DECIDING WHO GETS IN: DECISIONMAKING BY IMMIGRATION INSPECTORS

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This article examines the work of immigration inspectors—the front-line gatekeepers at ports of entry to the United States who decide whether foreign nationals should be admitted to the country. Described are the shared categories primary inspectors use that help define travelers as referable or nonreferable for further intensive questioning. The study discusses how these judgments arise in the course of doing a distinctive organizational task that fundamentally shapes their character. The study explores the ways in which the nature of categorization and practical decisionmaking in the setting are shaped by agency concerns and the responsibilities and problems of this set of social control agents.

I. INTRODUCTION

The exercise of discretion is a critical feature of decisionmaking in legal contexts. Police officers, regulatory inspectors, and other legal officials typically have considerable discretion in handling cases.

There is substantial scholarly interest in the factors shaping discretionary judgments. In recent years, a major concern within several disciplines is how *prior knowledge* shapes these decisions (Lurigio and Stalans 1990:260). Sociologists and criminal justice scholars studying a variety of legal contexts have described the function of prior knowledge in legal officials' assessment and re-

sponse to cases (Emerson 1969:ch. 4; Hawkins 1984:110-17; Knapp 1981; Sudnow 1965; Swigert and Farrell 1977; Waegel 1981; Williams and Farrell 1990).[1] Social psychologists also have explored how decisions are affected by knowledge about other cases (e.g., schemata) (Lurigio and Carroll 1985) or other forms of organized prior knowledge such as prior record or recommendations (Carroll et al. 1982; Carroll and Burke 1990).

The nature of this prior knowledge is variously described. Some scholars suggest how popular stereotypes, rather than predominantly occupationally or situationally derived orientations for case handling, influence the way social control agents handle cases (Williams and Farrell 1990; Swigert and Farrell 1977). Prevailing stereotypes of particular offenses (e.g., child sexual molestation) provide an imagery about offender and victim characteristics, situational features of the offense, and the like, which is drawn on by legal actors in handling cases.

Other research, however, sees categorization as more firmly rooted in the organizational setting or situation in which social control decisionmakers work. The imagery in much sociological work is one of legal actors who over time accumulate considerable information about cases and their typical features, classifying them into categories ("normal cases") that shape inquiry, interpretation of information, and disposition of cases (Sudnow 1965; Emerson 1969; Hawkins 1983; Hawkins 1984; Lloyd-Bostock 1991; Waegel 1981). While some work by social psychologists also explicitly draws on this imagery (e.g., Lurigio and Carroll 1985), other writing is less explicit but hints at a somewhat similar framework (e.g., Carroll's work on parole decisions).[2]

Recently, the individual-case-oriented approach of much social-control decisionmaking research has been criticized. In particular, sociologist Robert Emerson systematically describes the largely unappreciated *organizational* concerns and conditions that shape social control decisionmaking. Emerson (1988) suggests that current research about social control categorization has a predominantly cognitive, "trait-driven" focus that is a barrier to the full appreciation of the fundamental organizational purposes or problems underlying categorization. Much work on social control decisionmaking, he observes, examines categorization in essen-

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[1] Research in other settings also shows the role of prior knowledge in decisionmaking; see Henslin 1968; Roth 1963:35-39; Hughes 1980a.

[2] Carroll et al.'s work (1982:212-13, 226) on parole decisions suggests that decisionmakers' particular concerns and their attendant use of information is shaped in part by the state's organization of work among different legal actors in the criminal justice system; see also Carroll and Burke 1990:316-17. Diamond's study (1990) of lay vs. professional British magistrates' decisions also suggests how their differing roles within the court system lead them to be situated in somewhat different environments (e.g., professional judges are more likely than part-time judges to see themselves as likely targets of public or media anger over decisions), which may explain their differential sentencing practices (ibid., pp. 213 n. 74; 215).

tially social-psychological terms—as "a narrowly interpretive process" of comparing features of the case at hand with those of the known category (ibid., p. 2)—an approach that presupposes and thus does not consider why particular categories have emerged and are being used by social control agents. This perspective, he suggests, hampers comparative sociological research on social control decisionmaking by drawing our attention from many other important features of categorization—including how occupationally derived categories in a setting ("normal cases") are fundamentally shaped by the problems or tasks of actors within a setting.

Emerson suggests that the *practical purposes or problems* of legal actors and their bearing on the emergence, content, and use of categories should be taken as a focus of analysis. He raises a central question (ibid., p. 6): given that any object can be categorized in any number of ways, why in any setting is it typed in a particular way? Categorization is viewed as shaped by perceived work problems or immediate tasks for which legal actors have developed particular notions about types of cases and related handling strategies that satisfy or at least take cognizance of the problems to be solved or task to be done.

> [N]ormal cases are not essentially cognitive categories distinguished on the basis of particular attributes, but rather devices for deciding between (and products of) alternative courses of practical organizational action. Decision-makers are not simply looking at a set of cases, assessing all their attributes, and then deciding how to treat them. Rather, cases and their attributes are assessed in light of the decisions that can and have to be made about them; and it is that subset of attributes that are somehow pertinent to these decision options (as assessed by these decision-makers) that become relevant. (ibid., p. 8)

In a study of detectives, Waegel (1981) suggests this decision-driven use of case attributes. Detectives categorize cases as "routine" versus "nonroutine" based on paperwork demands and the need to produce a proper number and quality of arrests. These concerns, and their associated normal case categories for sorting among cases and for directing and allocating detectives' energy and time, fundamentally determine whether and how vigorously particular cases are investigated.

Emerson also notes the relative lack of research attention to the background knowledge or understandings about other cases or case sets that inform social control agents' handling of particular cases. Existing research tends to view the decisionmaking unit in terms of "individual cases" or "discrete processing units." In fact, however, legal actors may evaluate and respond to cases not individually but with some larger unit in mind (Emerson 1983). Theoretical and empirical work suggests, for instance, that under certain organizational circumstances, cases may be processed in ways

that "take into account the implications of other cases for the present one and vice versa" (ibid., p. 425; see also Hawkins 1983:116). How particular cases are attended to thus may be affected by an official's "caseload" and the demands of other cases.

This article contributes to this emerging "organizationally grounded" approach to social control decisionmaking by examining the nature of categorization in an area rarely examined—immigration primary inspection. Immigration primary inspection consists of officers' questioning of foreign nationals at ports of entry to the United States. Decisions are made regarding individuals' admissibility to the country. There is little research on current admission-exclusion processing. One scholarly empirical study touching on the subject, conducted a half-century ago, provides a brief two-page description in which it noted that inspectors use "mental pigeonholes" in their sorting of cases and are "compelled to work rapidly" (Van Vleck 1932:45).[3] The study reported here provides a more comprehensive picture of inspection work than previously available.

My data are drawn largely from a study at an international airport ("Metropolitan Port") in the United States. Every day thousands of individuals fly into this airport seeking to be admitted to the United States. Many are U.S. citizens returning from vacations or business trips. Others are foreign nationals seeking to enter or reenter the United States.

Every traveler is inspected by a primary inspector. Prior to collecting their baggage, each arriving passenger's entry documents (passports, permanent resident cards, etc.) are reviewed by an inspector. Should the inspector suspect that a person is ineligible to enter, the person will be referred to a secondary inspector for further questioning and a possible baggage search. At the port studied, about 2 percent of the foreign nationals seeking to enter as nonimmigrants are referred for secondary inspection (see Table 1). If the secondary inspector concludes that the individual entering with a visa[4] is not admissible, that person typically is given the choice of going home on the next plane or being detained and having admissibility determined in exclusion proceedings before a Department of Justice immigration judge.[5]

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[3] Novotny (1971) provides another portrait of Ellis Island processing in 1907. More contemporary work includes two pieces by journalists. Crewdson (1983) provides an interesting and unflattering portrait of corruption of immigration inspectors at the Mexican-U.S. border. Starr's (1970) journalistic article on Customs agency work only briefly touches on the subject of immigration inspections. The several recent studies about decisionmaking in other immigration contexts, including deportation (Anker 1990; Koulish 1991), have a legal or normative rather than a sociological approach.

[4] Although a foreign national is issued a visa by an overseas consular officer of the State Department (*San Diego Law Review* 1978), individuals seeking to enter receive final scrutiny by primary inspectors before admission.

[5] If the foreign national or government is not satisfied with the immigration judge's decision, he or she may appeal to the Board of Immigration Ap-

Table 1. Overview of Disposition of Inspected Foreign Nationals ("Metropolitan Port")

	Total Foreign Nationals (Nonimmigrants) Inspected		Admitted After Primary Inspection		Admitted After Secondary Inspection		Paroled into U.S.		Inspection Deferred		Not Admitted	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1986	329,619	100.0	321,761	97.6	6,674	2.0	250	0.1	313	0.1	621	0.2
1987	416,014	100.0	406,039	97.6	8,343	2.0	768	0.2	319	0.1	545	0.1
1988	527,505	100.1	513,724	97.4	11,374	2.2	1,370	0.3	337	0.1	700	0.1
1989	598,195	100.0	585,062	97.8	11,555	1.9	481	0.1	336	0.1	761	0.1

SOURCE: Developed from Immigration and Naturalization Service ("Metropolitan Port") District Office, Monthly Office Workload Summary, G22.1 forms.

Primary inspectors theoretically possess extensive discretion[6] stemming from broad delegations of legal authority and from the organizational characteristics of enforcement. Legally, the federal law contains nine exclusion categories (including health, criminal, and security reasons).[7] Broad discretionary power lies in the fact-finding process for establishing these grounds for exclusion.[8] Moreover, given the social organization of immigration enforcement, inspectors potentially have considerable scope within which to exercise their discretion. Organizationally, this is a policing activity insulated to a considerable extent from outside demands or complaints for enforcement, thus giving the agency much leeway in the development and implementation of enforcement strategies that ultimately affect the identification and processing of suspected excludable foreign nationals (see generally Hutter 1986:117; Black 1971:1095; Waegel 1981:270). Then, too, primary inspectors are operating in a relatively low-visibility decisionmaking position

peals and then to the federal district court. Currently, citizens from eight designated nations (e.g., England, Germany, Japan) may come to the United States without visas. In these cases, if the inspector finds such persons inadmissible, they are subject to summary exclusion and are returned home without an exclusion hearing.

[6] Although a foreign national is issued a visa by an overseas consular officer of the State Department (San Diego Law Review 1978), individuals seeking to enter receive final scrutiny by primary inspectors before admission.

[7] See the Immigration Act of 1990 (Pub. L. No. 101-649). Section 601 of the act revises the previous thirty-three grounds for exclusion into nine categories. See generally U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1991a:265, 287; 1991b:305. On exclusion, see Aleinikoff and Martin 1991:Chs. 3 & 4; Schuck 1984:18-21, 62-65.

[8] Although grounds for exclusion exist as a partial guide to primary inspector action, and some elements to be weighed in decisionmaking have been articulated (see Martin 1987:Ch. 5), for many grounds of exclusion, primary inspectors have considerable discretionary power in deciding who to send for secondary inspection. For instance, the law excludes individuals who are paupers, professional beggars, or vagrants, as well as individuals likely to become public charges. But who, for instance, is likely to become a public charge? How much cash, what charging limit on a credit card, etc., must an individual have for what length of stay and visits for what purpose (business, family or friends)?

(by themselves in glass booths), in a one-to-one private interaction with passengers, in which superiors have little means to know if they are making mistakes or doing the job properly. This is not to say there are no limits on the discretion of primary inspectors. As discussed later, national and port policy require some types of travelers to be automatically sent by inspectors for further secondary inspection.

To collect data for this study, I traveled to Metropolitan Port and observed inspections for 102 days. Fieldwork began early in March 1988; the last trip to the port took place in December 1990. The selection of Metropolitan Port was partly a practical choice relating to matters of travel and access. But, more importantly, the port of entry is one of the largest U.S. international airports and one at which the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) annually processes hundreds of thousands of applications for admission by foreign nationals, U.S. citizens, and permanent residents, thus providing an excellent opportunity to look at how national exclusion laws and procedures are implemented.

I used a variety of methods, including observation, informal interviews, and development of port statistics. I observed and informally interviewed thirty-six primary and secondary inspectors and supervisors about all phases of airport inspection work. I stood with each of the seventeen inspectors who conducted primary inspections at the port during 1988 when most of those observations took place. I observed primary inspections for a period of twenty-nine days and observed most inspectors twice. I usually arrived at the port at noon and visited with inspectors, then stood with inspectors during the hours from 1 P.M. to 7 P.M.—the hours of arrival of most international flights—as they examined entry documents and questioned arriving passengers. I spent most of a day with inspectors in order to develop rapport and to have sufficient time to observe their work and talk with them, but I sometimes followed a referral to secondary inspection. Depending on how heavy the flights were, I would observe anywhere from seventy-five to several hundred inspections a day.

Because there is little scholarly work about the inspection process, I used extensive observations coupled with informal rather than formal interviews. Interviewing was a challenge because of the continuous flow of travelers and their speedy disposition. I typically inquired about cases in the hurried few seconds between passengers. Questions such as, "How did you come to decide to admit that passenger?" or "What were you thinking about in that case?" allowed inspectors freedom to talk about their thoughts. This questioning *between* passengers was essential because once a case was gone from the booth (particularly those admitted to the United States), most inspectors had trouble remembering much about it because of the massive number of repetitive, routine cases they inspected. Because cases sent to secondary inspection required that

the officer walk the passenger over to the secondary area, this provided a good opportunity to learn more detail about an inspector's thoughts about the case. It also meant I was present whenever a primary inspector stopped to give a secondary inspector his or her impressions about a particular case. The "dead time" between flights was extremely valuable. I used it for follow-up inquiries and general questions about the inspector and inspections. I often also used these breaks to query inspectors about the last two or three passengers they interviewed right before the break in flights—those they could remember. I also developed knowledge of the functioning of ports of entry by talking with inspectors about their work at other inspection ports and by talking with visiting inspectors about the similarities and differences between Metropolitan Port and the land or air port at which they were stationed.

My study of immigration inspection in the interior of the country was supplemented by a two-week period of interviewing and observation at a Mexican border port of entry. There I observed twenty-five immigration officers and supervisors involved in inspecting car passengers and pedestrians crossing from Mexico into the United States.[9]

II. "WORKING THE LINE": PRIMARY INSPECTION

"Flights in! Flights in!" The shout filters back to the small lunchroom as inspectors quickly move to the passenger arrival area and take their seats in the glass-partitioned booths stretched across a wide room. Another afternoon of inspecting international air travelers has begun.

The port of entry is a large and busy place with thousands of international travelers arriving within a few hours. At peak times, such as the summer, travelers almost continuously spill into the port and join other weary travelers standing in line for inspection. As each traveler completes inspection, tens of others are also beginning or completing their inspections in front of other primary inspectors.

Although full-time permanent primary inspectors receive several months of formal inspection instruction and language training, they chiefly learn how to make decisions by "working the line."[10] Inspection work is informed not only by inspectors' experience on the primary line but also by secondary inspection work. The dead time between flights regularly allows inspectors to share

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[9] The similarities and differences between interior air ports of entry and border ports will be the focus of a subsequent publication.

[10] Job training at the port typically consists of neophytes standing and watching an experienced inspector for several days as he or she processes passengers; then the neophytes try their hand at inspecting under the watchful gaze of a veteran. After this brief training, new inspectors are usually sent to one of the primary lines where predominately U.S. citizens rather than foreign nationals are inspected.

stories and knowledge about passengers as well as to check up on cases they referred to secondary—thus learning from one another as well as reinforcing shared notions about travelers. More experienced inspectors also do secondary inspections, which helps them see what kinds of cases can be developed from bits of information generated on the primary line. Finally, inspectors share information in occasional staff meetings, discussing problem groups of travelers and hearing announcements regarding policies for inspections.

A. Features of Work

Several features of primary inspectors' work are essential in understanding their decisionmaking. First, primary inspectors are *repeat players* with a vengeance (Galanter 1974). They are legal actors who day in and day out are faced with decisionmaking in similar cases. Inspecting passengers from 1 P.M. to about 8 P.M., each inspector deals with up to several hundred cases a day. In other words, they have much opportunity to develop notions about cases.

Second, like many other social control agents, inspectors operate under *pressures of a large volume of cases and limited resources* (much like Scheff's (1964) doctors and Waegel's (1981) detectives). Inspectors are keenly aware of the large number awaiting inspection. The lines stretch in front of their booths for tens of feet. Although each inspector is shielded by a partially enclosed glass booth, the noise of passengers, the restless shifting of those anxious to be through inspection, and the waves of new arrivals for inspection place a heavy burden to "keep things moving." Public and congressional attention to inspection delays add to the immediate pressures (U.S. General Accounting Office 1991; McGinley 1991; Strom 1991). Although typification or classification of people emerges naturally in everyday interaction and is not operative only when caseloads are high (Emerson 1988:6), time and resource constraints encourage decisionmakers to rely on known categories to determine the direction of questioning initially and, at times, for case disposition.

Third, primary inspectors perform a *distinctive organizational task* that fundamentally shapes the nature of their assessments. While there is no formal amount of time within which inspectors must dispose of cases, inspectors share a belief that they should conduct the inspection of foreign nationals in two to three minutes. If a case requires more attention, "secondary it"—refer it for more in-depth work properly left to the secondary inspector. Inspectors' work involves referring "suspicious" persons for more extensive inquiry. They are not looking for truth, only suspicions that can be confirmed or disconfirmed later by the secondary officer. As a result, the screening is coarse—sometimes only one at-

tribute (e.g., nationality) is attended to—which inspectors view as appropriate for this initial sifting or winnowing task.

Fourth, primary inspection in the interior of the country is essentially one of *policing a population of strangers*. Inspectors typically have never before seen the individual they are inspecting. This is in part an outgrowth of the structure of inspecting. The organization of inspection allows those seeking admission to the United States to enter at one of many interior airports, sea ports, and Canadian and Mexican land border ports. The large number of inspectors nationally and the infrequency of much international air travel by most individuals increase the likelihood that any entry will involve a different inspector. In short, unlike work in some regulatory settings, a major feature of inspection work is the lack of continued relations between regulatory officials and "clients." Assessments of travelers therefore draw on a more limited base of information, particularly one uninformed by an inspector's prior encounters or past history with an individual. The judgments about individuals must be made in the immediate, brief inspection.

Fifth, the inspection of foreign nationals is highly *labor intensive*. It involves a flurry of questions while the inspector types the passenger's name and passport number into the computer system, pages through the passport to locate the visa or the visa waiver form, and stamps the departure document and passport. The labor-intensive task diminishes the time an inspector has for cues normally picked up through eye contact and examination of demeanor. This situation is compounded by the fact that policing in this setting typically does not operate with the full range of cues normally available to assess an individual (see Goffman 1959: 22–30). Information about the individual within his natural setting is normally not available; thus inspectors are largely limited to examining the fit between the passenger's appearance and manner (compare, e.g., Skolnick 1975:45 n.5, 48)

Finally, technology exists to draw together an organizational history of an individual's entries, criminal record, and the like, relevant to the admission decision through the inspector's use of the agency's computer system. Inspectors recognize, however, that the organizational intelligence system provides *incomplete, unreliable, or dated knowledge* about certain travelers. For instance, even when the computer suggests a "hit" or "match" between the individual presenting himself for inspection and the agency's records of an excludable alien, the information is not reflexively relied on for a secondary referral in all cases.[11] Thus, although inspectors need not rely on the immediate inspection and judgments about

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[11] Since my observations, the quality of information in the computer system has been improved. "Last name only" computer matches occurred regularly, and inspectors never knew whether the individual passenger was the "Mr. Brown" who was the subject of agency interest. Some inspectors humorously called these "Mr. FNU's," "Mr. first name unknown."

the responses of travelers and document examination to make a decision, they in fact do so in some cases because of doubts about the quality of computer information. In addition, language difficulties and the limited availability of airline interpreters intensify problems of information gathering. In situations of incomplete or unreliable knowledge, inspectors tend to rely on what they know about similar types of travelers to guide their decisions.

B. Decisionmaking Characteristics

More than fifty years ago, Professor William Van Vleck spent two weeks on Ellis Island observing the immigration station. Although he was speaking of the inspection of steamship travelers in the 1930s, his description remains remarkably current even today:

> As a rule the inspectors are compelled to work rapidly. They develop a *routine of questions* and a *routine of decisions*. Usually they have *fairly well-defined mental pigeonholes* into which they place each case. The inspection becomes largely a matter of rules worked out by the inspectors from experience or followed as a matter of custom or administrative routine. (Van Vleck 1932:45) (emphasis added)

Indeed, like other decisionmakers faced with the need to make decisions on the spot, inspectors organize and make sense of their world using two major techniques: (1) focused data collection and (2) categorization.

1. Focused Data Collection

Primary inspection is focused. Inspectors tend to work with a few standard questions. Their task usually is not one of streamlining existing mounds of data, as it is for some decisionmakers (e.g., parole officers, Hawkins 1983:114-16) but rather one of generating kernels of useful information.

When time permits, the more experienced inspectors scan the lines of waiting passengers to learn more about individuals.[12] For the most part, though, inspections are confined to information gathered at the inspection booth. The initial key pieces of data sought from questioning and document examination include the purpose of the trip (business or pleasure), length of stay, and who or what (family, friends, company, or trade show) the person is visiting. The following exchanges illustrate some typical brief immigration inspection questioning of business and tourist visitors admitted to the United States:

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[12] Suspicions may be aroused when, e.g., a traveler in business attire "jumps" primary lines and appears to be looking for an "easy" inspector.

Inspection 1
Q: What kind of business are you coming for?
A: Automotive.
Q: Number of days in the States?
A: Four to five days.
Inspection 2
Q: You coming on holiday?
A: Yes.
Q: Who are you visiting?
A: Friends.
Q: How long will you stay?
A: Two weeks.
Q: Are they a citizen or resident?
A: American citizen.
Inspection 3
Q: Where are you going?
A: To Chicago, to South Korea in four days.
Q: [Requests ticket] Do you work for U.S. Air?
A: Yes.
Q: Hotel in Chicago?
A: No, I'm staying with friends

Inspectors' prior experience and knowledge about types of cases allow them in just these few questions to note "items of information" or "tip-offs" (Emerson 1969:84) suggesting that something may be wrong and that secondary inspection is called for.

> After a few questions, an experienced person can decide whether to go further. You can't determine excludability right away. The potential can be determined in 4-5 questions just on our knowledge in what has happened in the past, cases that we've had in the past, what would be the type of thing developed from this item. (Inspector 13)

Knowledge of types of travelers and their features are fundamental in the interpretation of "items of information" gained in the inspection.

> You get a lot of scraggy kids from [airline]. I'm not alarmed. *No tickets* [to return home], it's so common of these [airlines]. They have a lot of backpackers. They're not coming to work, not a problem. (Inspector 8)

> A person may come in, a man, he's *nervous*, he has sweating hands, and you conclude that he has drugs. Then, the next person comes, and that person is nervous, too. . . . But she's an old lady, and she's nervous because its her first time in the country. . . . There's no rules. That's the hardest part of the job. It's not something someone can tell you. You have to learn it with experience. (Inspector 26)

In inspection work there are few features of cases (e.g., "nervousness," "a request to stay in U.S. for many months," "touring without a destination," "no plane tickets" or "tickets without a return date") that by themselves trigger a secondary inspection referral. The salience and interpretation of bits of information are

understood through the filter of understandings from categories of cases that inspectors learn while working at the port.

These categories provide a starting point for the direction of more developed questioning when items of information from the standard question tip off the inspector that something may be wrong. The conception of the normal tourist/business traveler and the *unfolding nature* of the inspection in the face of discrepancies is described by one inspector.

> If they say they're going to be here for two to three weeks, to me that's a bona fide entry. If they're going to stay six months, then I have to know how much money they have in order to support themselves. Have they abandoned their residence? I tend to think that they may be taking up residence here in the U.S. If they just came here for two or three months and then go and return, I want to question that, and we'll send them to secondary. Most of those people are just living here, and they went back for a short visit, and are returning here again (Inspector 1).

Scholars note that quite different pictures exist in the literature regarding whether categories are preliminary hypotheses leading to further inquiry or presumptive definitions acted on with little or no further questioning (Emerson 1988; Hughes 1980a). In the setting studied, the initial categorization of travelers is the occasion for quite different handling by primary inspectors. As discussed later, the primary inspection task and related agency concerns partly determine the level of effort devoted to particular cases. For instance, categorization of an individual as from a "high-risk" nation routinely results in the inspector treating the individual as referable with *no further inquiry* to take place *at that stage*. The inspector's task—to cull out and refer these cases to the more experienced, less rushed, better equipped secondary inspector—determines effort. Also, individuals who do not fit the normal pattern of the "low-risk" tourist/business traveler can trigger additional inquiry. During this information search, the inspector may attempt to subcategorize or recategorize the individual, exploring, for example, whether the case at hand represents an "unusual" normal case (see Fiske et al. 1987:404). Inspectors' knowledge about unusual normal cases (known but types of cases encountered less often) directs the line of additional inquiry that provides a more individualized inspection than would a referral to secondary inspection based on initial suspicions. For example, an individual traveling to the United States for a four-day holiday with an undated return ticket may raise questions about his real intentions (see Inspection 3 above). (Given the cost of air travel, who can afford such a short visit?) Doubts are quickly set aside once the inspector discovers that the individual is an airline employee who has a free or reduced-rate ticket and must take advantage of it by waiting on stand-by for a flight home.

While inspectors can and do reformulate their pictures of travelers, they can never completely ignore the fact that their task is to quickly move the line while still looking for the bad ones. Most inspectors frequently wonder whether they have asked enough questions of a traveler they just admitted to the country. Indeed, a striking feature of work is the degree of uncertainty about many completed inspections.

2. Normal Case Categories: "High-Risk" and "Low-Risk" Travelers

Categorization of events and people abounds in inspection work. The entire world of the inspector is one of well-honed understandings and occupational typifications of events and people. For instance, some flights come to be described by all inspectors as "dirty flights"—flights perceived as having an unusual concentration of morally repugnant travelers (e.g., fraudulent passport users). Other flights are labeled as "bad flights"—flights requiring inspectors to deal with matters viewed as unrelated and inferior to their occupational skills (e.g., filling out travelers' uncompleted entry documents) (Hughes 1958:70-72; Emerson and Pollner 1976:244). Flights not marked by such problems are labeled "clean flights." Moreover, inspectors take great pride in their knowledge of their setting—for instance, in identifying the nationality of passengers by the height of the men, by the straightness of the inspection queue, or the existence of pushing in it.

Inspectors hold a set of notions about the problems they are likely to find on various flights and with various types of individuals. These preconceptions tend to be organized into a number of unwritten "normal cases," that is, "locally recognized, recurrently encountered types of case[s], usually comprised of a series . . . of more specific typifications" and formulated to deal with certain organizational situations or problems (Emerson 1988:7).

Inspectors describe passengers in terms of "high-risk" or "low-risk" groups of travelers.[13] Emerson (1988:13) has suggested that the number of named normal case types is an outgrowth of the varying complexity of the decision tasks facing legal actors and an aid in an organization's differentiated allocation of time and resources. Hughes's (1980a) study of ambulance crewmen, for instance, suggests a relatively simple categorization of incoming patients ("serious" or "genuine" vs. "nonurgent" cases) reflecting two courses of action available to crewman (i.e., whether routine or special action was necessary—the latter being advance warning to the emergency room or use of ambulance lights and sirens) (cited in Dingwall and Murray 1983). In his study of juvenile court

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[13] High-risk/low-risk categorization may guide other judgments in the system, including the State Department's selection of countries to participate in its visa waiver program (U.S. General Accounting Office 1991:23-24).

processing, Emerson (1988:13) identified an elaborated set of normal cases reflecting the three decision tasks of the court.

In the immigration setting, the bifurcated case set of high- and low-risk travelers reflects the binary nature of the decision task of primary inspectors—deciding who to let through and who to secondary. The categorization reflects and assists inspectors' thinking about the allocation of the port's secondary resources under general working conditions of uncertainty about the nature of cases being inspected. The high-risk travelers are ones on whom the port is willing to expend its secondary inspection resources. Indeed, the categorization contains a specific decision type (type II error)—a willingness to err in the direction of overinclusiveness or erroneous referrals to secondary inspection of travelers subsequently found admissible.[14] The opposite decision error is embedded in perceived low-risk categories. Nonindividualized sorting sometimes occurs,[15] and generally an approach of "we'll get you the next time" (rather than a secondary referral) exists on the primary line when an officer is suspicious but unable to put his finger on anything concrete.

There are good reasons why inspectors are willing to err on the side of admission with low-risk cases. The occasional admission of an otherwise inadmissible alien is not viewed as serious or dangerous to the nation—at the worst, the admitted alien may be an intending immigrant or worker, not a terrorist, smuggler, or criminal. If inspectors mistakenly admit an inadmissible foreign national, there is no review of the decision and no one is likely to know of the mistake. In contrast, their judgment is likely to be called into question if they refer a series of perceived "nothing" cases to secondary inspectors. Different settings have different costs for different types of decision errors; for example, the parole board that erroneously releases an offender can be criticized. In this setting, individual inspectors, and the port in general, are far more open to complaints and criticisms for slowing down the primary line with lots of questioning or for referring travelers while digging too deeply for the needles in the haystack.[16]

3. Types of Travelers—Negative and Positive Categories

A number of unwritten specific types of high-risk and low-risk travelers are used in inspection work. These types are derived pri-

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[14] See subsection B3a, "Negative category—nationality."

[15] See subsection B3b, "Positive category—nationality," and B4.

[16] Peter Schuck (1984:82) has suggested that in the immigration area both positive and negative errors are likely to be common and difficult to detect because of their low visibility and the powerlessness of those involved to challenge government actions. In airport inspection processing, some "errors" of nonadmission are particularly likely to provoke complaints from relatives and friends: suspected "nannies," fiancées arriving without appropriate visas, and lawful permanent resident aliens who are suspected of illegally living permanently in a country other than the United States.

marily from organizational knowledge rather than from general cultural or common-sense knowledge. The types discussed are images of travelers shared by primary inspectors,[17] and inspectors themselves typically reported them in the course of describing particular inspections. Their knowledge about these types emerges largely from local port experience, but port awareness of problem travelers seen at other ports (from agency intelligence reports) informs that local experience to some extent. These types are learned on the job, and although inspectors are aware that they contain generalities that "prejudice" the individual traveler in the primary inspection, use of the categories is viewed as crucial to competent inspection. As one inspector explained:

> I had an inspector say to me when I began, "Do you have any prejudices?" I said, "No, not that I know of." And he said, "You will have." In another sense I don't think its prejudice . . . the straight definition of prejudice is when you think something without having fact, but if you can say in many cases, every time I handle a passenger from X country, I can, almost 99.9 percent of the time, thus and so can happen . . . it's prejudicing that passenger, but if you can count on the old [people from a European country] not having their documents filled out . . . the women to bring in food, or [an Asian country] women to lie, or [an African country] to photo substitute their passports, or you can count on [an Asian country] to alter their documents. . . . If you ignore these kinds of generalities, you become a poor inspector. (Inspector 20)

Each specific type is a picture providing a fairly detailed description of the social and demographic features of the individuals, a prediction as to their likely intentions, and a "handling recipe" (Waegel 1981:272-73) that defines the appropriate response to individuals so categorized. In addition, categories in this setting typically are associated with a broader conception of the social organization of applications for admission (legal and illegal) and a formulation of the problems of policing (if any) they present—an assessment reflecting the port's own organizational interests and concerns that are both enforcement oriented and at times political in nature. In inspectors' descriptions of specific types of high-risk and low-risk travelers are often embedded judgments of credibility,[18] that is, assessments of the likely trustworthiness or validity

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[17] This article explores consensual categories. One category where regularities in behavior across inspectors broke down somewhat was the "nanny" category. Here one inspector in particular contrasted his handling of case to that of other inspectors by saying that he didn't "dig as hard as some" and that he didn't get "pleasure for sending little girls back." Nevertheless, he did secondary suspected nannies, although from his account, one would suspect, less often than many others. One would also suspect less consistency across inspectors would arise with more *de minimus* rule violations.

[18] Generally speaking, inspectors are not standing at their booths, in gear for each case, intensely examining the trustworthiness of each passenger and consciously judging each to be "honest" or "lying." In fact, for some categories

of statements and documents of individuals seeking admission to the United States.

> [*Commenting on one Asian country*] They're the best, we have very little fraud, visa or passport problems. They are legit. . . . *What they claim to be is the truth; they are not trying to pass themselves off as something that they are not.* (Inspector 16)
>
> Any male [from one specific Asian country] you secondary. You don't waste your breath. They're not going to tell you anything. They're going to give you a sing-song language, or *they are going to lie to you anyway.* (Inspector 14)
>
> What you're asking is mainly, *"does that person appear to be what he says he is."* Quite often the national background makes a difference. Let's say he's from [a specific European country]. Now [they] come, and they say they backpack. . . . In most cases, that is just what they are going to do. (Inspector 23)

The imagery of how credibility assessments are made often plays down or ignores this larger categorization that embodies and influences initial assessments and their revisability. Credibility judgments are seen as the product of reactions to discrete characteristics of individuals, the outgrowth of decisionmakers' reactions to the way an individual speaks or acts. Implicit is a focus on the individual as the unit for analysis of how decisionmakers make assessments of credibility.[19] Yet, in a variety of organizational circumstances, including the setting studied here, assessments of credibility are sometimes so shaped by decisionmakers' prior work experience or the local work culture that to view them as simply reactions to the behavior of the particular individual being judged is to misunderstand the nature of judgments. The work of Hawkins suggests a similar conclusion. In his description of how truthfulness accounts of polluters are constructed (1984:171), he observes that inspectors used a variety of sources, including not only the suspected polluter's demeanor or account but also the inspector's understanding based on his prior experience with "excuses and bluffs" of the same kind.

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and case processing of low-risk travelers, the inspector's "brain is in neutral," focusing on "nothing much." Indeed, as in other institutional settings, many individuals pass by fairly anonymously with decisionmakers taking a disinterested approach to them (Hughes 1980b).

[19] There is considerable theoretical interest in and empirical work on the issue of credibility of social communication. Some of this work treats the features of a speaker's oral communication (e.g., the rapidity of speech, the presence of a foreign accent, powerful vs. powerless speech styles) as the principal if not exclusive focus of analysis. For a review of some of the literature see Schaffer 1985; and Lind and O'Barr 1979. Other research on attitude change examines how source characteristics like perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness (see, e.g., Cooper and Croyle 1984) influence credibility assessments.

a) **Negative category**[20]—**nationality.** Many of the prominent types of high-risk travelers are based on nationality. These named types sometimes are not more precise than the country name (although sometimes age and gender are mentioned), since more refined distinctions are not relevant for the primary inspector's task.[21] The importance of nationality is discussed by several inspectors.

> I guess people have told you about our profiles. There are certain groups that we look at more closely because of our experience with many problems with them. We have found fraudulent passports, photo substitutions. These cases are [Asian countries 1 and 2]. . . . Then you have good groups like [Asian country 3], and people from [a European country]. This obviously has a bearing on what you do. You're more likely to believe something that someone from [Asian country 3] tells you than [Asian country 1], such as even "where are you going?" (Inspector 16)

> There are different people that you watch more closely because of what you know from the past and what you know is coming from different countries. If it's a [person from a particular Asian country], you have to look closely. When I see people coming from [specific large businesses] and they've been here fifty to sixty times, I don't feel I should waste their time. (Inspector 15)

Any inspector will describe one high-risk nationality category[22] involving an Asian country—as typically young men coming with $1,000, going to "any hotel" and carrying no baggage but a briefcase. Such high-risk nationality categories are usually associated with routine processing and disposition practices that reflect the organization's priorities, concerns, incentives, and at times, political assessments.

At the port studied, the perception that the incidence of photograph substitutions on passports and visa fraud is very high for a number of countries has led to a port policy of automatically sending for secondary inspection all individuals presenting passports from those countries.[23]

Little or no individualized inspection occurs; presentation of

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[20] The negative category types include both high-risk and some other known categories of problem traveler. For the latter cases, there is less consensus among inspectors that extensive secondary resources should be devoted to them.

[21] On the organizational interests underlying the precision of normal case categories, see Emerson 1988:10.

[22] I have chosen not to identify the countries by name. I did not promise confidentiality on this aspect to administrators or inspectors as a condition of the research. However, I concluded that the informational value of such identification would not outweigh the potential international relations problems and the potential diminished value of the enforcement profiles that such disclosures might produce.

[23] Sometimes, however, the more experienced inspectors (who also do secondary inspections) will conduct a full inspection on the primary line.

the country passport suffices to judge what type of individual is re-
questing admission.[24] This handling implicitly reflects inspectors'
notions about the individual's limited credibility, that is, lack of
trustworthiness of statements or documents. "Judgments of credi-
bility" thus are fundamentally shaped by the distinctive organiza-
tional task of the primary inspector—a quick sifting and referral of
cases, with more individualized assessments left to the secondary
officer. In short, judgments of credibility are embodied in the na-
tionality categorization and are shaped as much, if not more, by
decisionmakers' knowledge and experience with other cases than
by specific features of the individual being assessed in the primary
inspection. The reverse dispositional situation also exists. Individu-
als from some nations (described later) receive relatively limited
primary questioning; their credibility is presumed, and their cases
are rarely pursued in a secondary inspection.

Primary inspectors are aware that certain individual attributes
(age, gender, economic status) are likely to be relevant in whether
suspicions and assessments are eventually confirmed or discounted
in these high-risk and low-trust cases. But these more refined clas-
sifications of travelers or individualized credibility assessments are
not relevant for primary inspectors' specific practical decisionmak-
ing task. The categorization, however, does not create blinders that
prevent a later broader view of the case. In the secondary inspec-
tion, these initial preconceptions can be modified as additional in-
formation is gained from further questioning, baggage search, and
technical document analysis.

In this setting, the "preformed decision" of an automatic refer-
ral is not unlike that used in other agency settings where adminis-
trators use this organizational strategy to provide control over low-
visibility decisionmaking.[25] In his work on forest rangers, for in-
stance, Kaufman (1960:91) observes that preformed decisions (au-
thorizations, directives, and prohibitions) emerge from all levels of
organizational management as administrators attempt to prescribe
"courses of action to be taken for designated categories of . . .
events and conditions." At the port studied, the preformed decision

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[24] Virtually automatic judgments of this sort also are found in such other
legal decisionmaking contexts as the psychiatric setting (Scheff 1964:410-11,
automatic hospitalization in family petition cases).

[25] This analogy is not meant to gloss over the substantial legal, adminis-
trative, and political questions that arise with the use of automatic secondary
inspection of certain nationalities. Although beyond the scope of this article,
many questions remain: If automatic secondaries are used, how can adminis-
trators structure their use (regularize, review, validate categories) to control
the exercise of discretion within acceptable bounds? Can a high quality of jus-
tice be achieved using automatic secondaries? This assumes we can arrive at
fair and apolitical procedures for assessing and handling travelers from all na-
tions. Finally, given that certain innocent nationals are at considerably greater
risk than others for questioning, handbag and baggage searches, and delay, are
there other ways to structure enforcement to protect these individuals? (On
the problems of probabilistic reasoning in policing, see Skolnick 1975:218-19.)

of automatic referral for certain countries is rooted in practical organizational concerns—the agency's high enforcement priority of identifying document fraud and smuggling, the port's interest in detecting as many serious immigration violators as possible for good port statistics, and the presence of inexperienced and busy inspectors on the primary lines whose technical equipment is less sophisticated than that in secondary inspection.[26]

A developed conception of the organization of immigration fraud also underlies the port's extraordinary efforts to detect illegal entries in high-risk cases by limiting the discretion of primary inspectors. The problems in high-risk cases are viewed as fundamentally different from immigration troubles with most other travelers. High-risk cases, such as those in which document fraud appears, are viewed as involving highly organized crime rings. It is thought that if travelers using such documents get through one port, the crime rings will send more individuals to the port. Sending someone with a fraudulent entry document home from the airport is viewed as "getting a message back" that they are not going to get through this port, thus stemming future attempts. Finally, like the police in Skolnick's classic study (1975:45, 218-19), immigration inspectors place some immigration violations on a different moral level from others. The greater importance attached to serious criminal law violations (e.g., document fraud) than to relatively minor rule violations (child-care helpers or fiancées arriving without proper visas) may help explain the zealous efforts taken and the perceived reasonableness of these actions, even though some innocent travelers may be caught in the broad net of automatic secondary referrals.[27]

The use of automatic referrals for high-risk nations, however, is also partly shaped by political assessments. For instance, early in the research, I observed that inspectors perceived that travelers from one European country routinely claiming to be tourists were coming to the United States to work temporarily. The Service could have made a concerted effort (as it does with some countries) to show that some of these travelers were not tourists, by au-

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[26] At other interior ports of entry, case types (geared to the population of travelers the port services) also lead primary inspectors to confront travelers from each nation with a set of assumptions about what they are likely to find and with an expectation of the likely action that will be needed to dispose of the case. Ports differ, however, as to how officially constrained primary inspectors are in handling these cases. At one international airport primary inspectors were reported to operate in a similar fashion, but at still other ports of entry inspectors reputedly operate with greater discretion as to which individuals from perceived high-risk nations to send to secondary (perhaps reflecting greater experience or confidence in these inspectors). Nevertheless, whether by official port policy or by more informal sorting among travelers through use of categories, inspectors' dispositions are guided by shared categories that heavily rely on positive and negative images of particular nationalities developed from experience.

[27] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this portion of Skolnick's account of police decisionmaking.

tomatic secondaries and routine searches of the luggage for physi-
cal evidence that they are planning to work. This was not done in
part because experience suggested it was extremely difficult to
find evidence to establish work intentions (e.g., letters from em-
ployers). But also inspectors perceived that introduction of such
tactics was likely to provoke an outcry from a politically powerful
local constituency and their local and national politicians.[28] More-
over, they perceived that Department of State foreign policy inter-
ests in the preferred positive treatment of these nationals would
make officials responsive to the anticipated intervention by polit-
ical representatives.[29]

Finally, nationality case categories resist extinction. While
there may be cognitive reasons for this, there are also reasons
grounded in inspectors' understanding of these cases. Long periods
when there are no port problems for a particular nation do not
necessarily signal a lack of need for the port's close scrutiny of a
nation through automatic secondaries, but merely suggest that the
individuals are not coming to the United States or are going to
other ports. Thus the very conception of the organization and na-
ture of illegal activity diminishes the likelihood that these normal
case categories will be readily extinguished.

b) Negative category—nannies. Another prominent working cat-
egory of problem travelers is the "nanny," understood to be a
young woman typically coming from certain specific European
countries, in the early weeks of summer, for a so-called visit of
several months with friends of her family who have small chil-
dren. As an inspector explained in one case: "When I saw her, I
knew she was bad. She was coming here for six months and she
didn't know the family. She was typical. She fit a pattern" (Inspec-
tor 8).

Claims by young girls—that the visits are to see friends of the
family who happen to have young children and that she will travel
and holiday for several months—are "stories" that inspectors have
heard many times and routinely result in referral to secondary in-
spection. The primary inspections are quickly terminated after
"items of information" suggest commonalities between the particu-
lar case and the known nanny type—the remaining digging to con-
firm or disconfirm the initial suspicions is left to in-depth inquiry
at the secondary stage. This response to such "stories" reflects the
perceived similarity of the particular case to a whole set of other

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[28] This is not to suggest that the port failed to work on investigating ac-
tivities relating to this nation's fraud or smuggling rings. But the handling pro-
cedure of automatic secondary used for other perceived high-risk nations was
not used in this effort.

[29] That country's political conditions have dramatically changed since my
observations of primary inspectors. It is possible that this latter factor is no
longer important in the handling of that nation's travelers.

previously detected nanny cases that inspectors become aware of through follow-up of their primary referrals and (for some officers) from doing secondary inspections themselves.

> If you see they are 18 to 20, and they are coming to visit a family . . . never met the family, and the family has two kids [you refer to secondary]. You get experience back there [in secondary inspection]. You don't have a lot of time to question them here [on primary]. . . . You get a chance to see the luggage . . . and to so see if they're nervous. You can learn with the different stories they tell, so you're more alert on the line. Something clicks. They said they're coming to visit a family. That's always the story with nannies. How did you meet them? Through friends, or fathers, or their families. Or they've just been here. They're coming back again mainly in May or June, and school had just let out, and the parents need a sitter. (Inspector 4)

Importantly, the bits of information that make up often-told stories by young girls do not provoke the same response when told by elderly men and women. Inspectors respond to these older travelers in very different ways since their stories are viewed as credible within the working knowledge of inspector.

Moreover, just as there is a developed conception of the world of immigration fraud, there is also a picture of the world of what some call nanny "smugglers." Hiring women to come to the United States to care for children would not be illegal had the family gone through the proper agencies and paperwork. But the conception is that families choose not to follow the law since the paperwork is too much trouble, the terms of employment limit the girl's working hours below those desired, and legal procedures require them to pay higher wages and benefits than they prefer. General knowledge about the category type of nanny also includes awareness of the unpleasant problems of dealing with wealthy, powerful, and often politically well-connected families when enforcing the law against illegal employment. These latter attributes usually are not attended to by primary inspectors, although they are not oblivious to them. These nanny attributes do concern the secondary inspectors and supervisors who must decide the lengths to which the port will go to remove a suspected nanny (e.g., whether there will be a concerted effort to "break" the girl), if no "foolproof" evidence, such as a letter from the employer, is found.

c) **Positive category—nationality.** Positive nationality types also guide decisionmaking. Business and tourist travelers from one Asian country have reputations for honesty and integrity in immigration matters and receive relatively little screening. There is a tendency where inaccessible airline interpreters prevent good communication to admit the individual despite these impediments to a full inspection. As one inspector described business travelers from

this country: "[Their] businessmen are what they say they are. They have money and they have credit cards. They are here for what they say they are. They are low risk" (Inspector 8).

Country origin does not, however, exercise a consistent direct influence on categorization. Rather, national origin takes on a positive or negative image as it is filtered through the prototypical conceptions held by inspectors screening individuals with different organizational purposes in mind. At the port of entry the U.S. Customs Service seeks to identify travelers involved in drug and merchandise smuggling or possible money-laundering schemes. Although immigration inspectors categorize the above-described Asian travelers as low risk for immigration purposes, when considering Customs concerns, they have doubts about their honesty. It is not uncommon for travelers from this nation to fail to declare that they are carrying more than $10,000 in cash, thus leading inspectors to screen them closely for possible further Customs questioning and baggage search.

   d) Positive category—business travelers. Who a traveler is visiting also shapes processing. As in some other regulatory contexts, whether an enforcer is dealing with a large or small company leads him to have certain expectations about the kind of company and people he is dealing with and their willingness to comply with the law. These general understandings affect the way any particular case is handled (Hawkins 1984:114-15; Knapp 1981:550).

   In the immigration area, people visiting large, so-called respectable companies (companies seen as unlikely to hire illegal aliens, such as big accounting firms or major corporations) are seldom queried at length except to establish that they are from the company. Once that is established, further examination is suspended, since the type of individual is understood to be low risk. In these cases, there is a tendency for inspectors to rely on the company's own screening of job candidates. This is essentially "surrogate screening," in which an earlier institution's decisionmaking is substituted for a fresh screening. Thus, decisions by other institutions, not within the legal system, come to affect legal decisionmaking. This shifting of screening to other institutions also is augmented by the additional weight given to the State Department's consular visa issuance process. Several inspectors' comments suggest the effects of positive categories on case processing. They also suggest inspectors' broader conception of the world of big business that leads them to conclude these cases pose relatively few problems for policing our borders.

> [Q: After the inspection of several business travelers the question was asked, "What if anything were you looking for here?"] Nothing really, they're doing the same thing, they're going to the same place, . . . just making sure they've got the proper working visa. . . . Most are from [big

car companies] . . . companies that don't want any problems, and they take care of the people so they do things the right way. . . . Big companies like that I feel don't need the risk of bad people. They're not hiring illegals. They're not the type that want people like that. . . . [Q: Why ask any questions then of them?] Often just to make sure that their position in the company is valid, that they're not bringing some "Joe" along with them. (Inspector 5)

[Q: What were you thinking?] . . . These people were going to the [major company], he's wearing a business suit. . . . He works for [major company] in his home country. . . . But anyhow, guys like that are as good as gold, businessmen not coming to live here, they are good. . . . [Q: Is the particular company important like [major company]?] Yes, I think so. It's my opinion. If he said he worked for Schwartz Delicatessen I'd be more reluctant. Financially he's able to be here. . . . They've checked him out. If the guy worked for [major companies listed], they checked him out fairly good, and these companies are choosy as to who they hire. . . . [Q: Why is it important that they checked him out?] Their character, their general character. Also it means when they issued the visa, he probably went with letters [from his job] to get the visa. We're less likely to think there's something wrong with the visa. (Inspector 16)

4. Short-Term Categories

Decisionmakers work not only with long-term normal case types but also with more short-term, temporary, or transitory categories developed through daily inspections. Inspectors learn of public or business events (trade shows, athletic events, biker's rallies) from other inspected passengers, and they draw on what they have learned about the intended length of visit and destination of these other visitors in decisionmaking. This information forms a valuable background for determining the scope and line of questioning, comparing the applicant's story to that of others before him, and filtering certain potentially "troubling" information as not relevant to the admission decision since these concerns have already been considered and discounted in other earlier inspections. For instance, as one inspector describes the inspection of several farmers traveling as a group, "They are farmers, and you don't ask them about money because they have little. . . . It's very obvious after the second one, they had the same ticket, and they're going to Sacramento to the show there. I have been seeing that all week. I know what it was."

While the previous discussion of categorization focuses on inspectors' decisionmaking in the cases of individual travelers, in a host of other cases they process cases in ways that take one another into account with important implications for evaluations of

individual travelers. Emerson (1983:448) has observed that "the place in which a particular case occurs in a known *sequence of cases* has critical implications for the treatment and handling of that case."

In some circumstances, such as the arrival of a tour group or a group of school boys to play polo, the inspection of the first traveler or two (sometimes the tour group leaders) may serve as the inspection for the rest, with the inspector making sure that ensuing travelers are part of the group. This "batch processing" is illustrated with the inspection of a European symphony orchestra. After the music director and the maestro were individually queried about the purpose and length of their trip, the remaining members of the orchestra were simply asked what instrument they played— to ensure they were part of the group. Thus the handling and disposition of the first couple of travelers in the group had important implications for those later in the sequence of inspections. Virtually all immigration-related questioning was suspended in the subsequent inspections. The nature of the inquiry shifted from a concern about the intentions of the individuals applying to enter the country to one of a concern that the individuals were part of the "group" whose admissibility had already been adjudged favorably.

While in the processing of the orchestra the checking to ensure that various travelers belong to the group was done through questioning, in other batch processing such checking is done visually. For instance, the inspector looks for the oddball, the man in a suit in the middle of a casually dressed tour group, or some other feature that does not fit. As one inspector said, "if there is one young person, who's 25 or 30 years old in a group of 60-year-olds, he might be the one to talk to. You don't find that. Most travel with people their own age."

The mere presence of a group tour in the inspection line does not trigger a batch processing routine unless the nationality of the group is acceptable. For instance, during the processing of a tour from one Asian country I asked the inspector whether the fact that it was a tour affected the processing of these passengers? He volunteered: "It makes it faster. . . . Now, if it's a [negative category country] tour group, you do not approach it in the same way. You thoroughly check each one. There is a high degree of fraud. It sounds like prejudice, but it's just experience talking." Thus, implicit in the use (or nonuse) of batch processing is a conception about the type of travelers being inspected. When batch processing is employed, inspectors expect these groups to contain low-risk travelers whose more individualized inspection can be suspended because they are credible—the group contains neither travelers attempting to enter the country with fraudulent documents nor travelers whose stated intentions to tour are likely to conceal a different agenda.

Table 2. Justifications for Secondary Inspection of Foreign Nationals

Basis of Referrals	No.	%
Mandatory/automatic:		
a) Designated nations	80	32.0
b) Asylum requested	7	2.8
c) INS/Customs "hit"	8	3.2
d) Lost permanent resident card	19	7.6
Total	114	45.6
Other:		
e) Possible "nanny"	13	5.2
f) Permanent resident illegally living outside U.S.	13	5.2
g) Fraudulent/altered documents	25	10.0
h) Missing or improper visa/documents	28	11.2
i) Verification of seaman status	7	2.8
j) Coming to live/work/insufficient funds	43	17.2
k) Assorted reasons	7	2.8
Total	136	54.4
GRAND TOTAL	250	100.0

SOURCE: Developed from oral and written data collected on 10 randomly sampled days during June, July, and August 1990 at "Metropolitan Port."

5. Justifications for Secondary Referrals and Implications

Table 2 shows the justifications given by primary inspectors for their referrals to secondary inspection.[30] Several points are worth mentioning. First, at the port studied decisions are heavily skewed to one outcome—admission (see Table 1). The study has described the shared categories, decision rules, and practical procedures primary inspectors employ in sorting among passengers. Table 2 suggests that a significant portion (about half) of the secondaries occur because passengers fit an INS or port-designated category for mandatory or automatic secondary referral. The bulk of these referrals are due to port concerns and related categorization of certain nationalities as high risk for which a port policy of

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[30] Table 2 presents the reasons given by primary inspectors for referring 250 cases for secondary inspection. The data were collected on ten randomly sampled days during June, July, and August 1990. These referrals occurred during fifty-nine hours of data collection during these ten days, representing the disposition of passengers from 228 airline flights. I collected both the oral and written reasons given by primary inspectors for their referral. When primary inspectors brought individuals to the secondary inspection area, I asked how they decided to refer the case to secondary. In some cases, the primary inspector provided this information directly to a secondary inspector, and I recorded it. Written information was also available about the reason for referral from a passenger document called the I-94. On the document is a space where primary inspectors briefly jot down a sentence or one-word reason for the referral. Toward the end of the data collection period, inspectors were beginning to shift from using the I-94s to sending messages to secondary officers via their computer terminals. When this occurred, secondary inspectors shared these reasons with me. Excluded from Table 2 are secondary referrals of U.S. passengers—typically for lost passports. Also excluded are the cases of foreign nationals for whom there was no suspicion about their intentions, but who were secondaried so that an airline representative who spoke their language could obtain the address of the individuals they were visiting.

mandatory referral has emerged. In other words, for these and several other sorts of travelers (Table 2 (b)-(d)), primary inspectors exercise little discretion in handling procedures once the case is categorized.[31]

Second, the relatively large proportion of referrals accounted for by mandatory referrals and another prominent negative case type (the "nanny") raises the question whether reliance by decisionmakers on known categories operates to the detriment of seeing other opportunities for action. Particularly in this striking setting of day-in and day-out repetitive, routinized, brief, and pressured encounters, are inspectors' preconceptions and work routines open to revision as new problem travelers appear on the scene? While it is hard to answer this question given the focus and scope of the study, my data do indicate that categorization is not static. During the research, a new category of high-risk traveler arose. Passengers arriving on a newly scheduled South American flight began to be labeled as problem travelers after several altered passports were identified. The flight was viewed as bringing in an "element" from the nation that differed from previous travelers from the country.

Various ports in the United States (including the one studied) have an intelligence officer whose role is to identify categories of problem travelers and disseminate information to inspectors at the port and elsewhere in the agency. To the extent that intelligence officers rely on patterns gleaned from secondary referrals, will the "normal" case profile types relied on by primary inspectors suppress (except in extraordinary cases such as blatantly tampered-with documents) the emergence of new or fresh assessments of travelers? The influence of organizational arrangements (e.g., existence and location of "trouble-spotter" positions) on the emergence of new categories and perhaps even persistence of old ones is a further fertile area for future research.

III. CONCLUSION

In recent years, research on social control decisionmaking has focused on the role of prior knowledge in case processing and decisionmaking. In particular, studies have shown how heavily some officials rely on shared categorization schemes about people and events in responding to cases. Underlying much of the research in this area is an individual-case-oriented approach to social control

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[31] It is administrative practice to secondary individuals requesting asylum, as well as lawful permanent residents who have lost their resident cards while traveling abroad. The category of "mandatory/automatic" secondaries also includes computer "hits" or lookout intercepts, that is, individuals that either the Immigration Service or the Customs Agency has listed in their computerized data banks or on their daily lookout listings as individuals requiring close examination (on the formal policy for handling these cases, see INS Operations Instruction, OI 235.lt).

decisionmaking. Emerson (1988:5), in particular, has described the limitations of research that focuses on the "narrowly interpretive processes" of case categorization by social control agents; an approach which typically presupposes and neglects why particular categories have emerged and are being employed by social control agents. Moreover, he suggests, research that views social control agents as simply processing cases as independent or "discrete units" (1983:425) ignores situations where the processing of particular cases is fundamentally linked to sets or collections of other cases (ibid.).

In this article I have drawn on and added to these insights in describing decisionmaking in a seldom explored area—immigration inspection work. Using Emerson's organizationally grounded approach to social control decisionmaking in this setting, I have described how various features of categorization and practical decisionmaking—the named types of categories in the setting, the particular traveler traits attended to by inspectors at this stage of work, the level of effort devoted to the inquiry, the persistence of certain categories, the differential handling procedures and credibility assessments embedded in categorization of travelers, and the batch processing of collections of visitors—are shaped in part by the distinctive task of primary inspectors and the local practical concerns of the port of entry.

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