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**Vacuum of Social Mobility:
Warehouse Labor's Impact on
Young Workers in California's
Inland Empire**

Hector De Leon



Vacuum of Social Mobility: Warehouse Labor's Impact on Young Workers in California's Inland Empire

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Abstract: Racialized Neoliberalism is resculpting the fabric of Southern California's Inland Empire. Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, located directly east of Los Angeles, encompass the largest hub of warehousing and logistics in the United States. These warehouses serve key roles in the supply chains of companies such as Walmart and Amazon. This project attends to the disproportionate placement of warehouses in communities of color, analyzes the discourse of local politicians who support these neoliberal developments and focuses on the experiences of youth (aged 18-22) who are pushed into warehouse work. By illuminating the impact that warehouses have on youth in the Inland Empire through interviews, this project argues that neoliberal economic developments do not empower but, rather, harm minoritized communities. This generational impact is reflected in young workers' experiences of social mobility, wage slavery, and time poverty. Through Convenience Sampling and Nomination Recruitment Strategy, this project interviewed young warehouse workers. Dedoose software is employed to utilize a codebook for the interviews averaging 45 minutes. This research addresses how logistics impacts the lives of young warehouse workers.

Keywords: *Neoliberalism, Workers, Logistics, California, Opportunity*

Introduction

My research attends to two main focal points: (1) to identify and prove a racialization of neoliberal developments in the Inland Empire, and (2) to explore how warehouse labor impacts young workers and BIPOC communities. The former is achieved through a case study analysis of the cities of Fontana and Moreno Valley. The latter is achieved through semi-structured interviews with young warehouse workers.

The Inland Empire is the warehouse capital of the world. 1.5 billion square feet of warehouse distribution center facilities permeate Southern California, predominantly in the Inland Empire—a metropolitan area of 2 million people comprising Riverside and San Bernardino Counties (Mongelluzzo 2019). The industry responsible for the distribution of goods across space is known as logistics; semi-trucks, large warehouse facilities, and workers power this process. This industry is currently more lucrative than ever due to the increased demand for online shopping (exacerbated by the limitations of COVID-19). The logistics sector increased over the course of 2020. Amazon increased its workforce by 55%, adding 427,300 workers to a total of 1.2 million worldwide (Schendruk 2020). In particular, Amazon is the Inland Empire’s largest employer, with 20,000 employees and 14 facilities throughout the region (Mayorquin 2021). The Inland Empire is significant because it is the 13th largest metropolitan area in the United States and is in a unique position due to its demographics (InlandEmpire.US 2021); 20% of residents in the region are immigrants (Eyrich 2018).

Warehouse labor is physically demanding in nature. Due to the lengthy work shifts and limited flexibility of labor jobs, workers often find themselves in time poverty. Time poverty is defined as a condition in which one does not have enough time to complete all the things that he or she must accomplish during a given time frame. Research suggests that states of time poverty are more negatively impactful on quality of life than unemployment (Harvard 2020). “Wage slavery” is a pejorative term used to criticize a relationship of exploitation between labor, wages, and social stratification (Gourevitch 2020). The goal of this paper is

to gain a novel perspective on how warehouse labor particularly affects young workers and their agency of social mobility and to see if factors such as wage slavery, and time poverty have an impact.

Literature Review

Goals, Questions, and Objectives

My literature review aims to analyze the existing knowledge surrounding how racialized neoliberalism facilitates the logistics industry's disproportionate development in marginalized communities of the Inland Empire and how this impacts the social mobility and agency of its people, particularly young warehouse workers. This will serve to identify where connections between these topics already exist, and where there are gaps in information and cohesion. Primarily, the review will examine the works of Juan De Lara and Thomas C. Patterson, two Southern California-based professors.

Racialized Neoliberalism

Thomas C. Patterson served as the chair of Anthropology at UC Riverside. In his book, *Social Change Theories in Motion*, he describes the prevalence and impact of neoliberalism as a form of contemporary social change. He describes “the central tenets of Neoliberalism” to be “(1) the completely autonomous individual (firm); (2) a market completely free of government intervention, central planning, or regulation; and (3) fiscal policies that asserts the primacy of the money supply over investment and government spending and that target the growth of the money supply.” (Patterson, 2018). Here, the author proves that profit and market freedom for firms (private companies) are upheld by neoliberal ideals. Neoliberalism principally values the benefits of profit, productivity, and consumerism, expressing the importance of worker productivity.

As Neoliberalism has risen since 1970, the productivity “gap” has as well (Economic Policy Institute 2019). As described

by Darrick Hamilton, Neoliberal economics made a promise to “lift all boats,” or a promise to economically empower all people (Hamilton 2019). The effectiveness of trickle-down economics has been called into question over the past 40 years, where productivity has outpaced wages by 6 times (Economic Policy Institute 2019). Particularly, people of color and those in low-income communities have experienced wider gaps than the average.

Disproportionate Development

The fixation on economic prosperity in a neoliberal economy has taken center stage for business and private capital. Three actors are at play in the Inland Empire’s economic development: (1) the owners and elite businesspeople who own and develop the construction of warehouses, (2) local government stakeholders in the Inland Empire who balance the issue of unemployment and winning the support of constituents, and (3) working-class people of the Inland Empire. Neoliberalism fosters the economic environment ideal for elite owners of warehouses. Local leaders experience an influence of funding from warehouse interests to fund their campaigns, and also the compounded pressure from constituents to solve the heavy levels of unemployment.

Patterson’s other book, *From Acorns to Warehouses*, recounts the Inland Empire’s transformation into the “Warehouse Empire.” In the ninth chapter, he describes the mechanisms, entities, and situations that facilitated the political economy’s transformation into logistics. Notably, Patterson emphasizes the Inland Empire as the logistics capital of California, home to 97% of the state’s logistics warehouses (Patterson 2015). Furthermore, 10% of all workers in the Inland Empire work in logistics-related occupations.

Juan De Lara, a professor at USC and native of the Inland Empire’s Coachella Valley, wrote a detailed book entitled *Inland Shift* surrounding the Inland Empire’s transformation into a landscape of logistics. A strong argument he illuminates is that being anti-warehouse equates to being anti-Latino. In the city

of Moreno Valley, City Councilwoman and Mayor Pro Tempore Victoria Baca adamantly believes that creating new warehouses, and in turn jobs, will significantly empower the predominantly-Latino city (De Lara 2018). De Lara emphasizes that 80% of all people who have moved to the Inland Empire since 1980 are Latino, and this population is mainly working-class. There has been a simultaneous increase of Latinos in the same region who have experienced the largest increase and concentration of warehouses.

Warehouse Impact & Youth Labor

Logistics has been a prominent area of study in Southern California; Andrew Good, a former USC media relations specialist, took note of De Lara's work on this issue. In Good's article, he highlights Juan De Lara's interrogation of the nature of work in warehouses. A significant number of warehouses in the Inland Empire have had numerous workplace and safety violations. This occurs in an occupation in which workers have been described as discardable and unvalued, with jobs increasingly being replaced by others within the week or by automation (Good 2013). These jobs have "slave wages and slave shifts," with little room for error in a mentally and physically stressful environment.

Moreno Valley

As emphasized in Juan De Lara's *Inland Shift*, Moreno Valley City Councilwoman and Mayor Pro Tempore Victoria Baca believes that being anti-warehouse is equivalent to being anti-Latino, since that requires being against the economic opportunities of the Latino population (De Lara 2018). It is clear that Baca uses her positionality and experience being Latina and part of the Latinx community to push her support for warehouse development. She argues that Latinxs in the area need jobs, especially since the 2008 recession and through the pandemic; trying times mean people need to put food on the table and pay rent. Amazon is the largest employer in the Inland Empire and city of Moreno Valley, and the fastest-growing job sector over the last

10 years (Mayorquin 2021). Victoria Baca's initial rise to local politics and community leadership was funded and supported by warehouse developer Highland Fairview (Danelski 2013). She has been funded in elections by this developer and has since been an adamant supporter of logistics. She, and many of her time, such as Mayor Yxstian Gutierrez and Councilman Ulises Cabrera, are Latinxs elected to local Inland Empire government positions through warehouse developer campaign contributions (Ghori 2018). Over \$500,000 was raised by Highland Fairview alone for these candidates from 2014 to 2018 (Ghori 2018). The owners of warehouse companies like Highland Fairview utilize and pay for elected officials of color in communities of color to push their economic interests.

Highland Fairview, with the support of the Moreno Valley city council (primarily composed of people of color), plans to build the *largest* distribution center complex in the entire United States of America (Ghori 2015). The World Logistics Center will be over 41 million square feet, one-eighth of the land of Moreno Valley, and the size of 700 football fields (Ghori 2015). Furthermore, it is supposed to bring with it several thousand jobs, as well as thousands of cars and trucks moving through local streets on a daily basis (Ghori 2015). This is a blatant example of the deliberate concentration of the logistics industry targeting communities of color for development, further evidenced by rhetoric in Fontana.

Fontana

Fontana's Mayor, Acquanetta Warren, is an African-American woman who left Compton in search of better economic opportunities in the Inland Empire. She is a strong proponent of warehouses as a supposedly amazing and prominent opportunity for her city, in which the majority of the population are BIPOC (Steinberg 2017). She is also adamantly proud of her nickname "Warehouse Warren," and wears it as a symbol of the great change she has pushed for her city (Ingold 2020). The Fontana city council seats predominantly people of color, and most residents who are surrounded by warehouses near their homes

are BIPOC as well (Esquivel 2019). She, her supporter base of BIPOC, and the thousands of dollars she receives from white-owned warehouse developers have sculpted a paradigm in Fontana that is particularly polarizing (Ingold 2020). There is a targeted rhetoric present, similar to Baca's in Fontana, and it is important that further investigation is carried out to determine if this occurs in other similar communities, and to see if there are differences in Whiter and more affluent communities.

Gaps in Literature

Despite these descriptions of warehouse occupations, there is a gap in the literature regarding how this work affects young people in the long term and what solutions are available to utilize for these impacted communities. There are existing literature and movements surrounding the environmental impact of warehouses, as well as labor conditions. However, there is limited literature on how it specifically affects young people from this area, and the economic opportunities present as a result.

Governmental and private entities are sculpting the Inland Empire for their economic benefit. It is crucial that the working-class people of this region sow the fabric of their home themselves, rather than accept what is presented to them. The rest of this paper will explore how warehouses affect the livelihoods of young workers in the community. Furthermore, this paper will examine community organizations that can empower themselves, create positions of ownership and autonomy, and determine what is best for their own homes.

Methodology

Design

This research project consists of two parts: (1) an analysis and case study of the cities of Fontana and Moreno Valley to investigate a racialization of neoliberalism, and (2) interviews with young warehouse workers from the Inland Empire.

Part 1, covered in the Literature Review, is a theoretical

analysis of the developments in Fontana and Moreno Valley. The structure of this research is similar to an extended literature review, using local community information to connect these two cities. I utilized information from local news outlets such as The Press-Enterprise and The San Bernardino Sun, which service Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, respectively. I also drew from social media accounts related to community organization, and local political information and news. I compared the two cities and their developments in order to approach the local politics of logistics from a new perspective.

Part 2 is a personal and informal interview process with young workers from the area. Participants who fit the requirements of this survey are individuals who live in the Inland Empire and have worked at a warehouse in the region between the years of 2019-2021, between the ages of 18 and 22. My design is fundamentally shaped by my lived experience, being born and raised in the Inland Empire. Principally I used convenience sampling; my sample directly includes people I know personally who fit this description. This includes family members of mine and close friends. To gain a better understanding of who in my social network fits this demographic, I conducted a brief social media survey. On my Instagram account, I shared a question on my story asking my followers if they had worked at a warehouse before, which gave me a better sense of whom to reach out to for this interview. It was a “yes” or “no” question asking, “Have you ever worked at a warehouse?”. If they responded “yes,” I conducted a further investigation to determine if they fit the participant demographic. In addition to this outreach, I supplemented each interview with nomination recruitment (snowball sampling) to reach out to more individuals who fit the participant demographic.

My position, belonging to this age group and being a peer, close friend, and mutual friend of my intended participants, guided the interview process and design. The aim was to maintain personal and informal interviews to reveal their perspectives and experiences.

Through mixed methodology and the use of qualitative and quantitative data, this interview gauges the extent to which the experiences of these workers are impacted by social mobility,

time poverty, and wage slavery. Furthermore, these responses were quantified to categorize the experiences of these participants and examine the data into observable patterns.

Each participant was asked the same questions and interviewed in the same manner. Some questions were open-ended to provide the space and opportunity for participants to provide more organic insight into their lived work experiences. All participants were informed that their identity would be kept anonymous and their names would not be attributed to their responses. Each participant was asked for basic demographic information to assist in categorizing and quantifying the responses and data.

The following are the questions that were asked to nearly every participant. To maintain the natural flow of the conversation, some questions were asked in different orders or were not asked at all. Additionally, some additional questions were asked outside of this list if they fit the topic of conversation.

Questions

Screening Questions:

- Since 2019, have you worked at a warehouse in the Inland Empire?
- How old are you?
- What city do you live in?

Demographics:

- What are your pronouns?
- What is your gender identity?
- Are you currently a student in high school?
- Did you graduate from high school or receive your GED?
- Have you attended or are you currently attending college?
- When were your start and end dates in college? If still enrolled, when is your expected graduation?
- What college do/did you attend?
- At which warehouse do/did you work?
- In which city was the warehouse located?
- What month and year did you begin working? Do you still

work there currently? If not, what month and year did you stop working?

- On average, how many hours a week would you work?
- What times were your shifts?
- How flexible was your work schedule?
- What was the hourly wage for your most recent paycheck?

Warehouse Work Questions:

- Tell me a bit about your job.
 - Probe: What was your position, and what kind of work did you do?
- What were some reasons for working at this job?
 - Probe: Was it for experience? To pay for school or living expenses? For extra income? To start work at this company? To help your family?
- How did you hear about this job and find this opportunity?
 - Probe: Did you hear about it through someone you know or another outside source?
- Were there other job opportunities available at the time for you when you were applying?
- Why did you make the final decision to work at this job, and which factors influenced your decision?
 - Probe: Factors may include the easy hiring process, wage, convenience, distance to home, friends at work, etc.

Work-Life Balance (Student Workers):

- How do you set your schedule? Is it based on work or school or other responsibilities? Please describe.
- How do you balance your personal life, work, and school on a regular basis?
 - Probe: Do you find yourself prioritizing one over the other? Why or why not?
- How do you balance working at a warehouse with your personal life and time spent with family, relationships, fun, and recreation?
 - Probe: What kind of free time do you have? What do you do for fun?

- How has working while going to school impacted your ability to complete homework and other school tasks?
 - Probe: Has it impacted your grades, your ability to participate in school activities and clubs, or your opportunities to meet with professors and TAs?
- Can you tell me about a time you faced some sort of difficulty at school or in your workplace?
- Have you ever considered taking a leave of absence from school?
 - Probe: What were the reasons for this absence? (e.g. time, cost, working too much, stress, family obligations, etc.)
- Can you tell me about a time when you worked (or went to school) and felt stressed or overwhelmed?
- Did your workplace provide any resources to support you through that or other stressful times?
 - Probe: How did you ultimately deal with the stress?

Workplace Satisfaction:

- What do you enjoy about the work?
- What are things that you find challenging about the work?
- Is there a way to bring up problems or issues in the workplace with a supervisor or the company?
- How does the company respond to the concerns of workers?
 - Probe: Can you share any example of there being a concern and what happened?
- How valued do you feel by your employer?
 - Probe: Do your supervisors make your work experience better or worse? How so?
- Is what you earn sufficient to meet your household needs? If not, what would be a wage that would be sufficient?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against at work?
 - Probe: Can you share what happened?
- Do you think people of different backgrounds are treated differently in the workplace?
- Can you share an example of how you saw the different treatments?
- What change did you notice at work during COVID-19?

- Probe: Examples may include loss or increase of employment/hours, health and safety issues, workload, etc.
- Probe: Were there any causes of the pandemic that may have influenced your employment?
- Probe: If you worked during COVID, how did COVID affect your work? Were there any instances of COVID-related dangers?

Career Path:

- What are the biggest benefits of working at a warehouse?
 - Probe: What did you enjoy the most about your job?
- What are the most significant negative aspects of working at a warehouse?
 - Probe: Have there been any physical or mental effects? Any impact on your opportunities?
- Do you know of opportunities for you to get a raise or a promotion at your work?
- Do you believe that the skills and experience you have gained from this job and the time spent there will help you with your future career, occupation, or goals? Why or why not?
- What are your short-term and long-term career goals?

For People Who Left:

- Can you share what led to you leaving your job?
- What sort of work are you doing now?

Conclusion:

- What role and impacts do you think warehouses have on our community?
- If you had a magic wand and could change anything about warehouse work, what would it be?
- Is there anything else about working at a warehouse you feel strongly about? How do you feel overall?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Materials

Due to the pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. Participants needed to have access to the internet and a suitable electronic device. Each participant was informed that the interviews would be recorded (maintaining anonymity). The audio was transcribed using Zoom recording software for reference and use. Considering the limited time available for warehouse workers, I worked around the schedule of the participants in order to maximize the number of interviews and make it as convenient as possible for them.

Procedure

Prior to each meeting date, I provided a Zoom meeting link. The interviews were scheduled beforehand at the most convenient time for the participants. I maintained the semi-structured interviews in an informal and personal manner throughout. First, I prefaced with the consent script read to each person, informing them of the aims of this project and whom they could contact for any questions or concerns they may have. The end of each interview provided space and opportunity for an open-ended discussion and anything else they wanted to share.

Coding

Dedoose software was utilized to analyze the interviews with a mixed methodology. The interviews were quantified through Dedoose, which allowed for a more in-depth qualitative approach to the interviews. The following are the parent and child codes used to organize the interview data:

Parent Code 1, Job Conditions, Child Codes: Working Conditions, Covid-Related Conditions, Scheduling, Co-Worker Relations, Supervisor/Employee Relations, Unions & Worker's Rights, and Resources & Support. Parent Code 2, Emotions, Child Codes: Stress, Overall Feelings & Emotions, Feeling Valued by Employer. Parent Code 3, Finances, Child Codes: Opportunities

for Raises & Benefits, Multiple Jobs, and View on if their Pay is Sufficient. Parent Code 4, Discrimination & Demographics, Child Codes: Personal Experiences/Views with Discrimination, and Secondary Experiences/Views with Discrimination. Parent Code 5, Work-Life-School-Balance, Child Codes: Impact on Personal Life, Time Management and Priorities, Impact on School, Family/Friend Interactions Affected, and Use of Free Time. Parent Code 6, Job Opportunity and Attractive/Unattractive Factors, Child Codes: Hiring Process, Wage as a Pull Factor, Distance to Work (Commute), Relationship to Others During Job Hiring, Reasons for Leaving Job, and Reasons for Pursuing Work at a Warehouse Over Other Types of Jobs. Parent Code 7, Career & Education, Child Codes: Short Term Goals, Long Term Goals, and Warehouse Impact on Career Path. Parent Code 8: Views & Perspectives on Warehouses & Work, Child Codes: Quality of Job, Impact on Time & Life, Impact on Community, Impact on Other People, and Economic Impact. Parent Code 9: Quotes That Stand Out.

Findings

This project completed and transcribed 15 surveys, one of which was conducted in and translated from Spanish. 6.7% of participants were Asian American, 13.3% were African American, and 80% were Latinx. 6.7% were on-binary, 46.7% were female, and 46.7% were male. In terms of ethnicity, the proportion is fairly equivalent to the city that these participants live in. 73% of participants are from Moreno Valley, 20% are from Perris, and 6.7% are from Eastvale. Moreno Valley is 58.7% Latinx, 17.5% African American, and 6.1% Asian American. The participants are overrepresented as Latinx, but the African American and Asian American representation is proportionate to Moreno Valley—the majority of where participants live. Perris is

76.8% Latinx, 10% African American, and 3.9% Asian American. Latinx participants of Perris are fairly proportionate and African Americans and Asian Americans are slightly underrepresented. Eastvale has different demographic trends, reflecting the diversity of the Inland Empire: 39.5% Latinx, 26.3% Asian American, and 8.6% African American.

The first group of findings is in the Pay & Wages category. The most salient finding in this project is that all the participants expressed their wages being higher than other job locations in the area as a primary factor for working at the warehouse job. Some participants, despite the relatively higher pay, shared that they often had to work multiple jobs to sustain themselves. Notably, most of the participants experienced a turnover rate from their job within a year; most people stopped working at the warehouse very quickly. In particular, a monolingual Spanish-speaking participant shared that they stopped working there after one day due to poor working conditions and language-based discrimination. Additionally, most workers believed that they deserved higher pay than what they earned, even considering that these jobs still pay more than other jobs in the area. There is a clear limitation in the amount, quality, and type of work available in the area for young people entering the workforce. “I saw how tired, or burnt out they were. They weren’t enjoying the job so it just led to me to quit,” said one participant.

The next group of findings is in the Hiring Process category. Similarly to the appeal of wages in warehouse work, most participants noted the extremely swift and simple hiring process as an attractive factor. Some participants shared anecdotes about how they started working the same day, the next day, or within a few days after applying. In contrast to the easy hiring process at a warehouse, or through a temporary employment agency in the logistics industry, many participants shared that they struggled to find employment outside of this industry. One participant recounted how they reapplied to a former place of employment in fast food and were rejected. Furthermore, many participants shared how they never heard back from the other places of work they applied to, the majority being in fast food and retail, a common trend and some of the only options apart from

logistics in the area. Says one participant: “It was very useful for when people were losing their jobs, at one point, because you were able to get it really fast, without even an interview.”

The next group of findings is in the Work Conditions category. Warehouse jobs are known to be particularly strenuous and have difficult working conditions. This was clear in the stories shared by workers. The following are direct quotes from participants. “Amazon, I would say, is probably one of the worst because they kind of work you like a dog,” says one participant. “I am just a number. They don’t care about me, or my well-being. They just want me to produce, you know,” says another. “They let me go home. Crying works.”

One Latinx Female expressed a story about how she would be forced to go up and down 20-foot ladders and felt extremely unsafe, burnt out, and overworked. She shared that she would often contemplate deliberately letting go of the ladder and falling off so that she could be excused from work and get to leave. This is not the case for each of the participants; some shared neutral experiences or responded that the work was “fine.” However, the extreme experiences shared are alarming. Many participants felt overwhelmed, overworked, and physically drained. Some experienced dangerous and inconsiderate management. One example of this from a participant was in regard to COVID-19. He shares how his warehouse took light precautions against COVID-19 which made him feel unsafe. For other reasons, he left the workplace and less than a week later, his entire work team and section (the place in the warehouse where he worked) contracted the virus. As a result, his supervisor passed away, a consequence of poor COVID safety precautions by the employer. Another condition from work that was prevalent was anti-union sentiments. Most participants were completely uneducated about unions in relation to their warehouse occupation. One participant described how at her work orientation, there were blatant anti-union efforts from the employer to deter any unionizing efforts. She shares that the orientation presenters would tell new employees that anyone who would talk to them about unions was not their friend, and should be reported.

The next group of findings is in the Discrimination category.

African Americans were found to be doing disproportionately harder work than other demographic groups. This was noted by both African-American and Latinx participants. “I don’t know if it was a coincidence or not, but most of the time African Americans were doing most of the harder work,” said one participant. As mentioned before, Spanish speakers were discriminated against in some warehouses; one participant left their job after one day as a result. Another participant shares how he noticed the same Spanish-speaking Latina woman being constantly harassed and discriminated against due to her language, with no measures ever taken to address the harassment by supervisors. Forms of racism occurred in some of the participants’ experiences. One interesting finding to note is that most warehouses were populated by BIPOC (mainly Latinx and African American) workers. As one participant recounts, “I noticed that a lot of warehouses... it was mostly Hispanics working there, where basically the majority spoke Spanish.” This perhaps can be connected to the racialization of the neoliberal logistics industry being concentrated in communities of color.

Additionally, some workers felt belittled due to their age and experienced ageism, though this was generally less salient than the experiences of racial and gender discrimination.

Many of the female participants in this project expressed that they had experienced harassment in the workplace. During one instance of harassment, one participant recalls, “my sister made a complaint to one of the supervisors...and nothing happened.” There were several instances in which these young women were put in uncomfortable situations, but after reporting this to their supervisors and employers, nothing was done. This is a prevalent issue that creates an unsafe environment for women in warehouses and is not at all being addressed. Furthermore, there were economic disparities between men and women in warehouses. Positions in the workplace that required driving, like forklift drivers, were extremely overrepresented by men. Out of all the participants, only men ever mentioned they had held a driving position—a position with higher pay and benefits. Some of the female participants noted that women rarely had the opportunity to take on those higher positions, and were sometimes

not informed of the opportunity at all. As one female participant describes, “The forklift drivers, most of them were men, there was only one female...but they never really gave me the opportunity to even learn how to drive, even though I have my license.”

The next group of findings is in the Student Workers category. Working at a warehouse and going to school at the same time proved to be highly difficult for most who fit this demographic. Many student warehouse workers ended up leaving either school or work entirely due to the strenuous effect it had on their time capacity. Balancing both resulted in them losing personal time and time spent with others. Most student warehouse workers expressed that work had negative impacts on their education, as it limited students’ ability to attend live classes and office hours, as well as their ability to balance assignments. “For school, it wasn’t flexible at all, which is one of the main reasons I had to leave,” says one Latina participant. Another Latino participant recounts the difficulties of “going from paying attention to lectures for two hours for back-to-back classes to going straight to work on and working all night.” He adds: “I like how I can read Marx differently now.”

The last group of findings is in the Work-Life category. Most of the participants’ schedules were primarily determined by work, followed by school. Most also experienced little flexibility in their hours from their supervisors. See the following quotes: “Most warehouses that I know aren’t flexible, they don’t have flexible hours... previous jobs that I’ve had, let’s say fast food restaurants like Carl’s Jr., you could change your availability.” “Everyone had come in to work for 21 days straight, no days off, working lots of overtime.” These are extreme and inconsiderate examples of labor violations and neglect. Furthermore, many expressed the sentiment of cycling through “work, sleep, work, sleep, repeat.” See the following additional quotes: “I got really, really depressed during that time as well, when I was working there. And it didn’t really help that I was just tired and angry all the time.” “Actually, I didn’t see any of my friends for the entirety of the time that I was working there.” The limited scheduling had a clear negative impact on the mental health and time availability of workers. One other striking example can be drawn from my

family relative, a Latinx male, who was fired because he could not attend work. This person requested time off from work to take a shared relative of ours to dialysis for diabetes treatment, and his supervisor fired him for the request. That warehouse, like many others, did not consider the personal lives of its employees.

Limitations

This project was limited in its extent and outreach. To quantitatively represent one of the fastest-growing, largest, and most diverse regions of California would require more than 15 interviews. Furthermore, these interviews may not be fully representative, as they are all individuals I personally know, including friends and family. However, they are all rich in depth and story. Each person interviewed has a deep experience and unique perspective on how warehouses impact their lives and home region.

For future studies, the inclusion of more participants would provide a better quantitative representation of young warehouse workers in the region. Additionally, there should be more people beyond the social network of one person. Most of the participants should come from an equal number of different communities in the Inland Empire, outside of just predominantly Moreno Valley and Perris. Perhaps financial incentives for these interviews will provide a higher interest in participation, which will in turn garner a wider range of stories from different groups and areas in the region.

Conclusion

Significance

This project illuminates and echoes the experiences of countless workers in the Inland Empire. I view these interviews as a reflection of people beyond young warehouse workers. This is a reflection of young people entering the workforce who are struggling to find labor that they are comfortable and happy with. This is a reflection of older folks who have worked

at warehouses for years without adequate pay raises, as many participants emphasized. This is a racial and gendered reflection of discrimination and harassment towards people in the workplace, and a lack of accountability or action from supervisors, companies, and employers. Finally, this is a reflection of the necessity for unions in the warehouse workplace and beyond. More broadly and fundamentally, this project displays the economic development of the Inland Empire, and how an entire industry of logistics, powered by consumerism, is altering the fabric of life for millions of people, especially BIPOC, immigrant households, and the working class.

Nearly one out of eight people in the Inland Empire are employed in the logistics industry, a statistic amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic (Horseman 2022). This figure is continuing to grow as the usage of online shopping continues to increase in the context of the pandemic. Furthermore, the Inland Empire now has over 4,000 warehouses, with a higher demand to meet the labor needs in this industry (Newton 2023). As these needs grow, companies will be keen on meeting the number of workers required to continue their operations. Young and predominantly low-income workers of color are a prime population of the Inland Empire to funnel into the logistics industry.

Implications

My research attends to the gap in knowledge about how neoliberal logistics development and its attributed warehouse labor is affecting young, majority-BIPOC communities and workers. The results of my data illuminate how racialized neoliberalism is inhibiting the agency and empowerment of young workers. Existing knowledge already confirms the poor working conditions in warehouses, but this novel approach will reveal how it can impact our community in the long term by means of inhibiting our upcoming young workforce. Warehouse workers should not be expendable or disregarded. Neither should there be a disproportionate concentration or targeting of warehouse development in working-class communities of color. I aim to target forms of exploitation that are occurring in my community.

Research is only as important as its application. I hope to share these findings with groups and people throughout the Inland Empire to carry important conversations and provide support for existing movements and hopefully push for new ones. Currently, there are people and communities in the Inland Empire focused on mitigating the environmental impact of the logistics industry. There are also groups working to push for the unionization of Amazon warehouses in the region, to fight for stronger workers' rights. The city of San Bernardino voted to exercise a warehouse moratorium on the city with a vote of 7-2 (Whitehead 2021). The South Fontana Concerned Citizens Coalition, the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice, and other groups also work to advocate against the sensitive placement of warehouses near schools and homes.

Following this study, which focused on the issue of logistics through a labor lens and economic lens, I will explore how this industry affects education in the Inland Empire region. I aim to investigate a potential "School to Warehouse Pipeline" that may be occurring in the region. My home and the public schools I attended K-12 are all located less than a mile from a warehouse distribution center. This is a commonly shared experience throughout the Inland Empire, as over 640 schools in the region are within half of a mile of a warehouse (Torres and Klooster 2021). My continuation high school, local community college, and some underserved schools in the region all have a logistics program that serves to build a school-to-warehouse career path for students. I want to investigate how this is affecting education and opportunities for young people in my home region. Furthermore, I have heard personal accounts in my own high school where teachers have discouraged students from pursuing higher education and have told them, "Just go work at a warehouse instead." There is definitely an important issue to illuminate in my local education system.

As revealed by the content of these interviews, neoliberal systems in the Inland Empire have impacted young workers in several capacities. Particularly, the output demands of logistics companies on their employees has fostered conditions that affect their quality of work and life. It is important to understand the

story as fully as possible, and this could potentially be found in new developments in the public education system of the region. There are thousands upon thousands of unique experiences and stories that could be shared in order to improve the quality of work and life for people in the region as a whole.

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