



Teaching and Learning Guide for “Gender In/equality in Worker-owned Businesses”

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Abstract

This teaching and learning guide accompanies the article, “Gender In/equality in Worker-owned Businesses,” which reviews existing literature on gender in businesses with employee stock ownership plans, worker cooperatives, and communes. Worker ownership has attracted renewed interest as a possible solution to the social and economic problems confronting our society. In worker-owned businesses, workers have greater control over what they produce, how they produce it, and how they are compensated. If workers ran things themselves, so the story goes, jobs would be better and workplaces would be more equal. What do we actually know about work in alternative organizations? Do women fare better? Can they offer alternatives or solutions to the gender inequality that permeates working life? This teaching and learning guide provides supplemental information to facilitate the use of this article in the classroom. This includes a list of recommended readings, online resources, a sample syllabus, focus questions, and project suggestions.

Author’s introduction

Worker ownership has attracted renewed interest as a possible solution to the social and economic problems confronting our society (Dewan 2014; Wolff 2012). In worker-owned businesses, workers have greater control over what they produce, how they produce it, and how they are compensated. Scholars have also identified alternative work organizations like worker cooperatives as places where the problems of inequality could be solved, such as the gender pay gap (Rothschild 2009). If workers ran things themselves, so the story goes, jobs would be better and workplaces would be more equal. What do we actually know about work in alternative organizations? Do women fare better? Can they offer alternatives or solutions to the gender inequality that permeates working life? This article reviews the existing literature on gender in different types of worker-owned businesses as a starting point to answering these important questions.

This article is relevant to the study of gender, work, and organizations because it emphasizes the *organizational context* in which work takes place. Instead of assuming a traditional or capitalist workplace, this article offers an overview of three of the most common types of worker ownership in the United States. These include businesses with employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), worker cooperatives, and communes. The article begins with a brief history of each organizational form and provides a useful framework to understand variation across these different types of organizations. Next, it reviews what (little) we know about gender in worker-owned businesses: gender inequality persists even when workers share ownership. Yet important exceptions exist. Literature across forms of worker ownership suggests that these businesses can mitigate gender inequality if they are as follows: (1) intentionally formed to combat gender inequality; (2) contain built-in mechanisms to promote participation at all levels; or (3) recognize and compensate domestic and reproductive labor.

While these conclusions are tentative given the limited research on the topic, they signal important directions for future scholarship that can inform debates over the viability and desirability of alternative organizations like worker-owned businesses. More research is needed to understand how alternative organizational forms can promote labor processes that improve women's positions in individual workplaces and in the labor market more broadly. The article concludes with a discussion of important avenues for future research, calling on scholars to take seriously alternative organizations that attempt to combat social inequality by reorganizing and reimagining the workplace.

Author recommends

The following articles and books are ideal for introducing students to key debates related to gender inequality and worker ownership. The article by Britton and Logan (2008) provides a framework for understanding gender inequality in the workplace, while the book edited by Atzeni (2012) contextualizes worker-owned businesses as alternative work organizations operating around the globe. The remaining readings delve deeper into different forms of worker ownership. While some provide an overview of alternative organizational forms (Kanter 1972), others introduce case studies of worker-owned businesses. For example, organizational practices in the Mondragon cooperatives (Hacker and Elcorobairutia 1987; Heras-Saizarbitoria 2014), bureaucracy in worker-owned cooperatives (Meyers 2011), and gender equality in a US commune (Rothschild and Tomchin 2006).

Atzeni, Maurizio, ed. 2012. *Alternative Work Organizations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

This edited volume examines different cases of alternative organizations that trouble the norms of capitalist work relations. The introductory chapter offers a comprehensive review of theories of alternative organizational forms. Through rich case studies across time and space, the chapters of this book empirically illustrate attempts to change taken-for-grant logics of production, association and ownership in the workplace. Of particular relevance are chapters five and six on worker self-management in Venezuela and Argentina, which examine on-going experiments in workplace democracy in Latin America.

Britton, Dana M., and Laura Logan. 2008. "Gendered Organizations: Progress and Prospects." *Sociology Compass* 2(1):107–121, 10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00071.x

This article provides an overview of the theory of gendered organizations and the large body of research that has developed since its original formulation. The authors discuss what they see as the three most important areas of research on gendered organizations: studies of intersectionality, studies that emphasize the role of organizational context, and those that explore mechanisms of organizational change.

Hacker, Sally, and Clara Elcorobairutia. 1987. "Women Workers in the Mondragon System of Industrial Cooperatives." *Gender & Society* 1(4):358–79, 10.1177/089124387001004002.

This article offers a feminist analysis of gender inequality in the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation in Spain. The authors examine how women workers fare in industrial cooperatives in contrast to those working in private firms. They find that women in cooperative organizations are better off in terms of employment, job security, and earnings. Nevertheless, both types of workplaces have similar patterns of gender stratification and occupational segregation. They suggest that alleviating gender inequality may require not only an equitable wage distribution, but also the socialization of housework and childcare.

Heras-Saizarbitoria, Iñaki. 2014. "The Ties that Bind? Exploring the Basic Principles of Worker-owned Organizations in Practice." *Organization* 21(5):645–65, 10.1177/1350508414537623.

This article provides a current review of the well-studied case of the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation. It does not specifically address gender, but the author does illustrate the disjuncture between formal principles of cooperation and actual practices that influence workers' daily experiences. Building on the work of other scholars who have critically examined the Mondragón over time, Heras-Saizarbitoria finds a decoupling of traditional cooperative principles and a reliance on job security and membership to be the most salient principles guiding workers' daily activity.

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1972. *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

A classic sociological analysis of communes in the United States, this book examines the emergence, organizational arrangements, values and dilemmas confronted by utopian communities and communes. Kanter links her study of the commune movement in the 1970s with the history of communalism in the U.S. dating back to the nineteenth century. The result is a very readable and insightful study of social experiments that confront often-unquestioned social institutions and norms, such as the nuclear family, individualism, and capitalist arrangements of work. Part One is especially useful for introducing the commune and discussing how utopian efforts are both idealized and discounted.

Meyers, Joan S. M. 2011. "Unpacking Bureaucracy: An Intersectional Theory of Gendered Organizations." Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. Retrieved August 11, 2014 (<http://smlr.rutgers.edu/2011-unpacking-bureaucracy-intersectional-theory-of-gendered-organizations-joan-sm-meyers>).

In this paper, Meyers examines the organizational structure of two worker cooperatives: a grocery store and a bakery. Through an examination of their bureaucratic structures, she shows how different arrangements of hierarchy and formality shape different access to power and resources across gender and racial lines. Drawing on Acker's (2006) concept of "inequality regimes," Meyers shows how two different inequality regimes constructed in the context of worker ownership produce inequality in different ways.

Rothschild, Joyce and Amy Tomchin. 2006. "Can Collectivist-democracy Bring Gender Equality? The Efforts at Twin Oaks." *Research in the Sociology of Work* 16:239–62, 10.1016/S0277-2833(06)16009-4.

This article examines efforts to overcome gender inequality in Twin Oaks, a long-standing commune in the United States. The authors document the commune's work system, which was designed to equally value all forms of labor. Members receive one labor credit for each hour of work, from income-producing tasks to housework and childcare. Members also intentionally attempt to break gender norms by encouraging one another to perform work stereotyped to the opposite gender. This case study offers insights into the way that organizational structures can challenge gender norms, illustrating how a radical reevaluation of work can significantly reduce gender inequality.

Online materials

There is a wealth of information about worker ownership online. This includes not only blogs that collect recent news and events, but also searchable databases of different types of worker-owned businesses mentioned in the article.

American Worker Cooperative blog

<http://www.american.coop>

The American Worker Cooperative is a long-running and resource-rich blog that focuses on worker cooperatives in the United States. The blog includes a map of U.S. worker cooperatives, complete with links to different databases of cooperatives. It also provides short videos explaining the idea of a cooperative economy, as well as a library of articles on worker co-ops, guides for starting a co-op, syllabi on worker ownership, and readings on the history of the cooperative movement.

Information on businesses with employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs)

ESOP Association: <http://www.esopassociation.org>

National Center for Employee Ownership: <http://www.nceo.org>

The ESOP Association and the National Center for Employee Ownership are two major membership organizations for ESOP companies. Their websites provide valuable information about employee-owned businesses in the U.S. They both also include a directory of member organizations, which can be used to find local ESOPs. Although the sites have some content behind pay walls, free references can be found. For example, the website for the National Center for Employee Ownership includes a free library of online articles and news reports, which includes basic information about employee ownership and current events.

Information on worker cooperatives in United States

US Federation of Worker Cooperatives: <http://www.usworker.coop/>

Democracy at Work Institute: <http://institute.usworker.coop>

The websites of the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives and its research arm, the Democracy at Work Institute, are valuable resources for accessing information for and about worker cooperatives in the United States. Under “Resources,” the website of the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives provides a database of registered worker cooperatives by state and industry, which is a useful tool to locate worker cooperatives and access basic contact information. It also aggregates recent news media on worker cooperatives.

The website for the Democracy at Work Institute provides more specific information on how cooperative businesses operate in communities affected by social and economic inequality. It includes news and updates on the development of cooperative businesses, as well as information on the Institute’s projects in rural development, workplace conversion, and improving access to capital. Under the “Tools” tab, there is a wealth of resources, including presentations on cooperatives, thematic reports and case studies. It also has a useful search feature, which allows you to filter content by topic or keyword.

Information on communes

Fellowship for Intentional Communities: <http://www.ic.org>

The Fellowship for Intentional Communities (FIC) is an organization of groups that are broadly classified as “intentional communities,” including ecovillages, cohousing groups, land trusts, income-sharing communes, student cooperatives and spiritual communities. Their website offers access to a directory of registered communities that is easily searchable. It also archives articles from its magazine *Communities*, which has been continuously published since 1972.

Documentary films on worker ownership

Shift Change: Putting Democracy to Work 2013, DVD, Moving Images, Seattle, WA. Produced by Mark Dworkin and Melissa Young (<http://www.shiftchange.org>)

We the Owners: Employees Expanding the American Dream 2012, DVD, The Foundation for Enterprise Development and Passage Productions, San Diego, CA (<http://www.wetheowners.com>)

There are a handful of documentary films on worker ownership. I list two recent ones here. Additionally, both websites provide useful information about the specific cases of worker ownership they highlight. *Shift Change: Putting Democracy to Work* is a documentary film that features cases studies of six worker-owned cooperatives. These include the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation, the Evergreen Cooperatives, the Arizmendi Association of Cooperatives, WAGES, Isthmus Engineering, and Manufacturing and Equal Exchange. *Shift Change* was distributed on PBS channels across the United States in 2014.

We the Owners: Employees Expanding the American Dream is an award winning documentary film that features different types of worker-owned businesses. These cases include New Belgium Brewing, which operates an ESOP; Namasté Solar, which is organized as a worker cooperative; and DPR Construction, which provides extensive stock options to its employees. The website also includes useful teaching guides and business case studies.

Sample syllabus

The article “Gender In/equality in Worker-owned Businesses” can be assigned in a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses. Examples include courses on the sociology of gender or work and organizations. It is also relevant to business courses that teach organizational behavior and/or management practices.

This sample syllabus presented below, entitled “Gender and the Future of Work,” introduces capitalist work arrangements and then critically examines how and why gender inequality persists in work organizations. Next, it teaches students about alternative work organizations and how they differ from traditional firms through case studies. It concludes with a critical examination of different proposals for the future of work that address gender inequality in the workplace. In each section of the following syllabus, I describe the learning objectives and then include a list of suggested readings that can be tailored to the specific course.

Course overview and introduction (week 1)

This class begins by presenting the main learning objectives. These include (1) understanding the emergence and nature of capitalist work arrangements and resulting workplace inequalities; (2) learning feminist theories that explain the nature and persistence of workplace inequality; and (3) critically examining proposals for the future of work.

Suggested readings:

Dewan, Shaila. 2014. “Who Needs a Boss?” *The New York Times*, March 25. Retrieved October 7, 2014 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/magazine/who-needs-a-boss.html>).

Vallas, Steven. 2013. “Introduction.” Pp. 11–56 in *Work: A Critique*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

Alternatives to what? (Weeks 2–5)

Before we introduce alternatives, we must first detail the workplace models that are under critique. This course begins by taking students back to the Industrial Revolution to teach them about the emergence of work under capitalism. The next section introduces them to the relationship between capitalism, patriarchy, and the enclosure of the commons. Students are then introduced to the corporate organizational form, ownership arrangement, and governance structure. The final week of this section draws these topics into the present with a discussion of the impacts of globalization and neoliberalism on work organization. Students should take away not only a foundational understanding of work under capitalism but also how these arrangements are gendered and historically embedded.

Week 2: Industrial Revolution and rise of wage labor

Suggested readings:

- Marx, Karl. 1978. "Estranged Labour." Pp. 70–81 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd revised & enlarged edition. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Volti, Rudi. 2012. "Industrialization and Its Consequences" Pp. 39–54 in *An Introduction to the Sociology of Work and Occupations*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Week 3: Capitalism, patriarchy and the commons

Suggested readings:

- Burris, Val. 1983. "The Dialectic of Women's Oppression: Notes on the Relation Between Capitalism and Patriarchy." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 27:51–74.
- Engels, Frederick. 2004. "The Family." Pp. 45–87 in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Chippendale, Australia: Resistance Books. Retrieved December 23, 2014 (<http://readingfromtheleft.com/PDF/EngelsOrigin.pdf>).
- Federici, Silvia. 2004. Preface and "All the World Needs a Jolt." Pp. 1–59 in *Caliban and the Witch*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- Federici, Silvia. 2012. "Feminism and the Commons." in *Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*. Edited by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich. Amherst, MA: Levellers Press. Retrieved December 23, 2014 (<http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/feminism-and-politics-commons>).

Week 4: Private ownership and the traditional firm

Suggested readings:

- Bakan, Joel. 2004. "The Rise of the Corporation." Pp. 5–27 in *The Corporation*. New York: Free Press.
- Hansmann, Henry. 1988. "Ownership of the Firm." *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization* 4(2):267–304.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1977. "Introduction," "Men and Women of the Corporation: The Population," and "Contributions to Theory: Structural Determinants of Behavior in Organizations." Pp. 3–28, 245–64 in *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Film: *The Corporation* 2003, DVD, Zeitgeist Films, New York

Week 5: Globalization and neoliberalism at work

Suggested readings:

- Crowley, Martha, and Randy Hodson. 2014. "Neoliberalism at Work." *Social Currents* 1(1):91–108.

- Eisenstein, Hester. 2009. "Women, Work, and the Mainstreaming of Feminism." in *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Salzinger, Leslie. 2004. "From Gender as Object to Gender as Verb: Rethinking How Global Restructuring Happens." *Critical Sociology* 30(1):43–62, 10.1163/156916304322981677
- Vallas, Steven. 2013. "The Globalization of Work." Pp. 180–218 in *Work: A Critique*.

Workplace inequality (week 6–7)

With a foundational understanding of the capitalist organization of work, students now learn about the persistence of inequality in the workplace. Special attention should be paid to the organizational context in which these readings analyze workplace inequality.

Week 6: Gender inequality and the "theory of gendered organizations"

Suggested readings:

- Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 4(2):139–58.
- Vallas, Steven. 2013. "Ascriptive Inequalities at Work I: Gender." Pp. 120–154 in *Work: A Critique*.
- Williams, Christine L., Chandra Muller, and Kristine Kilanski. 2012. "Gendered Organizations in the New Economy." *Gender & Society* 26(4):549–73.

Week 7: Intersectionality and "inequality regimes"

Suggested readings:

- Acker, Joan. 2006. "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations." *Gender & Society* 20(4):441–64.
- Stainback, Kevin, Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, and Sheryl Skaggs. 2010. "Organizational Approaches to Inequality: Inertia, Relative Power, and Environments." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1):225–47.
- Vallas, Steven. 2013. "Ascriptive Inequalities at Work II: Race, Ethnicity and Diversity at Work." Pp. 155–179 in *Work: A Critique*.

Alternative organizations and workplace in/equality (week 8–10)

Students are now introduced to alternative work organizations and how they contrast with capitalist workplaces (Atzeni 2012). Students first learn about different organizational forms with worker ownership, including businesses with employee stock ownership plans (Blasi and Kruse 2006) and worker cooperatives (Curl 2010; Datta and Gailey 2012). Next, students consider how alternative organizations address gender inequality (Sobering, Thomas and Williams 2014). Finally, they examine actual attempts to change organizational structures, patterns of resource distribution (Miller 2012), and gendered divisions of labor (Rothschild and Tomchin 2006) to create more equal outcomes.

Week 8–9: Worker ownership and alternative organizations

Suggested readings:

- Atzeni, Maurizio. 2012. "Introduction." Pp. 1–24 in *Alternative Work Organizations*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Blasi, Joseph and Douglas Kruse. 2006. "The Political Economy of Employee Ownership in the United States: From Economic Democracy to Industrial Democracy?" *International Review of Sociology – Revue Internationale de Sociologie* **16**(1):127–47.
- Curl, John. 2010. "Introduction." Pp. 1–12 in *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Datta, Punita Bhatt and Robert Gailey. 2012. "Empowering Women Through Social Entrepreneurship: Case Study of a Women's Cooperative in India." *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* **36**(3):569–87.

Film(s): *Shift Change* (2013) or *We the Owners* (2012)

Also, consider showing the segment on SEWA in *Shape of Water* 2006, DVD, Santa Barbara, CA. Produced and directed by Kum-Kum Bhavnani.

Week 9–10: Addressing inequality in alternative organizations

Suggested readings:

- Miller, Genna R. 2012. "'Gender Trouble': Investigating Gender and Economic Democracy in Worker Cooperatives in the United States." *Review of Radical Political Economics* **44**(1):8–22.
- Rothschild, Joyce and Amy Tomchin. 2006. "Can Collectivist–democracy Bring Gender Equality? The Efforts at Twin Oaks." *Research in the Sociology of Work* **16**:239–62, 10.1016/S0277-2833(06)16009-4.
- Sobering, Katherine, Jessica Thomas and Christine L. Williams. 2014. "Gender In/equality in Worker-owned Businesses." *Sociology Compass* **8**(11):1242–1255.

Exploring possibilities and solutions (weeks 11–13)

During the final weeks of this class, students critically evaluate three or four different proposals to address gender inequality in the workplace. Students should be encouraged to apply what they have learned during the course to critically debate these possibilities.

Proposal 1: *Redesigning the workplace*

Suggested reading:

- Correll, Shelley J., Erin L. Kelly, Lindsey Trimble O'Connor, and Joan C. Williams. 2014. "Redesigning, Redefining Work." *Work and Occupations* **41**(1):3–17.

Online resources: The website for the "Redesigning, Redefining Work" initiative includes video clips on ways to create more inclusive work cultures (<http://gender.stanford.edu/rrwvideobook-overview>).

Proposal 2: *"Shared capitalism" and the "democratic deficit"*

Suggested readings:

- Blasi, Joseph R., Richard B. Freeman, and Douglas L. Kruse. 2014. *The Citizen's Share: Reducing Inequality in the 21st Century*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wolff, Richard D. 2012. *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Online resources: The website for the “Democracy at Work” initiative includes news and teaching resources on worker self-directed enterprises that compliment Wolff (2012) (<http://www.democracyatwork.info>).

Proposal 3: “*Envisioning real utopias*”

Suggested readings:

Gornick, Janet C., and Marcia K. Meyers, eds. 2009. *Gender Equality: Transforming Family Divisions of Labor*. London: Verso.
Wright, Erik Olin. 2010. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso.

Online resources: The website of the “Real Utopias” project includes conference and working papers on a variety of topics (<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/RealUtopias.htm>).

Proposal 4: *Imagining “postwork” futures*

Suggested reading:

Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Conclusions and course wrap up (week 14)

Wrap up the course, review conclusions and have students submit final project (see below), and/or take a final exam.

Focus questions

- 1 How do worker-owned businesses differ from traditional firms?
- 2 Can worker-owned businesses produce better outcomes for workers? If so, how?
- 3 How do worker-owned businesses address gender inequality in the workplace? What does equality look like?
- 4 What are some advantages and challenges worker-owned businesses may face in the global economy?
- 5 Can the innovations of alternative organizations be applied to traditional firms?

Project ideas

Group project: organizational comparison

Compare and contrast two different types of organizations that operate in the same industry in the United States. Students should select a traditional organization and a worker-owned business. These cases should operate in the same industry and provide relatively similar products or services. Examples include a comparison of supermarkets, factories, bakeries, or breweries. Students will form groups to conduct research on these two businesses and write a comparative report no longer than 15 pages.

For each case, students must analyze each organization by providing a description of the organization’s structure, as well as its size, industry, products and/or services, and a brief history. Students must then compare and contrast the two different organizations. How do they differ from each other? How are they similar? What are the successes, challenges, issues, or problems faced by each organization? The report should conclude with directions for future research based on the analysis.

Individual project: local business report

Select a work organization in your local community and write a report about its business structure, ownership arrangement, worker participation, and culture/ideology. This report could examine a worker-owned business, such as one found using online databases of ESOP organizations, worker cooperatives, or intentional communities. However, students may also select a traditional workplace they are interested in. The report must draw on at least one interview conducted by the student with someone who works in the business and has knowledge of the organization. Information learned in the interview should be supplemented with research of secondary sources.

In the report, students must provide a brief history and background of the organization, including information about its creation, evolution, current size, and industry. Students must then report on the ownership, governance, participation, and ideological orientation of the business, following the chart found in Sobering, Thomas, and Williams (2014, p. 1243). Upon completion, students will give oral presentations discussing what they found most interesting about their case study based on the themes presented in class.

Class exercise: contributing to a “knowledge commons”

Wikipedia can be considered a modern example of the commons, a free space that provides crowd-sourced information on a wide range of topics in multiple languages. Yet Wikipedia also has a problem with gender inequality: it is estimated that nearly 90 percent of its contributors are male (Simonite 2013).

Students should read the following article in advance:

Simonite, Tom. 2013. “The Decline of Wikipedia.” *MIT Technology Review*. October 22. Retrieved December 23, 2014 (<http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/520446/the-decline-of-wikipedia>).

Following the guidelines offered by Wikipedia on the appropriate use of wikis in the classroom (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_educators), students will write and submit one original entry (or an original addition to an existing entry) based on the content of the course.

Short Biography

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Note

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- Rothschild, Joyce. 2009. “Workers’ Cooperatives and Social Enterprise: A Forgotten Route to Social Equity and Democracy.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52(7): 1023–41, 10.1177/0002764208327673.
- Wolff, Richard D. 2012. *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.