

Life in a Logging Camp

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During the summer of 1979 I undertook a piece of participant observation research while working at a logging camp on the Queen Charlotte Islands.* The study's purpose was to look at the way the social life of the bunkhouse was structured and the sort of cultural beliefs that existed. Little has been written about loggers in the sociology of work and industry; consequently, much of what I have to say specific to logging cannot be substantiated by referring to other authors. However, the general framework of the project is based upon Tom Lupton's *On the Shop Floor*¹ and *Coal Is Our Life*² by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter.

First a note about the research method. The field notes were based on observations and informal discussions which occurred that day. I would record the notes of the day an hour or so after dinner in the lounge area of the bunkhouse. No attempt was made to hide the fact that I was doing research on the men in the camp, and whenever I was questioned about it I tried to answer as fully and clearly as possible. How well the questioners understood these answers is difficult to say. Some would go on to state that it sounded very interesting, while others quickly changed the topic. As this project was based on only one camp I cannot generalize about all loggers and logging camps. Neither group, however, were atypical of other camps or other loggers I have known.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first explains the division of labour; the second gives an account of the social groupings³ that were formed in the bunkhouse; the third makes the argument that the logging

* I do not think anything is to be gained by stating at which camp the research was done, so in order to protect the individuals involved the name or location of the camp will not be divulged and the men's names will be changed.

¹ T. Lupton, *On the Shop Floor* (London: Pergamon Press, 1963).

² N. Dennis, F. Henriques and C. Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life* (London: Tavistock, 2nd edition, 1969).

³ Lupton, *On the Shop Floor*, pp. 68, 72 and 188. Lupton uses the term "social groupings" to depict the groups workers formed in their free time, and to show the social structure of the workrooms he was looking at.

camp had a distinct subculture, and that this subculture emphasized the importance of work. This contradicts Dubin's assertion that work is of little importance to industrial workers⁴ and supports what Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter said about the Yorkshire colliers they studied.

The first section gives a fair amount of background information about logging, which is then used to demonstrate the effect of the occupational structure on the social groups that were formed and the way in which the nature of the work isolates the men and leads them to develop a subculture which is derived from their daily existence. The key elements of this subculture are its emphasis on toughness or "manliness," a specialized language pattern, the expectation of some freedom and independence at work and the sense that work was central to the self-identity of the men. Reference is also made in the third section to the importance of folklore — that of the particular camp and that of logging in general — and to the way in which it affects the behaviour of the loggers.

All the men in the camp were members of Local 1-71, the "Loggers' Local" of the IWA. Their work was divided into six departments: Yarding and Loading (Y&L), Falling and Bucking (F&B), Road Construction (Grade), Boom, Shop and Engineering/Forestry. Job promotions generally occurred within departments and were largely determined by seniority. The F&B department is different from the others because there is only one position in it, that of faller.

When loggers speak of logging they are usually referring to yarding: the moving of felled trees from the stump to a place where they can be loaded onto hauling vehicles. The methods of yarding most prevalent on the coast, and the ones used at this camp, were grapple-yarding and that done by mobile steel-spar yarders. Steel-spars (or towers, so called because of the 90-foot steel tube which stands on the machine and through the top of which run the steel cables used in logging) are generally manned by two chokermen, a chaser, a rigging slinger, a machine operator (engineer) and a hooktender. The position of chokerman is the first step in the occupational structure through which almost every logger passes. The job entails wrapping steel cables (chokers), suspended from larger cables, around the logs so that they can be pulled to the landing area where they are loaded onto logging trucks. When the logs have been put in place on the landing the chaser unhooks the chokers so that they can be sent back out on the cables and the process restarted. Rigging

⁴ R. Dubin, "Industrial Workers' Worlds: A Study of the 'Central Life Interests' of Industrial Workers," in A. M. Rose, ed., *Human Behaviour and Social Processes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 262.

slingers act as supervisors for the chokermen, telling them which logs to wrap the chokers around, setting the work pace, and relaying signals by means of an electric horn to the engineer. The engineer runs the tower and looks after its maintenance, while the hooktender (hooker) supervises the entire crew and deals with any problems which might occur. He also plans the logging of the site.

On grapple-yarders the chokers are replaced by a steel jaw-like grapple which can be lowered onto a log and tightened to grip the log so that it can be brought to the landing. Thus, on grapple-yarders there are no chokermen or rigging slingers, and the chaser generally passes the day by performing minor house-keeping tasks around the machine. In contrast to towers, hookers on grapple-yarders work under the machine operator.

The other part of the Y&L department consists of loading. Grapple-loader operators are responsible for putting the logs onto the trucks. As their job is the main bottleneck in the production process, they determine the work pace. Second loaders (often referred to as second loafing) assist the grapple operator by helping the truck drivers position their trucks and buck logs to specified lengths. Logging truck drivers then drive to the sorting grounds where the logs are unloaded and prepared for transport.

Work in the Falling and Bucking Department is self-explanatory and does not need to be discussed at length. Falling has a reputation as a hazardous occupation, but many men in the Y&L crews argue that it is no more dangerous than yarding. It is the highest paying job in coastal logging. In contrast to the minimum eight-hour day other loggers work, the faller only works six and a half hours. In annual earnings, however, fallers often slip behind hookers, grapple operators and grade shovel operators as a result of the production bonuses these men receive and the extra hours they work.

Road construction only became a necessary and integral part of logging after World War II. This, in addition to the fact that grade jobs are sometimes perceived as easy, not physically demanding jobs, means that the grade crew may be looked upon with disdain by some loggers in other departments. Although the position of chokerman is the starting point of most loggers, the grade crew recruits its own workers, who start at the same wage as chokermen. Consequently, members of the grade crew often have no actual "logging" experience. Grade crew skills are similar to those used in mining and construction, whereas yarding and falling skills are specific to logging. Members of the grade crew have a

larger labour market available and more opportunity to leave the logging industry without suffering a loss of earnings.

The grade shovel begins road construction at the camp by building the base grade. It is manned by an operator and his helper, the padman. The front-end loader operator then loads the gravel trucks which carry gravel onto the finished base grade and dump it there so that the cat operator can spread the gravel to form a uniform road surface. Rock drillers are also employed to drill and blast any rock outcroppings which may block the planned road, and to create quarries for gravel. They are assisted by driller's helpers, who change the drill steels and perform any manual labour. There is, in addition, a stump blaster on the crew who blows up the large stumps in front of the grade shovel, and he is aided by the powder packer.

With the advent of self-loading, self-dumping log barges, the importance of boom crews has diminished, as has the number of men needed to staff these crews. A boom crew's most important function now is to make holding pens for the log bundles so that they do not drift away while waiting for a barge. When a logging truck arrives at the log dump it pulls up in front of a large wooden A-frame, and cables suspended from the A-frame are wrapped around the bundle lifting the logs off the truck, swinging them over the water and dropping them. Small, powerful dozer boats then push the bundles into holding pens where they await the arrival of a barge. Aside from the A-frame and dozer boat operators the only other job in the boom crew is that of deckhand.

As the work of shop crews is similar regardless of the industry they are servicing, there is little point in expanding upon their work: the shop crew handle almost all of the camp's mechanical repairs.

The final department to be mentioned is Engineering/Forestry. Although engineering and forestry are part of the same department, their crews are separate. The engineering crew conducts all of the survey and planning work, while the forestry crew spends the majority of its time thinning young timber stands. These crews have a somewhat different status in camp because of their greater discretionary powers. The crews work almost every day in isolation from any direct supervision. Further, the engineering and forestry crewmen are more likely to be graduates or students of forestry.

The impact of the occupational structure on the formation of social groups was very difficult to substantiate. Some of the men who worked at the camp lived with their families in houses near the campsite, and therefore could not be observed off the job. Another problem posed by

the camp was that some of the men who lived in the bunkhouse knew people that lived in the community and spent considerable time with them, away from the bunkhouse. In addition, a high proportion of the loggers had immediate relatives that worked in the camp. Consequently, family ties had to be considered as a determinant of the social groupings.

Two methods of information collecting were used to distinguish how loggers fitted into the perceived social structure. One was listening to statements made in normal conversation; the other was personal observation of behaviour. Behaviour was observed in three areas: the job-site, conversation groups, and the cookhouse. Conversation groups and meal companions were not always the same. In one case a son always ate with his father, but they seldom spent time together outside the cookhouse. Only those workers who had spent at least two months in the camp were included in the project, and, of the 39 included, 12 could not be readily identified with any particular group.

The cookhouse was divided into three areas. Two tables side-by-side were occupied by the younger men who were chokermen, swampers, etc. The table in the middle of the cookhouse was used mainly by the shop workers and the operators of grade machinery, while in the third area the older loggers from the Y&L and F&B crews ate together. The first area was by far the noisiest and most boisterous in the cookhouse; there was constant banter going on between the men on varied subjects. The second and third areas were considerably quieter with the conversation related to work.

Based on the behaviour of the workers in the cookhouse and the conversation groups that were formed, it appeared that five social groupings existed. These were not mutually exclusive; members of one social group frequently spent time with members of another, and within groups members were often considerably friendlier with some men than with others. The groups will be referred to as the Traditional Logger Group, Chokermen Group, Grade Crew Group, Engineers Group and Mechanics Group.

The Traditional Logger Group comprised six individuals, all with at least five years' logging experience. They were Ted (chargehand for the yarding crews), Les (Ted's brother and a faller), Sam (faller), Ken (power-saw mechanic), Rick (hooktender) and Ivan (faller). Ted, Les and Sam were all in their fifties, Ken was almost 65, and Rick and Ivan were in their late twenties. These men always ate together and intermittently spent an evening together telling stories, generally about logging, and drinking heavily.

Ted and Sam were the two men most respected and feared by the younger loggers in the camp: stories were regularly told by the younger men about what they had done that day. Ted was a champion of logger sports and had spent over thirty years in logging camps up and down the coast. Sam had also spent a number of years in logging, and before that had been in the Foreign Legion. Les did not share the same respect accorded Ted and Sam, mainly because he was often drunk and incoherent, thereby making himself the subject of jokes by the younger men. He was nonetheless a very hard worker and his work pace was frequently mentioned. Ken had been a faller before an injury led to his becoming a power-saw mechanic. Ken had worked with Ted, Les and Sam for a number of years, and they remained friends by virtue of this shared experience. Rick and Ivan were able to enter the group largely because Rick had worked under Ted for almost all of his logging career, while Ivan had been Les and Sam's falling partner for over one year. Work was therefore largely responsible for forming the social bond.

This group often talked of logging. Ted and Les in particular would argue that the young loggers of today do not work nearly as hard as they did when they were young. All of the men in this group stated that individuals should work hard to justify their wages.

The Chokermen Group is considerably different from the other groups as a result of the greater transience of the chokermen, chasers, etc. who made up the group. In this study the group's membership was limited to eight men all between the ages of 17 and 22. Of these, three were chokermen, one was a chaser, one was a second loader, two were rigging slingers, and one was a driller's helper and the only student employee in the group.

All of these loggers ate together except for one of the rigging slingers, who ate with his father at the Traditional Loggers' table. After dinner they regularly met in someone's room and almost invariably during these gatherings beer and marijuana were consumed. The central event of these meetings was the smoking of marijuana, in which everyone took part. The Chokermen Group would meet in the room of whoever had marijuana, and when his supply was finished they would use the room of someone who had recently bought some.

The Chokermen Group and the Engineers Group were different from the other three in that they were more cohesive and obvious as social groupings. Subjects of conversation and areas of interest were varied among the Chokermen Group, though none exhibited as strong a sense of responsibility toward work as was exhibited by the rhetoric and be-

haviour of the Traditional Loggers Group. Everyone in the Chokermen Group looked upon Ted, Les and Sam with a certain measure of awe and esteem, although at times their lifestyle was a subject of derision and ridicule. The aspect most often seized upon was Ted and Les leaving camp only twice a year to spend time with their families, once at Christmas for two weeks and another two weeks in the summer.

Fred (cat operator), Dave (driller) and Paul (cat operator) composed the Grade Crew Group. Fred and Dave were both in their late forties, while Paul was approaching retirement. Fred had worked at the camp for over ten years. Paul started at the camp in June 1979; he had previously worked in highway construction. Dave, who had been working at the camp for just under one year, had worked in mining until lung disease forced him to leave the industry.

There was little contact between these three and the other men in the bunkhouse. After eating dinner at the same table as the mechanics they usually returned to their own rooms to spend the evening. Grade Crew men work in isolation from other workers and operate noisy machines which make it difficult to communicate with anyone nearby. The work of the Grade Crew Group restricted their opportunities to establish contact with other workers.

Dave and Paul's recent arrival in camp undoubtedly affected how they fitted into the camp social structure. If another study were to be done at the camp now, it might be found that they had integrated themselves into another group. This cannot be said of Fred, however, as he had already spent a number of years at the camp. Fred's status in camp was a reflection of his problem with alcoholism. Only in his forties, he looked twenty years older and appeared to suffer from all the physical effects of alcoholism. It appeared that Fred, in order to stop using alcohol, limited his contact with other loggers to avoid any form of social pressure. Dave also had a problem with alcohol, and in the last two weeks of this research was often totally incoherent in the evenings. Even though the use of alcohol is prevalent among loggers and its use is encouraged, those who abuse liquor or "can't handle it" are to some extent ostracized by the others in the bunkhouse.

Three engineering crewmen, one forestry crewman, one chokerman, one chaser and one rigging slinger/hooker made up the Engineers Group. Of this group four were students who worked only during the summer, one had just graduated from BCIT in forestry, and two planned to begin their studies at university as soon as they had earned enough money.

The age distribution of this group was similar to that of the Chokermen Group, yet there was little social contact between the two. Exceptions to this were the rigging slinger/hooker (Mike) and the chaser (Ben). The two were long-time friends, had worked as loggers before, and were the sons of loggers. They occasionally met with particular members of the Chokermen Group, but they remained separate from this group as a whole because neither used liquor or drugs. By refusing to take part in the central activity of the Chokermen Group, Mike and Ben excluded themselves from any possible membership.

The occupational structure separates the engineering and forestry crewmen from all other loggers during working hours, and this served to reinforce the group entity of the Engineers Group. Mike, Ben and the chokerman were also different from the Chokermen Group in their feeling of responsibility to work. Ben claimed that rigging (yarding) crews should be running at work and, as he put it, "giving our best." The woods foreman took advantage of this situation by placing Mike, Ben and the chokerman on the most powerful machine in the camp with Rick as hooker. Mike and Ben demonstrated their interest in work and production further by discussing with Rick after dinner how production could be improved.

The final social grouping to be discussed is the Mechanics Group. The most salient factor separating the mechanics from the other men was the amount of overtime they worked. After working a full day the mechanics regularly returned to work at night, leaving them very little time to spend in the bunkhouse. Making up the group were two mechanics and one welder. The welder and one of the mechanics were in their early fifties and had worked about five years at the camp. The other mechanic retired during the project after nineteen years at the camp. Although they were the only skilled tradesmen in the camp, they were not directly involved in the production process and thus remained on the periphery of the social structure. Shop crews frequently worked on machinery in the presence of the men who worked the machines, yet even in these instances there was little time for conversation because of pressure to finish repairs and resume production. These constraints made it difficult for the shop personnel to integrate into other groups.

Portraying the social structure of the bunkhouse in terms of social differentiation is difficult because material goods, one of the key elements sociologists use to do this, are relatively equally distributed. Differences in status were observable, but not to the extent that it is possible to rank each social grouping according to status. The most that can be said, based on

this preliminary analysis, is that the Traditional Logger Group was the dominant group in the bunkhouse. This observation is based on statements made by others about members of the group, and on observation of who were the most important and influential men in the bunkhouse. Support for the observation can be found by examining the occupational roles of the men in the Traditional Logger Group. Those who have the most valued and important roles at the workplace are usually able to transfer their social standing at work to their residence, if they live and work with the same men. Therefore, because the men in the Traditional Logger Group were either fallers (or retired faller in the case of Ken) or occupied positions of authority, they could base their position in the bunkhouse on the difference of power and esteem inherent to the occupational structure.

The common occupation and residence of the men living in the bunkhouse, along with traditional folklore still being transmitted through the media and popular literature⁵ as well as by word of mouth, provided a setting conducive to the development and maintenance of a subculture. One of the most obvious aspects of the subculture was its emphasis on what can be put under the heading of "toughness," both physical and mental. Physical strength and stamina were highly valued. Stories about the past physical exploits of Ted, Sam and to a lesser extent Les were often told in the bunkhouse. Individuals who were not able to maintain the work pace were derided. Toughness also encompassed a resigned acceptance of the hardships of logging and a willingness to take risks. The men were not supposed to complain continually about either the living conditions or the work.

Workers suffering minor injuries were expected to finish the day's work before receiving treatment. Supervisors never attempted to prevent any worker from receiving medical attention, but to leave the job-site with a minor injury was considered to be the act of someone who lacked mettle and was prepared to shirk his responsibility to his workmates. To some extent injuries were looked upon as the fault of the individual rather than an accident. They were the result of a lack of attention, skill or strength.

Risks were generally expected to be taken at work as well. An example of this occurred at a Safety Meeting where a machine operator com-

⁵ Typified by B. Griffiths, *Now You're Logging* (Vancouver: Harbour, 1978); the poetry of Peter Trower; films such as "Sometimes A Great Notion," which portrays the lives of a family of loggers; and in journalism by such articles as L. Dean, "Mahatta River High," *Canadian Weekend*, 17 November 1979.

plained of the bad brakes of a machine which trimmed the brush along the roads. The Safety Supervisor had been informed of this problem previously by the Master Mechanic. He told the operator that new brakes could not be purchased because the machine was used only sparingly, making the costs prohibitive. At the end of the exchange between the operator and the supervisor some of the older crew members light-heartedly commented that a good operator could handle this problem, and joked about how the operator would have to practise jumping out of the machine when going down hills. A front-end loader operator argued that this was just one more example of production taking precedence over worker safety, but he received no support for his view from other workers.

It is important to make clear that most of the folklore, specific both to this particular camp and to logging in general, is based upon incidents involving a high degree of risk and danger. One of the more popular stories regarding Ted pertained to an act so dangerous that it is difficult to credit it, although most of the men did. The dangerous events detailed in the folklore were a part of the subculture and thus helped to establish norms encouraging the taking of risks during work.

The characteristic of toughness did not pass completely unobserved or uncriticized. One of the men (Gord) who spent several years in the bunkhouse prior to buying a house recounted stories involving Ted, whom he described as an egoist. He claimed that Ted was constantly striving to prove his manliness by driving himself and the men under him hard in order to obtain a high rate of production. Gord went on to argue that Ted's perceived relationship between high production and manliness was nonsense, and that he unjustifiably exploited the men under him to achieve his goals.

Liquor and drugs (mainly marijuana) were used extensively in the bunkhouse. Toughness or manliness was demonstrated by the quantity of liquor and drugs one could consume before becoming ill. Periodically marijuana was taken to the job-site and smoked before, during, after, throughout work. The danger inherent in this practice, especially for the rigging crews, where constant alertness is essential, was known. Nevertheless, it was another means by which workers could demonstrate their carefree attitude and independence from supervisory control.

Specialized language patterns are important aspects of a subculture, and it is worth noting the historical development of expressions of loggers and their pervasive use of profanity in normal conversation. The list of

expressions that have been coined over the years by loggers is extensive.⁶ Relative isolation from outside society allowed for the development and perpetuation of these linguistic traits which provide a bond between loggers and serve as a demarcation between loggers and the outside society.

Freedom and independence, not in the abstract but in relation to work and control over the productive process, were valued very highly by the subculture. Cottell noted in his questionnaire study of loggers in north-central B.C. that

the dominant work values expressed by forest workers . . . might be summarized in the word "freedom." Freedom on the job included the ability to set one's own work pace, and in some cases, hours of work. It meant the absence of close supervision, so that one could exercise some choice in the use of work methods and tools: It meant being able to "move around" on the job, and not be restricted closely to a work station.⁷

Men expect to have considerable freedom of movement as well as the opportunity to use a great deal of discretion at the job-site. The supervisors at the camp were aware of this situation and made only brief, occasional visits to the areas being worked. On at least one of his supervisory visits to a work area the assistant woods foreman brought along golf balls and clubs so that he could practise his swing while performing his management role.

An example of the independence of the men in the bunkhouse took place one morning during a conversation with the stump blaster. Asked where the bosses were sending him that day he responded by saying: "Fuck the bosses, I go where I want to go." In fact it was not the case that the stump blaster could go wherever he wanted, yet his assertion demonstrated this belief, or at least his desire to impress upon me that he was independent.

Changing jobs regularly was approved by the bunkhouse subculture (provided the man's work met the accepted standard) because it showed that the worker was not afraid of the bosses and could not be tied down. Quitting work or threatening to quit was also a source of power for the loggers. Those who used it effectively were rewarded in terms of esteem. Ted successfully used it about three years before this study was done. At that time Ted was a hooker at the camp, and he asked the camp super-

⁶ McCulloch, *Woods Words* (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society).

⁷ P. Cottell, "Loggers View Instability as Key to Maximum Employment," *B.C. Logging News* (January 1975), p. 36.

visor for a wage increase because he was receiving the same earnings as the other hooktenders but had to deal with all the problem areas. The supervisor said no, so Ted quit and became a faller at another camp. A few months later he was rehired as the rigging handyman, at a higher wage than the other hookers and the rank of chargehand. In this incident Ted not only demonstrated his independence but won his dispute with management as well.

The question of what role work played in the subculture or how it was looked upon by the men in the bunkhouse was difficult to assess. An incident illustrates this problem. On this day Rick was the hooker and he suggested to the rest of the crew that they work through lunch. Mike and Ben, who were working on the machine that day, enthusiastically supported this idea. Rick's plan was that two men would have lunch, then switch with two others, Rick would continue working until everyone else had eaten, and the tower operator was expected to eat while he was working. The reason Rick gave for wanting to do this was that tower operators get paid for lunch and therefore should have to work (they are the only ones paid for the 30-minute lunch period; during this time they are supposed to conduct maintenance on their machine, but this is rarely done). Rick also stated that he found sitting down for lunch boring and liked to keep active. None of the chokermen objected to the idea, although they were not enthusiastic about it. The tower operator strongly objected, however, and the lunch break was taken in the usual way.

The question remains as to why the suggestion was made to work through lunch. There was no compulsion to work through lunch, as the union agreement forbids it and above-average production was achieved. To state that Rick, Mike and Ben wanted to work through lunch because it gave them pleasure or because they wanted to make the tower operator work the total time he was paid for is difficult to sustain. Logging is not inherently enjoyable, and the operator was not disliked to the point that others would subject themselves to hardship to put him to some trouble. Their behaviour was most likely the result of a shared conception on the part of Rick, Mike and Ben of what was culturally valued behaviour. The most reasonable explanation is that they agreed to work through lunch because they saw the subculture as rewarding this action.

The single value of the bunkhouse subculture most open to dispute was the significance work should have for the individual. The instance cited is the extreme example of that segment of the loggers who felt that

work defined the man, that commitment to work was important. Its importance to some was substantiated by the comments of a young faller who was friendly with Ted and Les when he stated that he found it hard to accept the way they judge people on their work. That Ted and Les judge people on their work supports the idea that work was indeed important to them.

The loggers that deemed work important were those in the Traditional Logger Group, and Mike and Ben. The entire Engineer Group also seemed to demonstrate a commitment to work; this, however, is probably best explained as the result of students trying to create a favourable impression with a potential future employer. The fact that Mike and Ben were both the sons of loggers and had grown up in logging camps provided a background conducive to their acceptance of the importance of work as an end in itself for personal satisfaction.

None of the other groups in the bunkhouse were in actual opposition to this segment, but on the continuum representing the importance of work the Chokermen Group was farthest removed from the Traditional Logger Group. When members of the Chokermen Group were told about the incident of Rick, Mike and Ben wanting to work through lunch, they were very critical of them. Criticism was not of the act of working through lunch, which was rate-busting, but that Rick, Mike and Ben were attempting to increase their status. Instead of the criticisms being centred on complaints such as "If they work through lunch, then we'll all have to do it," the men stated things like "They're just trying to show what tough men they are." In other words, although the Chokermen Group did not like the idea of other loggers working through lunch, they accepted the ground rules of the Traditional Logger Group by recognizing that one's commitment to work affected one's status in the subculture.

This situation poses a problem for much of what is written about workers' relationship to work, and specifically Dubin's argument that "the industrial workers' world is one in which work and the workplace are not central life interests for a vast majority."⁸

If Dubin's claim is applicable to the loggers in the bunkhouse, then why would anyone (assuming a basic level of sanity) want to work through lunch? Secondly, why would others construe this as an attempt to alter one's status in the subculture if work is not a central life interest?

⁸ Dubin, "Industrial Workers' Worlds," p. 262.

Dubin's assertion does not apply to the men in the bunkhouse, although this response is tentative, for two reasons. First, the data provided is derived from only one camp and is therefore insufficient. More important is the difficulty in translating the results of Dubin's methodology to this study. Using a questionnaire, as Dubin did, is not the best way to discover how meaningful work is to an individual or how important relationships at the workplace are. Quantitative analyses of behaviour are subject to a number of problems in the way they are constructed and administered; moreover, they tend to distort their results by separating human action in an artificial way. Dubin's conclusions about industrial workers are not wrong simply because of the methodology he adopted. If the loggers had been asked to fill out forms asking which relationship was more important to them, that with family or that with workmates, the answer probably would have been family. But this would not exclude the possibility of work as a central life interest. A worker might not admit as much on a questionnaire. It could also be argued that work might be a central interest without the worker even being cognitively aware of it. For the loggers in the bunkhouse work was a central life interest, and the subculture encouraged the men to look on work as an indicator of one's qualities as a man. How central or how important an indicator it was are relative questions which I cannot answer. In a simple comparison, however, I would hypothesize that for the men studied, these two aspects would be of greater importance than for workers in a typical factory setting.

This hypothesis hinges on the impact the bunkhouse environment has on the individual's definition of self. This physical and social world is able to alter (where necessary) certain beliefs, values and norms, and later sustain these. Goffman's description of patients in a mental institution serves as a good example of how behaviour has to be seen through the eyes of the actor in order to be understood. What, then, do loggers see, and how does this affect them?

The lives of the men in the bunkhouse revolved around their work. Breakfast was served from 6:15 to 7:20 and the men were expected to be in their trucks ready to go, if not gone, by 7:30. Lunch was eaten in the woods and workers did not return to camp until 6 p.m. Dinner was served until 7 and the majority of men were in bed by 9:30. Almost everyone in the bunkhouse worked six days a week; work was rarely done on Sundays and then only by special workers. No one in the bunkhouse played an active role in union affairs or community projects. The men

pursued few interests, either physical or intellectual; they just tried to pass the time.

That there were neither women nor children in the bunkhouse is an important point because it shows the limits of personal interaction available and the abnormality of the lifestyle. This contributed to the communal atmosphere of the bunkhouse, which was by and large the result of negative forces; they were stuck with each other and had to make the best of it.

One could argue that by a process of elimination work would be of importance to the men simply because there is little else available for them to base a definition of self upon (little family involvement, no community, nor church, no union involvement, and few close friendships). However, this would overlook the impact logging folklore has on loggers' behaviour — folklore that is based on the nature of the work, the hard manual labour done in the woods, and which is easily related to. In a sense the men in the bunkhouse were products of tradition. This tradition is typified by the song about the character Joe Montferron, who "went to work like he was going to war," and in the stories of Bus Griffiths, who in one instance tells of how after topping a tree a logger sits on top of it (sixty metres above the ground), rolls a cigarette, and gives his philosophy of life to his young partner, holding on halfway up the tree.⁹ These traditions are still perpetuated in popular writing, as evidenced by this journalist's account of a logger: "Chris, a 32-year-old faller at the Mahatta River logging camp on Vancouver Island, was wise without book knowledge, solid as the earth he worked on, self-assured. And he was a faller, a mighty man among mighty — and proud — men, a prima donna of loggers."¹⁰

The general folklore of logging was assisted by that folklore specific to the camp. As this was largely based on the Traditional Logger Group its impact was to transmit the beliefs and norms of the Traditional Logger Group to the others in the bunkhouse. The men in the bunkhouse are the product of tradition because the Traditional Logger Group, by virtue of the greater status and power of its members, is able to put forward its world-view as the dominant one to the younger men. As these men become older and increasingly separated from outside society, due to their physical and social isolation from it, their definition of self becomes more and more based on their daily existence in the logging camp. This

⁹ Griffiths, *Now You're Logging*.

¹⁰ Dean, "Mahatta River High."

reaches its conclusion when these men perceive the world and their lives as the original Traditional Logger Group did, and begin to transfer this knowledge to the new young loggers.

In essence the argument of this paper is that the bunkhouse was a social institution capable of developing and maintaining beliefs and norms specific to the bunkhouse, and able to explain and justify the existence of the bunkhouse community. The case put forward about the loggers reiterates what British sociologists have been saying for twenty years. In their study of a Yorkshire coal mining village Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter demonstrated the centrality of work in the lives of the colliers, and the way in which work permeated their lives above the pits. The authors found evidence to back this up when they observed what occurred in the Working Men's Club after work:

The great majority of the men who frequent this club spend most of their time at the bar, drinking and talking. The topic which surpasses all others in frequency is work — the difficulties which have been encountered in the course of the day's shift, the way in which a particular task was accomplished, and so on. A whole series of jokes are based on this fact. It is said that more coal is "filled off" in the clubs than is ever filled off down below and that the men come back from a hard shift at the club.¹¹

Similarities between the colliers and the men written about here can be seen in the abundance of folklore which surrounds both groups of workers, and in particular the way in which both groups put a great deal of importance on "manliness" and hard work.

In conclusion, this paper is an attempt to outline the belief-system and way of life in a logging camp — in short, its ideology. Merely to provide this ethnographic material leaves one open to Rex's charge of trivializing sociology, of divorcing it from the broader concerns of power, inequality, exploitation and conflict. It also leaves unanswered a question Wright Mills used to ask of his students: so what? How is the research relevant to the real problems of men and women? Acceptance of the ideology that was dominant in the bunkhouse did help the men to make sense of their lives, but one has to ask in whose real interest the ideology worked. My answer is that the bunkhouse ideology worked in capital's interest in that it encouraged the loggers to be concerned with production and, in so doing, served to perpetuate exploitative relations of production. Clearly, though, the information contained in this article is not sufficient to prove this claim. Others must undertake this task and try to develop the beginnings of praxis.

¹¹ Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life*, p. 144.

It is unfortunate that few social scientists have written about loggers. Stories about "timber barons" and romantic historical accounts of trade unions could probably do with some debunking, and they are no substitute for a sophisticated look at loggers and the relationships of production to which they are subjected.