

# Aversive Workplace Conditions and Employee Grievance Filing: The Moderating Effects of Gender and Ethnicity

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Studies examining the direct effects of employee demographic differences on grievance filing have yielded mixed results. Moreover, little is known regarding the possible moderating effect that such differences might have on the link between workplace adversity and grievance filing. Using a sample of 866 blue-collar workers drawn from four unions, we examine the potential moderating effects of gender and race/ethnicity. Our findings suggest that while gender and ethnicity are not significantly associated with perceptions of workplace adversity, grievance filing in response to certain forms of adversity is amplified among women (as compared to men) and among African Americans and Hispanics (as compared to whites). The meaning and implications of these findings are discussed.

RESEARCH ON EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE FILING SUGGESTS THAT A broad range of employee, workplace, and market factors all play a role in determining the likelihood of grievance filing, with Hirschman's (1970) Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (EVL) paradigm and Klaas's (1989) expectancy model of grievance behavior providing a strong theoretical underpinning for explaining how such factors might come together to explain such formal employee remedy-seeking behavior. Based on these models, recent studies suggest that while aversive or potentially injurious workplace conditions may provide potential grievance opportunities, actual grievance filing by the employee is determined on the basis of the subjective expected utility associated with such behavior relative to that associated with other alternatives

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such as leaving the organization or “suffering in silence” (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a; Cappelli and Chauvin 1991). However, such expectancy-related processes may not apply universally across all employees in a given work setting. Indeed, according to Felstiner et al.’s (1980–1981: 640) dispute emergence and transformation theory, formal remedy-seeking claims emerge as an outcome of a socially constructed transformation processes in which claimants’ prior experiences (reflected in such “social structural variables as ethnicity and gender”) interact with objective conditions to determine whether perceived injuries are transformed into formal claims. Put in other terms, since employee demographic characteristics may reflect institutional, normative, and cognitive influences on grievance-related expectancy perceptions, it is likely that employees’ demographic characteristics such as gender and ethnicity/race moderate the link between adverse workplace conditions and grievance filing, conditioning the extent to which employees turn to the grievance system as a means by which to seek relief from workplace adversity.

Interestingly, however, most of the research on the impact of individual differences on grievance activity has assumed a direct effect of demography on grievance behavior, with little research exploring how such demographic differences among employees might condition the link between potentially grievable workplace conditions and actual employee grievance filing (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1994). Given that grievance-like procedures are becoming increasingly common in nonunion organizations (Delaney et al. 1989; Feuille and Hildebrand 1995) and that the workforces employed by both union and nonunion organizations are becoming increasingly diverse (Williams and O’Reilly 1998), an enhanced understanding of the possible demographic moderators of the link between workplace and job conditions (on the one hand) and employee grievance filing (on the other) is—for a number of reasons—critical if conflict resolution through employee grievance filing is to remain, as noted by Peterson and Lewin (2000: 395), “the major accomplishment of the United States system of industrial relations.” First, a focus on demographic moderators of the link between aversive or potentially injurious work conditions and grievance filing is likely to shed light on those particular workplace issues for which, due to institutional, normative, or cognitive reasons, certain groups may be more sensitive than others. To the extent that these issues can be proactively identified and addressed, it may be possible to reduce the productivity and displacement costs often associated with grievance processing (Katz, Kochan, and Gobeille 1993), thereby enhancing the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the system as a whole.

Similarly, such a focus may also allow researchers and practitioners to identify and address those issues for which certain groups as opposed to

others are less able to utilize informal (and thereby, typically less costly) mechanisms by which to resolve disputes. Drawing from Peterson and Lewin (2000: 402), if grievance rates for particular groups are higher than some norm for a particular type of workplace issue, it may suggest that for such problems, members of these groups experience a relative absence of effective informal conflict resolution mechanisms. Such informal mechanisms, as suggested by Peterson and Lewin (2000), play a key role in ensuring that grievance systems are not over-utilized and ultimately detrimental to organizational performance.

Finally, a focus on demographic moderation effects (as opposed to the more traditional analysis of the direct effects of demography) is likely to generate findings with more practical relevance to both labor and management. While main effect analyses provide an indication only of which demographic groups tend to file more or less grievances, they generally fail to link this tendency with any particular type of grievance. Consequently, while such research suggests, for example, that men may be more likely to file a grievance than women (Peterson and Lewin 2000: 397), it fails to provide any insight as to whether such an increased likelihood is perhaps a function of men's higher probability of being subject to discipline<sup>1</sup> (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1994), a tendency to be more sensitive to particular adverse workplace conditions, or a tendency to resort to formal remedy-seeking behavior more quickly than women (i.e., a lower remedy-seeking threshold). In contrast, consistent with the social constructionist perspective of law and dispute resolution (Felstiner et al. 1980–1981), demographic moderator analyses facilitate a greater understanding of the potentially differential drivers and motivators of justice- and remedy-seeking for different groups in increasingly diverse organizations. Relative to findings regarding which groups are more likely to file grievances overall, as noted previously, insight into what motivates certain groups to file more grievances than others, and whether grievance filing is more tightly linked to perceived workplace adversity for some groups of workers than others, may provide a far stronger basis for labor–management action.

Consequently, in the current study, we generate and then test a theory of how gender and ethnicity, as two central demographic attributes, are likely to moderate the association between aversive and potentially injurious workplace conditions on the one hand, and the rate of employee grievance filing on the other.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lewin and Peterson (1988: 141) discipline is the single largest determinant of grievance filing, accounting—on average—for approximately 9 percent of grievances filed.

## Workplace Conditions, Demography, and Employee Grievance Filing

Although there is broad consensus that a grievance is initiated when an employee formally files a complaint with an agent of the union and alleges that his rights have been violated (Gordon and Miller 1984: 118), there is less agreement as to the proper level of analysis for capturing such behavior. The majority of recent studies have examined grievance activity at the aggregate level, focusing on the rates of grievances handled by stewards across organizations or organizational units. Indeed, only a handful of empirical studies has examined individual-level employee grievance-filing behavior (Bemmel and Foley 1996). Nevertheless, as noted by Bacharach and Bamberger (2004a), there are a number of good reasons to examine individual-level grievance filing behavior rather than unit-level grievance rates. For example, as noted by Bacharach and Bamberger (2004a), the link between workplace conditions and unit-level grievance rates is largely explained by the variance in individual-level grievance filing. That being the case, in the current study we focus on the individual as the primary unit of analysis, seeking to explain the rate of employee grievance filing over a 1-year period.

In seeking to explain such individual-level behavior, we frame the analysis around the expectancy paradigm proposed by Klaas (1989). According to this paradigm, employees must first perceive grievance conditions (i.e., “opportunities”) before they can even consider the potential benefits and costs of filing a grievance. That is, Klaas’ model suggests that the perceived existence of aversive or potentially injurious supervisory, job, or general workplace conditions is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for grievance filing. Whether or not the grievance is actually filed largely depends upon the employee’s perceptions of the subjective expected utility of doing so. Consistent with expectancy theory, the subjective expected utility of grievance filing is likely to vary as a multiplicative function of the *perceived* net benefits of filing a grievance (i.e., positive outcome of the grievance determination net of any costs incurred in the filing process itself or incurred subsequent to grievance resolution), and the *perceived* probability that such net benefits will actually be realized. Thus, demographic factors may significantly influence perceptions regarding the severity of these conditions (i.e., the extent to which an “injury” or injustice is perceived to exist in the first place) and may also affect the cost/benefit and probability calculations largely determining whether and at which point it is in fact worthwhile for an individual employee to turn to formal processes to address the “injury” or injustice perceived. For example, for members of some groups, the perceived benefits of grievance filing may be greater to the

extent that they feel that they have experienced an injustice and are at increased risk of additional or greater injury by failing to file a grievance, and to the extent that they feel that they have no alternative, informal means by which to seek a remedy.

*Work-Related Determinants.* Research has shown that among the many work-related issues that may influence grievance activity, supervision and job conditions tend to be the most frequently grieved across multiple sectors (Lewin and Peterson 1988: 143). A basic premise of the studies examining the impact of work conditions on grievance filing is that aversive or potentially injurious supervision and job characteristics, which present employees with grievance opportunities, should be linked to an increase in grievances.

Researchers concerned with the impact of supervision on employee grievances have tended to focus on two main types of indicators: supervisor capabilities and leadership style (Bemmels and Foley 1996). A relatively strong and consistent inverse relationship has been found between supervisory capabilities and grievances. For example, Allen and Keaveny (1985) found that, relative to grievants, nongrievants held significantly more favorable attitudes about the competence of their supervisors (specifically, believed that their supervisors were “competent in doing their job”). Similarly, focusing on steward perceptions of supervision, Bemmels, Reshef, and Stratton-Devine (1991) and Bemmels (1994) found that higher perceived supervisor capabilities (e.g., better knowledge of the collective bargaining agreement) were linked to lower frequencies of employee complaints to stewards and lower grievance rates. Although some of the research on supervisory qualifications is somewhat dated, given recent changes in the nature of the supervisory role (in particular, requirements for supervisors to serve less as monitors and more as coaches and mentors; Bamberger and Meshulam 2002), we can only expect this variable to have an increasing impact on employee grievance behavior.

The findings on leadership style and grievance behavior have been less consistent, however. Using Fleishman and Harris’s (1957) measures of supervisory consideration (emphasis on trust and respect) and structuring (task-related directiveness), early studies (e.g., Fleishman and Harris 1962) suggested that both consideration and structure had a curvilinear relationship with grievance rates. For example, Skinner’s (1969) findings suggested that subordinates of foremen rated in the middle of the structure range filed the most grievances. However, more recent studies have found structure to be unrelated to grievance activity (Bemmels 1994), and consideration (or a more democratic leadership style) to be significantly associated with *more* grievances (Walker and Robinson 1977).

To a large extent, these inconsistent findings may be attributed to the context-specific implications of alternative leadership styles (House and Podsakoff 1994). Indeed, in some contexts, employees may not see structuring behaviors as aversive, or consideration behaviors as positive. For example, particularly under conditions of high organizational ambiguity, employees may find supervisors' structuring behaviors to be beneficial (Bacharach and Bamberger 1995). Consequently, in the current study, we attempt to model the effects of supervision on employee grievance filing by focusing on indicators of supervisory behavior that are more universally perceived to be aversive or injurious, such as the degree to which supervisors are perceived as intimidating, arrogant, or impatient (Tepper 2000), as well as the degree to which supervisors are viewed as having the necessary qualifications to do the job.

Far less grievance activity research has examined the impact of job conditions than the impact of supervision. Researchers concerned with job conditions have concentrated primarily on work technology variables (Kuhn 1961; Peach and Livernash 1974), such as the need to follow strict schedules and procedures, routinization, and task interdependence (Bemmels et al. 1991). There again the results have been, at best, mixed. For example, Bemmels et al. (1991) found essentially no support for the presumed relationship between work technology and grievance activity. In fact, out of six technology variables studied, only one, the need to follow strict schedules and procedures, was related to grievance rates, and this in the opposite direction from that predicted. However, as with leadership style, the degree to which work process configurations present grievance opportunities may be situation specific. In certain work contexts, a high degree of monitoring and formalization may, for example, reduce the risk of work injuries and therefore reduce grievance activity. In other contexts, employees may view similar technologies as an instrument of excessive managerial control and may resist them via the grievance system.

Consequently, as with supervision, we focus on the impact of job attributes that are universally perceived to be aversive or potentially injurious, namely an unsafe work environment (exposure to occupational hazards) and excessive work hours (temporal job demands). The latter is of particular relevance in light of recent changes in the nature of work (Frese 2000). Specifically, many employers have recently sought to lower labor costs by reducing staffing levels and increasing the flexibility of their remaining work force, thus placing increased temporal demands (manifested by increased hours of work) on their employees (Bamberger and Meshulam 2000; Schor 1992). Such increased temporal job demands have been associated with a wide range of negative consequences for employees and

their families, including stress and burnout (Zohar 1997), work–family conflict (Bacharach, Bamberger, and Conley 1991; Moen and Yu 2000), and physical health complaints (Shirom et al. 1997).

Aversive job and supervisory attributes are likely to increase the rate of employee grievance filing for a number of reasons. First, the rate of grievance filing is likely to rise if these attributes reflect actual contract violations by management and if employees turn to the grievance system in order to seek redress. Second, because employees may use the grievance system as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction with management, the rate of grievance filing may rise even if these attributes merely reflect employees' concerns with supervision or working conditions. This is not to say, however, that perceived aversive supervisory or job-related attributes *necessarily* increase the rate of employee grievance filing. As noted above, while perceived aversive attributes are likely to be viewed as grievable conditions or grievance opportunities, the decision to seek a remedy will likely depend on the outcome of “a rational, calculative process” in which the employee will weigh the attractiveness of initiating the grievance against the relative attractiveness of alternative forms of action or inaction (Klaas 1989: 451).

*Employee Demographic Characteristics.* Much of the early research on employee grievance filing attempted to identify the demographic characteristics of those using the grievance system. Descriptive rather than theory based, the bulk of these studies simply tested the ability of one or more demographic variables to predict grievance filing. Although these studies provide some evidence that grievants tend to be men as well as younger, and more educated and skilled than nongrievants, on the whole, this research has produced few consistent results (Gordon and Miller 1984; Peterson and Lewin 2000). Indeed, Kissler (1977) points out that the individual correlates of individual grievance activity appear to be largely situation specific.

However, as noted above, in the context of Klaas' expectancy model, injustice or injury sensitivity, or in other words, the perceived existence of aversive supervisory, job, or general workplace conditions (itself potentially a function of the individual's demographic profile) is only a necessary, not sufficient, condition for grievance filing. The determination as to whether the individual in fact files a complaint is likely to be based largely on individual subjective expected utility calculations (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a; Cappelli and Chauvin 1991). To the extent that an employee's demographic profile may reflect cognitive, normative, or institutional influences on either the cost/benefit perceptions or perceived outcome probabilities associated with grievance filing, demographic characteristics such as gender

and ethnicity may serve as an important conditioning factor, moderating the link between a set of workplace conditions and individual grievance filing.

But what is the nature of this conditioning effect likely to be? On the one hand, from the perspective of power dependence (Bacharach and Lawler 1981) and organizational punishment-industrial discipline (Arvey and Jones 1985) theories, there is reason to suspect that this link between aversive workplace conditions and grievance filing may be *attenuated* among female and ethnic minority workers relative to their male and ethnic majority peers. For example, employment discrimination experiences may prompt women and members of ethnic/racial minorities to overweigh the potential retaliation-related risks of grievance filing, particularly if the end result of supervisory retaliation is likely to be a prolonged period of unemployment (Arvey and Jones 1985). Put in other words, while all employees are likely to consider the potential ramifications of grievance filing (i.e., that by filing a grievance they may be subject to employer reprisal, which ultimately makes it difficult for them to remain on the job; Lewin and Peterson 1999), the subjective expected cost of such a grievance-related outcome is likely to be greater for those viewing themselves as having fewer comparable employment alternatives such as women and minorities. In addition, as Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach (1994: 274) suggest, stewards' lack of familiarity with the handling of "female-type" disputes (as opposed to more "male-type" disputes such as discipline), may dissuade women from formally seeking redress.

On the other hand, based on research on workplace diversity, union commitment, and labor markets, we believe that a stronger case may be made for an amplification effect, with the expected positive relationship between aversive workplace conditions and grievance filing likely to be *stronger* among female and ethnic minority workers relative to their male and ethnic majority peers (e.g., Duffy and Ferrier 2003). That is, we posit that, for two reasons, objectively aversive work conditions may be more strongly associated with grievance filing behavior among women and minority group members.

First, it may be that certain objectively aversive work conditions take on added saliency for members of particular demographically defined work groups. For example, the aversiveness of temporal job pressures may be more salient to women than men since family responsibilities tend to place greater restrictions on the flexibility of women to respond to employer demands to work overtime (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1994; Keene and Reynolds 2005), thus either increasing their sensitivity to such aversiveness, or lowering their threshold for remedy seeking. Similarly, while supervisory abuse may create a generally aversive work context for all of those employed

in the supervisor's work unit (Tepper 2000), such conditions may be more salient for women and minority work unit members who, as vigilant social auditors (Kramer and Wei 1999), may be concerned that as members of a "minority status" such behavior will ultimately become disproportionately targeted against them (Duffy and Ferrier 2003). To the extent that women and minorities may upwardly estimate the costs of such aversive conditions relative to their male and majority peers, they may also attribute greater potential utility to grievance behaviors aimed at addressing such conditions. As a result, they may resort to formal remedy-seeking mechanisms such as grievance filing at lower perceived levels of aversiveness than their non-minority peers.

A second reason why the link between aversive conditions and grievance filing might be stronger for women and minorities has to do with their level of attachment to and/or trust in their union. Confidence in the interest and ability of one's union to successfully pursue a grievance may play a significant role in employee decision making regarding the utility of grievance filing in that, based on subjective expected utility notions (Heath 1976), the perceived utility of grievance filing is likely to be a function of not only the perceived benefits of filing, but also of the perceived probability that such benefits may actually be realized. Indeed, a number of studies suggest that individuals will be more likely to voice complaints in organizations when they believe that others (such as their union shop stewards) will support their position, and they are likely to stay silent when they believe that they will fail to gain the active backing of others (Bowen and Blackmon 2003). Although numerous studies over the past two decades have consistently found that relative to men and whites, women and minority group members are more likely to desire unionization (Farber 1989; Kochan 1979), hold more favorable union attitudes (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a; Fullagar and Barling 1989), and evidence higher union instrumentality perceptions (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a; Schur and Kruse 1992), other studies suggest that these same groups tend to be more skeptical of the interest or ability of their union to pursue grievance issues deemed to be of particular salience to women and minorities unless they are more glaring violations of the collective agreement (Forrest 2001; Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1993). Consequently, relative to men and whites, women and ethnic minorities may give greater consideration to the severity of the aversive condition in deciding whether to file a grievance, grieving only when the perceived condition is deemed severe enough to capture the interest and attention of their steward. If this is indeed the case, we would expect a tighter link between the severity of perceived workplace adversity and the rate of grievance filing for women and minorities relative to that for males and whites.

Finally, in the context of Hirschman's (1970) EVL theory, the association between aversive conditions and grievance filing may be stronger for women and minorities in unionized workplaces because relative to their male and majority-group peers, they are likely to have fewer realistic alternative means by which to address such adversity. The research on workplace diversity suggests that women and ethnic minorities may have far more limited access to those individuals and gatekeepers (e.g., supervisors, upper-level managers) able to more informally facilitate a satisfactory solution to the perceived work-related problem (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1994; Kanter 1977). Similarly, as demonstrated in a number of studies (see, for example, Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a; Cappelli and Chauvin 1991), grievance behavior is contingent upon the availability of comparative, alternative jobs, with employees tending to voice (i.e., grieve) rather than exit (i.e., leave the organization) as unemployment as well as the wage premium associated with the current job rise. Simply put, under such conditions, the relative benefit of "exit" (as the alternative means by which to address workplace adversity) declines. Given that, even in the best of times, women and minorities tend to face less advantageous labor markets than their male and majority peers (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Core 1999; Yamagata et al. 1997); they may tend to overweight the advantages of voice and disadvantages of the alternative, namely exit.

Taken together, all three of these arguments suggest that the association between specific adverse workplace conditions and the rate of grievance filing is likely to be amplified for women and members of ethnic/racial minority groups relative to that of their male or white peers.

## Method

*Sample.* Self-report data were collected from members of four blue-collar unions in the manufacturing and service sectors who were employed on a full-time basis in the northeastern United States and earning at least \$5.00 per hour. Data were collected from a random sample of members employed at each of the plants or facilities represented by the particular union. In all four cases, the unions had signed contracts at least 1 year prior to the study and were at least 1 year away from future contract negotiations.<sup>2</sup> In addition, all the members of a particular union were

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<sup>2</sup> This is significant because it is generally believed that grievance activity intensifies as contract renewal dates and negotiations approach or occur.

covered by the same contract. All of the unions included in the current study had broadly defined grievance procedures. For example, a provision appearing in the contracts of two of the unions guaranteed employees the right to grieve all matters “in connection with their work.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, all surveys were distributed and returned within a single 8-month period in 1996–1997.

Across these four unions, 3444 surveys were distributed, and 1662 were returned (overall response rate of 48.3 percent). The effective sample size was reduced to 1562 by the exclusion of twenty-eight grossly incomplete questionnaires or questionnaires with highly suspect/unreasonable responses, and the disqualification of nineteen respondents earning less than \$5.00 an hour, and of an additional fifty-three respondents employed on less than a full-time basis (defined as a minimum of 35 hours per week). An additional 696 observations were eliminated due to missing values in one or more of the explanatory variables, resulting in a final sample size of 866. The list-wise elimination of these observations had no impact on the results reported below. All significant parameters remained significant with no change in the nature or magnitude of association, and all nonsignificant parameters remained nonsignificant.

Forty percent of these (558 respondents), employed in thirty-eight work units,<sup>4</sup> were members of the two unions in the manufacturing/industrial processing sector (occupations including unskilled workers, machinists, and skilled trades workers). The remainder (308 respondents), employed in thirty-seven units, were members of the two unions in the service sector (occupations including retail clerks, warehouse workers, nurse’s aides, maintenance, and kitchen workers). The mean number of observations per work unit was twelve (median = 6 observations/unit). In approximately 75 percent of the work units, there were four or more observations. The tasks performed by members of a common work unit were in all cases either identical or nearly identical.

In each of the unions, we checked for a possible nonresponse bias, and found that, as reported elsewhere (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004b), our final samples were representative of the membership of their respective unions across a wide range of criteria (e.g., seniority, skill level, hours of work). Specifically,

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<sup>3</sup> Complete contract language available from the authors. Similar language appeared in the contracts of the remaining two unions.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of one service and one manufacturing union, the work unit was defined by facility. In the case of the other service and manufacturing unions, each representing employees in a larger, single enterprise, the work unit was defined as the department. In all cases, all members of the same work unit reported to the same shift supervisor.

grievance rates in each of the six union subsamples examined were nearly identical to those reported by their respective unions for the parallel period (deviation of less than 10 percent). Given that all of the explanatory variables analyzed in this study are assessed on the basis of unit-level measures (e.g., hazards, temporal demands) or demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity), the risk of a nonresponse bias is minimal.

Women ( $n = 380$ ) comprised 44 percent of the sample, and African Americans and Hispanics comprised 26 percent ( $n = 227$ ) and 9 percent ( $n = 80$ ) of the sample, respectively. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to >60, with a mean age of approximately 45. More than 61 percent were married or living with a partner. Whites comprised 65 percent of respondents. Respondents were relatively well educated, with 94.6 percent having completed either high school or vocational school, and 11.3 percent having completed four or more years of college.

*Measures.* In addition to a measure of employee grievance filing, the present study includes four measures of the work and environmental factors potentially influencing employee grievance behavior, as well the two demographic moderator variables (gender and race/ethnicity) and six control variables. These measures are presented below along with their respective reliability estimates. Except as otherwise noted, all scales were formed on the basis of the arithmetic mean of their respective items. Variable mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

*Employee Grievance Filing.* Adopting an approach similar to that used by Allen and Keaveny (1985), we assessed employee grievance filing by asking respondents to indicate how many times they had filed a grievance *in the last year*. Study participants were instructed to include all written grievances filed with a steward or committee person, regardless of whether or not the steward or union had actually ended up pursuing the matter. On average, study participants filed 0.57 grievances during the specified time period, with the average range of grievances filed per employee varying considerably across both unions (from 0.22 to 0.87) and work units (from 0 to 3.0). Thirty percent of the sample as a whole reported having filed at least one grievance during the preceding year, with half of these individuals (i.e., 14 percent of the sample as a whole) having filed only one grievance in the past year, 6 percent having filed two, and 10 percent having filed three or more. This average proportion of employees filing grievances is somewhat greater than the rates reported in several other studies (e.g., Bemmels 1994; Cappelli and Chauvin 1991), most likely because the mean proportion of grievance filers in one of the four unions studied was considerably higher (0.44) than

TABLE 1

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS AMONG THE VARIABLES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS ( $n = 866$ )

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Grievance	0.57	0.99															
2. Skilled	0.08	0.28	0.09**														
3. Age	5.91	2.07	0.01	0.08*													
4. Seniority	3.90	1.79	0.12***	0.16***	0.52***												
5. Union 2	0.31	0.46	0.02	0.45***	-0.20***	-0.05											
6. Union 3	0.34	0.47	0.22***	-0.21***	0.09**	0.21***	-0.48***										
7. Union 4	0.23	0.42	-0.20***	-0.16***	0.06	-0.12***	-0.36***	-0.39***									
8. Unit size	34.87	30.17	-0.04	-0.11***	-0.18***	-0.03	0.52***	-0.09**	-0.20***								
9. Income	6.41	2.58	0.25***	0.36***	0.27***	0.48***	0.22***	0.28***	-0.40***	0.07*							
10. Female	0.44	0.50	-0.17***	-0.20***	-0.03	-0.19***	-0.23***	-0.30***	0.47***	-0.15***	-0.45***						
11. African American	0.26	0.44	0.03	-0.08**	-0.03	0.01	-0.12***	0.09**	-0.01	-0.15***	-0.09**	0.13***					
12. Hispanic	0.09	0.29	-0.06	-0.07*	-0.11***	-0.10**	-0.13***	0.08**	-0.04	-0.07*	-0.06	-0.01	-0.19***				
13. Abusive supervision	2.18	0.96	0.32***	-0.06	-0.01	0.08*	-0.11***	0.10**	-0.01	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01			
14. Supervisor qualifications	3.51	1.15	-0.22***	-0.06	-0.01	-0.04	0.07*	-0.17***	0.15***	0.08*	-0.04	0.06	-0.03	0.01	-0.51***		
15. Exposure to hazards	2.83	0.79	0.32***	0.07*	-0.03	0.10**	0.01	0.28***	0.16***	0.03	0.15***	-0.11***	-0.07*	-0.06	0.24***	-0.24***	
16. Hours worked	46.49	7.31	0.18***	0.12***	-0.13***	-0.01	0.36***	0.02	-0.22***	0.19***	0.29***	-0.23***	0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.02	0.08*

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ .

in the others (range of means across all four unions: 0.14 to 0.44).<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, it may be that unlike the steward-reported rates of formal grievance submission used in other studies, our measure assessed the number of grievances filed by individual employees with their stewards. Assuming that stewards do not necessarily formally pursue all of the grievances presented to them by employees, it is reasonable to expect steward-report rates to be lower than employee-reported rates.

*Work Context Variables.* Two scales developed by Bacharach and Bamberger (1995) were used to assess the nature of supervision. The first, *abusive supervisory behavior*, included five items. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently (1 = hardly ever to 5 = very often) their direct supervisor: (1) becomes impatient, (2) loses his/her temper, (3) becomes arrogant, (4) assumes one is guilty until proven innocent, and (5) becomes overly concerned with regulations. At the individual level, Cronbach alpha for this measure was 0.90.

The second variable used to assess the nature of supervision, *supervisory qualifications*, included three items. Respondents were asked to indicate (1 = not at all to 5 = very much) the extent to which they felt that their direct supervisor had: (1) the experience necessary for the job, (2) the education necessary for the job, and (3) the people skills necessary for the job. At the individual level, Cronbach alpha for this measure was 0.87.

We assessed the aversiveness of the job by focusing on two core job attributes, namely exposure to occupational hazards and temporal job demands. *Exposure to occupational hazards* was assessed on the basis of a sixteen-item scale (alpha = 0.90) developed after extensive preliminary fieldwork. Specifically, prior to the construction of the questionnaire, over one hundred fifty respondents from all four unions were interviewed in order to generate a list of the most pervasive hazards at each work site. The sixteen-item instrument captures those sets of hazards most frequently mentioned (e.g., fire or electrical shock, asbestos, slippery floors or catwalks, dangerous work methods, mugging going to or from work). Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they felt exposed (1 = not at all exposed to 5 = very exposed) to each of the sixteen hazards in their current job (See Appendix 1 for a list of the items).

We assessed temporal job demands on the basis of the average number of *hours* respondents self-reported that they had worked per week over the

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<sup>5</sup> The average proportion of grievance filers also varied across work units with none of the respondents from a given work unit filing in some units, and all of the respondents from a given unit filing in others (mean proportion for the 75 work units = 0.32; median = 0.29; SD = 0.30).

preceding year. While approximately 32 percent of respondents had worked, on average, 40 or fewer hours per week, approximately 40 percent reported having worked 41 to 50 hours per week; approximately 20 percent reported having worked 51 to 60 hours per week; and approximately 8 percent reported having worked an average of 61 or more hours per week.

*Demographic Moderators.* We examined two demographic moderator variables, namely *gender* (coded as 0 for men and 1 for women), and race/ethnicity. Given the limited number of ethnic minorities other than African Americans and Hispanics in the sample, in the current analysis, we focus on these two groups only. Consequently, race/ethnicity was operationalized in terms of two dummy variables with whites as the reference group, namely “African American” and “Hispanic.”

*Control Variables.* Following Cappelli and Chauvin (1991), we controlled for both skill level and seniority. “*Skilled*” is a dummy variable coded as 1 in those cases where the individual is employed in a craft job and 0 otherwise. To assess *seniority*, employees were asked to identify the category (ranging from 1 [less than one year] to 10 [40 or more years], with each of the in-between categories covering 5 years) most closely corresponding to the number of years they had been working for their current employer. We also controlled for *age* (a categorical variable ranging from 1 [under 20] to 10 [60 or older], with each of the in-between categories covering 5 years), since, according to the discriminant analysis conducted by Allen and Keaveny (1985), this was one of the most powerful factors in discriminating between grievants and nongrievants. Additionally, because the perceived aversiveness of certain work characteristics (e.g., temporal work demands) may be contingent on earnings, we controlled for self-reported annual individual income (a categorical variable ranging from 1 [below \$10,000] to 12 [\$60,000 or more]; with each of the in-between categories covering \$5000). Since individuals in larger work units may have fewer contacts with those able to informally resolve work-related problems or disputes (thus increasing the likelihood of grievance filing in the event of a perceived injustice), we also controlled for work unit size. Finally, since the seventy-five work units belonged to four unions, we included the union (operationalized on the basis of three dummy variables, with one of the two service unions serving as a reference group) as a fixed effect in order to control for a number of possible union-based effects having the potential to bias our results. For example, by including the effects of the union, we were able to take into account the possible systematic differences in the contractual breadth of the grievance procedure across unions. While, as noted above, all

of the unions included in the current study had broadly defined grievance procedures, in theory contracts may vary with respect to what is and what is not a grievance under the terms of the contract. Consequently, failure to take the union into account could potentially result in biased results in that, for those unions with narrowly defined contracts, certain predictors may simply have little grievance-related relevance.

*Analytic Approach.* Since the dependent variable is a count variable (reflecting the number of grievances filed by an individual in a certain period), and because all respondents were employed in one of seventy-five different work units, we applied a multilevel (i.e., hierarchical linear model [HLM]) approach for a Poisson regression model. Using this approach, we modeled the log of the expected count (i.e., number of grievances filed by an individual in a specific period of time) as a linear function of the predictor variables, while taking into account the nested structure of individuals within work units (i.e., the correlation between subjects belonging to the same unit). Accordingly, we applied the SAS GENMOD procedure, which fits the generalized linear models with correlated data, based on the method of generalized estimating equations (GEE) (Liang and Zeger 1986). Although the goodness of fit statistics provided by the GENMOD procedure fail to take into account the potentially nested structure of individuals within work units, we present the differences in  $-2 \log$  likelihood in order to provide a general indication as to the marginal effect of including demographic moderator terms in grievance models.

## Results

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the dependent, independent, and control variables are presented in Table 1. The correlations among the variables do not suggest any multicollinearity problems, with only two correlations exceeding 0.50 ( $r = 0.52$  between seniority and age, and between unit size and one of the union dummy variables). Interestingly, most of the correlations between demography and the work condition variables were not significant. Indeed, all three of the significant demography–work condition correlations (gender and African Americans with exposure to hazards, and gender with hours worked) suggest that, if anything, members of the three minority groups examined in this study were *less* exposed or less sensitive to potentially injurious conditions than their male or white peers.

Results regarding the moderating effects of demography on the relationship between work conditions and grievance rates are displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

RESULTS OF GENERALIZED LINEAR MODEL (“GENMOD”) ANALYSIS OF RATE OF GRIEVANCE FILING ( $n = 866$  IN ALL MODELS)

Variable	Grievance filing: main effect models				Grievance filing: moderation models			
	(1) Demographic model		(2) Work context model		(3) Gender model		(4) Ethnicity model	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Union (2) (reference = 8)	0.35	0.9	-0.10	0.37	0.006	0.36	-0.20	0.31
Union (3) (reference = 8)	0.823**	0.34	0.21	0.35	0.25	0.34	0.20	0.26
Union (4) (reference = 8)	-0.13	0.41	-0.23	0.37	-0.25	0.36	-0.49	0.31
Skilled	0.16	0.23	0.15	0.27	0.11	0.28	0.21	0.26
Age	-0.07*	0.03	-0.04	0.03	-0.04	0.03	-0.04	0.03
Seniority	0.01	0.05	-0.006	0.06	-0.008	0.05	0.03	0.05
Unit size	-0.004	0.005	-0.003	0.004	-0.003	0.004	-0.002	0.003
Income	0.15***	0.03	0.14***	0.03	0.13***	0.04	0.10***	0.03
Gender (female)	0.02	0.17	-0.05	0.15	-1.49	1.20	-0.04	0.11
Ethnicity (black) (reference = white)	0.05	0.14	0.10	0.12	0.07	0.12	-1.52	0.96
Ethnicity (Hispanic) (reference = white)	-0.26	0.21	-0.10	0.18	-0.11	0.18	-2.47	1.31
Abusive spv. behavior			0.35***	0.06	0.27***	0.07	0.31***	0.06
Spv. qualifications			-0.0005	0.05	-0.06	0.06	-0.01	0.06
Exp. to hazards			0.50***	0.11	0.34***	0.11	0.55***	0.12
Hours/week			0.02**	0.006	0.02***	0.007	0.008	0.008
Abusive spv. behavior * gender/ethnicity (black)					0.23*	0.11	0.24**	0.09
Abusive spv. behavior * ethnicity (Hispanic)							-0.03	0.17
Spv. qualifications * gender/ethnicity (black)					0.19	0.10	0.11	0.10
Spv. qualifications * ethnicity (Hispanic)							0.07	0.15
Exp. to hazards * gender/ethnicity (black)					0.30**	0.12	-0.18	0.15
Exp. to hazards * ethnicity (Hispanic)							-0.27	0.19
Hours/week * gender/ethnicity (black)					-0.02	0.02	0.03*	0.01
Hours/week * gender/ethnicity (Hispanic)							0.06**	0.02
$\Delta$ -2LL(contrast to model 2) <sup>†</sup>	-		-		11.94*		12.9*	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , <sup>†</sup>Based on GEE estimates and thus not taking into account the potential nesting of individuals within units.

As can be seen in column 1 of this table, (i.e., the demographic model), employment in union 4 (relative to union 8; estimate = 0.82,  $p < 0.01$ ), and income (estimate = 0.15,  $p < 0.001$ ) are both strongly associated with an increased rate of employee grievance filing. In addition, age, a significant determinant of grievance filing in previous research, had a significant but inverse association with the likelihood of grievance filing (estimate =  $-0.07$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

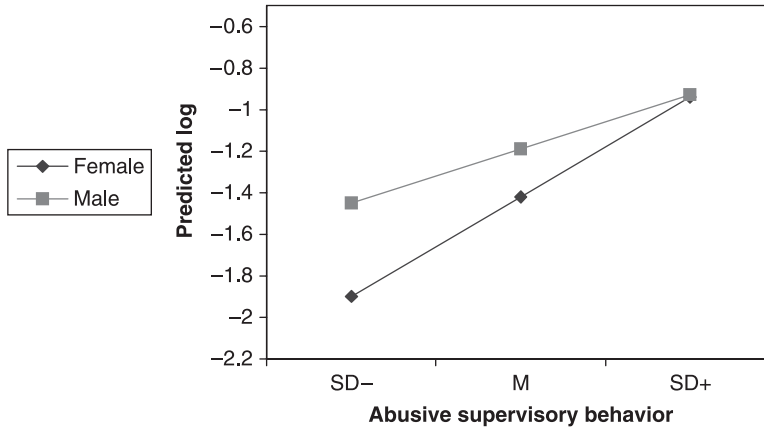
The second column of this table (i.e., model 2), presents the main effects of the four work context variables examined. In terms of the control variables, it is notable that with the inclusion of the four workplace condition variables, employment in Union 3 (relative to Union 1) is no longer significantly associated with grievance filing, suggesting that greater perceived workplace aversiveness among the individuals represented by Union 3 (relative to Union 1) may largely explain the earlier finding. Nevertheless, consistent with Cappelli and Chauvin's (1991) suggestion that efficiency wage theory may play a role in explaining grievance rates, income remained a significant parameter.

With regard to the workplace aversiveness variables, consistent with expectations, abusive supervision was found to have a significant, positive association with the likelihood of grievance filing (estimate = 0.35,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, both of the two aversive work conditions tested were found to have a significant main effect, with higher unit-level mean hazard levels (estimate = 0.50,  $p < 0.001$ ) and average number of hours worked per week (estimate = 0.02,  $p < 0.01$ ), both being associated with higher rates of grievance filing. However, neither gender nor ethnicity was found to be significantly associated with the rate of employee grievance filing.

*Conditioning Effect of Gender and Race/Ethnicity.* The results of the tests of the interactions are presented in the third column (model 3) with respect to the moderating effect of gender, and the fourth column (model 4) with respect to the moderating effect of race/ethnicity.

*Gender.* As indicated by the results presented in model 3, when taking into account gender-related interaction effects, all three of the four work context variables found to be significant in model 2 were found to retain their significant main effect ( $p < 0.0001$  in all three cases) with respect to the rate of employee grievance filing in the expected direction. As indicated in the lower portion of column 3, consistent with the hypothesized amplification effect, the generally positive association between two aversive work conditions (namely abusive supervision and exposure to hazards) and the rate

FIGURE 1  
THE LOG OF EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE FILING AS A FUNCTION OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION,  
BY GENDER

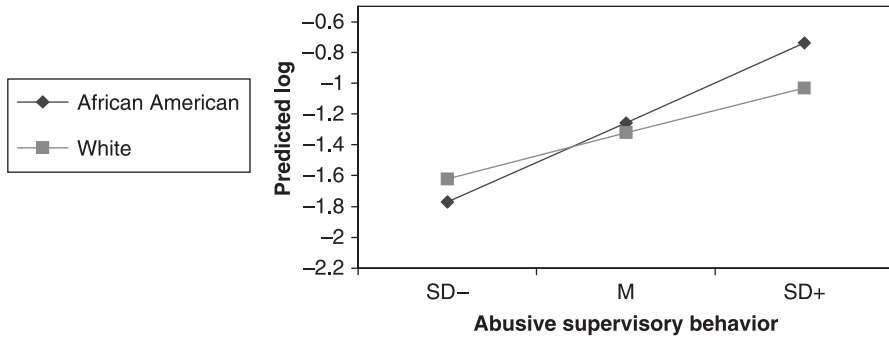


of grievance filing was stronger for women than for men (interaction term estimates = 0.23,  $p < 0.5$ ; and 0.30,  $p < 0.01$ , respectively). The first interaction (with abusive supervision) is portrayed graphically in Figure 1, which shows that while for men the rate of grievance filing is relatively inelastic with respect to abusive supervision, for women it is in fact quite elastic, rising as a function of supervisory abuse. An almost identical interaction pattern was generated with regard to exposure to hazards (not shown but available from the authors upon request). As indicated by the significant difference in the  $-2LL$  value (11.94<sub>4</sub>,  $p < 0.05$ ) the model including gender as a moderator term offers a significantly greater degree of goodness of fit than the main effect-only model (i.e., model 2) nested within it.

*Race/Ethnicity.* The results of our test for the possible conditioning effects of race are shown in column 4 of Table 2 and are presented in Figures 2 and 3. While main effects were found for only two of the four workplace variables (namely supervisory abuse and exposure to hazards), once again, no main effect was found for any of the demographic variables. However, consistent with our amplification hypothesis, the generally positive association between supervisory abuse and the rate of employee grievance filing was found to be greater for African Americans than for whites (estimate = 0.24,  $p < 0.01$ ), as was the generally positive association between the mean number of hours worked and the rate of grievance filing (estimate = 0.03,  $p < 0.05$ ). A comparison of Figure 2 (supervisory abuse for

FIGURE 2

THE LOG OF EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE FILING AS A FUNCTION OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION, BY RACE



African Americans versus whites) with Figure 1 (supervisory abuse for women versus men) suggests that relative to their reference group (whites) African Americans may exhibit a higher degree of remedy seeking for supervisory abuse than that exhibited by women relative to men. Specifically, while the rate of grievance filing rises faster for both minorities relative to whites/males as a function of supervisory abuse, for African Americans the rate of grievance filing is similar to that of whites at mean levels of supervisory abuse (exceeding the filing rates of whites at 1 standard deviation level above the mean in supervisory abuse), whereas for women, the curve is generally positioned below that of the men with the rate of grievance filing only becoming similar to that of men at 1 standard deviation level above the mean level of abusive supervision.

Similarly, the generally positive association between the mean number of hours worked and the rate of grievance filing was found to be stronger for Hispanics than for whites (estimate = 0.06,  $p < 0.01$ ). Once again, a comparison of the ethnicity–hours interaction pattern shown in Figure 3 for African Americans with that in Figure 4 for Hispanics suggests that while the rate of grievance filing rises faster for both minorities relative to whites as a function of temporal work demands, for African Americans the rate of grievance filing is similar to that of whites at mean levels of temporal demands (exceeding the filing rates of whites at 1 standard deviation level above the mean in temporal demands), whereas for Hispanics, the curve is generally positioned below that of the whites with the rate of grievance filing only becoming similar to that of whites at 1 standard deviation level above the mean level of temporal demands. Finally, as in the case of the gender model discussed above, the inclusion of these two-way conditioning

FIGURE 3

THE LOG OF EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE FILING AS A FUNCTION OF HOURS WORKED BY ETHNICITY  
(AFRICAN AMERICAN VERSUS WHITE)

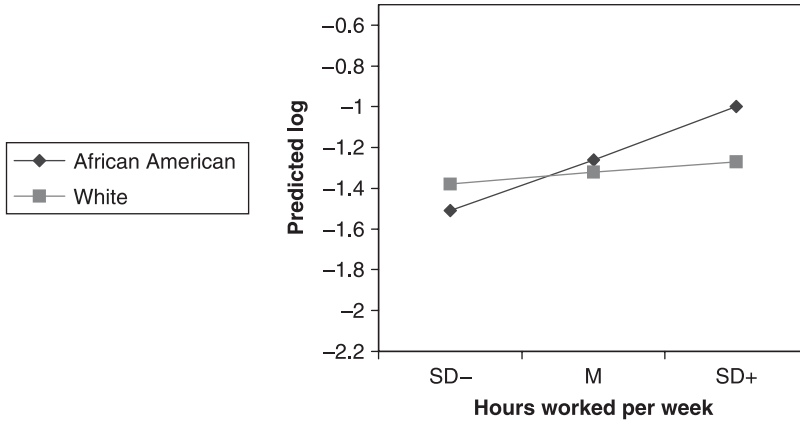
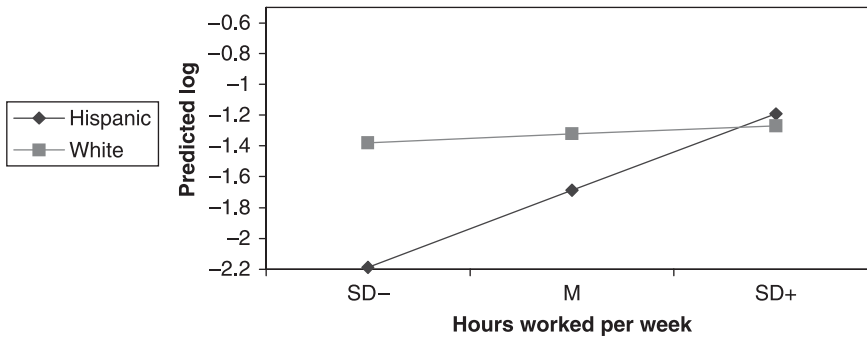


FIGURE 4

THE LOG OF EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE FILING AS A FUNCTION OF HOURS WORKED BY  
ETHNICITY (HISPANIC VERSUS WHITE)



effects improved predictive utility over and above the main-effect model presented in column 2 of Table 2 ( $\Delta$ -2LL = 12.9<sub>8</sub>,  $p < 0.05$ ).

*Three-Way Interaction.* Finally, in order to test the possibility that patterns of grievance filing are different for female members of ethnic minority groups, we tested a fifth model incorporating four three-way interaction effects (i.e., gender  $\times$  ethnicity  $\times$  adverse work condition). Given the limited

number of Hispanic women in the sample, we conducted the analysis operationalizing ethnicity in terms of the African American dummy variable only. None of the coefficients for the four three-way interaction terms were statistically significant.

## Discussion

In contrast with Lewin and Peterson's (1988) findings, the findings presented above suggest that the overall rate of grievance filing by women and ethnic minorities is not significantly different from that of their male or white counterparts. Nevertheless, employee demographic characteristics *were* found to serve as a significant moderator of the link between potentially injurious workplace conditions and the rate of employee grievance filing. More specifically (and consistent with our hypothesis), the link between several of these conditions and grievance filing was found to be significantly amplified among women (as compared to men) and ethnic minorities (as compared to whites).

Overall, our findings suggest that the grievance-based response of women and minorities to perceived workplace injury or injustice may—relative to their corresponding groups (i.e., men and whites)—be more tightly linked to the severity of adverse work conditions experienced (i.e., rising more steeply as a function of adversity). Thus, while the grievance-filing behavior of men and whites may remain fairly constant regardless of their perceived level of workplace injustice or injury, for members of the three minority groups examined, grievance-filing behavior appears to be more tightly linked to the particular nature of their workplace experiences and perceived conditions. The fact that this condition–grievance link is stronger among women and minorities is not trivial in that it may explain the largely inconsistent and context-specific findings regarding the association between employee demography and grievance filing reported in the research literature (Kissler 1977). If in fact grievance-filing rates for women and minorities are more sensitive to grievable workplace conditions, then one could only expect to find lower rates of grievance filing among women and minorities (relative to male and white employees) in those workplaces in which such workers perceive fewer potentially injurious conditions, and relatively higher rates in those workplaces in which workers perceive more adverse conditions.

As for why grievance filing for women and minorities is more tightly linked to the severity of specific adverse workplace conditions than it is for men and whites, we can only speculate. Theoretically, one possibility is that

women and minorities may be more exposed to certain workplace conditions (e.g., abusive supervision) than male/white workers, and that it is this increased level of exposure to these particular workplace factors or conditions that underlies a heightened sensitivity to injustice or potential injury, and hence a greater tendency to turn to the grievance system in the hope of relief. However, given the nature of our bivariate results, this is unlikely to be the case. Indeed, although employee perceptions of most of these conditions did not significantly vary by gender or ethnicity, in those cases in which gender and ethnicity *were* correlated with an adverse condition (exposure to hazards and temporal workplace demands), women and African Americans reported significantly *lower* levels of exposure.

Another explanation for the amplification effects suggested by our findings may have to do with the potential employee-perceived risks and benefits of grievance filing. To the extent that women and minority group members may perceive these risks as greater than those perceived by their male and white counterparts, grievance filing may only become a realistic option to the former when the *failure* to file is perceived as entailing even greater risks than those entailed in filing. This may occur, for example, in the case of supervisory abuse. It may be that the increased saliency of supervisory harassment to females and African Americans (perhaps stemming from concerns that such abuse may have a sexual or racial grounding) creates a situation in which, relative to the perceived risks of suffering in silence for members of these groups, the risks of grievance filing are rather small.

On the other hand, with respect to other adverse workplace conditions such as excessive hours, the grievance behavior of minorities may be driven less by the concerns over failing to file than by concerns over the potential repercussions (i.e., net costs) of filing, namely the recognition that any employer retaliation could force them to look for alternative employment in a labor market within which they are at a clear disadvantage (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Core 1999). Thus, our findings regarding an amplified link between temporal demands (i.e., longer hours) and grievance filing among African Americans and Hispanics may stem from the perception among members of these two groups (relative to whites) that the value of formally seeking a remedy for perceived temporal adversity fails to compensate for the heightened risks of doing so at lower levels of adversity. Given the risks, such formal remedy-seeking behavior may only begin to be viewed as offering utility at higher levels of adversity.

Similarly, concerns over the relative benefits of grievance filing may explain women's tendency to file grievances in response to both supervisory abuse and workplace hazards at a rate similar to males only at far higher

levels of perceived adversity. Previous research suggests that the tendency among women to grieve only more severe instances of workplace adversity may stem from concerns regarding the potentially limited benefits of filing. More specifically, a number of studies (Forrest 2001; Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1993: 311) suggest that women and minorities may discount the likelihood of grievance success for those issues of particular concern to them (e.g., sexual or racially based harassment or abuse) in that these issues are often either not properly addressed in the collective agreement or not of sufficient interest to nonminority union stewards to make it worth their while to effectively pursue. In contrast, if (as in the case of whites and men), the risks ascribed to grievance filing are viewed as more limited, and the benefits more certain, there is far less reason to expect whites and men to seek redress by means of grievance filing only in more extreme case of workplace adversity.

Finally, more limited access to alternative, informal mechanisms by which to address particular workplace concerns may also explain a tighter link between certain forms of perceived workplace adversity and grievance filing for particular minority groups. For example, the amplified association between hazardous work conditions and grievance filing among women in the current sample may stem from the fact that, for a variety of reasons (e.g., being a numerical minority in these units, having, on average, far fewer years of seniority in these units) women in more hazardous work units lack the social relationships with supervision often used by their male coworkers to informally address hazard-related concerns. Thus, while for women, few options other than grievance filing may remain as the perceived level of hazard-related adversity increases, for men, often able to address such conditions on an informal basis with their supervisor, there may be less of a need to turn to the grievance system.

Whatever the factors underlying the amplification effect, we believe it is also important to point out what our findings do *not* suggest. First, the findings reported above should not be interpreted as suggesting that women and minorities (more so than men and whites) consistently resort to grievance filing as a means by which to resolve all workplace issues. Indeed, the fact that amplification effects were not consistent across all workplace factors or across all groups suggests that members of different workforce groups tend to each view or utilize the grievance system as a remedy-seeking mechanism for different types of work-related issues. More specifically, our findings indicate that for women, the impact of both abusive supervision and exposure to hazards on grievance filing is more amplified than it is for men. And while the impact of abusive supervision on grievance filing for African Americans was also found to be amplified relative to the association

between these two variables for whites, no such effect was found with respect to hazard exposure. Still, the link between temporal work demands (average number of hours worked per week) and grievance filing was amplified for both African Americans and Hispanics relative to whites. Thus, consistent with the expectancy notion introduced earlier in this paper, our findings suggest that institutional, normative, and cognitive experiences and frameworks unique to specific employee groups may play a key role in determining the point at (and degree to) which different groups deem the filing of a grievance to offer a sufficient level of subjective utility, and ultimately utilize the grievance system as a mode of remedy seeking.

Second, these findings should also not be interpreted as suggesting that for those issues for which the amplification hypothesis was supported the grievance-filing rates of women or members of ethnic minorities will necessarily be greater than that of their male/white colleagues. Indeed, as suggested by Figures 1 through 4, at lower levels of adversity, grievance-filing rates of the female and minority employees were lower than that of men and whites. Indeed, for both women and Hispanics, grievance-filing rates appear to be consistently lower than those of the majority group (men/whites) at low and even *mean* levels of adversity (i.e., supervisory abuse for women, and temporal demands for Hispanics), only approaching the majority group's grievance-filing rates at 1 standard deviation unit above the mean.

Finally, our findings should not be taken as suggesting that members of these groups have a lower threshold for "injury" before turning to the grievance system. Indeed, quite the opposite may be the case, particularly with respect to women (whose level of grievance-filing approaches the level of men at relatively high levels of supervisory abuse and hazard exposure) and Hispanics (whose level of grievance-filing approaches the level of whites at more extreme levels of temporal demands). If anything, relative to their male and white counterparts, our findings suggests that women and Hispanics tend to have a higher threshold for the specific forms of perceived workplace adversity examined here, either suffering in silence (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a; Boroff and Lewin 1997) or perhaps utilizing means other than grievance filing in order to resolve their workplace disputes.

*Limitations.* Several of this study's limitations create potential opportunities for future research. The first has to do with the generalizability of the employee grievance behavior model across various types of grievances. Although the current study focused on grievances in general (i.e., without regard to the specific nature of the grievances filed), some studies suggest that grievance-filing patterns may vary significantly depending on grievance type (Bemmel 1994). Consequently, our findings may not be generalizable

with respect to particular types of employee grievances such as those specifically concerning staffing issues and disciplinary action. However, because, as indicated by Lewin and Peterson (1988: 141), the nature of employee grievances tends to be highly diverse and heterogeneous, with no single type accounting for more than 10 percent of all grievances filed, it is unlikely that our findings would have been vastly different in nature had we limited our attention to only, for example, those grievances that were nondiscipline related. Indeed, it is likely that by not limiting our analysis to only nondiscipline-based grievances, our findings err on the conservative side in that, if anything, there is likely to be less demographic-based variance in the filing of these types of more “automatic” grievances. Nevertheless, researchers may wish to examine whether there are differences between men and women, and across racial/ethnic groups with respect to grievance-filing behavior specifically with regard to particular types of grievances.

Second, the current study was limited to members of four unions representing workers employed in largely traditional blue-collar occupations during a period of rapid economic growth and relatively low unemployment. Because more skilled or professional female or minority workers may be less disadvantaged in their respective labor markets, the demographic effects identified in the current study may not replicate in other union (not to mention, nonunion) and macroeconomic contexts. Consequently, in the future, researchers may wish to test a model similar to ours among members of professional unions or even among nonunionized employees. Similarly, given that labor market conditions may influence grievance-filing behavior (Bacharach and Bamberger 2004a), researchers may wish to attempt to replicate our analysis in the context of less favorable economic conditions.

Third, given that all of the variables in this study were assessed on the basis of employee self-reports, in theory, there is a risk that our findings may be confounded by same-source bias. However, we believe that this risk is quite limited for two reasons. First, the risks of same-source bias are greatly limited in models incorporating interaction terms, particularly when one of these interaction terms relates to an ascribed characteristic such as gender and when the dependent variable is measured in terms of the frequency with which the respondent engaged in a particular behavior such as grievance filing (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Second, the ICC<sub>2</sub> levels for all four of the workplace condition variables approximated or exceeded the 0.60 standard noted by Schneider, White, and Paul (1998), suggesting that, as would be expected given that unit members typically share common work conditions, much of the variance in these variables is indeed shared among unit members and not a function of some underlying personality factor or individual response tendency.

Finally, while the explanation of our findings presented above suggests that differential perceptions of union instrumentality and procedural justice may underlie the demographic differences identified, our study did not directly address these issues. Future research might expand upon the current model to take into account the possibility of moderated mediation, with these two factors mediating the link between perceived workplace adversity and grievance filing in a manner described by Edwards and Lambert (2004).

## Conclusion

Despite these limitations, and largely consistent with an expectancy model of grievance filing (Klaas 1989), our findings indicate that the link between particular workplace conditions and the rate of employee grievance filing is not necessarily universal. Rather, members of certain demographically defined work groups may be more or less likely to file a grievance in response to a particular perceived grievance opportunity. More specifically, our findings suggest that relative to men and whites, grievance filing among women and minorities tends to be more tightly linked to the perceived severity of particular injurious workplace conditions. In this sense, while grievance-filing tendencies for male and white workers also rises as a function of the perceived severity of particular injurious workplace conditions, the slope of this relationship is significantly more steep for women and minorities. Although we lack the data to explore the dynamics underlying this amplification effect, underlying this consistent pattern of interaction across members of labor-market-disadvantaged groups may be a tendency among such individuals to look upon grievance filing with suspicion and concern. As noted above, these suspicions and concerns may stem from an underlying fear of employer retaliation and its particularly salient implications for those disadvantaged in internal and external labor markets, combined with a certain skepticism as to the potential benefits to be derived from filing a grievance. In such a context, it is reasonable to expect that grievance filing will be selected as a mode of remedy seeking only when the severity of the condition is such that the net subjective utility of filing is greater than that of suffering in silence.

In this context, our findings offer a number of important implications for both researchers and practitioners. For industrial-relations researchers, beyond providing further support for the expectancy model of grievance behavior, our findings also suggest that demography may have more complex effects on grievance behavior than that considered by researchers to date. Not only do the findings indicate that the main effects of demography

may indeed be context dependent (i.e., greater in those work contexts in which employees perceive more adverse conditions), they also suggest that employee demographic factors play a significant role in conditioning the link between workplace adversity and grievance filing. The latter point is important in that it suggests that many grievance systems may not provide utility to all employees on an equal basis, with some employees deriving benefit only under more severely adverse workplace conditions.

For industrial relations practitioners, our findings suggest that for those individuals who, because of their gender or minority status, are disadvantaged in the labor market and are thus perhaps most in need of an effective mechanism by which to effectively voice concerns regarding aversive workplace conditions, the grievance system may not necessarily always provide an adequate answer. Although changes might be made in unionized grievance systems to ensure that women and members of particular ethnic groups are no less likely than their male/white coworkers to pursue their workplace concerns via the grievance system, it is difficult to say just what changes are necessary at this point. If, as we suspect, underlying the tendency of women and members of certain minority groups to file grievances at a rate similar to their male/white counterparts only in response to more severe conditions of workplace adversity is a perception among such workers that they will be more subject to employer retaliation and less likely to secure the backing or support of their union in the pursuit of their grievance and the prevention of such retaliation, then there is room for action by both employers and union leaders. Employers should ensure that managers do not retaliate against workers for filing grievances, and in particular, that women and minorities are not subject to any greater degree of grievance-related retaliation than their male/white coworkers. Union leaders should ensure that women and minority grievance filers receive the same degree of backing and support as male and white grievance filers and might even consider taking public action to reverse any common perception among female and minority members that they might be at greater risk or at a disadvantage when utilizing the grievance system. For example, unions might take actions to make grievance-related statistics more transparent to their members so that members might more objectively evaluate the potential benefits and risks associated with the filing of a grievance in their workplace.

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## APPENDIX 1

### SIXTEEN-ITEM EXPOSURE TO OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS MEASURE

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1. Fire or electrical shock
  2. Dangerous chemicals
  3. Air pollution from dust, steel dust, smoke, gas, fumes, fibers, etc.
  4. Working outside in bad weather
  5. Extreme temperature or humidity indoors
  6. Dirty or badly maintained areas at your workplace
  7. Things that are stored dangerously
  8. Very loud or continuous noise
  9. Diseases such as AIDS or TB
  10. Attacks by people or animals
  11. Repetitive motion strain and/or tingling in fingers and limbs
  12. Asbestos
  13. Slippery floors or catwalks
  14. Work requiring heavy lifting or risk of back/muscle strain
  15. Dangerous work methods
  16. Mugging going to or from work
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