TEMPORARY LABORERS:

BEING A WORKER IN LATE CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

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Over the past few decades US businesses have increasingly turned toward flexible employment relationships made up of temporary workers who do not receive the benefits and rights of standard full-time employment. Temporary labor agencies, which operate by leasing workers out to client businesses, form one component of this shift toward flexible labor and previous researchers have called for more study on this group of formalized employment. My research thesis explores the employment relationships between temporary labor agencies and temporary laborers in order to understand the ways in which this type of labor arrangement affects workers' lives. I performed my research in Flagstaff, Arizona and my study population is primarily comprised of temporary laborers. I conducted participant observation, questionnaires, interviews, time budgets, and archival research to perform my research. I interpret my data through a combination of political economy, performance theory, and anthropology of the body approaches. My findings reveal how people end up working temporary labor, the daily challenges they face, their strategies to increase their job security, and the effects temporary labor has on their lives and bodies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	4
Transcription Conventions	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Chapter 2: Understanding Temp Labor	10
Chapter 3: Methods	22
Chapter 4: Ethnographic Context and Study Population	38
Chapter 5: The Roads to Temporary Labor	43
Chapter 6: The Daily Lives of Temp Laborers	63
Chapter 7: The Embodiment of Temporary Labor	86
Chapter 8: Conclusions and Discussion	109
References Cited	113

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Triangular Employment Relationship	7
Figure 2: Recruitment Flyer	25
Figure 3: Time Budget	28
Figure 4: Questionnaire	28-29
Figure 5: Temp Laborer Interview Schedule	31
Figure 6: Client Business Employee Interview Schedule	32
Figure 7: Data Collection Efforts	33
Figure 8: Research Flow	34
Figure 9: Gender Demographics	40
Figure 10: Age Demographics	41
Figure 11: Race and Ethnicity Demographics	41
Figure 12: Educational Level Demographics	42
Figure 13: Housing Demographics	42

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

,	The comma indicates a pause in the utterance.
.	The period indicates an end of an utterance and tends to follow literary convention.
?	The question mark indicates a question.
!	The exclamation mark is used to indicate a raise in volume.
–	The en dash indicates a cut-off or self-interruption.
[word]	Brackets enclose words added by the author for purposes of readability.
[…]	Brackets with an enclosed ellipsis within the text indicate small portions of the transcription have been removed. If placed on a separate line this indicates that the content below comes from another part of the interview.
____	Underscores indicate that part of the utterance was removed by the author for confidentiality purposes.
(word)	Parentheses enclose words added by the author to clarify something left out for confidentiality purposes.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

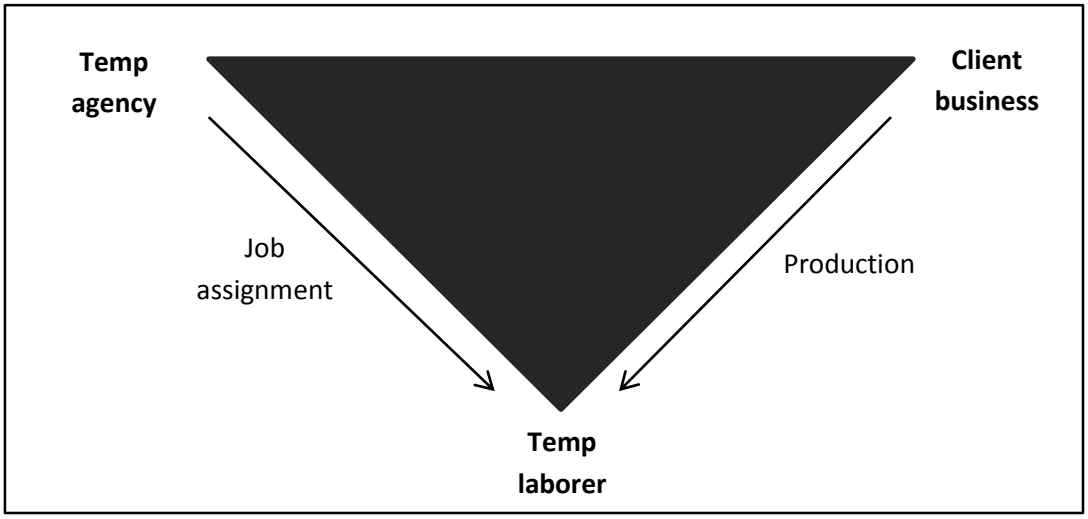
My thesis research focuses on workers in a form of employment called temporary labor. Temporary labor fuels a growing industry comprised of employment relationships not common to more regular and permanent forms of work. In this chapter I define temporary labor, describe its research significance, present my research objectives, and outline the chapters of my thesis.

I define *temporary labor agencies* as formal employment firms that function on the "low-end" (Peck and Theodore 2001:474) or "low road" (Purser 2009:402) of the temp help industry. A component of the "day labor industry" (Purser 2009:401-403), temp labor can be distinguished from other forms of temporary employment because it (1) requires frequent (if not daily) in-person contact with the agency for work and pay, (2) typically offers physical or manual labor job assignments that can be labeled as unskilled or semi-skilled, (3) provides low pay due to the categorization of the work, (4) and is commonly located in places where there is a demand for labor (such as poorer neighborhoods and near shelters or missions for people without homes) in order to have a ready access to a surplus of workers.

Temp labor agencies are unique because they operate a "triangular employment relationship" (Kalleberg 2000:348) in which the worker is a legal employee of the temp agency and the client business is responsible for supervising and managing the worker (Figure 1). This triangular employment relationship is specific to the temp help industry and involves what can be described as a "dualistic control" (Gottfried 1991) in which a worker's labor and production is managed by two separate entities. Temporary labor is

valued by business leaders because it provides functional, temporal, and regulatory flexibility – allowing them to select the skill of the employee, select the date and length of the job assignment, and conform to labor regulations (Theodore and Peck 2002:468).

Figure 1: Triangular Employment Relationship



Researchers link the first major increases in the U.S. temp help industry to two political economic changes: (1) the decrease in manufacturing and increase in services of the 1950s and (2) the political economic shift from Fordism to late capitalism of the 1970s (Harvey 1990:121-124; Hernandez 2000:5; Hatton 2011:6). These political economic shifts have led to a decrease in jobs categorized as unskilled or semi-skilled and those that exist have become precarious and temporary (Harvey 1990:150; Hernandez 2000:5).

The temp help industry has thrived in late capitalism. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported there were 2.8 million "temporary help services" (BLS 2014a) employees in the United States in December 2013 – accounting for two percent of the total nonfarm employment workforce of the same period. However, these numbers do

not accurately describe how many people are affected by these employment relationships because of the temporary nature of the work. The American Staffing Association boasts that in 2008 the temp help industry employed 11.2 million workers with an average tenure of 12.4 weeks (Berchem 2009). Therefore, in 2008 around eight percent of total nonfarm employees were employed at some point by the temp help industry (when comparing the industry figures to an average of the BLS total non-farm employment monthly figures of the same year) (BLS 2014a).

Research on temporary laborers is significant for three reasons. First, the triangular employment relationship in temporary labor constitutes relations of power not found in regular and more permanent forms of work. Temporary laborers may therefore experience work in ways that differ from regular workers. Second, temporary labor is the result of a recent shift in the U.S. political economy. Through this research I can examine how neoliberal business models affect workers. Finally, the continued growth of the temporary help industry means that temporary labor affects an increasing amount of workers in the U.S.

For my thesis I pursued three research objectives: (1) the policies of temp agencies; (2) the effects temporary labor has on the lives of my participants; and (3) the strategies my participants develop within this system of labor. These research objectives yielded data that elucidate the relations of power within temporary labor and reveal ways in which neoliberalism effects workers. Overall, my research speaks to the challenges workers experience and the efforts they undertake to better their lives within the system of temporary labor.

My thesis is divided into eight chapters. In the next chapter, I present a review of existing research on temporary labor and the theories I use to interpret my data. In chapter three, I cover the research methods I used to conduct my study. In chapter four, I describe the ethnographic setting and study population of my research. In chapters five, six, and seven I present my results. I examine the reasons why my participants work temporary labor in chapter five, I illustrate the daily lives of temporary laborers in chapter six, and I explore the embodiment of temporary labor in chapter seven. Chapter eight contains a conclusion and discussion of my results.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING TEMPORARY LABOR

In this chapter I review research on temporary labor and outline my theoretical approach. First, I present a literature review of previous research from the social science disciplines. I then present concepts and models regarding the political economy, performance, and the anthropology of the body to outline my theoretical approach.

Literature Review

Anthropologists have conducted a substantial amount of research on both late capitalist forms of labor and people who are homeless. However, the majority of research specific to the temp help industry has come from sociologists, political geographers, and other social science disciplines. In this section I present a cross section of the research that I found useful for my study.

Anthropologists have made significant contributions to understanding the ways in which labor and the political economy affect workers. One example of the scholarly contributions in this area (among many) comes from Constable who (1997) examines the effects domestic work has on the bodies of Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong, revealing themes of docility and resistance. In another publication, Constable (2014) explores the lives of Indonesian and Filipina foreign domestic workers who have children in Hong Kong and posits that their identities as temporary workers within this context obstructs their employers from seeing them as anything more than labor for hire. Additionally, McTague and Wright (2010) examine temp agency practices that

serve to control and contain the mobility of workers – making workers invisible to the broader public and visible to the agency for purposes of surveillance.

Anthropologists have also contributed significantly to understanding the lives and experiences of people without homes in relation to cultural, political, and economic forces. Desjarlais (1997:6, 10) draws primarily from his conversations with homeless shelter residents to better understand their experience both on the street and within a psychiatric institution in Boston. Wasserman and Claire (2010:104) performed ethnographic research for four years in the homeless camps of Birmingham, Alabama and claim that the policies and programs meant to address homelessness further distanced their participants' from public life and spaces. The researchers also found that many of their participants engaged in both formal and informal forms of temporary labor (Wasserman and Claire 2010:83).

Most of the research on the temp help industry has been conducted by sociologists. Henson spent three summers conducting participant observation in temporary employment agencies and interviewing temp workers. The author's research explores how temporary employment affects the workers as they manage their identities and self-esteem in employment arrangements in which they are undervalued (Henson 1996). Parker provides an extensive look into temporary labor by examining the major industries that use it and the worker populations. The author discusses the inadequate pay and benefits, the underutilization of temp laborers, and the unsafe working conditions and proposes that temporary employment is commonly used to curb the efforts of labor unions (Parker 1994). Hatton examines the development and

growth of the temp help industry in the U.S. from post-World War II into the 21st century through its media advertising. The author shows how the temp help industry has evolved from a gendered form of work advertised as a source of extra income into an industry that is now used by nearly every company in the U.S., decreases permanent employment levels, and produces "permatemps" in place of full-time positions in order to decrease labor costs (Hatton 2011).

Additional research includes Kerr and Dole (2005) who investigated the work experiences and grievances of homeless day laborers in Cleveland, Ohio in order to address structural inequalities present in this type of work. Smith provides a legal assessment of contingent worker rights and benefits and finds that these are only entitled to those who "fit the specific definition of 'employee' under a particular law" (Smith 2008:199). Smith raises concerns surrounding the findings and proposes strategies for increasing legal protections. Additional literature includes Padavic (2005), who focuses on the ways in which workers adopt temp agency managerial ideologies through identity management strategies, and Williams (2009), who interprets the temp agency practices in responding to worker grievances as a divide-and-rule tactic to produce loyalty.

Purser (2006; 2012) has performed some of the most recent ethnographic research on temporary labor. The author finds Bourdieu's "flexploitation" mode of domination through the temporal dimensions of the job allocation process and argues that the waiting involved in temp labor is used as a form of control to reduce business risk and prepare disciplined workers (Purser 2006:11, 16). In another publication Purser

focuses on ex-offender temp workers and their barriers to permanent employment. The author finds that many ex-offenders view temp work as a type of "extended incarceration and enduring form of punishment" and that their engagement in temporary work produces a "forever liminal status" while they attempt to re-enter society (Purser 2012:397).

At the same time, some scholars contend that temporary labor agencies provide a space for ex-offenders and people without homes – i.e. those that may not be marketable or comfortable with traditional recruitment methods – to find work (Williams 2009:222). This can help legitimize their existence outside of the deviant status associated with both groups, imbue in them a sense of autonomy, and provide them with a source of income that may otherwise not exist (Williams 2009:222).

The aforementioned research is a fair representation of the ways in which temp labor is understood through social science disciplines. What most of the research has in common is a focus on the employment relationships and specifically the power of the temp agency to control or influence the worker. It is very important to examine these asymmetrical power relations because they have profound implications on the workers. However, most of the research does not focus on the strategies or agency of the worker within these precarious employment relationships.

Theory

I draw from three bodies of anthropological theory to interpret my research data: (1) political economy theory, (2) performance theory, and (3) anthropology of the body. Each theory provides valuable approaches for understanding temporary labor. In this section I first present concepts and models from political economy theory. I then introduce theories surrounding performance and end with the anthropology of the body.

Political economy theory provides a useful way to contextualize temporary labor and understand its emergence as a common form of labor in the U.S. Furthermore, political economy theory is suitable for interpreting temporary labor since the latter involves an exchange of labor for money and is regulated by policy. Below I present theoretical concepts regarding business models and employment relations of both the previous and current U.S. political economy.

In the 1970s the U.S. shifted from the "Fordist-Keynesian"[1] political economic configuration to late capitalism (i.e. "the 'flexible' regime of accumulation" (Harvey 1990:124)). Under the Fordist "asset model" (Hatton 2011:4-5) of employment relations, the wages, skills, and well-being of workers were considered directly related to profit. Proponents of the asset model claim that if a worker is treated well, trained, and paid a comfortable wage, then she or he will be more productive and have income to consume mass-produced goods (Harvey 1990:126).

Late capitalism primarily operates through a neoliberal political economic framework. The term "neoliberalism" refers to ideologies, policies, practices, and

discursive forms that endorse deregulation, unhindered competition in business, and cuts to public expenditures (Bourdieu 1998a; Goode and Maskovsky 2001:8; Lyon-Callo 2004:10-11). The "strong discourse" of neoliberalism constructs deregulation and unhindered competition as "pure market logic" (Bourdieu 1998a), foregoing any regard for "social logic" (Bourdieu 1998b:96). As a result, neoliberal practices have promulgated more flexible business models that allow employers to reduce labor costs and adapt to fluctuations in product demand (Clinton 1997:3).

The laissez-faire environment of late capitalism has transformed how people view themselves and others in relation to work. Under neoliberalism, business leaders have typically abandoned the Fordist "asset model" of work and replaced it with the "liability model of work" (Hatton 2011:4-5, 53), which views the worker as a burden to profit. Steps to reduce wages, benefits, and employees and to replace skilled workers with low wage, unskilled workers are seen as viable remedies to increase profits under this model (Hatton 2011). The growth of the temp help industry can be partially understood as an outcome of the liability model of work.

The changes in business and employment relations stemming from the market logic of neoliberalism have affected the lives of workers. Workers are now expected to accept short-term contracts or assignments and to be flexible with their time, space, and functions in relation to work (Bourdieu 1998a; Theodore and Peck 2002:468). Additionally, certain classes of worker are culturally accepted as "disposable" (O'Brien 2006; Purser 2012:402) and can be dismissed with little or no recompense. The flexibility and disposability found in neoliberalism has extended into nearly all forms of

work – evident in 90 day probationary periods when starting a job, professional staffing firms, and adjunct faculty at universities to name a few. Nevertheless, the temp help industry is a prime example of the neoliberal agenda toward flexible and disposable workers.

The aforementioned theories on the political economy help contextualize temporary labor and provide a framework for understanding my data. The increasing use of temporary labor by U.S. businesses correlates with the shift to late capitalism, the liability model of work, and the neoliberal demands for flexibility and disposability. Although using a neoliberal framework allows for comparative cultural studies, many scholars have critiqued the ways in which such frameworks are applied – claiming that "neoliberalism" has become "hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (Harvey 2005:3) and can limit interpretations (Ganti 2014; Hoffman et al. 2006; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Ong 2006). In my use of a neoliberal framework, I am interpreting workers' experiences and strategies in temporary labor as outcomes of business models that promote flexibility and disposability.

Performance theory is useful to interpret the actions and accounts of my research participants as part of a broader field of culture. This is possible because performances both reflect and reconstitute culture and engender identification processes. I begin with a definition of performance and then describe what performances in everyday life accomplish through the concept of performativity.

I use the following definition of performance as a way to recognize the performances of my research participants. Goffman defines performance as "all the

activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1973:15). This definition requires social interaction, includes both intentional and less deliberate performances, and allows for performance to influence others that are present. These characteristics will allow me to locate unmistakable performances in my research data.

It is also important to interpret what my participants are accomplishing through their performances. Goffman describes performance as "the presentation of self in everyday life" and the sociologist examines "the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others" and "the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him" (Goffman 1973:xi). According to Goffman, performances constitute idealized impressions to the audience that epitomize social values (Goffman 1973:34-35). The performances by temporary laborers in my research can therefore be correlated to cultural understandings of work and workers and understood as tools for identity formation (via their impression-making).

The accomplishment of something through a performance can be linked to the concept of performativity. Performativity denotes the ability for gesture and speech to accomplish actions, form identities, and bring the social world into being (Ahearn 2012:161; Bucholtz and Hall 2004:381; Butler 1999:180). To better understand this concept I refer to Butler who describes how the body is used in gender performativity and indeed any production of identity:

> What we take be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through gendered stylization of the body. In this way it showed that what we take to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one

> that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts. The production of gender – or any identity – thus depends crucially on ideology to render that identity recognizable and legitimate. [Butler 1999:xiv-xv]

Understanding performativity in this way removes cultural assumptions about the interiority and fixedness of identity. Moreover, the concept of performativity recognizes that identification processes exist in social interactions and are informed by cultural ideologies.

These concepts from performance theory allow me to locate performances within my data and relate them to broader cultural processes. The performances of temp laborers can therefore be understood as acts of identification that draw from cultural ideologies about work. I use this model from performance theory to evaluate the bodily acts witnessed and performed during my participant observation and described by interview participants.

Theories from the anthropology of the body are useful for a study of temporary labor because of the physical nature of this type of work. In particular, the concept of embodiment provides a way to examine the ways in which cultural and social processes affect the bodies and emotions of my participants. In the following I describe the concept of embodiment and its relationship to emotions.

Embodiment generally refers to the ways in which culture is inscribed upon and carried out by the body. There are numerous theoretical models for embodiment; however, for the purposes of my thesis I draw from medical anthropology. Medical anthropologists typically examine the ways in which cultural and social phenomenon affect bodies (Horton and Barker 2010; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Tapias 2006).

For example, Horton and Barker reveal how social inequality is inscribed upon the oral health of Mexican American farmworker children, leading to life-long social stigma and health problems (Horton and Barker 2010). I use this model of embodiment to examine the effects temporary labor has on the physical bodies of my participants.

Emotions are considered by many scholars to be important to the study of embodiment. Scheper-Hughes and Lock propose:

> An anthropology of the body necessarily entails a theory of emotions. Emotions affect the way in which the body, illness, and pain are experienced and are projected in images of the well or poorly functioning social body and body politic…Insofar as emotions entail both feelings and cognitive orientations, public morality, and cultural ideology, we suggest they provide an important "missing link" capable of bridging mind and body, individual, society, and body politics. [Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:28-29]

Lutz and White take a similar stance in their development of an anthropology of emotions (Lutz and White 1986:406-409). Other scholars have also contributed to this position by exploring the influence of emotions on human action (Rosaldo 1984; Lewis 1980). Additionally, Wilce posits that studying emotion compels us "to consider the relation of body, action, and mind; of embodiment and society; of biology and culture… they force us to ask what it is to be human" (Wilce 2009:28). For my thesis I examine the emotions of my participants to better understand the embodiment of temporary labor.

Theories from the anthropology of the body provide useful ways to examine and interpret the effects of temporary labor on the bodies of my participants. Using a medical anthropological model of embodiment, I can relate injury, hunger, the aging body, and emotions to social, cultural, and political phenomenon.

I use the aforementioned concepts about the political economy, performance, and the body as a model to interpret my data. Furthermore, these three bodies of theory are conceptually similar in regards the relationship between the political economy, bodies, and performances. Scholars such as Butler have developed similar models that illustrate the ways in which the political economy influences bodies and performative acts of identification (Butler 1988).

Notes

1. Harvey describes the Fordist-Keynesian political economic configuration: “the long postwar boom, from 1945 to 1973, was built upon a certain set of labour control practices, technological mixes, consumption habits, and configurations of political-economic power, and that this configuration can reasonably be called Fordist-Keynesian” (Harvey 1990:124).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter I describe the methods I used to conduct my research. I chose a range of data collection methods in an effort to investigate multiple research objectives and triangulate my findings. I cover the sampling, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis research methods below.

Sampling

My total sample size consisted of 24 people who perform temp labor and 3 employees of client businesses.[1] I sampled temp laborers through "convenience" and "snowball" methods (Bernard 2006:191-193). I sampled two of the client businesses through a "purposive" (Bernard 2006:189-191) method in which their inclusion depended upon their ability to speak about temp labor.[2] I fulfilled this criterion by targeting businesses that were frequently mentioned in conversations and interviews with temp laborers.

I invited temp laborer participants to fill out a time budget and questionnaire and participate in an interview. I provided temp laborers with ten dollars for an interview and raffle tickets to win three graduated monetary prizes for the questionnaire or time budget. I only conducted interviews with the client business employee participants and I provided no compensation to them.

Recruitment

Before I began recruitment, I called a temporary labor agency in Flagstaff. The person I spoke with seemed open to the idea of allowing me to work and conduct research; however, I had problems getting permission as the employee wanted to contact the corporate office before proceeding and never seemed to get around to actually contacting them. I eventually went in person to an agency that I was referred to by a friend who assured me the employee would allow me to conduct research. The temp agency employee gave me permission to work and perform research. The one caveat was that I recruit outside the temp agency rather than inside, which is something I preferred in order to maintain participant confidentiality.

I began recruiting outside the temp agency a week into my participant observation. Recruitment was difficult for a number of reasons. Many of the temp laborers had seen me come into the agency the prior week or the morning of for work. It presented a challenge I had overlooked: how do I tell these people that I am actually a graduate student researching temp labor? I did not walk into the agency each day of my participant observation and make such an announcement; although when I ran into someone I knew through my previous employment I normally mentioned this to them in a private conversation. Additionally, I began contemplating the ethics of performing temp labor while so many of the these people needed the work and money.[3] The solution I devised was to begin with people I previously knew and have them introduce me to other people or introduce myself in conversation. This was somewhat successful;

however, even some of the people I knew were hesitant to talk with me about temp labor so close to the agency.

I eventually moved recruitment to another location after running into to a person at a local library who reconsidered participating now that we were both away from the agency. My new recruitment site became shelters since temp labor is common to people without homes.[4] I created a flyer (Figure 2) with my contact information and distributed them with permission at two shelters.

The change in recruitment produced three things: (1) an increase in the number of willing participants; (2) a biased sample; and (3) a necessity to screen the participants to ensure they actually performed temp labor. The increase in the number of participants was welcome although this ultimately led to more interviews than I originally planned. This is because many participants selected what they were willing to do over the phone and preferred the cash in hand compensation for the interview as opposed to the raffle tickets I provided for the survey and time budget. The biasness of the sample must be recognized and interpreted as such; however, it should be noted that at least one participant with a stable residence was recruited after switching recruitment sites and the majority of participants recruited at the temp agency did not have a stable residence. Many of the participants that I recruited with this new strategy I already knew from my employment at a shelter or recognized from my participant observation in temp labor. If I did not know or recognize the person, then I asked a series of questions about their involvement in temp labor and included or excluded them based upon their answers.[5]

I also contacted client businesses mentioned in my interviews with temp laborers and told them I was a graduate student and explained my research. I then asked if I could set up in interview to speak with someone. I came in contact with two employees of client businesses through this process while others were more difficult to reach. I set up a time to meet with one for an interview while the other preferred answering questions through email. I recruited the third client business employee in person during my participant observation.

Figure 2: Recruitment Flyer

(Front)

Do you currently get work through a temp agency?
Have you worked for one in the past month?

I would like to interview you.

Call Jason at XXX-XXX-XXXX

See other side for details!

(Back)

I am a student at NAU and I am studying temporary labor. All information provided will remain confidential.

What I need <u>your</u> help with:

- Interview (1 hour)
- Survey Questions (20 min)
- Time budgets (15 min)

*Compensation provided – $10 for interview and raffle entries for survey and time budget.

Methods for Data Collection

I used archival research, participant observation, time budgets, questionnaires, and interviews for data collection (Bernard 2006). I employed these multiple methods to target my research objectives and triangulate data.

Archival Research

I conducted archival research to familiarize myself with the policies surrounding temporary labor and to better understand how policy legitimates and shapes temporary labor. I reviewed various federal, state, and local policies on temporary labor. I also obtained or recorded hiring documents from the temporary labor agency. Archival research is effective because it allows the researcher to examine cultural processes through time and provides a way to gather established data surrounding issues that may be too hot to share in an in-person interview (Bernard 2006:448-449).

Participant Observation

I became a "participant observer" (Bernard 2006:347) by working as a temp laborer over the course of a month in the summer of 2013. I conducted informal interviews and recorded my experiences in a daily journal. Participant observation is an effective method for understanding cultural phenomena because of its immersive aspect, which "enables the fieldworker to directly and forcibly experience…both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject" (Emerson et al 2011:3). In addition, participant observation can enhance the quality and interpretation of data

because it imbues the fieldworker with a sense of tacit knowledge (Dewalt and Dewalt 2010:10).

During my participant observation in temporary labor, I gained insight into the daily processes of temporary labor. I learned about the job allocation process, the safety policies, the employment relationships, and had time to talk with many temp laborers. However, I did not experience the same living conditions and financial troubles as my participants as I had an apartment to go to every night and money to address my primary needs.

Time Budgets

I asked temp laborer participants to fill out time budgets (Figure 3) in order to deepen my understanding of temporary labor and to socially map their mobility and use of space in Flagstaff, Arizona. I initially asked participants to record a daily log for one week and include where they went, approximate times, and what they did for the day. After having trouble tracking down participants to collect the completed time budgets, I switched strategies by attaching a map to ease the process and asking participants to fill as much as they could by recalling the preceding days. In total I collected eight time budgets. Time budgets are useful to examine the sequence, duration, frequency, and context of behaviors (Bernard 2006:293).

Figure 3: Time Budget

(Page 1) A printed Google map of Flagstaff, Arizona.

(Pages 2-3)

Date and Time	Where did you go?	What did you do?	Additional notes

Questionnaires

I distributed questionnaires to the temp laborer participants focusing on age, gender, race, ethnicity, level of education, employment, and reasons for and experiences from working for temporary labor agencies (Figure 4).[6] The questionnaires were self-administered because this can provide more reporting on topics that are open to social ridicule such as wage earnings, amount of work received, or personal employment history (Bernard 2006:258-260). I occasionally assisted participants in filling out the questionnaires by rewording questions. I collected fifteen questionnaires in total.

Figure 4: Questionnaire

Name: _____ Age: _____
Phone or contact info:
____ Gender (M=male or F=female)

Race/Ethnicity

a. American Indian or Alaska Native
b. Black or African American
c. White
d. Hispanic
e. Asian
f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Highest Education Level Completed (can select more than one if needed)

a. No high school diploma
b. High school diploma or GED
c. Associates degree or college certificate
   _____
d. Bachelor's degree _____
e. Master's or PhD _____
f. Trade school or certification _____

Short Answer Section

1) How long have you performed this type of work?
Recently _____ (days, weeks, months, or years)
Lifetime _____ (days, weeks, months, or years)
2) Do you currently have other work besides temporary labor? (If so please describe what you do)
3) What kind of work have you performed in the past besides temporary labor?
4) What types of jobs have you done through temp agencies? (Please list as many as needed)
5) What do you like about temporary labor? (Please list as many as needed)
6) What do you dislike about temporary labor? (Please list as many as needed)
7) Why do you do this type of work?
8) How does this type of work affect your life?
9) Are some temp agencies better than others? Why or why not?
10) Do you sometimes feel temp labor is unfair? Is so, explain
11) On average, how much money do you make in a day of temp work? _____
12) What is the least you have made in one day? _____
13) What is the most you have made in one day? _____
14) How many days do you try to get work a week? _____
15) How many days do you end up getting work a week? _____
16) When did you last have regular employment? _____
17) Do you get as much temp work as you would like? Y or N
18) Do you have stable housing? Y or N
19) Are you ever concerned for you safety while doing temp labor? Y or N
20) Have you ever received a full-time job from temp work? Y or N
21) Have you ever not reported an injury while doing temp work? If so, why not?

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured, audio recorded interviews with nineteen temp laborers and two client business employees. Semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate method for my research because they allow the researcher and participant to follow new leads of investigation and are useful to obtain a variety of data in a single interview session (Bernard 2006:212). Separate interview schedules were used to guide my interviews with temp laborers and client business employees (Figures 5 and 6). The majority of questions from the interview schedule were asked to each participant in addition to new lines of investigation. A structured email interview was conducted with one client business employee using a shortened version of the client business employee interview schedule.

Figure 5: Temp Laborer Interview Schedule

1) What is temporary labor? Is that what you call it?
2) What types of jobs have you done through a temp agency?
3) Why do you work through temporary employment agencies?
4) What do you like or dislike about this type of work?
5) How does this affect your life?
6) Can you afford housing with the income you get from temp work?
7) Does working temp labor require being flexible? (e.g. times and jobsites)
8) Do you ever feel uncertain while doing temp work? (e.g. ending time, job duties, supervision, how to do something)
9) What are the rules and regulations you have to follow when working?
10) How do you deal with these rules and regulations?
11) How do you adapt to this type of work arrangement?
12) Is temp work fair or unfair? Explain
13) What is the best job you have had?
14) What is the worst job you have had?
15) Have you ever received a permanent job through temp work?
16) Have you ever been injured? Did you report it? If not, do you know someone who has been injured and did not report it?
17) Is there a difference between workers with cars and those without?
18) Describe your relationship with the temp agencies? Do you get along with the employees?
19) Have you ever been recruited informally for temp work?
20) Has an employer ever taken you out from under an agency before the 90 days?
21) What are your overall opinions about this work?
22) What would you like to ask the agency or client business?
23) What should I know about temp labor that we haven't already covered?

Figure 6: Client Business Employee Interview Schedule

1) Why does _____ (business name) use temporary labor?
2) What advantages does temporary labor provide for _____ (business name)?
3) Are there disadvantages to using temporary labor? If so, what are they?
4) What policies do you have to follow or be aware of in the use of temporary labor? (e.g. state, federal, internal, safety, OSHA)
5) What are some of the pressures _____ (business name) faces that require using temporary labor? (e.g. seasonal trends in work, worker's comp insurance, benefits, adherence to policy or regulations)
6) What is the process for deciding to use temporary labor at _____ (business name)?
7) What work do temp laborers perform at the _____ (business name)?
8) Do temp laborers do the same work as regular employees? Is there discrepancy in pay? If so, why?
9) Who oversees the work of temp laborers? Can you describe the employment relationships between temp workers and their supervisors?
10) What wages are temp laborers paid from agencies?
11) How much do you pay the temp agencies for their services?
12) Can you describe what temporary labor is?
13) What should I know about temporary labor? (e.g. is it important? Helpful? And why?)

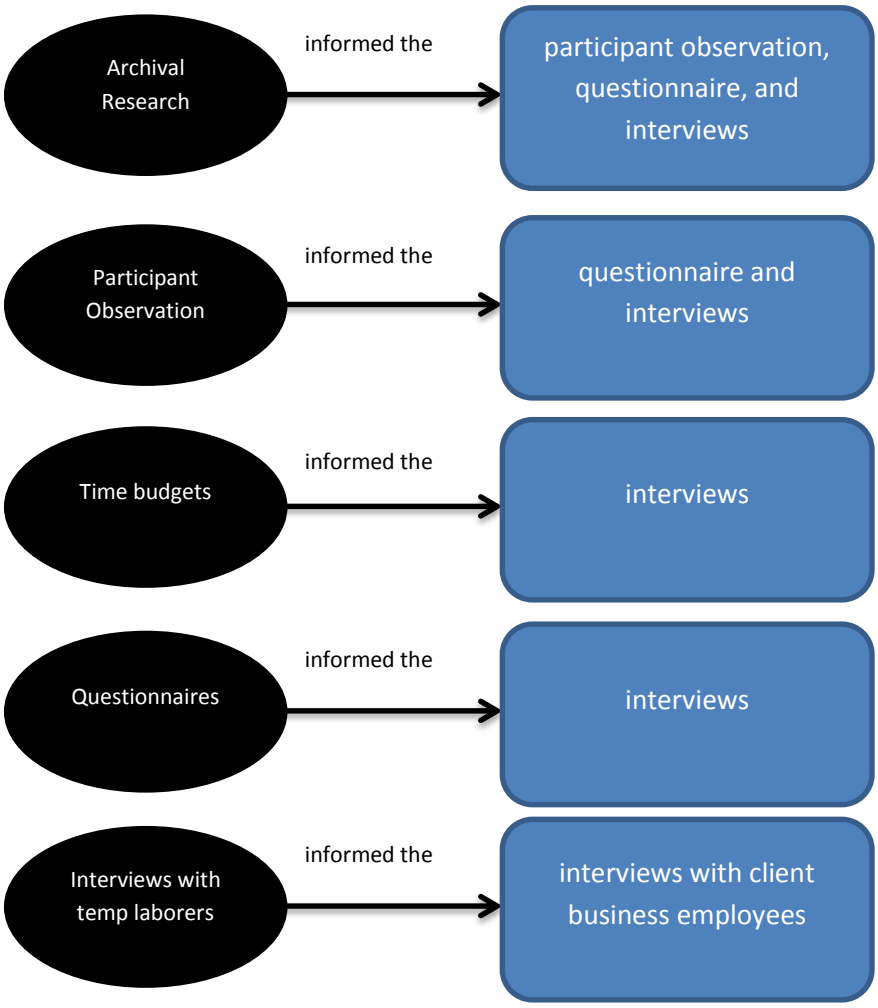
Data Collection and Research Flow

The aforementioned data collection methods were used to achieve my research objectives and they were employed in such a manner that preceding methods informed the content of subsequent methods. Figure 7 details the research objectives each method targets. Figure 8 depicts the research flow. New research foci were included in subsequent data collection methods. Furthermore, different data collection methods were sometimes conducted during the same time period. Figure 8 describes the starting order of each method (e.g. interviews did not start until after budgets and questionnaires were conducted).

Figure 7: Data Collection Efforts

	1) Creation and enforcement of policy	**2) Effects on workers lives**	**3) Ways workers negotiate employment relationship**	**Neoliberalism**	**Body**	**Policy**
Archival Research	X			X		X
Participant observation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Time Budgets	X	X	X	X	X	
Questionnaires		X		X	X	
Interviews	X	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 8: Research Flow



Methods for Data Analyses

I performed descriptive statistics, textual and thematic analyses with inductive and deductive coding processes, and social mapping to analyze my research data.

I evaluated the demographic portion of the questionnaires through various "univariate analyses" (Bernard 2006:549) to better understand my research participants. A collection of univariate statistical methods was used to create a "descriptive analysis" (Bernard 2006:549) of the participants. This provided me with a better understanding of "who" makes up my research sample. It also helped me understand the characteristics of my sample and allowed me to avoid overgeneralization by not representing temp laborers on a whole.

I transcribed my participant observation notes in addition to the questionnaire responses and audio recorded interviews from the research participants. I then analyzed this textual data – along with a purposive sample of archival documents – through a qualitative inductive coding process to reveal emergent themes and formulate hypotheses. I began to test these hypotheses through a "content analysis" method, which involves testing a theory by creating a set of codes and applying them systematically to the sample of texts (Bernard 2006:507). For this deductive, textual analysis, I coded for emergent themes from my research as well as concepts from the political economy and anthropology of the body theories. Unfortunately, I lost a good portion of my inductive coding and content analyses in March of 2014 after dropping my laptop. The interview and archival research data analyses were salvaged through

reexaminations. Existing handwritten or printed notes on themes and hypotheses helped me greatly in this endeavor.

I used the time budget data to build a "social map" (Van Willigen 2002:167) of the research participants as a way to better understand their mobility and use of space. My initial plan to plot the data on a map was abandoned to protect the confidentiality of the participants, temp agencies, and client businesses. Instead, I created modified bar graphs of the data as visual illustrations of the effects temp labor has on the use of space and mobility of the participants.

Notes

1. Additionally, conversations with four temp agency employees, one informal labor employer, and an employee of Arizona's Labor Department occurred during my research.

2. The actual client business employee participant was selected by the client business.

3. This dilemma eventually compelled me to stop the participant observation portion of my research.

4. A Labor Ready branch manager is described as saying that half of his workers are homeless in a March 23, 1998 Forbes article (Gorham 1998; Theodore 2003:1820). A study in Tucson, Arizona found that 25 percent of people without homes had recently worked day labor (Snow and Shockey 1998; Bartley and Roberts 2006:43).

5. Screening questions included: What agency do you go to? Where have you gotten work? When was the last time you tried to get work? And, how many years have you done temp work? Additionally, I listened for common temp labor words such as "tickets" (i.e. job assignments) and gathered their general understanding of temp labor.

6. The racial and ethnic categories derive from the US Census Bureau.

CHAPTER 4: ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND STUDY POPULATION

I describe the ethnographic context and study population in this chapter for more accurate understandings of my research site and participants. I begin with the ethnographic context in order to provide a socioeconomic and geographic backdrop to the research. I then present a description of the study population to highlight the demographics of my research participants.

I performed my research in Flagstaff – a town in the northern part of Arizona with a metropolitan area population over 134 thousand (U.S. Census 2010a). Flagstaff is predominantly white (73.4 percent), American Indians comprise nearly twelve percent of the population, roughly four percent of the resident reported being of two or more races, and eighteen percent identify as Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (U.S. Census 2010b). In 2013 Flagstaff had a labor force of nearly seventy-two thousand, an employee count of sixty-six thousand, and an unemployment rate of over eight percent (BLS 2014b). Furthermore, the median household income is just over forty-eight thousand dollars and nearly one-quarter (23.3 percent) of the population earns an annual income that is below the poverty line (U.S. Census 2014).

Flagstaff sits on the I-40 corridor, which spans from California to North Carolina, and is near a number of smaller towns that dot the landscape of northern Arizona – including communities of the Navajo and Hopi nations. The city is also home to Northern Arizona University, has a ski resort on the tallest peak in Arizona, and is a tourist retreat for residents from Phoenix and other locales – all of which add to the flexible and seasonally variable employment offered. Based on this description and my

experience of living in Flagstaff and working at a shelter for people without homes, the city tends to be a stopping point for a number of itinerant people traveling across the country and a place for people from adjacent communities to search for work.

I present descriptive statistics on the gender, age, race, ethnicity, educational level, and housing status to better understand my study population of temp laborers. The demographics for my study were determined using data from the questionnaires and interviews. Some of the data on the participants' age, ethnicity, and housing were derived through either participant observation or knowledge of the participant prior to the research. The data presented does not always include all twenty-four participants since some chose not to share certain aspects about themselves.

My temp laborer study sample consisted of twenty males and four females (Figure 9). The ages of the participants ranged from eighteen years old to sixty-five years old. Six participants were under twenty-five years old, four were between the ages of twenty-five to thirty-five, seven were between the ages of thirty-six and fifty and seven were over fifty years old (Figure 10). Eleven of my participants identified as white, ten as Native American or Alaskan Native, one as Hispanic, and two as being multiracial or of mixed ethnicity (Figure 11). Of the sixteen participants that shared their educational level, over one-third (6 of 16) were without a high school diploma, over one-third (6 of 16) did not receive education beyond high school, three had an associate degree, college certificate, or trade school certification, and one had received a bachelor's degree (Figure 12).

Determining the housing status of participants was complicated because it rested on different interpretations of the term "stable residence." I can be confident in saying that at least four-fifths (20 or 24) of my participants can be described as not having a stable residence in Flagstaff because they regularly used a shelter, slept outside, stayed at a friend's house, or slept in a car. It is important to note that at least three participants from this group did have a stable residence in a nearby city but would use a shelter or sleep outside when looking for work in Flagstaff. I can only be certain that one participant had a stable residence in Flagstaff and the housing status of the remaining three participants is unknown.

Figure 9: Gender

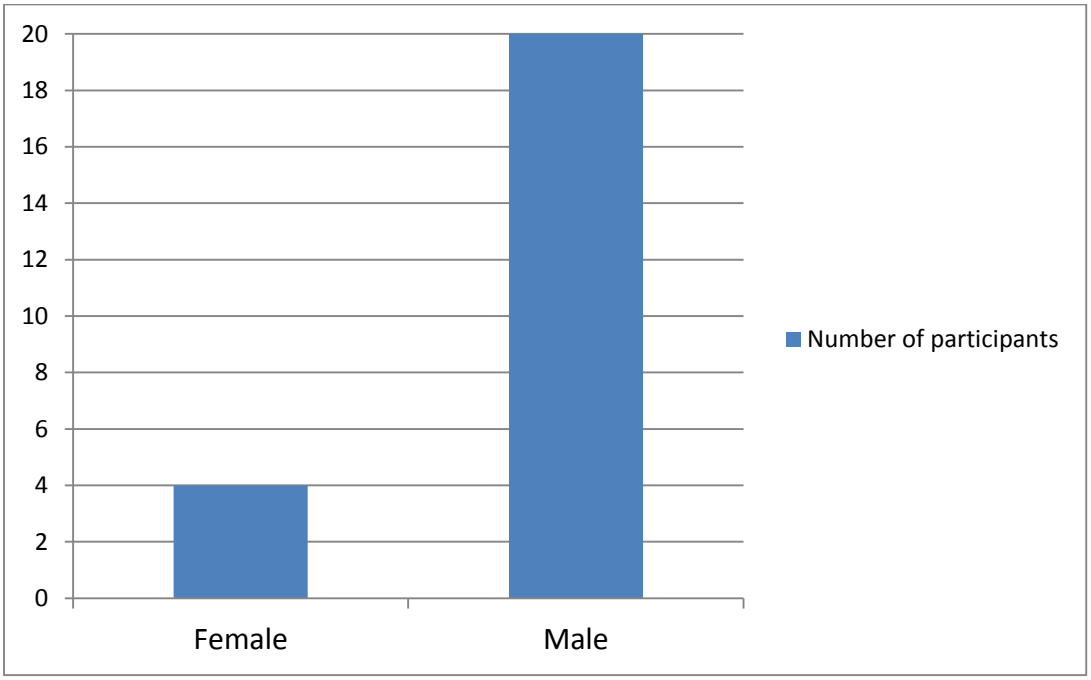


Figure 10: Age

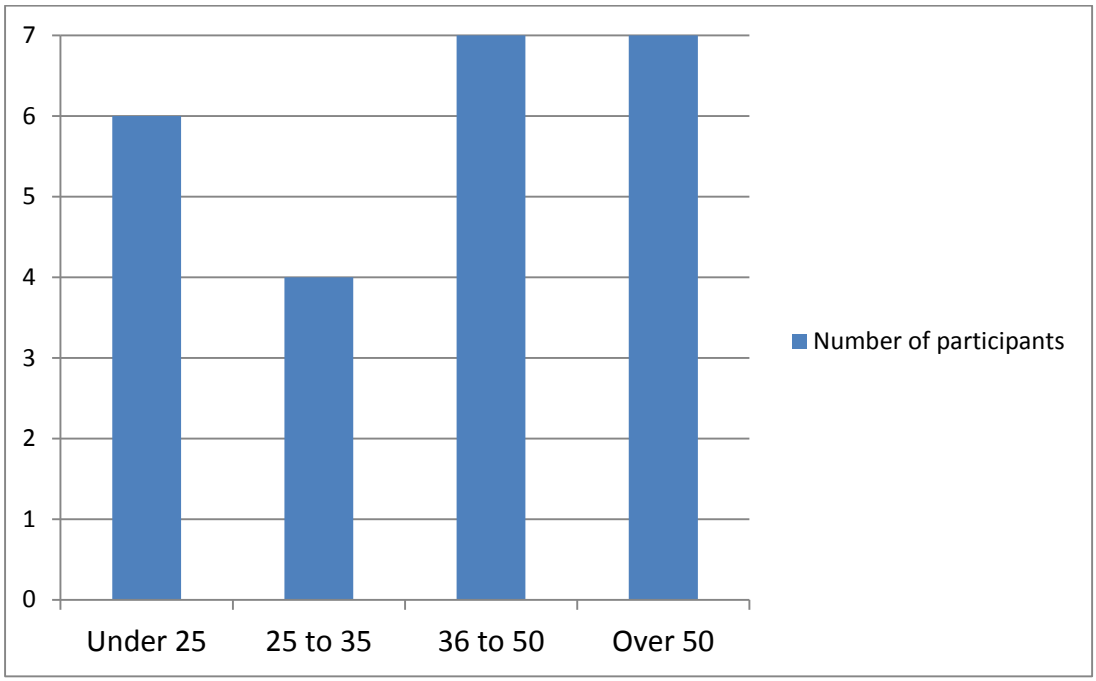


Figure 11: Race and Ethnicity

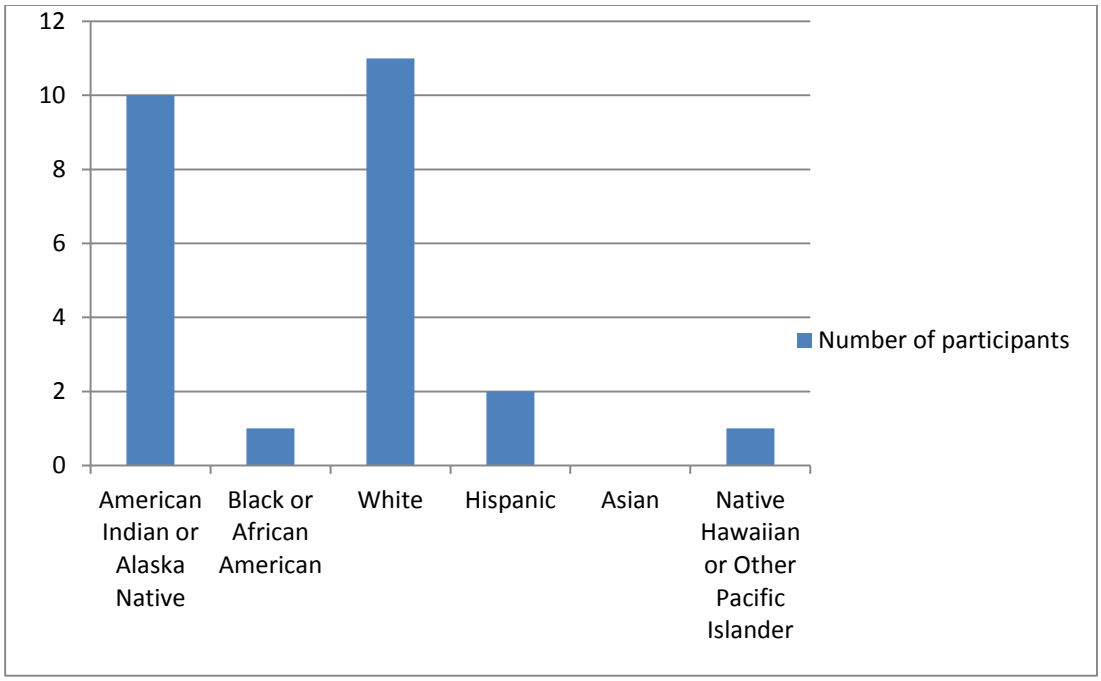


Figure 12: Educational Level

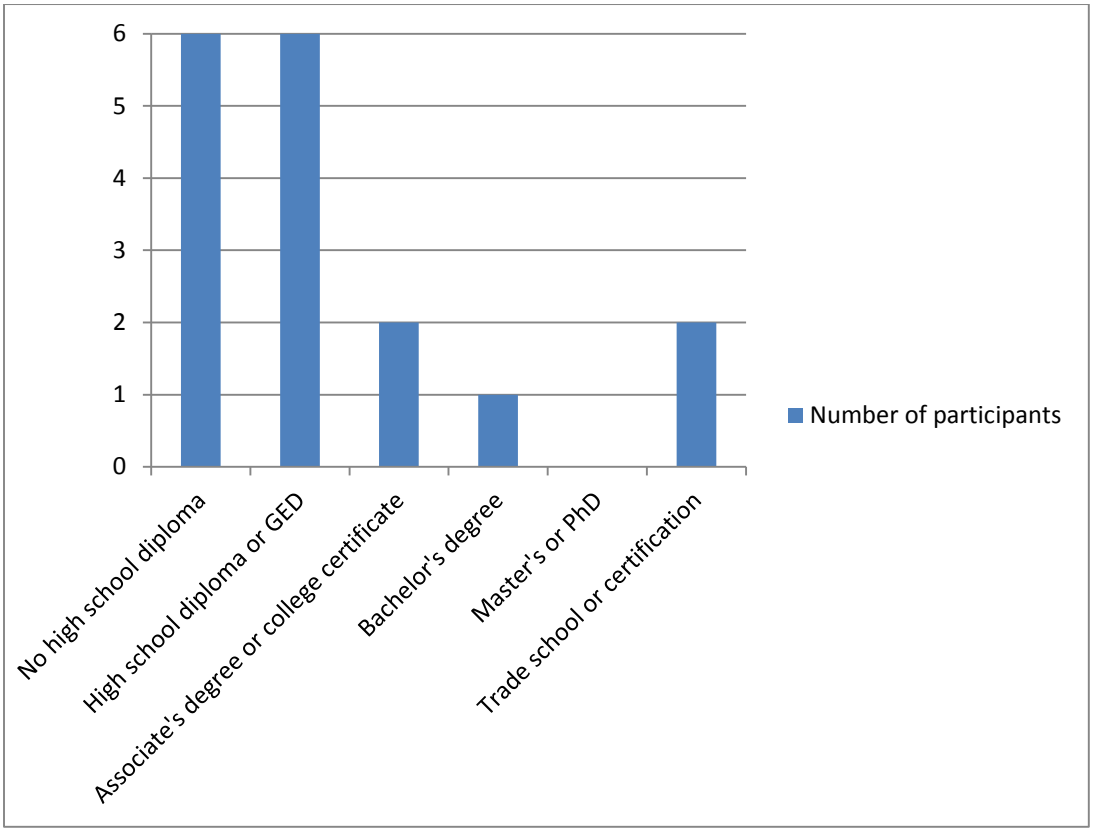
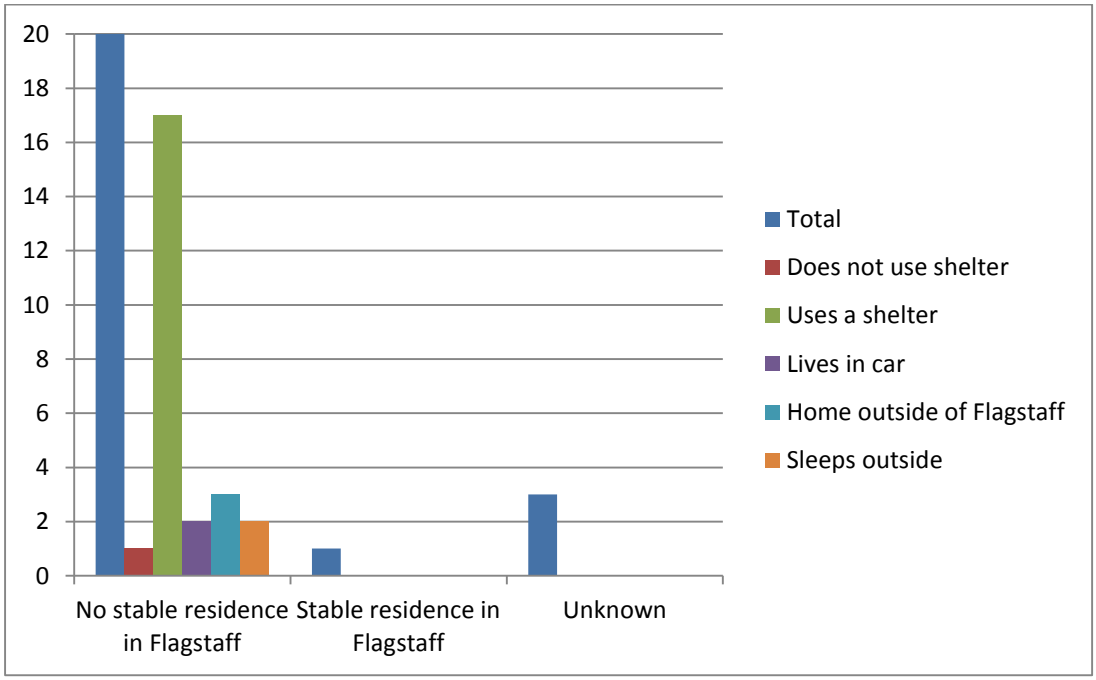


Figure 13: Housing



CHAPTER 5: THE ROADS TO TEMPORARY LABOR

Most of my participants did not choose to work temporary labor. Twenty out of twenty-four said they preferred permanent employment over temporary labor. However, many of my participants found barriers to permanent employment and working temporary labor became both a means of survival and an unreliable pathway to permanent work. In this chapter I draw on data from my interviews and questionnaires to better understand what motivates people to work temporary labor.

Desperation and Barriers to Permanent Employment

Rick, a 53 year old white male, had recently arrived in town from the Midwest and was staying at a shelter when I met him. He worked his first temp job in the early 1980s after four years of service in the military and estimates he has worked "at least six years" on and off in temporary jobs. Rick describes what leads him to do temp work below.

> Pretty much out of desperation, you know, nothing else. When I've walked up to two hundred places and nobody wants to hire you. And you go there two to three times a week and they know that you are still looking, you know. Like there's a few places in town, downtown here. A ____ (business) that's looking for a full-time driver and right next to that there's a ____ (business) […] and they both got signs in the window. I turned in my resumes and they are really nice and friendly when I talk to them, but then they won't give me a job and I don't understand why. And usually, I mean today I didn't shave, but normally I am clean shaven, you know, wearing a polo shirt with a collar and have clean clothes on and I don't get what is going on. It's frustrating because I've been there like 18 times. I go there a couple times a week to talk to them and they don't give me a reason. […] I just don't understand why they won't hire me. I got a proven driving record. I got whatever it takes to get the job done. So why not hire me?

Rick did not want to work temp labor. In the beginning of the interview he told me, "I'm kinda down on–. You can tell right away I'm pretty negative on temp services." He had worked regular jobs throughout his life and once held a position for ten years doing maintenance for a hotel. He decided to come to Flagstaff to find a better life after recalling stories from friends who attended college here decades ago, describing it as a wonderful city. Yet Rick's repeated attempts to secure permanent work and rejections from it placed him in a precarious situation and feeling desperate.

This desperation was common to many of my participants. Most of my participants worked through temp agencies to address immediate needs. The money was used primarily for food, clean clothing, shelter (e.g. hotel room), and to pay bills (e.g. cell phone[1]). Additionally, temp work was "the only thing available" and a "last choice" for some participants. It was also understood to be "a good way to make fast money" or "same day pay" when permanent work was hard to come by. Furthermore, many of my participants felt they could not wait three weeks for a paycheck if they were hired onto a regular job. The quick work and daily pay provided by the temp agency became a "convenient" way to address their immediate needs. Desperate for work and money, the immediacy of both were paramount in most of my participants' decisions to work temp jobs.

Rick's struggle to find more permanent work was also common to most participants. The workers I spoke with primarily blamed their struggle on "the economy." In addition to this, some were aware of other barriers to finding work. Adam, a 31 year old white and Hispanic male who stayed at a local shelter or slept

outside, had worked temp labor in between more regular jobs since coming to Flagstaff four years prior. Adam's friend, Grace, first told me about Adam's struggles to find permanent work:

> Adam was using the address for the shelter for his thing (job application). And I guess the people that were wanting to hire him, like ____ (business), they called over there because they thought it was his home number. They called over there: "hello, ____ (name of shelter)." "I thought–. I was looking for a–." "Oh I'm sorry we can't– [give out personal information]." When he went back over there to ask them about it, they're all, "oh we already filled that position." […] Cause he put in I don't know how many applications and they all did that. And I go, "well, on the call back number, which number did you use?" And he said he used the shelter. And he thinks he got discriminated because he used the shelter address. And they're like, "oh shoot, you know, this guy lives at the shelter. Are we sure we want to hire–?" And I think that was discrimination.

I was not surprised by Grace's account. In my time working at a shelter I had been involved in similar situations. Some residents applying for jobs would mistakenly use the shelter's main number instead of the second phone number – the latter of which went immediately to a generic voicemail and served as a message phone for the residents. The employer would find out their applicant was living at a shelter when such mistakes were made and any opportunity for an interview would vanish. As Grace describes it, this is a form of discrimination against people without homes.

Employment discrimination towards the homeless draws from longstanding cultural assumptions. Many people in the U.S. view the homeless as deviant – e.g. lazy, addicted, mentally unstable, or criminal. The "individualized deviancy" (Lyon-Callo 2004:12) hypothesis of homelessness is connected to political economic ideologies and discursive forms that turn the poor into deviant subjects and blind inequalities in a

system where (supposedly) anyone who works hard enough succeeds. These assumptions become forms of stigma that cause people who are homeless to feel shame about their situation. Additionally, Wasserman and Claire describe the homeless identity as a "master status" (Wasserman and Claire 2010:139); one that dominates all other forms of identity. The stigma ascribed to people without homes is therefore a barrier to secure work. It operates as such both through the employer and the homeless applicant who assumes it as part of their identity.

Adam later shared that he had been discriminated against by a temp agency, which he believes never found him work because he used the shelter address. This is interesting because many temporary labor agencies knowingly hire people without homes. The agency management in question, however, made conscious efforts to differentiate their business into a higher class than typical temp labor agencies. For example, they advertised primarily office work on their website, called workers when there is work instead of making them show up and wait, and provided weekly as opposed to daily pay. Nevertheless, Adam and Grace believed that the stigma of Adam's homelessness effectively prevented employers from hiring him.

The economy and the stigma assigned to people without homes were not the only perceived barriers to permanent work. Tim is a middle-aged, white male who has worked temp labor on and off for the past ten years and was staying at a shelter when I met him. He describes his reasons for working temp labor below:

> I got some felony convictions, so it really closes a lot of doors. That's the main reason I go to temp agencies because most the time they don't do background checks. [...] The other sensitive issues are food stamps and I actually do have

> AHCCCS health insurance. And at a certain dollar amount, those are cut off. So if I'm at a temp agency, well, "see ya later" this month. I'm just not going to work anymore. It's based on a monthly deal. [...] For example, there's two hundred dollars a month for food stamps and health insurance for a single man my age would be about that same figure. So we are talking about four hundred dollars a month that would suddenly just evaporate if I took on their minimum wage job […] It's just a very sensitive issue, but it's frustrating at times as you might imagine.

Tim was not averse to work. He wanted permanent work, but found more success at temp agencies because of his past felony convictions. Tim's ex-offender status is also understood to be a "master status" of identity – one that is constantly reinforced when applying for jobs (Hattery and Smith 2010:92). Tim's employment situation was further complicated by the loss of food stamps and health insurance that would occur if he made too much money. Public policy scholars refer to this as the "cliff effect" (Folk and Bloch 2000:256-257) of social benefits and find that low wage workers and their families may sustain an overall reduction to their net income when their pay increases and their benefits are cut. This sudden and complete loss of benefits is understood as a disincentive to work (Luce 2000:134-135). For Tim, the barriers of his ex-offender status and the "cliff effect" combine to make temp work the most attainable and useful form of employment.

Tim's employment in temp labor is common to many people who have felonies on their record. Purser claims that nearly everyone she met in 32 months of working in Oakland and Baltimore for day labor agencies was "formerly incarcerated" and many of them experienced day labor as an "enduring form of punishment" (Purser 2012:398). In the same vein, McTague and Wright found that 52 percent of the 499 day laborers they

surveyed had felony convictions and that day labor halls continue forms of control, containment, supervision, and evaluation that parallel the Prison Re-entry Industry (McTague and Wright 2010). These findings are further evidenced by the heavy involvement of temp agencies in the Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC) federal program, which subsidizes 40 percent of the first 6,000 dollars in wages that a business pays to disadvantaged workers, such as ex-offenders (Hamersma and Heinrich 2007:6).

Although temp labor is commonly promoted as a pathway to permanent work, it can also act as a barrier to permanent employment. Many participants felt that waiting at a temp agency for an unguaranteed assignment took time away from applying for work and, even more, the dirty and physical jobs in temp labor made it difficult for them to maintain clean clothing for job interviews. Furthermore, some participants felt that working temporary labor came with a form of stigma that could hurt their chances of being hired onto a permanent job through a client business. Clyde described this during our interview:

> I think people look down on you just cause you come through a temp agency they think that they can tell you what to do, you know. […] They probably think that you go there just, you know, you don't– you're not really I guess have confidence or self-esteem or whether you don't have the time or energy to go out and find a real job. […] They might just think that this guy has a bad background or something is wrong with him. I don't know it's hard to explain. I've learned so much, just being in the situation I've been in for almost– for the few months I've been here and you know I have more respect for the person to not even look at them like that or think of them like that. I found respect for a lot of people because a lot of people come from different backgrounds or different situations that happened in their life and, you know, they can't help it but that's just the way they do it. And I've known people that worked at temp agencies all their life. And all they do is just travel you know. Go from town to town and just work at temp agencies because they know that they can find work.

The stigma ascribed to temp laborers was probably affecting Clyde's chances to receive permanent work through the client businesses he worked for. Indeed researchers have found that temp laborers endure such stigma, which affects the workers' treatment at work and psychological health, in addition to other consequences (Boyce et al. 2007). Clyde shared that he held this stigmatized view of temp laborers before his experiences in temp labor caused him to reevaluate this perspective. After spending months in temp labor Clyde had "more respect" for temp laborers and "learned" to "not even look at them like that or think of them like that." Finally, at the end of the quote Clyde hints that this stigma may force people into a life of temp labor, going from "town to town" to find the only work they know they can get.

Additionally, the temp help industry has been accused of purposely creating barriers to permanent work. According to Hatton, the temp industry has played an active role in replacing permanent positions with temporary ones in both business and government (Hatton 2011:9, 100). I found that a number of Flagstaff's major employers (both private and public) have replaced whole occupational sectors with workers supplied by temp agencies. The most prominent occupations are those that require little formal education such as construction or custodial work. This has resulted in fewer opportunities for people to receive permanent work. Meanwhile, the temp help industry has burgeoned nationwide and even in the small town of Flagstaff there are five temporary employment agencies.

Billy, a 26 year old Native American from Phoenix, was staying at a shelter when I met him. Billy moved to Flagstaff for a job at a large entertainment venue two years

before our interview. He lost his job soon after moving and turned to temporary labor to survive. During our interview Billy spoke about his struggles to find permanent work:

Billy: I went to a couple of the jobsites and asked if they were hiring but they said they hire through the labor place. So most of the construction sites around here, hire through there.

Jason: Why do you do this type of work?

Billy: Well right now it's pretty much the only jobs I could get in Flagstaff. Well I applied for other places, but it's the only place I could actually work and stuff for right now.

Jason: How has applying to regular jobs been going?

Billy: Not too good. Yeah, I've been trying since last year but.

Billy comments hint at the pervasiveness of temp labor since workers in Flagstaff have to apply through temp agencies for many of the entry-level positions in construction. At the time of the interview Billy was also taking classes to get his GED and in other conversations he shared that one of the primary reasons he decided to pursue his GED was to find better work.

Education is perhaps one of the most important factors in receiving permanent employment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) numbers for February 2014 show that for workers 25 and over the unemployment rate is 9.8 percent for people with less than a high school diploma, 6.4 percent for high school graduates with no college, and 3.4 percent for people with a bachelor's degree (BLS 2014c:4). A little over one-third (6 of 15) of my questionnaire participants did not receive education beyond high school and another one-third (5 of 15) did not have a high school diploma or GED. Despite this, few interview participants spoke about their education. The temporary assignments they

worked and permanent jobs they applied for were not ones that traditionally demanded much classroom education and, therefore, the topic may have seemed irrelevant.

Most of my participants worked temp labor to address immediate needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and bills. This is what any job is for. However, the gravity of not having money or a stable residence made it different for the temp workers I spoke with. Most had, at times, no other choice than to work temporary labor. Some understood the state of the economy and the stigma ascribed to people without homes as barriers to more regular work. Rick's desperation in finding permanent work may be a result of both of these barriers. Tim had additional stigma and barriers from his past convictions and the "cliff effects" of his food stamps and health insurance benefits. Additionally, the educational level of the participants and the growing prevalence of temp labor undoubtedly influenced their employment opportunities. These barriers, in a way, create channels that supply the temp help industry with workers. Despite the struggles and barriers, however, the majority of participants expressed a desire to find permanent work and (interestingly) came to view temporary labor as a means to achieve it.

A Pathway to Permanent Work

Everyone I interviewed confided (from experience) that a person cannot live on temp labor alone. For example, one participant felt that temp labor should be called "relief services" because "that's really what it is, just a little relief." My questionnaire participants' average pay for a daily job assignment was fifty-seven dollars and they went to the agency an average of five days a week to receive about three days of work. A temp worker could bring in 684 dollars a month with these figures. This doesn't

include transportation expenses to and from the jobsite, which could include providing gas money to a worker with a car.

The amount of pay a temp worker can bring in is therefore inadequate to support a living in Flagstaff. This finding is consistent with previous studies of temporary labor. Scholars find that temp workers must commonly turn to shelters, welfare benefits, and other social service agencies for support (Kerr and Dole 2005:88). The temporary help industry is, in many ways, subsidized via tax payer or donated money because it cannot provide enough jobs and pay for its workers to live on.

Most of the temp workers I spoke with aspired for permanent employment because of the inadequate amount of work and pay in temp labor. The barriers they faced in finding regular work forced them into temporary labor to survive and it was here that they found a pathway to permanent work and hope for a better life. Grace explains: "Well, the reason why I do temp work is sometimes you can get hired through them!" Most participants held this belief to some degree and one-third (8 of 24) had received a permanent job through temp labor. The ideology that temp labor can be a pathway to permanent work was therefore founded on actual experiences and became all the more convincing as success stories circulated via workers, temp agency employees, and client business supervisors.

The pathway to permanent work in temp labor is, however, complicated by the employment contract between the worker and the temp agency. The temp agency explains in the application that part of this contract entails working a set number of hours for the temp agency before a client business can hire the worker. This policy

ensures that the temp agency is not used as recruitment firm by their client businesses and secures a certain amount of profit from workers that go on to receive permanent jobs. Surprisingly, some of the workers I spoke with that had received permanent work through temp labor managed to circumvent these rules.

Dean, a 43 year old Hispanic male I knew from my time working at a shelter, had just caught a ride back to Flagstaff from Phoenix with hopes of finding work the morning I ran into him at the temp agency. Dean shared his experience of the pathway to permanent work during our interview: "I got hired onto ____ (department store) at merchandise pick-up. I was there consistently for like two weeks until they actually hired me permanently and that was the only time I ever got a chance at a real job." The short length of time Dean worked for the temp agency before being hired on means he was either granted an exception by an agency employee or the client business supervisor breached the contract in order to hire him. Either way, someone took an active role to secure Dean the permanent job.

During my participant observation I breached my contract with the temp agency on the third day after being offered higher pay by the client business supervisor to work directly for him. When I asked the supervisor about this event during our interview he told me he was unaware that such a contract existed. I figured my decision to "go where the money is," would be what any temp laborer would do. However, I was new to the game and I late found out that it was not wise to discount the temp agency.

Victor is a white male in his 50s who has performed a variety of jobs through temp agencies in the 13 years he has worked for them. During our interview he

described how he handles job offers from client businesses. His narrative clarifies why some temp agency employees allow workers to get hired on early and alludes to the value of respecting the temp agency:

> Victor: Yeah if they say, "we want to hire you." And I always tell them, "Well, I have to work a week first with ____ (temp agency employee)," to show respect for the company. That way they get their cut. And that's what they want. They want to help. They do, they want– they've put me in positions that were killer jobs. There though, you gotta do a good job to get hired first. Cause a lot of times they just want somebody for maybe, who knows, indefinite, like the jobs I got. So if you do a good job they want to hire you cause they're paying you less than they're going to pay the _____ (temp agency). But I make sure _____ (temp agency employee) knows so–. He doesn't mind if, you know–
>
> Jason: So he doesn't mind if you jump out like a week–
>
> Victor: Yeah it's fine. For certain people I guess. Cause he's always been good to me.

The contractual terms of the temp agency Victor is talking about in this narrative actually require temps to work for longer than the week he mentions. According to him, his absolution from this contract is because the temp agency employees “want to help” and one particular employee has “always been good to” him. Victor’s experience is therefore an example of an informal arrangement between him and an agency employee. A brief conversation with the same agency employee convinced me that he wanted to help workers find permanent jobs. However, Victor was also sure to “show respect” to the temp agency employees by giving them “their cut” because as a seasoned temp worker he knew the benefits that being loyal to an agency had on securing future job assignments (c.f. Bartley and Roberts 2006).

Despite the few successes, most of my participants never received an opportunity for permanent work through a temp assignment. Instead, many came to view the pathway to permanent work as a mirage – an unreachable dream they had long since abandoned. Worse yet, some even thought of it as a ploy by temp agencies and client businesses to encourage hard work. Rick had a lot to say about the pathway to permanent work. Below are some excerpts from our interview.

Rick: Just the fact that they're making, you know, 12 dollars an hour and giving you 8. That's kind of a turn off right there. Or they're making 18 and giving you 9. You know it seems like that's using people. And you know, people, especially people out here in the ____ (shelter), they just– they need a helping hand. They don't need to be taken advantage of. So I just feel like, it's just them taking advantage of people who need a regular job. And it takes away from them getting a regular job. Because they're busy going there every day and they are missing out on other opportunities. Cause, like I said, very seldom does it turn into a permanent, permanent thing.

Jason: Have you ever gotten permanent work?

Rick: No. Actually I never have personally, no. Oh no. No I mean nobody ever said, "we'll buy his contract and keep you on." But you know I've had people say that you can do that. And I've heard people get on that way, but not very many considering how many are being sent out. A very small proportion get held on and kept.

[…]

Rick: After the first month I was there they were talking that way. "Oh you're doing good. We might just bring you on and buy your contract from ____ (temp agency) and bring you onto permanent." But yet it never, you know, never happened […] It's not fair that they leave you the false impression that you're definitely going to get a permanent position out of it. Even though they know that you're not. But they are just kinda b.s.-ing you to work harder. And it's to come back to them. So that's another thing, basically the lies that they feed ya.

Rick experienced the pathway to permanent work through the "lies", "false impressions", and "false promises"[2] told by the temp agency and client business employees. It is likely that no agency or client business employee explicitly told Rick "I promise" and the example he provides ("we might just bring you on") is a conditional sentence. Nevertheless, Rick's interpretation of these utterances to sometimes be false promises suggests he experienced them as "performative"[3]. Rick's comments regarding false promises are therefore significant to understand how temp workers' desperation for income, barriers to regular employment, and hopes for permanent work combine with the pathway to permanent work ideology to serve as leverage against them in temporary labor. Over time, he and other participants have learned that agency employees and client business supervisors sometimes abuse the pathway to permanent work as a tool to promote hard work.

The pathway to permanent work, however, is more than an employment strategy or set of false promises. For people with few options for work, the pathway is a dream for a better life. Walt, a 61 year old Native American, had been active in marathons and worked as a professional for most of his life. He credits one employer from seven years ago in providing "bad" (and what he calls "political") employer references that ruined his chances for future work in his business network. Walt therefore frequently came to Flagstaff from his home on the reservation for extended periods of time to look for work and was staying at a shelter when I met him. To Walt, temp labor was both "a means of survival" until he could get a late retirement with social security and a chance to get back some of the life he once knew in the meantime.

> I need to make more money. Cause I got a house and I got a truck and I'm having problems with it and I need to get it working with the money so I can get around. And that's the reason why. Now the temp service, you can't maintain a living here in Flag. You know like a motel or even a–. If you were to maintain like an apartment, you gotta do it with somebody else. You can't do it by yourself.

Temp work was therefore a chance to climb back up the socioeconomic ladder for Walt and it seemed to be one of the few options he had. Additionally, Walt said he was "lucky" compared to most because he sometimes received weekly or even monthly assignments at a local manufacturer, once received a raise during a temp assignment, and even got overtime pay. Yet he never received a chance for permanent work and, according to him, "only three employees to date, since I've been there at ____ (business), have went from temp service to, uh, got hired." The inadequate amount of work and pay in temp labor – even for someone that received more, better paying, and longer assignments than most – made Walt dream of a more permanent job.

Despite the fact that temp labor can turn into permanent work, this seldom happened to my participants and many spent years in temp labor without ever receiving such an opportunity. Those that did land a permanent job had only one to a few experiences in their years of temp work and were commonly one of the first to be fired if a company needed to cut positions. Others believed that the pathway to permanent work was a "false promise" and a tactic by agencies and client businesses to increase work performance. These false promises played on the workers' dreams for a better life and offered shoddy ladders to those striving for upward mobility. The pathway to

permanent work in temporary labor can therefore be a dream and a nightmare. It can motivate and dishearten.

The Conveniences of Temporary Labor

Workers did, however, find some conveniences to working temp labor. Some of the workers enjoyed not being committed to show up every day to the temp agency and would take days off to attend medical and social service appointments, rest up, apply for permanent work, go to class, or attend to other errands and pressing needs.

The four participants that expressed a preference for temp labor mentioned the added flexibility as one of their main reasons for working temp jobs. Sally, a white female in her late forties, has held a regular job for over thirteen years from fall to spring and works temp labor over the summer. When his regular occupation in road construction is inactive, Scott, a Native American male in his sixties, hitchhikes to Flagstaff every Monday from his home in a nearby town and stays in shelters or with his sister during the week while he works temp labor. And Francine, a 59 year old white female who held government jobs for most of her adult life, works temp labor in between other flexible jobs (e.g. census taker and grocery store demonstrator). The flexibility therefore provides them with supplemental income when their other forms of work are unavailable.

A number of the younger workers found other benefits in temp labor and provided these as reasons to pursue it. Adam said his initial reason for working temp labor when he arrived in town was to become "established in Flagstaff as a reliable, dependable person for work." Adam therefore used temporary labor to identify as a

valued worker in order to increase his job opportunities. He shared other benefits of temporary labor during our interview:

> Adam: See I like working temp agency. The reason why I do it is because you never know when your job's going to end. So if you keep good status with the temp agency, it's a backup. So I do it for a backup. Sometimes we do it for extra cash. For extra cash, you know, extra cash, you know. I wish I could go see a movie but I don't have money. Okay let's go work a temp agency for a day and we can go watch the movie.
>
> [...]
>
> Jason: What's that like going and doing different jobs every day?
>
> Adam: Well I think, I think it's good, because then it gives a chance of individual people that have not– have a good work ethic history to be able to learn certain things. Like me, I've been working ever since I was eight years old and, I mean, there's nothing that I really can't do. My father always told me, "it's good to have a secondary and a thirdary job just in case number one or two goes out." And for other people to learn different things all the time, you know, gives them a foot in the door to be able to apply for jobs, permanent jobs. In whatever, you know, they can go do landscaping for the first time in their life and they're like, "hey man, I really like that." Then they can go apply at a job– a landscaping job and say, "hey, I'm a beginner, I like it, I want to go forward." You know, stuff like that.

Adam started temp labor in Flagstaff as a way to identify as a valued worker and increase his employment opportunities and then continued in temporary labor as a "backup" plan to increase his employment security after finding other work (his job at the time of the interview was working for an independent metal recycler). Adam's comments regarding using temp labor for "extra cash" are also significant because they reference the socioeconomic status of the participants. He was not the only participant to speak of using the money to sometimes see a movie at the theatre, eat a steak dinner, or get a hotel room for the night. Occasionally indulging in these amenities

allowed the temp laborers to participate in and enjoy what many take for granted in U.S. society.

At the end of the quote Adam mentions that he enjoyed going to different jobs because it introduced him to potential lines of work. The advantage of being introduced to different occupations through temp labor was shared by other participants as well – primarily those in their 20s and early 30s. Clyde, a 23 year old Native American male originally from Phoenix, had worked temp labor for over a year when I met him. Below he describes this advantage of temporary labor after I asked him if he ever felt uncertain on a temp job.

> Yeah, there's times I would get there and I didn't know if I could get through it you know, working with a jackhammer and thinking, "this is going to be too much for me," you know. And thinking that's it's going to be hard work but then, yeah, you start learning things and you start seeing different kind of trades. And maybe, you know–. I mean that's why I want to be an electrician because I go to all these construction sites and see, you know, carpenters and pipe welders and electricians and just, you know, different kind of trades do their work and I can, you know–. Right now that's what I want to do is I want to be an electrician, you know. Even HVAC, I wouldn't mind HVAC too. I like to work with my hands and stuff like that.

Clyde's dreams of becoming an electrician or HVAC technician were therefore inspired through temporary labor. He appreciated learning on the job and seeing other trades while working temp labor and used this to plan his own future.

All of my participants found some conveniences in temporary labor, such as the flexibility in scheduling and introductions to various trades and employers. For a few participants, these were direct reasons for pursuing temp labor. For most, the benefits were discovered once they found themselves with no other option but to work temp

labor. My participants' appreciation of the flexible aspects of temporary labor reflects hegemonic political economic discourses that express the desirability both business leaders and workers have toward flexible work (Martin 1990:146-150).

Summary

My research participants worked temp jobs for a number of reasons. Primarily, they found barriers to regular employment and worked temp labor out of desperation in order to purchase food, maintain clean clothing, and pay bills. They felt stuck working temp labor to address immediate needs, yet the amount of work and pay was inadequate to provide housing, much less a living. Within temporary labor, most participants found new hope in a pathway to permanent work as the ideology circulated via temp agency employees, client business employees, and fellow workers. Unfortunately, two-thirds (16 of 24) of my participants never received an opportunity for permanent work and some came to view the "false promises" by the temp agencies and client businesses as tactics to increase job performance. There were, however, conveniences to be found even if permanent work could not be. The flexibility in scheduling and the exposure to different trades were valued by some participants. It seems that as much as working temporary labor was a trap, it was also an opportunity. As much as temp labor prevented people from getting permanent work, it also provided hope for it.

Notes

1. The cell phone bill was the most frequently mentioned bill. This may seem strange that someone with little money and no home would spend it on a cell phone bill; however, cell phones are a way to contact loved ones and access social media and provide a direct line of communication for work opportunities.

2. Rick used the term “false promises” in another part of the interview not included in this chapter. His use of the term is significant to understand his experiences with the pathway to permanent work.

3. Austin coined the term “performatives” (Austin 1962:6-7) to categorize promises and other utterances that perform an action in the social world – rather than merely say something. According to Austin, performatives cannot be true or false (Austin 1962:5). The utterance is the act itself whether or not the act was “purported but void” or “professed but hollow” (Austin 1962:18). The author adds:

> Do we not actually, when such intention is absent, speak of a 'false' promise? Yet so to speak is not to say that the utterance 'I promise that . . .’ is false, in the sense that though he states that he does, he doesn't, or that though he describes he misdescribes—misreports. For he does promise: the promise here is not even void, though it is given in bad faith. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. [Austin 1962:11]

CHAPTER 6: THE DAILY LIVES OF TEMP LABORERS

The daily lives of temp laborers are not always the same as regular workers due to the conditions of temporary labor. Within the precarious context of temporary labor, a number of interesting worker practices and strategies have developed. In this chapter I draw on data from my participant observation, questionnaires, and interviews to examine the effects of temporary labor by illustrating the daily lives of temp laborers.

The Pre-Dawn of a New Day

Participants would typically awake before dawn to begin their journey to the temp agency. One shelter had closed its overnight services due to inadequate funding over the summer that I performed my research. With fewer beds available at local shelters, many of my participants found spaces in the forest or in the city to sleep for the night.[1]

Clyde would make his way late at night to sleep on a somewhat concealed park bench on the periphery of town and awake early in the morning to leave in fear of being caught by homeowners in the area. Henry, a twenty year old Native American male who came to Flagstaff to build a better life, found spaces in the forest to pitch a tent. While visiting one of the sites he showed me a thick patch of trees he was going to move his tent into to be more concealed from hikers. Neil, a sixty-one year old white male who had worked in landscaping and ceramic production over the course of his life, also camped in the forest, sometimes with Henry.

Grace, a twenty-nine year old Native American female who spent her time in Flagstaff or a neighboring city, slept near a park or at a friend's house. Adam also slept near a park on the edge of the forest. Eric, a twenty-three year old white male from Phoenix, found different spaces each night with seemingly little preparation. Eric confided that the week prior he had missed the last day of a three day job assignment because he overslept after bedding down in the forest for the night. The night before the interview he picked a row of hedges adjacent to the temp agency in an obvious effort to prevent such a misstep. This was not the only time I witnessed someone sleeping next to the temp agency during my research. There was an advantage in arriving at the agency early and sleeping next to it was one way to ensure this.

Kelly – a white female in her fifties who had regular work as a housekeeper for over twenty years and as a security guard for six – found respite in her vehicle, which she moved between parking lots out of convenience or after being asked to leave. Her vehicle was parked in the temp agency parking lot during the time of our interview. In exchange for the parking spaces, she served as an informal steward of the lots by "picking up trash" and "keeping the drunks away." Matthew, a fifty-five year old white male, also slept in his vehicle. Unfortunately, one's vehicle was not functional enough and the other's not practical to drive to a temp job. Billy, Levi, Oliver, Patrick, Rick, and Tim were each lucky enough to have a space in a shelter. Francine, a fifty-nine year old white female with a bachelor's degree, was the only participant with a home to go to at night. Several participants I interviewed did not share where they slept at night.

After waking up there was the question of clothing. Temp labor jobs are typically dirty and people with low incomes and no homes face additional challenges in purchasing, storing, and washing clothes. For instance, the shelter that I worked at had coin-operated machines because allowing seventy residents to regularly use the three sinks to do laundry would be too problematic. Additionally, some residents had immediate access to a small locker space for storage while others had to either wait for a regularly scheduled time to access their items stored in another area or convince a staff member to help them out.

After my first day of temp labor I looked at my jeans – in awe of rarely witnessing them so dirty – and contemplated both how it would be possible to wash them every day and if I could ever wear them again outside of work. I chose to go to the temp agency the next day in my dirty jeans. It was better to ruin one pair and the water use and labor involved in washing them every day seemed ridiculous. This was the choice many of my participants made, although they certainly had fewer resources to clean their clothes.

When I asked Walt how temp work was different from permanent work and if one had to adapt to it, he made his way to clothing after covering the difference in the "type of work you can get" and "amount of pay" between the two.

> But the type of work. If it's office work, you're going to be eight to five or nine to six. But if it's construction, it's going to be different. It's going to be different type of attire, you know, different clothing. […] You can adapt. I know with me, I carry clothes with me in case I get dirty or get wet or have to put something over in case it rains.

Walt adjusted to temp labor by carrying a change of clothes and rain protection to work. This is useful in temp labor because a worker typically knows nothing about their potential job assignment when planning for the day. A person might need a raincoat or long sleeves for sun protection if the job is outdoors, want short sleeves if it is indoors, and need an extra set if the job is “dirty” or “wet.”

Additionally, the type of attire in temp jobs many times includes what Walt called “steel toes.” Requiring workers to wear steel-toed boots for certain jobs is a safety policy and the agency I worked for had pairs to lend out. Interestingly, I was not told I needed “steel-toed” boots the first day and I was given a size too big on the second day. Some workers, therefore, decided to purchase their own steel-toed boots to both avoid wearing the well-used ones provided by the agencies and ensure proper footing at work. Other workers successfully passed off their shoes as steel-toed since many times there was little examination beyond the question: “Do you have steel-toed boots?”

> After sharing the narrative about my dirty jeans from temp labor, Walt replied:
>
> I always like to be clean. But the thing is I'm just like you. If I get dirty and I see that my pants and I says, "well, it don't look that bad today," then I'll wear [the pants] another day. I'll just change my shorts and my socks, even shirt, then go back to work. But that's about it. You don't really change that much.

Walt’s admission that “you don’t really change that much” contains a strategy that other participants mentioned. Many had only a few sets of clothing with little income and limited storage space. By wearing the same clothing every day they could maintain clean sets for public appearances outside of work.

Oliver is a 38 year old Native American who works temp labor when he is not employed in the restaurant industry. He had worked temp jobs for roughly two and a half years across different states during his life and was staying at a shelter when I interviewed him. After asking Oliver to describe the best temp job he has been assigned to, he began to elaborate on clothing:

Oliver: Hmm. My best job would be–. I don't think there was no best job. They're all dirty. They're all dirty jobs.

Jason: Nothing? Nothing?

Oliver: Yeah, because I like to work in restaurants and, I mean, I'm all dirty and stuff. And you don't get a job and you're all dirty, can't wash your clothes. So that's the thing, the thing about it.

Jason: Yeah, that's true. I actually, when I was doing it, yeah my jeans, I couldn't believe how dirty they got.

Oliver: Yeah, they get dirty.

[…]

Oliver: It just makes you not care. Like one of my friends, he works and I ran into him at the ____ (shelter). He looks at me and he says, "bro you look like you've been drinking." I go, "what do you mean?" "Cause your clothes are all dirty, I've never seen you like that." I said, "hey I worked today and I gotta do laundry and stuff so." He goes, "well that's good you're working but–."

Jason: That was hard to uhm–. That would be hard to like keep even shoes clean for an interview.

Oliver: Yeah. That's what I was thinking about too. If I get an interview with one of these jobs, "how am I going to–?" That's why I wear the same clothes all week. My other clothes are clean so once they ask me I can just change out. So I think ahead of time, you know.

Oliver's account demonstrates the challenges temp laborers without homes face in maintaining clean clothing. Temp jobs are "dirty" and it costs money to do laundry. The irregularity of jobs and low pay only worsen the situation and appearing in public in such

dirty clothing can evoke assumptions of alcohol abuse. Wearing the same clothes all week was therefore a strategy to maintain clean clothing– even if the dirt came with its own negative cultural connotations. Although one set of clothes would become extremely dirty, the others were kept clean for job interviews and public appearances on days off from work.

After getting dressed, workers made their way to the temp agency. To be successful, workers needed to leave early in the morning before the bus routes started at six a.m. so many had to either walk or ride a bike. Adam was the only participant I know of that had a bike, which he found invaluable to being one of the first in line at the temp agency. Either form of transportation could, however, be a struggle depending on where the participant slept and what agency they went to. For those in the forest, getting into town every day posed a challenge as they scrambled down hillsides and, at times, walked miles to make their way out of the forest. For those at shelters, the distance could be anywhere from one to five miles. Many in the city – although they could choose a space closer to the agency – preferred safe and concealed locations that were more distant. Stopping for food was rarely mentioned as many were working to get money for that very thing. Instead, they earnestly made their way to the temp agency to be one of the first in line.

Waiting for Work

The process to get work has just begun when a person arrives at a temp labor agency. He or she signs in, takes a seat, and waits for work given out by an agency employee. Most of the temp laborers I spoke with believed that agencies do or should

primarily operate on a “first-come first-served” basis in distributing job assignments. Many workers would therefore arrive as much as 30 minutes before the agency doors open to be one of the first in line and sit for hours waiting for work. However, temp laborers are not guaranteed work and many wait days or weeks in between assignments. Furthermore, workers are not paid until their assignment starts – if, that is, they receive one at all. Many of my participants therefore adopted certain strategies to increase their chances of getting work within this unique employment arrangement.

Clyde, who had lost his last regular job 11 months before our interview, gave the following summary of a day in temp labor.

> Clyde: Usually, my regular– my day would consist of just waking up about four in the morning, you know. You know, wash up and be there by at least four-thirty, four-forty-five. Be the first couple in line just so they know that you are there to work. And I would probably wait for like at least a good hour to get sent out, between six and eight o’clock. I think I got sent out late the other day just, you know, like ten o’clock. And, you know, a whole day would consist of a twelve hour day. Just waking up at four and getting off at four and stuff like that. So it’s– yeah it’s a little stressful.

As Clyde describes, it is important to get up early and be one of the first in line because this communicates a desire to work to the agency employees. Although it may seem unfair for workers to wait for upwards of five hours for work or to receive eight hours of pay for twelve hours of their time, my participants accepted these employment terms because they had few options for work and needed the money to survive.

Many other participants described the purpose of waiting for work as Clyde did. According to Oliver, it was important “that they see you and get to know you” because it tells the agency employees that “this guy really wants to work.” The actions described

by my participants suggests that waiting is a "performance" to identify as eager workers to agency employees and, thus, deserving of an assignment. This is further evidenced by the finding that some of the participants who waited inside the agency – as opposed to outside the back door – said they did so strategically in order to be more visible to the agency employee.

It was, however, common for a worker to wait days or even weeks before receiving an assignment. When I asked Rick why he went back to the same agency the second day after not receiving work the first, he explained that another worker told him: "[If] you go for two weeks straight every morning, you eventually get out." The waiting time of "two weeks" echoed throughout my interviews with temp laborers. Persistently waiting for days or weeks was therefore an integral part of getting work. Over time, a worker could perform their work ethic through waiting and identify as someone that "really wants to work."

Waiting itself, though, was not always the most successful strategy. Many workers confided that it was effective to form a relationship with the temp agency employee in order to receive more regular work. Quincy, a 61 year old Native American male describes it this way:

> In my book it's all favoritism. It all goes back to that. It doesn't matter whether you show up all the time. If you're not a regular, you're not going to get work, period. If you push yourself into it and you tell them that you really want to work and started talking to them, they will look at you and they will put in somewhere. If you start talking to them and being friendly with them. But if you just sit back and keep quiet you ain't going nowhere. But if you're a regular, you're always going to be working no matter how bad it is. […] If you have a good relationship with whoever is doing the booking, you're okay. If you get to

> know them. A lot of these guys that do work, you know, they have that– they have that connection.

Many participants expressed how important it was to form a "connection" or "relationship" with the agency employee responsible for distributing job assignments. Some reminisced about past employees who treated them well and gave them regular assignments. When such an employee left the agency and was replaced by someone that participants did not connect with and receive as much work through, many were quick to label the allocation of work "favoritism." Quincy, however, views it all as favoritism and the job allocation process is certainly influenced by these social connections. As some of the seasoned temp labor participants confided, workers who waited patiently inside and conversed in friendly ways with agency employees were treated better than those who waited outside or complained about the shortage of work.

This favoritism helped some, yet was problematic for many others. Adam, who received regular job assignments from one particular agency employee in the past, faced challenges in getting assignments when a new employee began distributing the jobs. He describes the situation and expresses his frustration with it below.

> Between the first time in 2009 until now, it has mutated into this favorite list that they have created, which I don't think is very right for the person that gets there at five o'clock. Wakes their ass up at five o'clock. Walks their ass down there–. Oh well they have to wake up before five like at four or whatever. Get down there. Wait in line. Put their name on the piece of paper and sit there for four or five hours while other people are getting jobs off of their favorite list.

Adam claimed that this particular agency used to operate on more of a first-come first-served basis. Although he spoke highly of a past employee who gave him work, Adam

became frustrated because showing up early no longer guaranteed him a job. When he received work in the past through this employee he would be one of the first in line and, seemingly, the favoritism did not apply. When employees changed and he showed up at the same time yet received fewer assignments, Adam was quick to label this favoritism.

Walt shared a similar experience regarding changes in management and favoritism during our interview.

> Walt: Right now they got new management over here at ____ (temp agency). And right now that new girl there is kind of blackballing me. So I'm not getting any of the type of work I used to from the previous employees.
>
> Jason: Why do you think she is doing that?
>
> Walt: I think she just wants to put in her own people. […] And I've been gone for two weeks and I just got back and she didn't send me out one time this week until last night. When ____ (business) had the shutdown and they requested twenty-five additional people. So that's the only reason why I got in. But the other agency across town, they open up at five. If you're not there between five and six, you're pretty much–. Cause there's more people on that side. It's more competition over there. And right now I'm just noticing both because I've been over here in the morning last week. I wait about half an hour, if they don't have nothing here I take the bus on the other side and there's been nothing over there. So lately it's really been a bummer.

Walt's comment that the temp agency employee "put in her own people"[2] further validate the favoritism found in the job allocation process. Additionally, Walt describes waiting at two agencies in one day. It was common for participants to do this and some agencies (especially two with the same ownership) strategically opened at different times, conveniently accommodating such a practice. By funneling workers from one agency to another, management ensured a steady supply of workers. This strategy of maintaining an abundant supply of needy workers has been found in other

studies of temporary labor. Many agencies open shop in poor neighborhoods or near shelters for people without homes to ensure access to a large pool of workers (Theodore 2003). By maintaining a surplus of workers, agencies can fill large orders like the twenty-five person assignment Walt described. At the same time, this business strategy undeniably produces a precarious employment situation in which a portion of the temp laborers receive no work for the day. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine how a sense of "competition" could arise from thirty workers lined against the walls of an agency, all waiting for the same jobs.

Finally, most participants were aware that temp agencies use a number of factors in addition to first-come first-served in allocating work. Foremost, the applications to agencies typically include a skills section to fill out, which certainly tells the worker that skills matter in the job allocation process. Adam acknowledged that a worker had to be "capable to do that type of work," which could include "certain skills" or "certification." Quincy knew that the temp agencies "look at your work history" and Walt explained how a worker's "proven record," "longevity" with the temp agency, or "grading" from the businesses could increase their chances of receiving work. At the same time, it was clear to most of my participants that having good relationships with agency employees and identifying as valued workers were also significant to getting work.

On the Job

Workers fortunate enough to receive an assignment for the day were called up one by one by the agency employee and handed a "ticket." The ticket told the worker who they are working for, when and where to show up, and a few words about the nature of the work (e.g. "construction debris clean-up "). It did not necessarily say the length of the job or any additional jobsites the worker may be asked to go to during the day. The temp laborers would check out a shovel, push broom, hardhat, or any other equipment they needed for the day and leave the agency with ticket in hand. Assignments could start right away, in a couple of hours, or much later for the occasional overnight shifts. Some workers therefore continued to wait unpaid for their assignment to start, while others headed to their jobsite for the day.

Getting to the jobsite was completely up to the workers as they made their way on foot or by bike, bus, or car. My participants mostly walked, sometimes miles, to the jobsite carrying the equipment needed. The ones that had money would sometimes opt to use the busses if they were running. In the instances reported where my participants rode in a car to work, it was driven by another temp laborer going to the same jobsite.[3] Upon arrival, the worker would find the supervisor (if one was to be found) or call him or her on the phone to check-in and get a better understanding of the job.

Job assignments varied from construction clean-up, "flagging" (i.e. directing cars through construction sites), or snow shoveling to janitorial work, food preparation, manufacturing, or any number of other jobs performed for both public and private

entities. The majority of assignments, however, had two common aspects: (1) they were physically demanding and (2) they dealt with "dirt."

Clyde shared a lot about the physically demanding nature of temp labor. He described digging trenches that required "eight hours of shoveling," "carrying fifty pound rocks," or "pushing a wheelbarrow around all day." Clyde explained how these tasks were made worse by the "lack of sleep" from waking up early and "working outdoors in the sunlight," which "can really burn a person out." As one of the youngest of my interview participants he perhaps had more stamina than the rest; yet Clyde also shared that it could become too much to work five days every week in temp labor and many times he would take a day off just to "rest up." Clyde's depiction of temp labor as physically demanding was shared by all of my participants. Temp labor was typically "hard work" – even for a person in their early twenties.

At the same time, temp labor jobs were commonly "dirty." Adjectives such as "dirty," "gross," or "nasty" were frequently used to describe temp labor. When I asked Walt to share the worst assignment he had ever received, he described two assignments that pertained to the dirtiness of temporary labor.

> Walt: Oh the worst job I had was over here at that ____ (type of business) […] It gets in your nose, it gets in your ears. It gets everywhere and you stink like it and you're grossed out. Then you have to change your clothes every day. With ____ (another business) it depends on what department you work for. Most of the stuff you can just blow off. But with processing, where you– where they mix all the ingredients and stuff and it goes through these extruders and stuff like that to mix it, and it's– you get a lot of moisture, like water, in there and that's where you get really dirty. And you would have to change every [day]–. And I think that's the reason why their employees are given, you know, uniforms. So

> they get paid. They get a stipend I guess, an allowance for their work. For the temp service you don't.

Walt's description focuses on the dirty aspect of temp labor. Although many people in the U.S. work dirty jobs, most of my participants found difficulty in cleaning, storing, and purchasing clothing (as previously mentioned in this chapter) since they had low incomes and no homes. Walt's comments about regular employees at one particular company receiving uniforms further highlight this difficulty. Although the dirtiness of the work was problematic, the bigger issue to my participants was the dirty clothes that came from doing such work and the stigma this dirty clothing evoked.

Learning the job

Learning how to perform a job in temp labor can be very different from regular work at times. Supervisors were not always present at the jobsite and this could make understanding the job functions or acquiring skill more difficult than regular work.

Being new to construction clean-up, I was at a loss during my participant observation. I chose the word "uncertain" in my field notes to capture the feeling I had throughout my first few days working for a building construction company. The feeling was unexpected. The shovel and push broom given to me by the temp agency and trash bags dropped off by my supervisor provided a false sense of confidence. I had used these objects before, but never in this manner, at this place, and with this company.

The first day at any of my non-temp jobs I was provided with clear instructions or asked to shadow a model employee. The temp labor assignment was different. I was told via the job ticket to go to an address and "report to homeowner" for "construction

debris clean-up." The client business supervisor (whose name and number were on the job ticket) was not the homeowner – the homeowner could be considered a "fourth party." I rang the doorbell and waited twice and then called my supervisor before the homeowner answered the door (in a bath robe and fresh from the shower), provided meager advice, and returned inside. So there I was the first day on the job with no immediate supervision or instruction.

It became difficult to construe what was "construction debris" as I surveyed the grounds of the house. I considered every piece of plastic wrapper, wire, bit of concrete, nail, wood, and anything "out of place" or "unwanted" to be "debris." I even picked up an old dog chew toy that was bleached from the sun and obviously not construction debris. My understanding of "debris" mirrors Douglas' universal concept of "dirt." According to Douglas, "dirt is essentially disorder" (Douglas 2002:2) and the classifications of what is or is not "dirt" vary across cultural contexts. My difficulty in classifying debris was partially due to my inexperience with the culture of construction work.

The second jobsite of the day was even more perplexing as I had to clean inside and outside a building being constructed with workers from different companies and many more objects to classify as debris. I reflected on each object using only what I've learned from my past life experiences:

> Should I throw away these fast food bags or are they someone's lunch? What about that water bottle? I assume these corner cuts of wood are debris. What about this three foot high pile of rocks? It sure looks like debris. I don't know…it's close to the fireplace, maybe it goes with that.

The questioning was constant even down to the dust that continuously recoated the floor. I had to rely on my cultural understandings to determine what was or was not debris without someone always present to tell me. My supervisor was satisfied with the quality of my work but he did make comments about how long it took me to do it. Over the next few weeks of irregular work for this building construction company I felt more confident in my ability to perform the job properly and efficiently.

It is very apparent that I was learning how to perform the job of construction clean-up. I was acquiring skill. Most of the objects I encountered were known to me, just not in that context. Categorizing objects into "debris" was a process of classification. My feeling of uncertainty and efforts to resolve it can be linked to the indeterminacy present in classifying objects. This is what Csordas describes as the "effort to become oriented in the face of the vertigo of essential indeterminacy" (Csordas 1993:14).

Learning a skill in temp labor, nevertheless, involves a relationship between the worker, supervisor, and temp agency to achieve a mutual understanding of the job. The temp agency employee drew me a map one time so that I knew where to go. I called my supervisor six times the first day of work to better understand my job functions. Sometimes my supervisor would even grab the broom, mop, or a rag and demonstrate the job to me. Over time the supervisor and I eventually arrived at a shared perception of what a "clean" construction site looked like and perhaps a shared feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day.

The uncertainty I felt about my job functions were substantiated in my interviews with temp workers. Quincy put it this way:

> Anytime you go someplace new you're going to feel that way and you know it's up to you to whenever you run into your supervisor or whoever you're working under to throw those questions at them. If you don't, you learn by time. You know through going back on a regular basis. You learn by time. But then it's hard to do it that way so it's better to ask them ahead of time. Before you start working for them. If it's new, to ask them those questions before you put yourself in a bad bind. Because it always goes down to the negative when someone do that.

Quincy recognizes the uncertain feeling and advises me to seek out the supervisor to ask questions about the job. He further distinguishes the second approach of "learning by time" to be difficult and hints at likely repercussions from not asking questions. Quincy therefore places the responsibility of learning how to do a job on the temp worker. His stance is empowered through his linguistic treatment of the temp worker as an agent, such as "it's up to you to […] throw those questions at them" or "you put yourself in a bad bind." This agency toward determinacy and acquiring skill therefore demands another person in order for the temp worker to skirt "the negative"; it demands a supervisor to coproduce the functions of the job.

The interaction with supervisors to achieve "mutual understandings" in temp labor can be understood as "intersubjectivity" (c.f. Wilce 2009:198). Many times workers have to locate their supervisor – first to learn their job functions and later to receive evaluation – in order to arrive at a mutual understanding and be a successful temp laborer. This is no different than any job. The differences appear when there is little to no training provided to temp workers much less another person to achieve

intersubjectivity with (e.g. when no skilled employee or supervisor is present).

Additionally, intersubjectivity is harder to achieve when the temp agency or a "fourth party" becomes involved. For example, the homeowner from my first day of work asked me to build a wall from the rocks that were unearthed from construction (which could be considered "debris" depending on how one defines it). I called my supervisor to inquire if this was part of my job and he was adamant that it was not. Without a cell phone I may have been at the house all day doing a job I was not supposed to and consequently ruined my chances for future work through the client business.

Learning a job and acquiring skill in temp labor can therefore be more difficult than regular work. Although assignments that involve cleaning may be thought of as something anyone can do with little training, the shifting contexts of temp labor demand continuous learning, reflection, and classification of objects. The difficulty is further compounded when no supervisor or regular employee is present to describe job functions or evaluate the work. Learning job functions and acquiring skill, after all, require intersubjectivity. That is to say, they require another person to coproduce the job functions and evaluate the work.

Jobsite Performances of Work Ethic

Similar to the performances of waiting, temp laborers also engaged in performances of work ethic on the job. Jobsite performances of work ethic are strategic because client businesses are asked to grade the worker for the temp agency, they can give workers "return tickets" (which ensure the workers a job the next day), and they

have the ability to hire workers on to more permanent positions. In this section I examine the jobsite performances of work ethic.

Quincy gave the following account of his performance of work ethic:

> You know no matter where I go I push myself and people, when they see that, like when I was shoveling snow one of the guys he'd seen my work ethic, he pulled me out from this other guy that I was working at another housing duplex and I went to this other side and they put me in as a groundskeeper. They put me in over there for a month.

Quincy describes his performance of work ethic that he used to garner a long-term temp assignment. Moreover, his actions are performative in the sense that they identify him as a valuable worker. Many of the participants shared similar stories that reified the relationship between working hard and receiving longer assignments. A few workers also described halting this performance when no one was around because as Billy put it: "what they don't know doesn't hurt them."

The need to perform when being evaluated was prominent in my interviews with temp workers; however, the fact that supervisors were not always around – yet could show up at any time – complicated this performance. While breaks are assumed in manual labor because of its physicality, temp laborers could feel the need to work constantly because if they took a break and the supervisor showed up it could appear they were not working at all. Billy described that while eating lunch one day a fellow coworker laid on the ground to rest. Billy decided to end lunch early and start working because he believed the supervisor (if one showed up) might think he was lazy because of his proximity to the other temp worker. I also felt the need to constantly work hard in fear of being in the middle of a break when the supervisor showed up. To establish a

working relationship with a supervisor that would address this is not always possible because of the temporary nature of the assignments.

Performance can also extend outside of being observed at work. A supervisor can assess the performance of the temp worker at the end of the day by surveying the jobsite. The supervisor can imagine the performance that took place and thereby ascribe an identity to the worker as productive or lazy. Additionally, the body can become an image of an earlier performance. For example, I was very aware of how the sweat and dirt on my clothing and skin signaled something to the supervisor. Sweat can be understood to be an index of a body in action and dirt indexes an engagement in certain job functions (i.e. via its closeness). Moreover, dirty clothes are symbolic of an attitude toward certain types of work that places job performance above personal cleanliness and appearance. The sweat and dirt on the bodies of temp laborers can therefore add to their jobsite performances of work ethic and identifications as culturally valued manual laborers.

Jobsite performances of work ethic are salient in temporary labor because the workers are striving for longer assignments and permanent work. By performing their work ethic and identifying as valuable workers, temp laborers can increase their chances of receiving more and longer-term assignments. These performances can, however, become problematic when laborers feel the need to constantly work in case the supervisor shows up. Additionally, these performances can be partially determined by inference, through examining the jobsite and the bodies of the workers.

After work the participants would make their way to the temp agency to collect their checks. If the assignment lasted longer than the temp agency was open, the worker would have to wait for another day before receiving their check. There were mixed feelings about such assignments. Most participants appreciated the extra hours because it meant more money; however, not receiving a paycheck that day was problematic for those that were there to earn money for food and other immediate needs. Once they received their paychecks, workers would head to a nearby grocery store or other business to cash their checks for a fee (e.g. two dollars). With money in their pockets many of my participants would purchase food, hang out at a library, shelter, or (as only one participant shared) occasionally go to a bar before making their way to their respective spaces in the city or forest to sleep for the night.

Summary

Temporary labor has significant effects on the daily lives of those who work in it. Most of my participants woke up very early in the morning so that they could get be one of the first in line at the agency and increase their chance of getting work. With no guarantee of an assignment at the agency and not being paid to wait, many participants felt the need to perform, build their identities as valued workers, and forge social relationships with the agency employees in order to receive work for the day. If they received work, my participants typically walked with equipment in hand to the jobsite. Once at work, participants had to learn the job if they had never done it before with limited access to supervisors for instruction and evaluation. While working many kept up their performances of work ethic in order to impress the client business and increase

their chances to receive more assignments or a permanent job. At the same time, temp labor made it difficult to maintain clean clothing and this brought additional challenges to the lives of temp labors both at work and in public appearances outside of work.

NOTES

1. Leading up to the shelter closing over the summer (as it had the year before) residents were prepping by collecting tents, sleeping bags, rain gear, and other supplies for camping. Social service agencies distributed supplies and helped some find suitable locations in the forest.

2. I understood Walt's comment that the temp agency employee "put in her own people" to refer to people that had developed some level of personal relationship to the temp agency employee. His comment could also be interpreted as referring to ethnicity. This can be considered favoritism through either interpretation.

3. Workers with cars were valued by the agency for their abilities to travel to distant jobsites and transport other workers. Most of my interview participants confided that workers with cars were given more assignments than those without. Walt even estimated that workers with cars were "80 percent" more likely to receive work. This preference in the job allocation process was considered favoritism by some participants and practical to others.

CHAPTER 7: THE EMBODIMENT OF TEMPORARY LABOR

Temporary labor has a significant relationship to the body. The physical labor common to most job assignments, the workers' challenges with food, and the inadequate supervision create a situation that has profound implications on the bodies of temp workers. In this chapter I use data from my participant observation, questionnaires, and interviews to explore the ways in which temporary labor is embodied. I follow this theme through the topics of safety and injury, hunger, the aging body, and emotions in temp labor.

Safety and Injury

Concerns for safety and injury were prominent in my research data. Workers did not want to be injured because it was painful and could jeopardize their ability to work. Furthermore, agencies had to pay for workers' compensation insurance and injuries could affect their rates. Agency management therefore employed policies and strategies to promote safety and workers had strategies to ensure safety and continued work.

The agencies implemented a number of policies and strategies regarding worker safety. Steel-toed boots, hard hats, safety glasses, and brightly colored vests were provided by the agency to the workers for certain assignments. Although agency management required workers to wear these on the job, the former was not in the business of supervising workers to ensure this occurred. For example, I quickly removed my safety glasses, vest, and hardhat on the second day in a more finished building when

I felt I did not need them in an attempt to fit in with the other workers on the jobsite. Some agencies I observed also displayed one-page documents concerning safety on the wall near the counter and they encouraged the workers to sign a form confirming they had read the document before going out on a job.

Visually, however, agencies could convey a mixed message about safety and injury. One agency had a significant number of posters on their wall that were predominantly of two types: (1) those depicting proper lifting techniques or other safety instructions and (2) those with warning messages about workers' compensation fraud. From my experience, the juxtaposition of these two types of posters served to both inform workers about safety and seemingly threaten them from filing claims for workers' compensation. Furthermore, another agency I observed displayed a tally claiming zero injuries in the past three hundred plus days. This claim seemed hard to believe and I wondered if there was something preventing workers from reporting injuries.

Despite the safety measures and fear tactics used by the agencies, there is a disparity in safety between temp labor and regular forms of work. In May 2014 the American Staffing Association (ASA) and the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) "signed an alliance agreement" (ASA 2014) to develop educational materials on workplace hazards and disseminate them to temp agencies and their workers. This agreement came over one year after OSHA initiated the Temporary Worker Initiative in April 2013 after finding an excessive number of jobsite injuries and deaths as well as inequality in the workplace treatment and training of

temp workers (OSHA 2013). The inadequate training of temporary workers ultimately means they are more vulnerable on the job than permanent employees.

My participants provided their own accounts in regards to safety. 11 of the 12 questionnaire respondents indicated that they were sometimes concerned for their safety while performing temp labor. However, my interview participants shed some light on the responses given in the questionnaires. As many explained, it is common in construction or other manual labor to be responsibly concerned for one's safety. To say that they were not concerned for their safety could be taken as an admission of inexperience and irresponsibility. However one interprets it, the fact is temporary labor can be dangerous and even fatal – both of which are compounded by the disparity in the supervision and training of temporary workers.

Reports of injuries in temp labor were few among my participants. Nearly eighty percent (14 of 18) of my interview participants were quick to say they had never been injured while working temporary labor and most had never heard of anyone not reporting an injury. However, a little over twenty percent (4 of 18) gave different accounts that revealed the complications that come with injuries or seeking treatment for some other physical condition while in temporary employment arrangements.

One participant placed a question mark instead of selecting "yes" or "no" on the questionnaire as to whether they[1] had ever been injured during temporary labor and failed to report it. Later in the interview the participant revealed their swollen knee – an injury that had occurred the week prior while working at a jobsite with unstable cinder rock footing. This participant had been in the temp agency looking for work the

day of the interview and was hiding the injury in order to do so. After not receiving work for the day (and purposefully waiting outside to decrease the chance), they commented that it was probably for the better so that the knee could heal.

Earlier in the interview when I had asked the participant if there was anything they wanted to ask the temp agency, the participant provided the following response.

> Participant: Okay worker's comp. Not worker's comp, but injury. I heard that if you report you got injured or something they won't put you back to work. It's just a rumor, that's why I won't go into ____ (urgent care) because I need more temp.
>
> Jason: Cause you're afraid that– you don't want–
>
> Participant: They'll take me off tickets. Won't send me out somewhere because I got hurt here. "How do we know you won't get hurt over here on this job?"
>
> Jason: So it would be good to know what the truth is about that.
>
> Participant: Yeah. Because I had a friend that did hurt himself working for them. They gave him- they have- he quit sending him out on that many jobs.

This participant's inquiry clarifies the downside of reporting injuries to temp agencies. With a surplus of workers, agency employees could easily deny assignments to workers who had previously been injured. In addition, the participant's negotiation in grammatically assigning agency – from "they" to "he quit sending him out" – shows how careful temp laborers have to be when speaking about injustices. By switching to "he," the participant was aware that I would discover who they were speaking about. The participant later shared that they had shown the injury to another agency employee and when offered treatment replied: "No, because you guys won't put me back on a ticket."

Chris provided a different account that bears more generally on reporting injury in physical labor jobs. Chris made it clear that he had never been injured while working

through a temp agency. However, after I asked him if he ever heard of anyone not reporting an injury, he described an injury he sustained while working directly for a business and then explained why he failed to report it.

> Chris: I did with my hand, but it wasn't through temp work.
>
> Jason: And why didn't you report that through your–?
>
> Chris: Well, this kid– this moron. I was walking and he stuck his foot in here and I fell and went down like this. And it was a good paying job and I thought my wrist was just uh sprained. And then I'd do hammer drilling and it just hurt like hell. Just beating in anchors for eight days. I figured I needed this job. I would then go home and dunk it in ice. I thought it was just–. I was hoping it was not as bad as it was. But as soon as the job ended I went and got x-rayed and it was broken. I had to have surgery.
>
> Jason: So you didn't report it because you thought it maybe wasn't as bad as it was and you were– but really you were hoping because you needed that job.
>
> Chris: Right. It was a good job. So he got fired. The kid that tripped me got fired. He made twenty-one bucks. Yeah, he lost his job. And I never got called back. Yeah I look back and I always think, "that could be why I sit right here where I am today." That one incident. Cause when I called them they were pissed. I was talking to them and they said– they said uh, "you gotta tell us when it happened. As soon as it happens, as soon as it happens you gotta tell us," you know. I said, "yeah but, you know, I just want to collect unemployment. That's all I'm asking is just to collect unemployment." But I never got a call back.

Chris says he did not report the injury because he did not think his hand was "as bad as it was"; yet, more importantly, he did not want to lose his "good paying job." He worked for eight more days until the assignment was over before going in for an x-ray. When he found out his hand was broken, he only asked the company to confirm that he had worked for them so he could collect unemployment until his hand healed and was not seeking a claim for workers' compensation.[2] Chris believes that this injury and his

inability to receive unemployment benefits ultimately led to his homelessness and his consequent engagement with temp labor.

Quincy provided similar accounts in regards to delaying treatment of a physical condition and not reporting injuries. Quincy regretted that he did not wait to get his knee replacement surgery until after he worked a two-month long job assignment he was offered through a non-profit job service: “You know I should have done the work and then take care of this. But it (the surgery) was already set up so.” Although Quincy first said he always reported injuries from temp labor, he later recanted by confiding, “You don’t do those things. You know you are going to lose hours, so you don’t say nothing.” As Kelly, Chris, and Quincy describe, the main problem with reporting an injury or seeking treatment for a physical condition was the risk it brought to receiving future work assignments.

Rick was the only participant that reported an injury sustained through temp labor and he encountered problems when he tried to seek recompense for it. The injury occurred at a three-month temp assignment in the Midwest while manufacturing parts for a supplier of major U.S. automobile companies. When I asked him if he ever felt uncertain on the job, he described this incident.

> Rick: Oh yeah, well I've felt uncertain plenty of times. When they uh– they don't enforce safety. Like there's one time, I forgot to tell you about this, I got sent through a temp service in ____ (a Midwest city). It was a machine shop, and you had to punch out these metal pieces for the car industry. They sent them to the like all three of the big, big ones like Ford, Chevy, and Dodge. And basically you had this punch press thing and it came down "clunk-clunk-clunk" and it would go really fast. So uhm, it had this like antifreeze that was sprayed out from the side of the machine to keep the metal parts cold so they wouldn't actually get super-hot where you couldn't touch them. And the antifreeze would spray up

and hit you in the face. So it would drip in your mouth. So you really got antifreeze in your face, in your eyes, and in your mouth. And antifreeze is really, really not good. And they did that. And they sent you from the temp service over to do that.

Jason: And you–. They didn't give you–. You didn't have a mask?

Rick: No they didn't do that until like– I heard they didn't do it there until five years later. Till somebody actually, you know, started getting really sick. And I was feeling really ill from doing that like a month straight. And uh I said, "I can't do this." It cost me, you know. I mean I had to leave. And then of course once you leave a job you quit. You gotta leave the temp service cause they won't, they won't take you back. Even though that it is an absolute health risk. And I went to the doctor's office and they won't stand up for ya. They said, "Well, we don't know if that's the direct cause of this or that." Cause they don't want to be sued and part of a lawsuit. So they, they, they– hands off. So you got no ground to stand on. There you are being poisoned and you can't get a doctor, and you don't get a doctor you can't get a lawyer. The first things lawyers tell you is "go get a doctor." So you just got no rights. You're just, you might as well be a–.

Jason: So when you got sick what was it? Lung problems?

Rick: No it was nauseousness. Really slow, I felt really sluggish and nauseated. Like sick to my stomach all the time. Couldn't, couldn't eat. And you know the diarrhea and everything. Losing body flui–. I lost weight and body fluids. Yeah so yeah, the temp service was really responsible– part of the responsibility for poisoning me. That's how bad that was.

Above, Rick describes how the unsafe working conditions of a three-month long temp assignment caused him to become ill and quit the assignment early. He explains how by quitting early he was giving up any opportunity for future work through the temp agency. Furthermore, his attempts to address the "poisoning" went unresolved since he could not find a doctor willing to investigate the connection between his symptoms and his chemical exposure.

The experiences described by my participants speak to the embodiment of temporary labor. Having low income, facing barriers to regular employment, and provided with unequal treatment and training at work, some felt the need to hide their

injuries and delay treatment so they could continue to work and make income and not endanger future opportunities for work. The warning posters on the walls of the agency – which communicated to temp workers that workers' compensation claims can be deemed fraudulent and can lead to monetary fines or jail time – only further complicated their dilemma in reporting injuries. The bodies of temp laborers are therefore a site from which the neoliberal demands for flexibility and disposability take their toll.

Hunger and the "Eat and Work" Lunch

Many of the interview participants commented on the challenges they faced with hunger and procuring food for the day. Specifically, some of the interview participants shared their experiences of working through lunch or eating lunch while they worked. In this section I examine the issues surrounding food and hunger in temporary labor.

When I asked Quincy about his overall opinion of temp labor he responded with the following:

> I think they could do a lot better because they're making a lot of money off people so they should be able to at least– mainly the food, food part of it. They should have you know some with hot food in their machines that, you know, have warm up sandwiches or things like that microwave in those establishments so people can at least, at least have something to eat. Because, like I said, you get up too early here and you leave over there and you don't eat here and you go over there and you don't eat all day. It, it, it will add up especially at my age. For somebody else younger it probably don't bother them, they can do it.

Quincy went to work hungry many days. The shelter he stayed at frequently had no food available in the mornings and his engagement in temp labor meant he missed the

donated bag lunches, which would arrive around ten or eleven a.m. As a solution, Quincy advises companies that use temps to at least provide vending machines with sandwiches or other food that could be warmed up as well as access to a microwave. Additionally, not eating all day was difficult for him (especially at his age) and the calorie-draining, physical labor in temp work only compounded this hardship.

Earlier in the interview Quincy provided the following account, which emphasizes his struggle in procuring food and the effects hunger had on his body. Toward the end of the quote he hints at a strategy of temp laborers in regards to lunch.

> Quincy: You know like I said, sometimes you don't have money for lunch. You have to work straight through the lunch period. You get out a little earlier but you're still weak by the end of the day cause you don't have nothing to eat. They don't see that. They don't care about it. They're just there– you're just there to work under them. That's it. They don't care.
>
> Jason: Do people ever say, "Hey, this is lunchtime, take a break."
>
> Quincy: No. If you tell them that you'll work straight through, they'll be keeping an eye on you because you say you're doing that, but you know they don't care.
>
> Jason: But can you–. I mean if you're assigned a temp job can you at twelve just say, "Hey I'm going to stop and eat." Say you brought a sandwich. Would you feel comfortable doing that or is it like–
>
> Quincy: Well of course there is a thirty minute lunch break everywhere you go. So yeah, that automatically is there, but if you want to get off early and you tell them ahead of time, they're going to let you. Then, you don't wanna take a lunch break and work straight through. But you have to specify to them. Other than that, they are going to doubt you even if you did work unless you find someone that was working with you and ask them because they're not going to be around all the time.

Since most of my participants cited food as a primary use of the money they made in temp labor, it is likely that many went to work with no lunch and not having eaten for

the day. One strategy for temp laborers without food was to work through lunch. The advantage of working through lunch was the chance to leave work early, which made it more likely to get to the agency and receive a paycheck before it closed. However, as Quincy describes, it was entirely up to the temp laborer to prove he or she had worked through lunch.

Working through lunch was also common to some of the temp assignments. After hearing conflicting stories from participants about not being able to take breaks during a particular type of construction work, I asked Oliver to provide more insight about lunch breaks.

> Oliver: You can, but sometimes you just work on the job.
>
> Jason: Why would you not take a lunch break?
>
> Oliver: Well I guess the construction workers, some of them don't take lunch breaks and stuff. Depending on who the company is, they'll just work through lunch and they call it a "eat and work" or something like that.
>
> Jason: So you like work and
>
> Oliver: Eat, sometimes.

It is important to note that many workers did not bring lunch to work. In fact, during my participant observation I witnessed very few temp workers with packed lunches. Without a lunch in hand and the time or money to go buy food, temp workers were more likely to not have anything to eat while working. This “eat and work” lunch could therefore become a serious concern for the health and safety of temp workers. Furthermore, Oliver was not the only participant to mention the “eat and work” lunch. Others referred to it as a “working lunch” and the strategy Quincy mentioned above is similar in nature.

At the same time, lunch breaks were found in many of the temp assignments and workers were typically paid during their lunch break. Yet, packing a lunch for most of my participants was challenging since they had little income and limited access to a refrigerator, storage, and cooking facilities. Kelly shared the following account during our interview when I asked her about lunch.

> We usually stop somewhere on the way to the job if it's an option. Cause otherwise you got a lunch and what are you going to do with it? Cause unless I buy a lunch or cook some food for the day, I'm not going to eat.

The "option" to get food that Kelly describes would entail two requirements: (1) the temp worker had time to stop at a grocery store on the way to work and (2) he or she had the money to purchase food. Additionally, Kelly was one of two interview participants that had ready access to facilities to store and prepare food, although I rarely saw her with a packed lunch. The other participant, Francine (who had a home) was the only participant I observed carrying a packed lunch to work.

Hunger was an issue for many of my participants. Those with little money and limited access to storage, refrigeration, or cooking facilities devised strategies from this hardship. By working through lunch, temp laborers would increase their chances of leaving work earlier in the day so they could receive their paycheck, purchase food, and quell their hunger. However, this hunger stems from demands for flexible labor from business leaders and the inability of the temp help industry to provide enough jobs and pay for its workers to live on. As a result, temp laborers are forced to live with their hunger and jeopardize their health and safety.

The Aging Body

Temporary labor can have a prominent effect on the body since it can be physically demanding. Half (3 of 6) of the participants fifty-five or older shared similar themes involving both their knees and aging bodies. Interestingly, their perspectives on the body both diverged and converged around themes of health and fitness in temporary labor. In this section I examine these themes using data from my interviews.

The connection between the aging body and temp labor was evident in interviews with some of the older participants. I asked Walt to describe temporary labor in the beginning of the interview and he gave the below response.

Walt: For me it's, it's a means of survival. And as far as because I'm single, I don't have to– my kids are all grown up. They got their kids of their own. You know, I don't have no obligation, as far as spouse or anybody. So basically it's just me. And uhm, right now uhm, I'm still about three or four years away from retirement. So basically that's what I'm waiting for. And uhm, I don't want the early retirement, I want the full, full retirement. So I have to wait until 67. So right now I got– so I'm 61, I just turned 61, so. But I've been pretty fortunate, but I think lately that my body been telling me, "Hey, you're getting too old."

Jason: Yeah?

Walt: Yeah. But I still can do it.

Jason: Talk to me about that a little bit.

[…] (Walt talks about his employment background)

Walt: I was kind of overweight when I first came to work. Cause you know I was kinda on the heavy side, cause I'd be sitting around behind a desk. But now, physical work twelve months of the year and I do a lot of walking, from A to B. Between, between the bus routes. But it's, it's– right now as far as my body is concerned, it's just my knees that are. But uh I still have the ability to work. I still wanna. So.

Jason: But you feel like your body is just giving out?

Walt: Yeah.

Jason: So I mean is temp work– I mean it's pretty physically demanding.

Walt: Yeah. Well if you do it all the time, which, which I have.

Walt immediately went into his role in his family (e.g. "my kids are all grown up") then to his upcoming retirement and then to his aging body in order to describe temp labor. This may seem like he was not describing temp labor at all; however, his first utterances "for me" preface a highly subjective response. It follows that Walt makes a strong connection between temp labor and his aging body.

In a way, Walt is describing senescence – i.e. the deterioration of the body with age. As Lock explains, senescence was not an important topic in Western medicine until the latter half of the 20th century when it emerged from a growing interest in the future of the U.S. baby boomer generation (Lock 1993:xxv). Today in the U.S. one cannot miss the large number of pharmaceuticals and plastic surgery procedures that seek to prevent or hide the aging process. However, Walt spent most of his life on a nearby Native American nation. In many Native American communities the elderly receive more respect than in U.S. society and associations with functions of aging such as dementia can be imbued with spiritual meanings rather than biological ones (Henderson and Traphagan 2005:274). Nevertheless, it is clear that Walt describes the physicality of temp labor as something that deteriorates the body "if you do it all the time."

Quincy had a longer history in physical labor than Walt and provided a somewhat different account. To him, temp labor was a means of physical fitness and something that kept him young as opposed to wearing him down. At the same time, when describing his knees he remarked, "They just gave out. Too much wear and tear."

However, his recent knee replacement surgery was not seen as the end of temp labor but rather a momentary halt. One and a half months since the surgery and still in pain, Quincy claimed, "I can do anything, I can do anything" when I asked if he felt he could ever again work in temp labor. The overwhelming agency exhibited by Quincy contrasts with the messages Walt received from his body – i.e. "Hey, you're getting too old."

Additionally, Quincy seemed to be comfortable perceiving his knees as replaceable. During our interview he provided a long explanation of the whole knee replacement procedure, describing the "bones that they cut off," "attachments," and "holes." This was not how the participant with the swollen knee injury (mentioned earlier in this chapter) viewed their knees. To provide a reason for resting their knee (and not receiving work for the day) the participant stated: "I know how important my legs are because you need them to walk and everything else. But I need them most for my time." After the interview we met one more time so I could give the raffle money they had won for participating in my questionnaires. I followed up on the knee injury and after commenting on her decision to rest it they remarked, "Cause I only have one set."

The differing views of the body permeated into both of the participants' engagement with temp labor. After attempting to get work for the day, the participant with the swollen knee had become convinced that resting the knee and letting it heal was best. Throughout our interview, Quincy was constantly identifying as a hard worker who pushed himself more than others. This identification was especially noticeable in a narrative he told of shoveling "every little drop of snow" while his temp co-worker left

ice on the sidewalks. It was evident that he was prone to exert himself on the job more than most workers. Moreover, he felt he could go back to work despite the lasting pain from his knee replacement surgery.

These older participants had to make decisions about their knee injuries or other conditions. Since temporary labor provides little means to make a living (much less save money), Quincy regretted getting his knee surgery right after being offered a three-month temp assignment, while the other participant decided to forgo much needed income so the injury could heal.

Working in temp labor was embodied by these three participants in different ways. They each viewed their engagement in temporary labor in different ways in relation to their health and fitness. Walt connected temporary labor to his knee problems and his aging body, yet had to continue doing it for survival. Quincy connected temporary labor to staying young and was eager to continue working with his newly replaced knee. And the last participant worried about reporting the swollen knee injury and considered hiding the injury in order to work before later deciding to let it heal.

Emotions

Emotions were common in the interviews with my participants and the uncertainty involved in temporary labor cultivated a particularly rich field to produce such emotions. In this section I present the emotions found in temp labor and propose that there are forms of control that shape the emotions temp laborers are allowed to perform and feel while at the temp agency or on the jobsite.

Both the participants' and my own feelings of uncertainty (presented in chapter 6) are particularly important to understanding other emotions in temp labor. This is because many of the emotions shared by my participants came directly out of feelings of uncertainty related to the job allocation process, safety, injury, job functions, and job performance. This uncertainty can be likened to Bourdieu's concept of "precarité," which the scholar describes as a "new mode of domination in public life…based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation" (Bourdieu 1998b:94-99).

With no guarantee of work, temp laborers are set up to react to their success or failure in obtaining assignments. Adam's frustration described in chapter 6 was a direct result of not receiving assignments due to the perceived favoritism found in the job allocation process. In a similar fashion, Walt described his inability to receive work assignments as a "bummer" to convey his depression, frustration, and disappointment (American Heritage Dictionary, "bummer, n.1"). Oliver expressed a number of emotions in regards to the job allocation process. Below are the relevant quotes from our interview.

Jason: What do you not like about temp labor?

Oliver: When they don't call you out. Sometimes it will be a week. Sometimes it will be five days or less or even two weeks, you know. It's kind of hectic right there. Trying to figure out, "How am I going to get some money?" To pay your bills. Pay your phone bill or something.

[…]

Jason: Do you ever know going in how long you will be working?

Oliver: No, they don't let us know. It's just, you know–. You'll be there thinking, "Oh, I'm going to get eight hours. I'll be okay. I'll pay my bill. I'll be alright." And then, boom. You only make about five, six hours and they tell you you're done. Stressed out again and you know.

[…]

Jason: What's the difference in doing temp work versus permanent work? Do you have to adapt for one compared to the other?

Oliver: Yeah it's kinda, you know, it's kinda hard. Struggling, like you know long days. It feels good when you get sent out but if not then what are you going to do? Who's going to you know, send something? […] You get your energy up, you know. You're going to get work but you don't get nothing, you know. So you go to the next labor center right there _____ (temp agency). You be sitting there waiting and you get nothing so. Only thing is try tomorrow again, so. […] It's frustrating and, you know, what are you going to eat and stuff?

As Oliver describes not receiving an assignment or getting fewer hours than expected could place him in a hectic state, feeling stressed out and frustrated. He also mentions that "it feels good when you get sent out"; however, he sometimes waits upwards of two weeks before receiving a job assignment. It is no wonder Oliver and the other participants felt the way they did. Their ability to buy food, pay bills, and ultimately survive depended upon the amount of work they received. When they did not receive an assignment in the last place they knew to look for work, they were left with little means to address their primary needs.

The uncertainty of temp work also pertained to the workers' safety on the job or injuries from it. As Rick described earlier in this chapter, he sometimes felt uncertain about the safety of the work environment and ultimately unsafe and vulnerable. The participant with the swollen knee was also uncertain about how reporting injuries affected future work assignments. When talking about the knee injury and the importance of her or his legs, the participant remarked, "And honestly, I'm scared."

My experience of the feeling of uncertainty pertained to the job functions and was related to not feeling confident about my ability to perform the job. I gradually learned over time how to perform my job and indeed felt confident in doing so. Clyde described a similar situation when talking about the conveniences of temp labor (presented in chapter 5). At another point in the interview, Clyde provided an example of relationship between uncertainty in job performance and confidence:

> I think I've learned a little bit of something from every job you know. Other than just um, you feel like a sense of accomplishment, you know at the end of the day. Just from actually getting through the day and doing the hard work you feel like, you feel a little bit stronger. You feel a little bit good about yourself. And I've learned, you know I've learned that I have more like respect about myself because I could do the work and I could–. You know it might take, might take a lot of heart to finish through the day things that I could never imagine doing. Working through 115 degree day, you know. I mean– you know, picking up 50 pound rocks you know. Pushing a wheelbarrow you know pretty much all day. A few times I ____ (indistinguishable) if I could ever do that kind of work, but now I have the confidence and I can get–. You know if I can– if anybody can get through that, you can get through a lot of stuff in your life.

Clyde's "sense of accomplishment" as well as feeling "stronger" and "good" about himself was directly related to his ability to "do the work" (i.e. perform the job). Although he uses the word "stronger," the surrounding lines show that he does not

necessarily mean muscle strength. Working all day took a lot of "heart" and when he performed a job he "could never imagine doing" he gained "confidence."

There is also a feeling of satisfaction that comes with making a living and being able to provide for oneself (especially in U.S. culture). This satisfaction was conveyed by many of the interview participants. Here is Walt's response when I asked him what he liked about temporary work?

> Walt: Really nothing. I can't say uh–. But the thing is it's been making a living for me. I've been paying a few bills. My utility bill. My house is already– doesn't need to be paid for. It's just cleaning up. I did a lot of renovation on it before I lost my ____ (professional) work, but it's mostly uh–. I guess it's just, it's, it's just the satisfaction of just making a living I guess. It's not really–. There's really nothing I like about it. It's just a means of making money.

The "satisfaction of just making a living" was therefore the only thing Walt could come up with regarding what he liked about temp labor. However, Walt was staying at a shelter and had also mentioned during our interview that one cannot make a living on temp labor in Flagstaff (presented in chapter 5). Moreover, he had recently been "blackballed" and was not receiving regular work through one of the temp agencies (presented in chapter 6). His ability to pay "a few bills" and not always necessarily make a living meant this satisfaction was not always felt.

Some participants also described the emotions of temp agency employees or client business supervisors. During our interview Quincy described past relational problems with an agency employee that affected his ability to get work and caused him to stop going to that agency. I asked him if he felt he could go back to the agency to get work and he provided the following account.

> From what I heard there's different people in there. The people always change so if you're gone for a little while I'm sure, you know, the people in there now are different so they don't know about the past. That was just one individual who got mad at me. He used to treat me good. But there was also a woman there before that got me in that really treated me good. Then they got rid of her. Then he started treating me okay but he got mad about that incident when I switched to ____ (non-profit job service) because they called him for a reference. That's what he got mad about. That's when I told him straight out, I said, "If you called me out to work I wouldn't have done this, but these guys have me in at the ____ (public entity) for two months." But I didn't get to do it because of this [knees]. I had to go up for the surgery so I didn't even get to go to work.

As Quincy describes, he was not being given assignments from a particular agency employee and decided to try to get work through a non-profit job service in town. Unfortunately, when the agency employee discovered Quincy was looking for work somewhere else the employee became “mad.” This anger ultimately led Quincy to stop going to the agency until the employee was no longer there.

In addition to the emotions found in temp labor, there was a form of control that shaped the emotions temp laborers were able to express and perhaps feel. Quincy shared the following account during our interview that speaks to his challenges with prejudice and the emotional control found in temp labor.

> That guy I was working under was real prejudice and I didn’t like that. I was always bumping heads with him. Any time you are in a negative mood they can read it. They just don't want to talk to you. They're just like “go do this” and, you know, I used to. I push myself and I work way harder than anybody. I'll put up with it for a while but I won't put up with it for very long.

Quincy actually shared several accounts of facing “prejudice” while working. The prejudice he experienced from one client business supervisor led to them “bumping heads” and produced a “negative mood.” At the same time, supervisors could “read”

his emotional state and they would not "want to talk" with him when he was in a negative mood. Despite his ability to "work harder than anybody" Quincy was left with little choice but to "put up with" the prejudice and impersonal treatment. His active efforts to curb his negative mood are evidence of a form of emotional control. He was not able to address this unfair treatment because doing so would jeopardize his opportunities for work. In addition, emotional control is found in the performances of waiting (presented in chapter 6) since temp laborers had to be friendly and not complain in order to receive work assignments from the agency employee.

Emotions are particularly salient in temp labor because of its precarious nature. Feeling uncertain about receiving work, job safety, reporting injuries, job functions, and job performance cultivated strong emotions of frustration, hectic states, stress, vulnerability, fear, and self-doubt in my participants. Those who received work and learned how to perform the job successfully felt good and garnered pride and confidence. These emotions felt by my participants are therefore embodied characteristics of the "precarité" found in neoliberalism.

Summary

The narratives from my participants in this chapter reveal how temporary labor is embodied. The injuries, hunger, aging bodies, and emotions of my participants are effects of broader neoliberal trends toward flexibility, disposability, and precarité. Participants had to decide whether reporting injury was worth the risk of being disposed of by the agency. Participants also had to decide whether caring for their injuries was possible due to their low income and high job insecurity. The hunger experienced by my

participants was also a result of the irregular work and low pay inherent to precarious and flexible neoliberal business models. Finally, the widespread uncertainty found in temp labor and its emotional effects are the result of the precarité found in neoliberalism.

NOTES

1. I use the singular gender-neutral pronoun “they” and determiner “their” in this description to hide the identity of the participant.

2. There is a way to make sense of Chris’ need for the company to confirm his employment in order to collect unemployment benefits. Under Arizona law those filing for unemployment must have reported income and perhaps the company had yet to report their most recent quarterly wages.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

There are a number of important conclusions of my findings. The majority of my participants (20 of 24) did not work temporary labor out of convenience or in addition to another job. Due to their low education, past legal troubles, and housing status, many of my participants found barriers to landing a regular job and had to work temporary labor in order to survive. At the same time, every participant confided that they could not make a living from the amount of work and pay provided through temporary labor. With few options for work, many placed their hope in temporary labor as a pathway to permanent work. Overall, the majority (16 of 24) of my participants never received a chance for permanent work in their years of temp labor, but still found convenience in the flexibility and introduction to various jobs that temporary labor provided.

The inadequate amount of work and pay of temporary labor meant that at least five-sixths (20 of 24) of my participants could not afford a stable residence in Flagstaff and sought refuge in local shelters, at the houses of friends, in the forest, or in concealed spaces within the city. The housing situations of these participants made getting to work and maintaining clean clothing difficult. At the temp agency, my participants waited unpaid for hours, days, or weeks before receiving work. To increase their chances of receiving work within this precarious system, temp laborers would engage in performances that demonstrated their willingness to work and attempt to forge social relationships with the agency employees responsible for assigning work. The impact of social relationships of the job allocation process was undeniable in my

data and became problematic for some who viewed it as a form of favoritism. On the job, many participants tried to increase their job security through intentional performances of work ethic to client business supervisors.

Working temporary labor, however, had significant effects on the bodies of my participants. Some participants concealed their injuries in order to continue working and protect future opportunities for work through the temp agency. These participants felt that reporting injuries could threaten their job security and many were compelled to delay treatment. Hunger was also an issue for many of my participants due to their low incomes and housing situations. Therefore, many participants worked all day without having eaten breakfast or lunch, which seriously affected their health and safety on the job. Some of the older participants related their aging body and knee problems to their engagement in temporary labor and came to view this type of work as either problematic or beneficial to their health and fitness. Additionally, the uncertainty found in temporary labor cultivated strong emotions in my participants.

My findings warrant a number of points of discussion. First and foremost, the experiences my participants shared surrounding temporary labor are results of the neoliberal political economy. The flexibility desired by business leaders creates a class of disposable workers that have to live with the insecurities that such flexible labor arrangements establish. Furthermore, neoliberal ideologies and discourses place responsibility for work, income, health, and other aspects of life solely on the individual and this same pattern can be seen within my data. The responsibility my participants took in order to stand out as a valued worker in the job allocation process, to find their

own means of transportation to the jobsite, to learn the job, and toward safety, injury, and health reflect the rugged individualism prescribed under neoliberalism.

The various ways in which individual responsibility in is constituted in both the employment relationships and the job allocation process provides unique sites to study the uneven development of neoliberalism. The presence of favoritism, racism, and classism in my data suggests that individual responsibilities are constituted in relation to culturally constructed categories and social relationships. For example, Quincy's accounts of dealing with racist supervisors suggest that his responsibility to negotiate or "put up with" these hardships is contextual to Native Americans and the U.S. Moreover, the fact that Quincy shared a long history of racism, whereas the rest of the Native American participants did not, may imply that the latter may have completely accepted that it is their individual responsibility to deal with such issues. The various ways in which favoritism, racism, and classism emerge in temporary labor warrant future study on the job allocation process and employment relationships in the temp help industry.

The neoliberal elevation of individual responsibility is also evident within my participants' performances both while waiting and at the jobsite. Showing up, signing in, and doing a good job were not enough to ensure work assignments. It was the responsibility of the worker to convey a desire to work through both patiently waiting and conversing with the agency employees and overexerting themselves on the job. Furthermore, my participants' identities as valued workers only came into being through social interaction. Examining performances of work ethic in this way highlights not so much the interiority of my participants' work ethic, but the ways in which such work

ethic is performed, ascribed, and coproduced in their interactions with agency employees and client business supervisors.

Finally, the neoliberal trends toward flexibility and disposability create high levels of uncertainty and insecurity that seriously impact the bodies of my participants. My participants' strategies to cope with injury, hunger, and emotions became necessary for their survival in a labor system that operates with a surplus of worker and does not guarantee work. The ways in which they took on individual responsibility in these endeavors by concealing injuries, delaying treatment, working through lunch, going hungry, and regulating their emotions illustrates the hegemony of neoliberalism.

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