

Young Adults and the Consequences of Precarious Work

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ABSTRACT

Despite the appearance of affluence attained by the community's economic growth, the prevalence of service sector jobs have altered the employment structure of South County. Within this thesis, it is my purpose to answer two questions. First, how are young adults limited in their economic security due to precarious work? Second, how has precarious work disempowered young adults and altered their ability to respond to their immiseration? In order to answer these questions I conduct qualitative interviews with young adults within a region of Hillsborough County, Florida. These interviews help me elaborate on young adults and their experiences with precarious employment.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, a variety of demographics have been exposed to precarious work (Kalleberg, 2009, 2012; ILO, 2011; ESOPE, 2004; Vosko, 2000, 2010). While scholars have made great attempts to understand insecure, uncertain, and unstable jobs as a result of shifts in the global economy, less understood, as Furlong (2009) states, “is the significance of precarious work for young people under these changed conditions.” Young adults in the beginning stages of their adulthood often find employment at corporations that utilize forms of precarious employment. This raises the question of how young adults are altered in their trajectories because of the insecurity and uncertainty associated with precarious employment.

While there has been an increasing amount of literature on precarious work, the problem is that research on the experiences of young adults in the US is limited and has yet to address their disempowerment. It is necessary for sociological literature to take into account where the concerns for young adults fit into the discussion of working lives. Building off prior research, the purpose of this thesis is to add to sociological literature a case study of the hardships of young adults that experience precarious employment. It is my objective to answer two questions. First, how are young adults limited in their economic security due to precarious work? Second, how has precarious work disempowered young adults and altered their ability to respond to their immiseration?

Summary of Findings

First, I discuss young adult experiences of precarious employment within a region known as South County. Young adults employed at chain corporations in service sector jobs are limited in their resources and opportunities due to the conditions of precarious employment. These conditions (part-time, low wage, low benefit, high turnover, low training, etc...) eventually limit the ability of young adults to achieve greater material security and social well-being.

All of those that I interviewed had experienced temporary periods in and out of employment and unemployment. When they were employed, they were usually underemployed due to their part-time status and in need of additional sources of income. Due to this lack of income, they came to rely on other sources of assistance, including government, family, and friends. Of their struggles with employment, they were also highly restricted in their living situations. For some, their reliance on others became a burden and that their work left them feeling dehumanized. For others, they desire to move away or find alternative meanings to life.

Second, I discuss the powerlessness of young adults in the face of their struggles. For some young adults that live in South County, their working lives diverge from their expected paths of affluence due to the shift towards precarious employment. This ultimately leads to not only a lack of material security, but also to feelings of powerlessness. This is one respondent's, Josh, experience of precarity. His insecurity is caused by his inability to obtain what he perceives to be the normal way of life. Though he perceives this to be due to his own inability, it is rather due to the changing sociohistorical

circumstances that have diminished the ability for young adults to obtain a living from employment. The precarious conditions of work have altered his ability to achieve a more affluent lifestyle, all while achieving the goals of past generations are still expected of him.

Theory and Previous Literature

The term ‘precarious’, and its many variations such as precariousness and precarity, has in the last few decades become a popular term among academics and policy makers. The term grew to popularity in Europe, and, recently, in North America (Barbier, 2002). The term precarious is synonymous with insecurity, uncertainty, and instability.

While many researchers credit Pierre Bourdieu (1999) with popularizing the term, others attribute the term to earlier scholars. Jonna and Foster (2016) suggest that the term can be attributed to Friedrich Engel’s piece on *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Both Bourdieu and Engels relate the concept of precariousness with the emergence of a reserve army of labor and emphasizing the historical role of capital in alienating workers from themselves and their communities.

The US experienced a period of post-war growth that has altered these conditions to a certain degree. State policies focusing on welfare and full employment grew with the rising economic prosperity of the period. This period was remarked by John Galbraith as an “affluent society” (19858). Galbraith focused on the growth of affluent suburbs and increasing standards of living attributed improving employment relations.

However, this “affluent society” is not without social problems. As Galbraith points out, despite the increasing wealth in the private sector, the lack of wealth within the public

sector resulted in crumbling infrastructure and a perpetuation of economic disparities. In addition, corporations had emerged as central actors within the affluent society and they are also the main beneficiaries of wealth created. By the end of his life, Galbraith had become one of the last remaining proponents of planned economies against the reemergence of liberal economic ideals.

In reading Galbraith, the reader is reminded that wealth is a social relationship, rather than just an abundance of possessions. In this sense, we can view wealth inequality as being more than just disparities in incomes, but also as creating social relations that perpetuate disparities. The story within this thesis is of young workers that stand in contrast to the affluence of their surrounding communities. Those that live precarious lives serve the affluence lifestyles of others just to make ends meet.

The concept of ‘precarious employment’ has become prominent in response to the restructuring of the global economy and labor markets. Father Joseph Wrezinski in a 1987 report, *Great Poverty and Socio-Economic Precariousness*, defined precariousness as:

The lack of one or more sources of security that allow individuals and their families to endorse their elementary responsibilities and enjoy their fundamental rights. The resulting insecurity can be more or less important and have more or less acute and irreversible consequences. It leads most of the time to significant poverty and when it affects several aspects of existence and tends to prolong itself in time and become persistent, it reduces the opportunity for someone to get their rights back and endorse responsibilities for themselves in the future. (Nativel, 2011:1)

Father Joesph's definition is important because it touches on an issue that is vital to understanding the rise of precarious employment. This is the issue of *security*. His definition emphasizes an increase in insecurity for workers, which alters their standard of living for extended periods of time.

A European Commission project, ESOPE, defines precarious employment as “a variety of forms of employment...established below the socially accepted normative standards...in one or more respects...which results from an unbalanced distribution towards and amongst workers...of the insecurity and risks typically attached to economic life in general and to the labour market in particular (ESOPE, 2004:9).” ESOPE's definition is important because, in addition to its emphasis on insecurity, it also emphasizes a *normative* dimension of employment.

Scholars that have studied precarious employment often emphasize the role of the normative model of employment that became the standard of Post-War America (Kalleberg, 2009; 2012, Vosko 2010; ILO, 2011). These scholars point towards the Post-War era, when government, business, and unions established a ‘standard of employment’ (SER). This standard was based on various agreements regarding wages, daily and weekly work times, duration of employment, and benefits; all which provided a sense of security and certainty in workers' lives. The SER can be read as a standardization of the employment relationship between employers and employees. This relationship was idealized through the principles of scientific management in Fordist business strategies and Keynesian social policy (Kalleberg, 2009).

In the US, as in other nations, this SER created regulations that characterized employment relationships. They, however, were extended primarily to certain demographics. Core industries of the post-war economy were dominated by white males, which in turn led to a failure of inclusion into the SER for females and other minorities. As Vosko (2000) shows, in Canada, the Temporary Help Industry flew under the radar of public policy because these jobs were characterized as voluntary jobs for housewives.

There has been a change from the normative model of America's Post-WWII 'tripartite' (Kalleberg, 2009). The emergence of forms of precarious employment coincides with these shifts in the US economy. As Kalleberg (2000) states, a majority of the rise of nonstandard employment can be attributed to the increase in new industries.

The service sector has become the most predominant industry within the US economy. Since the 1960s, the service sector has risen dramatically. The service sector is composed of several industries, but most important to this thesis are "low skill" retail and food and accommodation services. These industries are dominated by the influence of chain corporations that are known for business strategies that utilize forms of precarious employment.

With shifts occurring in the global economy, businesses found that they could no longer maintain the rigid, standardized forms of employment of the post-war era. They instead sought flexibility that allowed them to adapt their labor to the fluctuations in global markets. This flexibility allowed them to schedule shifts around peak hours and to hire and fire workers "just in time" for seasonal shifts. This high turnover left many businesses

with little incentive to offer training to employees, which in turn limited career ladders for those employees.

There has also been a trend in the casualization of work. This refers to the emergence of temporary and part-time work. The involuntary nature of some of this work is important as not all part-time positions are necessarily precarious. For some, part-time and low wage work may be a choice. However, for others it is often the only option among limited choice. For young adults, underemployment in part-time work is often the standard regardless of their need for full-time work.

Recently, the US Census Bureau (2016) released a new interactive feature, *Young Adults: Then and Now*, which allows viewers to view data that show how young adults compare to previous generations. At the national level there have been several changes. First, one in seven of young adults in 1980 lived in poverty, where as in 2014 there has been an increase as one-fifth of young adults now live in poverty. Secondly, young adult employment has decreased slightly from sixty-nine percent in 1980 to sixty-five percent in 2014. Third, despite an increase in poverty and a decrease in employment, twenty-two percent of young adults in 2014 have a college degree, whereas only sixteen percent had a college degree in 1980. Finally, there has also been a delay in marriage by young adults, as only three in ten were married in 2014 compared to six in ten in 1980.

At the metro-level, for Tampa-St.Pete-Clearwater, the general area of my study, there have also been changes. Employed young adults at the metro-level have decreased from seventy-five percent in 1980 to sixty-five percent in 2014. There has been an increase in Bachelor's degree attainment from fifteen percent in 1980 to twenty percent in 2014.

This is slightly lower than the 2014 national average of twenty-two percent. There has been an increase in young adults living in poverty from fifteen percent in 1980 to nineteen percent in 2014. There has been an increase in young adults living with their parents from twenty-two percent in 1980 to thirty-two percent in 2014. This is higher than the national average. Finally, there has been an increase in young adults that have never been married from forty percent in 1980 to sixty-five percent in 2014. This is also higher than the national average.

These findings show that the conditions for young adults have changed since the 1980s. Despite obtaining higher level of educations, young adults are increasingly living in disadvantaged conditions. They are living with their parents longer and are delaying marriage. What is not shown is these statistics; however, is the type of work that young adults are employed in. Undoubtedly, many young adults employed at precarious workplaces are living out these trends demonstrated by this Census data.

Precarious Employment and Young Adults

Young adults in the early stages of their career are among the most common to experience precarious conditions (Bradley, 2005, 2008; McDowell, 2010; Newmann, 1999; Willis, 1977). Researchers have associated the prevalence of young adults' employment instability due to their employment in service sector corporations (Tannock, 2001; ILO, 2011). These positions are portrayed as entry level jobs for teenagers (Wal-Mart, 2013), yet many of these individuals are past their teen years and even further past their entry years in the labor market. This history of employment often reinforces the marginalization of these young adults as these forms of employment offer little credential

for a career with promotions. These individuals can then become trapped in a cycle of periodic employment and unemployment, which becomes detrimental to their material and social well-being.

Young adults are expected to achieve a certain material security, yet their precarious working situation has cut them off from the ability to achieve basic needs. The transition into adulthood is viewed as a temporary period of development; yet economic insecurity has prolonged this (Bradley and Devadason, 2008). They also experience temporary periods of stability and transition through a variety of these forms of precarious employment (Glauber, 2013). Young adults employed in low service jobs come to rely on various sources of security including government, family, second jobs, and/or informal means (Newman, 1999).

Precarious Employment, Young Adults, and Powerlessness

At the heart of this conversation of precarious employment and its effects on young adults, I believe there is utility in a concept that has been crucial to the history of sociology. This concept, ‘power’, has been defined in numerous ways. Researchers will benefit from understanding dimensions of power in relation to precarious employment for young adults.

Steven Lukes took great lengths to summarize the history of how scholars have conceptualized power. Lukes summarizes the one-dimensional view of power as involving “...a focus on *behavior* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed

by political participation (2004:19, emphasis in original).” In this view an individual holds power over another through their ability to alter policy.

Lukes summarizes the two-dimensional view of power as “...a *qualified critique* of the *behavioral focus* of the first view...and it allows for a consideration of the ways in which *decisions* are prevented from being taken on *potential* issues over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as embodied in express policy preferences and sub-political grievances (2004: 25, emphasis in original).” While recognizing the advancement of the second view he goes on to state several disadvantages of both the first and second dimension. Lukes critiques these views as following a pluralist notion of a methodologically individualist view of power. For Lukes, “...the bias of the system is not sustained simply by a series of individually chosen acts, but also, most importantly, by the socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals’ *inaction* (2004: 26, emphasis is mine).”

Lukes believes these prior views to be inadequate because they associate power with observable conflict. For prior theorists, power is only visible if there is actually conflict taking place; those that triumph in the conflict are seen as more powerful. Related to this critique of observable conflict is these prior theorists’ reliance on actual, articulated grievances by marginalized individuals. Lukes goes on to say, “...the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place (2004: 27).” Lukes concludes his critique by stating, “...is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people...from having grievance by shaping their perceptions,

cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural or unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (2004: 28).”

He then extends our understanding of power by introducing his own concept of ‘the third dimension of power’. This third dimension is a response to the failures of previous scholars who have failed to account for the beliefs and desires held by societies and their ability to perpetuate inequalities. Lukes defines the ‘third dimension of power’ as “the capacity to secure compliance to domination through the shaping of beliefs and desires, by imposing internal constraints under historically changing circumstances (2004: 143-4).”

Often, young adults are told that their precarious work situation is just a phase. For this reason, individuals still have hope that their immiseration is temporary. Furlong (2009) attributes this to the ‘stepping stone thesis’, which sees precariousness as part of a natural dynamic of youth transition into the workforce. This is a common notion that is popular in life course and aging studies. Lukes enables us to critique this natural dynamic. Rather than being outsiders to the labor force, young adults provide a constant replacement of workers that perform entry level jobs. Often, they are unable to transition out of these conditions without other forms of assistance.

Rather than rely on some conception of “nature” as a referent; researchers, such as Vosko and Kalleberg, have emphasized the role of normative standards in employment relationships. While scholars of precarious work are yet to address the issue of power, literature on implicitly implies some notion of power. Lukes’ third-dimension of power

serves literature on precarious employment because essentially he asks “...for an account of the material and social circumstances that must obtain to enable people to live lives that meet certain normative standards (2004: 117).”

Precarious work marginalizes young workers in such a way that they are unable to meet the normative standards of their communities. In being unable to explain their own immiseration, young adults find themselves powerless in the face of their struggle. Instead of looking at the socio-historical circumstances, they instead turn inwards and blame themselves and their own lack of ability to achieve their desires.

Methodology

This thesis is a case study of the impact of precarious work on young adults living in southern Hillsborough County, Florida. I use qualitative interviews with twelve young adults and an interview with a retail Store Manager to answer two questions. First, how are young adults limited in their economic security due to precarious work? Second, how has the characterization of precarious work disempowered young adults and altered their ability to respond to their immiseration?

Researchers have elaborated on the issues common to fieldwork, such as gaining entry and access, interviewing, the role of the researcher, how to record data with field notes, and the politics of researchers (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Fetterman, 2010; Emerson et al., 1995; Shefner and Gay, 2002). I have used these resources as guides, but they are often less useful when in the real world situations of fieldwork. In this sense, fieldwork is a learning process in which the researcher should go into the field prepared

with an understanding of what he/she is studying, but must be willing to adapt their understandings once confronted with actual experience.

Participant Selection

The individuals that make up this study are young adults in their early 20s to early 30s with the majority of their employment in the service sector. They have lived in South County for many years and have witnessed the changing landscape of their communities. The data on individual experiences consists of twelve semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately one hour each. A snowball sample was used with the first participant, David, helping me recruit other participants. Interviews were done at the homes of those interviewed. All participants were asked to sign a confidential IRB consent form and were informed that they were not obligated to continue.

Case Study Site and Topic

Employment is a central aspect of life in America, and for this reason it is essential we gain an understanding of the impacts of changing forms of work. The frequency of forms of precarious employment must be understood to differ in various sectors (ESOPE, 2004). Despite the appearance of affluence attained by the community's economic growth, the prevalence of service sector jobs have altered the employment structure of South County. Within this urban growth of South County, service sector chain corporations have emerged as central actors. The wealth of these chain corporations is often held by those outside of the community. Those residents of the community that find employment at these corporations are rarely afforded a share in this wealth.



Fig. 1 Site of Research Source: planhillsborough.org

The site of this study is the mainly rural region in southern Hillsborough County that is transforming into an urban area. This region, South County, is one of the last few rural areas within the county as corporate developers and local officials have expanded the growth to the extent of the county line (see Figure 1). Within South County opportunities for employment are often limited. Instead, young adults commonly find work at chain corporations that utilize forms of precarious employment.

Site Selection

Often, it is emphasized by researchers to ‘start where you are’ (Lofland et al., 2006). In this vein I determined the best option for my research site would be what I knew.

I chose South County because it is the place that I grew up; for more than a decade I have watched old, abandoned pastures turn into subdivisions and shopping malls. My parents first moved to Riverview in 1993. After moving away for a few years our family moved back in 2000. I lived there until I moved away to college in 2011.

Before moving away to graduate school and beginning this research, I also had a brief stint back in Riverview after I graduated college in 2013 when I stayed with one of the individuals that participated in this study, and also worked at another friend's family's restaurant. I mention this in gratitude for those who have helped me personally; as well as an example of the informal networks many individuals come to rely on in times of need.

This informant, David, was the original link to many of the other participants in this study. These acquaintances are family, friends, and coworkers that David asked to participate in my research project in hopes to elaborate on their hardships related to their precarious work.

I also picked this site because it exemplified a specific problem that I felt had larger structural determinants. While I have eventually gone off to college, how have so many of the people I grew up with become stuck even while the urban affluence around them grew?

It is important to note that I had moved away. Even though from the outset I had planned to study "where I was", I would soon learn that I had returned home from college with new sets of skills that separated me from people I'd known.

This epiphany came while I was interviewing a friend I have known for a long time. I arrived to interview with a notebook, tape recorder, and IRB consent form; all

which at first presented no problems. However, it was in my actions of jotting notes, starting to record, and getting him to sign his consent that the situation changed. As the interview proceeded I could see him sitting way too stiffly in his chair and speaking in some altered voice that was far more articulate than his usual everyday conversation. At one moment, one of his animals was rustling around in some plastic bags; I could see he wanted to get up and check it out, but instead he clung tight to his chair while paying half attention to the interview.

I mention this experience not to say that we should not study our own locales, but that we should be aware of our own presence on the research conditions. Researchers should not be naive enough to enter the field and believe that we are always starting in the same spot we left. The purpose of fieldwork is to illuminate the structural causes of inequalities; some of which may be exerted through the researcher.

These are the insights that a researcher with a certain ‘social proximity’ to their locale can understand. Bourdieu (1996) discussed this as the researcher having knowledge of the particular social and cultural histories of their research location. I have gathered this proximity over many years of living in South County; yet when I returned to do this research, I was not entirely the same person I was when I had left.

The prevalence of the chain corporations has created a predictable pattern of growth that is increasingly becoming visible within South County. South County’s growth resembles other local cities within Hillsborough County such as Brandon and Bloomingdale. Traveling through Hillsborough County one can find a Wal-Mart and a Publix every ten miles. At every intersection, one can find a 7-11 and a Wawa; a CVS and

Walgreens; a McDonalds and a Subway. These are all chain corporations that have found the region as a place suitable for their services due to the area's affluent, consumerist lifestyle.

As these chain corporations change the physical landscape of the community, they become key actors in the decision making policies that have taken place within the region. The success of these corporations, however, has yet to trickle down to their workers within the community. Often, in pursuit of favorable metrics of sales and profit, these corporations use strategies that ultimately result in precarious employment for those within the community.

Structure of Thesis

The remaining chapters of this thesis are as follows. In Chapter two I discuss the working lives of young adults that experience precarious employment. Despite the economic growth within their community, they actually receive very little of the wealth that is created. I discuss the practices of chain corporations and, in an interview with a former Store Manager at a retail chain, I discuss how employers perceive their role in the community. I conclude the chapter discussing the experiences of several young adults that have been employed at various chain corporations. In Chapter Three, I discuss the contradictory positions of young adults in relation to the affluence of their community. Ultimately, the powerlessness associated with precarious employment relates to the inability of young adults to achieve the normative standards of their community. I conclude the chapter in a comparison of two young adults, Josh and Robyn, and their experiences with the loss of normativity. Finally, in Chapter Four, I conclude this thesis.

CHAPTER II: THE WORKING LIVES OF YOUNG ADULTS IN SOUTH COUNTY

Just seven years after the stagnation of the 2008 recession, you can drive around the periphery of metropolitan Tampa and see the resurgence of economic growth. Standing in the face of the ever-expanding urban territory, residents of Riverview were attempting to organize a petition to ‘Save Riverview’. Residents were aggrieved by the inability of local officials to contain the reemerging growth in a responsible manner. The residents felt as if these officials had learned little from the recession.

Additionally, there were concerns voiced by residents that their suggestions were not taken in to consideration by officials. They were witnesses to the changes occurring within their community, but they had far less participation in the decision making process. Those involved with the ‘Save Riverview’ petition now realized this economic growth grew at the expense of their community rather than providing them with higher standards of living.

Riverview is one of eight unincorporated cities on the southeastern outskirts of Hillsborough County in an area known as South County. Previously several rural, unincorporated cities, the area is transitioning in its relation to the global economy through a county-level implemented ‘system wide area plan’. As local landowners sold their lands to developers, subdivisions and shopping malls sprawled into previously rural territories. The renaming of the area, from South County to South Shore, is representative of this transition of South County’s rural landscape into a global, urban community. This

transition is led by the shift of the economic basis of South County from extraction and agriculture towards service based industries.

South County was first settled in the late 1880s. Railroads connected the area allowing communities to begin extracting turpentine from oak trees. By the mid-1900s, much of the area had been transformed to farmland for agriculture, aquaculture, and cattle. Other areas were mined for phosphates. By the 1980s, however, the area started to see dramatic transition in its economic growth. As the metropolitan area of Tampa grew, the previous rural communities began to be overrun with the development of new suburbs. Since 2000s a large amount of chain corporations have started to build in the area to service their consumption.

South County is an increasingly urbanizing area composed of several unincorporated cities that share an agreement for development of the region and coordinated by loosely-related organizations, such as the Planning Commission, Board of County Commissioners, and the Chamber of Commerce (Hillsborough County, 2008). With an estimated population of 180,000, with 80,000 housing units, the area has seen dramatic growth since 1970. For example, Riverview, one of the six unincorporated cities that make up South County, went from a population of 6,000 in 1990 to a population of 71,000 in 2010.

The area is zoned for mixed-use as large residential areas are intertwined to local commercial areas. It consists of large residential areas divided into subdivisions. The development of the area has been fragmented throughout the years. Within each individual

unincorporated city, residential areas offer an array of different lifestyles built in different decades and populated by different demographics of people.

The commercial activity in South County also consists of an array of functions. Gibsonton has a local population who provide for themselves in the show business, traveling across the country running fairs and carnivals. Agriculture is plentiful, especially in Ruskin and Wimauma. These still highly rural areas are filled with large farms dedicated to strawberries and tomatoes. There are also large groves of citrus and palm tree farms that sell varieties of native and non-native plants. Residents also rely on industries, on smaller farming operations, such as aquaculture. While several large corporations, such as Mosaic, mine phosphates.

The largest industry in the area is health, education, and social services followed by the retail and the accommodation and food services. About 13% of the South County's total population works in retail and another 10% in accommodation and food Services (Census, 2016). Chain corporations dominate these industries. The area is typical in its characteristics of sprawl with development driven by new subdivisions and large shopping centers inhabited by popular name-brand chains of retailers, restaurants, and banks.

Within South County there is a story about the individuals who work and live in the community. These individuals experience the real consequences of the precarious employment tied to the growth of low-end service based work. This thesis is a story about their pursuit for meaningful employment that provides them with their desired standards of living. This pursuit, however, is restricted by access to resources and better opportunity for advancement. Opportunities are most prevalent at service sector chain corporations. The

pursuit of employment is then entangled with the objectives of these corporations; a relationship which is often contradictory.

Often chain corporations in service industries find young adults among the most desirable workers within the labor market. These jobs are seen as “good” for young workers, yet many of these workers get stuck within these jobs long past their youth. Even though these young workers are among the most marginalized by the service industries of chain corporations; they have no ability to offer a reaction. Their voice was, consequently, lost by their silence. Their marginalization is attributed to the bad decisions and lack of self-reflection on the individual’s part, rather than the practices of precarious employment used by chain corporations.

In this chapter, I discuss the working lives of young adults that experience precarious employment. Despite the economic growth within their community, they actually receive very little of the wealth that is created. I discuss the practices of chain corporations through an interview with a former Store Manager at a retail chain. I conclude the chapter discussing the experiences of several young adults that have been employed at various chain corporations.

Practice of Precarious Employment

The reemergence of subdivisions and retail space with South County shows that the 2008 recession was only a temporary speed bump in terms of the economic development of the community. Chain corporations often thrive during periods of economic downturn

due to their focus on low-prices for cash-short customers. As Roger, a former store manager, states:

I think Wal-Mart probably benefitted in the short-term on that because people were scared and they wanted to save money. So, you know, Wal-Mart is really a price leader. So, it probably helped in the short-term...I think the 2008 mini-recession or whatever you want to call it probably helped them in the long-term in terms of sales.

Roger makes no hesitation to call the recession a 'mini-recession', regardless of the implications it had on the store's wider community. As a manager, Roger knew how the recession helped retailers like Wal-Mart obtain their goals. They see opportunity in the fear of those who experience the true dangers of the economic downturns. Roger recognized that these were families that were 'scared' for their well-being. He recognizes that Wal-Mart is in the best position, as an industry 'price leader', to capitalize on the fear of those that are in need of a bargain.

Roger's mentality towards his employees was impersonal. Store managers are often middle men within a larger hierarchy that are unable to make decisions on their own. The Human Resources Office dictates the maximum amount of full-time employees at 'sixty-percent'. Wages are determined by the Home Office 'based upon competitors in the local area'. Each individual employee, or 'associate' as they are referred to by retailers like Wal-Mart, then gets an 'experience grade' which gets capped at 'three points'. The unfortunate reality is that 'competitors' offer wages similar to Roger's store and just as little 'experience' for better opportunities.

The District Office also sends along a monthly budget that dictates the funds allotted each month for wages. At the end of the day the Store Manager's greatest responsibility is towards the Profit and Loss Statement; as Roger said, "with the top line being sales and the bottom line being profit." Everything else in between is 'expenses' split in to two categories; "You have some that are controllable and some that are non-controllable."

Many of the employees are expendable and lead to high-turnover rates and little training. Very little is given to those that fill these positions and even less when the employee receives only part-time hours. The differences in full-time and part-time work are most characteristic in the examination of benefits. As Roger states:

The wages don't really change, because that's a base rate when you start. That's not really based on full-time, part-time; it's based on position. So, wages itself is based on position. You can be a part-timer, in a position, you're gonna get the same as a full-timer is gonna get. What changes is the benefits.

Following a recent trend taken by other corporations in the industry, in 2011, Wal-Mart eliminated health insurance for employees working fewer than twenty-four hours per week. Then in January 2015, Wal-Mart eliminated health insurance for employees working fewer than thirty hours (Business Insider, 2014). As these employees lose health coverage through their employers they are forced to look for other means in order to be covered. Individuals can stay on their parents' insurance until age twenty-six; afterwards they come to rely on governmental and non-profit assistance, or even go without. This policy is

typical of trends in the low-wage labor market. Essential, Wal-Mart's business model relies on the centralization of business decisions made at Wal-Mart's headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas. This decision making emphasizes cost controlling mechanisms which reduce wages and benefits to the lowest competitive level (Gereffi and Christian, 2009; George and Wilson, 2004; Ortega, 2008).

These corporations utilize strategies that are generalizable to most industries in the global economy. Since the 1980s there has been a remarkable turn towards "flexible capitalism" (Sennett, 1998). This new regime of capital sought to shed its old standardized rigidities of the Fordist model of production. Flexibility enabled corporations to respond to business cycles and changes in markets, especially by limiting employee wages and benefits. Coupled with an attack on the old bureaucratic structures of government as being inefficient, corporations were able to shift the risk of insecurity back on to the lives of workers.

Young Adult Experiences of Precarious Work

The relationship between security and work is diminishing. These young adults have been marginalized by the practices of precarious employment. For these young adults, employment is usually 'short-lived' as they experience transitions in and out of employment and unemployment. Reemployment often comes at another name-brand chain that follows similar practices. Individuals then have a long resume that lacks any credential for advancement at corporations that offer a fair wage. Opportunities for advancement are slight and the jobs that are available rely on resources that are out of reach of these individuals' current standards of living.

Many of the individuals in this study entered in to the workforce around 2008 during a period of recession. Tampa reached its peak jobs level in the 3rd quarter of 2006 and hit its low in the 1st quarter of 2010. Currently, the US population of involuntary part-time workers ‘for economic reasons’ totals around seven million people (BLS, 2014). Despite the need for full time employment many of them were limited to involuntary part-time work.

David lost jobs at both a sandwich shop and a pizza shop after the stores closed down. Often, this happened on a moment’s notice:

I showed up to work and they – and he was cleaning out the shop. I called him three days beforehand to make sure he still needed me in on that day, and, uh, I show up and he’s just decided to give-in, to just throw-in the towel and give up.

Obviously, it must be hard to plan for a situation like this, even if David and the owner had prior concerns that the store would be shutting down. The owner just days prior had been sure that his store would be open; yet, he decided to ‘just throw-in the towel’. A reference to a popular phrase in boxing in which a fighter’s corner stops the fight because their fighter has taken too much of a beating and cannot, and should not, continue. David, then, had to suffer the repercussions and went back on governmental unemployment assistance.

Recently, Chad, a twenty-eight year old I interviewed, was fired from his job at a retailer. In need of money he desperately sought the need of unemployment insurance.

However, like many precarious workers, he lacks the representation and the knowledge needed to navigate the unemployment process.

Chad states that there was supposed to be a three-way call between him, a company representative, and an unemployment representative to discuss his claim for unemployment benefits. He had already been out of work for two weeks and his wife, Heather, had just recently lost her job at the same employer. He sat by his phone waiting anxiously for the call from the unemployment representative, which he received about half an hour after the scheduled time. Unfortunately, the unemployment representative informed Chad of some bad news.

Chad had spoken to the company representative a week beforehand to make sure that he had everything submitted and set-up. The representative told him “everything was good.” However, during the call between Chad and the unemployment representative, Chad was told he failed to submit “a certain document,” and that the unemployment office would not take his case any further. He tried to contact the company representative again, but has been unable to get a hold of him.

Chad is now in limbo about what to do next. He has sought advice from his former co-workers on how to manage his way through the process, yet even they offer little advice on what to do next. Chad remains unemployed and the stress is weighing heavily.

If the recession was just a speed bump in terms of the economic development of the community, the same can't be said in terms of the individual experience of the downturn. What opportunities are now available for their advancement? Certainly, this lack of

mobility takes its toll on any perceived dream of advancement. The practices of precarious employment leave many individuals without work that will allow them to sustain the beliefs and desires they have become accustomed to. For those individuals with little education and training - and even for some of those with - the opportunities available for work follow a typical trend of low-wage, part-time positions, as mobility in to other industries with better pay and more prestige is limited.

David referenced his time at an automobile auctioneer as his only “good job”. This job offered full-time hours, “time and a half pay on the weekends,” as well as health and dental insurance. Despite this temporary opportunity the rest of his work experience since his first job at sixteen has involved name-brand retailers and restaurants, including working for “PetSmart and Wal-Mart twice.”

Matt graduated high school at seventeen and quickly joined the military. He served for four years and then returned home to South County. Since his return his work history involves a similar name of corporations where David was employed. Wal-Mart gave him experience points for being a veteran. He took the job as soon as they offered it and spent the next two years “earning praise from his higher-ups.” He even received a promotion to a department manager on the night shift; though his promotion didn’t come with a pay raise. He eventually hit a ceiling. The company wouldn’t allow him to change his position and still wouldn’t offer him a raise.

“Tired of working nights”, he quit the job; instead, enrolling in a local community college. After enrolling in college, he received a monthly stipend from his GI Bill, which he said was, “about eight hundred a month”. Yet, he still needed additional sources of

income; so, he has since worked at “a couple different” gas stations that give him about twenty hours a week; though the jobs usually only last a couple months at a time. This has provided him with an on-and-off income of about one hundred fifty dollars a week.

It is common for these individuals to live paycheck-to-paycheck. For workers that make close to minimum wage and work part-time, income is sparse. An employee, such as David, often only makes “around \$200 a week.” Sometimes he is able to get close to “thirty hours a week,” but typically “it is below twenty.” This minimal amount of income creates a need for second source of income; however, non-standardized hours make it difficult to plan their schedule.

Employees receive their schedule on a weekly basis; with changes in the hours, shifts, and days they are to work. Employees are also expected to be alert for any phone call received from their managers on days off if they need to make up shifts for others who fail to show up. While David said he knows he can’t get fired for saying ‘no’, he lives with the guilt hanging over his head knowing that it will be used against him one day.

Individuals that experience precarious work come to rely on multiple sources of support, including family, friends, government assistance, and the need for multiple forms of income. This income comes from multiple jobs held at the same time, being self-employed, and/or through informal means. David has sought hard to start his own business. He has been collecting and breeding reptiles for years. It is a hobby that has turned into a form of income. For him it is a less-risky means as compared to other informal income.

All of the young adults in my study are renters rather than homeowners. Yet, they live in a community that thrives on homeownership, which often limits the availability of shelter. These individuals often live in small apartments wedged in between much wealthier subdivisions. Their living situations are unsteady. They sometimes stay with friends and family – whether for just a few nights or even extended stays – and use storage facilities to store their possessions. When they do rent an apartment it usually is only temporary until they are unable to afford their rent and are forced to move out.

David's living conditions have been unstable. He stayed at his mom's house until about the age of twenty-two. After he moved out, he moved with two friends into a three-bedroom house in a subdivision in Riverview. This lasted almost a year until the three roommates, all working part-time jobs, were unable to pay the 'thousand dollars a month rent'. Currently, he is living in a small one bedroom apartment in Apollo Beach.

This apartment, which I visited when I interviewed him, was in poor condition. I first noticed as I was walking up to his front door that a small tree was growing out of the gutter on his roof. Inside, there was very little extra space in the tiny apartment that was a cramped one room apartment with large amounts of animals that he breeds for extra income. His A/C unit had the front cover taken off and was "currently under repair." His landlord had been there a few days prior, but had yet come back to fix it. He, also, showed me that he had decaying floors in his bathroom.

Chad and Heather live in the same apartment complex as David. This apartment complex is known by local residents as a high crime area with large amounts of drug use. They live there because they can't afford rent anywhere else in the area. It is one of the few

apartments that offer a one bedroom for fewer than eight-hundred dollars. At the time I went to interview them, they had no running water. They could not pay the bill because they both, recently, lost their jobs around the same time.

Chad and Heather are not the only couple that struggle. Matt and his girlfriend Robyn have rented a space at a local storage facility at ‘eighty bucks a month for about two years’. They have maintained the storage space since they lost their apartment in the nearby city of Brandon. During their time living in Brandon, Robyn worked at Subway and Matt was unemployed. Robyn lost her job at Subway and Matt was unable to find a job; so, they had to leave their apartment. Matt now moves back and forth between living at his parents’ place in Riverview and with Robyn at her Grandma’s house in Ruskin.

In addition to their living conditions, these individuals’ options for modes of transportation are also hindered by the infrastructure of South County. Many don’t have automobiles, yet live in areas designed to be navigated by automobiles.

As David said:

In this town...not having one definitely hinders one’s ability to get around and do any of these things cause you have to be readily available and capable of getting there in time if they need you.

The basis of planning for the area has been around easily navigable, efficient roads and highways. This leaves little other option, however, for those without access to automobiles. Walking, biking, and public transportation are limited within South County. Others have automobiles, but don’t have the funds to make them legal with insurance,

registration, and tags; or are unable to make them operate with gasoline and well-maintained parts.

Josh has a serious of unfortunate events in regard to his automobiles. He totaled his first car in an accident the day he got his license. His second car was totaled when he was driving to work one morning. A truck several cars ahead of him lost control causing a pile up. Josh said he slammed his brakes, but his car did not have an autobrake system; so, when he slammed the brakes he slid right in to the back of “a really nice Cadillac.”

Josh broke both his arms in the accident. He said when he slammed into the Cadillac he had both hands on the wheel and the impact broke his wrists. He didn’t feel the injury at first, but noticed it when he went to put his car in park and realized that he could not grab the shift. He was taken by ambulance to a local hospital in Brandon where he was released later in the day with casts on both arms up to his biceps. He said, “You find out who really loves you when you can’t wipe your own ass.” Though, it was hardly a joking matter. Josh had racked up over ten thousand dollars in medical bills from the accident. He had no health insurance from his job at the time and has still yet to pay these bills.

Due to these serious of unfortunate accidents Josh has been left without a car on many occasions. Most recently, he was able to buy an old car from a friend. At the time he did not have the money to pay for the tags or the legally mandated car insurance. Instead, he drove around illegally without the proper documentation. He said, he had things to do but no money to pay for it, and had no other options at the time.

Those without automobiles are stigmatized by having to rely on others for rides. To continuously ask friends and family day after day for a ride becomes bothersome for both the individual and those he/she asks. As Jason said:

You can't rightly put too much responsibility on someone else when it's not that relevant to them. So, with that being said it was not that easy to even favor my friends, or, uh, ask them for a ride. Whether it be just because of a confidence thing, that we men in America are not wanting to ask for help, to admit that weakness or that short-coming, if you will. And also a lot of schedule clashes and there's just a stigma within people of this general area - perhaps more so in this general area - that they would feel immediately annoyed that someone would ask for a ride, as if they're asking more from that person than they realize, and that it's more of a situation for them that they have to ask for a ride, that it is an issue of these things they do that they would have to ask for a ride. So, many people don't want to, they charge more gas money than you're willing to pay, or more than you would be putting in their car.

Jason's need for help is often met with ambivalence. His situation is perceived by others as his own incompetence. Certainly, there have been people willing to give him a ride, but it's the daily need to rely on someone else that forms their criticism. His situation is also seen as an inconvenience to those he comes to rely on. For Jason, this is certainly not "easy." The shaming received from others for his necessity to depend on others alters his confidence, his manliness, and his unwillingness to admit his "weakness."

He wants to be independent and by no means wants to depend on others. He proudly states that he has been providing for himself since his teens, since his mom wasn't able to. As an able-bodied male, his mother forced him to pay rent while he was at home. An incentive, he says, that was meant to be "motivation" for him to move out. However, his progress towards his goal of independence has been hindered by his lack of sustainable employment.

Retail jobs are not necessarily bad jobs, nor jobs that lack "skill" (Kalleberg, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2011). This is the case especially for those higher up the chain where wages can be extremely rewarding with six-figure bonuses. However, the experiences of many workers at retail stores are not as beneficial. Heather said:

I just – I kinda felt like I was in an abusive relationship when I was working there...It's like I knew it made me unhappy, but I kinda felt stuck, and I was like you know what, when your unhappy and you feel this way it doesn't matter if it's in your relationship with your husband or with your superiors or the people that you supervise and it took me six and a half years of excuses.

David's experience was similar:

It was, to a degree, uh, probably one of the worst jobs I had just 'cause what I had to go through and endure. And, you know, just the way they treat...tend to talk to you. It's an alienation of employees and just not even personable in any way or form, shape or form. Um, and I can't necessarily

work anymore where I feel dehumanized. Where I doubt any last one of them managers truly remember anybody that they worked with names. As if they paid attention or care.

Heather's quote is quite worrying; especially after she stated to me that she had been "sexually harassed" before by one of her managers and went on to mention the sexual encounters of her co-workers with several members of management. This imagery of being in "an abusive relationship" presents itself as an experience that has been physical; an altercation that has caused a complete subordination of her body and mind to her 'superiors'. This led her to feel "unhappy," but "stuck" and left only with years of 'excuses'.

David too felt the subordination, leaving him "dehumanized." His experience shows his perception of the complete disconnect of reciprocity between him and his former employer. It also shows the seeming lack of commitment managers feel towards their employees. With such high turnover rates in employment at chain retailers managers see these employees as only temporary; a stark contrast from Sam Walton's famous sayings about keeping your employees happy.

Sam Walton (1992) wrote in his autobiography that his success in business was attributed to "ten rules." Several of these rules articulated the importance of employees to the success of his company. He believed that you should 'share your profits with all your associates, and treat them as partners'. Additionally, employers should show let their employees know that they are appreciated through monetary awards and through praise.

He believed that the voices of his employees were among the most valuable. Yet, it seems Wal-Mart has taken a new direction in their relationship with their employees.

The stress of the precarious work and the inability of employment to provide them with stable lifestyles make many of these individuals want to move away from the urban area to rural areas where they can provide for themselves. Matt, Heather, and Mark all expressed this sentiment.

Matt escaped South County just after his graduation by joining the military. After he finished his service he moved back home searching for work. Since he's been back he has yet to find a decent job. He associates the ability to get a good job with moving away from South County. He said that he would prefer to be 'anywhere but here' and that he believed that moving away will increase his likelihood to be successful. Though, he does not desire to move to a big city; his preferred option is to "buy land," where he can grow his own food and just be away from the hassles of everyday urban life.

Despite being an "outgoing, people person," Heather referred to herself as a "recluse." She said that she resents much of the consumerist lifestyles of her community. Having spent time in Japan with a former boyfriend she compared the American lifestyle to the simple lifestyles of Japanese culture. She said that, "In America we live by quantity, where there they live by quality." In Japan, she said, that they live by different habits, such as only buying fresh food daily; rather than, in America consumers by weeks work of groceries at a time. She also compared her own position with a former coworker.

So, that money, that's, uh, is so freeing to us is really what holds us hostage...because my friend, they made the mistake of buying a brand new house, having it built, getting a brand new car for her husband, and they literally have no money and are so in debt – and they wanna die. And now they're trapped! They are trapped every day to know they have to come up with more than \$3000 a month to pay all of their bills. And I would rather know I had to come up with six-hundred dollars, and, hey, maybe there's no running water, but I'm gonna be ok.

Heather has no desire for luxurious lifestyle and most of the time her needs are quite modest. Heather and her husband, Chad, bought her mom a piece of property in Wimauma and she mentions that she has considered just moving there and growing her own food. It is an expression that has themes of independence at a time when she is most dependent.

Rather, than seek refuge in others, she still desires to provide for herself. For Heather, her hardships were relative to the deprivation of others. While others seek prosperity and happiness through “money,” she finds her meaning of self in ‘being nice’ to her customers and caring for an array of animals she has adopted. She “loves animals.” She is proud “mother” of a pigmy-pig, four rats, four cats, and a couple of guinea pigs. All of these animals free roam their one room apartment.

With the inability to achieve the affluent standards of their parents, many of these individuals are instead seeking alternative meanings. Mark had been frustrated for a while. He graduated from high school in 2007 and has worked ‘shitty jobs’ since. Most of the

time these jobs have been in pizza restaurants working as a cook or a delivery driver. Despite his frustration, he emphasized other aspects of his life other than employment. He told me, “I’m frustrated a lot. I always want more, but I’m beginning to realize that I’m wanting the wrong things. Happiness is interpretive, you know. You gotta be happy with what you have and forget about what you don’t.”

In this chapter, I discussed young adult experience of precarious employment within South County. Young adults employed at chain corporations are marginalized due to the use of forms of precarious employment. These forms of work limit the ability of young adults to achieve material security and social well-being. All of those that I interviewed had experienced temporary periods in and out of employment and unemployment. They came to rely on a variety of other sources of assistance. While they struggled with low incomes, their living conditions and access to transportation are minimal. For some, their reliance on others becomes a burden.

In the next chapter, I extend on the findings in this chapter, to discuss the powerlessness of young adults. For some young adults that live in South County, their working lives diverge from their expected paths of affluence due to the shift towards precarious employment. One respondent’s, Josh, experience of precarity is that his insecurity is caused by his inability to obtain what he perceives to be the normal way of life. The shift towards precarious conditions of work have altered his ability to achieve a more affluent lifestyle, all while achieving the goals of previous generations are still expected of him.

CHAPTER III: 'BEING BUILT UP TO BE LET DOWN': INSECURITY, POWERLESSNESS, AND DESIRE

Big Bend Road stretches from east to west connecting the shore line city of Apollo Beach to the inlands of Riverview. The economic development within South County has forever changed the landscape along Big Bend Road. Traffic now flows bumper to bumper backing up at the three main intersections. Big Bend connects the residents of the new subdivisions to these intersections. The old ten minute drive from Apollo Beach to Riverview now takes thirty minutes on a quiet day.

Just as noticeable is the emergence of the storefronts of chain corporations. In communities like South County brand name corporations are celebrated. It is not uncommon for these corporations to enter the community with great anticipation. Their grand openings are attended by large numbers of consumers admiring the spectacle of new stores.

Recently, on October 28, 2015, a Popeye's fast-food restaurant opened at the intersection of Big Bend Road and US-301. The new building generated interest as soon as construction began. There was speculation of what it would be - a fast food restaurant or another bank - but always some chain brand corporation. Soon there was a sign featuring Popeye's logo and a daily countdown to the grand opening.

I went to the grand opening and it was completely crowded. Inside of the restaurant there were large crowds of people waiting on their orders. The drive-thru circled around the building and overflowed on to Big Bend Road causing traffic to back up the Big Bend-

301 intersection. The workers rushed around frantically trying to cater to a never-ending line of customers. The cashiers took non-stop orders at all three cash registers. In the back cooks worked quickly, putting out order after order, and yelling out order numbers when the orders were ready.

A few months earlier, on July 29, 2015, I attended the grand opening of a retail store, Bass Pro Shop. The new store was located just north of South County in the city of Brandon. The mere size of the building, which can be easily spotted from I-75, draws attention. A massive parking lot sits at the front of the massive retail space. Their grand opening was just as astounding. Elbow to elbow customers brushed through each other. Here at Bass Pro they had all they needed. From the product line, featuring clothing, weapons, and boats, to the presentations given by sports celebrities.

These chain corporations are now a symbol of the community's affluence. These stores hold the capacity to provide the community with their desired goods. Their numbers on economic growth (job growth, tax revenue) serve as measures in which decision makers tout the progress of the community. Yet, hidden amongst the background of this affluence is the labor of those that service the community's consumption. Their grievances against these corporations will be seen as contradictory to the ideals of the community. Any alteration or loss of these corporations will be seen as damaging to the community's image.

Just the thought of a chain corporation leaving the community produces fear. Whenever there is a discussion about the unionization of Wal-Mart workers, there is a threat to the perceived affluence of the community. The typical response is something about looking at the historical lessons of Detroit. This historical lesson, supposedly, should

teach us about the greed of labor unions and how Detroit lost everything because workers were asking for too much.

Chain corporations rely on these fears. The thought of Wal-Mart leaving is so devastating that Wal-Mart rarely ever has to threaten communities. Communities already know the consequences. The very thought of Wal-Mart leaving invokes the loss of several hundred jobs and tax revenue. Additionally, consumers being unable to get their desired products at low prices would disable any platform for the airing of grievances. Not to mention the stores that Walmart already forced out are no longer there for customers.

The sheer amount of chain corporations that have started building store fronts in South County is tremendous. Wal-Mart alone has four store fronts within South County. They have a Sam's Club, Neighborhood Market, and a gas station all in the same parking lot located in Riverview on the southwest corner of the Big Bend-301 intersection. For a while there was a recruiting office, also, off of Big Bend Road. In Gibsonton, there is a Wal-Mart Supercenter and gas station. There used to be a Wal-Mart in Sun City, but it closed down when they build a new Wimauma Supercenter in 2008.

One of Wal-Mart biggest retail competitors, Amazon, opened a Fulfillment Center, in Ruskin. The highly automated warehouse hires seasonal workers in mass during holidays. I worked there for about four months as a seasonal worker during 'Peak Season'. At one point, there were approximately 6,500 people employed in both the day and night shifts combined; most of whom were seasonal workers. The free t-shirts they give you on the first day read, 'Have Fun, Work Hard, Make History'.

While Amazon went on to break Black Friday records, I can confirm that it was not much fun. They certainly work you hard as well. I worked fifty-five hours a week, making \$10.50 an hour, plus time and a half time over forty hours. As a seasonal worker, I was not guaranteed any health insurance and it was an at-will employment contract that could be terminated at any time.

While it is important to understand the importance of chain corporations' role in all of South County to detail the extent of their geography would be a thesis in itself. For this reason, I will only discuss the southwestern quadrant of the intersection at Big Bend Road and 301. Most of this development has happened since the 2000s. This is the intersection where Wal-Mart has both a Sam's Club and a Neighborhood market. In the same southwest quadrant of the Big Bend Road and US-301 intersection, there is also a Burger King, Applebee's, Chase Bank, Walgreen's, Sonic's, PDQ, a Village Inn, and an Ace Hardware store. Again, this is just the southwest corner of the intersection. In total, at this intersection alone, there are seven banks, five gas stations, twenty retail stores, twenty-five restaurants, six automobile repair shops, and a bowling alley.

Chain corporations hold power within South County. They have the ability to sway decision makers, but also the ability to hold the mentality of community hostage. Chain corporations thrive on the desires of communities that will do anything for "job growth". Yet, as we have seen in Chapter Two, job growth does not necessarily mean that the jobs that are being created within the community serve to provide employees with basic necessities.

These numbers show the extent of the growth of business. But what types of jobs are created and do they benefit workers? While there are no official numbers of young adults employed at these corporations, I have shown in Chapter Two that many of these employees struggle with their experience of precarious employment.

In this chapter, I discuss the contradictory positions of young adults in relation to the affluence of their community. For one respondent, Josh, the powerlessness associated with precarious employment relates to the inability of young adults to achieve the standards of his community. I conclude the chapter in a comparison of Josh to another respondent, Robyn, and their expectations for their futures.

Powerlessness, Precariousness

Precarious workers, such as the young adults in this case, often struggle to explain their poverty against the backdrop of their affluent community. While the economic growth around them continues, their own development has become stagnant. What is the cause of their immiseration?

During interviews I was able to witness the precariousness of some of those I interviewed. Such a moment occurred about forty minutes into my interview with Josh. It was a moment that I would contemplate for days. After a long discussion about his struggles we finally reached a moment in which he tried to sum it all up. In his attempt to put it all together he told me, “In order for me to tell you anything I’d have to tell you everything. It’s about the bigger picture.”

For Josh, “the bigger picture” was a totality of his life experience. He offered me his conclusion on why he was unhappy with the course of his life. He told me, “I’m just not where you would expect a twenty-six year old to be in life.” I paused for a moment and, eventually, offered a follow up question regarding the truth of this statement, “Is that really true? Do you think that others your age feel the same way?”

The emotional response Josh gave to this question is what confounded me the most. I did not know how to interpret his response. Before I could barely finish the question he shot up from his slouched stance and said, “Exactly!” He knew that those around him experienced the same conditions, yet his perception of this condition forced him to blame himself and to offer an empty response that did hold much meaning to the reality of his situation.

He perceived his own condition relative to an expectation in American society. It was the common narrative that by twenty-six someone should have already obtained a higher standard of living than Josh’s. Despite this response, Josh knew that this was not the case. He knew that the average twenty-six year old in his community was experiencing the same hardships as him.

Josh slouched back down in the chair and responded, “So, what’s going on?” This was not articulated in an excited voice. It was disheartening to hear. He sounded exhausted when he said it, as if he was tired of the confusion.

His question startled me as well. He asked me like I was the one that was supposed to know. Maybe I, with my “skills” as a researcher, should have known. Josh assumed I

had all the questions, but, honestly, I had few answers myself. The only thing I could do was confirm what he already knew.

We sat there for close to a minute in complete silence. I could tell Josh had nothing to say. For him, it was painful not being able to comprehend this larger issue, but not painful in the same way that it was when he just blamed himself. The pain associated with his realization that his struggles were much larger and outside of his control produced a feeling of powerlessness.

It was a difficult moment for both of us. I could not find what to say as I stared at a longtime friend on the verge of tears. The researcher in me wanted him to say more, the friend in me wanted to say something comforting. I instead decided to stop the interview. I did not need any last words.

After turning off the recording Josh stepped outside to smoke a cigarette while I collected myself and my belongings. A few minutes later Josh came back inside and said, “I want to say something, but I just can’t right now I would get too emotional.” I wanted to know what it was; so, I gave him the recorder and told him to step outside and that I would give him whatever time he needed.

He went on to record a ten-minute statement that featured long pauses as he thought through what it was that he wanted to say. He started off by summarizing what just happened in the interview, stating, “So, what just happened was we got to a point in the interview where I just – I just get so bundled up with thoughts because there’s so much to explain. And it’s not just one issue that I’m going through. It’s more of the big picture.

And I'm fucking nervous, I'm nervous - I'm really nervous just talking about it because I get really emotional. I think about this shit twenty-four seven." He continued, "It hard to come out and say something you are struggling with because it messes with you." On this late statement his voice cracked and he had to correct himself and gather his composure.

Josh went on to attribute his despair to the expected beliefs and desires that he has been taught, by both his family and community, since childhood, stating, "I just want to say that growing up you are told that, you know, if you work hard enough you will make your way. You will earn what you need and you will be happy, and you can grow up to be anything you want...You know, this is like the basis American society they instill in us, this is the ideology that they instill in us in our youth."

He went on to say, "You know, I've been working since I was sixteen. And I have nothing - I have nothing to show for it." Despite working two jobs and going to school for a majority of his youth he still has not found that standard of living. He referenced the opportunities within South County and said he is not sure if they exist for his benefit. He stated, that "opportunities like that are non-existent in this community." He concluded the recording by saying, "In this society it just hard not to feel you're being built up to be let down." It seemed he had finally become aware of the difference between his empty responses and his actual experience.

This is Josh's precarity. His insecurity is caused by his inability to obtain what he perceives to be the normal way of life. Though he perceives this to be his own inability, it is instead due to the changing circumstances that have diminished the ability for young adults to obtain a living from employment. The precarious conditions of work have altered

his ability to achieve a more affluent lifestyle, all while holding onto the beliefs and desires of past generations, and expecting he can fulfill them.

This inability has caused Josh to perceive his dependence as a burden. He is still dependent on his parents. His two older sisters have moved out and have married. Josh, however, is afraid to make the commitment of marriage with his longtime girlfriend because he feels he is not in the position to do so financially. He frequently compared his situation to his dad who by the age of twenty-six was able to provide for three kids.

His family views his dependency as an unwillingness to grow up and to get a “big boy job.” They often made jokes at family gatherings about his girlfriend being the breadwinner and how he wastes his days away playing videos games. They have become accustomed to his dependence to the point that they are comfortable laughing at the situation. Josh, however, told me that every day that passes adds to his pain. Still, Josh expressed that he felt bad ‘complaining’ about his problems. He knew that others had it worse than him and he should be thankful for what he does have.

However, another respondent’s, Robyn, responses stood in contrast with Josh’s. While Josh shared an emotional response to his situation, Robyn was humble in hers. Towards the end of the interview I still had no expression of frustration with of the corporations she had worked for. So, I asked in a more explicit manner. She responded, “I just haven’t been much of a victim of it.” Despite enjoying the rural lifestyle of her hometown, Ruskin, she said, about the development of South County:

You know you can look at it and you can get mad that everything's getting built up, but in the long run and you think about it and how people need jobs. Advancement is never a bad thing, it's just hard to cope with.

It seemed Robyn had come to terms with her situation. Or, at least, presented herself in a manner that refused to acknowledge her subordination. There was no emotional breakdown in Robyn's interview as there had been in Josh's. For Josh, it had been just under an hour into our interview when he began to get emotional. It was the part of the interview where I began to question the reality of his situation and asked him the truth of his responses. I never broke through this barrier with Robyn.

This perplexed me for days. Why did she not admit she was powerless? Or, if she was sincere, why did she not feel powerless? Why despite being subjected to the same working conditions as the others did she not respond in the same ways? The easy answer would be to say that people respond to situations differently. Or, that Robyn was not comfortable enough with me to allow her vulnerabilities to be shown. I believe, however, that Robyn was sincere in her response. She had no reason to respond in the same way as others, because she was not experiencing any loss of expectation.

Josh and Robyn have two different backgrounds. Despite having similar work histories, they have two very different lives with different expectations of their futures. What stood in greatest contrast were their aspirations. Josh longed for more, while Robyn was grateful with what she had. Josh had the expectation that he could achieve greater affluence. His precariousness was a result of the material and social conditions that had become normalized in his life and his inability to obtain these conditions.

For Robyn, her situation was a “mutual beneficial relationship.” Her Grandma just quit all her jobs and is now claiming Robyn and herself for food stamps. Robyn said, “I don’t get any assistance, but I don’t have a problem helping her get assistance.” What she meant was that she did not receive any of the food stamps herself, but she did not mind helping her Grandma get the extra food stamps for claiming her.

Further, Robyn’s family had been in a multigenerational living situation her entire life. Robyn, her Grandma, her mom, and her uncle all currently live at her Grandma’s house. Robyn’s lifestyle maintains close family ties with her extended family. Even despite living an hour away from her sister, they still see each other weekly.

The difference in lifestyle between Josh and Robyn can also be seen in their families’ history. Josh’s family moved to Riverview in 1990s with the newly emerging suburbs; whereas, Robyn’s Grandma moved to Ruskin about fifty years ago. Robyn’s family has been here since. Robyn was born in Ruskin in 1987 and went to the same high school as the rest of her family.

American society, in general, is said to value independence (Sennett, 2003). Though for Robyn’s family her dependence was not as stigmatized because it was to be expected. This lifestyle characterized the old rural areas of South County. Josh’s family, however, belong to a new generation of residents that migrated into the developing suburbs. These affluent communities stigmatize dependency. There is shame felt by young adults who are unable to achieve affluent lifestyles through their own independent efforts. Instead of decent jobs that provide them with luxury, they fill low skill service sector work that is characterized as “teenager jobs” (Wal-Mart, 2013).

Robyn's community takes pride in its roots, whereas Josh's values the affluence created through economic growth. This revealed discrepancies within the aspirations of each individual. Robyn desired a much easier going lifestyle, where Josh longed for greater wealth.

I asked Robyn about her work history. She said that it was "More of the path of the convenience." At first, I thought she misspoke and meant that she had a history working convenience store jobs. I soon realized that she did in fact mean "convenient." She was referring to jobs that were 'easy and did not command much' of her. She wanted jobs where she could "go home at the end of the day and not worry about it." She continued, "Lucky, for the people I know, it's not too high maintenance of jobs. (*laughs*) It's more like your McDonalds, your Burger King, your 7-11....those are the jobs you find around the area, those are the jobs that don't really require much of you. So, it's taking the easy way."

For Robyn, these jobs provided her with convenience. She was still able to have a life outside of work. It should be said, however, that Robyn was able to do this only because of the "mutual" relationship she had with her family.

Robyn did experience hardships, she just did not respond to them in the same way as others. She moved out of her Grandma's place and had lived in several different apartments with her boyfriend, Matt. Yet, due to financial difficulties she ended up back at her Grandmas.

She also has no automobile and is limited in transportation. She relies on her boyfriend and family to get to work. She said she usually works at a store 'close' to her home, but most of these places are about five or ten miles away. She said she often bikes both ways to and from work. While she does acknowledge that it is exhausting, she claims that she does not mind it much. Except for on one occasion when she was stop by police one night on her way home and when they searched her purse they found drug paraphernalia. She was lucky to be able to enroll in a misdemeanor prevention program so the arrest would not stay on her record. However, she added, that she has already spent a thousand dollars in for three months of the program. Still, Robyn is humble.

In proposing his concept of the third dimension of power, Lukes states that this dimension works contradictory to the old adage that power is "A's power over B". Instead, the third dimension is "not up to A, but to B" (p.146). That is, B having the capacity to determine his/her own interests, regardless of the influence of A. For Lukes, power is a form of domination in which there is constraint upon the interest of actors. The focus here is on 'interest'. That is, the interests of B and his/her capacity to achieve their desires.

In understanding the interests of Josh and Robyn, Robyn appears to consent to her domination. That she views it in her own best interest to continue working a "convenient jobs". Josh, however, is unable to achieve his desired interests. In fact, he is limited due to the constraints that are placed on his ability to even make choices. In this sense, Josh is powerless because he does not have the capacity to change these conditions. Instead, Josh is under the power held by others.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

Having seen the effects of the 2008 recession on my local community, I arrived at graduate school in Knoxville with plans to write a thesis on financialization. After agreeing with my professor that the theme had run its course, I set off into the vast study of Political Economy. It wasn't until I took foundations of political economy and a field methods course that I began to think of this project. While I had spent my first year of study reading literature that dealt with the economy in the general sense, such as literature on world-systems, I found that field research offered an opportunity to reveal the particularities of life that these general approaches failed to comprehend.

Yet, field research is a long endeavor. It can only be carried out over years of dedication on part of the researcher in order to understand the specific conditions of each community. I discovered in my readings on field research that Bourdieu often told his students to study the communities they came from; that their 'social proximity' to the cultures of each community allowed insights into the local knowledge of particular social-historical circumstances. What graduate students lack in their experience in research they can make up for in their lived experience within a particular community. It is this basis that I decided that I would try to improve my field research skills by focusing on the community I have known: South County.

What if anything defines South County? I found the answer in the communities desires for affluence. Yet, for those I had grown up with, their experiences were not

necessarily partaking in this affluent lifestyle, but, rather, in serving the consumption of the more privileged.

Further, the expanding presence of chain corporations within South County held a substantial amount of influence on the life course of my friends and family. My mom, lacking a high school degree, has worked service sector and retail jobs most of her life. My Dad and both my brothers have worked various retail jobs. As I thought through my social network, I began to notice the same trend with the work histories of many people I knew. Most of their jobs came at these service sector chain corporations. It is on this basis that I hope the particular knowledge of my community can lend to the general understanding of the global economy.

The focus of my study is on the emerging concept of precarious employment. Previous researchers have tied these forms of employment to the business strategies of chain corporations within the service industry. Using South County as a case of these shifts, I conducted interviews with twelve young adults who live in South County to demonstrate how the use of precarious employment by corporations affects young workers. For young adults living within South County, employment opportunities are often limited to the service sector. The resulting insecurity from their relation to the forms of precarious employment has numerous impacts on their lives.

Precarious employment has emerged as a key concept within sociological literature. Since the late 1960s, researchers have attributed globalization with the reorganization of the global division of labor, as well as an increase in service industries as the basis of cities. As urban areas increasingly become integrated in the global economy it is important

for researchers to understand the importance of places in relation to the inequalities caused by the global economy.

Previous researchers have emphasized the lack of policy in relation to the emergence of precarious employment. This is usually attributed to the decline of labor policies since the late 1960s. These labor policies are attributed to employment that offered security to workers and, consequently, a rising standard of living for middle class Americans. However, due to the decline of these norms, as well as the structural shifts in the global economy, workers often find themselves without the ability to maintain a secure standard of living.

South County is a case of an urban area that has been affected by these shifts in the global economy since the 1980s. Since the late 1800s when railroads first connected the area to the rest of the US, South County has remained several small rural towns that prospered from an economic basis of extraction and agriculture. Since the late 1980s, however, the area is increasingly becoming associated with the capital held by transnational corporations that seek to develop the area. As these developers alter the landscape with subdivisions, chain corporations find the region as a prime area for the services.

Young adults often find themselves in entry level jobs at chain corporations that utilize precarious employment strategies. All of those that I interviewed had experienced temporary periods in and out of employment and unemployment. When they were employed, they were usually underemployed due to their part-time status, and so were in need of additional sources of income. They came to rely on other sources of assistance,

including government, family, and friends. While they struggled with their low incomes, they were also highly restricted in their housing and transportation.

It is essential that researchers understand the importance of power in relation to precarious employment. Following Lukes concept of the third dimension of power I have elaborated on how the beliefs and desires of two respondents alter their ability to cope with their struggles. Ultimately, precarious work affects us all differently.

Josh's insecurity is caused by his inability to obtain what he perceives to be the normal way of life. Though he perceives this to be his own inability, it is rather due to the changing sociohistorical circumstances that have diminished the ability for young adults to obtain a living from employment. The precarious conditions of work have altered his ability to achieve a more affluent lifestyle, all while he continues to hold the outdated beliefs and desires of past generations about affluence.

Robyn has insecurity as well, but she copes with them in different ways. She presents herself as humble despite finding herself in the same conditions as many other young adults in this study. She does not have the same desire to have a more affluent lifestyle than Josh. Instead, she prefers to work jobs that don't require much of her. Instead, she has a life outside of work that means more to her. Her family has never emphasized going to college or moving away to get a big city job. They appreciate what they have through a simple lifestyle that requires only minimal expenses.

In this thesis, I have added two significant findings to the discussion of precarious work. First, I have added that young adults in the US, especially those that work service

jobs at chain corporations, experience the effects of precarity. Second, I have added the importance of the concept of power to the conversation of precarious work. I believe the first component is an issue which has begun to gain popularity, especially among those that belong to the “millennial” generation. The problem lies in whether young adults have the capacity to recognize their collective interests, rather than view each other as competition. Corporations should be seen as the foil of this narrative. Corporations, especially since shifts in public policy of the 1980s, have emerged as key actors that are responsible for the degradation of affluent conditions.

The second component of this thesis, the concept of power, has yet to take hold within the conversation on precarity. I maintain that researchers of precarity will find value in this conversation, especially in the dimensions that were expanded upon by Steven Lukes. While Lukes focus is on ‘freedom’, there is utility in researchers to focus on ‘power’ in relation to ‘security’. In this sense, people are willing to consent to domination, even at the expense of personal freedom, if they get something in return. Despite this, many young adults will continually seek employment at corporations that offer them little reward. They do so because of limited opportunity and the need of employment to meet their needs and wants in the absence of social welfare.

As the case with all research, my thesis has several limitations. Those that are familiar with sociological literature will notice the absence of any discussion on race, class, and/or gender. While these concepts would have surely added to my research, due to the limited sample (n=12) I was unable to make such generalizations. Further, the individuals within this study come from a variety of backgrounds and at such a personal level their

backgrounds become too complex for such general assumptions. For instance, David was born to two white parents, but his parents divorced when he was young and he was raised by a Mexican step-dad and his mother. Robyn's Grandmother is Latina and her mother is half Latina, half white. Heather's parents are of Russian and African descent and her husband Chad was raised by foster parents. With this being said, the study would benefit in numerous ways from having a larger sample.

I would have also liked to include a chapter focusing more in depth on the economic growth within South County. Due to practical concerns, I was unable to complete this chapter, but it would surely have added to the readers understanding of the global and local processes that are occurring within the region and how South County serves as a case of these processes.

In concluding this thesis, I think it is worth trying to understand the "big picture" of this project in my own subjective terms, in much of the same way Josh did. In all honesty, this has been an extremely depressing research project for me. This may be one of the disadvantages of studying things that are so dear to a researcher. This emotion towards this project is partially due to the pain displayed by many of the people that I interviewed. In addition, the emotion owes to the general consensus that seems to be prevalent in American society. That is, that the issues these young adults face are not seen as public issues, but rather private troubles.

Additionally, it worries me that I cannot provide the participants in my study with better answers to their immiseration. While I got something out of the interviews (i.e. the

data that allowed me to complete my Master's degree), many of the interviewees are still in the same position that they were when I first interviewed them.

It troubles me that I cannot offer them something greater, because they are good people that deserve better and, further, their experiences are representative of a wider trend in the US. Often, the only condolence I could offer them was that they are not the only ones to experience these hardships. I hope in the future that they will understand that their common struggle should be a means to bettering their lives; even if this thesis fails to do so.

Further, I think South County serves as a lesson that our current models of economic growth do not serve to benefits some members of the community, as is the case of youth in South County. Affluence attained by earlier generations is not seamlessly passed from generation to generation, but must be maintained by providing youth with basic needs that allow them to flourish; that allow youth to take risks without the fear of losing everything; that allow youth to receive a fair share of the wealth created within their communities.

Finally, the greatest lessons I learned from completing this thesis, and graduate school in general, are not evident in the writing. I think that many of us, especially graduate students, get caught up in our own personal struggles that we forget how privileged we are to have the opportunity to advance ourselves. As for myself, I am privileged to know that any time I fail I can always fall back on my friends and family and that even when I fail to achieve my own desires that I go back to those that have always been there for me. Knowing this allows me to take risks that many others can't and I am

truly grateful to have this ability. I say this to emphasize that for those that have become entrapped in precarity – social relationships are everything.

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