Why People Work as Hard as They Do: The Role of Work Ethic as a Legitimizing Myth in the Work Lives of New York City's Fast Food Workers

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Dedication

To

Katherine, Margaret, Mary, Margaret, Dedei

Caroline, Lucy, Caroline

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Why People Work as Hard as They Do:
The Role of Work Ethic as a Legitimizing Myth in the Work Lives
of New York City's Fast Food Workers

Intimately interwoven in American culture is the unquestioned notion of paid labor as a personally gratifying moral and civic responsibility. Yet, of the 46 million Americans living in poverty in 2010, 23% held jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The U.S. fast food industry employs 4 million workers (Statista, 2014) and "pays the minimum wage to a higher portion of its workers than any other American industry" (Schlosser, 2001).

The research methodology for this study was critical ethnography, which explores a cultural phenomenon and attempts to provoke social change by giving voice to marginalized communities (Thomas, 1993). A New York City–based nonprofit organization working to organize fast food workers was the field site for the study. The mining of empirical material involved multiple qualitative research methods, including observation, document and artifact analysis, and interviews with 25 fast food workers who participated at one or more strikes. This study addressed a single research question: What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations? Sidanius (1999) defined legitimizing myths—an element of his social dominance theory—as "values, attitudes, beliefs, causal attributions, and ideologies providing moral and intellectual justifications for social practices that either increase, maintain, or decrease levels of social inequality among social groups" (p. 104).

The study found that the role of work ethic as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth appeared to depend upon what the individual was fighting to achieve when she or he joined the Fight for $15, i.e., emancipation, reciprocity, worker solidarity, or personal development. Stigma and stigmatization appeared to act as a mechanism to maintain group-based social hierarchy and thereby reinforce the legitimization of the work ethic myth. In addition, the research participants had low expectations of escaping poverty in the future and experienced anxiety about the temporal nature of a future positive financial situation, further legitimizing the work ethic narrative. Recommendations based on these findings are offered for theory and research, and policy and practice.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Background

Weber's (1905/2001) significant and groundbreaking publication, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* has influenced much of the current understanding of work and work practices (Weber, 1905/2001). In this publication, Weber conceptualized the Protestant work ethic as a cultural phenomenon emerging from religiosity and theorized that among early 20th century Protestants, engaging in hard work meant more than responding to an economic necessity. Work was a religious calling, and working hard was key to salvation. More importantly, the activity of hard work signified God's blessings. Conversely, the failure to participate in hard work was sinful and simultaneously signified God's displeasure.

According to Weber, the Protestants' religious impetus to work drove the growth of Western capitalism. Today most scholars agree that the Protestant work ethic is no longer solely (if ever) a Protestant or religious phenomenon (Giorgi & Marsh, 1990). In current scholarship, the abundance of work ethic literature has reframed its initial cultural framing to individualize work ethic, defining it as a set of individual attributes and/or behaviors such as steadfastness, trustworthiness, and initiative. In this literature stream, scholars have drawn theories from psychological disciplines (Furnham, 1984; Miller, Woehr, & Hudspeth, 2002; Mirels & Garrett, 1971; Smith & Smith, 2011). The purported reward for hard work is no longer religious salvation. It is extrinsic or instrumental rewards, e.g., material gain, and/or intrinsic rewards, e.g., personal satisfaction and professional development (Barbash, 1983; Giorgi & Marsh, 1990; Weeks, 2011).

Scholars studying work ethic as individual attributes, attitudes, and behaviors have struggled to demarcate concepts, terms, or words related to work ethic and have struggled to postulate the relationship of these concepts, terms, or words with the work ethic construct. Terms such as *work orientation, work engagement, work identity, work commitment, nonfinancial employment, work centrality,* and many others are interchangeable or conceptualized as overlapping and/or inseparable from work ethic. Specifically related to work ethic, some scholars have settled on a universal characterization of the concept, describing it as an individual "value or belief (or a set of values or beliefs) concerning the place of work in one's life that either (a) serves as a conscious guide to conduct or (b) is simply implied in manifested attitudes and behavior" (Barbash, 1983, p. 28).

From the scholarship on attributes, behaviors, and attitudes, a multiplicity of work ethic scales has emerged. These scales typically measure work ethic by asking individuals to respond to questions or rate their adherence to beliefs about "the moral superiority of hard work over leisure or idleness, craft pride over carelessness, sacrifice over profligacy, earned over unearned income, and positive over negative attitudes toward work" (Barbash, 1983, p. 102).

There has been limited research viewing work ethic through a cultural lens, and few studies on work ethic have employed a qualitative methodology. Yet, the work ethic ideology permeates American culture as a prevalent and enduring myth (Sidanius, 1999) and is the key concept underpinning organizational and management research and theory building (Russell, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2011). An ideology is a "belief system that

explains and justifies a preferred political order for society, either existing or proposed, and offers a strategy (processes, institutional arrangements, programs) for its attainment" (Christenson, Engel, & Jacobs, 1972, p. 1). Ideologies told as stories (myths) (Flood, 1996) help people make sense of commonplace experiences and contextualize social interactions.

Research Problem

Despite Weber's (1905/2001) conceptualization of the Protestant work ethic as a cultural construct grounded in religion, overwhelmingly work ethic researchers have conceived it as an individual phenomenon and have studied work ethic as individual attributes or behaviors. Management theories and practices emerging from this stream of literature profess to increase or inculcate work ethic in workers through leadership strategies, motivational techniques, and/or worker training. Research on work ethic as individual behaviors or attributes circumvents challenges to the cultural myth of hard work as intrinsically and/or extrinsically rewarding by legitimating other American narratives: meritocracy, the American Dream (the view that material success is available to all), and the narrative that frames poverty as an outcome of inadequate work ethic among those who are poor.

While ignoring the societal structures acting as barriers to access to resources and opportunities (Weeks, 2011), American culture asserts that work is a rewarding individual responsibility. Notwithstanding research evidence that suggests otherwise, underlying the conceptualization of work ethic as attributes, attitudes, and behaviors is the supposition that society's social and economic resources—e.g., a quality education,

safe neighborhoods, access to well-paid and stable employment—are distributed equally among all its members who work hard. Because of these assumptions, "poverty means that there is something wrong with your character, that you've got bad habits, you've made the wrong choices" (Smiley, 2012).

Work ethic as a cultural construct, according to Gramsci, "is an amalgam of coercive and consensual mechanisms for reconciling human subjects to their unwelcome fate as laboring animals in oppressive conditions" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 179). Yet, intimately interwoven in American culture is the unquestioned notion of work as an intrinsically and/or extrinsically rewarding individual responsibility. This narrative has become the "common-sense of a whole social formation" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 114).

Truth claims emanating from research on work ethic as attributes and behaviors are unreliable and/or limited because they fail to question work ethic's common-sense familiarity (Weeks, 2011). This stance is problematic because in individualizing a cultural construct, researchers produce faulty theories and practices that managers apply to workers and work situations. Yet, there is little empirical knowledge of the impact of work ethic as an element of culture as Weber (1905/2001) conceived of it.

To generate new knowledge not producible through the study of work ethic as attributes and behaviors calls for reconceptualizing work ethic as a cultural element as well as deconstructing it. Reconceptualization and deconstruction act to make work ethic's familiarity unfamiliar (Weeks, 2011) by "distancing ourselves from the taken-for-granted aspect of what we see and allowing us to view what we have seen more

critically" (Thomas, 1993). The explorations of work ethic in ways challenging to its taken-for-granted or common sense acceptance create new knowledge.

The examination of work ethic as an element of culture is particularly helpful when exploring work ethic's influence on workers who are poor. Low-wage workers are the most understudied group in organizational science (Leana, Mittal, & Stiehl, 2012), but the most likely to experience the hegemonic force of culture (Gramsci, 1980; Sidanius, 1999). Organizational researchers have contributed to the marginalization of low-wage workers in at least two ways. First, organizational researchers do not use low-wage workers as study participants (Leana et al., 2012), and second, organizational researchers through their individualization of a cultural phenomenon (work ethic) provide empirical support to the claim that the lack of an individual work ethic is the root of poverty. Failure to reconceptualize and deconstruct work ethic will continue researchers' witting or unwitting contribution to the marginalization of workers who are living in poverty.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the cultural construct of work ethic as a legitimizing myth and the role this myth plays in the work lives of fast food workers working and living in New York City while in poverty. Situated in the context of the experiences of these workers who have participated in episodic work stoppages as a means of advocating for higher wages and better working conditions, the following research question guided this dissertation:

What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?

Statement of Potential Significance

More than 10 million people in the United States are among the working poor. Issues reflective of poverty affect all of societal life, including the economy and businesses. Yet, there are few academic conversations about poverty or the working poor in organizational science. This study is significant because it expands the ongoing conversations in organizational science to include the experiences of the working poor, recognizing that the numbers of the working poor in the United States continue to climb as the recovering economy replaces middle-income jobs lost in the economic recession with low-wage jobs.

This study is significant because of its public policy implications. Without empirical evidence to the contrary, policymakers will continue to design poverty-reducing strategies based on an understanding of work as intrinsically and/or extrinsically rewarding for all people. This study can support policymakers in conversations that go beyond individual responsibility to conversations critically examining the influence of culture, including work ethic, on poverty, which could lead to policies that offer meaningful support to workers who are struggling in poverty.

Reconceptualizing and deconstructing work ethic opens the possibility for new knowledge generation, revealing work ethic's dark side, i.e., its hegemonic characteristics (Bacchi, 2012). This approach contrasts with the standard approach, wherein "researchers

continue to explore the question 'Why don't workers work harder?' and then investigate norms about a reasonable work performance" rather than "attempting to deconstruct work ethic" (Burawoy, 1979).

Theoretical Framework

This study draws from two theoretical frameworks: cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1992) and social dominance theory (SDT) (Sidanius, 1999).

Cultural Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci died in prison in 1937. Found in Gramsci's personal letters and theoretical papers written while incarcerated by the Italian government of Mussolini was his conceptualization of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, 1996). English translations of Gramsci's writings first appeared in the 1960s. Rather than a fully developed theory, these letters are a collection of Gramsci's ideas. In these writings, Gramsci referred to "the usually uncritical, often unconscious way in which most people perceived the world" as common sense (Exoo, 1987). Hegemony was the process of controlling, perpetuating, or manipulating these taken-for-granted perceptions (common sense) by the elite for the benefit of the elite. Hegemony protects their power and privilege, but disadvantages others. The elite were in the position to exert hegemonic force because the elite owned and controlled institutions such as the educational system, markets, churches, political systems, media outlets, and other social structures.

Interestingly, however, Gramsci (1992) argued that consciously or unconsciously, marginalized groups consented to hegemony because the elite promulgated hegemonic

ideology disguised as common sense (Exoo, 1987). For example, consider the common sense of hard work leading to intrinsic and/or extrinsic rewards. Regardless of the limited evidence to support this common sense myth, Americans of all income levels, including the working poor, unquestionably believe this to be true (Exoo, 1987). Gramsci (1992) would argue the elites gain the lion's share of societal benefits accruing from commonly held beliefs. In the case of work ethic, the greatest value produced from labor is accrued to the employer. Yet, some of the value produced by their labor is accrued to the workers in the form of wages, which secures workers' future consent to labor. Cultural hegemony is "an ideology that best serves the interests of the 'house of Have', but is accepted by the 'house of Want' as well" (Exoo, 1987, p. 7).

More specifically, hegemony is

> The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group: this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12)

Social Dominance Theory

SDT draws its theoretical framework from Gramsci's (1971) cultural hegemony as well as other social theories. The most salient of these other theories are social identity theory and Marxism (Romm, 2013; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Developed by Henri Tajfel in the 1970s and 1980s, social identity theory argued that people's attitudes and behaviors are a function of their social group membership (M. T. Schmitt, Branscombe, & Kappen, 2003; Sidanius, 1999; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Like Marxism, SDT argues

that the elites work to maintain social hierarchy, but unlike Marxism, SDT does not exclusively focus on the economic system (the means of production).

Stated most simply, SDT argues that intergroup oppression, discrimination, and prejudice are the means by which human societies organize themselves as group-based hierarchies, in which members of dominant groups secure a disproportionate share of the good things in life (e.g., powerful roles, good housing, good health), and members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of the bad things in life (e.g., relatively poor housing and poor health) (Van Lange, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2012, p. 418).

SDT theorists proposed that three identifiers—age, gender, and an arbitrary-set system—stratify society. The arbitrary-set system includes socially constructed identifiers such as race, class, and ethnicity. Parenthetically, one could argue that society constructed gender (Lorber, 1994) and age because these terms have no meaning other than the meaning society gives them. Society imposes labels and their meanings on bodies based on the body's physicality.

The interplay between multiple levels of the social realm—societies, groups, and individuals—preserves the structure of the social hierarchy by the perpetuation and acceptance of legitimizing myths. Systemic action in support of or against a legitimizing myth may work to either sustain or destabilize societal inequalities. An example in support of this conjecture is the comparison between the mission of an investment bank and that of a civil rights organization. The mission of an investment bank is to increase the wealth of its investors. The economic gap between the wealthy and the poor widens,

thereby sustaining social stratification. Civil rights organizations destabilize social hierarchy by helping marginalized groups gain access to social resources that historically were accessible only to the elite (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius, Pratto, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004).

On the micro level, individuals have a psychological orientation towards or away from seeking to maintain social inequalities. Sidanius (1999; Sidanius et al., 2004) referred to this as social dominance orientation. "It expresses general support for the domination of certain socially constructed groups over other socially constructed groups" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 104). Social dominance orientation is measurable (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999). Developed by the seminal SDT scholars, the scale measures responses to questions like "To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other people" and "We should strive for increased social equality between groups" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 102).

The concept of legitimizing myths is foundational to SDT. Legitimizing myths are "values, attitudes, beliefs, causal attributions, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for social practices that either increase, maintain, or decrease levels of social inequality among social groups" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 104). Much like Gramsci's common sense, legitimizing myths are uncritically taken for granted and commonly held. Legitimizing myths play a mediating role between the maintenance of social hierarchy and social policies. Work ethic is one of many legitimizing myths (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius, 1999).

Conceptual Framework

SDT holds that social stratification exists in all societies. The elite classes control social resources and dominate marginalized groups through their ability to control social resources. Macro, meso, and micro social systems such as institutions, political structures, educational systems, and the media play a role in sustaining social stratification by embracing and propagating legitimizing myths.

Legitimizing myths, because they are taken for granted as true by the breadth of society, are powerful social control mechanisms. The endorsement of work ethic in the American context is a legitimizing myth (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004). Irrespective of structural barriers, the myth of work ethic prescribes that hard work results in intrinsic and/or extrinsic rewards. Conversely, those who do not work hard are cast as socially or cognitively inferior (Pratto et al., 1994).

Figure 1.1 illustrates the interconnection between work ethic as a legitimizing myth and a social policy pertinent to workers who are poor. Sidanius (1999) theorized that legitimizing myths serve a mediating role between social policies and societal stratification. Legitimizing myths can either sustain or destabilize social stratification. Work ethic, in a hierarchy-enhancing dynamic, influences social policy in support of the elimination of the minimum wage, and work ethic as a hierarchy-attenuating myth influences social policy supportive of a living wage.

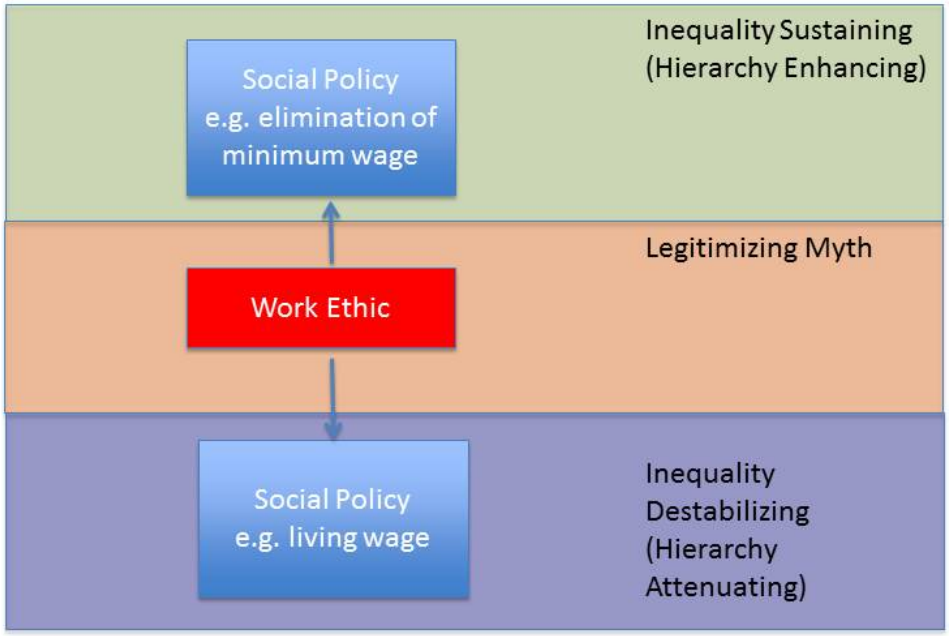

Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework.

While SDT has suggested that endorsement of the work ethic acts as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999), this study's research question explored this issue by asking: What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live And work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?

Summary of Methodology

This study's participants lived in New York City and worked in New York City's fast food industry. Some of the study's participants were members of a workers center in New York City formed to organize low-income families to advocate for social and

economic justice. The workers center is the principal organization in New York City mobilizing fast food workers.

This research used critical ethnography as the primary methodology. While ethnography is concerned with objective interpretations and descriptions of field experiences, critical ethnography, grounded in critical theory, incorporates a specific ideological perspective. The critical ethnographer works from the assumption that class, status, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation and/or sexual expression structure society into social hierarchies (Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993). The hierarchical structure of society works to marginalize these groups of people (Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993). Researchers use critical ethnography to uncover the hidden texts and experiences created by society's hierarchical structure.

Empirical material was encountered through participant observations, field notes, and semistructured interviews. The research included key artifacts such as organizing materials, flyers, protest posters, social media messages, and newsletters. The anticipated outcome of the study was to gain a greater understanding of the study participants' experiences of work and the influence of work ethic as a legitimizing myth within American culture.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all qualitative research, this study makes no claims of the generalizability of the findings, nor is there a claim that the findings will be replicable by other researchers or in other studies. Although there are a number of workers who are poor in

the United States, this research centered on a specific group of workers and reflected their specific personal experiences.

Embedded in a critical paradigm is the researcher's belief that elite groups oppress those that are on the bottom of the social hierarchy. This belief could have resulted in overlooking or misinterpreting empirical material pointing to an opposing supposition. Included in this study is a clear statement of the researcher's positionality. Such a statement does not eliminate the possibility of overlooking or misinterpreting empirical material, but it provides a frame from which a reader can understand the findings.

Another limitation of this study was that it relied substantially on empirical material encountered through personal interviews. Schein (2013) suggested that engaging in a meaningful relationship with another requires equitable and balanced conversations (2013, p. 9). Researchers with the best intentions may not possess the skill set to enable the building of the equitable and balanced relationships essential to eliciting open and truthful conversations. To address this limitation, the interviewer engaged in a specific interview technique, reflective listening. Reflective listening calls for the interviewer to listen closely to the interviewee's statements and responses and repeat them back to the interviewee to confirm that the researcher has clearly heard and understood the message (Passmore, 2011). This manner of communication sets the stage for open dialogue and works to encourage the interviewee to actively participate in the interview (Passmore, 2011).

Definitions of Key Terms

This section defines terms used in this study requiring further explanation.

Critical paradigm in research explores the social world through the lens of marginalized groups for the purposes of supporting their emancipation.

Hegemony is "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group: this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

Ideology is a "belief system that explains and justifies a preferred political order for society, either existing or proposed, and offers a strategy (processes, institutional arrangements, programs) for its attainment" (Christenson et al., 1972, p. 1).

Legitimizing myth "consists of attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that distribute social value within the social system" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 45).

Low-wage jobs are jobs paying the minimum wage or slightly above it with little opportunity for career or income mobility.

Myths are ideologies told as stories. These stories "draw on tradition and taken for granted knowledge" and may or may not be factually true (De Neufville & Barton, 1987, p. 181).

The precarious or secondary labor market has jobs that are low paying with little or no employment benefits. Workers in these jobs have limited opportunities for advancement to better jobs and virtually no on-the-job task autonomy (Boushey,

Fremstad, Gragg, & Waller, 2007; Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Kalleberg, 2011; Kwon, 2014).

Social dominance theory is a theory of intergroup relations focusing on the maintenance and stability of group-based hierarchy (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004).

Work is the "activity for which one receives financial remuneration and is separated from other roles" (Brief & Nord, 1990, p. 11).

Work ethic is the cultural myth that hard work is intrinsically and/or extrinsically rewarding.

Work orientation describes the "subjective dimension of the relationship between a person and his/her job or employment in general" (Karlsson, Furåker, & Håkansson, 2012). This orientation includes "the person's conceptions, knowledge, beliefs, feelings and evaluations concerning work or various aspects of it" (Brief & Nord, 1990, p. 11).

The *working poor* are "those who have jobs but do not earn enough to 'afford the necessities of life,' to 'maintain a conventional standard of living in their community,' or to 'avoid poverty during periods of temporary unemployment'" (Craypo & Cormier, 2000, p. 31).

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some workers employed as crew members, cooks or food preparers, janitorial workers, and shift managers and other managers and supervisors in the fast food industry, as well as a broader range of low-wage workers, including retail employees and domestic workers, have reenergized their efforts to organize. These fast food workers have organized multiple 1-day strikes in New York City that have now extended throughout the country. Today's fast food workers are striking because they want a salary increase from minimum wage to a living wage. Additionally, they want the fast food businesses to recognize the rights of workers to organize (Paul, 2013; J. Schmitt & Jones, 2013). With salaries earned from fast food work, these workers live in poverty. According to Leana et al. (2012), organizational scientists need to be concerned with the working poor because the nature of poverty "can powerfully affect work attitudes and behaviors, just as . . . [it] affect[s] other key aspects of life" (p. 888).

Yet, scholars such as Frost (1980) have leveled criticism at organizational scientists for being "preoccupied with what managers value and with their [managers'] definitions of organizational problems" (Frost, 1980) without consideration of the frontline workers. Peter Frost (1980) noted that many organizational scientists are "hired-guns for management" (p. 50). Some scholars have argued that McDonald's corporate executives hired organizational researchers as consultants with the explicit purpose of training workers, but actually intended that the consultants inhibit workers' union organizing attempts (Boas & Chain, 1976).

Like Frost (1980), Leana et al. (2012) argued that the voices of nonmanagerial staff, specifically the working poor, are absent from traditional organizational science research. They evidenced this assertion by a search of the publication *Organizational Science* from 2000 to 2010, finding only 12 empirical studies that sampled low-wage workers (Leana et al., 2012). Adding the term "working poor" retrieved one additional article. An additional search of journals of the American Academy of Management found two articles on the working poor.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the cultural construct of work ethic as a legitimizing myth and the role this myth plays in the work lives of fast food workers working and living in New York City while in poverty. Sidanius et al. (2004) have argued that legitimizing myths act to maintain the social hierarchy and drive societal inequalities. This research explored work ethic and its influence on workers struggling with poverty who have participated in episodic work stoppages as a means of advocating for higher wages and better working conditions. Specifically, this study's participants were workers employed in the fast food industry in New York City.

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to this study in two major sections. The first section discussed the context of the study, namely the working poor and particularly fast food workers. The second section discusses the theories related to the study's research question, in particular cultural hegemony, social dominance theory (SDT), and its premise of legitimizing myths in relationship to work ethic.

Google Scholar was the primary search engine used to obtain literature for this chapter. The researcher also searched the literature on multiple databases, including

Business Source Premier, ABI/Inform, Social Science Citation Index, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. The primary search words or phrases used were *social dominance theory, social dominance orientation, ideological hegemony, cultural hegemony, legitimizing myths, work ethic, working poor, work centrality, low-wage workers, fast food industry, poverty, work commitment,* and combinations of the aforementioned terms, such as *work ethic and the working poor*.

Study Context: Work Ethic, the Working Poor, and Fast Food Workers

This section provides an overview of the context of this study. This includes an overview of research on work ethic and a demographic description of the "working poor." Additionally, it describes the general precarious labor market and concludes with a description of the precarious labor sector specific to the fast food industry. The section begins with an exploration of Weber's conceptualization of the Protestant work ethic as a cultural phenomenon. Weber's conceptualization is in juxtaposition against more recent literature that constructs work ethic as individual attributes and behaviors.

Work Ethic

This study's concern was the experience of workers who are poor and the role of work ethic in these workers' work lives. Based on the theories of cultural hegemony and social dominance, it is the premise of this study that work ethic as a component of culture acts to maintain fast food workers in positions of marginalization while enhancing social stratification (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004).

"Evidencing the relationship between work and human value, Max Weber's coining of 'work ethic' figures largely into the cultural understandings and practices of work today" (Russell, 2013, p. 3). Weber (1905/2001), in his seminal work *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* provides the foundations for the core of the American taken-for-granted understanding of paid labor as a moral and civic responsibility. Weeks (2011) offered, "This 'peculiar idea' of one's duty in a calling, 'so familiar to us to-day, but in reality so little a matter of course' has settled into the cultural fabric, making it difficult to grasp on its own terms" (p. 588).

Weber's work ethic has religious origins. Weber understood that Protestants, especially Calvinists, thought hard work was the key to religious salvation. Furthermore, wealth derived from hard work was a sign of God's blessing. Poverty and unemployment were indicative of individuals' low morals or a sign of the wrath of God's displeasure. According to Weber (1905/2001), the Protestants' association of hard work with godliness was one of the reasons for the growth of Western capitalism.

According to Furnham (1982), there were four elements in Weber's understanding of work ethic:

- Doctrine of calling. This was the belief that people are "called upon by God to work for His glory and hence work itself was virtuous and had to be excellent and honestly done" (p. 88).
- Doctrine of predestination. This "suggested the sign of God's grace could be seen in this life, such as occupational success, and hence successful people could see themselves among the elect" (p. 88).

- Doctrine of asceticism. Asceticism "stressed saving, investments, the systematic amassing of capital and the reduction of expenditures on vices and luxuries" (p. 88).
- Doctrine of sanctification. "By rejecting the mystical sacramental system of Catholicism, [sanctification] stressed rational control over all aspects of life" (p. 88).

Weber concluded that religiosity bound people to working regard of whether or not it resulted in economic gain. To work without receiving a tangible benefit was not something one would naturally be inclined to do, but according to Weber, framing work as a religious calling created a situation in which people would continue to work hard without tangible benefits accruing to themselves.

Secularization of the Protestant work ethic. In the American colonies, the "ideals of the Protestant work ethic were retained but emphasis on the individual's 'calling' in a religious sense was replaced by reference to national virtues and social duty" (Porter, 2010, p. 538). The secularization of work ethic in America was rooted in the influence of the diversity of the population, including enslaved Africans and other non-European inhabitants, economic prosperity, slavery, and women's suffrage and democracy (Barro, 2004; Bell & Taylor, 2003; McCortney & Engels, 2003).

Work was no longer a sign of religiosity but was woven into the fabric of American culture. For example, "Benjamin Franklin popularized virtues such as frugality, industry, justice, chastity, humility, and order through his writings in *Poor Richard's Almanac,* without particular reference to religious doctrine" (Porter, 2010,

p. 538). Although work was no longer a religious mandate, it became a civic and moral mandate requiring the dedication to work as a virtuous activity (Weeks, 2011).

Bell and Taylor (2003) argued that organizational culture has an equivalency in religion:

> If religion is defined not in terms of the divine or supernatural but instead as a system of meaning constructed around historical and mythical narratives and reinforced by specific ritual practices, any organization that has explicitly articulated values intended to be shared by all members could be understood as religious. (p. 339)

As an example of the religiosity of organizational culture, Bell and Taylor (2003) referenced Amway International's organizational policies and practices. According to Bell and Taylor (2003), practices such as holding prayer meetings and singing organizational hymns are designed to encourage the development of an emotional connection to Amway by the employees (p. 339). Employees' belief in the mission of the organization is a higher priority for employment than employees' professional experiences or level of work applicable skills (Bell & Taylor, 2003, p. 339).

Giorgi and Marsh (1990) set out to determine if a modern work ethic existed and explored the link between a modern work ethic and religion. They posited that work ethic is both a micro-level construct and a macro-level cultural concept. Using secondary data collected by the European Experimental Values Systems Study Group, which surveyed residents of seven European countries on the five broad subject areas of leisure, work, meaning of life and religious beliefs, family life, and contemporary social issues, the researchers conducted a quantitative analysis.

The responses to the section of the survey on work provided the basis for Giorgi and Marsh's factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis led the researchers to conclude that work is a "meaningful activity" beyond extrinsic rewards, i.e., money. "The factor has good claim to being viewed as the modern version of a normative work ethic" (Giorgi & Marsh, 1990, p. 515). Interestingly, Giorgi and Marsh found that "work ethic was linked with degree of religious fervor . . . [but] it was not those who claimed to be religious who endorsed the work ethic the most, but those who claimed to [be] atheists" (p. 515).

Scholars in the United States have replicated Giorgi and Marsh's findings. McHoskey (1994) conducted a similar study to that of Giorgi and Marsh (1990) with 183 Christian students attending an American university located in the Midwestern region of the United States. The purpose of McHoskey's quantitative study was to reexamine Mirels and Garrett's Protestant Work Ethic Scale to determine what dimensions the scale measured. McHoskey (1994) was also particularly interested in the relationship between religion and the belief in the Protestant work ethic. McHoskey's findings confirmed the earlier findings of Giorgi and Marsh (1990). He found that religiosity was not associated with the endorsement of the Protestant work ethic. "Indeed, religious involvement was not even associated with what is perhaps the defining feature of the PWE [Protestant work ethic]—a veneration of hard-work" (McHoskey, 1994, p. 51).

Struggle to define work ethic and its related terms. To Weber (1905/2001), work ethic was a cultural phenomenon grounded in religiosity. After Weber, however, other researchers conceptualized work ethic not as a cultural phenomenon, but as a set of

individual attributes and/or work-related behaviors. Examples of work ethic attributes and behaviors, among many others, include integrity, dependability, initiative, and loyalty to one's employer (McCortney & Engels, 2003, p. 134). The conceptualization of work ethic as individual attributes and behaviors forms the lion's share of work ethic research (McCortney & Engels, 2003).

These work ethic scholars, however, have struggled to conclusively define work ethic and its related terms and have struggled to establish universally agreed-upon work ethic constructs and variables (Morrow, 1983). Accordingly, at least 30 work ethic–related terms and definitions in current academic research are used interchangeably and are directly related to, or overlapping with, concepts related to an individual's attitudes and behaviors related to engagement in paid labor, as shown in Table 2.1 (Morrow, 1983). Further confounding the situation, scholars have used the words "work" and "job" interchangeably in work ethic and related research, but work and job do not necessarily hold the same meaning within the context of an article or within the context of the wider field of research (Morrow, 1983). Believing there was no rationality in the development of these terms, Morrow (1983) suggested that scholars should discontinue introducing new work ethic–related constructs into the literature.

Table 2.1
Work Ethic–Related Terms Currently in Use

Terms		
Career commitment	Job involvement	Union involvement
Career identification	Job motivation	Work attitude
Career orientation	Job orientation	Work centrality
Career salience	Job salience	Work commitment
Commitment to a profession	Job satisfaction	Work ethic
Conventional ethic	Noneconomic commitment	Work identity
Ego involvement	Occupational involvement	Work involvement
Instrumental work ethic	Organizational commitment	Work orientation
Job attachment	Protestant work ethic	Work satisfaction
Job engagement	Union identification	Work values

In an attempt to distinguish between the multiplicity of work ethic terms, Morrow and McElroy (1986) sorted these terms into five broad categories: values, career, job, organization, or union related (Table 2.2). In this framework, work ethic is within the value-focused category of work commitment. Value-focused work commitment focuses on "the intrinsic value of work as an end in itself" (Morrow, 1983, p. 488) and is defined as the "extent to which a person feels that personal worth results only from self-sacrificing work or occupational achievement" (p. 489). Drawing further from the work of Blood (1969) and Mirels and Garrett (1971), Morrow (1983) wrote that the Protestant work ethic "is the belief that hard work is intrinsically good and an end in itself. The willingness to work hard demonstrates personal worth and moral stature" (p. 489).

Table 2.2
Facet Analysis of Work Commitment

Facets of analysis	Value focus	Career focus	Job focus	Organization focus	Union focus
Representative concept	Protestant work ethic endorsement (Blood; (Mirels & Garrett)	Career salience (Greenhaus)	1) Job involvement (Lodahl and Kejner) 2) Work as a central life interest (Dubin)	Organizational commitment (Mowday et al.)	Union commitment (Gordon et al.)
Focus of concept	The intrinsic value of work in and of itself	Perceived importance of one's career	1) The degree of daily absorption in work activities 2) The degree to which the total job situation is the central aspect of one's life	Devotion and loyalty to one's firm	Devotion and loyalty to one's bargaining unit
Definition	Extent to which a person feels personal worth results only from self-sacrificing work or professional achievement	The importance of work and career in one's total life	1) Degree to which a person identifies psychologically with his work; degree to which job performance affects self-esteem 2) Central life interest measures whether a respondent is job oriented, non–job oriented, or neutral	Extent to which a person (a) has a strong desire to remain a member of the organization; (b) is willing to exert a high level of effort for the organization; (c) believes and accepts the values and goals of the organization	Extent to which a person (a) has a strong desire to remain a member of the union; (b) is willing to exert a high level of effort for the union; (c) believes in the objectives of organized labor

Note. From Morrow (1983).

According to Morrow (1983), career salience "is defined by Greenhaus (1971) as the importance of work and a career in one's total life" (p. 489). Morrow (1983) noted

that Greenhaus' definition of career salience overlaps with definitions of other work commitment constructs, i.e., work ethic, job involvement, and central life interest.

"The most well-known and frequently utilized measure of job involvement is that devised by Lodahl and Kejner (1965)" (Morrow, 1983, p. 490). Lodahl and Kejner saw job involvement as the relationship between one's self-esteem and job performance as well as a "component of self-image (i.e., professional identification with work)" (Morrow, 1983, p. 490). According to Morrow, this understanding of job involvement partially overlaps with the Protestant work ethic and the literature on work commitment by suggesting that one's worth is a function of how well one performs one's jobs (p. 490).

Work as a central life interest refers to an individual's preferred locale for carrying out activities (Morrow, 1983, p. 490). To measure work as a central life interest, workers responded to survey questions such as "I would hate (a) missing a day's work, (b) missing work at an organization I belong to or (c) missing almost anything I usually do" (Morrow, 1983, p. 490). Again, according to Morrow (1983), there is definitional overlap between work as central life interest, Protestant work ethic, and job involvement.

Organizational commitment, organizational involvement, and organizational identification relate to an individual's desire to remain employed by a specific organization. It includes the degree to which employees buy into the mission, goals, and identity of the employing organization (Morrow, 1983). Union commitment was the newest work ethic–related construct to enter the literature, although Morrow and

McElroy (1986) believed union commitment measures overlapped with measures of organizational commitment.

Morrow and McElroy (1986) set out to determine if, as suspected, there was redundancy in the definition and use of constructs within the framework depicted in Table 2.3. They selected five terms on which to focus their research. These were Protestant work ethic (value focus), career salience (career focus), central life interest (job focus), job involvement (job focus), and organizational commitment (organization focus). They conducted a comparative assessment of the concepts as well as a factor analysis.

A sample of 563 public employees responded to Morrow and McElroy's (1986) surveys designed to measure the respondents' adherence to tenets of these five constructs. Of these five forms of work commitment, Protestant work ethic had the least intercorrelation with the other measures. Job involvement had the highest intercorrelation with the other work commitment measures. There was a moderate correlation between organizational commitment and the other four forms of work commitment. Nevertheless, there was significant overlap between at least some of these five forms of work commitment (Morrow & McElroy, 1986).

Using the statistical method of factor analysis, Morrow and McElroy (1986) analyzed 52 work commitment measures. In factor analysis, factor loadings are considered redundant at points of 0.3 or higher. The factor analysis revealed that measures of Protestant work ethic and measures of organizational commitment were independent from each other as well as from the other three forms of work commitment,

career salience, central life interest, and organizational commitment. The factor analysis also demonstrated that measurements of job involvement, career salience, and work as a central life interest were redundant, with common loadings on factors above 0.3 (Morrow & McElroy, 1986).

In a study similar to that of Morrow and McElroy (1986), Paullay, Alliger, and Stone-Romero (1994) sought to clarify the relationship between job involvement and work as a central life interest. The researchers tangentially included Protestant work ethic as one of the variables in the study because they believed there was an interconnection between Protestant work ethic and work as a central life interest. Job involvement consists of two components. According to Paullay et al. (1994), job role involvement is the degree to which a worker is engaged in his or her specific job tasks, and job setting involvement is the degree to which a worker is engaged in his or her specific work setting (Paullay et al., 1994, p. 225).

Three hundred and thirteen human service employees of a state psychiatric hospital responded to a 43-item questionnaire measuring job involvement, work centrality, and the Protestant work ethic. Whereas 8 years earlier, Morrow and McElroy's (1986) study concluded that job involvement and work centrality were redundant, Paullay et al. (1994) had a different finding. They found that job involvement and work centrality were independent terms. Like Morrow and McElroy's (1986) factor analysis, Paullay et al. (1994) found through factor analysis that work centrality and the Protestant work ethic were independent constructs.

Morrow and McElroy (1986) were one of the first to attempt to put forth a rational categorization of work ethic and related constructs. More recently, scholars have introduced the terms *work orientation, work attitude,* and *work values* (Karlsson et al., 2012). Work orientation is instrumental, moral, or nonfinancial. As with much about work ethic–related research, there is overlap in terminology (Karlsson et al., 2012). As such, these categorizations are not exclusive.

Other researchers, Brief and Nord (1990), sorted work orientation into five different types:

- Material values (such as . . . comfortable, life, money, family, security);
- Achievement related values (. . . sense of accomplishment, freedom, and wisdom);
- Sense of purpose (. . . inner harmony);
- Social relations (. . . true friendship and social recognition);
- Enhancement or maintenance of the self-concept (. . . self-respect). (p. 196)

Still other scholars used the two categories of intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic work orientation references the personal satisfaction one can feel for excellent job performance and the need for challenging job tasks (Kalleberg, 1977). Extrinsic work orientation is an external orientation towards work for an instrumental gain and is the same as the term *instrumental work orientation* and Brief and Nord's (1990) description of work orientation as material value.

Nonfinancial employment commitment: The lottery question. Since 1955, researchers have conducted a series of studies on nonfinancial employment commitment. These studies operationalized work ethic as nonfinancial by asking respondents, "Would

you continue to work if you won the lottery?" (Harpaz, 2011; Highhouse, Zickar, & Yankelevich, 2010; Warr, 1982).

In the first of lottery question studies, Morse and Weiss (1955) interviewed 401 randomly selected employed white men in the United States. Morse and Weiss (1955) found that 80% of these respondents indicated they would continue working following the receipt of a large amount of money. Stratifying the respondents by income and occupations, Morse and Weiss found that workers in farming, middle class, and professional occupations indicated they would continue working after a receipt of a large inheritance.

Vecchio (1980) replicated the Morse and Weiss (1955) study with a slight modification. Instead of receiving a large inheritance, Vecchio asked respondents if they would continue to work after a large win. Parenthetically, Vecchio thought a fantasy of a lottery win was more realistic than a fantasy of inheriting a large sum of money. With a sample of 92% white men and 8% black men, Vecchio found a 39% decrease in the number of men who would opt to continue working compared with Morse and Weiss's 1955 study. Vecchio believed this result suggested that American culture was moving from a culture of a work ethic to a culture of a leisure ethic.

A number of subsequent studies have replicated Vecchio's (1980) study with similar findings, indicating a continuing decline in nonfinancial employment commitment (Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004; Harpaz, 2011; Hedenus, 2012; Highhouse et al., 2010; Warr, 1982). In much of the early research on work commitment via the lottery question,

respondents were white men. Later research has included a broader demographic range and has categorized respondents based on gender, race, income, and other factors.

Work ethic research specific to certain U.S. population groups. Fast food workers are likely to be poor, people of color, and women. The literature suggests there are particularities associated with these groups in relationship to work ethic. This section reviews some key findings specific to people who are poor, people of color, and women.

An interesting finding not specifically related to work ethic but related to low-wage employment suggested that race influences one's ability to receive employment in the low-wage market (Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009). A total of 340 young men of black, Hispanic, and white ethnicities with similar characteristics of height, verbal skills, interactional style, and physical attractiveness participated in a field experiment (Pager et al., 2009). With fictitious resumes supplied by the researchers, the study participants applied to job openings in New York City's low-wage industries. White job applicants received a call back or a job offer 31% of the time, compared with 25.2% for Latinos and 15.2% for blacks (Pager et al., 2009, p. 785). The racial advantage decreased for white participants with a criminal record, but the "white participant with a criminal record still does just as well, if not better, than his minority counterparts with no criminal background" (Pager et al., 2009, p. 785).

Attribution of poverty and unemployment. Research has shown that people who affirm a strong personal endorsement of the Protestant work ethic are likely to blame the poor and the unemployed for their predicament (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Furnham, 1982). In a study of 109 participants, respondents completed three

inventory scales: the Protestant Ethic Scale (Mirels & Garrett, 1971), the Explanations for Unemployment Scale (Furnham, 1982), and the Attitudes to Social Security Scale. Examples of the questions asked on the Protestant Ethic Scale included "Most people who do not succeed in life are just plain lazy"; "Life would have very little meaning if we never had to suffer"; and "I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do" (Furnham, 1982, p. 279).

The scale measuring explanations for unemployment asked participants to respond to an inventory of statements relative to individualistic, societal, and fatalistic explanations of poverty such as "Unemployed people can earn more money on Social Security"; "Trade unions have priced their members out of a job"; and "Unemployment is the result of bad luck" (Furnham, 1982, p. 280). The Attitudes to Social Security Scale asked participants to respond to statements such as "There are too many people receiving Social Security who should be working" and "There would be fewer people on Social Security if there were more jobs" (Furnham, 1982, p. 283). The results of the study indicated that "a high Protestant Work Ethic scorer is likely to explain poverty in terms of idleness and poor money management; wealth in terms of hard work, honesty and saving; unemployment in terms of laziness and lack of effort" (Furnham, 1982, p. 283).

Low-wage workers and work ethic. Findings are mixed in regards to low-wage workers and their connection to work or to their specific jobs. Income as the motivator for working regardless of the nature of the work is a frequent signifier of an instrumental orientation. Work as a means to expand social networks and friendship groups, however,

is another example of an instrumental orientation not directly associated with monetary gain.

Some research suggested that low-wage workers are likely instrumentally connected to working (Karlsson et al., 2012; Morse & Weiss, 1955), and high-income earners are more likely to have non-instrumental orientations. Recently, as the economy has moved closer to a consumer rather than a production economy, some high-income earners have begun to lean towards an instrumental work orientation. One factor that might be the driver of this phenomenon, according to Gabriel (2008) is the perceived need and increased costs of staying in line with one's social class. When Karlsson et al. (2012) asked workers about the quality of their jobs, wages, and relationship with coworkers and managers, low-wage workers responded in ways that indicated an instrumental orientation. According to Karlsson et al. (2012), low-wage workers expressed instrumentality in one of three ways: they viewed work as solely a means of income, viewed their lives as private and outside of the workplace, and/or viewed personal identity as not intertwined with work or work tasks.

Although it was not the response of the majority of workers, Karlsson et al. (2012) also found that many of the low-wage workers interviewed were expressly non-instrumentally oriented towards work. For these low-wage workers, employment was intrinsically rewarding. Some workers spoke of taking personal responsibility for meeting organizational goals, while others expressed valuing their engagement with clients and customers during the course of their work. Paid caregivers called their work a personal calling (Karlsson et al., 2012, p. 100).

Other research has substantiated this finding. In the lottery studies, researchers found that low-wage workers were just as likely as high-income earners to state they would continue working regardless of whether work was required for financial reasons (Hedenus, 2012; Highhouse et al., 2010; Vecchio, 1980). Hennessy (2009) interviewed 25 poor and low-income women. These women spoke of the "transformative character of paid work" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 567). Poor women who work believe they are filling their responsibility to contribute to society (Lavee & Offer, 2012).

This is similar to research findings related to poor men employed in paid labor. According to McDowell (2003), for young white men in low-wage jobs, their endorsement of work ethic reinforced their identities as men. McDowell (2003) found that regardless of their current circumstances, these young men "expected to be able to achieve the rewards of adult life—relative independence, an income from waged work . . . through their own efforts" (p. 843).

In the book *No Shame in My Game* (2000), Newman chronicled the lives of frontline employees of a fast food restaurant. Of note, all of the study participants were people of color. She wrote that the "working poor continue to seek their salvation in the labor market" (p. 61). She continued: "That such a commitment persists when the economic rewards are so minimal is testimony to the durability of the work ethic, to the powerful reach of mainstream American culture, which has always placed work at the center of our collective moral existence" (p. 61).

Yet, there is indication that the distribution of the "rewards" for hard work is predicated on race (DeSante, 2012). In an experimental research project, DeSante found

that regardless of work experience, “American norms and implicit racism serves to uniquely privilege whites” (DeSante, 2012, p. 1). DeSante randomly assigned race to the fictitious applications for government financial assistance. The fictitious groups of applicants were described as excellent workers, poor workers, or having no work histories. Researchers asked 1,000 adult research participants to award to fictitious applicants financial assistance of $900 to $1,500. Work ethic suggests that those with an excellent work history would receive the high end of financial assistance available for disbursement. Conversely, financial assistance for those applications with indications of a poor work history should be at the low end of the possible disbursement amounts (DeSante, 2012). Thus, those who work hard receive rewards and those who do not work hard do not receive rewards.

All fictitious applicants, regardless of race, received financial assistance. However, research participants allocated more financial assistance to white applicants for the same effort of work (excellent, poor, no work history). Moreover, white applicants characterized as poor workers were allocated more financial assistance than black or Hispanic applicants were with poor work histories (DeSante, 2012).

Implications for work ethic research specific to certain populations. What are the implications of these findings in regards to the purpose of this study? The theory of cultural hegemony proposes that marginalized groups consciously or unconsciously consent to their marginalization in order to receive benefits. Gramsci (1992) would argue that the aforementioned research studies confirm his theory of consent, as findings in these studies appear to indicate that low-wage workers uncritically endorse work ethic as

common sense. The lottery studies have found that some low-wage workers would continue to work even without the existence of a financial need. Karlsson et al. (2012) concluded that low-income workers receive both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for working, and McDowell (2003) found that poor men linked masculinity to their endorsement of work ethic.

The Working Poor

Forty-six million Americans were living in poverty in 2010, and of that number, 10.5 million Americans held wage-earning jobs. Broadly speaking, these workers are the working poor, and since 1987, there has been an increasing percentage of working poor among U.S. workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The American poor are commonly defined as those who fail to abide by the written and unwritten societal rules key to economic success in the United States (Smiley, 2012).

Leana et al. (2012) offered a definition of the working poor that differentiates between the working poor and low-wage workers. The working poor are workers from an impoverished background who are currently in low-wage jobs. Low-wage workers are workers who grew up in middle-income or high-income families and who now currently occupy low-wage jobs (Leana et al., 2012). Hence, the working poor are a subset of low-wage workers confined to poverty because of being born to a financially impoverished family (Golden-Biddle & Dutton, 2012). Other scholars have not included family background as a factor in defining the working poor.

Alternative definitions of working poor are people who have received cash welfare benefits for less than 2 years and who have been on and off welfare for a series of

years. The most often used definition defines the working poor as people who are employed and who live below or slightly above the government-established poverty level (Kossek, Huber-Yoder, Castellino, & Lerner, 1997). This translates to $22,050 for a family of four and $10,830 for an individual within the 48 contiguous states. Both the Alaskan and Hawaiian poverty lines are slightly higher than the level for the contiguous states. Parenthetically, the Economic Progress Institute (n.d.) estimated that a family of four in the United States requires an annual income of $57,000 to meet financial needs.

People who are black or people of Hispanic descent are more likely to be working and poor than those who are white or Asian. In the last 50 years, there has been no change in the black/white income gap. In 2010, the median annual income for people of African descent was approximately $32,000, while the median annual income for whites was $64,000 (Plumer, 2013).

Families with children under 18 years old are about four times more likely than families without children under the age of 18 living in the home to be among the working poor. Women with children without a male partner living in the home are more likely to be working and poor than men with children without female partners living in the home (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Educational attainment has an influence on workers' income levels. As workers attain higher levels of education, they are less likely to be working in poverty-level jobs. "Among college graduates, 2.1 percent of those who were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks were classified as working poor, compared with 21.4 percent of those with less than a high school diploma" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Workers holding management and professional positions are less likely to be working and poor compared to workers employed in service jobs (Kalleberg, 2011; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Most store managers in the fast food industry earn just slightly more than line staff. Managers may work on average 50 hours per week but do not receive overtime compensation, which further limits their take-home pay (Royle, 2010).

The low-wage job sector encompasses a range of industries, but the fastest-growing sectors of low-wage jobs are retail and food services. Jobs in the low-wage labor market will account for two of every three new jobs in the United States over the next decade (Dodson, Albelda, Coronado, & Mtshali, 2012).

Key Characteristics of the Precarious Labor Sector

Dual labor market theory is one approach to defining the meaning or features of the labor market (Kwon, 2014). This theory conceptualizes the labor market as comprising two distinct sectors: a primary labor market and a secondary or precarious labor market. The good jobs lie in the primary labor market.

Good jobs are higher paying than jobs in the secondary market, and they include employment benefits such as access to health care insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off. In the primary labor market, workers have autonomy in job tasks and job goals, opportunities for advancement, and control of work schedules (Boushey et al., 2007; Kalleberg, 2011; Kaye, 2000; Kwon, 2014).

Jobs in the precarious labor market are low paying with little or no employment benefits. Workers in these jobs have limited opportunities for advancement to better jobs

and virtually no on-the-job task autonomy (Boushey et al., 2007; Kalleberg, 2011; Kwon, 2014). Additionally, employers penalize precarious labor market workers for certain behaviors that are not penalized in the primary labor market, such as arriving late to work or taking unanticipated time off. Race and gender discrimination is more likely in the precarious labor market (Kaye, 2000).

Wages and income mobility. Salaries in the secondary labor market are lower than salaries in the primary labor market. In general, the salaries paid in the secondary market are minimum wage to slightly above the minimum wage. There are at least two approaches to describing jobs in the precarious market based on wages paid: a basic income approach and the social inclusion approach (Boushey et al., 2007). The basic income approach considers the minimum amount of money it takes an American consumer to purchase commonly used basic goods and services such as food, transportation, and housing (Boushey et al., 2007). This basic income method is the foundation on which the federal government sets the federal poverty guidelines. Many scholars rely on the basic income method to delimit the precarious labor market because it is a generally recognized formula.

There is some debate of the efficacy of the poverty level delineation of precarious labor market wages. An alternative approach to delineating the secondary labor market is the living wage. A living wage is calculated from the same consumption metrics as the basic income approach, such as housing, transportation, and food, but it asks what it takes to live comfortably within a certain community, whereas the basic income standard is adequate living.

The social inclusion approach to determining the secondary labor market based on wages uses a calculation based on median income. Using this approach, commonly those jobs paying less than two-thirds the median income are jobs in the secondary labor market. Some opt to modify the social inclusion calculation, basing it on the median wage of male workers rather than the median wage of all workers. This reduces the influence of gender discrimination on the calculation (Boushey et al., 2007). Nonetheless, gender discrimination has a particular impact on working mothers across all income levels, but especially on women working in the secondary labor market (Budig & Hodges, 2010). Scholars have established a "wage penalty" for motherhood across all incomes. Motherhood disadvantages female workers relative to pay, perceived capability, and employee benefits in comparison to women who are not mothers (Budig & Hodges, 2010). This penalty is most significant for mothers employed in the precarious labor sector.

There are a few primary reasons for the greater impact of the wage penalty on mothers employed in the precarious labor sector (Budig & Hodges, 2010). First, mothers in the precarious labor market in general work for hourly wages. Compared to mothers employed in the primary labor market, mothers employed in the secondary labor market work fewer hours. Second, jobs in the precarious labor market are low-wage jobs. For these reasons, the wage penalty for mothers employed in precarious labor is much harsher than for mothers employed in the primary labor market.

Relatedly, although individual income mobility as well as generational income mobility in the United States has declined since 1980 for all workers, workers in the

secondary labor sector are the least likely workers to experience upward income or career mobility (Boushey et al., 2007; Kalleberg, 2011; Scully-Russ, 2005). Additionally, when workers are able to leave the precarious labor sector for work in the primary labor sector, rather quickly, 41% of these workers return to the precarious labor market (Campbell, 2012). Workers of African descent, women, and people who are undereducated are the most likely workers to remain in the precarious labor market.

Schedule unpredictability. Scheduling practices in the secondary labor market blur the distinctions between full-time and part-time workers. A common practice is controlling labor costs by varying the schedules and number of hours of full-time and part-time workers. In practice, then, even workers who are technically full-time often work part-time hours. Workers officially on the payroll can be without paychecks for periods of weeks or more because managers have not called them into work. Another common practice is the failure to post work schedules in advance, and hence the requirement that workers be available at all times to respond to a possible call to work. Conversely, the employer (with little notice to the workers) may remove workers from the work schedule as the managers see fit (Lambert, 2008). This unpredictability can be especially difficult for single women with children, as can make it difficult for mothers to secure childcare and plan other activities around the care of children, such as attending school meetings or taking children to medical appointments (Lambert, 2008).

Limited task discretion and routinized work. Some scholars define task discretion or autonomy as the ability of workers to exercise discretion in carrying out their work tasks. Standardization of service and products is a commonly held orthodoxy

among low-wage employers. Hence, in general, workers employed in the secondary labor market have little flexibility in how they complete work tasks (Kalleberg, 2011). With standardization comes routinization of tasks and intense task monitoring. .

The Fast Food Industry

Fast food restaurants, also known as quick service restaurants and limited service restaurants, are restaurants having "two or more of the following characteristics: expedited food service, takeout business, limited or no wait staff, and payment tendered prior to receiving food" (Block, Scribner, & DeSalvo, 2004, p. 212). Table 2.3 lists the 15 highest revenue earning fast food restaurants of 2013. Included in this list is an emerging class of restaurant within the industry called fast casual or quick casual. Fast casual restaurants such as Panera and Chipotle, like other fast food restaurants, offer minimal wait staff service, but have menus and ambiance closer to a table service restaurant (Ryu & Han, 2010).

Table 2.3
Top 15 Quick Service Restaurants Based on Sales in 2013

Rank	Company	U.S. sales (Millions)
1	McDonald's	$35,856
2	Subway	12,735
3	Starbucks	11,723
4	Wendy's	8,787
5	Burger King	8,503
6	Taco Bell	7,800
7	Dunkin' Donuts	6,700
8	Pizza Hut	5,700
9	Chick-fil-A	5,053
10	KFC	4,300
11	Panera Bread	4,284
12	Sonic Drive-In (tie)	3,800
12	Domino's (tie)	3,800
14	Carl's Jr./Hardee's	3,400
15	Chipotle Mexican Grill	3,169

Note. From Oches (2014).

In 2009, U.S. fast food chains had global sales of over $150 billion and employed 5 million workers in over 200,000 businesses (Royle, 2010). Fast food businesses located in the United States grossed approximately $600 billion in revenue in 2013 (Wasik, 2013). In 2013, the largest of the fast food chains, McDonald's, "raked in $5.5 billion in profits in 2012—a 27 percent increase in profits over five years—while YUM! Brands posted $1.6 billion in profits" (Owens, 2013, p. 1). Interestingly, the fast food industry "earns most of its profits not from selling food, but from collecting rent from its franchises" (Royle, 2010, p. 251).

Changes in American culture beginning in the 1960s spurred the growth of the fast food industry. Among these cultural changes was the move towards women's emancipation. In record numbers, women who had traditionally prepared homemade

family meals moved out of their traditional role as homemaker to enter the paid labor force (Schlosser, 2001). Schlosser (2001) explained:

> A generation ago, three quarters of the money used to buy food in the United States was spent to prepare meals at home. Today about half of the money used to buy food is spent at restaurants—mainly at fast food restaurants. (p. 81)

Many fast food workers, worker advocacy groups, unions, and others have leveled numerous complaints against the industry, specific franchises, and stores. Complaints include practices that reduce workers' wages by requiring them to "work off the clock" or work through designated breaks. Some workers have allegedly received food in payment for work rather than cash wages (Royle, 2010; Schlosser, 2001).

Individual stores are typically staffed by a store manager, shift managers, and crew (front-end customer service workers, cooks or food preparers) and sometimes janitorial staff. Many of these workers have little experience negotiating with employers, and those that do complain are subject to management retaliation, specifically firing. Human resource practices and policies reinforce to workers that they are easily replaceable. Foreign-born workers have the additional worry of deportation, and they may be unaware of U.S. labor regulations (Royle, 2010; Schlosser, 2001).

In the United States, few fast food industry owners and managers have supported workers' attempts to unionize.. Industry operators and owners have effectively maintained a virtually union-free industry (Boas & Chain, 1976; Royle, 2010; Schlosser, 2001). According to Royle (2010):

> U.S.-owned fast food chains are adept at using a variety of union-busting techniques, which usually involve a combination of legal action, flying squads of managers, buying out contracts and/or harassment and intimidation of union

> supports, which the labour courts or similar bodies are often unable to address in any effective way in the long term. (p. 257)

More than 30 years later, McDonald's workers and other fast food workers, as well as a broader range of low-wage workers including retail employees and domestic workers, have reenergized their efforts to organize. Within the last few years, fast food workers have initiated multiple 1-day strikes, beginning in New York City and now including fast food workers throughout the country. Today's fast food workers are striking because of the same issues that were present in the industry 30 years ago. Workers want a salary increase from minimum wage to a living wage. Additionally, they want the fast food businesses to recognize the rights of workers to organize (Paul, 2013; J. Schmitt & Jones, 2013).

Demographics of workers employed in the fast food industry. In 2013, the fast food industry in the United States employed 4 million people (Statista, 2014). In 2013, U.S.-born employees comprised 84.6% of fast food workers over the age of 20 (J. Schmitt & Jones, 2013). Although the fast food industry employs a growing pool of undocumented immigrants, it is difficult to obtain the exact number. Because of language difficulties, immigrants often have more challenges than the native-born in finding jobs other than fast food services (Royle, 2010). Approximately one-third of McDonald's workers in the United States have no English language skills (Schlosser, 2001). Table 2.4 summarizes the demographic characteristics of fast food industry workers.

Table 2.4
Demographics of Workers Employed in the U.S. Fast Food Industry

Characteristic		Percentage
Age (years)[a]	<19	30%
	20–24	30%
	≥25	40%
Education level completed [b]	High school [c]	85%
	Some college/postsecondary education	33%
Gender	Female	57%
	Male	43%
Have children	Yes	36%
	No	64%
Birthplace	United States	85%
	Outside the United States	15%
Race/ethnicity	White	56%
	Black	18%
	Asian	4%
	Latino(a)	20%

Note: From Royle (2010), Schlosser (2001), and J. Schmitt and Jones (2013).
[a] n = 4,000,000.
[b] n = 2,800,000 (age >19).
[c] Not mutually exclusive

Wages. All but a few frontline workers in the fast food industry receive wages above the minimum wage. Further, fast food workers represent a higher percentage of workers who earn the minimum wage than workers who earn the minimum wage in other American industries (Schlosser, 2001). After an adjustment for inflation, fast food workers earn either the same as or less than they would have earned in 1973 (Royle, 2010).

In 2013, the average wage for frontline workers was $7.25 to $9 an hour. Fast food workers working a 40-hour workweek for a full year will earn $15,020. In the normal course of business, fast food employers vary workers' schedules and number of working hours to suit the demands of the restaurants. Thus, many workers work less than

a 40-hour workweek and as such earn less than $15,000 a year (Loprest, Acs, Ratcliffe, & Vinopal, 2009; Schlosser, 2001). On the other hand, "the top U.S. McDonald's executives continue to earn as much as 150–300 times as much as the new hourly paid U.S. McDonald's employee" (Royle, 2010, p. 254).

Limited task discretion and routinized work. The fast food approach, the management policies adhered to in the industry, mimics much of scientific management (Gould, 2010; Schlosser, 2001). The fast food workers in management positions monitor and control every task assigned to frontline workers. Fast food restaurants have timer systems calculating how many cars visited the drive-through at various times of the day and the length of time it takes workers to complete a transaction (Allon, Federgruen, & Pierson, 2011).

Workers are instructed to follow highly detailed procedures with no allowance for discretionary modifications (Royle, 2010). Interestingly, there is evidence that highly bureaucratic systems can decrease organizational effectiveness. For example, store policies requiring frontline staff to have all unforeseen customer requests approved by managerial staff impede the frontline workers' ability to provide quick service to the customer. Thus, a rule that apparently benefits an organization's effectiveness (getting managerial approval) also constrains its effectiveness (slowing down response) (Royle, 2010, p. 410).

Benefits of fast food jobs. Gould (2010) argued against the widespread criticism of the employment practices in the fast food industry. According to Gould (2010), critics unjustly malign fast food jobs and the industry as a whole. Gould undertook a study to

examine the employment relationship between workers and locally owned McDonald's outlets in Australia.

Gould (2010) surveyed a random selection of 1,000 crewmembers and 95 managers in a McDonald's franchise located in suburban Australia. Gould used an independent means t-test to compare manager and crew responses. The following is an example of a pair of questions from the survey. For the crew, "If I do a good job, I'll be offered more hours of work," and for the manager, "Crew are rewarded for good performance by being given the option of working additional hours" (Gould, 2010, p. 792). Gould's (2010) regression analysis of the responses resulted in mixed findings. While workers did experience the work as routine and lacking complexity, fast food managers modified practices and procedures when appropriate. Employment policies offered employees job security, the possibility of promotion for crewmembers, and the opportunity for a meaningful career. Nonetheless, Gould (2010) admitted, "Many crews may be either unaware of or uninterested in these benefits" (p. 799). Further, Gould also argued that some people have personalities suited to repetitive work and enjoy the lack of complexity of the work.

Summary

This section of the literature review has provided a general framework of the practice context for this study. Engrained in the American culture, the Protestant work ethic is a contributor to other American cultural elements such as meritocracy and the American Dream. Americans perceive hard work as bringing intrinsic and/or extrinsic rewards.

The Protestant work ethic has its origins in Calvinism, which suggested that those who worked hard had spiritual salvation. Poverty was a manifestation of the lack of spiritual salvation. Weber (1905/2001) claimed the Calvinists' association of hard work with godliness was one of the reasons for the growth of Western capitalism.

There is empirical evidence, however, that the Protestant work ethic is no longer solely the providence of the religious. Giorgi and Marsh (1990), as well as McHoskey (1994), confirmed that there is no link between the Protestant work ethic and religion. Further, there is evidence suggesting a correlation between work ethic and atheism (Giorgi & Marsh, 1990; Wiseman & Young, 2013).

From Weber's (1905/2001) *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has grown a vast amount of research interest in work ethic. In much of the subsequent research, scholars conceptualized work ethic as individual work-related attributes or behaviors. This stream of work ethic literature has suffered from the complexity of naming and defining work ethic and its related constructs. Examples of work ethic–related or overlapping constructs are work centrality, job involvement, work values, work orientation, noneconomic work commitment, and work commitment, among others. Research into work ethic resides in multiple academic disciplines, including religion, psychology, economics, management, and sociology. More than 20 scales measure work ethic as an individual attribute. The scale created by Mirels and Garrett (1971) is the most frequently found in research.

There is empirical evidence suggesting it is increasingly difficult for Americans to move up the economic ladder. It is especially difficult for some groups of the American

citizenry, such as people of color and women. Empirical evidence indicates that intergenerational mobility in America has decreased over time across all income levels (Boushey et al., 2007; Kalleberg, 2011).

Fast food jobs, among the lowest-paid jobs in the United States, are part of the precarious job market. These jobs are characterized as such not only because of the low wages paid, but also because of their lack of workplace benefits, stable work schedules, and the opportunity for upward mobility, as well as the fact that they are overly monitored and routinized. The earliest documented attempt at organizing among fast food workers was in 1998 when a 17-year-old worker led a 6-day strike against her employer, a McDonald's located in Virginia. The recent resurgence in fast food workers' organizing efforts began in November 2012 (Royle & Towers, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural construct of work ethic as a legitimizing myth and the role this myth plays in the work lives of fast food workers working and living in New York City while in poverty. The following section explores the constructs of cultural hegemony and SDT. These theories form this study's theoretical foundation.

Theoretical Framework

This section begins with a discussion of the theory of cultural hegemony, the foundation of SDT, followed by a discussion of SDT.

Cultural Hegemony

This study relied on Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of cultural hegemony for its theoretical framework. Scholars have constructed Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony from his personal letters and writings during his incarceration in fascist Italy. Found in these materials are not a fully developed theory, but rather a collection of ideas. Antonio Gramsci died in prison in 1937. English translations of Gramsci's writings first appeared in the 1960s.

Although there is no definitive definition of cultural hegemony in Gramsci's writings (Lears, 1985), in his letters written during his imprisonment, Gramsci (1971) suggested that hegemony was

> 'Spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group: this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 12)

Notably, Gramsci understood society as two sectors, the state and civil society. According to Gramsci (1971), government directly dominates the population through laws and regulations. For example, government regulates drivers by traffic signs and signals and fines or incarceration for disobeying the traffic signs and signals. Civil society encompasses such institutions as education, religion, workplaces, and the economy, which indirectly assert domination through common sense (culture).

By common sense, Gramsci meant "the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any epoch" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 625). The dominant groups, having more access to social institutions

than the subordinate groups, use their privileged access to institutions to propagate ideologies sustaining the dominant class's privilege and power while at the same time sustaining the subordinate position of marginality.

According to Gramsci (1971), subordinate groups consciously or unconsciously consent to domination because they receive a benefit from the system of hegemony. For example, people consent to precarious work conditions because of the desire for wages. Paulo Freire (2000) drew from Gramsci in his articulation of conscientisation (emancipatory learning). Freire thought subordinate groups were complicit in their subordination through their passivity. The goal of cultural hegemony is to control social interactions and reduce the possibility of protest or revolution (Burrell & Morgan, 1994).

It is important to note, as Rueschemeyer (2004) has, that the effect of cultural hegemony "remains largely invisible to those whose views, values, and preferences it shapes, and they are taken for granted by those whose material and immaterial interests find expression under the hegemonic status quo" (p. 80). For example, research has found a strong correlation between income inequality and a strong endorsement of work ethic (Corneo & Neher, 2014). Yet, work ethic is so entrenched in the American cultural system that it goes unremarked on by the vast majority of people on which it imposes social order to benefit the dominant group.

Social Dominance Theory

SDT has roots in the work of Gramsci as well as early Marxism, social identity theory, authoritarian personality theory, and sociological theories on institutional discrimination. Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (1999) are the scholars credited with

developing SDT(Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004; Van Lange et al., 2012).

SDT posits that interacting macro, meso, and micro social systems create social inequality, and all levels of the social environment (institutions, groups, and individuals) are responsible for the continuance of social inequalities. Individuals and social structures produce and reproduce group-based hierarchies and group-based oppression based on factors such as race, ethnicity, economic class, gender, immigration status, and sexual orientation.

Three social identifiers stratify the hierarchies. The social identifiers are age (older people have social authority over younger people), gender (males are dominant over females), and an arbitrary group consisting of groups subject to racism, classism, and homophobia or other forms of discrimination (Romm, 2013, p. 112; Sidanius et al., 2004). Social hierarchies are tenacious but adaptable (Van Lange et al., 2012). Three processes produce and reproduce group-based social hierarchies: aggregated institutional discrimination, behavioral asymmetry, and aggregated individual discrimination.

Aggregated institutional discrimination. Sidanius et al. (2004) described institutional or macro forces producing social stratification in the following manner: Many social institutions (e.g., schools, organized religions, marriage practices, financial houses) and many powerful individuals disproportionately allocate desired goods—such as prestige, wealth, power, food, and health care—to members of dominant and privileged groups, while directing undesirable things—such as dangerous work, disdain,

imprisonment, and premature death—toward members of less powerful groups (Sidanius et al., 2004, p. 847).

Sidanius (1999) proposed that societal institutions maintain social stratification through the establishment of rules and procedures, which disproportionately distribute social value across social statuses (p. 41). An illustration of this component of SDT is the recent judicial actions reducing preferential treatment for university admissions for applicants from marginalized groups, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. On the other hand, children of university alumni continue to receive preferential treatment in response to their applications for university admission. In this respect, institutions' action can be either hierarchy enhancing or hierarchy attenuating (Sidanius, 1999; Van Lange et al., 2012).

Systemic terror also helps to sustain social stratification (Sidanius, 1999). By terror, Sidanius (1999) meant "the use of violence or threat of violence disproportionately directed against subordinates" (p. 41). To deliberately or inadvertently exercise control over the behavior of marginalized groups by exacting punishment for deviating from norms propagated by the elites defines terror.

Society deploys three types of terror to maintain social hierarchy: official terror, semiofficial terror, and unofficial terror (Sidanius, 1999). Subordinate groups are disproportionately the victims of all three forms of terror. Governmental bodies sanction official terror. Past regulations that sanctioned legal segregation in the American South are an example of official terror.

People in dominant groups exert semiofficial terror by behaving in ways tacitly sanctioned by governmental organizations that terrorize members of marginalized groups. New York City's stop and frisk policing policies exemplify semiofficial terrorism. New York City police officers have tacit approval from their commanders to stop and frisk young men without cause (Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007; Simmons, 2014).

Finally, unofficial terror involves behaviors from private individuals against members of subordinate groups. These behaviors do not have overt governmental approval, but may enjoy tacit approval from governmental entities. Sidanius (1999) suggested the actions of the Ku Klux Klan as an illustration of unofficial terror.

Behavioral asymmetry. The concept of behavioral asymmetry distinguishes SDT from other conflict theories and theories of social stratification (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004). According to Sidanius (1999), other models of understanding conflict or social stratification theorized that inequalities exist because of the actions of dominant groups. SDT, however, recognizes that "systems of group-based social hierarchy are not maintained simply by the oppressive activities of dominants or the passive compliance of subordinates, but rather by the coordinated and collaborative activities of both dominants and subordinates" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 45).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire (2000) proposed similarly to behavioral asymmetry that subordinate groups are complicit in their subordination. Freire asserted that subordinate groups accept their subordinate roles. In addition, subordinate groups identify more with the dominant group than they identify with members of their own group. Unlike SDT, which posits that it is nearly impossible to dismantle social

stratifications, Freire believed members of subordinate groups can dismantle structures of social inequality through the pedagogy of conscientisation (emancipatory learning) (Freire, 2000).

Barker's (1993) scholarship on the subject is of particular interest to organizational scholars. To explore the nature of values and norms established by self-managed work teams, Barker (1993) conducted an ethnographic study of a technological manufacturing firm that a few years earlier transitioned from hierarchical management to self-managed teams. To summarize his findings, Barker (1993) concluded that there was more in-group pressure to conform to established values and norms among frontline workers than there was from external forces such as management.

In a different study on intergroup relations in organizations, using quantitative methodology, Aiello, Pratto, and Pierro (2013) explored the use of power in organizations using SDT as a model. The research had two purposes. The first purpose was to ascertain the relationship between employees' social dominance orientation (SDO) and their views on acceptable supervisory tactics. Second, the research tested how employees' SDO correlated with what supervisory tactics the employees wanted their supervisors to use towards them (p. 487).

In this study, 184 employees of an Italian communication company and 95 hospital physicians with supervisory responsibilities completed a self-administered questionnaire. This enabled the researchers to quantify the respondents' SDO and preference for specific supervisory tactics. The study categorized supervisory tactics as either soft (rewards) or harsh (coercive).

Research findings indicated that virtually all subordinates preferred soft supervisory tactics, but workers with higher SDO had a higher likelihood of complying with harsh supervisory tactics. Supervisors preferred to employ soft supervisory tactics, but supervisors higher on the SDO scale were more likely to employ harsh supervisory tactics. Aiello et al. (2013) concluded from these findings that workers with high SDO are complicit in their own oppression by actively sustaining power asymmetry (p. 491).

Aggregated individual discrimination. Aggregated individual discrimination refers to the individual acts of discrimination by one person against another person. Acts of discrimination can be overt, but they are often unconsciously or unintentionally committed (Sidanius, 1999). Aggregates of individual acts of discrimination act to sustain macro and meso levels of social hierarchy.

Sidanius (1999) believed that people inherently have a bias towards or against social equality. The definition of SDO is "a very general individual differences orientation expressing the value that people place on nonegalitarian and hierarchically structured relationships among social groups" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 61). Individuals' SDO is rooted in socialization, situational context, and temperament (Sidanius, 1999, p. 77).

SDO is measurable. SDO scales have been tested and proven reliable (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius, 1999). The scales rate responses to such items as "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups" and "Group equality should be our ideal."

Legitimizing Myths

Legitimizing myths is the primary theoretical component of SDT of interest to this dissertation. SDT draws its theory of legitimizing myths from the scholarship of the

Italian Marxist and political activist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) and specifically his writings on cultural hegemony.

Like hegemony, legitimizing myths sustain group-based social hierarchies (Sidanius, 1999). Unlike Gramsci, who understood the ideology of the dominant class as being false, SDT theorists believe that ideologies can be either true or false. A broad swath of society believes legitimizing myths to be true. Legitimizing myths are either hierarchy enhancing or hierarchy attenuating. Hierarchy-enhancing myths work to sustain social inequalities. Conversely, hierarchy-attenuating myths work to reduce social inequalities.

The degree to which legitimizing myths are able to enhance or attenuate social inequalities depends on four factors: consensuality, embeddedness, certainty, and meditational strength (Sidanius, 1999, p. 46). Consensuality refers to the degree to which members of society share an ideology such as "stereotypes, attributions, cosmologies, predominant values or discourses, shared representations, etc. to organize and justify social relationships" (Van Lange et al., 2012, p. 427). Embeddedness means the degree to which an ideology is entrenched in systems of culture, religion, economics, and other social forms that support their production and reproduction (Sidanius, 1999). As an example, religious institutions and the American economic system both serve to propagate the legitimizing myth of the Protestant work ethic. Work is rewarding religiously and financially. Work ethic also illustrates the notion of certainty. Certainty is the degree to which an ideology is a taken-for-granted truth.

Most important as a definitional aspect of legitimizing myths is the degree to which the myth mediates between the "desire to establish or maintain group based social hierarchy . . . and the endorsement of HE [hierarchy-enhancing] or HA [hierarchy-attenuating] social policies" (Sidanius, 1999, p. 48). Sidanius (1999) illustrated this aspect with the ideology of the Protestant work ethic. According to him, people who endorse the Protestant work ethic are the most likely to oppose government support for the poor (p. 48). Supporting the Protestant work ethic is a socially acceptable way of justifying social inequality (Sidanius, 1999, p. 48).

In Figure 2.1, the boxes and arrows on the left illustrate the relationship between an individual's SDO and his or her experience and psychological characteristics. In the middle left column under the heading legitimizing myths are Sidanius's (1999) examples of hierarchy-enhancing myths, and the right column shows examples of hierarchy-attenuating myths. The boxes and arrows on the far right illustrate the complex relationship between individual and institutional discrimination, behavioral asymmetry, and the maintenance of group-based social hierarchy.

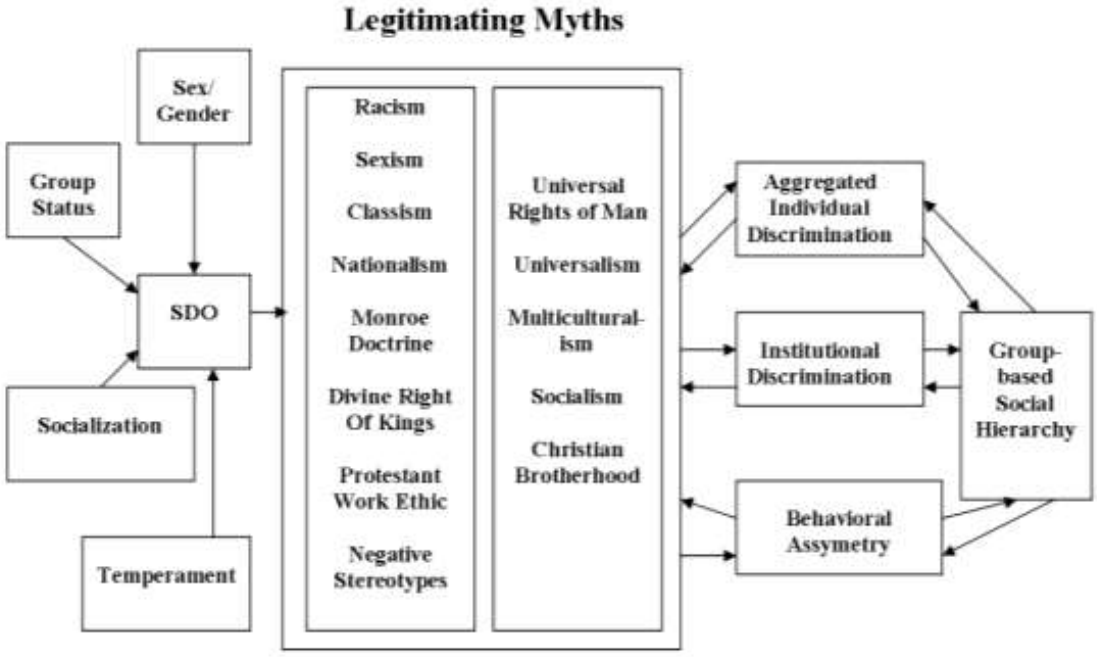

Figure 2.1. Legitimating myths. SDO indicates social dominance orientation. Reprinted with permission from J. Sidanius, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression,* 1999, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, p. 40.

In a quantitative study relevant to this dissertation, Küpper, Wolf, and Zick (2010) explored Europeans' endorsement of anti-immigrant prejudice. To test the SDT model, Küpper et al. (2010) used representative samples from eight European countries of survey data collected in 2008 by telephone interviews (Küpper et al., 2010). The sample consisted of stratifications by social status defined by income and migrant background.

The researchers explored two legitimizing myths: anti-immigration beliefs (hierarchy-enhancing) and diversity beliefs (hierarchy-attenuating). The researchers asked 1000 interviewees to respond to statements such as "There is too much immigration" and "Diversity is good for the country." Based on the results of the

statistical analysis, Küpper et al. (2010) proposed that SDO is not stagnant. It fluctuates depending on which outgroups are involved. This is true across social statuses. Additionally, this study confirmed SDO as a predictor of intention to discriminate and identified prejudice and pro-diversity beliefs (to a lesser extent) as legitimizing myths (Küpper et al., 2010).

Summary

Fast food jobs are among the lowest-paid jobs in the United States. Further, these jobs have the characteristics of jobs in the precarious job market, with low wages, routine work, and unpredictable work schedules. Fast food workers have been struggling to organize for increased salaries and benefits for decades, with a recent resurgence of this effort. Empirical research suggests that some Americans of color and women have a more difficult time in comparison to other Americans when it comes to access to employment in the precarious labor market.

The theories of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, 1992; Lears, 1985) and social dominance (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004) frame this study. Cultural hegemony proposes that marginalized population groups result from the oppressive nature of the dominant culture and by acquiring the marginalized populations' consent to its authority. SDT (Sidanius, 1999) views society as grouped into a social hierarchy. The interaction of macro, meso, and micro forces sustains this hierarchy. Some institutions or ideologies, however, influence the enhancement of social inequalities or influence the attenuation of social inequalities. Similarly, legitimizing myths work to

either enhance or attenuate societal inequalities. For Sidanius (1999), work ethic is a legitimizing myth.

The theoretical premise of this study was as follows. Work ethic as a legitimizing myth works to enhance the marginalization of frontline workers in the fast food industry. Additionally, these workers consent consciously or unconsciously to marginalization. The corresponding research question for this study is: What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations? This chapter has provided the foundation for the arguments embedded in this dissertation. The next chapter explains the research design and methods used in this study.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research explored the experiences of workers struggling with poverty as they advocated for higher wages and better working conditions by participating in episodic work stoppages, demonstrations, and other forms of activism. One research question framed this study: What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?

Critical Paradigm

The critical paradigm rooted in critical theory was the lens for this study. Central to critical theory are the works of Karl Marx (1818–1883), Georg Lukács (1885–1971), and Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). The Frankfort School and its theorists Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), and Jürgen Habermas (1929–) were the primary contributors to the development of critical theory (Burrell & Morgan, 1994). The fundamental belief that positivist research methodologies fail to fully describe or explain lived experiences is core to critical theory and, in a sense, the failure of positivism was the catalyst for critical theory's development (Burrell & Morgan, 1994). Contemporary critical subjects include queer studies, feminism, critical race studies, and studies from the vantage point of all who are not part of the elite class.

Over time, social values linked to politics, culture, economics, ethnicity and race, as well as gender and sexuality, among others, shape reality. From this process of reality

shaping, common sense, or otherwise taken-for-granted social structures, emerge. Society wrongly accepts these social structures as real (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These social structures, however, are a false reality because the social values from which they emanated wrongly attached significance and voice to the elite and diminished the importance and voice of all other members of society, giving rise to many forms of human misery (Wright, 2013, p. 2).

Critical theorists work to alleviate human misery by challenging taken-for-granted social structures and their underlying social values. By challenging what is taken for granted, critical theorists work to emancipate the marginalized by supporting their quest to free themselves from oppressive social structures and ideologies (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Freire, 2000; Scherer, 2009).

Epistemologically embedded in the critical paradigm is the assumption that there exists an inextricable link between the researcher and research participants. Making no claim of objectivity, critical theorists recognize that their values and the values of the research participants influence the process of research as well as the findings, while recognizing that the interaction between the values of the researcher and research participants constrains what is knowable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Conversely, researchers in the positivism camp claim objectivity and yet support unacknowledged conservative and oppressive social structures and values (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012).

Qualitative Research

The umbrella term "qualitative research" encompasses a range of methodological approaches and theoretical paradigms. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the

essence of qualitative research is twofold: "(1) a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and (2) an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism" (p. 6). Qualitative methodological approaches include ethnography, case study, and phenomenology, and compatible research paradigms are interpretative, critical, and postmodern, among others (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Participant observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis are the methods of qualitative research.

The qualitative approach permits researchers to acquire rich descriptions of lived experiences without reducing the complexity and nuances of these experiences (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Additionally, qualitative methodology has the capacity to interact with empirical materials that are intangible, such as values, social norms, beliefs, roles, and other constructed cultural elements (Mack et al., 2005, p. 1). Ideas such as work ethic, culture, poverty, and the intersectionality of gender, class, and race are rich with complexities, nuances, and contradictions. As such, qualitative methodology, specifically ethnography, was the appropriate methodological approach for this study.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a body of knowledge that includes ethnographic theory and a substantial number of studies of culture called ethnographies, but ethnography is also a methodological approach with specific research techniques. These techniques are a systematic method of creating comprehensive portraits of cultures from the perspective of cultural members (Spradley, 1979, p. 10). Ethnographers create cultural portraits by

observing members of the culture, interviewing key informants, and examining cultural artifacts while in the cultural group's natural environment (Spradley, 1979).

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2012), six principles guide ethnographic practice:

- Approaching the research holistically
- Contextualizing the research in relationship to the broader society
- Confirming with cultural members the veracity of interpretations and findings
- Developing comprehensive portraits of cultural groups
- Remaining judgment neutral
- Recognizing that exploring culture is the core of ethnography research

It is important to note that judgment neutrality contradicts a critical paradigm. Objectivity in any research, including positivistic research, is impossible because researchers and research participants come into the research relationship with experiences, biases, beliefs, and values (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Rather than aspiring to neutrality, critical theorists claim their biases and make them transparent to their partners (research participants, other collaborators, and the general public) in the research process. Nonneutrality and transparency were values that were in the forefront of this study's research process.

Additionally, scholars have a divergence of opinion about the nature of culture. For example, they disagree on the elements of culture shared by cultural groups. Is culture integrated (shared), differentiated, or fragmented (Martin, 2002)? There are also

numerous definitions of culture. The subject matter and assumptions of this dissertation align with Mills's (1988) definition of culture:

> Cultural arrangements, of which organizations are an essential segment, are seen as manifestations of a process of ideational development located within a context of definite material conditions. It is a context of dominance (males over females/ owners over workers) but also of conflict and contradiction in which class and gender, autonomous but overdetermined, are vital dynamics. Ideas and cultural arrangements confront actors as a series of rules of behavior; rules that, in their contradictions, may variously be enacted, followed, or resisted. (p. 366)

Critical Ethnography

According to Thomas (1993), "critical ethnography is traditional ethnography with a political purpose" (p. 4). Like critical theorists, ethnographers in this tradition have an openly stated political and social agenda, which is to address social inequities by changing the social environment (Madison, 2011). Through their scholarly research, critical ethnographers reduce the production of social inequities by uncovering socially jaundiced cultural narratives (Madison, 2011).

Embracing subjectivity, critical ethnographers use statements of positionality as well as the practices of research to forthrightly acknowledge the ways in which their own beliefs, values, and biases guide research interests, methodological approaches, and interpretations of phenomena. Questions of inequality related to social position, gender, race, and ethnicity are at the forefront in critical ethnography. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) noted that these concepts are present in all research. Yet, most researchers not engaged in critical research ignore or discount manifestations of oppression.

To be critical, ethnography must have three characteristics (Simon & Dippo, 1986). First, research must be of interest to the research participants, and researchers are

obligated to interact with the empirical material in ways that respect research participants as equals to the researchers in the research process. Second, "the work must be situated, in part, within a public sphere that allows it to become the starting point for the critique and transformation of the conditions of oppressive and inequitable moral and social regulations." Third, critical ethnographers must admit their research is "constituted and regulated through historical relations of power and existing material conditions" (Simon & Dippo, 1986, p. 197).

Unlike traditional ethnography, which strives for value neutrality, critical ethnography has emancipatory goals, which means that critical ethnographers want to be a vehicle to support oppressed people's quest to free themselves from the restrictions, governance, and/or power of others (Boog, 2003). Critical ethnographers support the emancipation of oppressed groups by identifying and naming social policies as well as practices sustaining inequality (Anderson & Herr, 2005; Scherer, 2009; Thomas, 1993). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) argued that the emancipatory impulse is central to critical methodology.

Qualitative researchers occupy one of three distances between themselves and research participants: ventriloquist, voice, or activist (M. Fine, 1994; Madison, 2011). Qualitative researchers as ventriloquists claim that the research produced by them is devoid of their personal values, beliefs, and opinions, or they claim they have sufficiently obscured their personal values, beliefs, and opinions, making the researcher invisible within the text of the research. "Ventriloquy means never having to say 'I' in the text" (M. Fine, 1994, p. 19).

M. Fine (1994) argued that critical ethnographers in particular are guilty of hiding behind the notion of voice. To her, voice is ventriloquy in disguise (M. Fine, 1994; Madison, 2011). In uncritically accepting the unadulterated voice of research participants as truth, researchers fail to confront the way in which research participants promulgate dominant discourses, such as racism, misogyny, homophobia, or classism. Inherent in this failure to critique is the assumption that research participants do not have the cognitive ability to engage in critical thinking. This approach also allows researchers to hide their own political and social beliefs. Of particular concern, by privileging the voices of research participants, researchers may fall into the trap of romanticizing lived experiences, especially when those experiences differ from the experiences of the researcher (M. Fine, 1994). No research approach is liberating if researchers fail to regard research participants as their cognitive equals (Freire, 2000). In romanticizing, researchers make research participants unequal and invisible.

In truly critical research, researchers are activists (Deetz & Alvesson, 2000; M. Fine, 1994; Madison, 2011). Activist researchers clearly state their political posture. They serve as an advocate for the research participants and the issues that affect their lives. In truly critical research, researchers use their position within the social hierarchy to suggest alternative ways of organizing (Deetz & Alvesson, 2000; M. Fine, 1994; Madison, 2011). Of upmost importance, truly critical research is a social justice project.

Positionality

Researcher positionality is the degree to which the researcher positions himself or herself as an insider or outsider in relationship to the research participants and/or the

research site (Anderson & Herr, 2005). Positionality is also the acknowledgment by the researcher of his or her position of privilege and power in relationship to the research participants. "Positionality . . . recognizes that . . . texts are always partial and incomplete; socially, culturally, historically, racially, and sexually located; and can therefore never represent any truth except those truths that exhibit the same characteristics" (Lincoln, 1995). Some scholars believe any act of research is an act of domination (Madison, 2011).

The idea of researcher positionality is fundamental to critical theory and its related research methodologies. Simon and Dippo (1986) alluded to the importance of transparency in regards to research positionality in their third point in the characterization of critical ethnography connecting research to power and history. Anderson and Herr (2005) wrote that clarity in positionality is essential when researchers seek to construct research that is both ethical and valid. Further, some scholars believe that reflective positionality discourse is so important that they reframed critical ethnography as reflective ethnography (Madison, 2011).

The insider-outside positionality is a continuum. Patricia Collins (1990), a scholar of African American feminism, coined the term *outsider within* to reflect the positionality of researchers who are members of marginalized groups. The body and biography of the research influences the degree to which the researcher has access to the phenomenon and the degree to which the researcher develops meaningful insights from the research experience (England, 1994).

Murillo used the term *mojado ethnography* to describe his experience as a researcher of Mexican descent conducting research within his home culture. *Mojado* is a pejorative in the Spanish language for Mexican and other Latinos living in the United States as undocumented immigrants (Madison, 2011).

Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) wrote,

> My experience as an educational ethnographer, to date, can sometimes be described as traveling those blurred boundaries when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist, and how one emergent and intermittent identity continuously informs the other. (p. 166)

Noblit et al. (2004) suggested that a critical ethnographer define his or her positionality by reflecting on self (cultural heritage, culture influence on experience, etc.) in relationship to others (cultural heritage of research participants, etc.) and from self to system (what is known about the people under study). Madison (2011) posited these additional questions for researchers to answer:

> What are we going to do with the research, and whom will it ultimately benefit? Who gives us the authority to make claims about where we have been? How will our work make a difference in people's lives? What difference does it make when the ethnographer himself [or herself] comes from a history of colonization and disenfranchisement? (p. 8)

Researcher's Positionality

Adler and Hansen (2012) challenged scholars to be passionately involved in the communities and issues they research. With courage, conviction, and passion, researchers can disrupt the status quo for the benefit of marginalized people. My passion to be of

service to people who look like me and people who currently exist in the circumstances from which I came drove the choice of this dissertation topic.

Noblit et al. (2004) suggested that scholars writing positionality statements declare their cultural heritage. Quite interestingly, Noblit et al. (2004) suggested that researchers answer a follow-up question: "How does the researcher know her cultural heritage?" To answer Noblit et al.'s (2004) question, my cultural heritage is 16% Asian, 23% white, and 61% African. Through DNA testing, I know this to be true. However, I believe race, ethnicity, gender, and class, among other classifications, are socially constructed groupings. I also believe in the existence of commonalities of values, norms, beliefs, and ideology among those assigned to the socially constructed groupings of race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.

I am a black woman born to a black father from the American South and an immigrant mother from Liverpool, England. I am a New Yorker from a large working-class family. I have personally experienced poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to health care, bad jobs, and other disadvantages affecting people struggling with poverty. However, I am troubled because a lot of research and discourse about people who struggle with poverty is a recounting of the known deficits correlated with poor people and poverty. As do those who are not struggling with poverty, people struggling with poverty experience the joy of accomplishments, families, and communities. Conventional research does not reflect the complete picture of impoverished families and communities.

Membership in multiple marginalized groups is integral to my research perspective. It is the reason I sought a research methodology with a social justice mission

(Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). It is the reason I favor the critical perspective. I believe everyone has the right to liberty, life, and the pursuit of happiness and to whom much has been given much is required.

My biography is a bridge between the research participants and me. The research participants are workers who live in poverty. Many of these workers are people of color and women. We share much in common. I have been where they are. The similarity of biographies with the research participants brings me insight and access to the research participants and the subject matter that is unavailable to other researchers. Yet, I am an outsider.

The positionality of the researcher reflects the degree to which the researcher is an insider or outsider for the community of interest. Insider/outsider is not a dichotomy, but a continuum. As a member of marginalized groups, I am an outsider within (Collins, 1990). Still, I also recognize that my current socioeconomic status and my education place me in a position of social and financial privilege in respect to the research participants.

Recognizing my position of privilege increasingly makes me uncomfortable because perceived power and unequal distribution of benefits are accompaniments of privilege. I am uncomfortable because research privileges the knowledge of the researcher over the knowledge of the research participants. I am uncomfortable because researchers as opposed to the research participants are the receiver of the direct benefits of the research. The researchers are the recipients of the accolades, the degrees, and the opportunities to publish in scholarly journals. This is something I have yet to reconcile.

During the field experience for this study, I met many people who were on the frontlines in the fast food industry and on the frontlines in the Fight for $15. Through our conversations and interactions, I understood that I shared a commonality of background and life experience with many of those whom I encountered. Yet, there were some stark differences—the obvious being that I was a doctoral student and they were low-wage workers. I had a level of class and educational privilege that as fast food workers they did not.

However, another difference was not as obvious. Many of the workers involved in the Fight for $15 believed that they could dismantle a systemic barrier to economic opportunity. They believed they could win the Fight for $15, and at least initially I did not. I could not reconcile that my view of structures such as capitalism would concede power to the marginalized.

Yet, gradually through my interactions and connections with the workers as members of the Fight for $15, I began to see $15 an hour for fast food workers as a possibility. *I believe that we will win. I believe that we will win!* became my favorite rally chant. The workers won.

New York City is on track to reach a $15 minimum wage for fast food workers by December 31, 2018, and the rest of the state by July 1, 2021. Across the nation, municipalities have responded to the activism of low-wage workers. The cities of Seattle and Tacoma have instituted a $15 minimum wage. The county of Los Angeles will have a minimum wage of $15 by 2020. Additionally, in 2017, the minimum wage will have increased in 21 states, at least 22 cities, four counties, and one region (Sahadi, 2016).

My parents told us if we worked hard, financial security was an assurance. At the same time, however, my parents' actions belied what they said. My parents talked the American Dream, but conveyed to me that black girls living in the United States do not get to be president. Yet, despite experiencing the wins of the Fight for $15, I still believe that my parents were right. The marginalized do not get to be president.

Study Setting

In May 2015, under the authority granted decades ago by the New York State legislature and under the direction of governor Andrew Cuomo, the State Labor Commission empaneled a Wage Board to investigate and make recommendations on an increase in the minimum wage in the New York State fast food industry. "Under New York State law, a Wage Board can suggest changes to the minimum wage in a specific industry or job classification if it finds that wages are insufficient to provide for the life and health of workers within that industry or classification" (New York State Governor's Office, 2015).

During the summer of 2015, the appointed members of the Wage Board—the mayor of the City of Buffalo; the CEO of Gilt, an online seller of high-end products; and the secretary/treasurer of Service Employees International Union—held four hearings across the state of New York. The board listened to many hours of testimony from fast food workers, franchise owners, policy makers, the public, academics, and advocates for and against raising the minimum wage of fast food workers. In September of 2015, this board recommended and the governor ratified a $15 minimum wage for New York State workers in the fast food industry. Interestingly, when Governor Cuomo, a Democrat,

came into office in 2011, he attempted to raise the minimum wage of state workers to $10.50, but to his disappointment, Cuomo could not get the bill past the Republican-controlled legislature. As such, Cuomo was prime to take up the fight for an increase in minimum wage for fast food workers.

This action by the Wage Board was a culmination of a wage struggle. The wage struggle began in November of 2012, when fast food workers in Brooklyn, New York, led what was to become the first of a wave of organized worker strikes and rallies with the goal of moving the minimum wage for fast food workers to $15 an hour, improving working conditions, and allowing unionization. Since November 2012, there have been numerous work actions under the group known as the Fight for $15 nationally or known locally in New York as Fast Food Forward. The number of workers who participated ranged from a couple of hundred to thousands, including workers from all of the major fast food chains including McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Dunkin' Donuts, and Starbucks. The worker center that served as a participant recruitment site for this study (referred to here as "TWC"), with the help of the Service Employees International Union, has acted as the lead organizational entity supporting the Fight for $15.

Like other worker centers, the TWC is a "community-based and community-led organization that engages in a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing to provide support to low-wage workers" (J. R. Fine, 2006). The TWC is a membership organization for New York State's low- and moderate-income workers, with a membership of 266. Members pay a $10 monthly membership fee. In addition to workplace justice, staff and members of TWC engaged in advocacy, the development of

policy papers, and direct action on issues of affordable housing, foreclosure prevention, climate justice, and educational equity.

In addition to TWC's physical site, the Fight for $15 work actions, rallies, and demonstrations served as the research setting for this dissertation. Many of the Fight for $15 actions occurred on the streets of New York City and other cities around the state. Additionally, one action occurred in Chicago at the headquarters of McDonald's. The Wage Board hearings were additional sites for the collection of empirical material. Finally, many other sites, such as vans, hotel lobbies, various offices, and other locations, served as study settings.

Engaging the Empirical Material

The hallmark of ethnography is fieldwork. Fieldwork is a process of immersing oneself inside a culture of others or exploring one's own native culture. Ethnographers' empirical methods are many. The most often used methods are observation, interviews, and the analysis of documents and other artifacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This dissertation included all of these ethnographic methods.

Interviews

Scholars have recognized the essentiality of interviewing in ethnographic research (Creswell, 2012; Madison, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Spradley, 1979). The research interview provides a means of exploring cultural patterns, behaviors, and experiences not readily accessible or graspable through observation alone. However, in this study, the researcher did not privilege the empirical material encountered during the interview

process over empirical material encountered through other methods (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Recruitment. Through purposeful sampling, the researcher recruited 25 workers employed in fast food stores who met all of the following criteria:

- Were at least 20 years old (to capture adult workers)
- Were employed in a fast food restaurant in New York City
- Participated in at least one work action, e.g., a strike, walk out, or rally, since the November 2012 commencement of the most recent fast food worker labor movement or in TWC's Fight for $15 movement

The recruitment goal was to engage a diverse group of interviewees who represented a range of ethnicities, racial groups, and ages from young adult to elders. The research plan initially called for recruiting solely workers who worked full-time, defined as working at least 27 hours a week. However, recognizing that fast food employers commonly schedule workers to work for less than full-time hours, this criterion was deemed impossible to meet and not necessary for the research.

As the first strategy for recruitment, TWC staff identified potential research participants. Upon identification, the TWC staff, using information provided by the researcher, described the research and introduced the potential research participant to the researcher, who in all cases was present in the offices of TWC. At this time, the researcher introduced herself to the research participants and verbally provided a fuller description of the research study and consenting process. Additionally, all potential research participants received written documentation of this information before

proceeding with an interview (Appendices B, C, and D). This method resulted in the recruitment of eight research participants.

Direct recruitment was the second recruitment strategy utilized. At public events, such as rallies, where a number of people present were potentially members of the targeted cultural group, the researcher directly attempted to engage potential research participants. The researcher introduced herself and the study by conversing and distributing a recruitment flyer (Appendix E). This method resulted in the recruitment of two research participants, both of whom were members of the TWC.

As a third recruitment strategy, the researcher placed volunteer recruitment advertisements on Craigslist under the subsection of volunteers within the community section of the website (see Appendix E). The advertisements in English and Spanish were on Craigslist during the weeks of April 24, 2015, June 24, 2015, and July 10, 2015. The researcher responded to all Craigslist inquiries from potential interview participants by telephone or email. During the initial contact, the researcher gave (verbally or via email) potential interviewees an overview of the research study (Appendix B), information about the researcher (Appendix C), and a description of expectations of them as research participants, including that their participation was voluntary (Appendix D). Additionally, the researcher explained the confidentiality protections. The potential research participants were reminded that they would be financially compensated for their participation at $15 an hour for an interview not expected to last more than 2 hours and with a $5.50 New York City MetroCard for public transportation to and from the interview. Of the 25 fast food workers interviewed, 15 workers contacted the researcher

by responding to an advertisement on Craigslist. Two of these workers were members of TWC.

There is no standard or prescribed number of research interviews for ethnographic research (Bisaillon & Rankin, 2012). Saturation is the point in the research process when the interactions with the empirical material begin to be replicative and redundant of previously encountered material (Bowen, 2008). The researcher continued to recruit and interview research participants until reaching the point of saturation at 25 interviews.

Participant demographics. Participants for the interviews included 25 men and women, aged 21 to 60, who worked as managers, shift managers, cashiers, cooks, maintenance workers, crew members, and other roles having direct contact with customers. The sample's mean age was 32 years and 2 months. The median age was 31.

In 2013, the fast food industry in the United States employed 4 million people (Statista, 2014). In 2015, New York State reported that between 164,000 and 200,000 workers were employed in the fast food industry (New York Fast Food Wage Board, 2015). Table 3.1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of fast food workers in the United States compared with the study participants. Two differences were of note. First, the study had fewer white participants than the national average. New York City is much more diverse than the rest of the country, which may account for this difference. Second, the ages of study participants were different from the national average; this study purposely excluded workers under the age of 21 because the researcher wanted to capture the experiences of adult workers. Table 3.1 is followed by Table 3.2, which presents each participant's demographic information. Participants' employers are not provided to

further protect their confidentiality but included, in alphabetical order, Au Bon Pain, Burger King, Checkers, Dominos, Dunkin' Donuts, a food court, KFC, McDonald's, Papa John's, and Popeyes.

Table 3.1
Demographic Characteristics of Workers Employed in the U.S. Fast Food Industry Compared with the 25 Study Participants

Characteristic	US percentage	Study percentage
Age (years)[a]		
<19	30%	0%
20–24	30%	24%
≥25	40%	66%
Education level completed [b]		
High school [c]	85%	92%
Some college/postsecondary education	33%	60%
Gender		
Female	57%	60%
Male	43%	40%
Have children		
Yes	36%	44%
No	64%	56%
Birthplace		
United States	85%	80%
Outside the United States	15%	20%
Race/ethnicity		
White	56%	20%
Black	18%	40%
Asian	4%	8%
Latino	20%	24% [c]

Note. Sources: Royle (2010), Schlosser (2001), and J. Schmitt and Jones (2013).
[a] n = 4,000,000.
[b] n = 2,800,000 (age >19).
[c] Not mutually exclusive.

Table 3.2
Demographic Characteristics of Each Research Participant

Participant	M / F	Age	Race/ ethnicity	Birthplace	Position	Tenure	TWC member
Angela	F	40	African American	U.S.	Cashier	10	No
Bethany	F	28	African American	Jamaica	Manager	5	Yes
Carlos	M	24	Latino	Mexico	Shift manager	6	Yes
David	M	26	White	U.S.	Cook	4	No
Edward	M	43	African American	U.S.	Maintenance	<1	No
Foster	M	34	African American	U.S.	Assistant floor manager	8	No
Gina	F	33	African American	U.S.	Manager	12	Yes
Hazel	F	27	African American / Afro-Caribbean	U.S.	Cook	<1	Yes
Ida	F	60	Multiethnic	U.S.	Cashier	9	Yes
Joseline	F	29	Multiethnic	U.S.	Manager	7	No
Kendra	F	21	African American	U.S.	Cook	3	Yes
Lourdes	F	21	Latina	U.S. (Puerto Rico)	Cook	<1	Yes
Melissa	F	21	Latina	U.S.	Cashier	1	Yes
Naasih	M	22	Asian	U.S.	Cook	1	No
Oliver	M	22	White and Hispanic	U.S.	Cook	<1	Yes
Parvaiz	M	33	African American and Hispanic	Panama	Cashier/cook/ maintenance	2	No
Quin	F	44	White/Jewish	U.S.	Cashier	2.5	No
Rurik	M	46	White	Russia	Maintenance; occasional shift manager	2	No
Saleel	M	33	Biracial	U.S.	Crew member	2.5	Yes
Thomas	M	42	African American	U.S.	Maintenance	2	Yes
Ursulina	F	31	Latina	U.S. (Puerto Rico)	Customer serv ice representative	7	No
Vui	F	46	Asian	China	Cook	5	No
Wanda	F	53	African American	U.S.	Assistant cook	2	No
Xiomara	F	48	White (Irish) and Puerto Rican	U.S.	Cashier	1	No
Yandy	F	28	African American	U.S.	Cleaner	1	Yes

The tenure in fast food employment for these interview participants ranged from less than 1 year to over 12 years. Excluding four workers who had worked less than a year, the mean length of employment was 4.4 years and the median length of employment was 3 years. Most of the workers, when specifically asked, indicated that they received wages at $8.75 an hour, the minimum wage in New York City, and no worker indicated that he or she earned above $10 an hour.

Interview guide. Found in Appendix A, the interview guide was the loose framework formulating and ordering the interview sessions. The interviews were a combination of description and analysis. The descriptive questions asked interviewees to describe their social reality, such as "Please describe these rallies and/or 1-day strikes." Analytical questions were conversations between the researcher and the research participant generated from the follow-up questions. The follow-up questions elicited the research participant's analytical insights (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011; Kreiner & Mouritsen, 2005). "Why do you think your coworkers have not participated in the strikes?" is an example of this type of question.

Interview logistics. At the time of the interviews, the researcher reviewed with the participants the facts about the research study. In addition, the research participants were told how to contact the George Washington University Institutional Review Board as well as how to contact the researcher's dissertation chair should the need arise.

TWC, as well as several other locations across New York City including libraries, offices of a local nonprofit, and other private offices convenient to the research participants, served as interview locations. The participants engaged in interview sessions

ranging from 14 minutes to 1 hour and 57 minutes. The median interview length was 42 minutes and 41 seconds, and the mean was 47 minutes and 12 seconds. The researcher audio recorded interviews with research participants. A transcriptionist transcribed each completed interview, including the researcher's and the interviewee's actual words and as much verbal and nonverbal material as possible.

Document and Artifact Review

Document review is indispensable in both qualitative and quantitative research (Bowen, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), documents are written, visual, digital, and material objects, i.e., artifacts (p. 139). Through documents, researchers can unearth cultural contexts, underlying meanings, and cultural patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Document review began at the onset of the field experience and continued throughout the research process.

Bowen (2009) listed five uses of documentation in the research process. He believed document analysis is an avenue to greater insights about the history of the subject matter, enabling the researcher to understand the broader context of the phenomenon of concern. Document analysis allows the researcher to trace the history of the subject matter by tracking the changes and modifications that occur to the documents over time. Documents allow for the emergence of unforeseen directions of inquiry, e.g., a researcher seeking out an author of a compelling document who was not previously included among informants. Document analysis supplements the literature review and is a useful tool of triangulation (Bowen, 2009).

Reviewed documents included news stories, social media communications, and protest art. From the *New York Times* to the *Washington Post* to Comedy Central's "Colbert Report" and others, American and international news outlets have devoted an extraordinary level of coverage to the fast food workers' rallies and demands for workplace justice. Many news media outlets featured human-interest stories documenting the lives and concerns of workers in the fast food industry. In addition to traditional media, all forms of social media, including websites, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as protest art such as signs, banners, posters, and flyers, are traditional tools of communication for social movements.

As protest art (such as flyers, posters, chants, and other music) is rich with meaning (Febres-Cordero, 2012) and easily observable and/or obtainable, the researcher photographed protest art present at demonstrations and collected flyers and other handouts for visual and textual review during the analysis phase of the research process. Using tools available through Facebook and Twitter, the researcher collected applicable Facebook and Twitter feeds to include in the analysis phase of the research.

Observations

Alvesson (2003) suggested that ethnographers should rely more on observations than other methods, including interviews, based on the idea that in observation power dynamics between the researcher and research participants are less influential. Creswell (2012) distinguished four modes of observation based on the degree of researcher participation: complete participant, participant observer, nonparticipant/observer as

participant, and complete observer. Merriam (2009), however, wrote that no researcher is completely a participant or completely an observer.

In this study, the researcher occupied the schizophrenic role (Merriam, 2009, p. 126) of participant observer. It was schizophrenic because the researcher was a participant in action while observing the activity. As such, the researcher was required to establish sufficient distance from the research participants to observe them while recognizing that her presence as a researcher changed what was observable.

The researcher was an active participant/observer while at the offices of TWC at public strike actions and rallies, press conferences, meetings, New York State Wage Board hearings, various fast food restaurants, and buses and vans going to and from these activities. In this role, the researcher interacted with community and fast food organizers, members of TWC, volunteers, and others, serving in the position of volunteer organizer. The purpose of acting as participant/observer was to gain meaning from the physical setting, participant activities, interactions, and conversations and to gain meaning from the researcher's own behavior in these settings and among the research participants (Merriam, 2009).

As participant/observer, the researcher called TWC members and others at the behest of TWC staff members to spread the word about upcoming actions and to encourage them to join in these actions. At demonstrations and rallies, the researcher marched, chanted, and held signs. During meetings, the researcher answered or asked questions as appropriate. At one point, the researcher was the driver of the van transporting fast food workers from Albany to New York City. A demonstration in the

State Capitol resulted in the previous planned arrest of the researcher and other demonstrators. The police held those arrested for approximately 3 hours before giving them a desk appearance ticket for disorderly conduct.

At public events, whenever possible, the researcher recorded the events by capturing photographs, audio sound, or video. She video recorded demonstrations and other work actions as well as the public Wage Board meetings. Additionally, she viewed videos of Wage Board hearings that were published by the New York State Department of Labor for hearings that she attended but was unable to record. This comprised 24 hours of recorded material.

The Process of Interpretation

Reflective Analysis

"Reflection means thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways that are difficult to become conscious of" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 269). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2011) argued that all interpretation of empirical material is an interpretation of the already interpreted. In the case of an interview, for example, the interviewee is disclosing through talk experiences or knowledge that she has already interpreted through her experiences or knowledge. Additionally, as the researcher frames this study around the concept of work ethic as a cultural value, the theory of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), and social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004), she is interpreting the empirical material. The

sampling method, the research methodology of critical ethnography, and the research question of "What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?" are also interpretations. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) referenced this level of interpretation as simple hermeneutics. "Double hermeneutics is what interpretive social scientists are engaged in, when they attempt to understand and develop knowledge about this reality" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 175).

As critical research, this study employed triple hermeneutics:

> The triple hermeneutics of critical theory includes the aforementioned double hermeneutics, and a third element as well. This encompasses the critical interpretation of unconscious processes, ideologies, power relations, and other expressions of dominance that entail the privileging of certain interests over others, within the forms of understanding which appear to be spontaneously generated. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 176)

Quadri-hermeneutics is the interpretation occurring when the researcher creates the ethnographic document through her selection of the voices or the text that will appear in the document (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Table 3.3 describes the levels of interpretation, and Table 3.4 shows the relationships between them. The three vertical arrows on the left show the interconnection between all levels of interpretation. The middle vertical arrow represents working with two levels of interpretation, self-reflection and interpretation, without specifically focusing on critical interpretation. The horizontal arrows are an indication of strong emphasis (long arrow) or less emphasis (short arrow) on interpretation or critical thought (p. 277).

Table 3.3
Levels of Interpretation

Aspect	Focus
Interaction with empirical material	Accounts in interviews, observations of situations, and other empirical materials
Interpretation	Underlying meanings
Critical interpretation	Ideology, power, social reproduction
Reflection on text production and language use	Own text, claims to authority, selectivity of the voices represented in the text

Note. Source: Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, p. 273).

Table 3.4
The Interaction Between Different Levels of Interpretation

Level of interpretation	Possible reflective themes
Empirical material/construction of data	
	Multiplicity in the interpretation and consideration of pluralism in looking at different aspects. Surprise potential in the empirical material favoring of certain interpretations. Interpretive repertoire.
Interpretation	
	A negation of a data-confirming interpretation (a radically different view of reality); a consideration of why certain interpretations dominate; the presentation of counter-images; the discussion of winners and losers as the result of a particular interpretation.
Critical interpretation	
	Self-reflection on elements of dominance in the researcher's line(s) of interpretation; the identification of and critical reflection on potentially problematic forms of authority; an openness to other representations, interpretations, and conclusions than those favored.

Self-critical and linguistic reflection

Note. Source: Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, p. 277).

Interpreting the Empirical Material (Double and Triple Hermeneutics)

In this study, the engaging and interpretation of empirical material was an iterative process that allowed the researcher to modify her research process in response to new learning as it emerged (Creswell, 2012; Miles, 1984). Thus, it is impossible to separate the engagement of the empirical material and the interpretation of the material in a succinct and linear manner as required by this text. However, the following procedures were part of the iterative analysis process underpinning the research findings:

- Analytical memos. As suggested by Miles (1984) and Strauss et al. (1994), the researcher wrote memos about particular questions or concerns that arose from field visits and/or interviews.
- Quick notes. The researcher jotted down short notes to herself while in the field. Their purpose was to have a record of particular events or actions that she did not want to forget. These notes formed the basis of the field notes. The researcher also recorded quick notes during the observation periods and made notes that were more detailed immediately after the observation period. The observation notes included notations of observable demographic characteristics, appearance, and an estimate of the number of participants.
- Field notes. The researcher wrote summaries reflecting the field experiences, including notations about the physical space, people involved, activities, specific

acts, perceived goals of activities, type of event, her feelings, and her reflections. Field summaries were completed within 48 hours of the field experience.

- Summary of interviews. Immediately after an interview session, the researcher summarized the interview and noted her impressions and observations.

The first stage of the reflective analysis process is immersion in the empirical material. The researcher listened to the audio-recorded interviews while reading the transcripts. The researcher made notations on the transcripts about possible underlying meanings and connections to work ethic, social dominance theory, and/or cultural hegemony, as well as possible negations of her interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). As Gilmore and Kenny (2014) suggested, the researcher also made notations about the interviewees' use of language and emotions such as "repetitions, pauses, and difficulties in articulation, as well as changes in vocal intonation or speed" (p. 61). All of the gathered empirical material underwent a similar analytical process.

The second stage of the process was to identify themes. These themes included the emergence of four intentions (emancipation, reciprocity, solidarity and personal development). The themes and intentions are described in Chapter 4. The researcher, using an audio recorder to capture her spoken words, reflected on major themes of interest, the interrelation between themes, points of difference between empirical materials, and their contradictions (S. M. Thompson & Barrett, 1997, p. 68). A specific reflective process used by the researcher was to "ask questions or interrogate the empirical material". For example, asking of the transcript a series of questions, such as "who is this research participant?";"what is his story?"; 'what does he want from the

Fight for $15? The researcher wrote the emerging answers to these questions, themes and intentions on easel-sized papers, attaching exemplars such as interview quotes or photographs. These answers, themes and intentions became the foundations for the dissertation findings.

Displaying Results (Quadri-hermeneutics)

Including a diversity of voices in the text enhances its richness. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted, however, the inclusion of multiple voices presents a challenge to clarity and consistency in the argument and with the overall findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), and generally the researcher decides whose voice is included or excluded from the written text. Critical ethnographers are not to reduce the researcher's presence by hiding behind the voices of the research participants to reduce the researcher's voice by simply lifting up the unadulterated voices of the research participants without critique (M. Fine, 1994; Madison, 2011). Alvesson (2003) reminded researchers not to privilege interview interactions over interactions with other empirical material. This study's research results transparently denote the researcher's positionality, activist stance, and beliefs and values in relationship to the research topic. Additionally, in some instances, the research document includes research participants' verbatim words and the researcher's critique or reflections in response to those words.

Organizing and Storing Empirical Material

Like most qualitative research, this research process produced a huge amount of material. As such, it was essential for the researcher to incorporate organization and

storage planning into the overall research process. In hopes of engendering trust between the researcher and the research participants, the researcher informed the participants of her method of securing their information and personal narratives. This included informing research participants that pseudonyms were used to replace the research participants' actual names. Throughout this research process, the researcher kept all hard copies of documents related to the collection of empirical material (typed transcripts, field notes, audio recordings) on her person or in a secured location. Electronic material was stored with password protection and backed up on a cloud service. The researcher will destroy all audio recordings within 2 years after the publication of this document.

Ethical Considerations

In all research, there is at least minimal possibility of risk to the research participants, but following procedures in accordance with human subject guidelines and following the guidelines provided by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development and the Office of Human Research Institutional Review Board mitigated the risks. Additionally, the researcher informed all participants of the purpose and the goals of the research and the potential audience for the study, and the researcher read aloud the Study Information Sheet. Second, the researcher also informed the research participants that they could drop out of the study at any time. Third, the researcher informed the participants that they could choose not to respond to any question. Two of the respondents declined to name their employer. Others declined to give their names. Fourth, their tapes and transcripts were completely confidential and labeled with a pseudonym. Finally, many of the research participants were fearful that their participation

in the research might lead their employer to fire them. The researcher informed all of the research participants that the completed dissertation would contain no text that could lead to their identification.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Scholars continue to dialogue about the transfer of quantitative assessments of validity and trustworthiness to qualitative research activities (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991; S. M. Thompson & Barrett, 1997; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). From this dialogue grew a multiplicity of criteria against which researchers can assess the quality of their research (Whittemore et al., 2001). All of these validity tests have pros and cons, but to be useful the criteria have to align with the research methodology. As such, this research relied on the quality criteria developed by Lincoln (1995) of positionality or standpoint judgments, community as arbiter of quality, voice, critical subjectivity, reciprocity, sacredness, and sharing the perquisites of privilege.

Positionality or Standpoint Judgments

Positionality recognizes that the researcher can only record partial and incomplete truths. The culture, history, gender, gender expression, sexuality, race, and class of the researcher situate all text the researcher writes. Qualitative research can meet this quality criterion when "a text that displays honesty or authenticity 'comes clean' about its own stance and about the position of the author" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 280). To this end, this dissertation includes a statement of the researcher's positionality, and throughout the text

the researcher's voice is unhidden, further displaying her positionality in relationship to the research matter and the research participants.

Community as Arbitrator

As a validity criterion, community as arbiter of quality recognizes the intersection of community and academia. Qualitative research takes place with or on members of communities and, as such, research should serve the needs of communities (Lincoln, 1995). Moreover, research should not solely serve an academic purpose, but include purposes of public policy and social change or action (Lincoln, 1995).

This study had both an academic and community purpose. The academic purpose was to explore theoretically work ethic, cultural hegemony, and social dominance theory in the work lives of fast food workers. The community purpose was to support the community of fast food workers who were taking social actions to increase their wages.

Voice

The researcher subjectively chooses whose voices to represent in a study document. Consciously or unconsciously, the lens through which the researcher constructed the empirical material dictated the choice of representation. Lincoln (1995) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) referred to voice as the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices in the research text, including the voices of the research participants and the researcher. Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, the voice of the researcher appears (specifically in the positionality statement earlier in this chapter) and the voices of the research participants appear, sometimes as quotes from interviews. Yet, it is ill

advised to regard interview talk as taken-for-granted truths. Interview talk may point to the truth of a phenomenon, but interview talk is not the sole or final truth. Also, as the researcher saw fit and to the best of her ability, representations of conflicting voices, including her own, were included in the written document.

Critical Subjectivity (or Reflectivity)

Through meaningful research, the researcher increases self-awareness, undergoes personal transformation, and participates in social transformation (Lincoln, 1995). Social transformation emerges through the researcher's personal involvement in social change activities. As such, this dissertation represents the decision to avoid privileging the voice of the research participants over the voice of the researcher or the other sources of empirical material.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity refers to the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, specifically in regards to mutual support, consideration, and trust (Lincoln, 1995). In the field, the researcher demonstrated reciprocity through her participation in organizing activities in support of the workers and organizer. During the interview sessions, she shared narratives about herself with the research participants and she listened respectfully to the interviewees as they told their narratives. Keeping reciprocity as a key component of the interview process resulted in interview sessions being much like everyday conversation among peers (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007).

Sacredness

Sacredness enters the research process when the researcher develops relationships with others that demonstrate equality in power, respect, and the recognition of the humanity of all involved (Lincoln, 1995). The researcher expressed her belief in the sacredness of humanity throughout her interactions in the field and during the interview process. A genuine feeling of friendship developed between the researcher, organizers, and research participants.

Sharing the Perquisites of Privilege

Lincoln (1995) argued that the benefits of research do not accrue to the research participants, but to the researcher. Lincoln (1995) proposed that researchers come up with ways to share the advantages that come to them as producers of knowledge. As an example, some academics have shared the royalties received from book publications with the research participants. Research participants who were part of this study received $15 an hour for their time and a round trip MetroCard for transportation. Additionally, included in the acknowledgment statement are thanks to and recognition of the contributions of the research participants and organizers.

Summary

This chapter has described this study's research methodology and methods. Included was a discussion of the alignment of the researcher's critical lens with the research methodology of critical ethnography. Throughout this study, the researcher kept in mind two issues of primary significance to the critical paradigm and critical

methodologies: (1) the researcher and research participants are equal allies in the research process and (2) no research is neutral.

As pointed out in the introduction to this study, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of work ethic in the work lives of New York City's fast food workers who had participated in work actions and demonstrations in support of the Fight for $15 labor movement. The next chapter presents the findings specific to the research question. Following chapter 4, chapter 5 presents conclusions that emerged from the analysis of the empirical material, the implications for theory, and recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

CHAPTER 4:

RESEARCH FINDINGS

> My check is flat.
> I'm ma need more zeros on that.
> Pay me now. Pay me good.
> Pay your workers like you should.
> —Chant heard at fast food worker demonstrations, spring 2015

> I provide a career ladder for people with a strong work ethic. —Franchise owner's testimony, June 2015

This research explored the experiences of workers struggling with poverty as they advocated for higher wages and better working conditions by participating in episodic work stoppages, demonstrations, and other forms of activism as part of the Fight for $15. Grounded in critical theory, this study challenged the 'taken-for-granted' understanding of work ethic to (1) understand its role in the oppression and marginalization of workers in the precarious fast food industry; and (2) provoke social change by giving voice to fast food workers (Thomas, 1993). The key construct of work ethic provided the overarching context for this ethnographic study, as the study sought to explore the role of work ethic in the experience of workers who participated in the Fight for $15.

One research question framed this study:

What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?

Two overarching themes emerged from this study. The first overarching theme that emerged was the link between the research participants' beliefs and attitudes towards

work ethic and the rationale for their participation in the Fight for $15. For example, there were four primary explanatory intentions the workers had for their involvement in the Fight for $15: emancipation, reciprocity, solidarity, and personal development. The other theme that flowed through much of the empirical material was the experience of stigma, both social/structural and internalized, and structural intimidation. The first theme is explored below. The discussion of the second theme, stigma and structural intimidation, follows.

Intentions are instructions giving to oneself to perform particular behaviors or to attain particular results (Webb, 2006, p. 249). Emancipation was the first of the four intentions of the research participants identified. *Emancipation (conscientisation)* refers to the knowledge and learning that emerges within oppressed groups who organize and challenge social inequalities (Freire, 2000; J. Thompson, 2000). Workers who thought of their participation in the Fight for $15 as a route to emancipation perceived work ethic as oppressive and participated in the strike to seek emancipation from an oppressive capitalistic system. Five workers appeared to be fighting for emancipation: Edward, Gina, Joseline, Oliver, and Saleel.

Gouldner (1960), the pioneering researcher on reciprocity, defined *reciprocity* as a moral norm with the aim of a "mutual contingent exchange of gratification" (p. 161). The research participants seeking reciprocity via participation in the Fight for $15 perceived work ethic as embedded in a social contract between workers and employers—hard work is rewarded with good working conditions—a contract that fast food employers

were violating, Therefore, these workers sought workplace reciprocity from their employers through their participation in the Fight for $15. Ten workers appeared to be fighting for reciprocity: Carlos, Foster, Hazel, Kendra, Lourdes, Melissa, Naasih, Ursulina, Vui, and Wanda.

Essential in labor organizing (Hodson, 1993, p. 398), *solidarity* is defined as "unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group" ("Solidarity," 2016). Research participants seeking worker solidarity through their participation in the Fight for $15 believed in the common sense of work ethic. These workers evidenced the efficacy of work ethic in their lives and the lives of members of their social network. They joined the Fight for $15 as an outward demonstration of their support for the goals of the Fight for $15 and a demonstration of their support for colleagues. Six workers appeared to be fighting for workplace solidarity. These were Angela, David, Parvaiz, Rurik, Xiomara, and Yandy.

Engagement in the world in ways that enhances the quality of one's life through the expansion of knowledge, development of character, and increased skills and capabilities is essential for one's development as a person. Workers who held the intention of *personal development* as the rationale for joining the Fight for $15 held ambivalent and sometimes contradictory views about work ethic. These workers saw the Fight for $15 as a means to acquire knowledge and develop particular aspects of themselves. Four workers appeared to be fighting for personal development: Bethany, Ida, Quin, and Thomas.

This chapter presents brief profiles of the 25 research participants who took part in interviews with the researcher—organized according to their intentions: emancipation, reciprocity, solidarity, or personal development—and corresponding findings related to each of the intentions. Of note, the 25 are a portion of the total number of research participants encountered during this study. Moreover, the 25 profiles not only represent the 25 people who participated in the interviews, but are also a product of the researcher's interpretation and contextualization of the entire ethnographic field work, including participatory observations and interactions with research participants in the field with whom the researcher did not engage in formal one-on-one interviews.

Table 4.1 represents the best guess of where respondents' viewpoints lie reflected through the subjectivity of the researcher, but the table does not represent an absolute truth of the lived experiences of these 25 research participants.. Furthermore, scholars have theorized that people are predisposed to hold particular intentions based on past experiences, personality, talent, etc. (Boyd and Vozikis, 1994) and that a recursive relationship exists between intention and action. Taking action influences the held intention and vice versa. It is therefore likely that some research participants' intentions were established prior to joining the Fight for $15 and for others taking action, i.e. joining the Fight for $15 constructed or perhaps made more clear their intention of emancipation, reciprocity, solidary or personal development.

Table 4.1
Intentions in Joining the Fight for $15

Emancipation	Reciprocity	Solidarity	Personal development
Edward	Carlos	Angela	Bethany
Gina	Foster	David	Ida
Joseline	Hazel	Parvaiz	Quin
Oliver	Kendra	Rurik	Thomas
Saleel	Lourdes	Xiomara	
	Melissa	Yandy	
	Naasih		
	Ursulina		
	Vui		
	Wanda		

Following the presentation of the four intentions in joining the Fight for $15, the chapter discusses the stigmatization and structural intimidation of fast food work.

The Fight for $15 for Emancipation

Profiles

Edward. Edward was not a member of the TWC. Seeing coworkers who were young mothers struggle financially to take care of their children motivated Edward to join the Fight for $15. Finances were also a struggle for Edward, but participation in the Fight for $15 for him was not only about more money but also about job stability. He recognized that not all workers were in the position to strike or participate in the demonstrations, but they were taking on other actions such as writing letters to legislators. Edward believed that he was one of the workers with the capacity to use his voice to benefit others. According to Edward, there was a war on working people, and the war was about capitalism and capitalist use of people to increase capital for the benefit of the few. Edward observed, “Poor black and Latino young people have lost hope in the

future." Using the word "empowering," Edward described his participation in the Fight for $15:

> But it's empowering to know that people are on the same page and have the same issues that they're dealing with. Again, step aside from the fast food thing. It's the simple fact that it's always nice to see, obviously, the brothers and sisters getting together. We're all struggling. We're all in the same boat, and that in fact we still come from all different walks of life. It's always going to be an empowering thing.

Edward is a 43-year-old African American man. His mother immigrated to the United States from Jamaica in the 1950s, and his father was born in the United States. A military veteran, Edward lived in a single-room-occupancy long-term shelter with other veterans. He had one adult daughter, and his mother passed away some time ago. Edward attended college but left without completing a degree.

Edward had been a store cleaner for a fast food restaurant in Queens, New York, for 10 months. Before that, he had a spotty work history. He described his life trajectory before working for the restaurant as a long story." Edward's job duties were sweeping and bussing the tables as well as cleaning up the outside premises. He explained his job as "better than begging for change on the streets." He worked at the franchise 20 to 30 hours a week but wanted to work more hours. Edward did not characterize his work there as hard. He had a checklist of tasks that he followed every day.

Edward would only stay in the fast food industry if his employer promoted him to management. Edward imagined that as a manager, he could learn more about the restaurant industry. He reported a desire to understand the logistics of supply channels and to know more about the mechanics of running a restaurant.

Gina. As a member of the Fight for $15 national committee, Gina was charged with representing the interests of New York workers at national convenings, educating and mobilizing local fast food workers, facilitating local worker meetings, and acting as a spokesperson for the movement with the press and others. Gina was one of the first workers to participate in the Fight for $15. An aspiring rapper, Gina had written rap songs specifically about the Fight for $15 and had performed at countless rallies and events.

Gina was motivated to join the movement when she learned about people not being paid for their work. Gina believed that workers have to protect their livelihoods, as it is the only way to take care of their families and themselves.

Gina stated the following when asked about her intentions in joining the Fight for $15.

> My whole opposition is when you got people that's working, and they're not getting paid; we got to do something about that. We know people that don't even have homes to live in. We have people that live in homeless shelters, and they work every day. That's the working poor. We don't want to be the working poor. We want to be above that. . . . We just got tired of the same system nonsense. Kids ask me questions. A boy asked me: Why would you walk off your job? I told him I walked off so when you get your job, you won't make a poverty wage like me. That's what it's about.
>
> It's about passing that baton. It's about . . . I look at Dr. King. I look at all these brothers and sisters from early on in the civil rights movement. They knew what they were about. They knew what they were going through wasn't a good condition. We need inner strength to give you the strength to keep fighting on. Other coworkers want you to fight alongside of them. That's what it's about. I look past myself. Sometimes I don't even want to get out of the bed some days, but I know that I got to do this because it's not for me. It's for other people in a worse situation than I am. It's really bad. I don't want our kids to go through that.
>
> Then you go to college; you still got to pay this money. I know you know. Student debt is not going away. I tell my high school students: Student debt does not go

> away. For you to come out of high school to come to a poverty-wage workplace to make another poverty wage to pay off college with another poverty wages. Two poverty wages don't equal success. If you got two poverty wage jobs, you cannot pay for anything like that.

Gina, a 33-year-old African American woman, lived in Brooklyn with her grandmother and with a brother who was in college. A high school graduate, Gina had worked for the same fast food company for 16 years, including 13 years at her current store. At the time of the interview, she was on suspension without pay and had filed a complaint with the attorney general. Gina would not disclose any further information about her suspension. After the interview, the attorney general settled Gina's claim in her favor, and she returned to work with back pay.

As a manager, Gina described her role as managing the shift, answering phones, preparing food, getting customers and taking care of customers, cleaning, and cooking. She worked 26 hours a week and would have liked to work more hours. Gina supported herself with her income but wanted to help her brother pay tuition and also help her other family members.

Joseline. Joseline was not a member of the TWC but joined in the Fight for $15 because she believed that the mobilization of vast numbers draws negative attention to the corporation and thereby reduces the value of the corporation's stock, which upsets investors and forces businesses to comply with the wishes of the masses. Joseline believed that she could make a difference in the power balance between the workers and the employer through her participation in the Fight for $15.

> I think that just being present there makes a difference. I think that if one person is protesting, even if you're just standing there, even if you're just filling the crowd, even if you're just an extra, that gives it more power when you see a

> crowd of 100,000 people protesting or rioting rather than a small group of people. I think there is power in numbers. . . . Because there's such a wide economic gap and because it's so centralized in a very, very small group of people, the only power . . . I don't see any power in voting. I don't see any power in any of the traditional methods that we've used in the past. The only power I really see is where we're at right now is the breaking point of sheer numbers.

Joseline, a 29-year-old woman of mixed ethnicity, had parents who died when she was young. Joseline graduated from a premier New York charter school and attended college, studying psychology. She dropped out of college because she did not want to incur any substantial debt and had begun to think of college as a wasted effort of no benefit. She lived on her own in Manhattan. Joseline volunteered with a charitable organization that recruits New Yorkers as volunteers for other charities. Joseline said that volunteering gave her an opportunity for a "life" outside of work while "giving back" to those who were like her.

Joseline worked as a manager of a fast food store in midtown Manhattan. She had this job for approximately 7 years. She worked 30 to 40 hours a week, but she said that essentially she had to stay at work until the job was done. She did not want to move up in the fast food industry because it meant more responsibility but little additional money. Additionally, among those who moved to the corporate offices, usually the employer fired them or they left because of burnout. Joseline wanted a new job, but she did not know what she wanted to do and had no time to think about her future. She wanted to be able to try out different things, but she could not because she was always working.

Oliver. Oliver started participating in the strikes when he first started working at his current fast food restaurant:

> Well, I decided to because when I first started working at [franchise], . . . I wasn't getting a lot of hours at the time. I was doing good work, and I didn't think it was fair. I think that [I] need to fight for my rights. I don't think this is right, what they're doing.

An organizer came into his store. He joined the movement, but none of his coworkers joined. Oliver remarked of the Fight for $15:

> I think this is what we have to do, because the corporations, the fast food corporations, they're greedy. They're only looking out for themselves. They don't really care about the workers. We got to let them know that we matter too. I feel, I guess, more empowered—that my employer probably was watching the strike, and they saw these millions of people out there. I knew that there were probably going to be results, a good result. I still feel like they're, . . . the fast food corporations are looking out for themselves, more than workers are. That is still ringing true.

Oliver is a 22-year-old man of Hispanic and Caucasian descent. He was born in the United States and lived with his parents and siblings in Queens. He registered to begin a training program in data entry at a for-profit technical college. A member of TWC, Oliver had participated in 10 work actions.

Oliver was a cook, working about 35 hours a week. He had been at this job for about 14 months but had previously been employed in other fast food jobs. He liked his coworkers and his manager and indicated that they felt like a family to him. If he were to stay in fast food, Oliver would like to become a crew trainer.

Saleel. Saleel was a member of TWC and part of the national leadership for Fight for $15. According to Saleel, he made a conscious decision to become a leader in the movement because he knew he had the capacity to make a positive contribution to the struggle for fair wages. When asked by the researcher what participation in the Fight for $15 did for him as an individual, Saleel responded, "Well, it makes me want to work

harder." When asked by the researcher, he clarified that he wasn't wanting to work harder to make more money but to work harder "for the Fight for $15."

Saleel is a 34-year-old biracial man who was born in the United States but lived in Germany as a small child. A high school graduate, Saleel spent 10 years incarcerated but had been out of prison for 4 years. He lived in the Bronx with his parents.

Saleel had worked at a fast food restaurant nearly full-time (37 hours a week) for approximately 2 years as a crewmember, but he did not plan to continue to work in the industry and was not interested in a promotion. His parents wanted him to find a job with more status, and he had received job offers, but he felt he could not leave the industry because he believed the movement needed his skills and he wanted to give back to others.

Work Ethic and Emancipation

When asked to define work ethic and indicate from whom, where, and when they had first heard the term, both Joseline and Saleel could offer no clear recollection and described work ethic as ubiquitous in American society. Joseline said, "I mean, who hasn't heard of work ethic?" and Saleel commented, "I don't know. I mean, I've heard it many times. I'm sure I heard it when I was younger. I don't know. I've heard it a bunch of times. I've heard it in probably campaigns [Fight for $15]." The other three research participants in this group, Edward, Gina, and Oliver, had clearer recollections of their first encounter with the term *work ethic*. Edward first heard of work ethic from his parents. He stated that the commitment to work was a deeply held cultural value in African American tradition. However, Edward reported that for his current employer,

he did the amount of work required, but that was it. Edward recalled about work ethic:

> I was raised in a black household. You don't have to hear it. You live it. I'm sure you know [referring to the researcher]. If you are black, you do not utter the words you're not going to work. Everyone goes to work in the house. Father goes to work. Your mother goes to work. Okay, you can go to school. You do well in school. Work is nonnegotiable. Everyone goes to work. You don't utter those words. My father said, "If I have to get up to go to work, everybody has to go to work. You aren't staying around this house watching TV." You don't have to think a second thought about it.

Gina and Oliver reported learning about work ethic in relationship to employment. Oliver heard the term *work ethic* as part of job interviews and Gina heard the term for the first time at work:

> I heard it from my employer actually. They told me I have a good work ethic. That's the reason why I got promoted to the store I'm in now. That was my promotion store. Before I was just an inside worker and they started working good. That's how I got promoted to manager. They said I had a good work ethic. They said I could work good with my coworkers and I could make [food] really quick and fast.

Saleel was the only one of the 25 research participants interviewed who recalled hearing about work ethic within the context of the Fight for $15. What Saleel recalled hearing from paid organizers of the Fight for $15 in regards to work ethic was comparable to the characterization of work ethic as attributes, behaviors, and attitudes found in some of the scholarly research on the subject.

> The campaign says that we should go to work on time. We should punch the clock. If we should go on strike, we should carry ourselves accordingly. That's part of work ethic and that's their belief of work ethic. . . . But ethic is the word itself, "ethic." Ethic is just a proper way of saying, "This is how you're supposed to live, this is how you're supposed to work, this is how you're supposed to speak, and this is how you're supposed to carry yourself."

Oliver offered a similar definition of work ethic:

> Work ethic means the amount of work you put in, the hard work you put in, the amount of determination that you have towards your job. Let's see. The amount of, I guess the good work habits, like being on time and not calling out too many days of work. Try to do a good job. Yeah, it's stuff like that.

Gina simply described work ethic as someone like herself doing a great job while trying to be a role model for other workers. Edward offered a broader definition of work ethic, which touched on what he believed to be work ethic's cultural significance:

> I would gather it would mean that the harder you work, you shall be rewarded for that work. Again, not going through a long dictation, but the fact is, that's what this country was built on and the values of which it would like to have bestowed on people that have come here, immigrants and such. Like my mother, who came here, she did not ask anybody for anything. She went to work and paid her dues. You work hard; you get rewarded. You get a home. You get the car. You get all the trappings of some kind of middle-class success.

The research participants seeking emancipation through participation in the Fight for $15 shared the criticism of the work ethic narrative in ways that were not present in the other groupings of research participants. For example, Edward, who saw that he had little possibility of promotion at his current job regardless of the quality of his work, believed that his employer sold employees the dream of upward mobility but was interested only in financial profit. He offered the following critique of the current state of his employment in relationship to work ethic:

> The wage hours are one thing, but they sell you this dream that you're going to move up and advance into this long position managing. General manager, who I've met, he hired me. He just goes around to different stores, and he knows everything about the restaurant. You think you're going to move up and you really don't. It's a high turnover, a high-volume situation that you have increasingly little to no control over. I realized that in the few months that I've been there. They're more and more interested in profit and the bottom line. They're more interested in developing a business model that works for them in

> competition with like [franchise] and [franchise] and stuff. It has little to do with humans but people as business.

Although Gina reported receiving a promotion as an outcome of her work ethic, she recognized that many people work hard, and most will not receive increased pay, promotions, or benefits from working hard. To Gina, the American system of capitalism was structured to exclude marginalized people from financial success.

> It's like a Catch 22 phrase because people work hard all the time. That doesn't mean that they're entitled to anything. As we see time and time again, we as workers we work hard. We do everything that we're supposed to do. We either not get paid on time. We either get wage theft. We get stiffed in shift and we can never get to the top. It's always a race to the bottom.
>
> You know what's so sad to me. In this country, those animals get treated better than human beings in this country. That's crazy. We're taxpayers and they say, "What the taxpayer think about it?" We are the taxpayers. This is what's going on in society. We have to do better as a people and as a country. People say negativity. Well, if you go on strike, everything else is going to go up. I said everything else is going up now. Now, what? My check ain't going up.
>
> That's my rebuttal. Look how long it took for the minimum wage to raise from $7.25. That was crazy. If we didn't march, if we didn't do what we did, it would still be $7.25 now; $8.75 is not a big number from $7.25. It's a double standard. It's okay for the company. They raising their prices simultaneously, but people not recognizing it—20¢ over here and 10¢ over here. Okay, but you want to give the dollar raise, but remember that dollar didn't go to everybody. That dollar only went to 1,500 employees that work for one corporation. If you're a franchise worker, you don't get anything. If you another kind of worker you don't get nothing. Everybody from the corporation don't get anything. What type of message are you really sending?

According to Saleel, fast food workers are judged by others as undeserving of $15 an hour because fast food workers do not work hard. He also argued that there is no definitive definition of work ethic or hard work.

> There's a lot of people that hard work. There are different definitions [of work ethic]. Who am I to say hard work, "Oh, that's hard work"? Again, this is the

> thought pattern now, that fast food workers are not hard working enough to get $15 an hour. Who am I to sit here and say basically, considering who I am, who am I to say what's hard work and what's not? What I'm saying to you is what kind of difference does your hard work make? That's the difference that we need to start realizing what it is.

When the researcher asked whether the fast food corporations, franchise owners, or managers considered hard work when they determined promotions and pay level, Saleel responded:

> Their thought pattern is, "You know what? Go out and go to college and go to business school, and get your own [franchise]." That's their thought pattern—not make a livable wage [but] for you to go to school and then get your own [franchise]. No, no, you're going to pay me nothing, and I'm supposed to accept nothing because you went to school and you did all these things to get this, so I have to work just as hard as you, even though you did it in the 1970s and '80s?

Joseline believed employers used the term work ethic to encourage workers to work harder without paying them fairly. For example, her employer told workers that if they showed up on time, they were late for work. Societal values and morals were methods to control people. She believed money corrupts corporations and individuals.

> I think everybody has work ethic, but people quickly realize, "Am I supposed to whistle while I work? If I'm not getting compensated enough, how hard do I have to work to get the lowest amount that you can legally pay me?" That word gets thrown about by people who are in a superior position to you because they want you to work more and they want their company to save more money. How hard can you work for nothing?
>
> That's why we have riots right now, because people are like, being good, all these values that basically keep society in line, religion, ethics, all these different moralities that keep us in line, people are realizing being good equals being poor. Being bad equals raiding everybody's pension funds, getting a $2000 fine, and getting away with it. People are really realizing, "I'm not getting treated like a human being."

According to Joseline, her employer preferred managers who did not ask questions—who did whatever the employer asked them to do.

> With jobs like this, they really don't care if you're working hard. I mean they want you to be a compliant slave but, really, there's so many people who quit because they're like, "I don't . . ." As soon as they get another job, they're like, "F___ this. This is not worth it." Really, it becomes a thing of like—it's like, "Okay, this person dropped out. Who's next? Who's here? Who really needs this job?" . . . When I started becoming a manager, the position, the specifics of what my responsibilities were, were very vague. Then it became like, "We like this particular manager because he doesn't ask any questions and he doesn't cause any problems, like he just does everything." This is the guy who's probably going to die on the job.

Differing from the other research participants grouped here, Oliver indicated that work ethic was important "because it's like your responsibility":

> If it's your main source of income, you want to be doing—you're good at what you do. That's why when I'm at work I'm determined. I want to try to learn each day I'm there.

However, the researcher included Oliver in this grouping of research participants because not only did he offer a critique of the system of capitalism, but like others in this grouping he critiqued the work ethic narrative. He did not believe that money was the only measure of success. Oliver measured success by such things as promotions at work or life events and other accomplishments, like buying a house.

> You don't have to make a lot of money to be successful really. You could work at a middle-wage job, not a high-wage job. You could still be successful I think.
>
> Researcher: What would you describe then as success if it were not money?
>
> What else could success be? Promotions at work. Events in your life, I guess. Accomplishments. Maybe you bought a house or something. You got a house. You have your own place to live in, and you're able to support yourself.

Oliver, like other research participants seeking emancipation, believed that corporations were looking out for themselves and not the workers:

> I think this is what we have to do [Fight for $15], because the corporations, the

> fast food corporations, they're greedy. They're only looking out for themselves. They don't really care about the workers. We got to let them know that we matter too.

Upward Mobility and Emancipation

At the June 2015 New York State Fast Food Wage Board hearings, a representative of a politically conservative-leaning nonprofit think tank testified about the prospects of upward mobility for fast food workers in New York State:

> I started off my career scooping ice cream at [franchise] in the 1970s, and I could not have got a job as a model because I was not good-looking enough and few positions were available. Fast food establishments offer many openings and upward mobility. Many managers of fast food franchises began flipping hamburgers. Those in fast food and other industries start at the bottom and work up. Doug McMillon, now CEO of Wal-Mart, spent two summers unloading trucks for the company when he was a teen.

He continued his testimony by stating:

> Ninety-three percent of New Yorkers (and 97% of American workers) now make above the minimum wage—not because it is the law, but because employers have to pay higher compensation packages to retain workers.
>
> If people cannot get their first job, they cannot get their second job, or their third. The reason so few workers in America make the minimum wage or below is that they rapidly move on. Employers do not pay above minimum wage out of kindness, but because that is the only way they can prevent employees from moving to another job.

Ironically, this testimony occurred just before that of a worker who had been at the same fast food restaurant 24 years and had never received a wage increase other than what was mandated by law.

Upon reflecting on their social networks, only Edward, Gina, and Saleel could recall someone who improved their financial situation through employment in higher-income jobs. The financial gains, however, were minimal, as these workers moved from a

minimum-wage job to a low-wage job. Saleel recalled that his former district manager began as a "regular worker" in the fast food industry.

> He was a regular worker. Now he's a district manager. He's still brainwashed. You used to be a worker, you brag to me about being a worker, and you're still brainwashed? It's not what you know, it's who you know! It's really—this world is based on who you know. You could know like a lot of things, but even Bill Gates knowing what he knows, if he didn't know the right people, he wouldn't be in the position he's in now. He knew the right people.

Gina recounted the story of one acquaintance:

> I got a friend. He started with me at [fast food restaurant] in Atlanta. Now he's driving trucks and stuff. He's made good money or whatever. He's the only one that I know that made it. . . . He went to school to drive trucks then he started doing his trucks. . . . He started from the ground up. He's the only one that I know personally that was in the same level like me. He made a way for himself. You got to sacrifice. He had to move out of his house. I think he was living in his car for a little bit—for maybe 3 weeks or something like that. I'm not too really sure, but it was struggle for him. He had to make choices. He told me, "I don't know what I'm going to do, but I got to make it happen." I told him, "Make your next move your best move." He did that. Some people, they don't want to take the sacrifice. They don't want to leave. They don't want to do what it takes.

Both Joseline and Edward believed a supportive social network was key to upward mobility. For example, Joseline said:

> People can't be lied to [anymore] or lie to themselves and say, "If I pick up my bootstraps, if I work real hard . . ." They know it's not going to happen. . . . Okay, I have $30,000 in loans. I work for $8 an hour. Let's say I get a second job that is $9 an hour. How long will it take me to get out of that loan, just not even to get to another social class, but to just get out?
>
> That's like when I went to school. My roommate, her parents paid for her first car, her first apartment. She switched schools. She switched majors. She went to more than one school. I was like, "I don't have that luxury." I said, "I don't even have a driver's license. I have to start from scratch. . . . I don't even have a parent with a driver's license." . . . When I get insurance, it's going to be as expensive as it can be. I don't have somebody to put my name under. I don't have a credit line to put my name under.

> Then when she left school, she met a guy who had a lot of money or whatever. I was like, "That's cultural capital. You're doing very well." . . . Which is the premise for affirmative action, because if you're starting so far behind, how are you ever going to catch up or even just get to where they were, baseline?

Comparably, Edward stated,

> I do know people who had the family home. They had the car. They had the home-cooked meals. . . . My mom passed away some time ago, but his [successful friend's] mother is still alive, supporting him. He's able to transition easier into that prosperous life because, let's face it, you put down $20 a day, next week you're going to have $20. If you can save a little money from bringing your food from home, instead of going to a [fast food restaurant], common sense still rules. You transition easier into that life because you have that blueprint and focus.

Nevertheless, Edward also conceded that although a support system was very important to upward mobility, it was not a requirement. "You have to want that for yourself. I'm a believer in that. I believe that you can reinvent yourself at any time in your life." He continued:

> Society has to get clear about that. That those of us who are like that, that come from that lineage [black people in America], that history, that heritage, we're not going anywhere. We're not ever going anywhere. Give us the opportunity to do that for the generation of people who seem to be lost and need to come up. That's all we can ask. That's being honest. That's being straight up.

Oliver (22, cook) indicated that he did not know anyone who had moved up economically, but he had heard stories that the singers Madonna and Pharrell Williams previously worked in a fast food restaurant. Oliver believed that these celebrities' work ethic enabled them to achieve success. "They probably had good work ethic, yeah. They had a really good work ethic. They just did hard work and were determined. They were dedicated to get to where they are now."

Gina thought that the key to social mobility was the acquisition of a quality education. Gina believed that fast food work left her coworkers feeling trapped.

> Most people are stuck in a rut, I feel like—a rut of doing the same thing. Sometimes that could be good, but sometime that can be bad. You start to get complacent in that situation that you in. This is what I feel like as us as workers. We don't want to become complacent anymore. We don't want to be stuck in a rut. I call it a rut because you go to work early, get home late night. By the time you wake up it's day, then you got to go back to work. You don't really have time in between to just live your life and do things with your family or do things on your own.

Noneconomic Employment Commitment (Lottery Question) and Emancipation

According to Morse and Weiss (1955), posing a question in a manner that removes the economic incentive to work, i.e., winning the lottery, enables researchers to assess if research respondents have an intrinsic affiliation towards working. This study asked the lottery question. Unlike previous quantitative studies, this study asked several follow-up semistructured questions after respondents' initial yes or no answers to the lottery question.

Of participants in this group, Oliver was the only one who indicated he would not work after winning the lottery and he would use his lottery winnings for leisure activities. "I might quit my job. I might quit my job if I had enough to support myself and my family for the rest of my life. Yes. Yeah, I think I would." When asked what he might do after winning the lottery, he responded, "Probably a lot of things. Probably travel. Probably mostly travel."

Joseline had no specific response to the lottery question. However, she recounted that she inherited money after the death of her parents. She described herself as happier because inheriting the money enabled her not to work. Not working gave her a sense of freedom. However, she also believed that happiness from money caps out at a certain level. Once you have all of your basic needs met and extra spending money, additional money will not make you happier. In her case, Joseline returned to work when her money ran out. If she won a lottery, Joseline would continue to work, but not in the fast food industry. She would work to give purpose to her life and to seek happiness through work.

> Once you get out of the trap of debt slavery, for example, a loan, whether it be a car or a house . . . . I'm renting, so I'm just paying into nothing, whereas if you own something, then that frees you and that gives you a huge amount of independence and it takes . . . a huge relief.

By contrast, three other research participants in this section responded to the lottery question by indicating that they would continue to either engage in paid labor or launch a for-profit or charitable enterprise. Edward replied that he would probably start a home remodeling business:

> Probably would start my own business, and it would be along the lines of painting and stuff like that, some kind of roofing. My father, that's what he did. He was a very hands-on kind of guy. I would utilize the skills he tried to pass on to me. It didn't actually work. [Laughter] Another conversation. He tried to pass it on. He was raised in the South. It was do it yourself, fix it yourself–type thing.

Gina and Saleel envisioned that they would launch charitable organizations to benefit their communities.

> I would start some type of different foundations for different people. One for the kids, maybe an after-school program in my neighborhood, somewhere for the kids to go. That's what I wanted to do anyway. I want to start an after-school program for the kids, like a basketball thing, an indoor thing. . . . I'm into music, so people that want to learn how to make music, I might make different classes. The kids need to channel their energy into something that's positive. If they want to do swimming, if they want to do running around the lap thing. I thought about a big idea. I drew it out and everything how it should be. Pool tables, just somewhere where the community could come and relax. People have time with their kids. I want the program to be free so it's not an economical strain on the people that have kids and they can't afford to bring them. (Gina)

> I would go to people who don't have no food in their house, landlord's treating them like crap, and I'm looking . . . You know, I'm a good judge of character. Nobody's going to play me, you know what I'm saying? I'm going to look, and I'm going to . . . You know? I'm going to be like, "You know what? Stay in a hotel" and tell him that "I'm going to give you a brand new apartment the next day, full everything. Here's your job making $15 an hour, let's go." (Saleel)

When asked as a follow-up to the lottery question why they would continue to work after a lottery win, Edward, who imagined creating a for-profit business after winning the lottery, spoke of the desire to work as embedded in who he was as a person. Gina and Saleel, who envisioned engagement in charitable activities, responded with a description of their desire to give back to their communities. According to Edward,

> I'm pushing up on 50 real fast. At the end of the day, [fast food restaurant], like I said, so I can survive and sustain myself. But I'm pushing up on, I've said this, I'm getting older. You've got to bring it full circle. You've got to say to yourself: I owe this to myself because I have worked hard all my life. And I'll continue to work all my life. I need to or I have to; I'm struggling.
>
> It's just embedded in my makeup. You'd go stark crazy if you couldn't find somewhere to work at. America has to own up to that and be clear about that.

Gina stated:

> What made me do that [want to start a nonprofit youth center]? I feel like it's a need in my community. Not just my community, just different communities around. I feel like this is what we have to do. We have to provide for our future.

Saleel commented:

> I've always been that way, but I've always helped people in a negative way. I feel as though this is my way of showing people and giving people something back that I've taken from the other people. I have a conscience, and my conscience tells me I need to help people. I actually enjoy helping people. I like to see the smiles on people's faces; I like to see people come to me, like, "You know what? I know you're going to help me." You can see in their face that they know they trust you. They know you going help them. That's what makes my day.

Table 4.2 provides summary information about the five participants who joined the Fight for $15 with emancipatory intentions and key quotes from each of these interviewees. Evidenced in the table is a connecting theme of dismantling and critiquing the system of capitalism among these workers who sought emancipation. In the fifth column, "Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards," it is evidenced that these workers did not believe that if they were a high-quality worker they would reap benefits as a result of their hard work. Thus, for them the way to workplace justice was through dismantling the current capitalistic system.

Table 4.2
Summary: Research Participants with the Intention of Emancipation

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Upward mobility within social network	Work after lottery win
Edward	Empowering	Unmarried deceased parents, one child	"I would gather it would mean that the harder you work, you shall be rewarded for that work."	No	Yes, lower income	"You'd go stark crazy if you couldn't find some-where to work at." Would start his own business.
Gina	"We don't want to be the working poor. We want to be working people."	Lives with grandmother	"It's [like] someone like me—someone that works hard, someone that does a great job, someone that tries to be a model employee."	No	Yes, lower income	"We have to provide for our future." Would open a center for children.
Joseline	Demonstration of power of numbers	Lives alone, deceased parents	"I mean, who hasn't heard of work ethic?"	No	No	Money will give her freedom.
Oliver	Empowering	Raised in a two-parent household	"Good work habits like being on time and not calling out too many days of work. Try to do a good job."	Ambivalent	No	Would not work after a lottery win; would travel and enjoy leisure time.

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Upward mobility within social network	Work after lottery win
Saleel	Not interested in making more money for corporations through his hard work	Raised in a two-parent household; lives with parents; incarcerated for 9 years	"Ethic is just a proper way of saying, 'This is how you're supposed to live, this is how you're supposed to work, this is how you're supposed to speak, and this is how you're supposed to carry yourself.'"	No	Yes, lower income	"I feel as though this is my way of showing people and giving something back that I've taken from other people" [referring to his desire to have a charitable business].

The Fight for $15 for Reciprocity

Profiles

Carlos. Carlos participated in multiple strikes and rallies since the beginning of the movement called the Fight for $15 in 2012. The first demonstration had about 200 people, and the April 15, 2015, demonstration had about 30,000 people, including home attendants, airport workers, construction workers, and other minimum wage workers and allies. When asked about his intentions in joining the Fight for $15, he stated, "It's just a regular job like any other job, only that you work in fast food, which is cool, but the reason I'm doing this [fighting for $15 an hour] is because I'm broke."

Carlos, a 24-year-old Latino man, was born in Mexico. He came to the United States as a young child. A documented immigrant, Carlos described his parents as not "having papers." Carlos was among nine research participants interviewed who were either children of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Although, not the focus of this study of note was that there appeared to be little difference between these research participants endorsement of work ethic narrative and the U.S. born research participants interviewed.

At the time of this interview, Carlos lived in Brooklyn with his mother who had worked two jobs during most of Carlos's childhood. Carlos graduated from high school and was in college. Upon graduating from college, Carlos stated that he wanted to work in a less stressful environment, e.g., an office as a social worker or a hospital in a role involving helping people.

Until the week before this interview, Carlos was a shift manager at a fast food restaurant in Brooklyn. He had been there for approximately 7 years. He worked 50 to 60 hours per week, supporting himself and his mother with his income. Carlos walked off his job and/or his employer fired him because he demanded that the fast food restaurant pay him time and a half for overtime. His employer contested Carlos's request for time and a half by saying that the restaurant was not a government entity and, hence, did not have to pay time and a half. Carlos told his employer that he was going to complain to the authorities, and soon after quit his job. Carlos was a member of the TWC, and the TWC supported him as he filed a formal complaint with the New York attorney general's office against his former employer for nonpayment of overtime.

Foster. Foster participated in the demonstrations because he wanted to voice his opinion to those in the management of the fast food industry. Foster saw the demonstrations for $15 an hour as an opportunity to tell his employer his thoughts about work. Foster stated that there were ways to protest other than participating in the demonstrations; for example, people could sign petitions or attend meetings. It mattered for the employer to hear the voices of the workers. He was not a member of TWC but learned about Fight for $15 at the LGBT Community Center in New York City. When asked why he joined the Fight for $15, Foster said, "If something gets you to the point where you feel that things aren't right and stuff like that, by you not saying anything or not bringing it forward, it's like you allow things to happen to you."

Foster, a 34-year-old African American man born in the United States, had parents who were a public school principal and a teacher. He recently returned to college to complete an additional semester for a bachelor's degree in English and planned to become a teacher. Foster lived with his partner, a police officer.

Foster worked approximately 40 hours a week at a restaurant. He had started 7 years earlier as a food prep worker and later became a cook. Most recently, Foster worked as an assistant floor manager on the overnight shift.

Hazel. A member of the TWC, Hazel was starting to believe that the Fight for $15 would result in wage increases and the ability to join a union. She also thought that people would stop looking down on fast food workers when they made $15 an hour. Hazel saw the movement as about more than just salary. The movement was about

changing working conditions on the job. Hazel described her reason for joining the Fight for $15:

> It was like they used to slave us. Sometimes they would keep us working for 10 hours. No break. I don't really think it's much about the $15 an hour. Like for us, the treatment, the condition that we working in, it sucks.

Hazel, a 27-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman, was born in the United States, and her parents were from Jamaica and Trinidad. Hazel had a young son with a developmental disability. Hazel had worked as a cook for her employer for 7 months, but her employer terminated her after a customer overheard her speaking to her coworkers about the Fight for $15 and told Hazel's manager. Her employer had previously instructed crewmembers not to talk to union organizers.

Hazel worked less than 30 hours a week. When she applied for unemployment, the Department of Employment denied her application, and Hazel believed the denial was a result of working less than the required minimum number of hours a week or the required months of continuous employment. Hazel did not want to stay in the fast food industry. She would like to be in a helping field, such as social work or nursing.

Kendra. Kendra was a new member of TWC. Although she had not yet participated in a strike, she was looking forward to it. Her friends encouraged her to join. She understood that the strike organizers were there to support the workers. She believed striking would lead to improvements at her job. Kendra joined the Fight for $15 "so that everything can become better. I heard if you go on strike and you try to push more and more, things will become better for you at your job, at your place where you're at."

A 21-year-old African American woman, Kendra was studying to pass the GED. Kendra's grandmother, aunt, and uncle were teachers, and her mother was a school aide. Although she was not yet in college, she was certain she would become a nurse and planned to enroll in college upon receiving a GED.

She had worked in fast food for 4 years and at her current job—as a cook, working 6 days a week for 40 hours—for about a month. She left her first fast food job in 2012; she was living with her grandmother, and her grandmother passed away, so she quit to find a place to live. Kendra left her second job in fast food because her employer cheated her out of her wages.

Lourdes. Lourdes was a new member of TWC. Lourdes had not yet gone on strike but planned to participate in the next fast food workers strike. She was going because she wanted to be self-sufficient, which was impossible on her salary, and she wanted to be able to provide more financial help to her mother and sisters. She was also going on strike because she saw that fast food workers work hard. Lourdes commented:

> I want to help myself. Like, we deserve more money because like what we do is not easy. . . . We got to [go] through people [being] disrespectful, people telling you stuff, people don't liking their food, taking it back. I want this, and I want that. And it is not easy, and we deserve more money. We do. We do, especially here where the rent is so, so high. Like, what's $135 [her weekly wages]? That's my phone. That's my phone and my MetroCard for the week. That's it.

Lourdes is a 21-year-old Latina woman, born in Puerto Rico. She was training to become a phlebotomist. She lived in the Bronx with her mother and her sisters and worked in Brooklyn, approximately 25 miles and a 90-minute subway ride away. She had been working in fast food for 7 months. Her current job was her first job, and she worked to support her mother and sisters. Lourdes had a hope of becoming a nurse and opening a

health clinic. Although she worked 28 hours a week, she wanted to work more hours, but the job was too far from her home.

Melissa. Melissa had participated in four work actions. Seeing so many people coming together to fight for something amazed her. She stated that she felt deeply that this was going to work. She would not be involved in something that was a waste of time. Melissa believed that other workers did not participate in the demonstrations because they were afraid of the potential of termination, their parents were part of the 1%, or they did not have children to support.

Of her participation in the Fight for $15, Melissa said,

> If I didn't deeply feel like this is going to happen or it's going to be a life-changing experience, trust me when I tell you, I will not waste my time. I felt determined, like, you know what, I'm going to prove to you I deserve this $15 whether you fire me or not. I'm still going to get this $15 and get a job elsewhere if you do fire me, and I'm not scared to get fired. Why? Because like I said, I'm fighting for what I want, and I'm not going to stop until I get it.

Melissa is a 21-year-old Latina woman. Her family was from Puerto Rico, but she was born in the mainland United States. She recently regained custody of her 4-year-old daughter from her grandmother. Melissa lived with her daughter, mother, and siblings. Her mother received public assistance. Melissa was a member of TWC.

Melissa had worked in fast food for less than a year. She was a cashier and worked approximately 1 day a week. She wanted to work more hours, but her employer had not increased her hours. She had to call in every day to see if she was on the schedule. Melissa would stay at her current job if the industry raised wages to $15 an hour.

Naasih. Naasih first heard about the Fight for $15 on the news. He contacted a small local group and arranged to meet them on the day of the strike. He joined the demonstration because he wanted to fight for his rights. He agreed with the mission of the strikes because a job is a job and he wanted his work to be seen as a real job by others. He also needed more money.

Naasih also participated in the strikes because of the desire to help other people:

> A job is a job, and you want to be taken seriously. Nobody else takes you seriously. There's the side [employers] that takes you seriously, and there's the side that doesn't care. The side that doesn't care is just ignoring everything. Getting the cutback, taking hours for themselves and this and that. It was just too much.
>
> I feel like supporting something that means something to me as a person individually. I'm 22 years old. I want to make some money and a lot of hours, devote my time with the company, and get more money without hearing the stories about, "Oh, I can't afford you; I can't do this, I can't do that." When I heard all those stories about the people, like say they had families of their own, apartments, houses they can't afford, I got so involved in it. I was like really involved in it. I was saying: I feel you. I feel you. If I was in that situation, I would be the same way.
>
> When I'm there, I was carrying the hopes and dreams of our people. If this strike goes through and they actually get through, we get our hours, we get the money, we get everything, and that's it.

He did not talk about his participation with anyone at work and did not know if coworkers participated. His employer, however, suspected his involvement and questioned him about his reasons for supporting the strikes. Although his employer had previously told him that he could expect to be fired if he continued participating in the Fight for $15, he planned to continue because it was something he believed in.

Naasih, a 22-year-old man of Indian descent, lived on Staten Island with his parents and brother. His brother was in pharmacy school. Naasih had an associate's

degree in web design from a for-profit college, which he referred to as a fraud. He owed $17,000 in student loans and could not find a job in web design.

Naasih had worked as a cook at the fast food restaurant for about a year. While Naasih worked 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, he wanted to work more hours. His employer told him that due to budget constraints, they could not offer him an increased number of hours. Besides, they only conveyed additional hours to the best workers, and Naasih was not among the best workers. If he stayed in the fast food industry, Naasih would want to be a shift supervisor or team leader. However, he was not planning to stay in fast food. He wanted to work for the New York City Transit Authority.

Ursulina. Ursulina participated in the April 15, 2015, demonstration for Fight for $15 with her coworkers. Her participation grew out of her involvement with Occupy Wall Street. Her college promoted the demonstrations because many fast food workers were students there. Ursulina did not plan to participate in more Fight for $15 demonstrations because she planned to leave the industry. She explained her intentions in taking part in the Fight for $15 as follows:

> I do want it to go up to $15, but I'm no longer going to be in fast food. I'm about to land a job that pays way more. I'll get more benefits, and I don't know. I think it really depends, but I really do hope because of a lot of these people. We make minimum wage. That won't be me in a few weeks, but they make minimum wage. All their checks are gone. They hardly have anything. They can't even play with money, and when I say play, I mean you can't go out or anything.
>
> A lot of them are on welfare. Sometimes they have to get public assistance. They have to get food stamps, get Medicaid and stuff. Sometimes they would have to ask like one of my coworkers; he had to take a few days off to resolve his food stamp issue and the boss was just like, "Hey, I need you to come in. You're the shift leader. Come on." He was like, "I'm sorry, but I got a personal issue." It's just horrible.

Ursulina is a 31-year-old Hispanic woman. She was born in Puerto Rico, but her family moved to the mainland United States when she was 2 months old. She lived at home with her mother. A few years ago, Ursulina decided to complete a bachelor's degree in history. While she was currently working on a thesis and not taking any classes, she planned to return to classes the following semester.

Ursulina was employed at the restaurant for 7 years as a customer service representative responsible for taking telephone orders. Before returning to school in 2012, Ursulina worked 40 to 50 hours a week. Now, she worked 20 to 30 hours a week earning minimum wage. Her employer asked her on some occasions to move up to another position, but Ursulina refused because it required too much responsibility. If Ursulina planned to stay in the fast food industry, she would want to work in the community outreach division. However, Ursulina was not planning to remain in the fast food industry. She recently interviewed for a job at a law firm. Ursulina planned to continue school and obtain a Ph.D. in history followed by a law degree.

Vui. Vui went to two demonstrations. She had time off on both occasions and would not have gone if she did not have time off. If Vui had time off, she would continue to participate in other large, well-organized demonstrations. She characterized her intention in taking part in the Fight for $15 as requesting a raise from her employer.

> It's like something you wouldn't do at work. You wouldn't knock on the manager's door and say, "Hey, I want a raise." A lot of people don't do that, but this is like a lot of people got together and asked for a raise, so that's why it was fun. Something a lot of people wouldn't have the nerve to do that when they were at work. This is like outside work, and a lot of people got together and asked for a raise.

Vui is a 46-year-old Asian woman who was born in China. She had been in the industry on and off for 5 years and currently worked as a cook at a fast-food restaurant about 23 hours a week. She also had another part-time job as a housekeeper. Although Vui volunteered to participate in the study, she was reluctant to talk and asked that the interview end as quickly as possible.

Wanda. Just before Wanda started at this job, the workers were protesting, trying to get their wages increased, but to no avail. Wanda believed her employer fired some workers for demanding a wage increase. Wanda had not yet participated in any of the demonstrations for $15 an hour.

Wanda is a 53-year-old African American woman, the mother of three adult sons. One of her 25-year-old sons lived with her. Wanda had an associate's degree in psychology. Since 2013, she had worked in a fast food restaurant in New York City, a job she got through a referral from public assistance. She started as a cashier making $7.25 an hour and now worked as an assistant to the cook at $9 an hour, for 40 hours a week. She received a $0.15 hourly raise every 3 months. The job did not provide benefits. Wanda received Medicaid, food stamps, and government subsidized housing.

Work Ethic and Reciprocity

Nine of the 10 research participants with the intention of reciprocity first heard the words *work ethic* within their family, schools, and place of employment. For example, Kendra said she heard it from her grandmother: "She told me, 'You're not going to get nowhere in life if you don't go out there for yourself and work hard for what

you want.'" Like Kendra, Lourdes referenced her grandmother as the source, noting that her grandmother was "hard-working."

Most often when research participants reported school as their first encounter with the work ethic narrative, the encounter was in connection to acquiring employment or an internship. Hazel stated:

> I heard it [work ethic] in high school when they was asking us if we wanted to do these internships. It's just a voluntary thing. They said, you know, "It's a job readiness program for when you get older and stuff; help you for the real world." I was going there. They used to talk about job ethics a lot. I didn't have to go there, but I just went there because it's something to do after school.

Ursulina was the one person who relayed a circumstance where the subject of work ethic discussed in school was part of classroom learning and not solely about job-seeking preparation.

> I believe it was my first semester at [community college]. I took a speech course. I've always heard of ethics, of course, doing the right thing. Work ethic, I said, "Why is it important to do a good job at work?" I mean you have to because there's always that idea that you can get fired, but a student, a classmate of mine made a speech about work ethic because she worked at—oh gosh, what industry was it? I think it was those people that call and harass people [debt collection]. She says she hated doing that, although it was well paying, because a lot of people in debt, especially after the 2008 recession. And I was like: Oh my god. She said that her bosses later on over the years caught on that she started dreading her job. She spoke about how important it is to have work ethic. Do not be blinded by the fact that such and such job pays such a high amount of money. If you're not happy to do it and you're not happy to wake up and do it, then don't bother doing it. That just struck me. It struck me like wow.

Some workers, such as Naasih and Vui, first received messages about work ethic from their fast food employer. For example, when asked this question, Naasih replied,

> They talk to me all the time. I even asked them how am I doing. They just say you're terrible. I asked them about improvement. Well, this is when I first started,

> but then I'm getting better. I'm working really fast and I'm really tired, but I don't care because I really don't want to get fired.

As stated in previous chapters of this dissertation, scholars have struggled to come up with a definition of work ethic. Similar to the literature on work ethic, these research participants tended to define work ethic as a set of positive behaviors, attitudes, and attributes at work rather than work ethic as a cultural phenomenon. For example, Hazel (27, former cook) defined work ethic as "punctuality, pride, and manners." She continued, "That's what make or break you. You know, if you don't have no work ethics, then nobody's going to hire you. You're not going to hold a job." Similarly, Carlos (24, former shift manager) stated,

> Work ethic means, from my point of view, is the way you work. You got to work professional. I'm in fast food. The way you talk to customers, the way you talk to your employees, the way you treat them—for me, that's [work ethic].

To Lourdes, work ethic meant that "we got to be responsible and do a good job at what we doing and just be a good person. It doesn't matter what customers say to you. You got to be a better person." Similarly, Melissa (21, cashier) said of work ethic, "To me, it means hard work; you know what I'm saying, and dedication to your job and proving that I'm not only working for your benefit, I'm working for mine and to provide for my family." To Naasih (22, cook), work ethic meant "you're professional."

> They want you when you come to work, you got to look your best. Before, I had this necklace; I just put it underneath my shirt because they say no flashy jewelry. . . . When you're working, you've always got to be happy. . . . You got to do your work. Keep the place clean. If there's no customers, just clean the tables, sweep and mop the floor. Clean the counter.

When asked what work ethic means, Vui replied, "You're supposed to do your job at your job and do a good job. That's what it means. All the managers always say you got to get your job done, be professional or something like that."

For Foster (34, assistant floor manager) and Ursulina (31, customer service representative), work ethic was more about views about work than activities at work. Foster said,

> Work ethic is just your perception of how you look at your job, how you—what's the word, motivate yourself to go to work every morning and to always try to find different things to change, and whether it's your work or whatever you do at work, or your position at work. It's like your motivation for your job.

Ursulina characterized work ethic in the following manner:

> Wanting to be there, not having to dread every moment, not having to look at the clock hoping it's time for you to go clock out. Doing the best job you can, although you know in the back of your head you could be earning way more, you could be at a job position where you're treated better. Work ethic is wanting to be there.

Wanda believed she first heard the term from her public assistance caseworker. However, Wanda had vivid recollections of her mother in relationship to work and work ethic:

> My mother always made me work. I was working since I was like 14. I used to [work] Summer Youth. I worked at so many restaurants when I was younger. . . . But my mother, she never worked, but I don't know. It's 14 of us, so. Yeah, she always had the work ethic in us, but she never worked herself.
>
> She just always made us work. I don't know. She never used to talk about, too much about why, but she used to make us work and then she used to take the money. . . . I used to come home with my check and . . . it wasn't that much back then, like $80 a week. She'll take $60 and give me $20 or take $70 and give me $10, you know, just enough to get me back to work. At the time, I didn't complain and stuff because there was so many of us and then we had to eat and stuff, so.

> Then after a while, you get tired of that, you know: "Ma, . . . I'm working here for a whole year, and I don't see nothing. I'm not buying any clothes. I'm not doing anything. I'm coming home every day giving you the money." One day, I came home. I said, "Ma, I didn't get paid." She was like, . . . she went off. She just went berserk.
>
> I took that check. I cashed it. I took the money. I put it right in my panties, and I was like, "I didn't get paid." Because just in case she checked me, but she won't check down there, you know. I had to do what I had to do because I was tired of giving her . . . it was like a whole year of giving her my money. She always installed that in us, but she never worked herself, though.

Carlos, Foster, Hazel, Kendra, Lourdes, Melissa, Naasih, Ursulina, Vui, and Wanda held that they had fulfilled and even surpassed their work obligations by a demonstration of work ethic. For example, according to Lourdes (21, cook),

> We work hard and they [employer] just want more and more and more and more, and nothing is good for them. "Today, no, you've got to sell more apple pies. No. You've got to sell this and that and that." Like I tried, but people don't want that much. "What do you want me to do? I can't force them to buy things that they don't want to eat."

At the New York State Fast Food Wage Board hearings in Buffalo, workers gave the following testimonies supporting Lourdes' assertion that fast food workers fulfill their obligations as employees.

> I work full-time. My hours are 11 to 8. . . . I like my job and I like the people who I work with. But I know how busy we are daily. I'm the fry guy. I bet you've never had bad fries when I was working. I put in work. We put in work. I get burned. I got the scars to prove it. We put in work and I feel like we are not compensated for everything we do. (Fast food worker, Fast Food Worker Wage Board, Buffalo, Spring 2015)

Other testimony included statements such as "We put in work and I feel like we are not compensated for everything we do"; "I work very hard every day for myself and

for my daughter, and it is getting me nowhere"; and "I cook and clean and make sure customers leave satisfied after every shift." Another worker gave this testimony:

> At my store, [franchise], we have something that's called a survey, A Voice of the Customer. If I'm not at the store, I have customers that will not buy nothing. I have surveys all over western New York. I am the number one Western New York [Franchise] Voice of the Customer for [Franchise]. I have GMs come to my store. I have managers come to my store. I have people come from Missouri, the big headers I called them. They have asked me to come to their town halls, but not once has nobody asked me, "Do I want a raise?" Not one time have I got—I haven't even gotten a [franchise] gift card, a [retail] gift card to show appreciation because I like what I do. See all the time it doesn't have to be about how much you make, but if you got good workers and they like what they do, you need to pay them.

While all of the research participants seeking reciprocity through the Fight for $15 believed that they had fulfilled and even surpassed their work obligations, none anticipated that their employers would reciprocate through the provision of wage increases or other workplace benefits. Melissa (21, cashier) stated:

> Well, they want me to work hard, and they want me to prove to them that I deserve the position that I have, but my question to them is: Why do you want me to work so hard and you get all these billions of dollars and you're only giving me $8.75? That would be my question, like, why? Back to what I was saying before, no matter how hard you work, you're still getting paid the same amount, so whether you work harder than a former coworker or you're working less, whatever the case may be, we're still getting paid the same thing.

Carlos (24, former shift manager) framed it as follows:

> It's the more you work, the less paying—less paying, more labor, less pay, so I'm like, "Yo, it's crazy." . . . *Mucho trabajo, poco dinero*, meaning a lot of work not enough money, not enough money. . . . Through hard work and everything, they will still not appreciate you. Once [the employer] gets somebody else way better than you, then they replace us. That's what they're doing. They don't care. They only care making money, who's fast and who's not.

Wanda (40, assistant cook) responded to the question about if a relationship exists between excellent work performance and extrinsic rewards for work:

> It should [be], but not in [my job]. You work. I kill myself. I do cashier. I do the counters. I help the chef with the food. I serve. I do basically everything, but I still only get 15¢ extra. It doesn't matter. I don't know, maybe at some other jobs, but [not at my job]. . . . Since I've been working there, I have never, I haven't moved up or nothing. They hired me as a cashier, even though I feel like I'm a server. I'm an assistant to the cook. I never got those titles. My title has always been cashier. They hired me as a cashier. I don't know. It depends on which place you work because some places you can move up like assistant manager.

Lourdes (21, cook) referred to her employer:

> He's like, "Oh you got to work hard because maybe one day I'm going to put you as a manager" and I'm like, "When, when?" because 5 hours a day is nothing, nothing.
>
> Researcher: What does the manager say when you ask him when?
>
> He says sh_t. What is he going to say?

Furthermore, testifying about this issue at the Fast Food Wage Board hearing on Long Island, a fast food worker stated,

> The salary? It's a joke. When we start work, we are told that they are going to raise our salaries at the end of the year based on how we work. They keep making these promises with the hope that we are going to forget, but after waiting the year, a supervisor claimed that he was not going to give me a raise of 50¢ because after a year, I was just beginning to learn the job. After begging for 2 years, he gave me a raise of 35¢. (Shift manager, spring 2015)

Naasih and Ursulina believed that their employers intended to honor explicit, implied, and/or psychological contractual arrangements of reciprocity, yet situations beyond the control of the employer prevented them from doing so. For example, according to Naasih (22, cook),

> Budget. It's a budget. That's the problem; there [are] no hours. There's no nothing. . . . Some of my coworkers, they quit or they got fired for doing this and/or that. They steal money. They leave early. They don't do their job. That's it.

Ursulina (31, customer service representative) understood that promotions, raises, and other benefits were "fixed" by a rank system established by the corporate office of the franchise in which she worked.

Upward Mobility and Reciprocity

When asked to recount a story of someone within their social network who moved up economically, Kendra (21, cook), Lourdes, (21, cashier), and Vui (43, cook) did not know of anyone. "No. Anyone that I knew that worked at fast food rather left because of something, no matter what, they left. I don't know anyone, yet, that stayed at a fast food restaurant and became a manager" (Kendra). Lourdes said, "No. I don't know nobody yet." Vui, who also did not know anyone who had moved out of poverty, believed that "to become wealthy, you have to know the right people and have a mentor. . . . You need to know the right people, someone who's willing to help you, to mentor you, willing to take you in under their wings."

As examples of upward mobility, Hazel, Naasih, and Wanda recounted stories of people in their social network who moved from minimum-wage jobs to low-wage jobs. Hazel (27, former cook) had two friends whom she considered as having moved up the economic ladder. However, she thought it was unlikely most workers would be able to follow these examples.

> I have a friend that was working in [fast food] since she was 14. She's now 27. I think she's a manager in there. She still works at [franchise], but seasonal she'll

> work at the post office. They make a decent amount. So, she flip-flopped between those two jobs, but I think she's getting a job with . . . the Department of Homeless Services. That's a big step for her.
>
> Then my other friend was working at the [clothing retailer]. I think she was making, . . . she was making $8 an hour with two kids. . . . She was making that, and then it upped to $8.75. She started making $9+. She began working at the post office also.

Hazel thought that if fast food employers provided workers with opportunities for education, more workers would move up the economic ladder.

> Like they support schooling and getting positions in the company, like growth in the company. I think that would encourage a lot of people to move up, instead of sticking to what they know. This is what I know that gets the bills paid and stuff like that—barely gets the bills paid.
>
> I look at it like sometime we don't have time to go to school because we're working two or three jobs to make ends meet. We have all the children, where we're not looking at furthering our education, but making sure that they have education, food, and stuff like that. I look at it as just sometime you have family and stuff. That's how I look at it. I think of jobs that have things to nurture us, like growth and stuff in their company. I think a lot of people would be getting so far.

Naasih (22, cook), who said that people who achieved upward mobility have someone or something in their lives that influenced or inspired them, pointed to coworkers who left fast food and became security guards and baristas as examples of upward mobility within his social network. Naasih thought that a lack of financial resources prevented people from gaining upward mobility. For example, he owed student loans, and if he came from a family with money, he would not have had $17,000 in loans to pay.

As an example of upward mobility, Wanda (53, assistant cook) named her son who made $16 an hour up from a starting wage of $12 an hour. She also named the chef at the restaurant where she worked.

> The person that cooks in my job. He tells his little stories and stuff like that. He said he started off at the bottom with minimum wage and he said he worked his way up in [transportation company]. Now he's the chef. He cooks all the food, but I assist him when I'm on the shift or whatever. He don't tell you his salary, though.
>
> Researcher: How do you think he was able to move up?
>
> He's a Caucasian. That's the way I see it. I don't see black people in there . . . maybe the Africans.
>
> Researcher: So you think it has something to do with race.
>
> Yeah, he's Caucasian. He started off just serving like me, like other people like me, and now all of a sudden you're the cook. He's been there for, yeah, he's been there over like probably like 15 years, or he said 10 years or something like that. I'm not even sure.

The examples of upward mobility provided by Carlos, Foster, Melissa, and Ursulina appeared to be higher-income earners than the examples recalled by Hazel, Naasih, and Wanda. Carlos (24, former, shift manager), a part-time college student, knew of two people who improved their economic situation.

> I know this guy that used to work in fast food too. He used to work in fast food and then, he started in high school working fast food. Then after that, he went to bartending at night, while he goes to school. Now he works for Wall Street. He gets a pretty good amount of money.
>
> Then, there's another lady that I know she didn't have no papers. She got married for her papers and everything, and now she's a professor. Yeah, she went to school and everything. She struggled. It was hard, mind you. She had kids and everything. Then this other lady that I know, she had papers, but she was a single mother, and she went through a lot; sometimes she didn't have no money to eat. She became a principal, I mean, assistant principal, so, she was telling me, she was like, "Yo, I struggled, sometimes I didn't have no money, and I like had to choose between buying books or buying this, to buying this and buying that." She was like, "It was hard, but look at me, it's worth it now."

Foster stated that he believed working hard was the key to economic mobility and credited his parents for being role models to him. His mother was a retired teacher and his father was a retired principal. Foster named his parents and his partner as examples of people he knew who moved up economically from where they started. His parents wanted him to work hard in college and graduate on time which, according to his parents, would lead to Foster having a desirable job. Foster described his partner's experience moving up the economic hierarchy as follows:

> My partner was born and raised right here in the [New York City borough] in [low-income government housing]. Him and his sister and brother was taken away from their mother because she was always out on the streets. She used to leave them for days at a time and stuff. They went into foster care. . . . I look where him and his brothers and sisters came from the same background, and they're [partner's siblings] still stuck right where they are.
>
> . . . And he [partner] has gone through whatever he's gone through, even with the learning issue, the reading issue with the dyslexia and stuff like that, overcame the things, the poverty, living in the ghetto, and foster care, and to be living the life of a cop now. I mean, he's happy and stuff, and I look at that, and I say, that right there is a story where it doesn't matter where you came from or who your parents are or where you've been in foster care, whatever like that.
>
> If there's something that you want out of life and it enhances you, even if you go and you find somebody who enhances who you are, that motivates you right there and pushes you. He did push me to want to go back to school and finish, and then actually realize to myself that where I'm working at now is not fulfilling enough. It pays the bills, but at this point in my life, I'm getting older. I'm looking for something more than just pays the bills; I need something that I can give back to somebody, and teaching is what I can do. Working in fast food, I'm not giving back anything to anybody.

Melissa (21, cashier) and Ursulina (31, customer service representative) both recalled high school friends who went on to have successful careers. Melissa believed

her high school friend was "chosen," meaning someone decided specifically to help her by giving her access to opportunities.

> I'm not going sit here and throw hatred towards her job or whatever the case may be, but it isn't right. We're all hard-working women, and we're all hard-working mothers, and it's like I feel like the upper class, they pick and choose who they want. . . . We all are hard workers, so whether they pick and choose, I feel like we all deserve a spotlight in the upper class.
>
> Researcher: Do you think this person was chosen?
>
> . . . Yeah, chosen out of a few. Yes, I feel like she was, but like I said, I'm not going to throw hatred towards her lifestyle, her job. I'm very proud of what she's doing. She got probably like her own clothing line and stuff like that. I'm not the type of person to sit there and get jealous over your life story or your life struggles. . . . That was my best friend and that will forever be my best friend, whether she's in the upper-upper class and I'm still in the low class. I don't discriminate against anybody.

Ursulina (31, customer service representative) recalled that a high school classmate after a difficult childhood became a human rights attorney.

> Someone I went to high school with but dropped out—just having a lot of issues—went to school, studied law. Now she's a human rights lawyer earning about a quarter of a million dollars a year. She started from some bottom because she lived in public housing and she lived with a single mother. That was a struggle. She struggled. She'd come to school dressed a certain kind of way.
>
> I think I'm the only one at work that's like passionate about higher education and I think the only one attending at that. The managers have attended too, but they've only earned like their associate's. . . . Again, they may come from the most positive home, but my mom pushed me, but she wasn't a role model. She was just someone that I always thought, "Okay, I want to have better."

Nonfinancial Employment Commitment (Lottery Question) and Reciprocity

Of these 10 research participants asked the question, "Would you continue to work if you won the lottery?" eight responded in the affirmative. Wanda (53, assistant cook) and Vui (46, cook) replied that they would not work after winning lotteries. However, both women responded that they would use their time volunteering. Wanda would volunteer at an animal shelter, and Vui would volunteer at an organization providing services to the elderly. Of note, Wanda and Vui are the two oldest research participants in this grouping and their responses were consistent with previous lottery studies. The older the respondent, the least likely she or he will report the desire to work after winning a lottery (Highhouse et al., 2010).

Kendra, Melissa, and Naasih envisioned remaining in employment in which they worked for someone else. Of all of the 25 research participants asked this question, only Melissa responded that she would continue to work in fast food after winning a substantial lottery.

> I would [continue to work in fast food] because at the end of the day, like I said, it's still a job and money comes and goes. I could be a billionaire, and no matter how much money I have, it will never compare to hard work.
>
> Researcher: What are the reasons you have for wanting to continue to work after a lottery win?
>
> I enjoy working. I don't feel like I should have to depend on the money that I do get if I do win the lottery. I shouldn't have to depend on that. Why? Because it's really not going to get me nowhere. It's just going to buy me things.
>
> That's like a, what you want to call that, it's like an once-in-a-lifetime thing. You don't always win the lottery, so for me just to win it, become a billionaire and

> forget about my job, you know what I'm saying, because if it wasn't for that, I would've never been able to buy the ticket and I would've never been able to scratch it with the quarter that I had. You know what I'm saying? I feel like it all narrows back down to having a job. I'm sorry, but you have to have a job.
>
> Yeah, money comes and goes, money comes and goes. Whether I hit the lottery and I become a billionaire, that would never be enough money to provide for my family. Like I said, money comes and goes. New York is very expensive. God forbid, I win the lottery and I buy my mom the biggest house and all of this, you know what I'm saying, or I invest it and do something with my money, it's still going to come and go.

In response to the researcher's questioning on the type of work she would do after a lottery win, Kendra (21, cook) imagined a work environment and work conditions that were more pleasant than those found in the fast food industry. "Maybe, in an office or something in a nice building. Something nice, but fast food wouldn't be an option for me because I'm so tired of fast food, but I have no choice right now." Similar to Melissa, Kendra and Naasih had no faith in the reliability of wealth expectation even after winning a lottery.

> Because I feel like money doesn't last forever. You shouldn't stop doing something because of money. I would work to get more money. I wouldn't just stop working because I'm rich now. I would continue to work because I'm not the type of person that likes to lay and collect money. I'm a hard worker. I would still save my money, but I would also still work. (Kendra, 21)

Naasih would continue to work after winning a lottery to increase his wealth. "Yeah, to make more money even. Sure, I have a lot of money, and I don't have to worry about bills. I could just buy a house and whatever."

Carlos, Foster, Hazel, Lourdes, and Ursulina all indicated that they would launch social enterprises upon winning a substantial lottery. Carlos and Lourdes both responded with plans to open health care organizations. Asked why, Carlos said:

> That's just part of me, like I'm always working. I'm a hardworking man. Even if you got money, that don't mean nothing, because I know a lot of people sitting. . . . Plus you get bored not doing nothing, so I might as well get a little money. Even though you got money, do whatever you got to do. You never know; you might find somebody else that['s] struggling. . . . This guy right here, my friend, I know him. That guy, he hires immigrants, and after a whole year, after they work with them, he does a thing so they can get their green card. He helps them out. . . . Yeah, that's my whole thing, because like my parents are immigrants.

Lourdes responded, "Sure, why not?" when asked if she would work after a lottery win. "I would open a clinic. Not expensive, but not free because, you know, just to help people. Just to help people. That's just the way my grandmother raised me." Lourdes continued:

> I don't like to be lazy. . . . I don't like to be in my house doing nothing. I like to work. I like to help people. I like to go out, see people, see new things. Because I'm going to have money, . . . I wouldn't have to go through people being disrespectful, people treating us bad, and I wouldn't have to go through that.

Foster and Ursulina, both college students, imagined creating programs for children. "It would be something with kids, something that I can actually help with" (Foster). Foster continued:

> Like a young people's day camp or something where I can go in there, I can talk to the kids and play around with the kids and be kind of like their mentor. I would probably do something, maybe a summer camp like a creative arts summer camp where kids that are into music and dance and stuff like that would come there and take classes during the summer months. Or try to do something where I could have a little place like this, about the size of this place on this floor, where they can come after school a few days a week and learn about jazz, tap, and stuff like that. Those kids that was into acting and TV and stuff, maybe have a few acting classes for them. Kind of like mold them into, if it's something that they want to do, like enhancing what they're good at or what they want to do. By the time they get high school or whatever, they know what they're going to school for and how to work at it and stuff. It would be something with kids, something that I can actually help with.

Ursulina elaborated on the value of a community center.

> So, this is the South Bronx; this is the home to the poorest congressional district in the country and that shocked me when I saw that. I learned that in a documentary. I did research and it turned out to be true. I think a lot of kids, our youth today are doing the wrong things. I think there needs to be more community organizations. Students need to learn how to play music, for instance; that's a great skill. When you cut down on programs in the schools, that's the first thing they hit, the arts—"Oh, there's nothing in there; you can't do anything"—when yet scientific data proves that it helps students think differently, it helps with their math skills, things of that nature.

Foster and Ursulina also indicated a strong desire to "do something" with their lives as a motivating factor. Foster explained:

> I still have to feel like I am doing something like life is worthwhile. Just sitting there and spending money, yeah it would be probably a great thing, but then I'm not feeling like I'm putting any effort into my life. I always, my mother used to always tell me, my mother is retired now, she's always telling me that she's going to never stop working, because always being a teacher and once you've been doing that for 35, 40 years and you just stop, you're home or retired or whatever, your brain begins to turn to mush. She said I've always worked, so I always have to be doing something, and she said when you stop working as you've always had a life of working and do what you've got to do, that's when you begin to get sick. Things start happening to you in your life where you're not the healthiest person anymore. I sat back and told my mom I can remember when I wasn't working, and then I got the job and then when I would go on vacation or something like that, toward the end of the vacation I was saying to myself, "Man, I really can't wait to go back to work." I have to feel like I'm doing something or taking a part in my life."

And Ursulina:

> I'll be honest with you, no, but I will continue going to school, like that's a definite. That'll pay because I want a Ph.D. in history and then I want to go to law school, and I want to learn as much as I can. I could be a student forever. If I was born with a silver spoon in my hand, I would work a little, but I would really be a student, and then I would obtain a profession. But I don't want people to think of me when I'm written down in the history books—someone will write your story if you don't write it yourself—I don't want people to say, "Oh, she won the lottery and then got lazy and didn't do nothing with her life." No, I pursued higher education.

Hazel responded "of course" when asked if she would continue to work after winning the lottery. She would like to be in a helping field, such as social work or nursing. If Hazel won the lottery, she would continue to work because "it's in her blood." She remembered her parents working multiple jobs and not being home very much. As a social entrepreneur, Hazel would purchase buildings in need of rehabilitation and renovate them to give the rehabilitated homes to mothers, children, and working families.

> I would buy buildings, do them over. I wouldn't really do it for profit. I would do it mainly for people that really need it. Like low-income housing, or something having to do with mother and children, or working families; people that really want help.

She said she "wouldn't feel good" about not working:

> I don't know what would become of me. Honestly. When you think about it, and you have all that money, you honestly don't know what to do with it. I would continue working. . . . I think it's something of the fact that my mother had five girls. For some reason, growing up, I only remember my mom being there probably on Sundays when she would make Sunday dinner. Throughout the week she'd always be working. She would go to, like when we were in school, she would go to work and wouldn't come home until when we're asleep.
>
> My father was always working too, had two or three jobs. Even at his retirement age, he was still working. After he done got retirement and all that good stuff, he just went to work and started working in a supermarket after he finished doing maintenance in the hospital and stuff, and retired from that. He just kept working. I don't know. I don't know, it's just a part of my genes, I guess. It's just, I don't know. I can't really explain it. It's something that's instilled in all of us, I guess.

Table 4.3 provides summary information about the 10 participants involved in the Fight for $15 with the intention of reciprocity. As evidenced in Table 4.3, workers who sought reciprocity stated pragmatic reasons for joining the Fight for $15 and believed that there was no relationship in their current job between working hard and workplace

rewards. Foster was the only one among these 10 workers who thought that there was a relationship between hard work and workplace rewards.

Table 4.3
Summary: Research Participants with the Intention of Reciprocity

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Aware of upward mobility within network	Work after a lottery win
Carlos	"I'm doing this because I'm broke."	Raised by a single undocumented mother who worked two jobs	It's "the way you work. You got to work professional, the way you talk to customers, the way you talk to your employees; the way you treat them."	No	Yes, middle income	"That's just part of me, like I'm always working."
Foster	"By you not saying anything or not bringing it forward, it's like you allow things to happen to you."	Grew up in a two-parent household of middle-income parents. Lives with a partner who is a middle-income civil servant.	"Just your perception of how you [view] your job. How you . . . motivate yourself to go to work every morning."	Yes	Yes, middle income	"I still have to feel like I am doing something, like life is worth-while."
Hazel	"It was like they used to slave us. Sometimes they would keep us working for 10 hours. No break."	Single mother of a develop-mentally delayed child	"Punctuality. Pride, I would think."	Ambivalent	Yes, lower income	"It's in my blood. I wouldn't feel good."

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Aware of upward mobility within network	Work after a lottery win
Kendra	"So that everything can become better."	Raised by her grandmother who recently died and left Kendra homeless; from a family of educators.	"Where I work hard, but I don't get a reward for it."	Ambivalent	No	"Because I feel like money doesn't last forever."
Lourdes	"We deserve more money because like what we do is not easy."	Supports her mother and siblings	"That we got to be responsible and do a good job at what we doing and just be a good person."	No	No	"I don't like to be lazy."
Melissa	"I'm going to prove to you I deserve this $15."	Lives with her young daughter and her mother and siblings. Mother was unemployed and received public benefits.	"Hard work . . . and dedication to your job and proving that I'm not only working for your benefit, I'm working for mine and to provide for my family."	No	Yes, upper income	"Money comes and goes."

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Aware of upward mobility within network	Work after a lottery win
Naasih	"I want to make some money and a lot of hours."	Lives with parents and brother in a dilapidated home. Brother is in pharmacy school.	"You're professional. When you come to work, you're . . . clean face; your hair cut, . . . good clothing, no tears, and no little loose ends. You got to look your best."	No	Yes, lower income	"Even if your life is short, you still got to do something."
Ursulina	"I do want it to go up to $15."	Lives with mother	"It's like troop morale. When people go away to war, it's good to have high morale, wanting to be there, doing the best you can, and that's the same with work ethic, wanting to be there, not having to dread every moment."	No	Yes, middle income	"I think it's the correct thing to do."

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Aware of upward mobility within network	Work after a lottery win
Vui	It's like requesting a raise from her employer	Unmarried immigrant	"You work hard and then, eventually, you achieve your so-called American dreams."	Ambivalent	No	"If you have money, why bother working?"
Wanda	"I don't want to be homeless."	Single mother of three adult children; raised by a single mother with her 13 siblings	"I'm not sure."	No	Yes, lower income	Wouldn't continue to work

The Fight for $15 for Solidarity

Profiles

Angela. Angela participated in the April 15, 2015, Fight for $15 demonstration. She participated in support of younger workers with children who were struggling financially but working and living in homeless shelters. She became aware of the planned demonstration a couple of days before April 15 when she heard about it from her coworker. She commented that these were the workers "who are doing all the work, the ones on the frontlines, . . . the cashiers, the cooks, service people."

Angela, a 40-year-old African American woman, was born and raised in Brooklyn and lived in the Bronx at the time of this interview. Bored by college, Angela dropped out

before obtaining a degree. Angela was married with one son of middle school age, and her husband was unemployed.

Angela had been a cashier for her employer for 10 years and earned $9 an hour. She reported working approximately 30 hours a week, from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm. She also received food stamp benefits. When she started working at the fast food restaurant, she only expected to be there for a few months. She wanted to leave but could not until she found another job. She reported that she was continuously looking for a higher-paying job. She did not want to continue working in the fast food industry.

For a brief time, Angela quit to work at a wholesaler, which paid more and had better benefits and longer hours, but not flexible hours. However, Angela left that job because she had a difficult time with transportation, as it was much further away from her home. She felt lucky to get her job back at the fast food restaurant.

David. David was motivated to participate in the strikes because he saw the difficulty that young mothers in his job had in supporting their children. He believed that fast food workers get paid overall much lower than workers in other industries and that the pay does not equal the amount of work they put into their jobs. At his workplace, he met diverse people who did not always fully understand the purpose of participating in the demonstrations, and David felt like he had the knowledge and wanted to add his voice to the movement. At the time of this interview, David was not a member of the TWC. David explained his intention in participating in the Fight for $15:

> I think what's motivated me is seeing young families and they are on government assistance. I'd say this: I feel like that I don't like to put my name on something or go into something without thinking it over. . . . I work [in fast food], I see all

> kinds of different people, so I feel like I want to go into something and add my opinion to something and be a part of something.

David is a 26-year-old white man born in the United States. He had been a cook for 4 years, working roughly 35 to 40 hours a week. If he stayed in the fast food industry, David indicated that he would like to be a manager or a franchise owner, where he could earn a higher income.

David lived in Queens with roommates and used his income to support himself. He was not married and had no children. He did not receive any government assistance. He stated that it was very expensive to live in New York City, as an apartment could rent for $3,000 a month and the cost of transportation was astronomical. David did not expect to be able to raise a family in New York.

Parvaiz. Parvaiz joined the strikes because his coworkers were participating. His participation was a social activity for him and "a follow thing":

> It was a bunch of other crewmembers. They were talking about it on their lunch, and I kind have like hear a little bit, so I wanted to join in the conversation. A lot of them wasn't getting paid as much as I was because I don't discuss my pay wage and everything else, but they wasn't getting, . . . it wasn't enough.

To Parvaiz, striking "felt good actually. It felt like a family, like we were fighting for something positive, really. It really felt good that day. It really did."

Parvaiz, a 33-year-old man of African American and Hispanic descent, was born in Panama. He and wife separated. They had two daughters. Parvaiz had an associate's degree in criminal justice. He was a student at a for-profit online school working towards a bachelor's degree. Parvaiz worked at a fast food restaurant until he recently found a new job as a forklift operator. At the restaurant, he did just about everything,

including washing, cooking, cleaning, serving as cashier, and training new crewmembers. He did not have the title of manager but acted as manager. He worked there for 2 years and worked 40 hours a week. If he stayed in fast food, he would have liked to become a trainer. He would not want a management job because he viewed it as too much work.

Rurik. Rurik participated in the demonstrations on April 15, 2015. He was not a member of an organization but heard about the demonstration through the media. A few of his friends texted him about the demonstration, and he decided to join them. He participated in solidarity with his coworkers.

> You know, I probably have to say [I participated] out of solidarity with my coworkers because . . . there's a lot of friendly people. That's one of the things which would still keep me over there because, you know, we don't really have that major problem. Management is supportive. Coworkers are very nice.
>
> We don't really have that major issues in the store. Turnover isn't that high. The location's profitable. I guess out of solidarity with my friends. In general, I do support that unfortunately that minimum wage it's not necessarily that helpful. If it was just cash, and no taxes, that might, $10 might work, but $15 will give us $32,000.

Rurik, a 46-year-old white man who was born in Russia, came to the United States in his early 20s and had a bachelor's degree. He lived with his mother since he could not afford to live on his own. Rurik was a crewmember and occasionally worked as the shift manager. He had been with the restaurant for 2 years and worked approximately 30 hours a week. His employer offered Rurik a number of promotions, but he was not ready to take on more responsibility. Before working for the fast food restaurant, Rurik worked in computer technology full-time. He was losing his eyesight

and could not work in technology for much longer, but still did part-time computer jobs.

Xiomara. Xiomara found out about the demonstrations from her coworkers and social media. She decided to go to the demonstration because her coworkers were going. Xiomara thought it was important to stick up for your rights and that there was power in numbers. On her reason for participating in the Fight for $15, Xiomara said, "Because you hear about it and they [coworkers] say, 'Well, you going to go? You going to back us?' So you go." Xiomara described her experience at one of the worker demonstrations:

> Exciting. You know, it brings chills to your arms because you're there for a good reason, you know. You're really there for a good reason and remember there's people came there from all stores. It was nice, you know; when you smiled at somebody or looked at somebody, you knew that you had something in common with that person, which was so nice. Even though you don't know them, you still had such a closeness with them, and you could strike up a conversation with them immediately, you know, and feel good about it. . . . When you were saying no justice, you'd look at each other and you'd smile like, you know, you both felt those words.

Xiomara is a 48-year-old woman of Irish and Puerto Rican descent. She was married but in the process of divorce. She lived with her adult son. Xiomara went to nursing school for 2 years but dropped out before completion because she wanted to get a job.

For the past year, she had worked as a cashier at a fast food franchise for 7 hours a day, 5 days a week. Because she worked in a corporate-owned store, she recently received a raise to $9 an hour. Before working at that franchise, she had been employed by a major power company for 9 years. She left that job when she contracted a major

illness. She initially started working at the fast food restaurant for extra money, but since she was getting a divorce, her salary there would have to support her household. Xiomara received food stamps.

Yandy. Yandy, a member of the TWC, participated in many demonstrations and work actions. Recruited to join the TWC by a paid organizer who reached out to her while she was at work, Yandy compared the Fight for $15 to the civil rights movement. The Fight for $15 connected Yandy and her coworkers to their history.

> Being part of history is amazing. . . . The first real heartfelt moment I had with this organization was when we did the sit-down in [fast food franchise]. We all went in [franchise], and we sat on the floor. I felt like Martin Luther King or something like that. We sat on the floor of the restaurant. We didn't scream. We just sat there. On the floor, and I was okay with it. We were sitting on the floor that people would walk on with their street clothes. This is moving. This is really happening.

Yandy, a 28-year-old African American woman born in the United States, had an associate's degree in graphic arts from a for-profit college. She lived with her mother; her father had passed away when she was a teenager. Yandy spent much of her childhood in and out of foster care and group homes. Both her parents were addicted to drugs. Yandy had one brother who lived in the South with his wife and family.

Yandy worked as cleaning staff at the restaurant for the past 3 years. She had her own cleaning business. In addition, she cleaned private homes and office buildings. Yandy called herself a serial part-timer. She worked at the restaurant 2 days a week. In the past, she worked at other fast food restaurants. She was not planning to stay in fast food. Yandy planned to move to the South and hoped to continue the movement in the South.

Work Ethic and Solidarity

The family is society's foundational institution and the fundamental institution for socializing societal members (Kreppner, 2000; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2012; Ristroph & Murray, 2010). The role of the institution of the family is to convey to its members the stories of its history and to teach them the language, the values, and the norms of the society in which they are members (Kreppner, 2000; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2012). Many of the research participants relayed scenarios of becoming acquainted with the work ethic narrative through their families. Five out of the six research participants who joined the Fight for $15 in solidarity with their coworkers reported that their families were the source of their first contact with the term *work ethic*. Rurik, the only immigrant among these research participants, reported first hearing the term through the media: "I'm not necessarily sure that I even heard the terminology that often except in the media and except when discussing the corporations." Yancy (33, cleaner) commented:

> My mama, she was big on that [work ethic]. She was big on . . . you have proper work ethic. You do things you supposed to. . . . She taught me a lot about work ethic. . . . It's doing the right thing at work. Having pride in oneself and what you do. You might not like it, but you still should smile when you get a customer. You might have a stomachache that might make you want to punch somebody in the face, but you still got to do your job. I'm just saying, you still have to do your job with a smile. Your heart, like, it should come out when you speak.

Xiomara recalled her father and his lessons about work ethic:

> He was the national rep over there, my dad, and he said when it came for us to get a job, we were 16 and they were hiring summer help. . . . My father says: You're both going down by yourself. If you have a problem, then I'll come into the picture, but before that you go by yourself. And we both got hired, so they

> didn't know who we were supposedly and we got hired, and my father was very happy.
>
> . . . We were allowed to go out at 19. You go, but you better get up for work the next day, and if you didn't get up, my mother would drag you out of that bed so you kind of learned. You have a responsibility when you took that job. So my family was very . . . You worked. You got paid, but you do your job. You be proud of what you do, and they would say be lucky you have it. You're lucky you have a job. They always would say that. They didn't believe in—my father didn't believe back then, he didn't believe at all in going for help [public assistance], for anybody going for help. He always felt if there's work, you work.

Angela, Parvaiz, Rurik, and Yandy described work ethic as work positive behaviors, attributes, and attitudes: "That's like a code of conduct. I would say how you perform your job, your attitude toward your job and your coworkers. Do you show up on time? Being nice like that, not being late" (Angela, 40, cashier); "Just doing what you're supposed to do at work" (Parvaiz, 33, crewmember); "For example, showed up on time, wear the uniform, be presentable, be polite to the customers, and be supportive of the management, your coworkers. That's related to my thoughts and motives" (Rurik, 46, maintenance/occasional shift manager).

Yandy (33, cleaner) described it as follows:

> The way you uphold a job, the way you follow the rules, the way you understand the rules. First, you have to understand them to follow them, and when you don't, you must ask. That is a complete idea of work ethic. Being told and actually doing what is being told and expected of you. Sometimes, it's osmosis. You get it because you've seen it, not because you were told. Work ethic is doing what's expected of you at work in a professional manner. . . . Work would mean profession, which means you have to act a certain type of way. . . . It's doing the right thing at work. Having pride in oneself and what you do. You might not like it, but you still should smile when you get a customer.

Xiomara (48, cashier) and David (26, cook) saw work ethic as not job specific. For Xiomara, work ethic was " do you give a sh_t about your job or do you not?" and according to David,

> What it means to me is, it doesn't apply to any particular job. It's your mentality, maybe how you apply yourself to something. Whether it's being a McDonald's worker, whether it's being a teacher, whether it's being a business owner, whether it's being a construction worker. The way you approach yourself in terms of . . . Having good work ethic means that you're a hard worker. You come to work every day. You don't take off; you don't try to cut corners. I think work ethic really just means a solid foundation in terms of applying yourself to whatever particular job that may be.

All of the research participants who appeared to have joined the Fight for $15 as a sign of solidarity with their coworkers also appeared to fully embrace the tenets of work ethic. The following are examples of the workers' responses when asked specifically about their adherence to these tenets. "But it is true. Especially I come from southern families, they were cotton pickers and domestic workers. They always instilled that in us, work ethic" (Angela, 40, cashier) and "Work is good because it gets you out of boredom" (Rurik, 46, maintenance/occasional shift manager). David (26, cook) also indicated that a reward of work was relief from boredom, and he believed that work gave purpose to life.

> If you think about in your life, whatever you do, whatever it may be. If you don't work, or you don't do anything, what is the purpose of life? Time just passes. You can't just sit at home and watch TV. Even if you're a gazillionaire, you have to have something to do. I think that work serves a purpose in giving you something to be motivated for, something to strive toward, too; something to function. I think that you have to have something to strive for, something to live for.

Parvaiz believed there was value in being the best possible employee.

> A lot of people, when they come to work, they just come to work. It's just a title for them. Some people come to work, and they go to work. I try not to make it as being a chore to come to work, but it's something that, . . . it is something you need to do because you have to pay bills, cause and effect and stuff. You have to make it fun for yourself. You can get bored and tired and stuff. . . . You [can't] get angry.
>
> I guess they say the harder you work, the better. I think it's true. If somebody sees it, pass it along. Like I said, I'm a friendly person and stuff, so I talk to everybody and stuff, so everybody sees me. When I come in, good morning, good morning, good morning, hello, goodbye, everything like that. They don't see me having a bad day. They see me have a bad moment, brush it off, keeping going. That's it.
>
> . . . You work hard for yourself. It makes you feel good when you go home or when you open that paycheck or anything you've done throughout the day. It makes you feel good. You sit down like yes, I did something positive, and I worked hard for it, like a new phone I worked hard for it, so it's doing it for yourself.

Parvaiz, Rurik, and Yandy argued that even within their current employment situation, there was a link between the quality of their work and the possibility of raises and other workplace benefits. Parvaiz recounted how his good work habits resulted in an increase in his hourly wage.

> When the next person sees you doing good, even my coworker, "Man, you do a hell of a job. Excuse my French, but yeah." If they're saying it, I'm pretty sure the manager's seeing it. Yeah, that helped me get my raise. That's definitely. Within my first 2½ months, I got a raise for 50¢, 65¢, something like that, so I was climbing kind of fast.

Rurik thought it was likely that one could receive additional money for good quality work, but it was more likely that the reward for good quality work would be vacation time or other "benefits" such as additional work hours.

> You know in our case, you can probably get it. Well, you can't get it right away, so is the vacation, you can't get it right away. It has to be after 1 year, but it is a possibility, but they have to bug management quite often. They have to pester. Our management's not that receptive in all cases, not the store management. It's upper management, not the store management, franchise management. It is possible. It is possible. In general, what we do is try to give them more hours, a more flexible schedule. Sometimes you know here's how to handle it, there's a friendly environment, free food, free uniform, flexible schedule.

When asked about the relationship between work ethic and the fast food workers in New York State winning the $15 wage, surprisingly, Yandy did not think fast food workers "deserved" the wage increase.

> They didn't deserve it. Don't take me out of context; you deserve to be paid adequately, but with being paid that, you must do every single solitary thing that is expected of you. See, a lot of youngsters and people who take these jobs, they don't really know what the extra mile looks like.

Angela, who expressed her hopes to leave the fast food industry, believed a move up at the fast food restaurant in which she worked was possible but required additional education. "If you're interested in managing, going to school, there are possibilities, but I'm not interested." Xiomara responded "Nah" when asked if she thought with hard work she could work her way up in the fast food industry. She advised all who wanted to make more money at her restaurant "to go for another job." She explained the reason for this advice: "There was a guy that worked 25 years. Do you know how much he said he made? I met him at the thing [Fight for $15 demonstration]. That really turned me off. He made $11 or $12 an hour."

Upward Mobility and Solidarity

Rurik and Yandy could not recall anyone within their social network who had moved up the economic hierarchy. Rurik had no answer to the reasons people in his network had not improved their financial situation. Yandy, however, believed that people "lose the hunger to better themselves"; as a result, they remain in low-income jobs.

While education, according to Angela, was pivotal to the achievement of financial success, Angela also believed that talent, luck, and perseverance had a role as well. She shared the story of her niece as an example of upward mobility.

> My niece, she was a cashier at a supermarket. Now she owns her own home in Georgia. She's a single mother of two girls. I don't know how she got her foot in the door, but she got first life insurance policies, and she stuck it out. She would apply for different jobs and take the training. She gained the experience and the knowledge. She was able to secure some time on her resume and just kept building from there. She started taking online classes.

Like Angela, David spoke of the role of education in upward mobility. "If you look across this country, whatever side you fall on, I think the public school sector for a lot of people is not working. I'm not a politician. I'm not sure what the answers are but I do know it's not working." David shared the story of his uncle as an example of upward mobility.

> My mother grew up very poor, had 11 siblings. My uncle, I'm not going to say he's the 1%, but . . . he might be upper class. He's definitely not middle class. He's somewhere in between maybe. . . . He started at 13, working. He got into art. He was an art dealer. Became very successful with that.
>
> He worked hard. He was also very good at his craft. He was a networker. I think also helps that he didn't raise a family. He was single, but he has other issues, alcohol, things like that. I think he had good work ethic. . . . He was a good talker.

> I think he was a good salesman. I think he knew what he was selling. He had an interest in it. He had a passion. Went into college, he hooked up with the right people. He would be an example of at least . . . I would probably say he might be upper class. Not Upper East Side, but he may be a little bit below that.

Regarding upward mobility, Xiomara ironically recounted the story of a person she referred to as an alcoholic.

> The neighbor next door, he was a mess. He was a mess. I'm the only one that liked this kid and had faith in him. I really did. Because he used to drink, I loved him to death, and I'd sit in the hall, talk to him, and tell him you're going to be somebody someday. He did. Then he was doing little stuff, driving around, but now he's got a big company. I hope some of my talks helped him, really. Because we used to talk. . . . He always says to me, when he comes to see his mother, he'll always knock on my door. You know it's nice to have somebody remember you. He realized that he had brains when he was sober.

Parvaiz was certain that the potential for economic mobility existed in the fast food industry. "Because you could come in as a coworker and work your way into assistant manager and manager and work your way up. Then now you've got a salary, you're not an hourly wage now." Parvaiz talked about a coworker he knew.

> I had a friend and we was working in Jersey together, and she ended up being my damn manager in a year. Her success came from being nosy. Let's say she sees the manager counting money. She's asking, "Where is the money going to? How does the process take place? What does she need to do to be a manager?" Anything that has dealing with a manager, she wanted to know.
>
> If the manager was filling out some paperwork in the office, she's in there on her little time, "What are you doing?" . . . I guess [the manager understood] she really wants to be a manager, so start training her. After while he started training her, from time to time on her down time. "Hey come back, let me show you something, this paperwork." She learned it, learned it, learned it, and within a year, she became a manager.

Nonfinancial Employment Commitment (Lottery Question) and Solidarity

As with most of the 19 other research participants asked the lottery question, the research participants in this group responded that they would continue to work after winning a lottery. Each of the six research participants quoted in this section imagined their life after winning the lottery as an entrepreneur. David's reflection in response to the lottery question was typical among the respondents.

> Maybe not [current franchise employer] certainly, but I would say, I would try to do something. I don't know what it would be. Whether it be getting involved in a charity, getting involved with a nonprofit, political campaigns. I would say, maybe help local groups. Maybe do a job that maybe I have meaning to. Maybe it's like opening up something of a hobby of mine.

Asked why he would work, David replied:

> If you don't work, or you don't do anything, what is the purpose of life? Time just passes. You can't just sit at home and watch TV. Even if you're a gazillionaire, you have to have something to do. I think that work serves a purpose in giving you something to be motivated for, something to strive toward, too; something to function.

Moreover, David expressed a belief in the unsustainability of financial solvency.

> You get this money and, yes, it's millions of dollars, but it does run out. Let's say if the house is a million, the car is $100,000. The vacations, you talk about the family you want to set up. Now you're talking millions of dollars already. You're certainly going to spend differently than you did. You're not going to be on a budget. You're not going to be worried about rent and all these things. I think that what happens is that you have so many things you want to spend on. It's almost like a bucket list, but it does run out.

Yandy, who believed she would continue to work after winning the lottery like David, expressed that she had no expectations of her capacity to maintain financial

solvency even after winning a substantial lottery. “I’ll be done blew through every dollar I won.” Continuing, Yandy said, “What don’t people don’t realize is, just as easy as you got something, or just as hard as you work to get something, it’s so much harder to keep it.” Yandy, who self-identified as queer, stated that she would open a shelter for lesbian girls. “Lesbian girls get a bad end of the stick, they really do. . . . They need someone to hear you out, understand where you’re coming from, and meet you there. Sometimes that’s the best thing any girl could ask for.” She continued,

> Sometimes you need somebody to help you work it out, somebody to listen to you. You need somebody to talk you through it. Sometimes you just need somebody to just say, “Hey, no, no, no. Stop. You’re doing too much.” That’s sometimes what you need. That’s what I lacked when I was coming up, somebody to sit down and talk to me. Granted, me and my mother talked but not in the way and about the things that I really needed to talk about. Like getting kicked out because you’re gay. That sh_t ain’t easy.

Xiomara said she would still work, but emphasized like David that her work would not be in fast food. She planned to open a business. Additionally, she would volunteer to help the elderly as she currently does by helping elderly neighbors with a variety of errands, such as shopping and transporting them to medical appointments.

> Whether it be me owning a business or something, and I definitely would like to help the elderly. I would put a good sum of money, and I’ve said this all my life. I love the elderly. I always helped them in the street and stuff. I would definitely help the elderly, whether it be getting to doctors or whatever.

Angela would continue to work after a lottery, and as others, she would start a business to “pursue something I always wanted to do but never did, like the music

industry." She would also help others by doing "some type charity work or something."

According to Angela, work "just keeps you going":

> It's just instilled in the person that that's what you do. That's going back to work ethic. You think that your family and the people around you, it was instilled that that's what you do, work. Even if maybe you don't have the need to work. Because everyone needs help and it's the right thing to do. It's morals. It's morally right.

Rurik, who planned to create a hunger prevention organization, responded similarly when asked why he would continue working:

> I just feel much better if I work. It helps me a lot physically, mentally, and socially. Otherwise, you're sitting alone watching TV or watching soap operas, and you're going crazy watching this nonsense, the shows. Some of them I like, but some of them I don't. In general, you can't watch it 24 hours a day 7 days a week. I also think that people should be productive in life because I'm trying to find a purpose in life. Like for example, I probably will get involved more active in a charity. I'm already doing it. I work at the [thrift] store. I also help in [charitable food delivery] with the truck because the driver's not well or just the driver sometimes is not able to park or get deliveries, which I do. I'll probably get involved more in charitable activities like active charity, not the bulls__t charities.

Parvaiz (33, former crewmember) was one among three of the 25 research participants who envisioned the launch of a construction business following winning a lottery. Parvaiz was one of only four workers of the 25 asked who did not mention the aspiration to engage in charitable endeavors after winning a lottery.

> I would start buying up all kinds of property; so yes, I would have to work. . . . I wouldn't do no manual work. I'd be doing a lot of research and pointing and swiping a lot on my credit card. In a sense it, though, I'll still work somewhat, but not manually at a warehouse or say somebody else's job. My title will be "boss" now. I will be writing checks, so yeah.

Asked the reason he would work, Parvaiz replied:

> Now, the hard work for society, no. You work hard for yourself. It makes you feel good when you go home or when you open that paycheck or anything you've done throughout the day. It makes you feel good. You sit down like yes, I did something positive, and I worked hard for it, like a new phone. Let's say somebody on welfare has an Obama phone and they get that new iPhone. I worked hard for it, so it's doing it for yourself.

Table 4.4 provides summary information about the six participants involved in the Fight for $15 with the intention of solidarity. Table 4.4 shows that workers who joined the Fight for $15 out of solidarity with their coworkers most likely thought that hard work at their current job could result in workplace benefits. Additionally, interestingly almost all of these workers offered examples of upward mobility from those within their network.

Table 4.4
Summary: Research Participants with the Intention of Solidarity

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Example of mobility	Work life after a lottery win
Angela	Joined the Fight for $15 to help younger workers	Unemployed husband, one child	"That is like a code of conduct."	Yes	Yes, middle income	"It just keeps you going. It's just instilled in the person that that's what you do."
David	Motivated to join because of the financial struggle of young mothers on public assistance	Lives in a single-room-occupancy hotel. Uncle (role model for upward mobility) was an alcoholic.	"It's your mentality, maybe how you apply yourself to something."	Yes	Yes, upper income	"You get this money, and yes, it's millions of dollars, but it does run out."

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Example of mobility	Work life after a lottery win
Parvaiz	Took the lead of his coworkers	Divorced, parent of two children	"Just doing what you're supposed to do at work."	Yes	Yes, lower income	"I don't like being bored."
Rurik	"I probably have to say out of solidarity with my coworkers."	Lives with mother	"For example, shows up on time."	Yes	No	"I just feel much better if I work."
Xiomara	"Coworkers ask, 'You going to back us?' Therefore, you go."	In the process of divorce, one adult child	"How you feel about how you work."	No	Yes, middle income	Would work helping senior citizens
Yandy	To be part of a historic event	Lives with mother; raised in foster care. Parents were addicted to drugs.	"The way you uphold a job."	Ambivalent	No	"Just as hard as you work to get something, it's so much harder to keep it."

The Fight for $15 for Personal Development

Profiles

Bethany. Bethany, a member of the TWC, organized her coworkers to join the Fight for $15. She told her coworkers what she could about the reasons for striking, such as the benefits of $15 an hour and the importance of standing up for their rights. Through the TWC, Bethany was learning about labor regulations, demonstrating that she was a capable and knowledgeable worker. To Bethany, the Fight for $15 taught her to advocate for herself as a worker. She credited her participation in the Fight for $15

with leading to her personal growth that directly related to her ability to advocate for herself at work.

> I felt empowered because I felt that I could actually stand up for something and [that it] eventually will come [about]. Why I said that? I did the strike and a week after I got a raise. I felt like that kind of have an effect on me getting the raise. I'm more empowered because I walked in and I felt like they can't fight me. I'm like, okay, by being on the strike and from hearing from different people about stuff that shouldn't be going on, so I used that knowledge and I went back. I'm like: they got to pay me for sick leave. They got to do this. They got to do that. I stand up more, and I speak more than I was doing before. I guess that's what empowered me from the strike.

Bethany, a 26-year-old African American woman, was born in Jamaica. She had a small son and at the time of the interview lived on her own in Brooklyn. She graduated from high school and worked in the fast food industry for 5 years. Bethany was a manager at a fast food restaurant and worked 28 to 30 hours a week. She stated that she wanted to leave the industry to become a registered nurse.

Ida. Ida learned about the Fight for $15 and the TWC when a TWC organizer came to her store. Since that initial encounter with the organizer, Ida became an active member of the TWC and participated in a number of demonstrations. She appeared in a number of press stories on television, social media, and in print—including a recent story in the *New York Times.* Ida, a member of the TWC, planned to continue to participate in the Fight for $15 even after she left the fast food industry. She found a purpose through her participation in the Fight for $15 and wanted to continue lending her support to the movement. Ida indicated that participation gave her voice:

> I have a lot more confidence. I stand up for myself more. I don't see any reason why I should keep my mouth closed about what's going on. I'm cautious, but I like giving people hope that there's a better way for us to survive here. I speak

> to a lot more people. In one of the interviews that I did, the person was interested in me personally. What makes me tick? He was interested in my artwork. That really enlivened me. It gave me hope that I can do a lot better than what I'm doing.

Ida, a 60-year-old multiethnic woman, supported herself and her granddaughter with her income of $9 an hour. Ida had worked as a cook and cashier at the fast food franchise for the past 9 years. Before working there, Ida managed her home-based art business. She also had her line of aromatherapy products. Her husband did not want her to work outside of the home. In addition to her art business, Ida took care of three terminally ill family members. She was also ill for many years, which made her unable to work. Nine years ago, Ida's husband died, and as a result, Ida became the main income earner for her family. Widowhood required her to work outside of her home. She chose her employer because it was close to home, which would allow her to continue to care for her granddaughter.

Ida initially worked 40 hours per week. However, recently her employer reduced all of the employees' hours to less than 30 hours a week. If she stayed in the industry, she would like to be the general manager, but she did not think she would ever receive a promotion. Her employer had passed her over for a promotion at least five times. She thought it might be because of her age.

Quin. Quin learned about the demonstrations from her coworkers. She joined because her coworkers were going and Quin wanted to lend her voice to the protest. Ironically, one manager at Quin's store encouraged the workers to strike. According to Quin, this specific manager was in his early 20s and related to the workers' financial difficulties. The Fight for $15 was an opportunity for Quin to begin to express her

voice. “Everybody was going, and I was like, you know what? I’m going to do something. Let me say something here, just another voice, not that anybody really heard me or listened.”

Quin is a 44-year-old Jewish woman with a master’s degree in education. She was born in the United States, spending most of her life in New York. Approximately 8 years ago, she moved to Atlanta with a partner but returned to New York 3 years ago to take care of her ailing father. Quin was recovering from cancer. She lived with her father and planned to move back to Atlanta when her father died.

Quin worked at a fast food franchise as a cashier, making $10 an hour and working 28 to 36 hours a week. Someone she knew got her the job, and she had been employed there 2½ years. Before working there and before she got sick, Quin was a teacher and a director of a summer camp/after-school program. She had looked for, but had not gotten, a new job in education. She was not planning to participate in other demonstrations because she was planning to quit working in fast food.

Thomas. Thomas attended two demonstrations that he learned about on social media. Many of his coworkers participated in the strikes. In fact, the coworkers met at the store and traveled to the demonstrations together. Thomas was not an active member of TWC but attended a couple of its meetings. When asked about his reasons for participating in the Fight for $15, Thomas referenced the acquisition of information concerning his rights as a worker. “You want to make sure that you’re being treated properly as an employee. It’s good to know what to do just in case that happens

[unjustly terminated from employment], how you would survive and things of that nature."

Thomas, a 42-year-old married African American man, had a 10-year-old daughter. He attended college but dropped out because he did not have the money to continue to pay tuition. Thomas had worked as a maintenance worker at the fast food restaurant for 2 years. He worked about 35 hours a week but would like to work more hours, although there was little possibility of that. He initially earned $8.50 an hour but received a raise to $9.50 after about a year. He went to work there because it was close to home; he could save money by walking to work. He did not want to stay in the fast food industry, but if he did stay, he would want to become a manager.

Work Ethic and Personal Development

Among the four workers who joined the Fight for $15 seeking personal development, three—Bethany, Quin, and Thomas—named school as the source of their first encounter with the term *work ethic*. Meyer (1977) suggested that an educational system functions similarly to religion. "It provides a legitimating account of the competence of citizens, the authority of elites, and the sources of the adequacy of the social system to maintain itself in the face of uncertainty" (Meyer, 1977, p. 72). Educational systems are legitimizing institutions sorting and categorizing people into groups, such as professionals, laborers, or minimally skilled workers. Sorting and categorization maintains the social hierarchy by "both constructing or altering roles in society and authoritatively allocating personnel to these roles" (Meyer, 1977, p. 56).

When Thomas first heard the term *work ethic,* it was in relationship to obtaining employment or getting an internship. “They teach you training skills, like interviewing skills. They tell you how to dress, how to talk, what to wear, stuff like that and what to say and how to keep a job, things of that nature.”

Bethany and Quin, who both reported high school as their introduction to the term *work ethic,* also had memories of parents who demonstrated work ethic. Additionally, Quin recalled her parents’ relationship with work.

> I grew up in a family that worked, and they worked hard, and they were responsible. My environment was very organized, and again, I use the word “responsible” because I can’t stand irresponsible people, one of my pet peeves. I grew up in that kind of environment, so that’s . . . Yeah, my parents said work ethic, it is . . . I don’t know if they used those exact words, but they said you have to be responsible and in order to succeed you have to follow through and be persistent and consistent. They taught me the way to do it. To try to be successful and not necessarily money-wise but feeling good about myself and knowing at the end of the day that I put in, and I did my best at whatever I was doing, no matter what it was. It’s more about doing the right thing.

Ida (60, cashier) said of work ethic, “I’ve heard all about it from the time I was old enough to understand what work means.” She defined work ethic as “doing your job to the best of your ability, educating myself, and reeducating myself. Keep up with the policy and do the job in the highest quality I can.” Bethany, Thomas, and Quin offered similar definitions of work ethic: “What you do inside the job like your job description” (Bethany); “How you perform on your job. What you value in work performance. Just being reliable and responsible and doing a good job and putting your best into it” (Quin); “Being on time, being detail-oriented, a team player and just being happy, friendly, courteous, and just doing the job to the best of your ability” (Thomas).

When asked if they believed there was a positive relationship between the high quality of their work in their current employment and wage increases, promotions, or other workplace benefits, both Bethany and Thomas responded affirmatively. Ida and Quin expressed ambivalence in this regard. Bethany offered, "If you don't work hard then you won't succeed in what you want. Then you got to work hard to be able to achieve what you want. I work hard. I feel good." Bethany, who was a manager, asserted that the good quality of her work and the level of her determination led to a promotion to a management position at the fast food restaurant where she was working: "If I wasn't the way I am right now, I wouldn't get the position."

Thomas also recounted a story of a raise he received as a direct result of work ethic.

> Oh, yeah, they'll see that you're dedicated to what you do. They might come up to you one day and say, "Yeah, I recognize all the good things that you're doing. Everybody likes you; you're friendly, courteous. I think I'm going to give you a raise and I'm going to move you up to a higher position." . . . I started at $8.50.
>
> Researcher: What are your thoughts about how you moved up from a starting wage of $8.50 an hour to your current wage of $9.50 an hour?
>
> Just what I just said, too, just working hard and it seemed that I was dedicated, always on time. That's a main thing for me, being on time, and then I got rewarded. He just said, "Thomas, can I talk to you in the office for a minute?" Then, he said, "You've been here for about a year now. Everybody loves you, you work hard. I appreciate what you're doing." There's not too many bosses that'll tell you that they appreciate what you're doing, so I was happy for that.
>
> Then, he told me, "I think I'm going to give you a raise." He couldn't give me a promotion, a higher position, but he gave me a dollar raise. That was good.

Bethany's and Thomas's experiences of a positive outcome from quality work were not the experiences of Quin and Ida. However, Quin did not unequivocally believe

that work ethic equated with advancement in her current place of employment, although she conceded that there was a possibility of a connection.

> I just believe like they talk, talk, talk to keep you there, but it's [fast food]. . . . Do I believe a great work ethic there is going to get me further? I mean it certainly could help. I can tell you right now if I didn't have a good work ethic then no, I wouldn't be promoted, so it's certainly part of . . . You have to have a good work ethic. It doesn't mean you're going to get . . . I don't believe you're necessarily going to get promoted.

Ida believed that although she had a good work ethic, her employer was not commensurately rewarding her.

> As far as feeling successful and feeling like a better person, no. In this type of job, I'm always worried. I'm always scrambling for money. I'm always browbeaten and treated as if I'm not a good person. It affects your personality and your self-esteem when you work for little money. It's like what I call the new slavery.
>
> My old GM [general manager] used to tell me that if you work hard, you do this, and you do that you'll be able to get into management. I worked so hard. I worked my fingers to the bone. I worked my body sore, and I never got into management. I wouldn't know what to tell them except for to do the same thing. Have good work ethic, come to work on time, make sure that you dot your i's and cross your t's. Maybe if you're lucky. It didn't work for me. I see a lot of people it didn't work for them either.

Upward Mobility and Personal Development

In field observations, testimony before the New York State Wage Board highlighted how the fast food industry provided opportunities. One franchise owner told his story:

> I started in the fast food industry as a 16-year-old working throughout my high school and college years. I was very grateful to earn money to help pay for my college education, and I was also able to develop many work skills that would help me in my later professional career in the finance and accounting field. After working a few years in the corporate world, I then decided was to open up

> my first restaurants, returning to the community in which I grew up and worked. As an owner-operator, I am now giving these same opportunities to many of those who are in the position I was. (Owner and franchisee, testimony, spring 2015)

Additional testimony came from an owner of four fast food restaurants who believed the industry "provides a lot of opportunity to people like myself." He explained that he started as "a high school kid" who "didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't even know if I wanted to [go to] college. I had no special training. I had no trade. I wasn't handy as my father was with his hands."

> And I rather stuck with the job. I never decided . . . at one point, I never really went there saying I'm going to stay there, but at one point or the other, you come to the conclusion that I can do well here. I'm actually making a living. So, I stuck with it. And through 40 years and through working for [fast food restaurant 1], [fast food restaurant 2], and then [fast food restaurant 3], I made the big break and actually purchased the store, as I mentioned, last March.
>
> I always look at the crewmember position as a very important position, but I kind of equated it to the mailroom at a large company. You go and get your foot in the door and then from there, you do whatever you can to try, if you want to stay in the industry, to work hard to move into management and hopefully you can better yourself along the way; go to school or even if you pick up a trade, and you want to work to maybe fix these restaurants from a technician's standpoint.

Similarly, Bethany (26, manager) named herself as an example of upward mobility based on two factors. First, she cited the fact that her employer promoted her to management and secondly, she cited the ambition to become a registered nurse.

> To me by going back to school, and that's what I'm trying to do . . . I apply for [for-profit college] but I'm trying to go to a community college. That's the medical school right there. They wanted to give me a loan, and I can't afford that. I just came here. I can't afford all of that. . . . They [the for-profit college] want to give me a $10,000 loan. I can't afford that. They [for-profit college] don't care. As long as you're paying, they're good.

Ida, Quin, and Thomas named examples in their social network of people who demonstrated upward mobility, moving from a low-income economic class to middle-income earners. Ida and Thomas pointed to family members as examples of upward mobility. Ida told the story of her sister.

> I have a sister who's a journalist. She's an award-winning journalist, has done it for over 40 years. When we were growing up, we weren't rich. It's a lot of hard work. . . . After she got out of high school, she stayed in college. She just kept taking college classes up until now. She graduated from [Ivy League college] with her third master's degree, I think, maybe 4 years ago. Now she's retired from journalism. She's not really retired. She went back into the new form.
>
> She's in social media now. She does videos and that type of thing. She's just now starting to get paid again. She was trying to work her way into it. She's really an amazing story. I think they should put her in Black History Month because she's done so much. That's my sister. I'm so proud of her. We're polarized right now. She's doing so great, and I'm working at [fast food franchise].

Thomas (42, maintenance) gave an example of one person, his cousin, who moved from lower class to middle or upper middle class by refurbishing discarded computers. Thomas believed that his cousin was successful primarily because he lived in a white community. In communities of color, people do not throw away useful items.

> He took a trade, and he learned how to fix computers. He used to find computers in the street, and he'd take them home, reprogram them, clean them up, and sell them. He got rich like that. He used to live in New York and now he lives in California. He's worth probably about $300,000 or $400,000 now. That's a big success story for me.
>
> His girlfriend was white, so he lived in a predominantly white neighborhood. I guess that's why, because in most low-poverty neighborhoods, you won't see computers on the street to even pick up for the first place.
>
> He lived in a high-income community where people would throw away junk. One person's junk is another person's fortune. He knows what to do with it. He'd fix it

> up, reprograms them, and he'd sell them on Craigslist and eBay. He got rich. In a matter of 6 months, he had $100,000.

When first asked about examples of upward mobility, Quin replied that she did not know of any example, but she later recalled the story of two acquaintances.

> I do know this one couple, [they became] directors of a day camp. They're in their 70s, so they're older, but they were not wealthy at all. They barely made it through. They'd heard about the camp, so they were driving in just to see. This guy walked down, "Want to buy a day camp?" They said, "We don't really have the money." They borrowed. They put everything on the line to take a chance. They took this chance, and they now own the biggest day camp in Long Island for the past 40 years, so they went from rags to riches.

Ida, Quin, and Thomas thought that success required both hard work and the luck of meeting the right people. Quin, about the acquaintances that opened a successful day camp center, said,

> I believe it was luck, hard work. I mean, once they got their foot in the door and when they had nothing, they worked their asses off for years, 24/7, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. People don't know that, but I know it because I've done it. You always work. So yeah, if you want to get back to the hard work, hard work yes. You never get anywhere if you don't work hard. I don't believe that. I mean yes you could be a thief or whatever but I think they even have to work hard.

Ida said of upward mobility:

> It's a lot of hard work. You have to have a lot of irons in the fire. You have to have good contacts. It's just perseverance I think. You have to continually educate yourself and just stick with it. Keep your connections right. I think that you can be successful.

Thomas believed meeting the right person could change someone's life.

> If you meet the right person, that could change your whole life. A lot of times people don't get to meet the right person in their lifetime, so that's one of the unfortunate parts.

> I guess you just got to be around. That's why a lot of people go to Hollywood if they want to be an actor because they know they got a good chance of meeting somebody that could help them with their career, to get to the top, where they want to be.
>
> You got to put yourself in that environment for the possibility to happen. You're not going to get nothing just sitting at home, hoping and praying and wishing that it's going to happen because it won't happen that way. You got to go out and get it. I always believe in that.

Nonfinancial Employment Commitment (Lottery Question) and Personal Development

Bethany and Thomas had economic reasons for continuing work after imagined lottery wins. Bethany's (28, manager) response to the question was not uncommon among those who would continue to work. "I will still need money because one day the money will finish, so I got to continue work but not as a fast food worker. Because I want to be independent, I would be a registered nurse." Even after Thomas specifically said that the imagined lottery win would provide sufficient wealth to handle all of his financial needs for the rest of life, he maintained that he would still work:

> Yeah, [I would continue to work] even if I won the lottery, definitely. It's kind of a curse too and a blessing at the same time. A lot of people who win it, a lot will end up going broke 4 or 5 years later because they're not managing their money right. They're not opening their own business. They're not having no revenue coming in. They're just spending money, not making it. They're not investing their money right.

As with many of the other research participants, Thomas envisioned his life after winning the lottery as an entrepreneur. "I probably would open up a restaurant and a clothing store and a record company because I always wanted my own record company.

That's the three things I would do." Asked for his rationale for working after winning a lottery, Thomas replied,

> Just wanting more for myself, because I know I deserve more. The knowledge and the time that I got, I want to be compensated for it. I want to have more free time if I want to travel and stuff like that. I'm not a slave to a job or whatever. I have my own freedom. I'm making money while I'm on vacation; that's what I call "financial freedom." That's very important to me.

Quin (44, cashier) would also work after winning a lottery, since she "can't just sit around and do nothing. I'd have to open my own school since I can't get a job. . . . I'd probably open a day camp or something. That's my passion. Yeah, I'd work. Not in fast food, but I'd work." Ida was the only one of the three research participants with the intention of personal development who did not intend to work after winning a lottery.

> No, I wouldn't work. I've worked late. This is the longest time I've ever spent on a job. Late in life, I started working regularly. No, I wouldn't work ever again except for if I had my own business like the way I started out. I don't like the idea of having someone lording things over me the way it's been done over the years. It taught me that I would be my best boss. I really don't want to deal with someone as a boss ever again. I don't like the idea of a boss. I don't. I think I can take care of myself a lot better than they did.

Interestingly, unlike others, the research participants grouped together in this section because of their intention for personal development did not indicate a plan to use funds for charitable purposes after winning lotteries.

Table 4.5 summarizes information about the four participants involved in the Fight for $15 with the intention of personal development. As shown in the table, these workers both believed in the possibility of workplace rewards for hard work and had seen a demonstration of upward mobility in their networks.

Table 4.5
Summary: Research Participants with the Intention of Personal Development

Participant	Fight for $15	Family composition/ history	Definition of work ethic	Current job: Hard work equals workplace rewards	Example of upward mobility within social network	Life after a lottery win
Bethany	"I used that knowledge, and I went back."	Supports her mother	"Things that you would do inside the job like your job descriptions."	Yes	No	"One day the money will finish, so I got to continue to work but not as a fast food worker."
Ida	"I have a lot more confidence. I stand up for myself more."	Widow, raising her grand-daughter	"Do my job to the best of my ability, educate myself, and reeducate myself."	Ambivalent	Yes, middle class	No, wouldn't work
Quin	"Let me say something here, just another voice."	Raised in a middle-class household, caretaker of her dying father	"How you perform on your job. What you value in work performance."	Ambivalent	Yes, middle class	"I can't just sit around and do nothing."
Thomas	"You want to make sure that you're being treated properly as an employee."	Married, father of one	"Being on time, being detail-oriented, a team player and just being happy, friendly, courteous, and just doing the job to the best of your ability."	Yes	Yes, middle class	"Yeah, even if I won the lottery, definitely."

Stigmatization and Structural Intimidation of Fast Food Work and Its Workers

Stigma, both social/structural and internalized, and structural intimidation of fast food workers were ever-present themes that flowed through much of the empirical material. Stigma is the marginalization of the people in society who hold characteristics distinct from the dominant vision of the society's idealized person. Members of society interpret the labeled people's variation from the idealized person as negative, and the labeled people become the marginalized other. The nonmarginalized people's access to resources and power enables the promulgation of marginality and exclusion and stigmatization (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Social and Structural Stigma

Three primary sources of stigmatization were directed at fast food workers: the media (old and new media), direct contact with customers and the general public, and coworkers as well as the employer. This section highlights a few examples of the social and structural stigmatization of fast food workers.

Old media. On August 30, 2015, the Employment Policies Institute (EPI) placed a billboard (Figure 4.1) on one of the most trafficked locations in New York City, Times Square. According to its website, EPI is "a non-profit research organization dedicated to studying public policy issues surrounding employment growth. In particular, EPI focuses on issues that affect entry-level employment" (EPI, n.d.). The billboard was installed shortly after the New York State Fast Food Wage Board made its recommendations of a $15 hourly wage for state workers in the fast food industry. This billboard is one of a

myriad of examples of a concerted effort to stigmatize employees in the fast food industry as unskilled, uneducated, lazy, and unworthy.

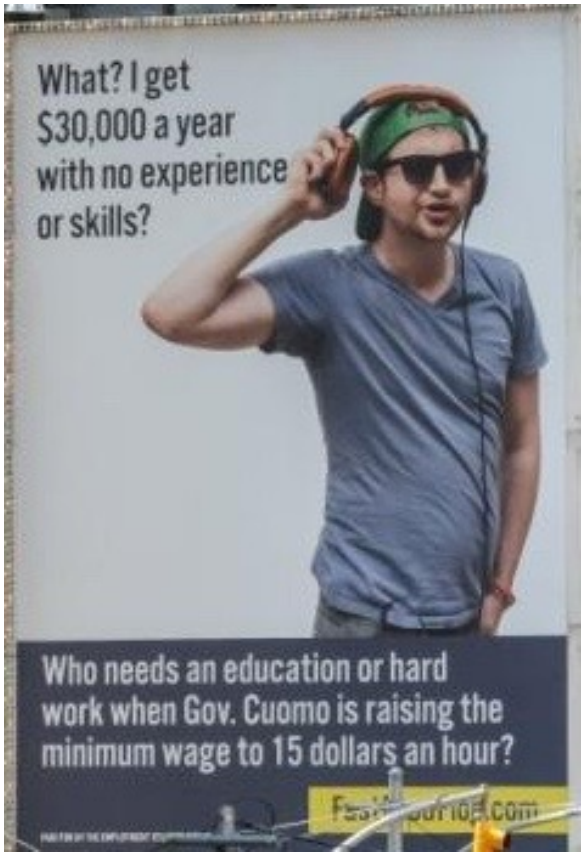

Figure 4.1. A billboard in Times Square stigmatizing fast food workers.

Social media. A review of posts on social media sites of Facebook and Twitter revealed much of the same sentiment as the Times Square billboard. Facebook postings in response to a news story about the testimony of the fast food workers at the New York State Fast Food Wage Board Meetings clearly illustrate this point.

> Yes because you don't deserve $15 an hour to heat up food. They should fire everyone and hire a few chefs and cook the food by scratch and actually have a

> taste to the food. It's sad that you want to get paid for doing nothing. Your job isn't that hard to do. Go cry somewhere else. (Facebook, 2015)
>
> Moreover, others wrote:
>
> 15 bucks an hour to flip a burger? Half of these idiots can't even do that right! (Facebook, 2015)
>
> I have a Jurist Doctorate. I have worked my entire 43 years of professional life for the poor. I have never made $31,000 per year, and I strongly object to these lazy low life who would do nothing to get ahead in the world making more money than I ever made in my life. (Facebook, spring 2015)

The general public. Carlos (24, former shift manager) gave an account of an event surrounding his participation in the initial fast food demonstration in November 2012. He recalled remarks from onlookers. "Oh, yeah, stupid. Y'all flip burgers and y'all want $15 and a union. Who does that? Everybody was saying that's [fast food work] just a starting job."

The employer. Through their testimonies given during the New York State Fast Food Wage Board hearings, owners of fast food franchises presented quintessential work ethic narratives. A Wendy's franchise owner testified, "I provide a career ladder for people with a strong work ethic and who truly respect other people" (franchise owner, June 2015). From these testimonies, it is possible to imagine the intended or accidental work ethic messages relayed from employer to worker and the not too different message conveyed by the Times Square billboard that fast food workers have only themselves to blame for their current economic and work situation.

The Internalization of Stigma

Many of the fast food workers in this study internalized the stigma of their position. The foundation of internalized stigma is the acceptance of and agreement with society's negative assessment of one's potential, humanity, and worth. To internalize stigma, one adjusts his or her self-image to align with the stigmatizing images held by society (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009, p. 33). One who is stigmatized perceives that she and those like her are socially unacceptable (Herek et al., 2009; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Consequently, those who internalize stigma hold deleterious feelings toward others who are most like them. However, in most cases, the deleterious feelings towards others similarly situated are subordinate to the negative feelings that the stigmatized possesses about him or herself (Vogel et al., 2007, p. 41).

Expressions of internalized stigmatization emerged in encounters with some research participants. For example, for Quin (44, cashier), issues of her stigmatization surfaced several times during her conversation with the researcher.

> It's a very bad feeling because like I said, the stigma, oh, you flip burgers. Flip burgers? First of all, I never flipped a burger in my life. It makes me angry, and again, I think I'm angry at myself because I'm in this position to be working at a fast food place.

A few minutes later in the discussion, Quin once again brought up stigma.

> I'm very well educated. I come from a good family. I mean, a lot of times I feel like I don't belong and I don't believe that's a race thing. I'm not prejudiced, none of the above, but people assume, you're black, you're Spanish, you're this, you're that. What's a Jewish girl working here? It's true. Believe me, people don't realize, but there's a lot of prejudice against Jewish people.

Reflecting on her experience participating in a Fight for $15 demonstration, Quin returned to the discussion of stigma.

> I had mixed feelings about it [participating in the demonstration] because I didn't want to be seen [in public with fast food workers] because of the stigma of even being a fast food worker, but I also did it because I work my ass off and I want more money. . . . Like I said, I wanted to be seen and heard, but I also didn't want to be seen and heard.
>
> Researcher: Why?
>
> It's all about the stigma. For me, it's all about the stigma. Is it because of I grew up in a middle-class family, and I shouldn't be . . . I'm a college graduate. I don't know. A lot of it's me inside.

Like Quin, other fast food workers made statements consistent with internalized stigmatization. For instance, Angela (40, cashier) stated,

> I just personally, I tend to beat myself up. I figure if I would've stayed in school, if I wouldn't have gave up, I'd be . . . I'm not saying I wouldn't be in the circumstances I'm in now, but I think I would have been better prepared for another type of job.
>
> Researcher: Are you saying that even after the demonstrations with seeing so many people in your similar situation, you still beat yourself up?
>
> Yeah, you know, the euphoria wore off. Then you sit there, and you think. You're by yourself. Then reality sets in.

Wanda (53, assistant cook) made several statements in regards to the stigma she had internalized because of her job as a fast food worker: "I hate telling people my age, especially working in a fast food restaurant, but hey, I do what I have to do" and "I have an associate's degree. That's the sad . . . I don't even want to tell people that. I have an associate's degree and I'm still working in fast food." Wanda continued:

> I'm 53 years old. I know I have to do better. I know this. In addition, . . . a lot of people, when they see me with my blue [transportation company] shirt, they think

> that I work, like, customer service. They don't know I'm going to work in the fast food part. They think I'm going to do the tickets and you know, I don't tell people that I work in the fast food part because I'm ashamed.
>
> Researcher: Why are you ashamed?
>
> Because I'm 53, I'm working at fast food. You know, I put my blue shirt on, I take my apron and my hat and I put it in a bag before I . . . I don't even wear that. However, when I go to work, I make like I'm doing the tickets [at the transportation company].

Ida (60, cashier) called herself the polar opposite of her sister. "She's really an amazing story. I think they should put her in Black History Month because she's done so much. That's my sister. I'm so proud of her." Ida concluded by saying, "She's doing so great and I'm working at [fast food franchise].

Thomas (42, maintenance) believed that some judged fast food workers as less than desirable potential intimate partners.

> When people see that you work in a fast food restaurant, they know you're not making no money. Say, if you see a woman in there, she's a high-class woman, she's an independent woman, she might not want to date you because she knows you're making less money than her, so why would she want to date somebody. . . . It's sad that it's that way, but that's the way people judge people by how much money you make.

Part of the internalization of stigma is the stigmatizing of others who are similarly situated. Yandy's (28, independent cleaner) statements typified a common sentiment voiced by fast food workers encountered during this study. "I'm personally going to say they [fast food workers] need some etiquette classes. They need some speech classes. They need a whole bunch of stuff." In response to the recommendation to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour for fast food workers, Yandy believed,

> They didn't deserve it. Don't take me out of context; you deserve to be paid adequately, but with being paid that, you must do every single solitary thing that is

> expected of you. See, a lot of youngsters and people who take these jobs [fast food], they don't really know what the extra mile looks like. Not being told, it's like, "Oh. You're trying to make me. That's not in my job description." "Did you read your job description, sweetheart? Because it says, 'And all that entails.' Did you read that very last part? Oh no, you probably didn't know what 'entail' means."

According to Saleel (34, crewmember) in reference to his colleagues, "They're so brainwashed they're like . . . some of them, they don't want $15 an hour. They don't feel they deserve $15 an hour."

Table 4.6 summarizes the manifestations of stigma. Most interesting about Table 4.6 is that those who joined the Fight for $15 with the intention of emancipation were the least likely of the workers interviewed to vocalize expressions of social/structural stigma or expressions of internalized stigma. Freire (1970) spoke to the freeing of oneself from internalized oppression as the route to emancipation.

Table 4.6
Manifestations of Stigma

Participant	Examples of social or structural stigma	Expressions of internalized stigma
Emancipation		
Edward	None	None
Gina	Ambivalent	None
Joseline	None	None
Oliver	None	None
Saleel	The bottom of their shoe	None
Reciprocity		
Carlos	Y'all flip burgers.	None
Foster	Fast food workers viewed as inner-city kids	None
Hazel	Customer reported her to her employer for organizing workers.	None
Kendra	None	We don't make enough to be put in places with high-class people.
Lourdes	People being disrespectful, people treating us badly.	None
Melissa	They want me to prove to them that I deserve the position that I have.	None

Naasih	I'm the guy that gets yelled at.	You have to be neat and clean.
Ursulina	They treat us like dogs.	None
Vui	None	Why are you asking people like me?
Wanda	None	I don't tell people I work in fast food because I'm ashamed.
Solidarity		
Angela	It is still frowned upon. It's not ideal. No one goes to school and finishes school to say I want to work in fast food.	I blame myself [for current economic situation].
David	None	None
Parvaiz	A lot of people think this is the lowest-paying job on the totem pole.	I don't want my daughters doing this job.
Rurik	Ambivalent	It's the bottom [fast food work] by choice, not by birth.
Xiomara	Customers equate the cheapness of the food with the quality of the workers.	None
Yandy	Treating people like garbage and telling people with a burn to put butter on it.	I'm personally going to say they [the workers] need etiquette classes; they need some speech classes. They need a whole bunch of stuff.
Personal development		
Bethany	They think that most of the fast food workers are school dropouts, people that live off welfare and stuff like that and mostly African Americans.	None
Ida	Employer browbeats the staff.	That's my sister. I'm so proud of her. We're polarized right now. She's doing so great and I'm working at [fast food franchise].
Quin	Oh, you flip burgers.	The stigma of just being a Jewish woman working at [franchise] is . . . it's not easy.
Thomas	You get paid for your back instead of your brains.	She's a high-class woman. She's an independent woman; she might not want to date you because she knows you're making less money than her.

Structural Intimidation

Furthermore, many workers indicated that their employers yelled or screamed at them. These employers consciously or unconsciously created workplaces that reinforced

stigma and were fraught with hostility and uncertainty. “My boss yelling at me” was Naasih’s (22, cook) description of his employer’s method of encouraging Naasih to improve his job performance. Ida (60, cashier) gave the following example of “berating” experienced while at work.

> The new general manager assistant, she was on this girl so bad. “What’s wrong with you? What are you, stupid?” Yelling at her and getting up in her face and not moving [out of her way] when she’d ask her to do something. She’d stand in her [the new coworker] way so she couldn’t do it. That type of thing, which is what she did to me. . . . I know how she felt, and this is her [the new coworker’s] first day. . . . I walked up to help her. . . . This lady [the manager] was watching the whole transaction, and that’s when she started attacking me. . . . She was yelling at me, “Why are you doing this?” I’m talking to customers, and she’s doing this in front of the customers. I felt humiliated.

Carlos (24, former shift manager) described a confrontation he had with a previous employer regarding the employer’s failure to pay time and a half for overtime work.

> So I confronted them. I’m like, “Yo, that’s illegal what you’re doing.” They was like, “No, we’re not. This [is] a private company. . . . They’re not going to listen to you because you don’t got money.” That’s what he told me. [Carlos said to himself], “Who are you, the one who got 30 stores?” He [the employer] was paying the government tax money, so they’re going to believe him more than me.

A worker during the Buffalo hearings testified to the following:

> We have to be a jack-of-all-trades there as well: cleaning, cashiering, dishes, prep work while putting up with disrespectful treatment from some managers. I had one manager ask me to get down on my hands and knees and clean the floor and then she stomped on my fingers when I wasn’t working fast enough. I also had a manager degrade me in front of my coworkers by calling me names you’d have to rate a movie R for and I won’t say them here because there are small children, but they treated many of my other coworkers terribly as well. I witness it all, and it makes me sick, and it is all for $8.75 an hour. I spent weeks standing in 2 to 3 inches of water from a leaky pipe that the owner refused to fix because it didn’t affect the customers. I was standing in water. My shoes were wet and I was slipping all over the floor, and nobody would do a thing about it, yet when there

> was a leak in the lobby for the customers, it was fixed almost immediately, yet it was okay for me to almost break my neck. (Fast food worker, New York State Fast Food Wage Board Hearings, spring 2015)

Saleel (34, crewmember) recalled visiting a fast food restaurant as part of his organizing activities and observing both a poor physical work environment (i.e., the lack of heat) and mistreatment of workers by customers.

> I walk into some of these restaurants, and you can see the tiredness of some of these coworkers. They be like, they're in the cold, and the customers that's coming by, they treat them with less respect than their bosses, and it's terrible. I know because I experienced it; I worked for a fast food restaurant.

Ida (60, cashier) described several situations in which she and her coworkers suffered sexual harassment and one situation in which a colleague raped another colleague.

> A young lady got raped in our store by one of the management. I've seen situations like that. . . . The abuse is outrageous. . . . I was even sexually abused and I had to fight. . . . I had to pick up something and just stab this young man with it. It wasn't a big stab or anything, cut the skin, . . . just to let him know. I had to do that three times to this young man and he's young. I'm an old grandma. . . . The abuse that I've seen over the years, it's crazy. Who would think that in a job . . . that someone would be isolated and raped like that? I even have seen a young man exposing himself to someone in there all morning. Constantly.
>
> Researcher: A customer?
>
> This is a worker. When I reported it, nothing was done . . . because when it happened to me, when the young man touched me, I went and I told my daughter. . . . My manager told me, "Why'd you tell your family?" I was like, let me just report this anyway because this young lady is going to get attacked in here. Again, they [employer] told me, "Don't tell nobody." They protected him and he's still working there to this day. That happened like 4 years ago.
>
> One young lady . . . told me what the general manager did to her [required sex for a promotion]. She refused him, so she's not a manager. . . . He said, "To become a manager, you know what you got to do, right?" This is what she was telling me. I hear this all the time.

Some of the fast food workers encountered during this study described the employers' use of a worker referred to by the research participants as a workplace "snitch" or "copy guy." According to the research participants, fast food employers recruited or encouraged individual workers to report to employers the occurrence of workplace infractions, even those infractions that have little consequence to business profits or management. The presence of a copy guy increased the fear and uncertainty of the workplace. A research participant told of the firing of a coworker because when he was hungry, the worker ate an extra hamburger while hiding in a closet. The research participant was confident the copy guy reported the coworker to the employer. Ursulina's coworker was disciplined by their employer for the coworker's failure to have a lock on his work locker. Ursulina said the following:

> The snitch is the kiss ass, the ambitious one. There's nothing wrong with being ambitious. I understand you have to be ambitious in this kind of work. There are levels to ambition that you just lose respect. That's where you snitch on people and jeopardize their job because you don't know what's the other person's background. You don't know why they're underperforming at work.

Foster described the copy guy as follows:

> I don't want to say snitch, but I'll say a copy guy. That's what we used to call him in [franchise]. Well, [franchise] and [franchise] call them copy guys. They have copy guys on every shift, and copy guys are people on certain shifts where, they actually work there, but they let the district managers and stuff know what's going on at the job. Who was what, and who's clocking in and stuff. A lot of the coworkers, and I work with all the females, women, know when there's a snitch somewhere or they know when something just ain't right. They have that intuition or whatever. . . . You don't really know who it is, but you will notice a lot of the times when there is a copy guy on your shift, you'll notice that they're there almost every day. They may come in. They're not on a full- or part-time schedule. You may see them 2 hours in the morning. Then they come back for another 2-hour shift in the afternoon, but they are there almost every day. I work 6 days a

> week. I'm only off now on Sundays and alternate Saturdays. We figured out who our copy guy is because he's there just as much as I am.

Gina stated, "My snitch works 6 days in a week. It depends on the snitch. They work 6 days a week. . . . It could be a relative of the owner." According to Joseline, the presence of a copy person depends on the size of the store and the number of individuals employed at the location.

> If you have 30 people working there or something like that then, yes, it is easy to slip out, report, and do things. If you have a small group of people, everybody knows what's going on, so that doesn't really fly. There are some people who try to use that as their road to the top, but it doesn't really work out that well for them.

Many fast food workers reported hostility directed at them by customers. Hazel reported that her employer terminated her when a customer reported to her employer overhearing Hazel's workplace organizing activities.

> I was working at [fast food restaurant], but when they got wind of me talking to the [TWC]. Somebody was snooping, actually. They didn't hear this from a coworker. They found out from somebody being nosy in the restaurant. Went back and told the boss. I don't know why. I don't know, like, he wasn't getting paid or anything. He wasn't working for [the fast food restaurant]. Told the boss, the boss asked me about it. I told him [the boss], you know about it, and how I felt. He [the boss] just got real hot underneath his collar. From then, they just fired me. No explanation. I didn't have any write-ups. They just let me go . . . but the person that said that wasn't someone that even worked for [franchise], just someone that's in the dining room all day.

A fast food worker who testified during the New York State Fast Food Wage Board hearings said, "People threaten us and everything. . . . Customers that spit at me, throw things at me and tell me, 'You minimum wage worker. You don't deserve anything" (spring 2015). Similarly, while in the field, the researcher observed an interaction between a customer in a fast food restaurant and a worker. At the time,

customers, workers, and onlookers crowded the restaurant. The customer asked: "How stupid are you that you can't get my order right?"

Summary

> We work. We sweat.
> Put that $15 on my check.
> —Chant heard at fast food worker demonstrations, spring 2015

This chapter has presented the findings of the study that incorporated interviews with 25 research participants, each of whom participated in the Fight for $15 labor movement aimed at gaining a wage of $15 an hour for workers in the fast food industry. The profiles of the interview participants summarized their knowledge of and interaction with the work ethic narrative as well as their reflections on the Fight for $15. Two main findings emerged from the data.

1. The role of work ethic appeared to depend upon what the individual was fighting to achieve when she or he joined the Fight for $15, i.e., emancipation, reciprocity, worker solidarity, or personal development.

Five research participants seemed to be fighting for emancipation for themselves and others from an oppressive capitalistic system. Though they understood the cultural meaning of work ethic, they viewed it as a tool used by their employers and society to maintain an oppressive social hierarchy in which the poor and working class were structurally disadvantaged. They joined the Fight for $15 to raise their own and others' consciousness to the inequities of capitalism and to foster structural change in the fast food industry and society writ large. Therefore, the role of work ethic in the fight for $15

for these workers appeared to be a legitimizing myth that these workers sought to challenge and potentially overthrow.

Ten research participants seemed to be fighting for reciprocity from their employer and society writ large. These research participants believed that they and their coworkers worked hard at their jobs, yet their employers and society did not reciprocate or adequately compensate them for their contributions. Therefore, they turned to the Fight for $15 to push their employers to improve working conditions and for society to recognize them as hard-working, productive members of society. For these workers, the role of work ethic was a catalyst for them to fight for the working conditions that enabled them to express their values for hard work freely and to hold their employers and society accountable to the principles of reciprocity and economic justice that they believed underlie American culture and the economy.

Six research participants appeared to be fighting for worker solidarity. These participants expressed deeply held values for work ethic and felt that they and their employers upheld its value within the context of fast food work. However, they recognized and empathized with the challenges facing their coworkers. These research participants turned to the Fight for $15 to show solidarity with their coworkers and to demonstrate their commitment to the goals of the Fight for $15, fair wages and improved working conditions.

Four research participants appeared to be fighting for a place or community within which they could grow and develop as people and leaders. They believed that work should be personally meaningful and a source of personal expression, growth, and

development. They held ambivalent values towards work ethic, at times acknowledging that it was an essential component of meaningful work and other times seeming to disregard its importance and recognizing that their employers often disregarded their efforts at work. Because these workers acknowledged as well as resented the fact that their fast food jobs were not a source of rewarding work, they turned to the Fight for $15 in protest and found meaningful experiences and opportunities for voice and personal growth in the context of the campaign.

It appeared that the research participants' views of economic mobility were not linked to their work ethic value; rather, the views seemed more closely linked to their social capital and whether there was someone within their social network who moved up the economic ladder.

Work ethic is a culturally shared value. It can be used to manipulate people to conform even when their job circumstances and/or life circumstances would suggest nonconforming is in their best interest. All but a few of the participants interviewed indicated that they would continue to work after winning enough money to make working not financially necessary. One of the research participants would continue to work in her current job, which by definition is a bad job, after winning the lottery.

2. Stigma and structural intimidation (direct abuse and hostility) operated in the fast food industry as mechanisms to reinforce the legitimacy of work ethic among the workforce. Stigma included both external and internal stigmatization. It appeared that workers who joined the Fight for $15 for an emancipatory intention were the least likely workers to express social and/or structural or internalized stigma.

The next chapter discusses and interprets these findings in the context of the literature, offering recommendations for theory, practice, and research.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hold your Burgers
Hold your Fries
Make our wages supersized.
—Chant heard at fast food worker demonstrations, spring 2015

Three inspirations were the primary factors motivating this study. One inspiration for this study came from witnessing the commencement of a labor movement built by fast food workers for fast food workers with the purpose of calling attention to unfair labor practices within the American fast food industry. The second inspiration was the desire to know the experience of low-wage workers in the United States who have been historically marginalized because of their income, class, gender, or other characteristics. The third inspiration for this study was to grasp how the cultural imperative to work and to work hard fits within the work lives of low-wage workers who are part of a labor movement. All of these inspirations were realized during the course of this study.

When considering that low-wage workers are the most understudied group in organizational science (Leana et al., 2012) but the most likely to experience the hegemonic force of cultural imperatives (Gramsci, 1971; Sidanius, 1999), this study was of vital importance to scholarship, but more importantly, to practice and policy. This study sought to explore the cultural narrative of work ethic as a legitimizing myth and the role this myth played in the work lives of fast food workers who worked and lived in New York City and participated in the Fight for $15.

This critical ethnographic research, grounded in critical theory, incorporated an ideological perspective that presupposed the existence of social hierarchy in which those on top had more access to resources than those on the bottom. Moreover, those on top of the social hierarchy transmitted societal ideologies that functioned to preserve them in the topmost position in the social hierarchy. Class, race, gender, and sexual orientation were among the key influencers of one's place in the hierarchy (Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993). Some of the study participants were also members of a worker center (in this dissertation referred to as TWC) in New York City that served as one of the research sites. Empirical material encountered included participant observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews.

Situated in the context of the experiences of New York City fast food workers who have participated in episodic work stoppages as a means of advocating for higher wages and better working conditions, this dissertation was guided by the following research question:

> What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?

While just one research question guided this study, two related theories (cultural hegemony and social dominance theory) formed the foundation for this exploration of the role of work ethic in the lives of fast food workers. This study sought to expand through a qualitative study on a body of quantitative research (lottery studies) that asked research participants one primary question, "Would you continue to work if you won the lottery?"

(Morse & Weiss, 1955). Their findings led Morse and Weiss to theorize that positive responses to the lottery question were indicative of the respondents' commitment to employment regardless of financial need. Morse and Weiss (1955) coined from this the term *nonfinancial employment commitment,* an operationalized definition of work ethic.

Revisiting the Theory

In Figure 5.1, the boxes and arrows on the left illustrate the relationship between an individual's social dominance orientation (SDO) and his or her experience and psychological characteristics. In the middle section under the heading "legitimizing myths" are Sidanius's (1999) examples of hierarchy-enhancing myths on the left and hierarchy-attenuating myths on the right. The boxes and arrows on the far right illustrate the relationship between the stability of group-based social hierarchy, individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry.

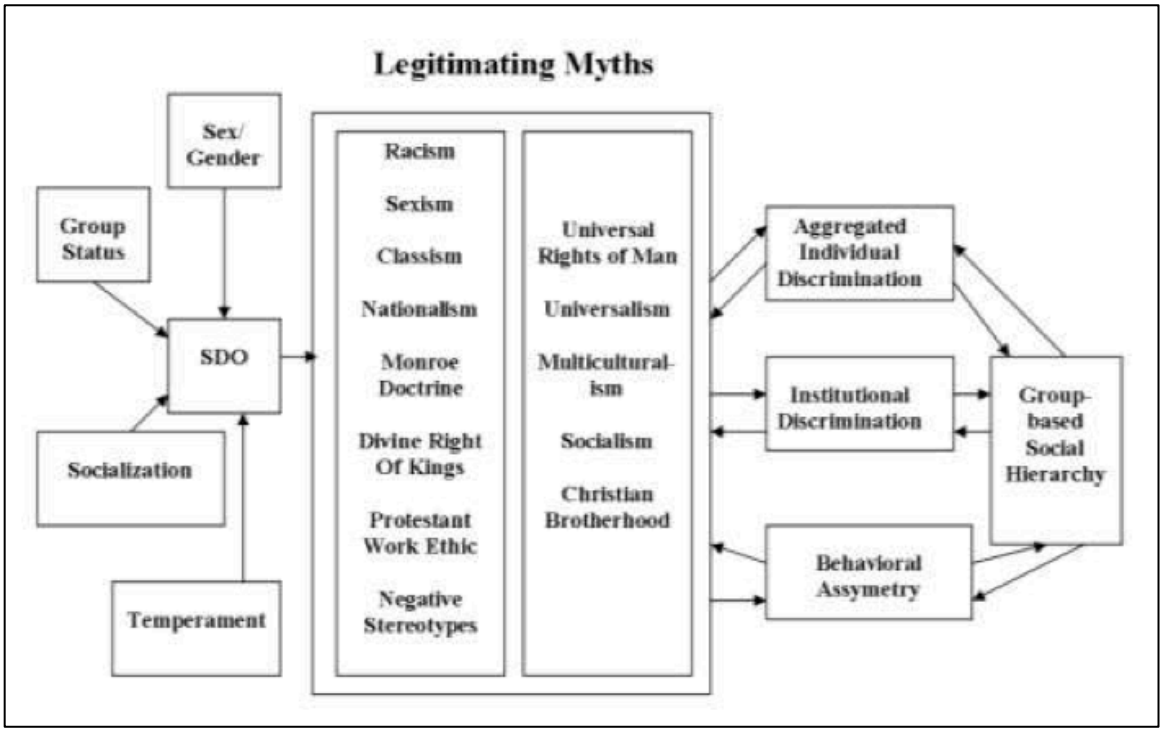

Figure 2.1. Legitimating myths. SDO indicates social dominance orientation. Reprinted with permission from J. Sidanius, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression,* 1999, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, p. 40.

As more fully described in chapter 2 of this dissertation, social dominance advances the theory that "group-based social hierarchy is driven by three proximal processes: aggregated individual discrimination, aggregated institutional discrimination and behavioral asymmetry" (Sidanius, 1999, loc. 860). Legitimizing myths regulate the processes (Sidanius, 1999, loc. 860). This dissertation explored two of social dominance theory's constructs, specifically the interplay of the Protestant work ethic as a hierarchy-enhancing myth and the maintenance of group-based social hierarchy through institutional discrimination and behavioral asymmetry. This study was not intended to explore social dominance orientation, aggregated individual discrimination, or hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing myths.

Conclusions

Based on the findings explored in chapter 4, four conclusions were drawn, as summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1
Conclusions

Conclusion 1	Work ethic appeared to operate for research participants as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth. The degree of which work ethic seemed to be hierarchy enhancing fluctuated among segments of the research participants.
Conclusion 2	Research participants were subjected to systematic terror directed at them by employers, customers, and the public. Yet, the research participants who were interviewed for this study continued to participate in the Fight for $15. Therefore, it seemed that systemic terror was not a barrier to the workers' attempts to dismantle the social hierarchy.
Conclusion 3	Stigma and stigmatization appeared to act as a mechanism to maintain group-based social hierarchy and thereby reinforce the legitimization of the work ethic myth. Stigma and stigmatization ferment both institutional discrimination and behavioral asymmetry.
Conclusion 4	The research participants had low expectations of escaping poverty in the future and experienced anxiety about the temporal nature of a future positive financial situation, further legitimizing the work ethic narrative.

Conclusion 1

Work ethic appeared to operate for research participants as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth. The degree of which work ethic seemed to be hierarchy enhancing fluctuated among segments of the research participants:

- *Research participants expressing a higher degree of certainty in the work ethic narrative were most likely to indicate joining the Fight for $15 for workplace reciprocity, workplace solidarity, and/or personal development.*

- *Research participants who expressed the least degree of certainty in the work ethic narrative were more likely to explain their involvement in the Fight for $15 through the goal of emancipation.*

Drawing from Gramsci's (Gramsci, 1971) construction of common sense (folklore that conforms with the position of most people) (Green & Ives, 2009), Sidanius (1999) defined legitimizing myths as stereotypes, values, beliefs, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for social customs and systems. Specifically, both Gramsci and Sidanius were concerned with the common-sense justifications for the customs and systems that lead to the concentration of high social value in dominant groups and the attribution of low social value to other groups based on income, race, gender, sexual orientation, and other characteristics (Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2016, p. 4).

Both Gramsci and Sidanius theorized that the legitimizing and hegemonic nature of folklore/myths is both invisible and taken for granted by those these myths assign to both the top and the bottom of the social hierarchy (Corneo & Neher, 2014). Gramsci believed that those marginalized through the force of these myths consciously or unconsciously consent (through passivity) to marginalization, while dominant groups actively work to keep marginalized members of society suppressed. Social dominance theory contends that the maintenance of social hierarchy requires the synchronized and cooperative activities of both the elites and the marginalized members of society (Sidanius, 1999, p. 4).

The use of a work ethic narrative to maintain social hierarchy was explicit in the testimony of a franchise owner at the Buffalo, New York, Wage Board Hearing during spring 2015: "I moved up gradually. . . . By the time he [the franchise owner] sold the company about 10 years later, I was a store manager." In other words, according to this franchise owner, if he can succeed, so can anyone else with one simple caveat: work ethic. As written by Paulo Freire (2000):

> For them having more is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own efforts with their courage to take risks. If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy; worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the generous gestures of the dominant class. (p. 59)

Saletan (2014) quoted these words from the former president of the United States, Barack Obama:

> "What I believe unites the people of this nation," he began, "is the simple, profound belief in opportunity for all—the notion that if you work hard and take responsibility, you can get ahead." Later, he made the equation more explicit: "Our success should depend not on accident of birth, but the strength of our work ethic and the scope of our dreams." (para. 6)

The following Facebook text was one example of a posting in specific service to the maintenance of social hierarchy: "I strongly object to these lazy low life who would do nothing to get ahead in the world making more money than I ever made in my life" (Facebook posting, spring 2015).

As participant Joseline, a 29-year-old fast food manager, said: "I mean, who hasn't heard of work ethic?" Social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 1994, 2006; Sidanius, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004) defined certainty as the degree to which a myth is a taken-for-granted truth. Accordingly, certainty is a primary predictor of the hierarchy-

enhancing and -attenuating characteristics of legitimizing myths. For example, a franchise owner demonstrated a high degree of certainty when he testified about moving himself up in the fast food industry, thus implying that mobility was possible for others as well. “I provide a career ladder for people with a strong work ethic and who truly respect other people” (Wage Board hearing, Buffalo, New York, spring 2015).

Some research participants also expressed certainty in the validity of the work ethic narrative. For example, when asked what he thought enabled a particular individual’s success, Parvaiz (33, crew member) responded, “Hard work, hard work; footwork to the fullest. No days off, he had to work.” Angela (40, cashier) said of work ethic, “But it is true. Especially I come from Southern families; they were cotton pickers and domestic workers. They always instilled that in us, work ethic.”

Not all of the research participants were certain of the existence of the essential truth in the work ethic narrative. For example, Joseline (27, manager) came to believe that employers manipulated the work ethic narrative to transform employees into “compliant slaves,” and Gina (33, manager) offered the critique that in the United States the needs of animals received greater regard than the needs of low-wage workers. According to Freire (2000), through the ability to name, infer, and critique ideology and its relationship to the power of the elite, marginalized people will be able to transform the circumstances that keep them in a state of oppression (J. Thompson, 2000, p. 2), thus leading to emancipation (critical consciousness). Interestingly, research participants who expressed the least degree of certainty in the work ethic narrative were more likely among the research participants interviewed to explain joining the Fight for $15 with the

intention of emancipation. In contrast, research participants expressing a higher degree of certainty in the truth of the work ethic narrative were the most likely participants to explain joining the Fight $15 for workplace reciprocity, workplace solidarity, and/or personal development.

It is undeterminable through this study, to know if the research participants joined the Fight for $15 with the intention of emancipation or developed this intention because of their participation in this labor movement. Interestingly, upon reflecting on the empirical material, there does not appear to be a pattern in relationship to membership in the TWC and the intentions. Of the five research participants with the intention of emancipation, three were members of the TWC. Perhaps, conscience raising for some occurs through the process of belonging to an organization designed for that purpose and for others conscience raising arises through action, such as participating in a demonstration. This also may demonstrate the recursive nature of intention.

The research participants who had yet to come to a place of critical consciousness equated work ethic to an employment contract. Employment contracts are explicit, implied, or psychological (Rousseau, 1989). Explicit contracts are formal, directly stated *quid pro quo* arrangements. Arrangement for payment per item sold is an example of an explicit employment contract. For example, some fast food workers reported receiving bonuses for upselling certain food items. Implied contracts are obligatory, relational, and situated in social structures, such as legal domains. In the United States, employers are legally obligated to pay workers at least the set minimum wage. Yet, in many instances fast food employers have broken this implied contract with workers (Schlosser, 2001).

Work-related psychological contracts emerge from an individual's belief that his or her hard work obligates the employer to reciprocity (Rousseau, 1989, p. 124). The more explicit the assurance of reciprocity, the stronger the psychological contract that in turn heightens workers' perceptions of obligations of workplace reciprocity (Rousseau, 1989). Rousseau (1989) offered two examples of explicit assurances. The first was public statements from a prominent figure, such as the previously quoted declaration of President Obama's lifting up of the work ethic narrative. The second consists of statements made by the employer to job applicants. For example, Edward (44, maintenance) described his interaction with his employer during his job interview: "They sell you this dream that you're going to move up."

All three forms of employment contracts are in evidence in the fast food industry. However, whether they felt ambivalence about the truth of the work ethic narrative or fully endorsed it, most participants believed that they had fulfilled and even exceeded their part of the employment agreement, but that their employers had violated their end of the contract. As Lourdes (21, cashier) stated, "We got to be responsible and do a good job at what we doing and just be a good person. It doesn't matter what customers say to you. You got to be a better person." Yet, she expressed the germination of an emancipatory critique of the circumstances of her work: "We work hard, and they [employer] just want more and more. Nothing is good for them." Few workers believed that the fast food employers had fulfilled their contractual agreements to their employees by rewarding hard work through wage increases, promotions, or other employment benefits.

Conclusion 2

Research participants were subjected to systematic terror directed at them by employers, customers, and the public. Yet, the research participants who were interviewed for this study continued to participate in the Fight for $15. Therefore, it seemed that systemic terror was not a barrier to the workers' attempts to dismantle the social hierarchy.

In social dominance theory, systematic terror is characterized as the deployment of "violence or threats of violence disproportionately directed against subordinates" (Sidanius, 1999, loc. 874). Cultural hegemony and social dominance theories propose that the oppressed willingly acquiesce to hierarchical structures; therefore, violence and intimidation are unnecessary for hierarchy maintenance. During the course of this study, many research participants recounted instances of the deployment of systematic terror by their employers, coworkers, and the public. For example, a worker testified at a Wage Board Hearing in Buffalo that her supervisor intentionally stomped on her hands while she scrubbed the restaurant floors. Other workers described accounts of assaults—including rape—by employers, customers, and coworkers.

It appears it was the ability to envision a different future that enabled the protesting fast food workers to overcome the force of systematic intimidation and join the Fight for $15. As Gina (33, manager) stated:

> Sometimes you got to look outside yourself and your surrounding situation. You have to look to the future and look and say: I don't want what's going on now to be going on 5 years from today. I don't want what's going on now to happen somewhere in Alabama. I don't want what's going on here now to be going on in Michigan. I don't want this stuff in my country. I don't want it in my city. I don't want it in my neighborhood.

This study did not include fast food workers who chose not to participate in the Fight for $15. However, when study participants were asked to deduce reasons coworkers chose not to participate in the Fight for $15, they believed that coworkers feared retaliation from employers. As Gina said, "It's three factors: they're scared, they're scared, and they're scared." The nonparticipating fast food workers were so focused on the day-to-day struggle of supporting themselves and their families that they could not look up to see other possibilities for themselves. Gina continued:

> We can't miss a check. We can't miss days not being paid. We can't miss any of that. Some of them have families. Some of them have husbands, wives, kids, homes, cars, so they look at it like: If I do this, I'm going to . . . That's how they look at things because they're so used to that mindset of I got to make my money.

Conclusion 3

> *Stigma and stigmatization appeared to act as a mechanism to maintain group-based social hierarchy and thereby reinforce the legitimization of the work ethic myth. Stigma and stigmatization ferment both institutional discrimination and behavioral asymmetry.*

According to the literature, there are three interrelated forms of stigma—structural, social, and internalized—which correlate with the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis (Corrigan, Kerr, & Knudsen, 2005; Herek et al., 2009; Livingston & Boyd, 2010). At the macro level, structures and systems (institutions) enact stigma through rules, policies, and procedures that limit rights and opportunities for some in society (Livingston & Boyd, 2010, p. 2151). Institutions perpetuate structural stigma through practices that legitimize disparities in power and status of the elite and maintain

the disadvantages and social exclusion of others (Corrigan et al., 2005; Herek, 2007; Herek et al., 2009). For example, Carlos (24, former shift manager) noted that although his employer appeared to be aware of the overtime pay regulation, the employer believed that in practice there was little possibility of enforcement of the regulations. This employer thought that his level of status in the social hierarchy protected him from adverse claims from a lower-status individual, i.e., his employee.

Social stigma is also referred to as public or enacted stigma (Livingston & Boyd, 2010). It is "the phenomenon of large groups endorsing stereotypes about and acting against a marginalized group" (Corrigan et al., 2005, p. 179). Similarly, Link and Phelan (2001) described stigma as existing when society marks particular people as bearers of qualities distinctive from the dominant culture's vision of the idealized person. Members of the culture (us) interpret as negative the marked person's variation from the idealized person, consigning the marked to the category of "them." The in-group's access to resources and political power facilitates the promulgation of stereotypes about "them," and, hence, subjugates "them" to discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization. Stereotypes, in turn, justify the marginalization. A textbook example of social stigma was the placement by the Employment Policies Institute of a billboard in New York City's Times Square that mocked fast food workers as lazy and undeserving. Carlos (24, former shift manager) recounted hearing from a passerby at a worker demonstration, "Oh, yeah, stupid. Y'all flip burgers and y'all want $15 in the union."

Existing at the micro or individual level, internalized stigma, referred to as self or sometimes felt stigma, describes a process whereby affected individuals endorse

stereotypes about groups of which they are members. Those who have internalized stigma believe stereotypes to be self-relevant and believe they and those like them are justifiably less valued members of society (Corrigan et al., 2005; Livingston & Boyd, 2010; Herek, 2007). Some fast food workers and other workers similarly situated voiced the opinion that fast food workers did not deserve to make $15 an hour; others like Angela (40, cashier) stated that their current financial situation was directly related to their individual actions and inactions. Freire (2000) referred to self-depreciation as a characteristic of the oppressed.

Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (2009) offered a distinction between self-stigma and felt stigma. Felt stigma is defined as " negative consequences resulting from an individual awareness of how society perceives, and will likely act toward, the group to which they belong" (Livingston & Boyd, 2010, p. 2152). This type of stigma was evident in Quin's (44, cashier) statement: "They don't have to say it. . . . It is more from within. So even if they're not saying it, I'm thinking they're saying it. You know what I'm saying?" On her commute to work, Wanda (54, assistant cook) reported not wearing her uniform, as she perceived wearing a fast food uniform while among other commuters identified her as a low-status individual.

Much has been written about how low-wage workers and workers in dirty jobs, bad jobs, and stigmatized occupations reimagine their employment in a more positive light (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010). Dutton et al. (2010) concluded, for example, that when housekeeping workers in a hospital viewed themselves as health care workers

rather than mere hospital cleaners, these workers experienced more meaning and personal satisfaction in their employment.

There was little evidence that the fast food workers in this study reimagined their jobs through the construction of a positive work identity. When asked what they liked about their jobs, most participants responded with the word "nothing." Others responded that they enjoyed interactions with customers and relationships with their colleagues. Other participants named tasks that were in the boundaries of their job descriptions, such as providing good customer service.

However, the workers encountered during this study did reimagine their identities—not through the lens of their job identities, but through their roles in resisting the exploitation and degradation they experienced in their workplaces. In other words, the workers constructed a positive identity external to the workplace and within the Fight for $15 movement. For example, both Saleel and Gina described themselves as movement founders and movement leaders. As Saleel stated:

> When I first started with the fast food campaign, I told myself, "I am going to be the main factor here. I am going to be the one that's going to fight all the way. I'm going to be the one that's going to be conducting everything," because I felt that I was the best suited to get lucky. I kind of put myself there. I've worked hard, and I've let my hard work show. And then once my hard work showed, my dedication showed, [and] they just put me there.

Gina (33, manager) likened her experience to that of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> It made me feel good just to see all those people on April 15 [and] to be up there in front of 30,000 people. That changed my whole life, my whole outlook on life. And I could feel like probably I can imagine how Dr. King felt, but it was just me.

Other workers described their activities on the continuum of the work of civil rights activists.

All of the workers who appeared to have joined the Fight for $15 with reciprocity as their intention cited instances of structural or social stigmatization. Yet, these workers held little or no internalized stigma in relationship to their current occupations. These workers were likely to endorse the work ethic narrative. Carlos (24, former shift manager) is an example:

> I mean, I used to think the same way. I'm like, just flip burgers and just get over it, but at the end of the day, it's just like any other job. You working your ass off, like everybody else. . . . You be sweating like everybody else. It is just a regular job like any other job, only that you work in fast food.

These workers recognized that negative stereotypes exist about the value of fast food workers and the value of their work, yet these workers did not internalize these stereotypes. As the above quote from Carlos demonstrates, these workers believed their work was as valuable as any other form of paid labor.

Workers who did not cite instances of structural or social stigmatization and held little or no internalized stigma in relationship to their current occupations were more likely to disavow the work ethic narrative and participate in the Fight for $15 with an emancipatory intention. Not only did these workers not feel stigmatized by their employment, but they had also conceptualized a relationship between capitalism and their poverty. Gramsci (2000) believed the hegemonic force of common-sense folklore was invisible. Yet, through the acquisition of conscientisation (critical consciousness), these research participants saw the connection between stigma, work ethic, and conditions of marginality. These workers developed a raised consciousness through dialogue (critique),

praxis (reflection and action), and love of humanity (Freire, 2000; Galloway, 2012), as evident in several quotes:

> They're more interested in developing a business model that works for them in competition with like [fast food franchise] and [fast food franchise] and stuff. It has little to do with humans and people as business. (Edward, 43, maintenance worker)

> I think that just being present there makes a difference. I think that if one person is protesting, even if you're just standing there, even if you're just filling the crowd, even if you're just an extra, that gives it more power. (Joseline, 29, manager)

> I look past myself. Sometimes I don't even want to get out of the bed some days, but I know that I got to do this because it's not for me. It's for other people in a worse situation than me. (Gina, 34, manager)

Conclusion 4

The research participants had low expectations of escaping poverty in the future and experienced anxiety about the temporal nature of a future positive financial situation, further legitimizing the work ethic narrative.

Overwhelmingly, the research participants indicated they would continue to work after winning a lottery. However, when asked why, some discussed the perceived unsustainability of wealth as the primary reason.

As depicted in Table 5.2, Leana et al. (2012) distinguished between four groups of workers: working poor, low-wage workers, aspirants, and textbook workers. In Cell I are the working poor, workers who grew up in poverty and were currently employed in low-wage jobs. These workers, according to Leana et al., expect to remain improvised. Cell II, aspirants, are workers who grew up in improvised homes but currently work in middle- to high-income employment. These workers fear the return to poverty. Cell III, low-wage

workers, are workers who grew up in middle- or high-income homes, but currently held low-wage jobs. Leana et al. suggested that these workers' status is temporary, for they are likely to improve their income situation when the economy improves or when they choose to give up the life as starving artists for a more lucrative career. Cell IV, textbook workers, are workers raised in middle- to high-income households who have maintained this status in adulthood.

Table 5.2
Relationship Between Past and Current Income and Future Expectations

Past experience	Current experience	
	Low income	Middle to high income
Poverty	Cell 1: Working poor Consistency between past and present experience. High expectation that the future stream of resources will be similar to their current income. Low expectation of escaping poverty in the future.	Cell II: Aspirants Inconsistency between past and present experience. Potential anxiety in the present because of fear that current situation is temporary and because they do not share the same developmental experiences as their peers.
Middle to high income	Cell III: Low-wage workers Inconsistency between past and present experience. Potential anxiety in the present because of loss of social contacts and status as a result of the downward change in income from past to present.	Cell IV: Textbook workers Consistency between past and present experience. High expectation that the future stream of resources will be similar to their current income.

Note. From Leana et al. (2012).

With Leana et al.'s table as a model, the research participants in this study are most appropriately classified as Cell I workers, the working poor, and Cell III workers, low-wage workers. For example, the statement of Wanda (53, assistant cook) is an exemplar of the working poor:

> If you're making $15 an hour in a job, you're going to have to pay for everything yourself. You're going to have to find your own medical insurance. . . . You got to buy food. . . . You're still going to be in the same boat.

Quin's (44, cashier) statement fits Leana et al.'s characterization of Cell III workers: "I grew up in a middle-class family, and I shouldn't be [working in fast food]; I'm a college graduate."

Furthermore, when asked to respond to the fantasy of having won a lottery, overwhelmingly, the research participants responded similarly to Leana et al.'s (2012) depiction of aspirant workers (Cell II). Aspirant workers, according to Leana et al. (2012), although no longer living in poverty, express a fear of returning to poverty. For those like Bethany (26, manager), even in fantasy wealth, there was no surety of financial sustainability. "One day the money will finish, so I got to continue work."

For the research participants, poverty was their reality, and few had any other economic experience. Few of the research participants had anyone within their social network who had transitioned out of poverty, and few could even envision a life without poverty. Of note, although research participants expressed anxiety around financial insecurity, these workers held strong inclinations towards philanthropic giving and charitable work. According to Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, and Keltner (2010), "Relative to upper-class people, lower class people exhibited more generosity, more support for charity, more trust behavior toward a stranger, and more helping behavior toward a person in distress" (p. 780). The empirical material in this study is consistent with Piff et al.'s statement. For example, Carlos (24, shift manager) told the researcher the following.

> If I'm capable of helping somebody else that needs it, I mean, things happen for a reason. One day we might be up, the second day we might be on the floor, so, it's

like that over everybody's life, it's like a circle. You might never know when you need help from somebody.

Similarly, when explaining what she would do with lottery winnings, Hazel (27, former cook) showed a concern for others: "[I would] buy buildings, do them over. I wouldn't do it for profit. I would do it mainly for people that really need it. Like low-income housing, or something having to do with mothers and children, or working families, people that really want help."

Answering the Research Question

Answering the Research Question

The guiding research question for this study was, What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?

Fast workers held in positions of marginalization by the social structures in which embedded their personhood and lives had little hope of achieving financial sustainability. Systems of education limited their access to higher education and financial institutions profited from their student loan debt. The criminal justice system worked in conjunction with the system of employment to penalize those among them formerly incarcerated. In almost all jurisdictions in the United States, potential employers legally ask job applicants about past records of felony convictions. Saleel (34), incarcerated for ten years, reported after seeking other employment, he believed that it was because of his history of

incarceration that fast food work was the only employment offered him. Community infrastructures such as housing and public transportation were often inadequately available to the research participants because the cost of access was beyond the research participants' financial resources. Research participants described social safety-net programs as inadequate. Capitalism, itself, acted to maintain the marginalization of the research participants, as the pursuit of profits is fundamental to capitalism. In this quest, the fast food employers limited the employees' access to the financial resources of this country by paying low-wages, setting-up unpredictable work schedules, and engaging in anti-labor organizing activities, and promulgating the work ethic narrative.

This study found that the work ethic narrative is a legitimizing myth that is foundational to capitalism. Without it, capitalism does not exist. In this study, work ethic worked in the lives of striking fast food workers to justify the ideologies, norms, values, and patterns of behavior that promulgate the stripping of wealth (or preventing the building of wealth) from them and their families so that wealth could be generated for other members of society. The work ethic narrative guided the behavior of the research participants in ways that were conducive to the persistence of capitalism. Few research participants experienced work ethic operating as advertised in their lives or the lives of those in their social networks. Almost every research participants could define work ethic, and each to varying degrees endorsed it. A phenomenon Gramsci (1992) called common sense, and Sidanius (1999) referred to as legitimizing myth.

As it is in capitalism, society defined the research participants in part based on the research participants' perceived relationship to production and capital. Members of society described the research participants as "lazy" and "unskilled" among other pejoratives. Other familiar labels in capitalist systems characterized people as the 1% percent and the 99%; takers and makers; job creators and welfare queens. Stigma, in addition to structural intimidation, functioned in syncopation with capitalism to reinforce the work ethic narrative. We see in this study that, although many of the research participants accepted the work ethic narrative as common sense and capitalism as reasonable, stigma and structural intimidation also became common sense and seemingly rational. For the participants in this study who did not endorse the work ethic narrative, these mechanisms served to ensure that they accepted the narrative as a fact of life, like it or not.

As we see in this study, stigma operates on many levels of society to reinforce structural disadvantage and to keep whole communities marginalized. In a recent example of this, Donald Trump tweeted, " Such poor leadership ability by the Mayor of San Juan, and others in Puerto Rico, who are not able to get their workers to help. They want everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort" (Trump, 2017). This is to say, that the people of Puerto Rico are in a desperate situation not because the United States government (capitalist structure) failed them, but because they had no work ethic or were too inept (stigma) to help themselves.

Work ethic imprisoned the research participants in the glass cage of capitalism. The metaphor of glass cage is appropriate here. According to Gabriel (2005), glass being both fragile and transparent presents a possibility of freedom. However, for most members of a capitalist society, especially those with little access to wealth, freedom in capitalism is an illusion.

Freire (2000) thought if people began to see themselves as oppressed, recognized the existence of structures of oppression and explicitly challenge these structures; emancipation was possible. Five of the twenty-five research participants, those with the intention emancipation, expressed the awareness of political, social, economic and historical structures shaping the current circumstances of their lives. Most important to emancipation, these five research participants saw their participation in the Fight for $15 as an action towards the dismantling of capitalism.

Implications for Theory and Further Research

Social Dominance Theory

Missing from social dominance theory is a thoughtful account of the mechanisms that maintain legitimizing myths in their hierarchy-enhancing role. Work ethic is a culturally shared value. It can be used to manipulate people to conform even when their job circumstances and life circumstances would suggest nonconforming is in their best interest. Structural, social, and internalized stigma as well as structural intimation are mechanisms that functioned to maintain the research participants in their marginalized positions on the social hierarchy. Stigma and stigmatization mechanisms reinforced

adherence to the hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth of work ethic by ascribing the research participants' material conditions to their individual life choices, attitudes, attributes, and behaviors. As previously suggested in this report, when research participants began to identify the oppressive conditions under which they labored and struggled to free themselves from the forces of the work ethic myth, employers and the society at large employed structural intimidation to keep the research participants in their place as marginalized workers. Undoubtedly other mechanisms reinforce hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths. Social dominance theory could benefit from a further exploration of additional mechanisms of social hierarchy maintenance.

Research participants interviewed were diverse in age, gender, race, country of birth and ethnicity. This study did not include an examination that focused on these identifiers. Future research could explore how identifiers—age, gender, and an arbitrary-set system (race, class, and ethnicity), which may already be stigmatizing confound or destabilize stigma/stigmatization as it relates to work and contributes to the maintenance of the legitimizing myths.

Nonfinancial Employment Commitment

Since 1955, researchers have conducted a series of studies on nonfinancial employment commitment. These studies operationalized work ethic as nonfinancial by asking respondents, "Would you continue to work if you won the lottery?" (Harpaz, 2011; Highhouse et al., 2010; Morse & Weiss, 1955; Warr, 1982). The study's findings support the position of the literature in that research participants overwhelmingly indicated that they would continue to work after a lottery win. However, this study's

conclusions differ from the findings of previous studies. Here research participants would continue to work because of the belief in the instability of wealth. This study suggests that when researchers apply qualitative methods to a field of study that has historically studied through quantitative methods, new learning emerges, as with this lottery question. Future researchers should continue to apply qualitative methods in the research of work ethic endorsement.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy

Over the preceding years, policymakers have introduced a multiplicity of policies to support low-wage workers such as supplemental income support through public benefits, earned income credit, the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid, and subsidies for child care, transportation, and housing. However, these policies seemed to have had little impact on reducing the number of working people who live in poverty. These policies are ineffective for a number of reasons.

First, the degree to which these income support instruments are available in any one municipalities across the country vary. These income support programs have their own unique income qualification standards resulting in increased difficulty of navigating of these systems. Additionally, income supports may phase out at the poverty threshold creating a situation where benefits loss may be higher than the potential increase in earned income. Secondly, only a small percentage of families eligible for income support receive it. The lack of awareness about availability, waiting list, and unaffordable co-payment requirements are, but a few of the explanations for the low percentage of

eligible workers receiving income supports (CGR, 2015; Community Services Society, 2016). Thirdly and most important, these programs have not worked to improve the material conditions either for the research participants or for those similarly situated because these policies are individualized solutions rather than solutions to address structural flaws and inequalities.

Essential to the research methodology of critical ethnography is the role of the researcher as an advocate. Made through the lens of an advocate the following policy suggestions can result in the dismantling of structures of inequality.

Policymakers must work to enact universal basic income legislation. Different from basic income proposals which require a means test, universal basic income is a regular cash payment(s) from the government to all of its residents without regards to individual income or assets (Woodbury, 2017). Universal basic income would serve to not only augment the meager wages from fast food labor but also, because it is a basic right available to all in society, it will de-stigmatize the receipt of financial support from the government. Additionally, substantial universal basic income payments would increase people's level of choice in the decision of where to work and what type of paid labor to in which to engage.

Policymakers must work to enact living wage legislation. A living wage is the amount of income required to cover the cost of a basic standard of living within a specific locality. While legislators initially implemented the minimum as a living wage, the minimum wage has not kept pace with the cost of living. For example, as per the MIT Living Wage calculator (http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/36061), while the minimum

wage in New York City in 2012 was $9 an hour, the living wage in New York City was $15.50 for a single adult and $29.61 for an adult with one child.

Policymakers must work to enact joint-employer standards. In 2014, the National Labor Relation Board ruled that the McDonalds Corporation and its franchisees are joint employers. Joint-employment status enables fast food workers to target the McDonalds Corporation in claims for redress in wage and other workplace complaints. Joint-employment status holds the corporation accountable for the actions and policies of its franchises and this may help to both improve and standardize working conditions across all locations. In addition, joint-employment status eases the path for unionization making the arduous task of unionizing store by store unnecessary. Recently, the Trump administration rolled back this Obama administration ruling. Rather than roll-back this ruling, policy advocates need to push to have it applied more broadly throughout the fast-food and other highly franchised industries throughout the economy.

Policymakers must work to give Governors the authority to impanel industry-specific wage boards. Since the 1930's, New York State Governor has had the power to appoint a wage board when he or she determines "any substantial number of persons employed in any occupation or occupations are receiving wages insufficient to provide adequate maintenance and to protect their health" (New York State Governors' Office, 2015). This legislation enabled New York State to enact a $15 minimum wage for fast food workers and governors in other states of California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Wisconsin have similar authority. These boards must be expanded across the

states and they must become more active in addressing industrial structures that rely on low-waged, contingent work to compete.

Policymakers must work to enact policies that reduce unpredictability in work schedules. As written about in previous sections of this report, the scheduling practices of the fast food industry, as a whole, places an undue burden on the industry's low-wage workers. Recently, the City of San Francisco enacted the Retail Workers' Bill of Rights legislation placed restrictions on employers' ability to change workers' schedules on a whim (Rolf, 2016). The regulation required employers to present employees with an estimate of the number of hours they can expect to work per week; two-week notice of work schedules and the employers are required to pay workers for on-call hours and scheduling changes made without a seven-day notice. A related suggestion is to require fast food employers to offer full-time employment to current part-time employees before recruiting for new part-time employees.

Practice

Over the next decade, economists anticipated that two of every three new jobs in the United States to be low-wage (Dodson et al., 2012). As such, this study has several implications for activists, human resource professionals, and others to counter the exploitative nature of low-wage work.

Worker advocates and workers themselves must take steps to change the way the general public perceives of low wage job to shift the narrative. Social movement leaders have used narrative shift campaigns (story-based campaigns) to change the way people view a particular community or issue. Narrative shift campaigns work when to

reframe or transform the dominant ideology. A narrative shift campaign in this instance goal would be to recast fast food work and its workers in a positive light.

Narrative shift campaigns involve significant media and communications work, including distribution planning for research reports and the creation of visual storytelling products like short videos. For example, social movement organizations intervened with local and state newspapers and pressed for a change in the identification of a particular group, i.e., from "ex-felons" to the formerly incarcerated. As another example, a nonprofit organization's "Drop the I-Word" campaign involving research, filmmaking, and social media strategies changed the Associated Press's use of the term of "illegal immigrant," in hopes of reframing the immigration debate from law and order to human rights. Further, the hashtag "Black Lives Matters" is an attempt to change the public perception of police violence against black people.

In the context of shifting the narrative for fast food workers and the work that they do, one could imagine a reversal of the Times Square billboard depicting fast-food workers as valuable members of society. Additionally, when positive stories about fast food workers appear in the public discourse, worker centers, unions, and other worker advocates could amplify these stories by use of social media and traditional media.

Worker advocates and workers themselves must take steps to change the way the general public perceives of low wage employers from job creators to exploiters of marginalized people. The Fight for $15 has resulted in some tarnishing of the image of the fast food employer and labeling the industry as a bad employer, but this was not the central aim of this movement. The Fight for $15 is a wage and labor movement;

therefore, the movement required a balancing between the desire to change the industry for the betterment of its employees and the desire to maintain the industry as a source of employment.

The anti-sweatshop movement of the past twenty years presents a model for actions against fast food employers. The anti-sweat shop movements targeted multi-national apparel and footwear corporations such as the Gap and Nike for their use of overseas factories with exploitative labor practices. Recently, similar campaigns have targeted Apple Computer as well for Apple's exploitative labor practices in Asia.

These campaigns have not been overwhelmingly successful, but have made incremental yet essential in-roads. Anti-sweatshop actions and campaigns have resulted in tarnish to the image and reputation of multi-million dollar corporations with exploitative labor practice, and more importantly, these campaigns have had certain success in compelling several multinational companies and local factories to change labor practices and working conditions.

An interesting notion is to bridge the movements against sweatshops with the movements for wages and improve labor conditions for fast food workers. There are many similarities with sweatshop work and fast food work (low-wages, poor working conditions, routinization of work, high profits). There is little dissent to the characterization of sweatshops as bad employers. In fact, sweatshop is synonymous with bad job. By bridging the anti-sweatshop movement with the Fight for $15, the bad employer narrative would envelop fast food workers as well. Both movements have something to offer the other and perhaps could be more powerful together.

Worker advocates, human resources professionals, and others must make concerted efforts to moving workers out of fast food industry.

Quite pointedly, fast food jobs are bad jobs. To say otherwise is to continue in the legitimization of capitalism, the work ethic myth and the related myths of meritocracy and the American Dream to the detriment of the marginalized. Worker advocates and human resource professionals must lend their energy to creating a way out of fast food work for those currently employed in the industry.

Human resource professionals must create pathways for fast food workers to transfer their skills to other industries. Fast food workers have little opportunity to search for employment outside of the fast food industry due to limits on their time and the unpredictability of working under an on-call arrangement. Human resource professionals could make a concerted effort to seek out fast food workers to fill open positions in other industries. As an example, fast food workers encountered during this study described themselves as organizers, yet spoke of the lack of job offers from the union employees with whom they work with side by side.

Worker centers and worker advocacy organizations must focus its efforts on preparing fast food workers for jobs in the primary labor market. However, occupational preparation programs have to be flexible enough to meet the scheduling needs of the fast food workers and adjust the traditional schedule of an eight-hour day classroom-based job preparation program to fit the scheduling needs of fast food workers. Suggestions of modifications include holding classes at night or early morning and in shorter time segments.

Human resources practitioners must join in solidarity with the Fight for $15. Human resource practitioners uniquely positioned with access to power and resources can act to change the material conditions of low-wage workers. Human resources practitioners can act to attenuate hierarchy and the corresponding marginalization of low-wage workers through their show of solidarity with low-wage workers by joining low-wage workers in the streets and lifting up the demands of the Fight for $15 low-wage workers within their work organizations.

Conclusion of Dissertation

This study explored a singular research question, "What role does work ethic as a legitimizing myth play in the work lives of New York City fast food workers who live and work in New York City and who have participated in work actions or demonstrations?" Estés (1992) argued, "Asking the proper question is the central action of transformation—in fairy tales, in analysis, and in individuation" and "the key question causes germination of consciousness" (p. 48). She concluded that it was not the key question that "cause[s] the secret doors of the psyche to swing open" (p. 48), but rather the essential curiosity about what stands behind the key question that opens the doors of the psyche. What stood behind the research question was the researcher's curiosity about the human endeavor called work. It was a desire to know the answer to Burawoy's (1979) question, "Why do people work as hard as they do?"

Work ethic, most often explored through quantitative methods, served as the foundational context in which to situate the study. Yet, a quantitative approach was not suited for this exploration because the goal was not to quantify work behaviors but to

understand the why of the behaviors. The intersecting and overlapping theories of social dominance theory, cultural hegemony, and legitimizing myths, all rooted in critical theory, provided the overarching explanatory framework for this study. It was clear that these theories explained the emergent results from the engagement of the empirical material. Yet, the unanticipated notions of stigma (social, structural, and internalized) led the researcher to include other complementary theoretical explanations that encompassed stigma.

Over the course of the field experience, the researcher interacted with hundreds of people who work on the frontlines in the fast food industry. Virtually all of them voiced or demonstrated an experience with or a connection to the term work ethic. Despite their marginalization and poverty, most (if not all) of the workers encountered during this study were acting in ways to stand up for themselves, their colleagues, and their families for workplace fairness.

Social movements are very often unsuccessful or long-term endeavors. A win is not typical. However, in fall of 2016, the New York fast food workers won the fight for $15 an hour. In December 2018, people who work in fast food restaurants located in New York City will earn $15 an hour. The answer to Burawoy's (1979) question, "Why do people work as hard as they do?" is because sometimes you get a win.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your age?
2. In what country were you born?
3. What is your race or ethnicity?
4. What is your level of education?
5. What is your current job?
6. How long have you been in your current job?
7. What job within the fast food industry do/did you want to obtain?

Listed below are open-ended interview questions addressing the key concepts of work ethic and participant experience. Additional open-ended, probing questions related to the interview question follow the major interview questions. The additional probe questions are to draw out description and encourage reflexivity from the study participants if necessary.

Interview Question 1: What is your understanding of the words "work ethic"? What do these words mean to you?

A. Probe question: Work ethic
    a. Where do you imagine you first heard this term and from whom?
        i. Family?
        ii. Work?
        iii. Community?
        iv. Religious community?
        v. Media?
B. Probe question: What else do you remember about hearing this term?

Interview Question 2: Based on your description of work ethic, what are your expectations about your job if you continue in your current job?

A. Probe question: In this scenario, what is the role of work ethic?

Interview Question 3: What was your participation in the recent fast food worker rallies and/or 1-day strikes?

A. Probe question: Please describe these rallies and/or 1-day strikes. Who was there? What did the main speakers say? What signage or symbols do you remember seeing?

Interview Question 4: Some people say that American society is set up in social classes based on things like income, education, where someone lives. For example, there is an upper class, middle class, and lower class. In other words, some people are on the top and some people are on the bottom. Where would you say fast food workers are located?

Interview Question 5: If someone wanted to move from the American lower class to the upper class, in your opinion how would one do so?

A. Probe question: Would work ethic or striking be the most useful method of moving from the lower class to the upper class? Why do you say so?
B. Probe question: Can you give me an example of people you know or have heard about who have moved from the lower class to the upper class? How were they able to do so?

Interview Question 6: If you were to win the lottery and win enough money to live comfortably for the rest of your life, would you continue to work?

A. Probe question: Why?
B. Probe question: If yes, would you continue on your same job? Why or why not? What other job do you imagine yourself working?

APPENDIX B:

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Why People Work as Hard as They Do:
The Role of Work Ethic as a Legitimizing Myth in the Work Lives
of New York City's Fast Food Workers

Institutional Review Board #_____

Student: Michell Speight, Doctoral Candidate, George Washington University
Telephone Number: 914.632.4268

Professor: Dr. Ellen Scully-Russ, George Washington University
Telephone Number: 703.244.7217

1. INTRODUCTION: As someone who works in a fast food restaurant, you are invited to take part in a research study. Your decision to participate is strictly voluntary. Before you decide to be part of this study, and I hope you will, you need to understand the purpose, benefits, and potential harm to you. These are explained in this information sheet. I have attached some information about me as well. I am available to answer your questions and provide further answers. Again, you are free to choose whether you will take part in this study.

2. PURPOSE: I am a student at George Washington University in Washington, DC, but I live in New York. As part of a study I am conducting, I want to learn more about your experiences as a fast food worker. I am particularly interested in your feelings about what people in the United States think about work.

3. PROCEDURES: As a participant in the study, you will be interviewed one or two times. You and I can decide on where we will meet for the interview. The interview will last between 1 and 1½ hours. So that I don't miss anything you say, with your permission I will record the interview and someone I hire will write out the audio recording. When I receive a copy of the interview, I will give it to you so that you can make sure it is correct. As a participant in the study, you will be able to choose a name you want to use for the study.

I am doing this study to earn a doctoral degree from George Washington University. George Washington University will publish the research, and there might be other educational purposes or publications of the study. Your real name will not be used in any of these publications.

4. POSSIBLE RISKS: Although I believe that little harm will come to you by doing this interview, I must tell you about the potential harm that could occur. Sometimes talking

about yourself, your opinions, and your experiences can be upsetting. You may also be worried that what you tell me could be told to others. I will make every effort to find someone to assist you if the interviewing process upsets you. I will also stop the interview when you want to stop. I will make every effort not to share your name with anyone. Additionally, George Washington University has a department called the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that protects study participants. You can contact them at any time to get your questions answered or to complain about the study or me.

5. POSSIBLE BENEFITS: A few good effects might come about because of this study.

- Currently, researchers studying work mostly study highly paid employees. There is almost no research from the point of view of low-wage workers. This study will let others know how low-wage workers experience work.
- Fast food workers are advocating for fair wages and the ability to join unions. This research might provide information to fast food workers to help them win this fight.
- Providing information about the experiences of work in the fast food industry by fast food workers might encourage the owners of the fast food restaurants to be more sympathetic to the needs of the fast food workers.

6. COSTS: There is no cost to you for taking part in this study. I will give you a New York City MetroCard to reimburse your public transportation costs to meet with me for the interview. I will also give you $10 for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

7. COMPENSATION: For your time, I will pay you $15 per hour at the end of the interview.

8. RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY: Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may change your mind or quit this study at any time.

Your records, including your interview, will be private and stored in a locked filing cabinet and/or kept on my computer with a password. I have a committee of three people helping me with this study. Two of these people are my professors at George Washington University, and the other person works at the AFL-CIO. No one, other than George Washington University's IRB (the department that protects study participants), my three committee members, and me will know you are part of this study. If you ask me to, I will release your research records to anyone you choose, but if asked by a court subpoena, I will be forced to release your research records even without your permission.

I will not include your name on any of the study records, and 2 years after this study is published, I will destroy the audiotapes.

QUESTIONS: If you have questions about this study, please call me, Michell Speight, at 914.632.4268. If you have complaints about participating, please call the George

Washington University Assistant Vice President for Health Research, Compliance and Technology Transfer.

APPENDIX C:

RESEARCHER'S BIOGRAPHY

I was born and raised in The Bronx, New York. I now live in New Rochelle, New York. I attended public school in The Bronx and went to Wagner College on Staten Island, New York, for my bachelor's degree and Baruch College in Manhattan, New York, for a master's degree. In 2011, I returned to school. I'm currently a doctoral student at George Washington University in Washington, DC, and I work full-time for a nonprofit organization located close to Poughkeepsie, New York.

Before my current job, I worked for many years in The Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens. In all of my various jobs, I worked to provide human and social services to families and children. I did many different things such as helping pregnant women and their children get medical care and helping families with children in foster care regain custody of their children. I worked at Planned Parenthood's Bronx location with teen mothers. One of my other jobs was finding women jobs in construction.

My parents were both actively involved in their unions. My family background and the jobs I held have developed my interest in workplace and social justice. When I saw the news reports about how fast food workers were organizing for fair wages, I wanted to learn more about fast food workers and I also wanted to learn how I could help in this struggle.

APPENDIX D:

STUDY PARTICIPANT RIGHTS AND CONSENT FORM

Why People Work as Hard as They Do:
The Role of Work Ethic as a Legitimizing Myth in the Work Lives
of New York City's Fast Food Workers

Institutional Review Board #_____

- I have read and discussed the research description with Michell Speight. I had the opportunity to ask her questions about the purposes and procedure regarding this study.
- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
- At any time, Michell Speight can decide to remove me from the research study.
- If, during the course of the study, major new information becomes available that may relate to my willingness to continue to participate in the study, Michell Speight will provide this information to me.
- Any information from the research personally identifying me will not be released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have questions regarding this research or my participation, I can contact Michell Speight, who will answer my questions. Her phone number is 914-632-4268. I may also contact her advisor at George Washington University, Professor Ellen Scully-Russ, at 703-726-3786.
- If at any time I have questions about my rights or concerns about the way Michell Speight is conducting the research, I can contact the George Washington University Institutional Review Board. The phone number for the IRB is 202-994-2715. I can also write to the IRB at George Washington University, 2030 M St NW, Suite 30,Washington, DC 20036.
- I will receive a copy of the Study Information Sheet and this consent form.
- Audiotaping is part of this research. Only Michell Speight and members of the research team will have access to written and taped materials. Please check one:

(____) I consent to being audiotaped
(____) I do NOT consent to be audiotaped.

- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: (Please print)

_____

Participant's Signature:

_____ Date: _____

Researcher's Verification of Explanation

I, Michell Speight, researcher, certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to _____. He/she has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she has provided the affirmative agreement (consent) to participate in this research.

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E:

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Fast Food Workers Wanted for Study

- Looking for people who work in fast food restaurants interested in participating in interviews for a study with George Washington University student.
- The purpose of the interviews is to learn your thoughts about work.
- The interviews will take 1 to 1½ hours and pay $15 per hour to participants. Subway and bus fare will be reimbursed. Meal money provided.
- Must be over the age of 20 and live in New York.
- For more information contact Michelle
  (914) 632-4268 or mspeight@gwmail.gwu.edu