in everyday relational control to accomplish compliance with both internal and external normative systems, including law.

These perspectives and studies suggest that a key resource needed to make relational control an effective means of compliance is information, which includes circulating stories and expert formal knowledge. Actors operating in networks who are “in the mix” enjoy what social network analysts call “betweenness centrality” (Freeman, 1978). This positionality can constitute or reinforce preexisting social hierarchies even as it facilitates the social skill necessary to motivate collaboration (Fligstein, 2001). Betweenness centrality can also aid in anticipating network disruptions, heading off attempts at resistance, and coercing or punishing lower-status members in a network. As already noted, network embeddedness and centrality of workers can also lead to relational control against bosses in the form of tacitly coordinated sabotage or overtly coordinated collective action – the former often perceived as betrayal by social superiors, but only through after-the-fact, retrospective epiphanies (Morrill et al., 2003).

If relational control depends upon the mobilization of interpersonal networks, technical control depends upon establishing strong ties between workers and techniques and/or machines via efficient design, while simultaneously weakening interpersonal networks. Edwards (1979:113) observes that “technical control emerges only when the entire production process...or large segments of it are based on a technology that paces and directs the labor process.” Time-and-motion studies by engineer Frederick Taylor in the early 20th century illustrate an early instantiation of technical control: job design is tied to piece-rate incentive systems, thus avoiding both profit-sharing and unionization (Guillén, 1994:42). The other classic form of technical control is the assembly line, which established continuous, on-flow production. This was first developed by Rhode Island textile manufacturers in the latter third of the 19th century and became more well known as a feature of steel mills and automobile plants in the early 20th century (Edwards, 1979:113). In this sense, technical control operated in the crucible of collective interests and conflicts between workers and owners, enhancing the power of the latter at the expense of the former.

Although proscriptive and critical studies of Tayloristic systems and assembly lines still exist, research on contemporary technical control has moved beyond them to explore surveillance and privacy in the workplace. This research combines science and technology studies and socio-legal perspectives. It explores how organizations monitor behaviors by workers considered to be “risky, dangerous, or untrustworthy” from official vantage points – sometimes backed by law, and sometimes not (Monahan, 2010:10). Contemporary examples of technical control include drug testing, video- and keystroke-tracking software, and the remote surveillance of employees using global positioning systems and smartphone apps. These types of technical control can intertwine with relational control, as information delivered about subordinates to superiors can enhance the latter’s centrality and power (Monahan, 2010:84).

Weber (1946) recognized conflicts between superiors and subordinates as a key dilemma, to which bureaucracy provided a solution via consistent rules and policies, hierarchically arrayed offices, and clear lines of authority. This resulted in those at the tops of the bureaucracy wielding enormous power. Since his pioneering work, scholars of bureaucratic control have dug deeper into what enables bureaucracies to operate effectively and efficiently, and how bureaucratic managers sustain their social power.

First, they argue that bureaucratic control enables organizational members to manage individual-level “bounded rationality” due to cognitive limitations and the complexity of their information environments (March & Simon, 1958). As such, bureaucratic arrangements

exercise a great deal of control by sorting and reducing the information that organizational members receive about decision-making, incentives, and opportunities for mobility. These dynamics facilitate organizations' ability to economize in the pursuit of collective goals, and sustain managerial power because subordinates lack access to information and authority. Second, they see a key role for legitimacy in organizational compliance. Here, the impact of influence resides in the extent to which organizational members believe organizational policies and rules are appropriate and moral (Scott, 2008:54–56). Finally, they explore both explicit control expressed through written policies and implicit control grounded in unstated premises and expectations. A key finding is that bureaucracies achieve day-to-day control of their members as much because of what *is not* explicitly stated in standard operating procedures as because of what *is* (Perrow, 1986).

The role of legitimacy and unstated premises in bureaucratic control dovetails with research on cultural control. Scholars argue that the apparent efficiency, legitimacy, and power-laden effectiveness of bureaucratic control is insufficient to secure compliance with formal rules and regulations (Etzioni, 1961). Both a scholar and a corporate executive, Barnard (1938) early on recognized the need not only for compliance with bureaucratic rules in organizations, but also for “states of mind” that could compel organizational members' commitment to organizational goals. Human-relations scholars took cues from Barnard and others to conduct applied research on the attitudes and beliefs workers developed on the shop floor, seeking control mechanisms that aligned their mental states to corporate goals. By the 1980s, cultural control, a latter-day human-relations effort, took center stage in both managerial and scholarly consciousness (Morrill, 2008). Kunda (1992:11) argues that cultural control “attempt[s] to elicit and direct the required efforts of members by controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, and feelings that guide their actions.” Central in this process is socializing those new to the workplace to abandon old identities, learn new values and expectations, and stabilize their new identities through participation in everyday rituals (Schein, 1968). The effectiveness of cultural control, Kunda (1992:11) observes, ultimately depends upon the degree to which an “employee's *self*” is claimed “in the name of corporate interest” (emphasis in original). Corporations are not the only organizations that rely on cultural control to secure their members' commitments, however. Such dynamics readily appear in a variety of non-capitalist organizations, including religious organizations, public bureaucracies (e.g., police departments), community agencies and clinics, and non-bureaucratic organizations (e.g., utopian communities and cults) (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Historically, cultural control – in addition to coercive relational control backed by law – has marked efforts to sustain the compliance of slaves (Patterson, 1982).

Institutional scholars have long studied cultural and bureaucratic sources of constraint and compliance, although they rarely use the concept of social control in their research. Selznick (1969:17–18) developed and applied early institutional theory in order to understand the social evolution of organizations. He argued that large contemporary US organizations increasingly exhibited “legality,” which curbed arbitrariness and abuses of social power, and extended rights-like citizenship and equality among organizational members. Contemporary bureaucratic control in organizations never realized Selznick's substantive hopes, as underscored by Edelman's (2016) research, which blends neo-institutional and socio-legal perspectives. Edelman asks why racial and gender inequalities persist in US workplaces despite more than 50 years of organizational structures and policies aimed at reducing them. She answers this using 3 decades' worth of quantitative and qualitative analyses of social-scientific and legal evidence on the interplay between legal fields and organizations. The reason for the persistence of workplace inequalities, she finds, rests in

the “societal acceptance of and judicial deference to symbolic structures” (Edelman, 2016:5). Symbolic structures are formal organizational policies and procedures that ostensibly reduce social inequalities, but empirically come to signal “symbolic compliance” with civil-rights goals while granting corporations “the flexibility to adjust those structures to accommodate managerial and business interests” (2016:106). Such interests undermine the substantive effectiveness of attempts to reduce social inequalities, even as organizational members believe they are complying with efforts to do so.

The vision of social control from an agency theory perspective strips away the relational, technical, bureaucratic, and cultural imagery of other control systems. As conceived by principal-agent theorists, agency control operates as a “nexus of contract relationships” in which each individual reflectively and rationally chooses to contribute something to an organization in exchange for something else (Jensen & Meckling, 1976:311). Agency control offered a solution to the challenges emanating from the increasing layer of managers that operated between workers and owners as business enterprises dramatically expanded their size during the early 20th century. The key question in agency theory turns on reducing opportunities for manipulating earnings and diverting resources to personal rather than organizational gain as it becomes increasingly difficult for owners to directly monitor those who manage their enterprises (Palmer, 2013:45). Scholars have investigated a broad array of agency controls, ranging from principal-agent incentive systems that echo Taylorist piece-rate systems to more sophisticated arrangements in large corporations, such as stock options (Dalton et al., 2007) and independent boards of directors (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Aside from ownership–management separation, scholars have studied principal-agent problems across a wide variety of social settings in which someone directs others to conduct work activities on their behalf (Palmer, 2013:45–47). As a frame for organizing corporate governance over the past 3 decades, agency control became incredibly successful as both theory and practice. However, its empirical effectiveness as social control proved otherwise, swamped by a “wave of corporate scandals” and excessive risk-taking by executives (Fourcade & Khurana, 2017:376). This research points to questions that explore social control as a dependent variable in organizations.

## **Social Control as a Dependent Variable in Organizations**

The literature on this subject occupies considerably less scholarly space than the previous perspective. The central questions framing it primarily ask under what conditions particular mechanisms of social control emerge, persist, and/or die in organizations. To answer this question, scholars explore the broad historical, social, and institutional contexts that lead to organizations formally adopting particular social-control mechanisms. One common approach draws on Marxian frameworks or institutional theory, typically focusing on capitalist enterprises and state bureaucracies. A second line of research explores the organizational-level and microdynamics of why and how organizational members use and/or resist different social-control mechanisms.

Drawing on Marx (1967), Edwards (1979) offers a compelling historical account of the rise of particular mechanisms of social control in US capitalist enterprises. He argues that control systems arise in response to the constant collision of worker and employer interests as employers increasingly treat workers as commodities and workers try to “retain their power to resist being treated like a commodity” (1979:12). Enterprise scale, the structure of the labor process, and the collective capacities of workers and capitalists play key roles in

these dynamics. Relational control dominates when enterprises are small, production primarily relies on manual labor, and workers and capitalists are largely unorganized. Technical control emerges as enterprises grow, mechanization increases, and workers and capitalists become more organized. Bureaucratic control flourishes in association with continuous on-flow production, in large complex organizations, and when broad unionization and industry monopolies come to define economic activities. Each of these control systems is associated with dominant styles of worker resistance and counter-control. Tacitly coordinated or overt interpersonal resistance exists in relational control systems, while unionization aims at technical control. Bureaucratic subterfuge, mass unionization, and anti-monopoly movements aim at bureaucratic control, symbolic resistance seeks to subvert the dominant meanings, ideologies, and discourses proffered by cultural control, and the reduction of third-party monitoring targets agency control.

Institutional research, as already noted, offers considerable insights into the effectiveness of social control. Institutional scholars, however, devote more attention to understanding the conditions that first gave rise to the intertwining of law-like, bureaucratic, and cultural control in US corporations and other organizations. Selznick (1969), for example, argues that organizations are microcosms of larger public orders that, in the mid-20th century, became infused with moral values evolving toward less arbitrary and fairer modes of democratic engagement. In retrospect, his observations resonate with the period in which he wrote: an era of intense reform by the US “activist state” that defined multiple agendas for intervention into social inequalities of all kinds. The crowning legislative achievement of this era, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (CRA), outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (Garth & Sterling, 1998).

Neo-institutional scholars have benefitted from nearly a half-century of history since Selznick advanced his arguments to pinpoint the political and institutional processes that gave rise to prominent features of bureaucratic and cultural control in the last 3 decades (Dobbin, 2009; Edelman, 2016). Social-movement activists, elected officials, and judges all played key roles leading up to the passage of the CRA. However, Dobbin (2009:1), using archival and contemporary quantitative analyses, claims that after the CRA was passed, these actors played only “bit roles” going forward, as it was frontline personnel managers operating in organizations who “concocted equal opportunity programs, and later diversity management programs, in the context of changing ideas about discrimination.” Personnel managers and human resources (HR) departments, as Edelman & Suchman (1999:953) observe, transformed US organizations through the internalization of large portions of the legal system to signal legitimacy in fields infused with taken-for-granted assumptions that “rule-compliant fairness should be an attribute of private organizations as well as of public institutions.” These processes led to the “legalization” of organizational governance, expanded private dispute resolution and in-house counsel, and reinvented private policing.

The transformation of US governance begs the question of why, how, and whether organizational members mobilize law and quasi-legal (law-like) social-control mechanisms in organizations in response to perceived rights violations. In the aftermath of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), for example, Albiston (2005) conducted a state-level in-depth interview study of how organizational members who had experienced conflict over family leave, but did not go to court, mobilized their rights within their organizations. She found that institutionalized conceptions of work, gender, and disability shape whether workers mobilize their rights, reproducing gendered inequality and power relations in workplaces. In a large private university, Marshall (2003) explored the handling of sexual-harassment complaints through in-depth interviews of women who had brought their

complaints to managers. She found that managers discouraged complainants from defining all but the most egregious behaviors (e.g., physical assault) as rights violations, instead framing most complaints as poor management practices or a lack of professionalism by the offending party.

In a multi-method survey and qualitative field study of over 5000 students in public high schools in California, New York, and North Carolina, Morrill et al. (2010) found that self-identified African American and Latinx students perceived higher rates of rights violations than their self-identified white or Asian American peers with regard to sexual harassment, sexual and racial discrimination, freedom of speech, and due process in school disciplinary procedures. Regardless of ethnic and racial identification, students were more likely to take extra-legal than quasi-legal (school grievance system) or formal-legal (consulting an attorney) actions in response to self-reported rights violations. In response to hypothetical rights violations, however, higher rates of African American and Latinx compared to white and Asian students claimed they would take formal legal action against offending parties, although they reported being no more likely to do so than the latter groups in self-reported instances of actual rights violations. These three examples all underscore how gender and racial inequality condition the use of quasi-legal mechanisms of control in organizations and reproduce social inequality.

A second area of research along these lines expands the purview of social control as a dependent variable in organizations beyond the legal mobilization paradigm, exploring how people pursue grievances to any action they deem deviant. A key theoretical hub in this tradition is Black's (1984, 2011) social structural framework, which seeks to explain how social hierarchy, social ties and networks, cultural similarity or distance, and the organizational capacities of disputants (e.g., as individuals, groups, or organizations) pattern social control. In this framework, the key question is why some actions draw social control and others do not, which ultimately depends upon the social identity and positionality of those involved. Black conceives of the framework as being able to explain any mechanism of social control, with law as one among many possibilities. Morrill (1995) drew on this framework to explain how top executives like CEOs and CFOs in large organizations handle conflict among themselves. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews in two Fortune 500 and one Financial 100 firm, and peripheral observation and in-depth interviews in ten more firms, he found that executives typically evade law and quasi-legal procedures in handling intra-firm disputes with one another, and that social control and organizational structures are isomorphic. In corporations with strong formal authority structures among top managers (e.g., banks, private utilities, and traditional manufacturing firms), executives tend to pursue their grievances against one another up and down those hierarchies; in professional firms with flat formal authority structures among top managers (e.g., accounting, architectural, and law firms), they tend to engage in a variety of nonconfrontational actions, such as avoidance and toleration; and in corporations with cross-cutting (matrix) authority structures (e.g., engineering and some high-tech firms), they tend to pursue confrontational strategies in networked groups. Tucker (1999) offers another example of the isomorphism of social control with organizational structure from his ethnographic study of a post-bureaucratic firm that exhibits a type of therapeutic cultural control in keeping with its flat authority structure, close-knit networks, and high degree of shared values and identities among organizational members.

Can social control in organizations be studied without the explicit or implicit cause-and-effect orientation of the first two perspectives in our typology? We briefly consider some answers to this question in the next section.

## Social Control as a Constitutive Dynamic in Organizations

Scholars examining social control in organizations as a constitutive dynamic abandon the cause-and-effect orientations of the first two perspectives with regard to the instrumental efficacy or conditions predicting the organizational adoption or use of various mechanisms of social control. Instead, they shift the analytic focus to understand how the language and symbols used to enact social control shape fundamental social categories, identities, interests, and normative boundaries within organizations. This third perspective resonates with scholars studying law as a constitutive dynamic in everyday life (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Merry, 1990; Sarat & Kearns, 1996).

One exemplar of the constitutive approach to social control in organizations can be found in Foucault's (1977) classic *Discipline and Punish*. On one level, Foucault intends to explain how incarceration and prisons came to substitute for public spectacles of bodily violence as the standard penal practice in contemporary societies. At a deeper level, Foucault analyzes generalized microtechniques of discipline and punishment – via knowledge generated through “expert” assessment, diagnosis, prediction, and intervention – to understand power relations in contemporary society. “Normalization” operates at the heart of social control, focusing on the transformation of the “soul” rather than the body as in earlier forms of spectacular punishment, and does so by creating social categories against which everyone and everything is measured. In some ways, Foucault's arguments resonate with Kunda's (1992) observations about how contemporary cultural control aims to “claim” the self in the name of corporate interest. Yet, Foucault's analysis penetrates more deeply into the formation of social categories that create the self, and is somewhat agnostic regarding the underlying interests served by normalization. Certainly, training is oriented toward capitalist and state interests in some general way, but there are no Wizard of Oz-like managers behind organizational curtains manipulating normalization. What Foucault (1977) describes is a network of discipline, systematically administered by legions of “experts,” constituting and enveloping all individuals and groups in a broad field of action. This is not limited to corporations. The prison operates at the epicenter of these networks, which is why the techniques of social control in prisons, factories, schools, military organizations, and state bureaucracies all come to resemble one another. Normalization also defines marginals – whether criminals, the mentally insane, the poor, or the disabled – who do not favorably “measure up” to whatever categories of “normal” are proffered and must thus be disciplined. Ultimately, everyone is under the sway of discipline – the powerful and the powerless alike.

Multiple authors engaging in constitutive analysis add a robust sense of agency underplayed in the work of Foucault (1977). Vaughan (1996) argues that the deadly *Challenger* launch decision in the 1980s was not a failure of bureaucratic control and rule violations by engineers pressured to signal the continued viability of the US space program. Instead, it represents an “organizational accident” that “linked institutional forces, social position, and individual thought and action,” constituting engineering agency and choices about appropriate risk levels and decision-making (Vaughan, 1996:405). In short, the *Challenger* accident resulted from active choices to interpret information and follow rules rather than ignore or break them. This same emphasis on the constitution of a broad sense of agency by social control also can be found in Ewick & Silbey's (2003) in-depth interview study of the ways bureaucratic control and legalization in public organizations constitute the knowledge that individuals use to resist those systems. Morrill & Musheno's (2018) long-term ethnographic field study of how youth handle trouble in a high-poverty public school is another illustration

of constitutive dynamics in the interplay between different mechanisms of social control. These authors found that non-coercive relational control among youth not only constitutes the stakes and substance of peer trouble, but also symbolizes youth as worthy of dignity and regard: what it means to be a valued member of the campus community. They also found that non-coercive relational control among youth is sustained when informal and formal control mechanisms “pull together.”

Perhaps the most intriguing example of the constitutive dynamics of social control comes from Patterson’s (1982) analysis of slavery. The effective social control of slaves requires multiple mechanisms. Ultimately, “slaves” must be transformed from human agents to “desocialized...[and] depersonalized...nonbeings,” and so experience “social death” (1982:38). Through rites of passage, everyday language (e.g., the words “master” and “property”), and everyday practice, social control continually constitutes the social categories of “master” and “slave,” and the master–slave relation.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, research across all three perspectives of social control suggests multiple general patterns and questions that implicate the intended and unintended impacts of social control, power relations, the conditions that give rise to different control mechanisms, and social change. The first is that all mechanisms of social control have limited effectiveness in influencing organizational behavior, each seemingly carrying the seeds for its own resistance and critique. Organizational members challenge relational control because of its particularism, technical control because of its social alienation, and bureaucratic control because of its constraints and ineffectiveness. Although scholars continue spinning out complex theories of agency control, they also remind us of the failures of principal-agent solutions to defeat opportunism in economic action (Palmer, 2013:63–65). Cultural control would seem immune to these critiques due to its broadened scope, especially with regard to meaning, but it can lead to individual burnout and, ultimately, what Kunda (1992:213–216) calls “unstable selves,” which blur the boundaries of authenticity and inauthenticity. As discussed, Edelman (2016) found that elaborate bureaucratic and cultural control systems can lead to symbolic compliance, in which workers go through the motions but achieve few substantive reductions in social inequality.

Second, social control in organizations that has an authentic respect for members’ dignity and empowerment may be most effective at influencing appropriate member behavior. Lincoln & Kalleberg (1990), for example, argue that relational and cultural control that underscores co-worker support (rather than loyalty to superiors), bureaucratic and agency control that facilitates substantive rights and accountability for worker mobility (rather than mere symbolism), and technical control that mitigates social alienation will yield sustained worker satisfaction and commitment. Mueller et al. (2001) surveyed nearly 6000 employees nationally and found that features of social-control systems, parallel to those studied by Lincoln & Kalleberg (1990), can indirectly reduce self-reported instances of sexual-harassment victimization for both women and men, because such systems compel worker empowerment to protect co-workers. Dobbin et al. (2015) offer additional insight from a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 818 US workplaces, finding that engaging frontline managers in meaningful ways to promote diversity – rather than merely limiting their discretion in hiring – will have positive effects on increasing workplace diversity. In effect, empowerment matters.

Third, social control in organizations can produce a variety of perverse outcomes, both intended and unintended. Monahan (2010), for example, observes how contemporary technical control in corporations – such as drug-testing and key stroke-tracking – often targets the most marginalized and powerless employees, ensuring that they remain in low bargaining positions with regard to better wages and working conditions. Dobbin & Jung (2010) document how agency theorists attempted to remedy the US economic malaise of the 1970s by prescribing perverse incentives that substituted the goal of profitability for corporate stability (including arguing for reducing independent boards and executive equity holding), which heightened corporate risk-taking and helped lead to the Great Recession of 2008. At its most perverse, cultural control can intertwine with bureaucratic control in military organizations to lead to mass atrocities when organizational members deeply internalize values that demand abject obedience to superiors while dehumanizing external enemies (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989).

Fourth, institutionalist explanations for the rise of legalized bureaucratic control, together with Edwards's (1979) Marxian explanations, raise broader questions about the rise and fall of different control systems in US organizations. Have dominant mechanisms of control been replaced successively, as Edwards suggests, in keeping with changes in enterprise size, labor processes, and the collective capacities of workers and capitalists? Does the last half-century of law-like bureaucratic control, coupled with cultural control, represent an end stage in control mechanisms in organizations? Barley & Kunda (1992) offer one answer to this question, through a deep dig into managerial ideologies across 150 years of US history. They argue that two contrasting images of social order define managerial ideologies: one in which “people share a common identity...[and] are bound by common values” and one characterized by “competition, individualism, and calculative self-interest” (1992:384). Based on quantitative and qualitative analyses of historical evidence, they find rationalist and cultural control alternate with each other with differing economic conditions: rationalist control prospers during economic expansions, while cultural control prospers during economic downturns. Managerial ideologies set the parameters within which control varies, and economic conditions determine when new forms of control have occurred. Guillén (1994) offers a second answer, based on comparative analyses of work and control across Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, and the United States. He argues that the constellation of “institutional circumstances” – including the state, economy, and the collective positioning of managers and workers – provides perspectives on the problems that control is intended to solve for managers and the likelihood that particular mechanisms of control will actually be put into practice. Thus, the trajectories that scholars such as Barley & Kunda (1992), Dobbin (2009), and Edelman (2016) chart may represent but one path in the development of control in organizations across different societal contexts. These analyses also raise questions about the adoption of social control in transnational organizations and in bureaucracies that rely on burgeoning numbers of independent contractors (Barley & Kunda, 2004). Rather than alternating only between rationalist and cultural mechanisms of control, perhaps the ascendant form will be a hybrid of relational and agency control that further escapes public scrutiny in organizations.

This last, more speculative possibility points to how the use of different social-control mechanisms becomes a key site for the reproduction of social inequality. It is not simply that such mechanisms target different organizational members, further marginalizing them, but that they are unequally accessible. If HR departments largely symbolize equity remedies while ultimately indemnifying organizations against risk to managerial interests (Edelman, 2016), then, to the degree that social-control mechanisms in the organizations of

the future escape further public accountability, they may push more deeply toward the dark side of social control by explicitly discarding and stigmatizing those who try to remedy social inequality.

The constitutive perspective perhaps raises equally dark questions. In many ways, Foucault's (1977) analysis of techniques of discipline resonates with Weber's (2001) image of the "iron cage" of bureaucracy, which makes the world increasingly knowable, yet meaningless. A key question, then, becomes whether and how social control contributes not only to social order or other instrumental goals, such as organizational performance, but also to human dignity, equality, and meaning (Hodson, 2001). The research reviewed in this chapter primarily diagnoses the ills associated with the impacts of social control or provides explanations for when and how social control is used. Questions of how social control might yield dignity and equality or facilitate democratic order – to return to an earlier era of scholarship on social control (Janowitz, 1975; Selznick, 1969) – raise difficult theoretical, empirical, and value-oriented challenges. Indeed, scholars typically demonstrate how justice motives lead to resistance (itself a form of social control) against rationalist or categorical social control, but less so how social control itself can promote or signal dignity and social equality. As such, this challenge represents a future growth industry in this area of inquiry.

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