

A SHORT LADDER OF MOBILITY:
ENTRAPPING UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN UNFAIR WORKING CONDITIONS

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Aurora-Marie Bamba

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Colorado College Honor Code

On my honor, I have neither given nor accepted unauthorized aid on this thesis

Abstract

The current treatment of undocumented immigrants in the United States traps undocumented immigrants into the secondary sector. This leaves people who are undocumented in positions for potential exploitation in the workplace. This study explores the treatment of undocumented workers in the restaurant industry. It uses qualitative methods to analyze in-depth interviews. There were thirteen participants in total, all except one identified as Latino. One very special attribute about all the participants is they have all chosen to permanently settle in the United States. Most of the findings have already been noted in the literature such as low wages, hour violations, and unsafe working conditions. Adding to the literature, one important finding is *status preservation of co-ethnics or/and status of preservation of legality*, this is where supervisors who have the same ethnicity or status treat workers worst than their American counter parts. Furthermore, another important finding was the *slow maturation of exploitation consciousness*. Young people in my thesis were not fully aware of the exploitation they were receiving while undocumented. Through these findings above the purpose was to present a clear story on how undocumented people have no mobility and are static in working low-level jobs.

Introduction

On Priscilla's first day of work, she walked into a closed down restaurant where there was an inch of dirt, grease, and grime on the walls, floors, and furniture. It seemed as if the owner had not cleaned in a year or more. Luckily, her friends told her that a new restaurant was looking for people to clean. Priscilla felt relieved that she found a job, especially since she had been out of the job for eight months. Cleaning was better than nothing. In the next few days, Priscilla's boss made each employee pay for their own cleaning supplies at the nearby dollar store. The dollar store cleaning supplies were strong, but what was needed was a professional cleaning team. All three employees worked from seven o'clock in the morning to six o'clock at night. In these first days of working, Priscilla and her colleagues never received a break. When Priscilla and her co-workers asked their boss for a break, he said, "Whatever, you all can take one 30 minute break." There were fast food restaurants close by, but they had to now pay for cleaning supplies and their break meal. For two weeks, Priscilla worked at this restaurant under these conditions and never received her paycheck. One colleague worked there for a month and only got paid for two weeks of work; another colleague worked there for three months and only got paid for one month of work. Priscilla and her colleagues did not report the unfair treatment because she felt being undocumented left her no other choice but to try to find another job.

According to the Pew Research Center there is an estimated 11.7 million undocumented people currently living in the United States (2013). Time and time again, undocumented immigrants are found waiting for a reassured comprehensive immigration reform bill. This time the bill is currently supported by the Obama administration. Although this immigration reform bill is at a standstill, there have been small strides and temporary solutions for the upward mobility for people who are undocumented. On June 15, 2012, President Obama signed a memo

called “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (aka DACA). Because of DACA, undocumented youth are able to apply for employment and are also allowed to stay in the US “under color of law.” This is a temporary solution since DACA could be revoked at any time. Additionally, the national conference of state legislators have reported that sixteen states have taken it in their own hands and provided short term provisions for in-state tuition rates for undocumented students (NCSL 2013).

Since there are currently only short term solutions for undocumented immigrants, this leaves a lot of people who are undocumented in situations for potential exploitation, such as Priscilla’s experience described above. Furthermore, studies (Borjas 2006; Tienda and Singer 2005) have shown that long and short term upward mobility is very limited for undocumented immigrants. Since upward mobility of undocumented immigrants is confined, this study looks at job mobility as one factor of advancement. This study explores the treatment of undocumented workers in the restaurant industry. More importantly, it questions if the workplace is an area where exploitation limits the success of undocumented workers. Lastly, the study inquires, if there is exploitation in what ways does it manifest in the treatment of undocumented workers?

Literature review

Social Mobility of Immigrants in America

Social mobility is crucial especially to immigrants coming to the United States. The scholarship below first describes the social mobility of immigrants in America. These challenges affect all immigrants no matter their status. In this study, all of my participants are permanently settled in the United States, so it is important to discuss obstacles that hinder their social mobility. George Borjas (2006) argues that social mobility for immigrants is not only linked to social and political environments, but also to how well a family does in a specific location.

Furthermore, immigrants are more likely to thrive in the United States if they are from a nation where the economy is thriving and advanced. Immigrants from poorer countries like Haiti, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, and Mexico are more likely to do far worse in the labor market. This may be because immigrants from poorer nations are more likely to produce low-skilled workers. Social mobility over time comes from the children and descendants of immigrants, “in each generation about half of the ethnic differences in relative wages disappear” (2006:65). According to Borjas, “By 2000, second generation workers from Canada earned 16.8 percent more than the typical third generation worker, while second-generation workers from Mexico earned 14.7 percent less” (2006:62).

Additionally, although ethnicity seems to be an independent factor for social mobility, ethnic enclaves and community networks tend to cluster people with similar socio-economic status and values. Therefore, this indicates that ethnicity is not a factor for why a specific immigrant has no social mobility, but instead the important factor is socio-economic level. This view is supported in “neoclassical economics” where people from low-wage countries move to high-wage countries out of supply and demand for jobs (Massey, Durand, Malone 2002). Although Borjas’ study shows social mobility can occur over time with generational wealth attainment, other factors also contribute to social mobility for first generation immigrants from poorer nations. Studies show English ability and years of education attainment importantly affects immigrant’s initial occupational attainment in the U.S (Akresh and Frank 2011).

Tienda and Singer (1995) complement this by their study on wage mobility, which compared wage levels of immigrants and undocumented immigrants. They also found that the “U.S experience” positively affects labor market success for both groups, although unequally. Tienda and Singer argue that the debate wage of undocumented immigrants is based on an

assumption that undocumented immigrants have fewer skills. Their results show that declining skills among recent immigrants do not describe the experience of undocumented Mexican migrants. What affected the wages between undocumented and documented immigrants at the time was Immigration Reform Control Act. Undocumented workers who arrived before 1980 earned higher wages. IRCA provided sanctions for employers who hired undocumented workers which lead to the decline of wages (Orrienus and Zavodny 2001).

Political agendas not only influence policy but also include language and perceptions used to describe undocumented immigrants. It is important because the language and perception of society can influence the social mobility and livelihoods of undocumented immigrants. Pearson (2010) concluded that the use of “illegal alien” intensifies prejudice by enhancing perceptions of threat. “Illegal alien” connotes a foreign invader and criminal. The words “illegal alien” implies an invader doing something unlawful. Pearson found the word “undocumented worker” suggested a hard-working individual lacking official documents. Politicians and media have shaped political discourse by using racially charged language such as “alien invaders” who take resources from Americans.

“Tolerable” Workplace Conditions for Undocumented Workers

Gleeson (2010) argues that employers prefer immigrant workers because they view them as a resilient workforce willing to tolerate any type of working conditions. However, being undocumented also restricts labor market mobility by not having full access to range of available jobs (Tienda and Singer 1995). According to surveys, common workplace violations that undocumented workers have to face are paycheck irregularities, wage and hour abuse, and lack of access to safe equipment (McGrath 2005, Valenzuela et al. 2006).

Undocumented workers are in a contradictory legal position in the United States, especially when viewed legally on paper.

To this end labor standards enforcement agencies such as the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the Occupational Commission (CCOC), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (as well as their state and local counterparts) enforce workplace protections for all workers, generally regardless of immigration status (Gleeson 2010: 567).

Therefore employers must adhere to wage and hour standards, and are required to provide safe workplace conditions for all workers. However, as stated before, even these basic protections often times do not extend to undocumented workers. Franco (2007) found workers in restaurant positions reported to having to work in unsafe working conditions, low wages, and jobs that were unstable. Furthermore, in restaurant positions many workers could hardly make ends meet. Working in the restaurant industry also destroyed the quality of life for most undocumented workers. Many workers claimed they were working so many hours that work and sleep consumed their lives. One crucial finding in Franco's study is that there is no economic mobility in the restaurant industry compared to other secondary sector positions such as manufacturing.

Many scholars agree that citizenship has a crucial effect on the organization of labor process. Although Halpin (2011) says that undocumented workers give consent because workers have monetary needs and limited job mobility, these factors are not as important as why these undocumented workers stay in these environments. Halpin found that undocumented workers consent to "despotism" because management can create a system where these workers work in a semi-self-governing workplace. Workers were found to create a space where they could joke around with each other and bend the rules slightly. Halpin agrees with Gleeson by stating, "even though workers can create an atmosphere where their work position is valued, their position in

the United States is undermined by the State” (2011:17). In Halpin’s findings undocumented status allows for job instability with no benefits when the workflow is slow.

If undocumented workers have the same basic protections as all workers, why do undocumented workers keep quiet about unfair working conditions? Mostly undocumented immigrants want to avoid making their status known to their employer. Employer intimidation in many cases does not influence the decision to keep their status secret but, instead, the ever present fear of deportation is the main factor. Therefore, undocumented immigrants are more likely not to submit worker claims and risk their safety and livelihood. Gleeson (2010) insists that undocumented immigrants are not passive in their decision to avoid problems but also “they choose to not deploy their knowledge of workplace rights in order to gain a modicum of certainty in their lives” (2010:583). Gleeson also found that most of her participants were not ignorant or uneducated about work place violations and protections. Workers Gleeson spoke with also cited unpleasant (but wholly legal) workplace conditions such as infrequent raises, no paid vacation or sick pays, and unpredictable schedules.

Michael Piore (1979) argues that international migration comes from a demand from unskilled labor structured economies of “developed” nations. This view suggests there is a pull factor in receiving society where there is a need for low-wage workers. Additionally, Piore maintains migrants are suited for these jobs because their home country determines their social status and they are target earners. Piore suggests employers need low paid workers who work as a means to an end. Gleeson complements this in her study by finding that since undocumented immigrants have a short-term notion of work in the United States, immigrants do not see making worker claims necessary. Likewise, the duality of the labor market also causes immigrant labor. There are two parts of the labor market: primary sector and secondary sector.

The primary sector has characteristics such as stability, equity, high wages, and high professionalization. Workers in the primary sector receive benefits, job mobility, severance pay, and due process in administration. On the other hand, the secondary sector is labor intensive with no benefits, job instability, a disciplined environment, and lack of mobility. Massey et al (2002) assert that it is hard for people who are native-born to be attracted to secondary sector jobs and therefore, these jobs mainly go to people who have “low” status in society.

The literature indicates that the lack of job security, poor wages, and wrongful terminations are frequent in the secondary sector for all workers, not only undocumented workers (Brodie 2006). Piore argues that discrimination enlarges the secondary sector and lowers the wages of the secondary sector wages and thus perpetuates poverty. Workers, who have certain traits such as minority race, gender, demeanor, accent, and low educational attainment or test scores are trapped in the secondary sector with no mobility. Piore states, “The behavioral traits associated with the secondary sector are reinforced by the process of working in these jobs” (1979:551). Specifically, relationships between workers and supervisors in the secondary sector are based on reward and punishment. To add to this, all workers in the secondary sector are scared to engage in claim-making because of fear of jeopardizing their jobs, therefore oppressive any wrong treatment (Gleeson 2010). Control does not only happen through worker claims and discrimination, but also through routinization of secondary jobs (Leidner 1993). The obstacle in interactive service work for routine is the unpredictability of human interaction. Companies have standardized these routines to overcome this obstacle. However, routine can also help workers by making customers more compliant and allowing workers to get basic skills.

Although all workers in the secondary sector are vulnerable to discrimination, poor working conditions, and routine, people who are here legally have more legitimacy when

working. Legitimacy means that when documented workers are treated unfairly or are hurt, they can file a worker's claim without the fear of deportation. Additionally, people who are here legally may have more resources, networks, and range of accessibility for mobility out of low paid jobs. Secondary sector jobs are the only option for "low skilled" undocumented immigrants and, therefore, limits their social mobility. Most of the literature above refers to immigration as a revolving door, where most undocumented immigrants go back and forth between their native country and the United States. The "dual frame of reference" notes immigrants compare working conditions in their host country to assess their current position in the United States, and then look forward to their return home for mobility in their native country (Piore 1979, Gleeson 2010).

Although this metaphor of the revolving door, may be true, there is a serious lack of literature on undocumented immigrants who have permanently settled in the United States. Most, if not all, permanently settled undocumented immigrants are here in the United States for social mobility. As we see in the literature, the ill treatment and the structure of the secondary sector prevents mobility for undocumented workers. Moreover, more undocumented immigrants are settling in the United States not only because stricter surveillance on the U.S-Mexico border but migrants gain better and stable jobs (Massey 1986). Finally, the literature has not caught up with current restrictions preventing undocumented immigrants from working (for example E-Verify.) This is an "internet-based system" that compares records of employment eligibility in the Department of Homeland and Security, Social Security Administration and Department of State (USCIS 2013). Some states such as Arizona and Mississippi require employers to use E-Verify, but in general most employers participate voluntarily. Although E-Verify has made it difficult to find jobs, it has not stopped employers in hiring undocumented workers. My thesis will focus on

how current treatment for undocumented immigrants traps permanently settled undocumented immigrants into one sector.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methods. To gain access to this population, I used my own personal social networks. Since people who are undocumented are also known as a “hidden population,” snowballing was used to attain more than half of the participants. Each participant consented to be a part of the study on the agreement that their identities would be kept anonymous. Participants’ names have been changed to keep anonymity. Thirteen people between the ages of 20 through 45 participated in the study. There were seven participants who identified as female and six who identified as male. Twelve out of the 13 participants identified as Latino and there was one participant who identified as Asian. Four participants have recently received legal status. Seven participants spoke fluent English. The other participants spoke intermediate to beginning English. When a phrase or quote needed to be translated, I found a classmate to translate the quote as closely as possible. One important characteristic of all the participants is that they all have permanently settled in the United States. Data collection was through individual in-depth interviews that had fifteen initial questions (see Appendix). The interviews were open ended questions allowing participants to describe their different experiences and perspectives. Each interview was recorded by a laptop computer and had a duration of thirty minutes to an hour. To analyze the transcriptions, open coding and thematic coding were used. With issues concerning the internal validity, themes and findings in this study will be connected and compared to findings in the literature review. This study is not meant to generalize undocumented people but to explore the possible experiences of people who are undocumented

in the restaurant industry. In the paper, restaurant is used as an all-encompassing word to include fast food, high-end restaurants, catering merchants, and hotel restaurants.

Findings

The Job Hunt

For anyone, social networks are very valuable when trying to get a job (Granovetter 1974). Especially for undocumented workers, social networks become extremely important when they are one of the only options for finding a job. Participants in this study listed using social networks as the primary way they found and attained jobs in the restaurant industry. These social networks consisted of parents, friends and associates who had the opportunity to get participants employment. It is essential to have a connection with someone already working at a specific job site. Without these connections most participants could not secure a job. Kane, a participant, says, “I actually had five people I knew that worked there. They were the ones that helped me go under the system.”

Most frequently, when obtaining a position participants were hired on the spot without an interview. Sometimes participants did not have the skills to work in that position, but the recommendation to hire them came from someone who was reliable, so they were hired. Even though social networks were helpful in finding a job, a few participants felt that they had the obligation to give back to the person that recommended them. Grant, a participant, recalls,

It was sort of easy finding a job because of my mom’s help. She recommended me to her boss and therefore I didn’t get interviewed. So it wasn’t relatively easy finding a job but it wasn’t hard either. This was also my first job so I felt that I had to work hard so my mom didn’t look bad.

Although jobs may be relatively easy to find because of social networks, participants know that positions which are available to them in the restaurant industry are low-entry-level positions that do not require many skills. Participants agreed that to get higher positions in the

workplace, it would be easier if they had the proper documentation. Patricia's experience in finding a job echoes this sentiment,

It wasn't easy to find a job, but I got it because I knew the boss. So the boss knew I was undocumented and didn't have a social security number. So in that way it was easy but if I wanted something more advanced I couldn't because I didn't have legit papers.

There were only two participants who did not find jobs by using social networks.

Although, it is more probable for participants to attain a job by using social networks, it is not the only option. Priscilla's experience in finding a job was simple; she just asked "I went there and asked the front workers how working there was like and then asked if they were hiring. I left my information and then heard back from them very fast." Priscilla has a unique view on why this job was so easy to get. She states, "It's sort of easy to find jobs. A lot of places hire undocumented workers. Employees hire undocumented workers because those are the people they want. They know they will do the work without complaining no matter the working condition." Priscilla's view echoes the literature on why employers hire undocumented workers because they will do the job no matter the working condition. But do undocumented workers have any other option than to work in conditions that are harsh? Most likely, they do not especially because their social network connections are limited to entry level positions.

Although Priscilla found a job by just asking the employer, that was eight years ago. How is the current state of finding a job for undocumented workers? Spencer, another participant, says, "Back nine years ago, employers didn't really check. Employers now check everything. I have stayed in my job for this reason." Lauren also agrees with Spencer that it is difficult to find a job especially in a society where the technology is always advancing. Lauren says, "Yes, as of

today it is hard. Most places nowadays have the E-Verify. It is definitely hard to find a job when you have that against you.”

Even though it may have been relatively easy to find a job, now even with E-Verify, the job hunt has become harder and more risky. Gable applied for jobs in the last two years, his experience was also made difficult because of E-Verify. Gable describes,

It wasn't easy because you had to know someone in that job. You couldn't just apply to random places because having false paperwork, they could report you. There is always a risk when you just apply to random places. I applied to places where I didn't have any connections, but I never passed because of E-Verify. E-Verify, it's like a quick background check to verify if you are the right person you're claiming to be. They even ask you at the interviews, “You know we do E-Verify, are you giving us the correct information?” I would answer yes even though I knew my papers were false. Yeah, almost everywhere has E-Verify now. The directions are both in English and Spanish. So people who only speak Spanish can't be surprised employers are going to do this.

Gable explains that finding a job without social networks is hard. When he put in applications to random places, he was risking his safety. He was not only blocked by having limited social networks and safety, but limited because of the computer program, E-Verify. One thing that was surprising is that even though he knew that he was not going to pass E-Verify, he still put in his application. This could be saving face in front of the employers, a way of protecting himself and his identity for the moment. Moreover, Gable, Lauren, and Spencer all have the consensus that it is very difficult to find a job right now. Not only have employers buckled down with checking the documentation, but technology has made it very simple to do so.

Social networks have proven to be a pivotal method for participants finding work. Although no participants ever had an unpleasant experience when using social networks to find a job, social networks could also be harmful. This option to find work leaves undocumented workers in a vulnerable and obligatory position to those who give a recommendation to hire

them. Furthermore, many participants only had small social networks that could provide them a job. This is problematic because these small social networks most likely consisted of people of the same status, and therefore, who also work entry level positions. This leaves the only opportunity for undocumented workers who seek jobs as entry-level positions. Also, small social networks could be a problem when one becomes an outsider because then all one's social networks are cut off. For example, Priscilla quit because her managers and co-workers were overworking her. Once she quit working, she lost that social network. This resulted in her being unemployed for eight months. But social networks are not the only elements that make finding jobs for undocumented workers hard or easy. Currently, the U.S government has made technological strides in using employers to verify the identity of their employees. E-Verify has become a huge obstacle in obtaining jobs for undocumented workers. But like Priscilla and the literature affirm, employers will keep on hiring undocumented workers because they work no matter what the conditions.

Solidarity in the Workplace

In working conditions that have been harsh, social networks consisting of colleagues and managers have been a strong system of support and solidarity. Kane says,

The people who knew about my status would help me try to cover it up, especially because I tried to be friends with the people I work with. So those who that didn't know, I would tell lies about myself so people wouldn't question my status. My co-workers who knew helped me keep up with these stories I used to protect myself.

Kane's fellow undocumented workers and bosses protected Kane by backing up Kane's story to outsiders. Similarly, Greta had a very close relationship with her co-workers who were undocumented. Greta says, "I had a good relationship with co-workers and the same with management. The management would throw holiday parties where we could all relax and enjoy

each other's company." Grant echoes these thoughts by saying, "coworkers did know about my status and it affected the work environment in a good way. We joked around about it."

These systems of support were very important to participants. Priscilla became close friends with many of her co-workers. When management changed at Priscilla's work, the working conditions became harsher. These systems of support were the only thing that made working harder and longer conditions tolerable. One day Priscilla and her coworkers could not take the being "overworked mules," so they walked out together.

It is no surprise that many participants who developed close relationships with coworkers at work are still friends in their personal life. This is crucial since many participants had small social networks. Developing close bonds with colleagues grows networks and opportunities elsewhere. For example, Priscilla, who quit her job, was still able to maintain some friendships out of work. When it came time for Priscilla's son, who is also undocumented, to get work, she was able to find a job for him using her social networks from work. Although this is not surprising, it is important to note that connections between undocumented workers do thrive especially when there are harsh conditions.

Working Harder for Less

There are many characteristics of harsh and unfair working conditions, such as being overworked. Many participants felt that one way they got taken advantage of is being made to work longer and harder than most of their other American co-workers. Greta states, "I feel that I was taken advantage of with having to work more and having more responsibility with less pay. It was like this all the time. The undocumented workers would get more everything."

Greta and her co-workers who were undocumented would get more hours and put in more work than their American counterparts. Greta was always put in the back to do prep work,

to clean, and only rarely put in the front. Greta says, “I was doing the work for three people.”

Katherine supports Greta’s opinion by saying,

We are put in positions where we are overworked; there are American workers that can do the same things. But we are the ones that are chosen because of our status. We are overworked with high expectations. It’s dangerous for us because a person could only take so much.

Katherine has been overworked so much that she thinks it is dangerous for employers to expect so much from one person. When Katherine said this in the interview, she was upset because she questioned why she should have to work more than others just because of status when there are other American co-workers who could lighten the load. Working in the restaurant industry, one is more likely to work with young people who sometimes do not carry their own weight. Lauren recalls, “Since I could only work night, shifts they would stick me with mostly teenagers. These teenagers didn’t care for the job. Basically, I had to work harder than my co-workers that supposedly did the same work as me for the same pay.”

However, sometimes participants were not strong-armed to work more or harder. They worked more hours because they needed the money. They also they a belief of “I am a hard worker, so I can do it anyway.” Grant says, “They were taking advantage of me because of my hard work, and they knew I could do it more efficiently than Americans. But I also wanted more hours to make more money. I considered myself a good worker and that’s why I got chosen more.”

Gable similarly questioned if undocumented workers were chosen to work harder and longer because of status, or if it was something else. Specifically, he wondered if his co-workers who were undocumented just had a stronger work-ethic than his American co-workers. Gable states,

It seemed like undocumented workers worked more, but American workers wouldn't last at my work for long. Most undocumented workers were working there ten plus years, where American workers would last like six months to a year. I did see a few American workers actually work; they didn't complain and they would show up for work. That was the biggest problem. If we missed a day of work it was like, "Omg, you are going to be fired if you miss a day of work. You need to be at work now; I don't care what it is." Unlike American workers who missed work constantly managers would be like, "Oh, it's okay."

American workers have more privilege than undocumented workers and may not recognize that not coming in to work is a liberty. The participants were more likely to work longer and harder positions because they did not have a choice. Undocumented workers tolerate being overworked because they do what they have to do to keep the job. This expectation of working hard is reinforced by employers who threaten their jobs. "Toleration" is a word that best describes how participants felt about this expectation to work more because of their status. Gable says,

At least at this job they gave us breaks. We had two days off. Sometimes if you wanted more hours you could ask, and they would work around your schedule sometimes. There was this married couple that would always get the same days off so they could spend time together. Compared to other jobs, this was pretty good from the typical jobs undocumented workers would get. But they still overworked the undocumented workers.

Gable stayed at this job even though he was overworked because the environment was tolerable and had unusual traits for a typical job that he could find. When management changed at this restaurant, they overworked the employees to the point that Gable, Priscilla, and Ashley quit. The working conditions were too harsh and even though there were some characteristics of a "good job" and they needed the job, the workers could not tolerate working harder for less.

Segregation in the Workplace

It is easy for employers to make undocumented workers work harder for less pay, especially when Latino and undocumented workers are stuck in the back of the restaurant doing kitchen work. Ashley says, “All of the kitchen in the back was Hispanics who were documented and undocumented. The American people were in the front. There was a very clear distinction. There were also mostly young students in front of the restaurant. It felt like there were two completely different atmospheres.” Gable also agrees by saying,

In the back there were mostly undocumented workers and some Latinos who were not. You could totally tell the difference with people who worked in the front. The waiters, bartenders, busboys, they were all white. Most busboys were high school students from whatever high school is up north. Most of the high school students came from money and viewed the job as a hobby. It was them against us, basically, because they didn't care. They viewed us as just the workers who couldn't understand them. There were only three of us that spoke English. Everyone else in the back did not speak a word of English.

Both Gable and Ashley recall the clear segregation of undocumented and Latino workers in the back of the house and white Americans in the front. So why is it that Latino and undocumented workers work in the back of the house? This could be for a number of reasons. One reason is that both in both Gable's and Ashley's instances, people who worked in the front were mostly young high school students. Typically, young people work waiter jobs and busboy jobs. Another reason that undocumented workers might work in the back is that people in the front are interacting with customers and therefore need to speak English. However, systematic racism and segregation is a prominent factor for why undocumented workers are fixed in the back of restaurants and therefore working harder positions for the same pay. When undocumented workers find jobs, it is usually through social networks for these kitchen jobs. These kitchen jobs usually require much work and then workers may be overworked. There may

not be overt segregation to enforce undocumented workers staying in the back. But having only undocumented workers and Latino's in the kitchen limits their ability to gain other important skills like interpersonal skills, and the ability to practice English if needed.

Racist Hearts and Minds

Because many undocumented immigrants do not speak English, customers and sometimes higher management viewed undocumented workers as unintelligent, worthless, and inferior. Gable describes his experience with the owner of restaurant that served Mexican food,

One day the owner of the restaurant came in to talk about food cost. He was asking us questions and no one responded because no one except me and our manager spoke English. He said, "Come on you guys, these are child questions." The owner's assistant who was the owner's right hand man acted even worse. The assistant said, "I don't want to hear that Mexican crap. If you are going to listen to music, listen to it low." I specifically remember the meeting because we never had meetings. This meeting landed on May 10th, which is Mother's Day in Mexico. There were some co-workers that missed the meeting because they had other jobs at other Mexican restaurants which were really busy because of the holiday. The assistant asked, "Where are the other co-workers?" My manager responded, "Oh, they are at their other jobs because it is really busy at the restaurants because it is Mother's Day in Mexico." The assistant said, "I don't care, this is America. I asked everyone to be here and I expected everyone to be here. We are not in Mexico." I wasn't working that day so I came into the meeting with jeans and a black Pink Floyd shirt. The usual uniform was just a plain black shirt and jeans. Then the assistant started talking about how there's a uniform and he pointed at me saying, "I don't want workers wearing that crap." I was the only worker that could understand him, so I told him, "Well, I'm not working right now." The assistant responded, "I don't care. You wear the correct uniform." These people treated us super inferior, like we were nothing.

In this example, the restaurant owners that Gable worked for had no respect for the workers. The owner had complete disregard for Mexican culture by calling the Mexican music "crap," even though it was a "Mexican restaurant." The owners also held the belief that because "this is America," Mexican holidays and other obligations do not matter; only working at this

restaurant was important. Gable said, “No one was responding to the owner’s questions because the owner was talking to us like we were beneath him, so we just ignored him.” From Gable’s experience, these owners treated and spoke to the workers like they were unintelligent and worthless. These racist attitudes are shared by customers who come into restaurants, as described by many other participants. Kane described his experience with a customer, “who said he should not work there if he did not speak English.” But Kane does speak English, even if it is with a small accent. Priscilla similarly says,

I saw other co-workers get discriminated against. Customers would just talk to the workers bad. They would demand things instead of ordering things properly. Customers would then complain that workers didn’t speak English. I think it’s mostly because of how we look and that we had have really big accents or don’t speak English on why this happens. Customers would ask for food treating us like we are dumb. Like speaking more loudly and talking with their hands, pointing and saying, “I want that one right there.”

In all three experiences, workers were treated like they were dumb because they did not speak English properly. Also, in all instances, participants and their coworkers were discriminated against based on their work position and appearance and treated as a lesser person. Although racist and discriminatory attitudes in these low wage positions were anticipated, these acts of discrimination combined with the already unfair treatment of undocumented workers.

Unfair Wages

Participants received different wages depending on the restaurants where they worked. There were no standards across the board for how employers decided to pay workers. Some participants were paid below the minimum wage. Grace states, “At this waitressing job, I worked eight hours and I only got paid twenty dollars and did not get any tips. So I was like, ‘Well, I’m out of here.’ It basically was a waste of my time.”

Grace worked eight hours and got paid two dollars and fifty cents for every hour she worked. Although Grace's experience was at an extreme of unfair wages, other participants also experienced wages below minimum wage. Greta reported that she only got paid \$6.75, which was not minimum wage. Greta says, "Everyone else started at seven dollars. I started a quarter lower because I didn't have experience."

Although participants had jobs that did not pay minimum wage, other participants were paid minimum wage but had few to no pay increases. Priscilla says, "At Burgers on Wheels, I started at minimum wage which was around seven dollars. But there were no raises. It was like, however long you worked there you probably would get paid the same." Priscilla did not stay at this restaurant long enough to find out if she would have gotten a raise. Other participants experience slow wage mobility. Humphrey did work at a job that had slow term growth for wage mobility. Humphrey recalls, "I worked at two places for nine years. When I started working there, I made eight dollars and at the other job six dollars and seventy-five cents. Now I get paid nine dollars and fifty cents and at the other job almost ten dollars."

Humphrey at one job gained a one dollar and fifty cent raise and the other job a three dollar raise for nine years working at both places. Most participants experienced slow wage mobility similar to Humphrey. John B. describes his experience,

I started at Locos Tacos at eight dollars which was a little above minimum wage. After I worked there six months after, I got a ten cent increase because they do evaluations. What I heard is the regional manager would give a dollar increase for the restaurant, but they split it up between several people.

In regard to these slow increases in raises, one could say something is better than nothing. Humphrey who has had the most job raises and works two jobs is currently getting paid \$10.75 and \$9.50 and works seventy-to-eighty hour weeks. This makes his annual income around

\$40,000 before taxes. For a family of six, the poverty line is \$31,590 in 2013. Humphrey is making an estimated \$8,000 more than the poverty line working jobs in the restaurant industry. These rough estimates show a few things: being the sole supporter of a family, one job in the restaurant industry is not enough even with these small raises. Secondly, these small raises most likely did not affect participants' lives as much, especially over the long term. Humphrey told me that he got these raises over nine years. When you include the cost of living over nine years these small raises do not even out. To be fair, restaurant low-entry positions are not ideal for a long career.

Participants report that in these low-entry restaurant jobs, the struggle never seems to end, especially when there are a very limited number of jobs and types of jobs undocumented workers can obtain. Because of technology, finding work has become very difficult. Participants are often forced to keep a job that has limited to no pay raises. Sometimes participants did not even get paid minimum wage. To top it all off, workers are barely making ends meet to support their families and are not able to save for their children and a change for upward mobility.

Safety in the Workplace

Similar to wages, safety in the workplace also depended on the restaurant. Most participants did have safe working conditions. Grant says, "Yes, I felt it was safe at my work. We had constant checkups like sanitation crews. My work also equipped me with the proper work tools to get my job done, such as non-slip shoes." This quote implies that, depending on the restaurant, there are safe places to work. Furthermore, sometimes when there was a noticeable safety hazard, employers would make an attempt to fix it. For example, Ashley says, "At first, they didn't have safe working conditions. At the beginning, they didn't have cut gloves. But people were hurting themselves regularly, so they implemented the cut gloves."

Although there were many participants who worked in safe working conditions, there was a handful who worked in precarious conditions. One participant insisted that her co-workers disliked her and would make her do questionable things. Grace says, “My co-workers would send me to the storage and make me pick up and get boxes that were 50 pounds. I only weigh 115 and I’m 5ft so that’s a lot for me.”

Coworkers are not the only perpetrators of creating unsafe working conditions, managers and bosses did as well. Priscilla says,

When working on the job, I hurt my hand. I mean, there were always small nicks and cuts on my hands. But this time, I got tendonitis in my wrist. I made a worker’s claim and they provided me with the paper work. When I filled it out and turned it in they said, “You should try your own doctor first because it would be ‘better’ there.” So I went to a doctor, but I didn’t even have my own doctor. Anyways, the papers were never sent to the proper people.

The employers denied filing Priscilla a worker’s claim because it would be better for the employer to keep Priscilla’s status quiet. The employer made the environment unsafe by keeping Priscilla’s status hidden, especially since she was hurt. For an employer, this indicates that Priscilla can be replaced if anything worse happened to her. Furthermore, this continues this atmosphere where Priscilla and her co-workers have to be extremely careful at the workplace because employers do not care about safety. Gable shares his experience with bosses and managers, who did not care about safety,

At one restaurant it seemed like they did not care about safe working conditions. There was one time where the dish machine broke and there were sparks coming out of the bottom. So this was in the dish room and everywhere around me was wet. I was soaked with water and the machine is not even a foot away from my legs was shooting sparks. I told my manager there is something wrong with the dish machine. So he came and opened the machine and kind of put things together and basically put tape on it. He was like, “We can’t get an order in for a couple of days so they are not

going to fix it.” I was worried that I could get electrocuted because the tape did nothing but soak up water. My manager was like, “It’s okay. Just leave it and keep on working.” I actually was scared that something might happen to me, so I left early. What they should have done was told me to stop using the machine and turn it off. They could have had someone there to fix it right away because it was in the middle of the day, which is very slow.

Gable not only felt that his employers did not care about the situation, but also felt that it was dangerous to be in that situation, so he left for the day. Even though Gable needed the job, obviously his safety was more important. Safe working conditions are important for any worker, no matter of status. Experiences like these could happen to anyone regardless of status. However, having the privilege to put in a complaint or not having an option is the main difference for undocumented workers.

Mobility

Privilege and opportunity to put in a complaint are also connected to the worker’s ability to speak English. One thing that all participants stressed was that being able to speak English is a skill that would benefit undocumented workers. Grant, who is bilingual agrees, “One thing that would better people who have undocumented status in the job market is gain different language skills. This would open opportunities and help people avoid discrimination. People would have the ability to protect themselves more in the workplace.” This is connects to the example earlier where Gable speaks up to the owner of the restaurant after being called out because he was not wearing a proper uniform when he was not working. Thompson, who speaks English at a beginner level, agrees with Grant by saying,

It’s hard working as an undocumented worker who only speaks little English. You get treated differently because people label you because of the language difference. We definitely go through discrimination because people know that they can take advantage of you. You can’t do anything about being discriminated against,

because you need the job. They know this, so they use it against you.

Being taken advantage of because of the language barrier will be discussed further in a later section. Furthermore, Thompson's remarks reflect previous sections of how stereotypical assumptions affect and label workers as dumb. Being bilingual not only gives undocumented workers the ability to protect themselves, but also gives them job mobility. Grace who is also bilingual says,

Speaking both English and Spanish as an undocumented worker definitely gives you a competitive advantage. If you don't learn English, you really don't go far. You are the one stuck in the back. When you speak English, you are more likely to be in the front of the house or even get higher working positions.

Even though speaking English is not a solution to fix a system of injustice for undocumented people, being bilingual helps undocumented workers navigate experiences that are unfair. Furthermore, just because an undocumented worker speaks English does not mean discrimination and unfair working conditions do not happen to them. But English-Speaking undocumented workers have the ability to understand the situation of conflict better than someone who has no idea what is being said. With that in mind, participants agreed that speaking English is one way to protect themselves from discrimination. Furthermore, speaking English allows undocumented workers to interact with customers, which allows people to develop interpersonal communication skills. Undocumented workers who have the ability to speak English have a more likely chance for a higher position at the restaurant. Overall, participants agreed it is one thing they could do for better opportunities in the labor market in a society where there are limited options.

Mistreatment by “Our Own People”

The above findings support previous literature about the working conditions for undocumented workers. These findings are important because discrimination, low wages and unsafe working conditions further exploit people who are undocumented. Although these findings were anticipated, there were two findings that were surprising. These unexpected findings are the mistreatment by people who have similar ethnicity or status and generational differences for upward mobility. Both findings add to the exploitation people who are undocumented have to experience.

Mistreatment and exploitation is not only produced by the “other” but are often caused by people who share the same status. An outsider would assume that undocumented bosses and managers would treat their staff with empathy, but many participants caution against making this assumption. Participants recollected many instances of mistreatment by bosses and managers who share the same undocumented status or ethnicity. These undocumented bosses and managers expected workers to work harder jobs than their American co-workers. Furthermore, undocumented workers were compelled to carry more of the workload; each individual was expected to do the work of two or three people. Moreover, undocumented workers not only were expected to work harder, but undocumented workers were also required to take more hours.

Greta recalls,

Before, when I first started working at Gourmet Mex, the managers were American that only spoke English. They treated me better because if they saw you working hard, they would notice it. They would try to help you out more by giving you raises or try giving you more hours if you needed them. When management changed, they were Hispanic who were in the same situation and were undocumented. They treated the workers worst. They wanted the workers to work more and more. These managers expected us to work more than we had to. It used to be that six people would open, but then they brought it down to three to four workers. They

just expected us to work because they knew our situation and we couldn't do anything about it. When the undocumented managers would work with American workers, the managers would treat the American workers better because these workers could say something if something bad was going on. They gave them easier and less work, like running the register. The Hispanic managers, our own people, they would make the Hispanic workers do the harder jobs like all the chopping, putting us in the kitchen and in the back and on the grill.

Greta's quote describes the expectations she and her coworkers were required to work under. In Greta's situation, she prefers the White American managers because they were more lenient, respectful, and had more consideration. Greta also notes that "our own people or people like us" were the ones forcing us to work harder, which implied she too thought that there should have been solidarity between them. Bosses and managers not only over-work undocumented workers, but sometimes forbid them to take seemingly basic workplace rights like breaks, as in Gable's experience. Gable states,

You didn't get any breaks and it sort of didn't matter if you took a break. Verde Z didn't feed you anyways. Even if you had a chance for a break, you still had to pay full price for the food at the restaurant and then make it yourself. We never did that since we would never have time for a break. When we were hungry, four or five people would share an order that was messed up. We would have to hide in the back by the dish room and put things on top of each other so our managers wouldn't see us because we could get in trouble for eating. Sometimes the assistant kitchen manager would specifically say, "This messed up order is for you guys" or let us eat when he knew we were working hard.

In both Greta's and Gable's experiences, the manager and bosses created an atmosphere of fear, where this was used to control employees. Gable and his co-workers would hide from their bosses and managers for fear of being fired because of taking an food break. Similar to Gable, Greta and her co-workers tolerated the treatment by their bosses and managers because of

the fear being fired. Greta describes another incident at this another restaurant where fear was used to coerce undocumented workers to work harder. Greta said,

The manager was undocumented and Hispanic like us. She preferred her daughter and herself to get more hours. She knew that we were undocumented and there were a few of us working. The majority of us were undocumented. She would take away hours from other people to give to herself and daughter. She treated us really bad. She didn't care if it was your day off, she would call and say you need to show up to work now. The general manager took care of multiple stores in the area and she would tell us lies because she knew that the undocumented workers didn't speak English that well. So our manager would tell us, "You are not doing this right; you are going to get fired if you don't do this or this." So our manager would tell us thing like that to make us scared that this random guy the general manger was the worst because we couldn't understand him. But in reality, we did understand a little of what he was saying. So one day the kitchen crew got to talk to him and the general manager told us that we were doing a really good job and that he didn't have any problems with our store. So all the other things that the undocumented Hispanic manager told us was just things to make us scared.

In this example, the manager took advantage of the undocumented workers through the use of language since Greta and her co-workers could only understand English to a limited extent. The manager also used scare tactics to instill fear in the workers that they would lose their jobs.

These three subjects of overworking, not giving basic workplace rights, and instilling fear could be easily be called "general workplace violations," but what makes these findings important is that bosses and managers with similar ethnic background and status were causing this mistreatment. Not only Greta and Gable expressed these sentiments toward their bosses and managers, four other participants shared similar experiences. For example, Spencer said that "it wasn't only my [undocumented] boss that expected more work out of his employees but other [undocumented] people who worked really closely or below him." Bosses and managers who are

undocumented or share the same ethnicity can treat their employees similar or worse compared to their American counter-parts. These findings above indicate that mistreatment by bosses and managers who are undocumented or share the same ethnicity can vary.

However, these incidents of mistreatment by bosses and managers who are undocumented or share the same ethnic background in these cases differ by their status and power in the larger society. First, many people who are undocumented may not have the power or privilege to gain upward mobility in other spheres. When undocumented workers receive a small or large promotion, they have job mobility and may have a higher income, potentially resulting in upward social mobility. Therefore, this job mobility potentially leads to a higher social status. Bosses and managers who are undocumented or who share ethnic background seem to desire to give special importance to their social distance. Their way to differentiate themselves from entry-level undocumented workers is through exercising their power of mistreatment in their higher job position.

Bosses who share the same status or ethnicity are participating in this process of *status preservation of co-ethnics or/and status preservation of legality*. Status preservation of co-ethnics or of legality happens when people of the same status or ethnicity are in the same social sphere and try distinguishing themselves from people of lower-status. In this case it is Hispanic bosses and managers trying to differentiate themselves from undocumented Hispanics. Likewise, undocumented bosses and managers are trying to distinguish themselves from the stereotypical entry-level undocumented worker. In both situations, status preservation derives from not associating with the negative stereotype of a people.

In American society, being undocumented not only has negative connotations, but “undocumented” has become another word for Latino or Mexican in the public perception. So

again, Latinos who are documented have to separate themselves from the negative perceptions of the undocumented and validate that they are different. Bosses who are undocumented have to justify their new job mobility by again dividing themselves from the negative perceptions. Status preservation fuses into a system where people who are in the same marginalized group compete with each other for higher status. Instead of comradeship between people of the same status or ethnicity, exploitation is happening by our own people to our own people.

Generational Differences for Upward Mobility

The literature on undocumented young adults is very limited. Six out of the 13 participants were between the ages of 20 through 22. Four out of six of these young adults are currently under DACA and have received their work authorization for two years. One young adult has a permanent residency. That leaves one young adult participant who is currently undocumented in the United States. This age group is very interesting to study especially in this moment in history in regards to policy. DACA requirements cover a very small number of the undocumented population, especially because of its strict qualifications. Specifically, anyone who has graduated or currently in high school, has continuously lived in the US since 2007, and was brought to the US under the age of 18 and is currently under the age of 31 are just some of the requirements. Moreover, Colorado is one of the 16 states that has just been recently allowed undocumented youth to qualify for in-state tuition. This has allowed for a chance of higher education leading to a high social mobility. All four DACA recipients have taken advantage of these new political agendas and gone back to school.

Most participants in this age group could not think of mistreatment in the workplace when first asked about it. There were many statements of getting treated equally. Grant says, “I

can't think of any instances where I have been treated differently. I got treated like a typical worker." Patricia even had a friendship her boss,

Between my boss and other co-worker, it was a really good environment. We would eat together, like the boss would make me sushi. Even outside of work, we would watch a movie together or go to dinner. He would always pay for me. I don't know if it's because he felt like he was my boss that it was obligated, but I did see him as an older brother.

These quotes imply that these participants had good relationships with their bosses, managers, and coworkers. Patricia's relationship with her boss was more personal than work related. Patricia described the relationship as being a part of family and having respect for him. Most participants didn't realize or notice the mistreatment of their experiences at the workplace. Grant says, "I don't think I got treated differently in the workplace. The benefits I didn't receive, but that was all."

Grant's quote implies that not getting the benefits at his job is normal and is just the situation. However, not receiving benefits because Grant was undocumented is treatment that differs from people who have the proper documentation. Grace states, "I felt that everything hard or bad that would happen to me was just normal and part of the job. The things that happen to me, I never thought it was because of my status. I didn't ever think about that being an issue."

Grace was actually surprised that she never thought about how her status affected the way people treated her until the interview. She, like Grant, thought these incidents of mistreatment or unfairness were just a part of the job. When I asked Grace to really think about a time where she thought she was treated differently because of her status, she responded,

At this catering place, the stuff that my friend was made to do wasn't the stuff that I was made to do. I would do all the extra stuff. When my friend was done, she was done and she could go. But when I thought I was done, I always had to stay back to do the

work that was left. We got paid the same in the end, but I definitely had to do more work.

Although Patricia said that she had a great relationship with her boss and had no incidents of mistreatment at work because she is a close personal friend, she explained previous situations and admits that even though she had a good relationship with her boss, she did get taken advantage of because she was undocumented.

My boss's mom handled all the accounting and pay stubs. So I stopped working there before the restaurant closed down because I found another job that paid better. When I went back to pick up my paycheck, some of my hours were missing. I told her, "Oh I am missing some hours." She, was like, "You didn't get paid the first two weeks because we are holding your check." So the next week, I went back to pick up the two weeks of pay and she was like, "We already gave it to you." I told her no she didn't, but she insisted on that they paid me. I would have remembered because I was missing half of my paycheck. I could have taken it up with my actual boss, but I didn't want to ruin the relationship we had over 150 dollars. I also didn't take it up with my boss because I didn't have a social security number. If I was legit, then I would have brought it up. It wasn't just work related, it was personal related. So that's another reason why I didn't bring it up.

Another reason participants did not take mistreatment very seriously was that these jobs were some of the participants' first jobs. Furthermore, these participants were 17 to 19 when they had their first jobs. Unlike older participants, they have not had much experience working in very harsh working conditions. Moreover, these young undocumented adults did not see these jobs as their only source of income or vital to their health and well-being. Young undocumented adults may not share this view overall, but other participants did. Ashley says, "I liked working at 24 Burger's because I was young and any type of income, you know was money. I didn't mind having to work there because I didn't see it as a real job. I didn't have any real responsibility." Patricia responds in a similar manner, "I started working there because I needed to pay off my

car, gas and other stuff. Plus, I never got an allowance, so I wanted to spend my own money. I didn't need this job because I had my necessities covered. But it was something I wanted.”

These quotes may suggest that undocumented young adults were apathetic and had indifference to the job. But there also may be something else going on behind this attitude of apathy and indifference. Patricia describes her feelings working as a waitress compared to a house cleaner. Patricia says,

When you hear a “waitress” and you hear “house cleaner,” it holds different things especially at the age of 19. When I was housekeeping, it made me upset that I was so young and so bright, but yet this was this was the only job I could get. Whereas being a waitress, American people do it, too. Whereas housekeeping, I saw a lot of undocumented people do it because nobody wants to clean after others. For me it was more flattering to have a waitress job.

Grace also describes her experience getting fired because she was undocumented.

When I got fired because they E-Verified me, I was really upset. I had just moved back and I felt nothing was going the way I want it to go. I could not go to college. I could not even work. So I was like, “what do I do now?” I just thought I was done and that there was nothing else. I wanted something better, not just working at fast food restaurants for the rest of my life.

Participants are not apathetic to the mistreatment they have experienced. But there is a process of *the slow maturation of exploitation consciousness*. This process is due to the lack of life experience to exploitative atmospheres and the slow recognition that unfairness is happening because of status. Just because these young undocumented adults may have a slow maturation of exploitation consciousness because of not really analyzing the mistreatment they had received, this does not mean they did not care about being treated differently. These young adult participants are very concerned about their place and status in American society, not only because America was the place they grew up in, but also because they strive for upward mobility in country that has limited options for them.

Patricia in the quote above said “Americans waitress, too.” Grace also wanted to work and go to school. These are experiences that the ideal average American 20-year-old receives because they have an option. Participants did not have the option to go to college or choose where they found work because there were limited opportunities. Grace was very concerned about her upward mobility in life and with not wanting to be stuck in the fast food industry. Participants were not apathetic to their situation; they just did not know what to do about their status because of the limited options available.

This is why the current policies of DACA and the new provisions for in-state tuition are important. Now, many undocumented teenagers and young adults have more options. Even though this is a huge stride, the policies are also very exclusive and increase the exploitation of the rest of the population who are undocumented. What option do young adults who did not qualify under DACA have? Is the rest of the population of undocumented people trapped in working low-entry jobs forever?

Conclusion

Through interviewing participants who are or have been undocumented, this study explores the treatment of undocumented workers in the restaurant industry. Findings conclude that the exploitation of undocumented workers manifests in many ways. This includes participants being forced to accept more work and hours for little pay. For example, participants were not paid the minimum wage and in an extreme case only paid \$2.50 for every hour. If participants were paid minimum wage, there was little to no wage mobility. Furthermore, participants were overworked by sometimes having to do the amount of work of three people compared to their American counter-parts. Segregation of white Americans in the front of the restaurant and undocumented workers in back reinforced participants having to work in harder

positions. Furthermore, exploitative situations were continued because of bosses' and restaurant owners' indifference toward the safety of undocumented workers. This is seen when participants described the lack of action on part of the employers when undocumented workers were in unsafe working conditions.

One very important finding is this process of *status preservation of co-ethnics or/and status preservation of legality*. This happens when people of the same status or ethnicity are in the same social sphere and try distinguishing themselves from people of lower-status. Bosses and managers of the same status or ethnicity were treating the workers worse than their white American counterparts, thereby showing their different social distance. Status preservation of co-ethnics or/and legality shows the extent of how deeply exploitation is rooted in society to keep people who are undocumented marginalized. Not only do undocumented workers have to face the unfair working conditions because of their status by people who are “outsiders,” but they also face it from their own people. Instead of working together against the injustices that have been embedded in working conditions, undocumented managers and bosses are contributing to the exploitation of their own people. This finding indicates that status mobility is desired and used as an excuse for exploitation and unfairness.

The working place, especially the restaurant industry, is an area where systematic unfairness limits the success of undocumented workers. Participants had very limited mobility in the restaurant industry. This started with social networks to find jobs, when they had the opportunity to use social networks, the person who recommended them also worked in a similar job position. This limits what types of jobs undocumented workers can obtain. Moreover, when participants received small increases in pay, these did not match with how long a worker has been working at the restaurant or current cost of living. Most participants did not have official

promotions. Participants were trained to do the work of a higher position, but were not paid for the title. Mobility is further hindered by the racist attitudes held by bosses and costumers that undocumented workers. However, there were a couple ways participants gained upward mobility: by being able to speak English and through legislative policy.

Currently, there are policies that have helped undocumented youth attain work permits and attain a higher education through policies that have made it more affordable to go to school. Many participants who are young adults qualified for these policies, thereby having access to social mobility. This is problematic for the rest of the undocumented population because they do not have the option or access to social mobility. Because there is more opportunity now for undocumented youth to gain mobility, *the slow maturation of exploitative consciousness* was present in many participants who were young. The slow maturation of exploitative consciousness is displayed when undocumented youth do not realize that there is unfair treatment because of status. For undocumented youth and young adults who may be naïve about their situation, this leaves them vulnerable to unethical situations. This notion of “it gets better,” especially since there are legislative means for upward mobility, contributed to the slow maturation of exploitative consciousness because young adult participants did not view themselves stagnant. They had options.

These findings support the understanding that undocumented workers not only are faced with the unfair conditions of the secondary sector labor market that include discrimination, lack of job security, and poor wages. But undocumented workers also have to withstand oppressive working conditions for having a different status. Priscilla’s experience discussed in the introduction describes having to pay for cleaning supplies, working eleven hour shifts without breaks, and never receiving her paycheck for two weeks of work. Like Priscilla, the majority of

undocumented workers do not have the option to report similar incidents. In general, undocumented workers do not have the same opportunities or privileges as someone who has proper documentation. If undocumented workers had a legitimate status not only would this change working conditions, but it would also change individual lives. People who are undocumented would have the option for upward mobility and the opportunity to work in higher positions. Although this is ideal, this is not the current state for the majority of undocumented workers in America. Undocumented workers are static in working low-level-entry jobs and furthered immobilized by the deliberate dawdling of politicians. This leaves people who are undocumented no options for upward mobility.

APPENDIX

1. Is it easy finding a job in this town for Undocumented Workers?
2. Have you worked in other cities or States? Was it easy to find jobs there?
3. Where do you work now and do you like working there? How long have you worked there?
4. What is the starting wage for your position at your job? How much do you get paid an hour?
5. Why do you work there? Is it enough to pay for your bills?
6. What was the process in getting this job? Did you apply for other jobs?
7. How many restaurants have you worked at? Which one was did you enjoy the most?
8. Do your co-workers know of your status? Are you fearful that your manager might find out? Does this affect the work environment?
9. What type of relationship do you have with your co-workers and managers?
10. Can you describe the working conditions?
11. Did you get treated differently by your managers or co-workers because of your status?
12. Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your status?
13. How have these incidents affected your work ethic?
14. Think of a time where your status has directly affected your job, can you describe the incident?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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