

Letter to Editor

My research question for the interview is on how student workers, specifically the ones who have minimum wage service jobs such as in the dining or bookstore services, are exploited within their workplace environment and how it correlates to the university's responsibility in the bigger picture. After conducting the interview and gathering the evidence for the analysis, I developed an answer to my research question that student workers are exploited by the manipulation of their hours and physical labor, taking a toll on their mental and physical well-being; the reason behind the exploitation is because of the disparities in the differing sectors of those who control, manage, do the labor as well as the universities themselves that continues the cycle of inequality in the current society of capitalism.

My first main point from the interview is that student workers, specifically those who work in a more physically demanding jobs on campus, experience exploitation through the manipulation of their scheduled hours and physicality. For example, the student worker I had interviewed explained how the main “the company has cut hours, for some reason, like just these past 2 months,” even though they have a lot of stores across multiple universities (3:56). The reason for this action by the company is by assumption that other bookstores “don't make enough money... so [they] have actually been penalized for it, and [the bookstore] had [her] hours cut for the past like 2, 3 weeks” (3:56). To cut hours without consulting with these student workers disrupts their working conditions because having less hours than before would lessen the amount of wage they would receive throughout the week in order to provide for their college expenses and bare necessities. It leads to their disadvantage for the advantage of the parent company to save face in not receiving backlash from the possibilities of other bookstores abusing the number of employees they have, though that assumption has not even been proven true. Standing for an

extended period of time has also created health issues for these workers to want chairs, as the student worker I had interviewed explained how she “stands throughout [her] entire shift, and [they’re] not allowed to sit down, and [her] legs are aching...feet hurt, [her] legs hurt, and everything is cracking” (6:24). By standing beyond their limit to work for the hours they are scheduled is a form of exploitation as the money they will earn does not compensate fairly to suffice their expenses for college.

My second main point is that the real power dynamic is between those who control the labor, manage, and operate the labor itself compared to the visible relationship between the employer and employees in the physical store themselves. The actual labor takes place separate from the main, important business decisions that dictate the conditions of labor in the interests of the company’s hands rather than the workers. Without any checks and balances of the higher-ups in these parent companies, it is easier to exploit the workers at the bottom and leverage their power rather than the exploitation between a lower level of management and workers. For instance, in my interview, the student gave an example of a decision made by another higher-level department out of the bounds of their business that had cut their hours and became understaffed. However, they are incapable of denying those orders because the decision is made by the parent company that forces the decision for the managers towards all workers (22:03). Thus, employment relationships are convoluted in this current period of capitalism, where legal employers are not the real perpetrators of workers' exploitation.

The last main point from the interview is that the role of the university perpetuates inequality by neglecting or not properly treating these student workers, who are the majority under privileged in these minimum wage jobs. The universities are accountable to the direct root cause of their exploitation to a degree by not providing sufficient opportunities and resources to

these under privileged students on focusing for their studies to elevate themselves from their own socioeconomic background. Especially with an expensive tuition, the student worker I had interviewed voiced her opinion on this insufficiency by explaining “I don't think they understand how much more we need. Because it's not like just the amount of money, but it's like also kind of like the stress of having to like pay that off. We're always stressed always over work. There's no time to rest, but you still have to do all of your classes” (32:14). Thus, universities sustain the ever so increasing inequality in society through their institution by exploiting students through setting them up in a financially precarious state.

Based on my interview, one of my recommendations to change the labor arena for student workers is to have universities lower their tuition or pay for the rest of the expenses for college students that fall under a certain bracket of income. It is difficult for them to focus on their studies while working at the same time, which loses the opportunity for them to excel well in their studies. Another solution would be to expand and fund programs that aid those under privileged students to cover all their necessities without the need to have excessive hours of working at minimum to pay off their debts and expenses. Especially in the case where universities have several sources of fundings from both public and private sectors, it is not unreasonable to organize the fundings for underprivileged students to have a more successful career in their higher education and lessen the stress they must endure to earn the same degree as those who never had to work and think about their own financial responsibilities.

Interview Analysis

As academic workers across University of California schools strike for a fair contract against unfair labor practices, the student workers of minimum wage service jobs with more physical labor conditions, such as at food courts, bookstores, or transportation services, have the same sentiments but less competency to reach a fair bargain. This led to the development of my research on how student workers are exploited within their campus workplace environment and how it corresponds to the university's responsibility. The basis of understanding exploitation is gathered through Michael Yates's *Why Unions Matter* on how "the most fundamental aspect of work is not controlled by us" because "employers try to organize their workplaces so that we cannot exert much control by our own actions" (Yates, p.8). After conducting an interview with a student worker from Boston College, I proposed that student workers are exploited through the manipulation of their hours and physicality because of the disparities in the labor relations and the institutionalized structure of a university that perpetuates the extremities of stratification in the contemporary period.

I interviewed a student who is a retail associate at a bookstore, working part time at around 15 hours per week with the minimum wage of around \$15.25 per hour. She is a full-time undergraduate student in her third year at a private university. The interview setting was conducted and recorded through the Zoom platform.

The structure of the interview guide is divided into three sections of themes: working conditions, relationship between employer and employee, and stratification. These broad topics provide a logistical breakdown to answer the research question by extrapolating key insights on the interviewee's workplace environment and how it pertains to the university's system around student workers. The first section addresses the topic of working conditions in which to evaluate

the exploitation around the conditions and quality of the work, focusing on the system between labor and the means of production. The second section dives into the balance of power between employer and employee, observing the disparities in the power dynamic among the social relations of production that directly cause the exploitation of workers. The last section connects the previous two topics to an overarching explanation on how student workers are also taken advantage of by their respective university under the larger issue of inequality. Therefore, the last section tackles into a deeper discussion on the concept of stratification, where inequality is perpetuated by institutions or structures that distribute unequal access of resources to people under different social categories, in today's capitalist structure (Massey, p. 2).

The first section of working conditions introduces questions that revolve around reasonable hours and fair wage compensation, the safety around the workplace, and any changes to make in the workplace conditions. My main finding for this section is that student workers, specifically for those who work in more physically tasking types of jobs, experience exploitation through manipulation of their given hours and strenuous conditions—which can lead to unexpected health concerns. In terms of manipulating the scheduled hours of workers, for instance, my interviewee explained, “the company has cut hours, for some reason, like just these past 2 months... the company has a lot of stores... I guess they don't make enough money... so we have actually been penalized for it, and I've had my hours cut for the past like 2, 3 weeks” (3:56). The main company that controls several bookstores across different universities settled an initiative that cut hours for all employees to counteract the supposed concern that other bookstores may be abusing the number of hours an employee can have throughout the week. From an outsider's point of view, the strategy seems as though it would benefit the workers to stop the exploitation of employees. However, to unexpectedly cut hours for these student workers disrupts their

working conditions as it does not oblige to their required number of hours to sustain their basic income for housing or necessities. It is a poor and suspecting initiative by the company to force hours to be cut without a thorough investigation into the discrepancies between bookstores, leading to the disadvantage of student workers who are dependent on these hours. Furthermore, standing while working in the bookstore for long shifts prompted health concerns in which the interviewee expressed to want “chairs because [she] stands throughout [her] entire shift, and [they’re] not allowed to sit down, and [her] legs are aching...feet hurt, [her] legs hurt, and everything is cracking” (6:24). The student workers in these types of service industries are forced to stand beyond their capacities, developing unnecessary degrees of pain throughout their bodies for the sake of a wage that is not fairly compensated enough to provide expenses for college and, instead, are directed towards shareholders and top executives of the parent company.

In the second section, the questions asked in the interview centers around the relationship between the workers and their employers, specifically about their employers’ receptiveness and approachability. However, upon conducting the interview, I have discovered the account of where the employers respected the position of their employees and disregard the rather strict hierarchy in between. Especially in the case of my interviewee, she exclaimed that her managers are friendly and had never abused their power to place more work onto the employees without consent. For example, the interviewee had said, “I want more hours, they always take me to place like different places where they’re like low on hands...they don’t really take advantage of me. They always ask for my help.” (12-14:13). Under these rare circumstances, my main argument for this section of the interview is that the power dynamic within the complex labor system expands beyond the apparent relationship between workers and managers and towards the real actors in the parent companies that operate separately from the main labor components.

These executives of companies perform these strategic, capitalist decisions without any checks of balances, which are the real yet implicit causes to the exploitation of workers rather than an offshoot decision made by a subordinate management. My interviewee gave an example of an executive decision outside their store capability, explaining how “...all the other stores in the company isn't making enough money. They decide to cut the hours of our store. So, we actually are kind of like understaffed. But also can't do anything about it, because of, you know, just like the higher ups” (22:03). Thus, in the 21st century of capitalism, employment relationships are complex and legal employers are oftentimes not the real actors that withhold the real power to control workers.

After discussing the exploitation of student workers under their labor conditions and relations, the last section establishes the role of the university to perpetuate the cycle of inequality by neglecting or doing the bare minimum to aid these student workers, who are most often than not under privileged in these minimum wage, service-oriented jobs. With the concept of stratification, the university, as an institutionalized structure, is accountable to the full extent of exploitation of student workers in this current capitalist relationship. Universities are, to a certain degree, strategically taking advantage of their students' labor and intentionally providing insufficient opportunities of social mobility for those who fall at the bottom level of the stratified system of social groupings with an expensive, unrealistic tuition. The interviewee elaborated on this insufficiency, explaining “I don't think they understand how much more we need. Because it's not like just the amount of money, but it's like also kind of like the stress of having to like pay that off. We're always stressed always over work. There's no time to rest, but you still have to do all of your classes” (32:14). The interviewee also explains a university program that helps underprivileged students; however, the interviewee recalls that “every time [she has] requested,

they can't provide for, like all of it like [she] will need...so [she] feel like the university should definitely invest more in that” (34:36). Therefore, universities maintain the stratification similar to large corporations in this modern capitalist system, where higher profits are the main incentives over the well-being of their student body.

Ultimately, the interview process and its analysis had allowed me to explore and learn the perspective of student workers who are balancing both full-time undergraduate studies and working a part-time job. To take financial responsibility by working while also stressing over several classes and co-curriculars is an extreme amount of load for anyone. However, the most common incentive to survive through their tight schedule is to deal with having to be overworked throughout their undergraduate career. In the conversations about the environment for underprivileged students, it seems as though there are indestructible forces that continue to push the working class towards the brink of survival. It is a contentious point of time to critique these systems and institutions that uphold unfair labor practices as well as unlawful policies enacted by corporate leaders, sustaining the ever-expanding stratification of differing social categories.

References

- Massey, Douglas. 2007. Chapter 1 “How Stratification Works?” (pp. 1–27). From *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Yates, Michael. 1998. Chapter 1 “Why Unions?” (pp. 8–23). From *Why Unions Matter*. Monthly Review Press.

Interview Guide

I will interview a student worker, who is a full-time undergraduate student that works part-time at her private university's bookstore as a retail associate. She works about 15 hours per week, with the minimum wage of \$15.25 per hour. I have chosen this person to interview because she had worked for her university's bookstore for more than half of her career as an undergraduate. With an extensive experience in working in this particular service-oriented labor at her campus, she has several valuable, detailed insights about her workplace and how it pertains to her role as a student and to the university's system around student workers.

For my research question, I will answer how student workers are exploited within their campus workplace environment, and if so, how it corresponds to the university's responsibility in a general sense. I will focus on three broader topics of working conditions, relationship between employer and employee, and the concept of stratification to develop each section of the interview questions. In my analysis, I will engage in the chapter readings' of *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System* by Douglas Massey, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* by Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, and *Why Unions Matter* by Michael Yates. I will conduct and record the interview through the Zoom platform.

Interview Guide

1. Warm-up: Briefly describe your typical day at work
 - a. What is your role/position? What does your job consist of doing? How do you start and end your day of work?

Section 1: Working conditions

2. Do you believe that the hours are reasonable, and that you are fairly compensated if you have worked overtime or during those days where there's a large traffic of

customers in the beginning of school year, before sports games, and so on? Elaborate why or why not?

- a. Do you feel overworked? Are the hours given manageable?
3. Generally, do you feel safe while working? How safe is your workplace, and can you describe any changes would you want to make towards having a safer workplace?
4. Similar to the previous question, what changes would you make to your working conditions in order for a better and comfortable workplace environment?

Section 2: Balance of power between employer and employee

5. Can you briefly describe your managers/bosses and your relationship with them?
6. Is your manager/boss receptive to your needs, providing a certain level of respect as a worker, or are they taking advantage of your availabilities and skills?
 - a. How flexible are they towards adjusting hours to your schedule? Do you feel they are pushing you to work more even though you personally don't want to?
7. How comfortable are you to approach your manager? Are there any barriers that makes you feel intimidated to approach and talk with them because they are at a position of power?

Section 3: Stratification

8. If you feel comfortable enough, can you explain the reason why you work part-time?
9. Do you think that the university does not provide enough benefits and accommodations for a student who works for the university and is a full-time student, especially a private university?

10. To close it off, what do you hope for your university to change in order for you to feel satisfied with your part-time job?

Transcription of interview

Section 1: Working conditions

00:00:09.670

Xinyi Yang: Okay. So briefly describe a typical day at work. What is your role, position, and what does your job consist of doing. How do you start and your day at work?

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Worker: Usually I go to work after all my classes during the week and I also go to work on the weekend, since no one wants to work Saturdays, I guess, so I'm a retail associate. I go there. I'm a cashier, so I hope people with their transactions. There's a lot of people that come at like to ask questions, so I help them with that. Sometimes I also pick up the calls and then customers ask me very interesting questions.

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Xinyi Yang: like, how do you end your day at work?

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Worker: I just work with that for a few hours, and by closing time we go through our like closing tasks, so sweep the floor, swifter the floor. Take out all the trash, and usually during our shift, the merchandise manager also brings out like quite a few boxes of clothing just to hang, so from that we also have a lot of boxes that we take out to recycling, and then they also want us to vacuum the floor. We do that. What else? We organize all the receipts. And then, yeah, basically, that's it. We just leave over that.

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Xinyi Yang: Okay, and you do. You sometimes start your day at work like do you do morning shifts and prepare sort of like the cashier and all that.

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Worker: Only on Saturdays. Saturdays I'm there from 10 to 5, and so we're opening. We have like the wall of snacks that we have to like. We put up the snacks, and there's all in plastic bins, so we open all the bins as well. Then for a morning they still want us to sweep. So we sweep, swifter. And there's not really much else to do in the morning. If there's, if the day before, there's a lot of people that came in and messed up our floor, then we go and like, clean up the merchandise and stuff, and put away things that people didn't want. And then Saturdays, unless there is a football game or the tour is usually pretty chill, so the merchandise manager brings up a lot of shit. Oh, sorry! Do we just hang all of that, or we re-price a lot of items that come in with the wrong price on it. But yeah.

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Xinyi Yang: okay. So that's cool that we warmed up with having to describe your work, how you start and end of the day. So now we're gonna talk about your working conditions in general so like, do you believe that the hours are reasonable, and that you're fairly compensated if you have worked overtime or like no during those days where, like it's like a large traffic of customers right like in the beginning of school

year, before sports game. It's like, do you think, like you're kind of fairly compensated for those, and like hours are pretty reasonable. You don't feel overworked and all.

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Worker: yeah, I do think that I am, I guess, like compensated well. Since I am just a cashier, I don't really do anything else other than like clean up the floor. There are times where I feel like I'm doing like a lot more than like I should. But that's just because I want to help out like the merchandise manager, and she's like alone. There's no one else helping her. She usually has, like 2-3 people helping her. But the company has cut hours, for some reason, like just these past 2 months. And out like the company is, they have like a lot of stores, but because our campus is like pretty rich, there's like a lot of students that come in and like, spend a lot of money and the amount of like worker hours that we get correlates exactly to how much money we make. And we make a lot of money, so like the amount of workers that we're allowed to have it doesn't matter, since, like we obviously have the money. But at every other, and also, like our store, is bigger. But everywhere else, there's, I guess they don't make enough money, but they have way too many like workers, so they also like they spend, so I guess they just spend too much on employees. So we have actually been penalized for it, and I've had my hours cut for the past like 2, 3 weeks. Which has not been great. Let me just say sucks. Sucks, because, like usually, I work 15 hours a week or something. But past week I've worked 3 hours.

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Xinyi Yang: Oh, I see. And, generally do you feel safe while working like how safe is your workplace?

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Worker: Hmm. I feel safe while working. I think, the last boss I had, he sucked. But here I have maybe like 5 different managers doing their different things, but they're all very chill. Yeah, and I joke around with them.

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Xinyi Yang: Okay, I see. So generally it's safe. But you wouldn't want to make any changes towards your workplace to make it like safer.

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Worker: Maybe, maybe chairs because I stand throughout my entire shift, and we're not allowed to sit down, and my legs are aching. It's so sore, man. My feet hurt, my legs hurt, and everything is cracking.

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Xinyi Yang: And so, because you generally work like around how many hours per day, like 5 h or

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Worker: I work, maybe like 4 h like during the week, like on like a single day during the week. I would like 4 h shifts. But on Saturday I'm there from 10 to 5 like that full shift. And we get like one 30 min break. But like just to stand for that rest of the entire shift. My legs hurt, and already one hours too much, you know. Because I'm a student. That means I'm always on my ass. I'm always sitting down. Yeah. you just like, you know, doing work on a computer. So I know, signing for like 4 h kind of feels like a lot

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Xinyi Yang: So similar to the previous question. Since, like you want to put chairs to make basically your workplace more comfortable. Is there any other changes you would like to make, or just like more breaks? Do you think a 30 min break is enough even for, like that long of a shift that you have to do on a weekend?

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Worker: I feel like the 30 min break is enough for me. Since, honestly, I don't do anything at like during my break. I just like it's not long enough for me to take out my homework and start like, start something. It's not or like it's our lunch break to go get lunch. I live off campus, and I don't have a meal, plan, or anything. So if I don't bring lunch, I don't have lunch either. So I'm kind of just I have like 30 min of like nothing to do where I'm not getting paid. I have to take this mandatory 30 min like break. So I'm just on my phone clicking around, going through my emails.

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Xinyi Yang: I think you would want to have more like a flexible like break time. Right?

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Worker: I can choose. Whenever I have a break you just you get a 6. Oh, no, you get a 30 min break every like 6 h shift that you have. So the only day I do get a 30 min break is on Saturdays. I don't get one during my other 2 shifts. Which is fine. I don't know what I would do during my 30 min like break, but all like it's just standing for a really long time throughout my shift. I think that was like more like painful. The break doesn't really help. I think most really comes to mind right now. Yeah.

Section 2: Employer and employee relationship

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Xinyi Yang: Okay. So then, after talking about your working conditions and what you like to change and all. We're gonna talk about you as a employee and your employer. So like your managers or your bosses. So can you briefly describe your managers and like what's your guys' relationship right? So like how cordial you are or and such.

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Worker: We have the big boss, who's in charge of the entire store, and like the one that usually talks to corporate and stuff. Then we have just like the general manager. He's in charge of like all like the employees and everything else that you know the big boss isn't in charge of. We have the textbook manager, who's like in charge of all like getting all the books that the faculty requests, and just like figuring all of that out with rentals and buy bags and stuff. Then we have the merchandise manager. She's in charge of like getting all the merchandise in order, for, like our school campus. And then we have the assistance general manager, who like looks over like everything that happens in the front. So basically, like with the employees and the cashiers and all of that. And he kind of also is in charge of, like all the transactions that happens if someone makes a mistake, and you know, charges someone too much or like too little. And then there's like returns that he's in charge of. And I think I have a pretty good relationship

with all my managers. They're all really chill, and they basically don't care as long as we do our work, which is great. We always talk about like what we did throughout like, the weekend or yeah.

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Xinyi Yang: So you have a pretty good relationship with your managers and your bosses, which is like kind of rare but to go into more in depth. Do you think they're sort of like receptive to your needs like? Do you think there's a level respect they give to you as like you know, under them. Or do you think you are taking advantage of your like availability and skills as like a worker? Because you said that, like you're certainly are more, I guess, like experience than other employees, and also like you're more, I guess, like skillful too.

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Worker: you know, it's been a little strange, because I usually apparently, as they've told me, the workers always change after like one semester, like they do one semester, and they don't come back for the second semester. This is my third semester, working like at my job. So since I'm always there, and I want more hours, they always take me to place like different places where they're like low on hands. So sometimes they take me to the back room to help with online orders, or they take me to like the front. So I can help with, like all the new temp cashiers that we're just hired at the beginning of the semester. Or they take me to the back back to like the manager's office. And then, like I start filing the shit, papers. Yeah. So at the beginning of the semester, it's kind of weird because I have like all the managers asking me to come with them to help them, since I'm the only one who's been there for just like one more semester and all the new hires they're all getting trained with like with cashiers. So yeah.

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Xinyi Yang: So do you think, like they're not necessarily taking advantage. You think it's reasonable that they're just like, oh, because your experience for like more than 2 semesters.

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Worker: They don't really take advantage of me. They always ask for my help. I don't know what would happen if I said no, I always say yes. But in the beginning I think we're always understaffed and like there's just like a stampede of all the new students and all of their parents who come in to buy merch by all the books they need, and just everything gets absolutely messed up in the store. It settles down after a few weeks. Yeah.

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Xinyi Yang: using like, maybe some of the big bosses should have manage it better during those days where it's like super hectic, like you know. Why can't you maybe organize these people into like? Maybe I don't know, like limit, the amount of people coming to the store, or something like that

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Worker: I don't think you can limit them out of people coming into this, because just like from the size of the campus, and we're like the only like store on campus. So everyone comes to our store, and even the managers are super overworked man like because from all the online orders that we get at the beginning of the semester. The big boss himself does not leave like it until like 5 in the morning because he's like

fulfilling orders by himself in the room, like in the back room alone. Or he gets there super early, like before everyone else, and it's just like packing orders for hours.

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Xinyi Yang: I see. So you guys are practically like under staff right? The university should have done better to provide more promotion to your guys bookstore, and like hiring workers and such, because it definitely does seem like the case here is always like you guys don't have enough workers.

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Worker: We do have a lot of workers in the beginning, when it's super busy. They hire a lot of people, maybe like 50, 60. When the entire class of fresh, like freshmen, are coming in with their parents. That's like hundreds and hundreds of people that we just can't keep up with, like there's not enough room in store for, like 50 employees alone, but just to imagine, like no wiggle room, with all the little like all the parents that are like 'you're a cashier, and they're like. Oh, my gosh! This is my son! He just got into the school, and now we have to buy the entire family merch and hoodies, and they buy like 20 hoodies. and it's like a 1,000 books.' And I'm like 'oh, that's great, sir.' But yes, I've also been at the school for 3 years. I can see that your son just got in. You don't have to tell me the full story. But I don't know. Sorry I got sidetracked

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Xinyi Yang: I see. So it's just like that. Small micro interaction with customers is sometimes a bit difficult to handle. Right? And then how flexible are your managers to towards like adjusting your hours to like your schedule. Do you think you feel like in some cases you're like I can't really go to work today, they're like kinda lenient.

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Worker: Well, I do this to myself. I keep asking for more for more hours, man. What is it? The manager that handle the hours last year, when I asked him for all the hours I wanted that I could like physically do within my schedule, with all like, you know, to balance like if I wasn't in class, then I would be at work, and I would ask for it all the hours I possibly could do. And he would be like, okay. And so I will get all those hours. And then this semester I've actually been like cut back because the assistant manager now like he was just hired this semester. and he's like 'Bro. I'm like scared for you, man, because you keep asking for more hours, and I don't think that like it's healthy for you.' And so he's actually like. If I needed any time off he would be like, yeah, sure, I'll find someone else. And he will give me the time off. But he also doesn't give me more hours. Not his fault. He's looking out for me. and also the company cut hours for just like everyone in the entire store. But yeah. I mean, I would always take more hours.

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Xinyi Yang: I see. And can you repeat again like why they cut hours.

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Worker: They cut hours because the full, like the company has many stores across, like you know, the country. Some campuses aren't as popular as ours or as rich as ours, so they don't make nearly enough like money. But they still hire like a lot of workers. So basically they said that other stores are abusing the amount of like employee hours that they can have, because that correlates to exactly how much money the

store is making itself. So because of that, our store is being penalized for it, saying that we also have too many working hours. But we make so much more money than any of the other campuses. So we're allowed to have as many employees as we want. It's not a problem. But yeah. And I don't know if they were abusing the amount of worker like workers that they had, or if it's just like the bare minimum number of employees that they could have, because if you think of like a 9 to 5, you know day for like 5 days in a row, and then like there's also Saturday that I don't know if the hours are the same. Ours is open from 10 to 5 on Saturdays, close Sundays. But if you have just like one employee working, all of that, I don't know how much like profit any of the other campuses we're making. I just know that ours spend so much money.

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Xinyi Yang: So your guys' bookstore basically makes too much, and they're like we need to cut your guys as hours. The company basically announced that

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Worker: No, ours was doing great. We had just the right amount of employees, and we were making a lot of profit for the company, but because all the other stores in the company isn't making enough money. They decide to cut the hours of our store. So, we actually are kind of like understaffed. But also can't do anything about it, because of, you know, just like the higher ups. Like my managers are fine. They're great, but the higher up said, we can have more workers because it's too expensive.

Section 3: Stratification

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Xinyi Yang: Oh, I see. So since you don't feel like your managers are pushing you to do more work, think it's like more of a personal motivation that you want to add on more hours. If you feel comfortable enough, can you explain, like the reason why you decide to work part time at a bookstore.

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Worker: Well, I pay for everything in college myself like coming to college. So college, you know, across the country for me. I have to pay for plane tickets for that. I have to pay for the tuition that isn't covered in my financial aid. And actually, no, I think my financial aid covers all of tuition I have to pay for housing that isn't included. Since I'm in my junior year. I have a kitchen, which means that the meal plan isn't included. So I have to go out and buy groceries myself. And then just like any other necessity that I need like fucking shampoo or something. I have to pay for, like everything else myself. My family cannot help me because we poor so that's why I need to go out and find myself my own job, which is great. I found a great job at the bookstore.

00:24:23.770

Xinyi Yang: So yeah, to basically, cover your housing, your basic necessities, bare minimum. Do you think like minimum wage would be enough to cover all that? Considering like you, hours are cut and you only get like \$15 like an hour.

00:24:45.080

Worker: well, I don't think it's enough because I'm like 15 is good but groceries so expensive. Just feeding myself already expensive, and then you get like random costs you don't know where it came from, but now you have something else you need to pay for. I have to buy plane tickets and plane tickets home just one way, and I was buying them early too I'm not buying them like 2 weeks before like I need to leave. I was buying them like back in September, they were for 500 bucks for like one way. It's getting like, you know, and it's like it's not even like a non-stop, have to take a stop somewhere. Oh, my God! It's gonna be so bad, but like to go back home and come back to campus for the spring semester, that's like I don't know 800, maybe 800, 1000. That's expensive. Groceries are expensive, and then, like the rest of what I need to pay for tuition. I don't think I'm making enough in the semester alone to pay for that.

00:26:06.440

Xinyi Yang: So like, then do you think that the University does not provide any like benefits and accommodation for a student like you who works for the university is a full time student like, especially a private university that's like you know, makes a lot of money right? Has, like a bunch of funding from like, you know legacies, and like all that. They should have at least like push someone who is in this specific like financial circumstance to provide a lot more benefits, right?

00:26:39.810

Worker: Yeah. I guess I am confused. I feel like the University could have definitely given me, like everything for like, from tuition all the way to housing and everything but there's that expectation that my parents are going to pay for like everything for me and like. Maybe that is like the case for other students. But it wasn't for me, it wasn't for actually a lot of my friends like my co-workers at the bookstore. I've become like really good friends with my coworkers, and we talk about why we are working at the bookstore or stuff like that, just like you know. It comes up, and a lot of us are actually paying for everything ourselves without our parents help. And it's just like sometimes, it's just like not enough. I think like the University also doesn't understand how much like a part-time job kind of drains you. There's like they have a lot of different part time jobs like on campus there's some like really good ones at the library, where you just like sitting at a desk, so you can do your homework. But for, like our job at the bookstore, like people in dining, they're always on their feet, and they always have to like, serve someone so and like you might not be doing much but just like continuously moving your body, you get so drained just like 1 h, and it's like mentally, physically drained. And after that not like we're still students. You still have to go to classes and do all of your like school work, and after that, like you still need to study for your classes. But like is with even like 4 hours out of your day going to work like that's 4 hours that you couldn't have done school work. But then you're also super drained and super tired that it's super hard to go just like go back into like studying.

00:29:00.390

Xinyi Yang: I see. So definitely the universities for the University that you go to probably doesn't understand a different arrays of like student workers out there, and, like some, have a normal desktop that's comfortable in your case, and like for you know, people who work in dining right. Other service workers. It's a lot to handle right, especially also taking a lot of credits as a student.

00:29:28.690

Worker: Yeah, I guess.

00:29:34.100

Xinyi Yang: Then to close it off. What do you hope for your universities change in order for you to feel satisfied with your part time job. Like, do you believe that you know tuition should definitely be cut less, considering, you know, your guys tuition is definitely, very much expensive. Or do you have any other like things I could think of.

00:30:01.260

Worker: Our tuition is crazy. It's like 86 K for the year, like not counting all the other stuff like a 100 K. A year or something. I don't know. Yeah, the University could definitely do something about it. I like submitting my tax returns. I'm like man. Look at this. I don't make it nearly enough to like pay for just like the one year. I don't know how you expect me to pay for 4. But I think the University just assumes that, like you'll just take out loans and do all of that. I can't take out loans, man. I guess I can take out loans. I don't want to take out loans because those just grow and I don't know when I'm ever gonna like pay them off. I'm like talking with my managers at the books, for they all went to college, too, and there's like I don't want to be mean, but they are kind of pretty old, and they still haven't paid off their loans. I don't know when I'm gonna ever pay off my loans because I have like a few loans which they call "financial aid". It's included that I'm going to have to pay off at some point. Yeah. Also, they like forced me to like buy their insurance. Their insurance is crazy expensive, and that's also not included in financial aid. So I have to pay for that as well. Yeah.

00:31:54.580

Xinyi Yang: So they should definitely like change how they order their system around financially aiding those who really need it right compared to like their expectation that most people we go to that school to have the parents pay for it, basically, you know.

00:32:14.970

Worker: Yeah, I think they just like put us in like groups of how much financial aid you need. But the people, you know, on the lower end of the spectrum, I don't think they understand how much more we need. Because it's not like just the amount of money, but it's like also kind of like the stress of having to like pay that off. We're always stressed always over work. There's no time to rest, but you still have to do all of your classes. And then there's people in fucking business, majors that. Sorry I'm sorry, but let me tell you they don't do much, and they're always out, spending Daddy's money. Oh, my gosh! Sorry

00:33:08.960

Xinyi Yang: if I so obviously there is some sort of disparity in like the general student body and like, since you guys are the minorities, the University then tends to feel like oh, we could just like push you aside sort of way. It's not like you guys are the majority you can like, you know gang up on us. You know it's easy enough to just be like, well, here's what it is, and like you just had to like, do with it within these 4 years that you have.

00:33:40.900

Worker: Yeah, I guess because you just, in fact, just deal with it. There's like nothing else you can really do

00:33:51.770

Xinyi Yang: The University itself does not provide enough kind of like opportunities for you guys to just like, you know. Here's some of these programs that you guys can be in that helps you in your financial circumstance, right? Because definitely, there are some universities out there, they have, like these like programs for, like those who are in need, they can, you know, apply for it, and then they get some certain benefits and accommodations. I feel like it's not promoted enough in your university, because most people are all off there right. It should be something like that that can as of help. Do you believe that, or like? Do you feel like that should be the case?

00:34:36.030

Worker: Yeah, I guess we do have one called, like [redacted university's program], were they're supposed to help all the I guess like under privilege students. But even they don't have enough money. There's a few things that you can request like the cost for textbooks, flights back home. Or I think we're also allowed to request for groceries. But every time I have requested, they can't provide for, like all of it like I will need. I sometimes like first semester. I think maybe I need like 5 books, but they'll only be able to pay for like 2, and the flights back home is also so expensive that they can only pay for like one way or part of going one way, and then, like I need to pay for the rest of that. And it's not just me. There's just like so many other students within, like [redacted university's program]. So I feel like the university should definitely invest more in that. I don't even know if, like the money comes from like mainly comes from the school, or if it comes from like outside sources like.

00:36:16.290

Xinyi Yang: okay, I see. So you do definitely have opinions about university making your situation more better than it is, and to close it off again was like, in general, your opinion about like how you are satisfied with your work, and like the university like, do you think, those changes is sort of like necessary at the moment? Or do you feel like, because, like at this point, you've been here for like more than you know, 2 years now at this point, is this still like not enough to handle what's going on?

00:37:05.760

Worker: No changes like always necessary. You could always help more people. There's always going to be people that are like for struggling and need more help. Some of them, like don't even know that they need to help that sure. So yeah, they could do more in finding these students before, like they get burnt out and like, go down a hole. So like if they changed and they like, help me pay for my tuition. That would like take a load off on my mind. But I don't think that it's like gonna happen anytime soon like there's like survey set out every year of like—What can we do as a school to help you? You know nothing changes, nothing changes every year. The tuition has just gone up. Every single year. The housing has gone up every single year. Everything is just getting so much more extensive. You kind of just have to deal with it. I've already dealt with it for like 2 years. This is my fifth semester here, so I'll be fine. I'll survive. You're just dealing with it. I'll survive, but it's not the best thing

00:38:34.100

Xinyi Yang: I see. So thank you for doing this interview. I think those are all the questions I need to ask. and I'll stop recording.

00:38:51.520

Worker: Okay, Thank you.