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RESISTANCE THROUGH CONSENT?

Occupational Identity,
Organizational Form,
and the Maintenance
of Masculinity Among
Commercial Airline Pilots

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Recent theories underscore the indefinite, conflicted, and discursive character of labor identity and resistance, highlighting local practices and meanings. This article examines an empirical and political dilemma provoked by such models: what to do when once-dominant voices resist a loss of control. Drawing on interviews conducted with commercial airline pilots, the author examines how privileged professional men engage gendered threats. The analysis demonstrates how organizational efforts to induce crew empowerment threaten pilot identity, as well as how pilots resist emasculation by embracing mandatory changes. The study illustrates ways to grapple more fully with the implications of discursive, dialectical models of resistance. In particular, the author urges attention to tales of declining control as discursive realities that engender emotional resistance to social change.

Keywords: *control; occupational identity; gender; empowerment; professional masculinity; airline pilots*

Recent models of power at work underscore the dialectical and discursive character of resistance as well as the salience of identity to it. Increasingly, scholars depict labor identity, control, and resistance as entangled, multifaceted, fragmented, precarious, and conflicted processes (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001; Gabriel, 1999; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994; Mumby, 1997). Many authors advocate close analyses of local practices and participant meanings of resistance (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994), based on the twin claims that “power relations are subjectively experienced” (Collinson, 1994, p. 52) and that subjectivity is “a specific, historical product embedded within particular conditions and power relations” (p. 53). This article engages complications encountered in the empirical application of such models. It asks what organization scholars might gain from reframing what is usually deemed control as resistance, or from exploring the irony of relatively dominant voices resisting a perceived loss of control. Specifically, I confront these analytical and political quandaries through examining the contentious question: How do seemingly privileged professional men perceive and respond to gendered identity threats?

To explore this question, I examine data drawn from my ongoing study of professional identity among U.S. commercial airline pilots. My analysis highlights a tension faced by many pilots today: how to reconcile the legacy of a potent popular image with the increasing organizational emasculation of their routine role. I argue

that participants in the current study employed creative discursive tactics to (a) embrace institutional mandates that airline captains actively facilitate crew empowerment and (b) stave off the threat of feminization associated with such mandates. The analysis thus demonstrates how apparently privileged voices can experience occupational identity threats nascent in changing organizational forms. It also suggests how resistance can vary, or even reverse, in accord with audience, revealing the ironic possibility that even overt consent may constitute a form of resistance.

I use airline pilots' narratives of masculinity in decline to argue that organizational researchers can grapple more fully with the implications of discursive views of the resistance–control dialectic, especially their empirical and political consequences. I take particular interest in how the pilot case can generate an innovative agenda for scholars and activists of gendered work. Ultimately, I argue that—despite their political pitfalls—tales of resisting the loss of control warrant serious exploration, not because such narratives are backed by institutional or material evidence, but because they are discursive realities that shape lived experiences and pose a significant source of resistance to social change.

ENGAGING COMPLICATIONS: THE RESISTANCE ONCE CALLED CONTROL

Recent theoretical developments at once enhance theories of resistance and complicate empirical assessments of it. My purpose in this section is to articulate a place from which to confront one such complication.

RESISTANCE AT WORK: RESIDUAL ASSUMPTIONS

Typically, workplace resistance has been conceived as reactive opposition to oppressive forces (Anderson & Englehardt, 2001)

resulting in four lingering assumptions. First, resistance tends to be aligned with so-called underdog standing or with subordinate organizational members. Historically, subordinate status has been framed largely in class terms, with emphasis on white, male workers (Jermier et al., 1994). Recent studies expand the class lens by acknowledging resistance by multiple parties on multiple fronts—for instance, among women and/or people of color concentrated at lower hierarchical levels (e.g., Aptheker, 1989; Bell & Forbes, 1994; Fleming & Spicer, 2002; Hearn & Parkin, 1993; Hossfeld, 1993). Yet much of the work in this vein still implies a second assumption: Subordinate voices appear to be relatively distinct, at least analytically, from dominant voices, and these positions are sufficiently coherent that it makes sense to speak of members who systematically exercise or lack access to power (e.g., Scott, 1990). Although blatant adherence to such a claim may not be *en vogue*, and may even be explicitly argued against, the assumption often remains latent in conceptual language (such as references to so-called dominant or subordinate groups) and methodological choices (such as studying working-class, female, and/or minority populations).

Of course, this discussion suggests a third supposition: One's capacity for resistance and control seems to hinge around the salience of (group) identity (Clegg, 1994; Jermier et al., 1994). In this light, resistance and control are both moves of power, but how scholars read a particular power play often begins with the question of who made a move against whom or what. Not surprising, then, is a fourth theme: Control and resistance are usually conceived as deeply entwined yet also relatively distinct practices (Benson, 1977). Many contemporary formulations complicate the division considerably but still retain it. For example, common among Giddens' (1979, 1984) dialectic of control, Mumby's (1997) model of hegemony, and the "self-contained opposites" of Clair (1998) is a view of control and resistance as irreducible components of an ever-unfolding tension; they are at least somewhat analytically distinct yet interdependent, reliant on and responsive to one another.

COMPLICATING RESISTANCE: DEVELOPMENTS IN DISCOURSE AND DIALECTIC

The particular challenge I pose to these residual assumptions follows a wealth of precedent, for recent theoretical turns have significantly nuanced our understanding of resistance. Consider theoretical developments already hinted above, such as the increasing traction of dialectical models (e.g., Clair, 1998; Giddens, 1979, 1984; Mumby, 1997), wherein power relations entail ongoing struggle and, often, considerable blurring of control and resistance. As Jermier et al. (1994) remind us, "Resistance and consent are rarely polarized extremes. . . . Resistance frequently contains elements of consent and consent often incorporates aspects of resistance" (p. 29). Similarly concerned with how apparent compliance might obscure resistance, many authors urge sensitivity to covert forms of recalcitrance (e.g., Fleming & Sewell, 2002; Fleming & Spicer, 2002). Another key development is the recognition of "a cast of characters with a larger range of identities than those fixed by a model of class relations. . . . Identities are not only occupational and disciplinary . . . but also derive from aspects of embodiment such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality" (Clegg, 1994, p. 276). Such moves discourage tidy accounts of friction between the ostensibly powerful and powerless, stressing instead the complex interplay of "qualitatively different and specific fields of power that co-inhabit a particular space" (Fleming & Spicer, 2002, p. 76).

Growing interest in organizational discourse has also prompted more nuanced conceptions of the relation between resistance and identity. Invoking the work of Michel Foucault, many scholars conceptualize subjectivity as a political effect of discursive activity (e.g., Holmer Nadesan, 1996, 1997; Jacques, 1996; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994). In this view, membership in dominant and subordinate groups is neither straightforward nor stable. This is not simply because of the multiplicity of identity dimensions but because identities are neither given nor fixed; they take shape,

entangle, and evolve through discourse. Moreover, identities are of tremendous political consequence, for how one's subjectivity is configured affects one's capacities as an agent (Clegg, 1994). It is therefore not enough to say that the dialectic of control and resistance implicates identity. If identity is conceived as the precarious product of discursive activity, then understanding resistance requires close attention to the ongoing discursive practices that constitute our senses of self (Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Jermier et al., 1994; Kondo, 1990).

The development of perspectives at once dialectical and discursive has also emphasized the polysemic character of resistance and control: "What might be seen, from one perspective, as resistance, might just as easily be viewed as conformity, compliance or indifference, from another" (Jermier et al., 1994, p. 4). Likewise, others argue that moves of power are inherently promiscuous or slippery in meaning. Similar moves can be locally performed and interpreted in diverse ways toward different, even contradictory ends (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b). Fleming and Spicer (2002) propose that multiple readings are possible because any given act responds to multiple "plateaux" of power, not a unified hegemonic force.

Such conceptual developments imply that everyone who participates in discursive activity engages in control *and* resistance, sometimes simultaneously, and that participants derive their differential capacities to do so from their fluctuating positions vis-à-vis multiple discourses. Jermier et al. (1994) explain that "exercising power, as everyone does to varying degrees, cannot preclude one from also acting as an agent of resistance in relation to some other power" (p. 16). Knights and Vurdubakis (1994) elaborate, "It is not a matter of some people having power and others lacking" but of "how the same set of agents can be involved in both exercising power and resisting its effects at one and the same time" (pp. 191-192).

In response to this inevitable irony and ambiguity, scholars increasingly call for the study of localized forms of resistance. For example, Alvesson and Willmott (1992) conceptualize resistance as situated acts of "micro-emancipation," or "partial, temporary movements that break away from diverse forms of oppression" (p. 447). Arguing that scholarship reflects "the tendency of researchers to *impose*, rather than *investigate*" meanings of resistance, Jermier et al. (1994) advocate projects that "begin by *taking the*

word of the participants in assessing the significance of local resistance practices” (pp. 10-11). A growing body of qualitative resistance research reflects this logic (e.g., Bell & Forbes, 1994; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999; Trethewey, 1997). Arguably, however, overemphasis on localized resistance can gloss larger quandaries sparked by the theoretical developments reviewed here.

WHEN THE DOMINANT RESIST: THE CASE OF PROFESSIONAL MASCULINITIES

Recent theories of resistance thus emphasize the dialectical, discursive, polysemic, ironic, local, and intersubjective character of power relations and identity. Even as they usefully complicate resistance, such developments raise tricky dilemmas for empirical projects. My particular interest here is how scholars, especially those working from critical and feminist orientations, can productively respond when actors who are presumed to be dominant players resist a loss of privilege (or even define their practice as resistance to oppression). Although the accounts reviewed above suggest a need to take such claims seriously, doing so can kindle significant political consequence.

For example, despite awareness that even the most hegemonic masculinities at work are fraught with identity tensions and vulnerabilities (e.g., Donaldson, 1993; Mumby, 1998), few feminist organization scholars have considered discourses associated with white, heterosexual, managerial, and professional men through the lens of resistance (for a subtle exception, see Hamada, 1996). Even as popular representations increasingly depict once-privileged professional subjects under siege (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003), feminist scholars continue to frame professional men’s practices as control, in part for fear of lending credibility to identity politics and victimization (i.e., reverse discrimination) narratives among men who are relatively elite (Robinson, 2000). Yet, as noted above, recent conceptions of resistance invite attention to “the subjective worlds of actors . . . this includes their views on the experience of domination they encounter and the meanings they attach to the behaviour we are prone to call resistance” (Jermier et al., 1994, p. 6). As Robin-

son (2000) indicates, cries of masculinity in crisis are more than mere “backlash.” It is their language of struggle and liberation that render them especially seductive. Accordingly, I argue that scholars of workplace resistance may learn much about the preservation and transformation of power relations by investigating the irony of seemingly dominant voices that mourn a loss of control (e.g., Ashcraft & Flores, 2003).

Although they neglect the gendered subtext of their analysis, LaNuez and Jermier’s (1994) essay moves in this direction, conceptualizing resistance among managers and technocrats by explaining how these populations can be viewed legitimately as controlled subordinates. Interestingly, this logic expands common visions of who resists *and* fails to achieve substantive theoretical change, for it preserves the notion that subordinate status is a prerequisite for resistance. A parallel track here would substantiate the validity of oppressions faced by elite professional men. To be clear, such claims are *not* my concern. I mean to take seriously theoretical developments that affirm the complexity and frailty of identity, the ambiguous and contradictory texture of resistance, and the utility of exploring participant meanings. In so doing, I confront political dangers entailed in the question: How do seemingly privileged professional men perceive and respond to gendered identity threats? Next, I explore the case of an occupation particularly suited to this question—commercial airline pilots.

MAINTAINING A MANLY PROFESSION: EMPOWERMENT AS A GENDERED IDENTITY THREAT

This analysis stems from my study of occupational identity among U.S. commercial airline pilots, which examines how diverse sites of communication organize labor identity and, specifically, how gender, race, class, and sexuality become relevant players in the organizing process. I focus here on 18 in-depth interviews, ranging from 1 to 5 hours, with 14 white male pilots and 4 white female pilots at various commercial airlines, ranks, and career

stages. During these audiorecorded sessions, I asked a series of questions related to participants' history with the profession, perceptions of occupational status, experiences with rank transitions, roles relative to other aviation employees and agencies, and developments defining the profession. My initial reading of the interview texts indicated an odd tension: When asked if they practiced resistance in their work life, all participants flatly said no, depicting themselves as elite, autonomous professionals. Simultaneously, they described their professional prestige as under threat and in decline. I narrowed my focus to discussions of the airline captain's role, which became a sort of "hot bed" for the conflict. The 7 discursive tactics presented below are the result of my repetitive coding efforts to capture common ways in which participants navigated this tension. To contextualize the case, I begin with an abridged account of the historical evolution and contemporary legacy of an idealized professional identity.

PRELUDE: THE AIRLINE PILOT'S DISCURSIVE EVOLUTION AND LEGACY

Estimates vary, but recent statistics suggest that roughly 95% of commercial airline pilots are men, and 98% are white (e.g., Henderson, 1995; ISA+21, n.d.; Ott, 2001; "Taking Flight," n.d.). Some analysts offer individualistic accounts, stressing lingering bias and the occupational choices of white women and people of color. Other scholars point to aviation's early military affiliations and the rise of commercial flight as a viable mode of transportation after World War II. All of these accounts tell partial truths, yet none quite capture the full story. The pilot became a gendered character long before World War II; the World War I "ace" hero was one among a host of influential images; and women and people of color who aspired to fly for a living have long encountered barriers that exceed access to military training.

So how did the airline pilot come to be? Elsewhere (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004a, 2004b), I have traced how gender—in concert with race, class, and sexuality—served as a central mechanism for organizing the airline pilot's professional identity. In response to economic and political pressures, gender was strategically employed

by various constituents in the aviation industry to establish commercial flying as the natural province of a privileged few, to achieve a clear division and hierarchy of airline labor, and to effectively police occupational membership. For instance, pilots underwent a public makeover, from eccentric performer, grease monkey, and dashing playboy to dependable professional (Hopkins, 1998). The transformation hinged around a particular form of white masculinity, embodied in the commanding officer. This elite, civilized, rational, technical, omniscient, and thoroughly heterosexual and paternal figure clashed with another fashionable image of pilots, the liberated yet flighty “ladybird,” facilitating her retreat from cockpit to cabin, from glamorous pilot to sexy stewardess (Corn, 1979). Until at least the mid-1970s, popular depictions of airline crew romanticized this occupational coupling.

The question of interest here is how contemporary airline pilots engage with their gendered heritage. Across the interviews, expressions of extraordinary professional pride suggest, first, that pilots tend to internalize their elite image and, second, that gender plays a pivotal role in their intense professional identification. Specifically, gender serves as an organizing metaphor for the airline pilot’s career and a key source of emotional sustenance on the job. Most participants described transitions in rank as a male rite (right?) of passage that parallels the shift from immature, carefree son to authoritative, all-knowing father. Passing “captain upgrade” means becoming “the man,” shouldering sole responsibility for decisions and outcomes, prioritizing the safety of those who depend on you, and enjoying the privileges you deserve for doing so. Particularly for the male pilots I interviewed, the symbolic fatherhood of airline flying supplies the emotional core of the job, mitigating years of potential emasculation in the right seat (i.e., that of first officer [FO] or copilot) and anchoring the pain and pleasure of filling the captain’s shoes. Most participants punctuated tales of upgrade—their own or those of others—with palpable feeling. In such ways, the accounts of contemporary pilots summon historical formations, naturalizing occupational identities and experiences that once required tricky discursive maneuvering. As gender organizes the nature and significance of the captain’s role, it also grounds the visceral and emotional experience of performing the work.

**RESISTING DECLINE:
ORGANIZATIONAL FORM
THREATENS OCCUPATION IDENTITY**

The background provided thus far paints a neat picture of an enduring hegemony of professional masculinity. Glossed by this picture are the ways in which pilots concurrently depict their public image and the captain's everyday role as under siege. Many express ambivalence about the captain's "old" identity, clinging to its legacy even as they embrace its inevitable decline. Accordingly, this section complicates the matter of how pilots engage with their gendered professional heritage by emphasizing contemporary tensions.

Empowered crews, (im)potent captains? With few exceptions, participants perceived that the pilot's popular image and actual role are in decline. Most identified the 1960s and 1970s as the pilot's "heyday," when "airline captain was one of the best jobs you could possibly have." They recognized several threats to pilot prestige, including (a) automation, (b) decreasing discipline and hierarchy (attributed to social movements, generational shifts, and increasing reliance on civilian flight training), (c) proliferation of passengers and pilots (thanks to deregulation), (d) publicized contract negotiations and corresponding perceptions of pilots as greedy "glorified bus drivers," and (e) backlash from the politically incorrect exploits of the "jet-set" era pilot.

A final thread of decline discourse tended to occupy participant talk: (f) the captain's eroding power. Without fail, participants ascribed this change to a massive, industry-wide overhaul of cockpit philosophy, training, and practice, known as cockpit or crew resource management (CRM). CRM stems from studies that repeatedly confirmed the disastrous, often fatal consequences of crew members remaining silent for fear of challenging the captain's authority. Accordingly, CRM endeavors to institutionalize a shift in crew roles, from captain as infallible "god" to empowering manager and from crew as compliant minions to active, even questioning partners. Most respondents marked the contrast between the "old" and the "new" captains as a defining trend of their work, and the striking consistency across their descriptions is evident in two representative excerpts:

[Major airline] used to train for decades that the captain has all of the responsibility, and he's got to carry everything in his head, and these other guys just pick up papers when he drops them. . . . They have tried to shift it over the years more toward the CRM. . . . They ["old" captains] were supposed to do it on their own, and they would just give orders, and they weren't supposed to take or seek feedback. If they seemed like they were too needy, then they were maybe too weak.

The captain was the final authority. . . . And as a copilot, you weren't supposed to speak up . . . so you're going to continue this hierarchy, because your turn will come to be the king. . . . You can't have that. It's a matter of safety.

As even these excerpts hint, participants expressed some ambivalence about CRM. None questioned its necessity for safety. Trouble is, it makes the captain's seat, the capstone of a pilot's career, look less like a throne; that is, while CRM retains the captain's full decisional authority, it undermines the *image* of absolute power. The resulting dilemma for pilots entails how to reconcile their potent popular image with the institutional emasculation of their routine role or, in theoretical terms, how to navigate the conflicted meeting of occupational identity and organizational form.

This dilemma surfaced in captains' descriptions of their roles in relation to their crew members, as the following excerpts illustrate:

I always treated my crews well, and they could always come to me. I was always 100% supportive of my crew. . . . It carries you through, the whole realization that this is not a one-man show. . . . But anyway, the captain is the guy in charge; decisions come from him; he has to start the thing. But it takes . . . such a great bunch of people.

[Q: What's the relationship between captain and FO, in terms of your roles?] Chemistry of cooperation. But when the final decision is made, it's in the left seat. . . . When we get down, then we'll talk about it, and I'll tell you why I'm doing it, but right now, I don't have time.

The tensions apparent in these fragments—between teamwork and a “one-man show,” between joint and unilateral decision making, between the invitation and the rejection of participation, between collaboration and command—are not unlike those that characterize many participation programs implemented in the context of rigid,

hierarchical structures (see, e.g., Stohl & Cheney, 2000). In the case of airline pilots, the captain's final authority is deeply institutionalized, not only in pilots' identity discourse and airline cultures but also in federal regulations and airline policies designed around the demands of "high reliability" organizing (e.g., Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999). At best, then, crew participation occurs within evident limits, and the practical dilemmas faced by today's captain stems from his awkward institutional position—at once the official authority who bears all consequences *and* the empowering team coach who eagerly shares responsibility.

Moreover, to the extent that the pilots' narrative of "becoming a man" rests on the captain's role as all-knowing, all-powerful father, the notions of seeking help, of subjecting decisions to input and scrutiny, of sharing power with subordinates, become threatening, if not profoundly emasculating. Like the popular and scholarly association of empowering managerial techniques with so-called feminine leadership styles (e.g., Fondas, 1997; Helgesen, 1990), pilots, particularly in the company of other pilots, reportedly depict CRM as childish or "touchy-feely." As one woman pilot confessed,

Examining yourself—How good of a manager am I? Do I have the people skills for it? That's just another one of those things that goes against the pilot image. . . . Take that CRM stuff. . . . It's a joke among most pilots. In fact, during training, or whenever we talk about it otherwise, the guys will usually break into some camp song to make fun of it. . . . If you act like you like it, well then you're just a touchy-feely wuss. . . . But the funny thing is, I know that things have gotten a lot better because of CRM and that flying is better and safer as a result. But pilots just can't seem to admit that to each other.

As this quote suggests, pilots themselves mark the tension between empowered crews and impotent captains as a gendered phenomenon, at least implicitly. But how do captains negotiate "workable" identities amid this gendered threat?

Be(com)ing a man while empowering others: CRM as the benevolent father's gift. Here, I demonstrate how airline pilots—and, specifically, captains—masculinize their role as empowering managers by fashioning themselves as "benevolent fathers" who choose to "lengthen the leash" because of their professional commitment

to safety and to the welfare and performance of their crew. Put another way, pilots appear to be making creative adjustments to the “captain as omnipotent and omniscient father” discourse, drawing on available industry subjectivities (such as captain as protective father and flight attendant as sexualized dependent) and larger societal formations (such as cultural shifts in fatherhood, from distant authoritarian to emotionally involved coach). In what follows, I identify 7 specific discursive tactics through which captains resisted the gendered threat of CRM.

First, pilot accounts of crew management tweaked the pilot’s gendered career discourse, from “captain as father-knows-best” to “captain as benevolent father,” who remains open to the remote possibility that he may not know best, even though he probably always will. Second, they situated CRM as a captain’s generous gift to his subordinates. It is not that he must offer it, for he has free license to do as he wishes. As several participants put it, captains have “the hammer” to wield whenever they deem necessary, but typically, they graciously choose to withhold it. Instead, captains who offer the gift of CRM are demonstrating their ultra-professional commitment to safety and, in some cases, the sensitivity they gleaned from suffering the abuses of despotic captains. This so-called gift suggests a third, related tactic: Captains framed CRM as their personal choice or preference, rather than as an institutional mandate imposed on them (which it is, even if it is also the former). Even more, they took literal ownership of CRM, describing it as a personal habit, a life orientation, or even as their own invention. Rampant use of *I* language and possessive pronouns attests to the point. The discursive moves discussed thus far frequently converged, as in the following excerpts:

Now, if you’re smart, you’ll never try and use that power over other people, because the rest of the crew knows who the captain is and the proper use of that thing is to use the rest of your crew as a resource, and you’ll only get that if you treat them with human dignity. But you do have extraordinary powers. . . . I didn’t want to be pontifical in management of the airplane. . . . It’s just kind of my way of doing things. . . . I never wanted to mix up my uniform with my humanity.

I have a manner that I try to bring to the whole operation, and I know that the captain does set the tone, and we use this term CRM, and I'm a big team player. I love to get everybody involved, and I love to give away responsibility. You do that, just do it and talk to me. Keep me informed. Let's dialogue on this, and for god's sake, let's work together. So I think that by communicating my ambition and my requirement on them to open up that that's how you get the best kind of teamwork done. And you can work together, and I can draw the most out of you. . . . [Q: Isn't that a typical style for a captain these days?] Oh, I think not. I've flown with tons of captains, and the authoritarian model is very common. . . . They have tried to shift it over the years more toward CRM, but I just think I probably practice a little more of it. It's my nature.

[Q: Isn't that consistent with the CRM approach?] My version of it. That's the way I determined I wanted to run a cockpit after 35 years of flying. . . . The captain has the hammer, but the goal is not to use it. . . . I think the airline industry has evolved in that, but what you're getting out of me is my version, and my own interpretation to it.

Fourth, captains depicted the authoritarian approach as outmoded; that is, CRM reflects the way a savvy man in today's world gets people to perform for him: "If people care about you, they'll be better for you, and if you care about them, they'll do better for you." For many captains, then, CRM is a matter of self-interest as well as safety. Fifth, when offering tales of actual CRM application, captains emphasized interaction with flight attendants, coloring the instrumental logic noted above with hues of gendered, sexualized seduction. This captain, for instance, observed how gentleness with flight attendants translates into better service:

If you respect people and treat them right, it'll come back to you in spades. . . . I like to always say that, as captain, you're a benevolent dictator. . . . They had a great movie in this one CRM class. They were showing different scenarios of ways to set the tone when you first see your crew. You see the captain come on . . . and some smiling service manager comes up and greets him. And the captain says, "Coffee, black, two sugars." . . . So that's obviously the bad way. Then they show him getting on the plane, putting down his bag, shaking hands with the crew. "Is everything going well? Is there anything you need, that I can help you with?" I guarantee you that if you do this, they'll be right behind you offering coffee.

Sixth, when captains described CRM in the cockpit, they tended to couch it as a mentoring responsibility, like father pushing son to spread his wings, so to speak. Consider how this captain described the “new” generation of junior pilots:

They’re much more open to express their opinion about what’s going on, and when it’s their leg, sometimes you almost think they think that they’re the captain. [Q: Is that a good trend?] I don’t squelch it too much as long as they’re doing something that I want to do. If they were gonna start doing something that I didn’t want to do, then I would just say, “Let’s not do that,” you know. In a way, I kind of like to let them have their leash, if you want to look at it that way, or their reigns or whatever. I like to let them go. . . . That way, the transition will be smaller when they switch seats. And I think that’s part of my job is to not squelch them.

Most of the captains with whom I spoke required that crew participation exhibit proper respect; that is, they expected the crew to enact empowerment while upholding the captain’s manly authority. Indeed, most captains did not depict CRM as truly sharing power but, rather, as enhancing their own power and mastery over the flight operation. A final discursive tactic, then, entailed pilots’ depiction of CRM as a practice that transforms the crew into an extension of the captain’s own body and senses. For example, captains described flight attendants as “my eyes and ears in the cabin,” as “the people in the back that were gonna let me know if anything happened.” In this light, teamwork and a one-man show do not seem like opposites after all.

Remarkably, not one interview participant expressed resistance to the implementation of CRM; instead, they displayed intense, personalized identification with its principles. Ordinarily, such pervasive identification might be read as evidence of concertive control (e.g., Barker, 1993), particularly because it reveals that pilots internalize professional commitment to the primary value of safety in the context of high reliability organization (Weick et al., 1999).

That said, I wish to offer a slightly different spin and suggest that the expressed identification and disavowal of any need for resistance is also about preserving the potent agency of the captain’s role. Through this lens, resistance marked as such flags weakness because it implies lack of control over one’s own destiny (i.e., no

one commands us; we chose this!). Indeed, ongoing industry debates and my own research spark some doubt as to whether CRM is as seamlessly institutionalized and internalized as participants report. Consequently, I suspect that whether pilots welcome CRM may depend on the audience, and that embracing it in a conversation with a nonpilot (airline member or not) may be as much a tactic of resistance through masculinization as rejecting it with fellow pilots.

RESISTING DECLINING CONTROL THROUGH APPARENT CONSENT

As scholars have complicated theories of resistance at work, they have also generated analytical and empirical possibilities that have yet to receive serious consideration. This article explores one such possibility that stems from recent discursive models of the dialectic of control and resistance, which emphasize the fragile and multifaceted character of identity, the ambiguous and ironic texture of resistance, and the importance of examining local practices and participant meanings. Chiefly, this article engages the possibility of reframing as resistance a tactic that feminist and critical scholars typically call control—namely, by exploring instances in which seemingly privileged professionals perceive and respond to identity threats.

To do so, I turned to the case of U.S. commercial airline pilots, recipients of a discursive and material history that crafted them as elite, manly professionals. For the participants in my research, achieving the status of captain was tantamount to becoming “the man” and, specifically, to assuming the role of authoritative, omniscient father. Most of the pilots with whom I spoke appeared to internalize their historical image, actively preserving it by invoking gender development as a metaphor for rank transitions and a key source of emotional involvement with the job. At the same time, they told a narrative of decline in which the pilot’s potent image was eroding under various pressures, especially the industry-wide turn toward crew empowerment. Although CRM threatened to emasculate the captain, participants found creative ways to embrace

CRM and stave off the threat of feminization. Here, I consider broad implications of their responses to the experience of losing control.

First, my analysis suggests an alternative path to that taken by LaNuez and Jermier (1994), who support the claim that managers and technocrats resist by substantiating how they are subject to others' control. My analysis suggests that, from a discursive and dialectical perspective, "proof" of subordinate standing is an unnecessary, if not impossible, prerequisite for resistance. If subjectivities are multiple, unstable, and often conflicted (e.g., Holmer Nadesan, 1996, 1997; Jacques, 1996)—and if, consequently, all social actors invariably engage in control and resistance (Jermier et al., 1994; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994)—then verification of actual subordinate status becomes much less meaningful, if at all viable. Moreover, if one takes seriously the discursive construction of reality, the point is not whether pilots are, in fact, under siege as a professional group but, rather, that they perceived their control to be eroding and they responded in kind. This is *not* to say that other empirical realities of their situation do not matter. It *is* to say that, through a lens that sees discourse as constitutive, it makes little sense to invoke evident institutional, material realities to deny discursive truths. In other words, a widely circulated narrative of declining control assumes the material weight of lived experience.

While this line of argument honors the spirit of a discourse perspective, it becomes a profound political quagmire when considered through feminist and critical theories. Earlier, I reviewed (and sympathized with) feminist suspicion of the notion that masculinities, particularly hegemonic identities, are suffering decline or crisis. Primarily, the objection holds that any move to validate claims of victimization and so-called reverse discrimination—even by simply exploring such claims on their own terms—risks supporting the emergence of identity politics among privileged voices, thereby trivializing more "genuine" oppression and resistance (Robinson, 2000). Cautiously, I want to confront this valid political danger by suggesting that two activities that scholars presume to be antagonistic may not be at odds: that is, (a) the pursuit of radical social change in the configuration and practice of work and (b) the willingness to explore tales of privilege in decline. If we take seriously the constitutive force of discourse, refusing to hear such narratives

not only engenders ontological contradiction but also neglects a crucial obstacle to, and potential facilitator of, social change.

The airline pilot analysis reveals a complex form of resistance to occupational diversification, wherein beneficiaries of professional privilege struggle with the emotional experience of declining control. For at least some airline pilots, masculinity appears pivotal to the pleasure of flying. It thus becomes reasonable to ask if and how more inclusive work identities can yield alternate pleasures, not premised on relations of dominance and subordination? The question becomes all the more pressing when considered alongside an apparent material reality. Put bluntly, pilots are not simply massaging masculine egos when they resist the feminization of their work. The contested meaning of anyone's labor, body, and identity is more than a quarrel over possible selves. It is a discursive struggle for the right to occupational control, professional class status, and the economic and social standing of a job. If the fate of other feminized jobs is any measure (e.g., Garrison, 1972-1973), the diversification of pilot identity may carry material costs, as it will likely cast suspicion on the perceived value of the work.

In such ways, the airline pilot analysis provokes a fresh set of questions for gendered organization scholars and activists. What "losses" are mourned by narratives of privilege in decline, and how might these be productively addressed? What are the many faces of the perceived "feminization threat," within and beyond the boundaries of particular organization sites (for instance, "weak" or "soft" organizational forms, occupational desegregation, changing skills or technology, and meanings thereof)? How do these sources of threat interact, and on what resources do participants draw to resist? How can we diversify professional identities without "second-sexing" (Gherardi, 1994) or "feminizing" (Ferguson, 1984) certain occupations? Or if an occupation's worth is already "artificially" increased by affiliation with masculinity (Phillips & Taylor, 1980)—as is arguably the case with commercial airline pilots (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004a, 2004b)—how can we facilitate less gendered, more equitable distributions of value?

The airline pilot analysis also carries implications for scholars (myself included) who theorize organizational forms such as bureaucracy and collectivism as gendered and who urge the revision of dominant forms as a feasible path to social change (e.g., Acker,

1990; Ashcraft, 2001; Ferguson, 1984; Ferree & Martin, 1995), as well as those who conceptualize so-called feminine leadership styles (e.g., Fondas, 1997; Helgesen, 1990). The masculinization of the captain's role in crew empowerment attests to the remarkable malleability of gender discourse and its indeterminate articulation with particular organizational or occupational forms (Alvesson, 1998). It may be that the high reliability demands of contexts such as commercial aviation cultivate particularly fertile grounds for the masculinization of leading (Weick et al., 1999). However, the lesson seems clear: If something like servant leadership can be rendered a virile practice, we might do well to reconsider the claim that any organizational form is inherently gendered. While symbolic links between gender and form may be latent or even blatant, they are also unstable, such that savvy participants can appropriate and modify those meanings in practice.

For discourse-centered studies of resistance, the analysis expands the dialectical claim that resistance and control are "inextricably and simultaneously linked, often in contradictory ways" (Jermier et al., 1994, p. 29). In particular, the current study picked up the call for "close examination of what may appear to be co-operation at work" (p. 5) and other forms of subtle, covert resistance (e.g., Fleming & Sewell, 2002). In contrast to LaNuez and Jermier (1994), who examined managerial capacity for resistance via sabotage, my analysis implied the possibility that seemingly privileged voices can resist through professed consent. As I argued toward the end of my analysis, pilots' resounding discursive compliance with CRM mandates and, at times, overt denial of any need to resist—at least in the company of occupational outsiders—ironically resisted CRM's emasculating potential by confirming the potent agency and self-determination of pilots. This observation suggests an understudied but useful premise, which we might elaborate from a discourse perspective: The shape of resistance shifts constantly, not only because resistance is inherently polysemic (e.g., Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b) and responsive to varied forces (e.g., Clegg, 1994; Fleming & Spicer, 2002), but also because it is tailored to particular audiences.

Of course, this article aims to do more than contribute yet another localized analysis to a potentially "endless number of case studies" (Clegg, 1994, p. 317). I sought to demonstrate, first, how

case projects can usefully develop theories of resistance by confronting complications entailed in vital conceptual moves. Second, I meant to expand the usual scope of case studies of organizational resistance. By situating the control–resistance dialectic at the meeting of organizational form and occupational identity, of historical and contemporary discourse, this article informs how localized struggles interact with larger discursive and material formations of work.

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