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WAITIN' ON THE WORKPLACE TO CHANGE:
MANAGERIAL CONTROL, RESTAURANT INDUSTRY DYNAMICS, AND TIPPED WORKER RESISTANCE

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WAITIN' ON THE WORKPLACE TO CHANGE:

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Table of Contents

Waitin' on the Workplace to Change:

Managerial Control, Restaurant Industry Dynamics, and Tipped Worker Resistance

Abstract

This study investigates how industry dynamics and managerial control shape tipped workers' resistance behaviors in the restaurant service industry. Specifically, interview participants were employees working in Oklahoma, a state with the lowest minimum wage laws for tipped workers in the restaurant industry. Analysis of interviews with servers and bartenders revealed that managerial control, in the Edwards (1979) sense of simple arbitrary control, often shaped when, how, and whether tipped workers engaged in resistance; specifically, workers tended to engage in routine resistance behaviors based on constantly evolving evaluations of fairness. Arbitrary control forms and income volatility led to chronic evaluations of (un)fairness by tipped workers, thus increasing uncertainty and precarity in the workplace.

Keywords: Tipped workers, everyday resistance, managerial control, restaurant industry

Waitin' on the Workplace to Change:

Managerial Control, Restaurant Industry Dynamics, and Tipped Worker Resistance[1]

For over a century, workplaces have been the site of communication inquiry regarding managerial control and employee resistance (Courpasson, 2012). Various organizations across a diverse array of industries have been studied, from massive corporate conglomerates to close-knit teams (Kramer & Bisel, 2025). Among these areas, the restaurant industry in the United States (U.S.) stands out as a unique context for resistance research. The industry's uniqueness is due to several factors; namely, the industry's ubiquitous nonconventional compensation structures for tipped workers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024; Wilson, 2019). This paper brings academic attention to how tipped workers (i.e., servers and bartenders) enact and create meaning via resistance in a U.S. state with the lowest legal minimum-wage laws for tipped workers in the restaurant industry.

Previous research revealed much about the nature and forms of workplace resistance. Resistance entails everyday, routine, or mundane acts that aim to challenge, disorder, or deny organizational norms (Contu, 2008). Resistance was previously recognized as overt behaviors from workers, such as confrontations with management, employee sabotage of machinery, or other aggressive and disruptive acts. Yet, subsequent research has shown that this is not always the case (Contu, 2008; Courpasson, 2012; Mumby, 2005; Prasad & Prasad, 2000; Zanin & Bisel, 2018). Instead, scholars widened the range of behaviors considered to be resistance. Behaviors such as intentionally slowing down productivity and work or even gossiping would be considered resistance in the workplace (Prasad & Prasad, 1998). While overt acts of resistance certainly do occur, they are considered rare. Everyday forms of resistance occur more often and are exemplified by behaviors such as 'slacking off', 'goofing around', and gossiping (Scott, 1985). These resistance behaviors, however minor, still challenge and disorder organizational norms.

To understand contemporary forms of resistance more completely, Mumby (2005) recommended a dialectical perspective of workplace control and resistance. To contextualize resistance, the local interplay of control and resistance needs to be recognized. Therefore, workplace resistance is locally constituted, affected by tensions of control, and seldom self-attributed. Inductive and qualitative inquiry is therefore helpful for understanding workplace-specific contexts of resistance behaviors among tipped workers in the restaurant industry.

Restaurant Industry: A Context for Worker Resistance

The restaurant industry in the U.S. is a burgeoning industry (Qian & Miao, 2017; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996). Not only is the restaurant industry growing quickly, but it is also unique compared to other industries for various reasons: First, minimum-wage laws for tipped workers in the restaurant industry are state- and income-dependent. Due to minimum-wage laws, tipped workers are compensated just over $2 per hour by their employer in Oklahoma, whereas in California these workers are paid the state's minimum wage of $16 per hour by their employer (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). Second, and perhaps unsurprisingly, many tipped employees in Oklahoma live at or below the poverty level, per 2024 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Third, workers in the category of food services have been consistently ranked as one of the highest in terms of job turnover rate relative to total employment. Lastly, workers in the U.S. restaurant industry have one of the lowest unionization rates across industries, experience sexual harassment while working, and seldom have healthcare access (Hunt, 2016; Jayaraman, 2016; Jaxel, 2024). In sum, the workplace conditions for many tipped restaurant workers involve the volatility of tipped wages, a lack of official organized representation, and an absence of employment benefits such as healthcare. Such conditions characterize restaurant work as precarious: Work that is uncertain and risky (Kalleberg, 2009).

To better understand resistance in the unique context of the restaurant industry, semi-structured interviews were conducted with tipped workers employed in the Oklahoma restaurant industry. Oklahoma is a suitable area to investigate restaurant industry workplace resistance. Oklahoma's minimum wage law for tipped employees is the lowest legally required. Realistically, restaurant employers in Oklahoma only pay a $2.13/h wage to the worker, with the rest of the worker's income earned via tips. The unique dynamics of the restaurant industry should therefore be observable and comparable to other tipped workplaces.

Aside from the academic relevance of analyzing a novel, unique context for organizational communication, practical recommendations are made to restaurant industry employers and workers in hopes of raising awareness of workplace issues. Discussed below, relevant workplace resistance and control literature is addressed, followed by analyses of tipped workers, a history of service labor in the US, and a discussion of restaurant industry dynamics.

Literature Review

Workplace Resistance and Control

Resistance

Traditional conceptions of labor resistance stem from classic-Marxist interpretations, which essentially define resistance as a symptom of the antagonistic, exploitative relations of production (i.e., worker versus manager; Contu, 2008). Early conceptualizations of resistance also entailed collective opposition that is often spurred by a desire to change workplace conditions (Prasad & Prasad, 2001). Of course, the specifics of workplace conditions change from workplace to workplace, with different balances of power and resistance motivating different resistance strategies from workers. Large-scale, historical forms of labor resistance, which include peaceful and violent strategies (e.g., the Ludlow Massacre, West Virginia Coal Wars, Flint Sit-Down-Strike) were considered much more overt, due to context-dependent balances of power, control, and resistance (Scott, 1985).

At times, resistance is overt and intentional; at other times, forms of workplace resistance are subtle and difficult to detect overtly (Contu, 2008; Mumby, 2005; Prasad & Prasad, 2000; Zanin & Bisel, 2018). Fleming and Sewell (2002) stated eloquently, "Rather than looking for the patently grandiose and global strategies of insurrection we may instead find it in the commonplace cracks and crevices of intersubjective relations and other quiet subterranean realms of organizational life" (p. 863). Such nuanced notions of resistance stem from James Scott's (1985) foundational work on everyday resistance by Malaysian peasants (Prasad & Prasad, 2001). Following a two-year ethnography in a small rice-farming village, Scott found that acts of resistance took forms such as foot dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, and slander. These acts do not require tight coordination or planning among workers. Scott provided the following analogy when considering the long-term consequences of such behaviors: "Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do the multiple acts of peasant insubordination and evasion create political and economic barrier reefs of their own" (Scott, 1985, p. xvii). Over time, workers can achieve meaningful change through an accumulation of routine resistance behaviors.

In a critical review of extant literature surrounding workplace resistance Mumby (2005), outlined important points to consider when studying resistance. Mumby warned against an academic romanticization of resistance that risks "seeing it in every nook and cranny of organizational life" (Mumby, 2005, p. 21). Instead, he encouraged scholars to adopt a dialectical perspective on workplace control and resistance. Such a dialectical perspective entails analyzing the tensions of control and resistance that go into actors' decisions to engage in workplace resistance. To better understand the interplay of resistance and control, an understanding of how scholars have categorized resistance behaviors is warranted.

Prasad and Prasad (1998) delineated a four-fold typology to categorize workplace resistance in their comprehensive review of workplace resistance. They found resistance acts tend to take the forms of: (a) *confrontations* with clients or management, (b) *bypassing* control systems via gossip, (c) worker *disengagement* or withdrawal, and (d) *ambiguous accommodation* to workplace norms. In the context of servers and bartenders, these behaviors could take the forms of complaining to a manager, disrespecting clients, conspiring with other coworkers, skipping service steps, or withholding services from poor-tipping customers.

In their organizational ethnography of a hospital's shift to digitalization, Prasad and Prasad (2000) found that resistance is often mundane, routine, and difficult to detect overtly by outsiders. While the ethnography was not focused on tipped workers, their findings helped to define and deepen understandings of workplace resistance. Of particular interest, the scholars found that resistance was seldom self-attributed by participants and was instead attributed to other coworkers. The observed tendency of attributing resistance to coworkers could affect how tipped workers describe resistance acts from themselves and coworkers. While it may be easy to rationalize one's own resistance behaviors as routine or natural, when done by somebody else, these same behaviors could be seen by coworkers as a distinct form of resistance. Additionally, some acts and goals of resistance may be conscious to the worker and management, while other acts may not.

Zoller and Fairhurst (2007) explained that resistance is sometimes done by two or more members who are influenced by another member. Here, *resistance leadership* refers to overt or covert acts of resistance that go on to influence workplace norms. Resistance leadership is a concept born from the unlikely interplay of critical organizational studies and leadership studies. Traditional conceptions of leadership are typically synonymous with an organization's management (i.e., executives, boards of directors, or managers). Zoller and Fairhurst's work also exemplified how resistance exposes unfair policies and practices, sometimes prompting positive changes in workplaces. Scholarship has documented that resistance leaders can emerge among frontline employees and those with limited organizational or institutional authority (Zanin & Bisel, 2018; Bisel et al., 2017). Some resistance leaders even achieve a local, heroic status among coworkers. Research demonstrated that some coworkers can view resistance leaders as "…champion[s] of employee rights" and may see their actions as "courageous" (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p. 397).

Mumby's (2005) approach to theorizing resistance avoids explicit, a priori classifications, instead focusing on how actors enact localized resistance. Prasad and Prasad (2000) proposed that "researchers cease reifying routine resistance as a prespecified set of actions (e.g., horse-play, gossip, disengagement) and look instead at how it is constituted in local workplaces" (p. 389). To detect and classify contemporary workplace resistance, one must peer and pry through the contextual cracks and crevices of the workplace (Fleming & Sewell, 2002). Such an approach warrants qualitative inquiry to explore how resistance is locally constituted, and how, if at all, managerial control affects workers' resistance behaviors.

Control

Resistance and dissent are generally assumed to be negative behaviors by prominent organization leaders and management (Courpasson, 2012). Organization leaders, especially business leaders, have traditionally seen workplace resisters and dissenters as ‘boat-rockers’ (Kramer & Bisel, 2025), who need to comply with the will of management. Many managers and executives may prefer that boat-rockers be avoided by companies (Conrad, 2011). Understandably, many managers assume that social harmony and cohesiveness should be prioritized to maximize efficient coordination among members. Employers often seek and cultivate workers who embody the company man or company woman stereotype: A person who duly accepts, adheres to, and internalizes the company’s values, norms, hierarchies, and policies (Redding, 1985).

Various control strategies have been utilized by organizations to encourage worker compliance and assimilation. Control strategies range from surveillance, promotion of corporate culture and norms, and human resources management (Contu, 2008)—to name a few. Similar to resistance, academic conceptualizations of organizational control have widened in scope over the years: Initially, control in organizations was studied in its overtly coercive forms, typically focusing on a top-down point of view (Stephens, 2018).

Expanding theoretical approaches to managerial control forms, Edwards’s (1979) review of power arrangements in 20th century organizations, outlined three major epochs of control systems: simple, technical, and bureaucratic. The epochs of control are built upon one another, and generally coincide with major technological and economic changes. *Simple control* pertains to direct, idiosyncratic forms of control typical of smaller businesses, especially pre-industrial ones. Personal relationships and direct supervision are important aspects of simple control, as smaller workplace social environments helped to tighten ties between owners, foremen, managers, and workers. Further, simple control is arbitrary: Managers and bosses decide to whom and when certain rules apply. In this sense, management, and its ephemeral decisions, are just as consequential as formal policy. With the rise of mechanized factory production, simple control was surpassed by technical control as an effective means of organizing workplaces. *Technical control* entails the control of the pace and structure of work, oftentimes via machinery-based work systems such as an assembly line. As larger, more complex organizations grew, bureaucratic control was deemed necessary by management to coordinate and control massive swathes of employees. *Bureaucratic control* consists of, but is not limited to, control forms such as formalized policies, job classifications, clear hierarchies, contracts, and rewards for loyalty such as benefits and career growth.

Adding to simple, technical, and bureaucratic control, Barker (1993) proposed the rise of concertive control. *Concertive control* is exercised with teams and groups within an organization that do not have formal hierarchies. While these workers may have more autonomy, they are expected to internalize the organization's values, goals, and policies. Partially aided via peer pressure and group expectations, concertive work groups keep members in line with the organization, thus effectively managing themselves. For tipped restaurant workers, compliance with concertive control could take forms such as the maintenance of an attractive personal appearance, providing excellent service to impress patrons, or even sharing tips via a tip pool.

Edwards' (1979) notions of obtrusive vs unobtrusive control further distinguish the control epochs. Obtrusive control is direct and personal, aligning with simple control forms. Obtrusive control forms include in-person supervision, direct verbal reprimands, and personalized disciplinary actions. Alternatively, unobtrusive control operates largely without immediate managerial presence. Unobtrusive control takes forms such as technological surveillance, standardized procedures for discipline, and the internalization of organizational values and expectations by workers. Unobtrusive control forms align with the bureaucratic and concertive epochs. Looking at the shift from simple to concertive control epochs, control forms have become increasingly unobtrusive: Rather than direct, personal, and arbitrary, managerial control forms have become increasingly embedded in the daily operations of work teams.

The approaches to control provided by Edwards (1979) and Barker (1993) allow for nuanced understandings of contemporary organizational control. Different historical, economic, and social conditions influence systems of control used by management. In the context of the American restaurant industry, the local blend of control forms should reflect the idiosyncrasies of the industry. While most restaurant managers may not have as strong technical control as traditional factory production, they can enact simple control, as discussed in the findings. How might tipped workers' acts of resistance be affected by control forms? Can new policies, practices, or norms be attributed to resistance acts in restaurants and vice versa? Before interpreting the behaviors of tipped workers in relation to managerial control, a deeper understanding of the American restaurant industry is required to understand the industry's unique dynamics.

Tipped Workers

Tipped Workers in the U.S.

Servers and bartenders in the U.S. are defined as "tipped employees" by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA). The FLSA was created during the wake of the American Great Depression and granted workers invaluable labor protection laws such as a federal minimum wage, overtime regulations, and the 40-hour work week (Agrawal, 2023). According to the

FLSA, tipped employees are workers that "customarily and regularly" earn a minimum of $30 per month in tips (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). Tipped employees belong to the larger category of service workers, which pertains to general domestic service labor. In 2022, 'food service and drinking places' earnings were a record $975.9 billion, indicating both a post-Covid rebound and overall industry growth (Statista, 2024).

Service workers were excluded from the FLSA until 1996 (Agrawal, 2023). The exclusion resulted in unique wage and hours laws for tipped employees. Per federal law, states are required to enforce that employers pay their tipped employees a minimum direct wage of $2.13 per hour and a maximum tip credit wage of $5.12/h (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). Employers must always pay tipped employees a small direct wage (of $2.13 per hour), regardless of tips received, but must step in and pay employees a maximum tip credit ($5.12 per hour) when an employee's tips, combined with the minimum direct wage, do not surpass the federal minimum wage ($7.25 per hour as of 2025).

Minimum wages and tip credit amounts are dependent on state law. States such as Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas currently require employers to adhere to the federal minimum amounts, often paying tipped employees a mere $2.13 per hour. States such as California, Washington, and Oregon, however, do not have maximum tip credit laws as their state minimum wages surpass the federal minimum wage. How, then, do these wage laws affect wages and money earned for tipped workers in Oklahoma?

Tipped Workers in Oklahoma

Per statistics from the May 2023 Bureau of Labor Statistics report on occupational employment and wage estimates, there are about 6,780 bartenders and 30,450 servers employed in Oklahoma. Both categories of workers, on average, made about $12.00 per hour, resulting in an annual median wage of no more than $25,700 in 2023. For single workers, their wage would be about $10,000 above the national poverty level. For families with more than one child, servers and bartenders would be classified as living in poverty by several thousand dollars (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Such conditions could be contributing to the fact that Oklahoma has the nation's eighth largest poverty rate, per 2022 metrics (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2023). Ultimately, many unmarried servers and bartenders in Oklahoma are living near the poverty line, and this status quickly changes for families with more than one child.

Using the poverty line as a measure may be somewhat problematic. The poverty line statistic was created in the mid 1960's by researchers at the Social Security Administration (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The actual poverty threshold is calculated by taking the cost of "a minimum food diet," multiplying this value times three (for extraneous costs), and adjusting this value annually for inflation by using previous years' CPI changes. Although there may be issues with the accuracy of what demarcates the poverty line, it is still the de facto poverty assessment tool used by the U.S. Census and related governmental departments since the measurement's inception. As Oklahoma restaurant owners are allowed to pay servers and bartenders less than the minimum wage, the responsibility is shifted away from the employer to provide these workers with a living wage in exchange for their labor.

American Tipping History

Contemporary American tipping culture has roots in medieval England (Azar, 2004). Tipping was first mentioned in the 15th century as an informal practice that was later formalized during the 16th century in the custom of vails (Mentzer, 2013). Vails were essentially tips given to a servant by a noble or otherwise wealthy person for additional services, such as dining and being waited on at another noble's residence. The custom of vails shifted eventually to the regular tipping of employees at hotels, inns, taverns, or restaurants. By the late 1800s, tipping culture found its way to the United States. Contrary to contemporary attitudes and norms, tipping in the U.S. was initially met with scorn as a snobby, dishonest European practice. Oppositional hospitality business practices were the source of this initial negativity towards tipping: the American plan versus the European plan. The American plan was founded on the "… fiction that the customer was a visitor in someone's home" (Mentzer, 2013, p. 111).

The European plan, in contrast, featured separate eating spaces overseen by employees, varied meal choices, and separate meal and room rates. Tipping in the European plan was perceived by owners as an income supplement for service or servility, whereas their American counterparts saw it as a form of bribery for larger meal portions (Mentzer, 2013). As towns and taverns in America grew, owners found that the American plan ceased to be practical. They adopted the more profitable European plan gradually, and the attitudes of owners towards tipping shifted, too. By the late 1920s, most American establishments had shifted to the European plan. Despite attempted legislative resistance, tipping became commonplace in the US: a practice that continues in American bars and restaurants today (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Eos of the American Service Industry

Braverman (1974) discusses antecedents to the rapid enlargement of the service sector in the U.S. in the 20th century. Writing in classic-Marxist terms, Braverman outlined the concept of the universal market: the notion that modern capitalism engulfed and changed society via an all-encompassing marketplace. With the modern industrialization of food production, traditional modes of subsistence fell out of fashion, ultimately ushering in a society-wide reliance on the marketplace for basic survival. This new marketplace reliance also entailed a market-centric reorganization of social relations, drastically altering communities, families, and systems of social support. As traditional, previously non-commodified forms of human care and hospitality became increasingly institutionalized, an enlargement of the service industry followed. Additionally, growth of the U.S. service industry was partially enabled via the off-shoring of American manufacturing labor during the mid-20th century (Thompson, 1967; Kalleberg, 2011). Many women shifted into the service industry, as traditional forms of housework (i.e., cleaning, cooking, childcare) became an increasing part of the new national service economy. These roles became pecuniarily productive service industry jobs such as cleaners, servers, or clerical workers that contribute to, and may be exploited by, capitalist production.

Braverman (1974) provides a deeper understanding of the origins of the restaurant industry in the U.S. Braverman explained the shift to market-centric social relations under the conditions of the universal market. The market-centric shift effectively commodified hospitality labor, partially resulting in the growth of the service industry in the US. Understanding this shift helps to historically contextualize the novelty of the American service industry.

Braverman (1974) also allows for an alternative interpretation of modern hospitality labor. For servers and bartenders, not only is their physical labor commodified, but, via interactions with restaurant and bar patrons their cognitive and emotional labor are commodified too (Qian & Miao, 2017). To maximize tips, these workers must engage in emotional labor (e.g., flirting, appearing cheerful and happy, dressing attractively) to appeal to patrons and appease management (Jaxel, 2024). Some tipped workers, especially women, have reported cases of sexual harassment from management and patrons, with sexualized behaviors and appearances garnering better tips (Jaxel, 2024). Tipped workers rarely have access to healthcare or sick days, oftentimes forcing workers to work while sick (Hunt, 2016).

Industry Dynamics, Volatility, and Precarity

Unique workplace dynamics exist in which tipping is relied upon by workers for income. For instance, the distribution of tips can affect relationships among coworkers and between workers and management (Jaxel, 2024; Wilson, 2019). Typically, front-of-house workers, such as servers and bartenders, may receive direct tips, while support staff, such as bussers and hosts, tend to receive a so-called tip-out. A tip-out is a small percentage of a server or bartender's total tips after a given shift. Back-of-house workers, such as supervisors and managers, are exempt from receiving tips. Depending on the workplace, some cooks and dishwashers may receive tip-outs or small percentages of a tip pool. A tip pool is a compensation structure in restaurants in which tipped workers collectively pool their tips and redistribute them via a role-based payout system at the end of the night.

The industry's varied compensation structure, with different roles getting different amounts of tips at different establishments, creates volatile workplace conditions. Aptly put by Wilson (2019): "Workers of roughly equivalent rank laboring just feet from one another end up divided into economic winners and losers on a nightly basis" (p. 673). These divisions can exacerbate existing social tensions among groups in the restaurant, such as those related to class, race, and gender, especially among tipped versus non-tipped workers.

Relations can be strained even among tipped workers as a group. Tipped workers may build relationships with scheduling managers strategically to get better shifts. After all, managers control what, how many, and where workers are scheduled; in turn, scheduled shifts are opportunities to earn income. Employees learn quickly which sections of a restaurant are more lucrative than others. Fewer workers scheduled during a shift means fewer workers to split tips with at the end of the night. As management has minimal financial stake in how often a worker is working, the agency of scheduling is also, to an extent, granted to servers and bartenders: Tipped workers negotiate amongst themselves to sell, buy, or trade shifts once a schedule is released. In the context of scheduling alone, tipped workers work with and against each other.

Compared to other industries, the relations of production for tipped workers in the restaurant industry are unique. That is, rather than being primarily compensated via an employer, an unpredictable frequency of tipping customers is responsible for paying the wages of tipped workers in low minimum-wage states. The relationship with the employer is blurred, unsettling the contract of employment found in most other kinds of work. Before starting a shift, tipped workers in the restaurant industry do not know how much money they will earn (Jayaraman, 2016). Again, this contrasts with the more standard, predictable means of wage distribution (e.g., hourly rate or salary) found in most other industries. Moreover, volatile work schedules and uncertain workplace relations add to the anomaly of the restaurant industry in relation to other industries. For tipped workers, these aspects characterize the food service industry as precarious: Their work is volatile, uncertain, and risky (Kalleberg, 2009).

Aligning with Braverman's (1974) analysis of the American labor market, Kalleberg in *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* (2011) adds that the enlargement of service labor in the U.S. has created increasingly precarious labor conditions. Spurred by globalization and technological changes in the 20th century, an increasingly polarized gap between secure, well-paying jobs and insecure, low-paying jobs emerged. The gap between so-called 'good' and 'bad' jobs, led to the formation of a new class of workers whose work is defined by precarious labor conditions. Kalleberg argues that precarious work is characterized by insecurity, instability, and a lack of control over the conditions of employment. This characterization aligns with the experiences of tipped workers, as their earnings rely on factors outside of their control (e.g., customer volume, tipping behaviors, managerial control).

Volatility and uncertainty are therefore core aspects of the restaurant service industry, thus contributing to a precarious work environment for tipped workers. As Kalleberg notes, relying on external dependencies heightens uncertainty and decreases workers' sense of security. These precarious labor conditions disproportionately affect workers in low-wage service jobs, reinforcing cycles of economic and social vulnerability. For tipped workers, this means that even when they are technically employed, their income and working conditions nevertheless remain precarious, shaped by the daily volatility and unpredictability of the industry. These unique aspects of control and resistance in the restaurant industry, led the researcher to ask:

RQ: In what ways do managerial control and industry dynamics shape tipped workers' resistance behaviors?

Method

Participants

The dataset consisted of 14 interviews with servers and bartenders in Oklahoma. Participants ranged in age of 22 to 41 years (M = 28; SD = 5.15) and employment duration in the restaurant industry of approximately 1 year to 10 years (M = 5.4; SD = 2.93). Of the sample, seven participants identified as male, and seven participants identified as female. Six participants identified their role as a server, two as a bartender, and six as both. The majority of participants (n = 11) identified themselves as currently employed as a server or bartender, with the remainder (n = 3) being previously employed in the last 6 months. Thus, the sample covered diverse experiences from the two main service roles (i.e., servers and bartenders) in the restaurant industry and represented variable ranges of age and experience in the industry.

To participate in the study, participants must have met four inclusion criteria: (a) Participants must be a current or former server or bartender in Oklahoma; (b) participants must have at least 6 months of experience in the Oklahoma restaurant service industry; (c) if the participant is a former server or bartender, no longer than six months may have passed since they last worked as either; (d) participants must be 18 years or older. These inclusion criteria were selected to ensure participants had sufficient experience in the industry, had recent experiences to call upon, and worked in a low-minimum wage state. Additionally, these criteria allowed for the collection of common experiences of resistance and control while also accounting for the diversity of local workplace experiences. Participants received $10 as an honorarium for participating in the study.

Design and Procedures

Participants were recruited in-person via recruitment flyers (see Appendix B) and interactions, as well as a text message (see Appendix C). Participants completed an online survey to provide informed consent in keeping with institutional review board oversight. While completing the survey, participants also provided basic demographic information, and scheduled the teleconference-based interview. Demographic survey questions included age, sex, education level, ethnic/racial group, marital status, number of children, job title, and employment duration. For scheduling, a clickable link to a 3rd party service, Calendly, was used to provide available meeting times and send scheduled Zoom email invites. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Offering participants to conduct the interview via Zoom provided a flexible and convenient way for participants to participate, as well offered the opportunity to share their experiences in a private environment.

Initial interviews followed a 14-question interview guide (see Appendix A). Questions were crafted according to recommendations from Clark-Kazak (2023) and Tracy (2020). These recommendations include avoiding the use of jargon (i.e., explicit use of theoretical constructs), avoiding double-barreled questions, asking neutral questions, and following-up with relevant probes. Given the iterative, abductive nature of qualitative enquiry, around halfway through data collection the guide was adapted to 8-10 questions. Questions regarding hypothetical situations (e.g., "What would happen if you were to quit working?" and "If you could implement a new rule or policy at work, what would it be?") were removed from the interview guide. This modification allowed for greater focus on the lived experiences of the participants in relation to the RQ and a reduction in interview fatigue. Typical follow-up questions such as "What do you mean when you say X" and "Tell me about a time in which you experienced X" were asked to clarify, loop, and better understand participants' stories and the context surrounding them. Interview recordings averaged 51.5 minutes (SD = 16.23). Digital recordings were transcribed by the researcher by rewatching interview recordings and correcting auto-generated Zoom meeting transcripts for accuracy. Recordings generated 290 pages of double-spaced pages of transcriptions, with the average interview being 21 double-spaced pages.

Data Analysis

NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to organize data for analysis. Data were analyzed using a modified version of constant comparative analysis (CCA), which is typical of contemporary qualitative social science research in communication (Bisel et al., 2016; Charmaz, 2000). The inductive nature of CCA pairs well with in-depth interviews in that it allows for the identification of new themes and insights that arise from local contexts (Tracy, 2020). Data analysis was carried out in five steps: (a) data familiarization, in which data were read and reread (b) open coding, in which participants' experiences were iteratively assigned summative labels in relation to the research questions, (c) focused coding, in which open codes were reduced and organized into exhaustive and equivalent categorical schemes, (d) axial coding, in which the interrelationship between categories was discussed between the researcher and a senior scholar, and, finally, (e) negative case analysis was conducted to describe and explain contradictory cases that did not follow the general patterns of findings identified in previous coding and categorization stages.

Data collection was halted once a saturation point was determined by the researcher. Tracy (2020) defines saturation in the context of interview data as "considered to be the gold standard, which is the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to emerging findings and themes" (p. 359). Saturation was identified by overlapping processes of analysis and collection so that the researcher could iteratively review novel situations, findings, and emergent themes from data. As codes began to cluster into categories, and eventually themes, the researcher determined that no new categories were emerging, thus pausing sampling.

Credibility Checks

Creswell (2007) recommends employing at least two credibility checks, or validation strategies, to help ensure the rigor of qualitative findings. The present study employed member checking and negative case analysis as credibility checks. First, scholars indicate that member checking acts as a strategy to "check on the researcher's conceptualization and possible gaps in cultural understanding" (Motulsky, 2021, p. 394). Member checks include participants in the research process by giving them the agency to suggest critiques, provide alternative language, and verify findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, follow-up in-person conversations were held with three participants to review the study's findings, examine resistance and control sub-themes, and collaboratively interpret participant quotes. Participants read the study's overall findings and the interpretations of selected participant quotes. After reading a section, the participants discussed their thoughts with the researcher. Questions such as "do you agree with the interpretation of this quote?" and "would you change the analysis of 'X' topic?" were asked to participants. During these conversations, participants verified the study's overall findings, while also offering their critiques and clarifications of quotes and interpretations.

Second, negative case analysis was used late in data analysis to examine data that did not fit within emergent categorical schemas but were still related to the research question. By focusing on atypical cases, researchers can acknowledge potentially contradictory themes, expand theoretical considerations, and increase transparency, thus improving the credibility of findings (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher identified emergent codes and themes, the context (e.g., industry dynamics, managerial control) and outcomes of resistance behaviors (e.g., termination, workplace change) were iteratively compared. For example, while most participants' acts of resistance were individually enacted, rarely premeditated, and seldom changed workplace conditions, a participant's experience of circulating petitions to coworkers stood out as a contradictory resistance behavior. As the act of creating petitions was collective, planned, and achieved workplace change, it prompted a re-examination of existing resistance themes and interpretations. This particular case and its analysis are discussed in more detail at the end of the findings section. In addition to helping answer the research question, these comparisons of unique, contradictory cases strengthened the validity of existing codes and themes by illuminating the contexts in which atypical cases were likely to occur.

Positionality Statement

To bolster credibility in interpretive qualitative research, it is important to acknowledge my positionality and biases in the research process (Creswell, 2007). I am a former server and bartender that worked in the state of Oklahoma for several years. As such, I was influenced by my experiences as a worker in the target industry while conducting this study. During interviews, I partially suspended my knowledge of the industry. This process, known as bracketing, allowed the participants to discuss their lived experiences largely free from the influence of my personal experiences and judgments. Discussions with my committee members also helped me to situate my own experiences in relation to the analysis of codes, emergent themes, interpretations, and literature.

Findings

Overview

To answer the RQ, data analysis revealed that managerial control in the restaurant service industry, especially in the Edwards' (1979) conception of simple arbitrary control, often affected the context in which resistance was performed. Simply put, managerial control influences resistance via arbitrary, idiosyncratic decisions and situations. As simple managerial control in the restaurant industry is inconsistent, and often exercised through informal practices like scheduling, favoritism, and selective enforcement, tipped workers constantly (re)evaluate the situational (un)fairness of that control.

Regarding resistance, data analysis revealed that servers and bartenders tended to engage in behaviors of resistance based on evaluations of job unfairness. Routine, everyday resistance acts were oftentimes chronic and undetected by management. Larger, overt resistance acts tended to occur once, typically resulting in the worker quitting, being fired, or receiving economic sanctions. Findings suggest that participants evaluated job fairness moment-to-moment and engaged in resistance when they believed job unfairness had emerged. In that sense, resistance acts were seldom premeditated in advance, but instead, were enacted to settle the score, right a wrong, or restore agency. Ongoing evaluations of (un)fairness were often made in relationship to compensation; However, many tipped workers evaluated (un)fairness related to favoritism, unprofessionalism, and scheduling. Acts of resistance themselves, while unique to the context of the restaurant service industry, generally reflected Prasad and Prasad's (1998) resistance typology. Ultimately, the form and frequency of tipped workers' resistance acts were as varied and volatile as the restaurant industry itself.

Volatility and Uncertainty

Findings revealed that myriad aspects of the restaurant service industry are volatile, making work, and at times life, uncertain for tipped workers. Volatility, in relation to precarity, is discussed before control and resistance as it is practically constant through tipped workers' careers. Compensation was reported to be volatile due to scheduling, a low base minimum wage, and, as one participant stated, "the mercy of the night." As mentioned before, nightly income is uncertain for tipped workers. Early in their careers, tipped workers struggle to account for this inevitable volatility of income. One participant described relying on volatile income, as such:

> I really struggled to gain footing for a large part of my life because of the inconsistencies of just, like, you never quite know how much you're going to depend on or what your tips are. Some weeks you have really good business. Some weeks you don't. Sometimes you have really good tables. Sometimes you really don't.

Without the advice of seasoned coworkers, tipped workers may need years of experience to be able to save accordingly to meet recurrent financial obligations, such as rent, bills, and groceries.

A literal rainy day could be a metaphorical one for a tipped worker. Tipped income was reported to be affected by weather, season, and even political climate.

Income volatility could occur on a nightly basis. Sometimes tipped workers earn hundreds of dollars in a single night or even from a single patron. Other times, a tipped worker may receive tens of dollars for hours of physical and emotional labor. Two workers, working the same shift, may have entirely different experiences depending on the patrons who are assigned to their seating section. Other than providing quality service, tipped workers have little control over the money they earn. One participant likened the nightly uncertainty of income to being a gambling addict:

> It's so volatile. And it's one of the things that makes the whole job almost kind of addictive, because it's almost like being a gambling addict, you know- not knowing what you're gonna make, what's gonna happen. But like some days, you feel lucky, and you're like on, and your charm is on, especially as a bartender, and you can really make a lot of money in one evening, even from one person.

There are few, if any, reliable indicators that ensure when a tipped worker will be compensated well, or even adequately. The structure of tipped compensation in low minimum tipped wage states places the agency and burden of compensation away from employers and on to patrons. Patrons, at their own discretion, effectively decide who is and is not paid well. When discussing the nature of tipped labor, a participant said this about discriminatory tipping practices:

> If there's, you know, somebody who has any inclination to dislike othered groups, they are going to tip those othered groups less. And that's just statistically how it is. Native American, African American, sometimes even women get tipped less on average than men. It depends on the environment, obviously, but it's statistically, like, discriminatory,

> right? So if we think about what statistics reflect, that's a story and some data points. What's the story there? It supports racism, it supports misogyny, it supports homophobia, it supports so many things that maybe people who are good tippers don't even realize, right?

This quote illustrates how, for tipped workers, the tipping behaviors of patrons are arbitrary, uncertain, and potentially discriminatory. There are simply too many variables to consider. Colloquially, each shift and each patron are a roll of the dice.

Control

Simple control, in the Edwards (1979) sense of arbitrary, personal control, is the most common type of control exercised by management in the service industry. Simple control forms in restaurant industry workplaces included basic surveillance (typically via direct surveillance and cameras), personal relationships with management, and situational, idiosyncratic forms of control (Edwards, 1979). Bureaucratic and technical control forms were practically nonexistent. Concertive control, however, was seldom exercised in the form of basic pecuniary rewards for loyalty or performance (e.g., nightly sales competitions). As such, the simple control forms utilized by management often created uncertain situations via arbitrary, personal decisions that influenced workers' resistance acts to be situational and sporadic. The main control forms exerted by management included scheduling, favoritism and selective enforcement, and various acts deemed by participants as 'unprofessional'.

The prevalence of simple control in the restaurant service industry is logical, as food service labor is highly social. High amounts of worker-worker, worker-management, and worker-client communication are required to coordinate a quality guest experience. Tipped workers, most often bartenders, develop and use their own slang and jargon for efficient, high-context communication behind the bar. Furthermore, social relationships at work are highly valued by tipped workers: The relationships made at work were cited as one of the most important aspects of an enjoyable tipped workplace. Often, tipped workers were motivated to enter the industry via recommendations from friends already working at a given restaurant or bar, thus allowing for easier entry into existing workplace cultures (i.e., organizational osmosis; see Gibson & Papa, 2000).

Scheduling as Control

Personal relationships at work affect various aspects of tipped labor. The quality of scheduling is perhaps the most consequential for tipped workers. Scheduling managers decide the shifts allotted to each worker each week. It is rare for tipped workers to work a standard, set schedule every week. Not only does working different shifts each week increase volatility, but it also affects how tipped workers interact with management. A participant described maintaining relationships with management:

> Be like, 'Hey man, nice haircut. Hey dude, how're you doing? How'd you enjoy your staycation?' Just simple, like, friendly, interactions. Okay, it's like a conscious thing to try to, like, build those relationships. Or is it just like being at work? I think it maybe used to be conscious, but I think it's just something I normally do now.

This quote shows that this participant consciously engaged in strategic relationship maintenance to build positive social relationships with management. Additionally, this participant's experience shows how the cultivation of these positive relationships eventually becomes routine, indicating how ingrained this practice is. Managers, especially scheduling managers, have the power to reward or punish tipped workers via assigning workers to certain shifts, divvying seating sections, and deciding when workers' shifts are done (Jaxel, 2024). Some shifts are highly sought after, typically on Friday and weekend evenings when customer volume is high. Inversely, some shifts, commonly weekday morning shifts, seldom elicit satisfactory customer volume. With the volatility of shift quality, management can use scheduling as a tool of both control and punishment, particularly for tipped workers whose income depends on being given shifts during high-volume hours.

Unlike waged workers with guaranteed pay structures, tipped workers rarely have legal or contractual protection to ensure adequate hours, despite their livelihood depending on them. Thus, a reduction in hours effectively functions as a wage cut, without formally altering a worker's pay rate. For example, a participant shared this story about a coworker:

> A different server, her hours got cut, like, very, very much, like she went from, want to say, from 40 hours to like 28 or 30. And she's a mom of like a few kids. So, you know, single mom, a few kids. So you know that kind of cuts in money. And she- she went off on the management, and she actually got fired at the time due to that.

This quote exemplifies the wage reduction implemented by management. Simple control is clear: Direct managerial authority exercised via scheduling decisions. The worker, in this case a single mother, faces not only class-based insecurity, but also income insecurity, thus increasing precarity and the potential for resistance (Kalleberg, 2011). When conditions at work are evaluated as unfair, workers react and resist. In this case, the arbitrary decision to cut this worker's hours led to a direct confrontation with management, ultimately resulting in termination. Discussions regarding scheduling uncertainty and perceived fairness led to an unexpected theme that arose in almost every interview: The concept of perceived favoritism.

Favoritism and Selective Enforcement

As perceived by tipped workers, managers in the restaurant service industry often show favoritism. Management's favoritism evaluations were unsurprisingly subjective: Participants perceived that managers selected their "favorites" based on performance, personality, and employment duration (i.e., seniority). Managerial favoritism was seen as arbitrary and unfair by tipped workers, even when favoritism benefited the tipped worker in question. As one participant who received an extra annual bonus stated: "She kind of just picks and chooses on who gets bonuses, which I think is a little stupid and unfair. It's favoritism. Yeah, whoever can kiss the most ass".

Perceived favoritism influences to whom a tipped worker may voice concerns. In tipped workplaces, there are seldom formal rules for reporting incidents, making the maintenance of social relationships with different managers all the more important. Human resource (HR) professionals and departments are rare in the industry, especially in non-corporate environments. For example, one participant described an experience of reporting a workplace sexual misconduct incident involving a coworker:

> I tried to report someone for sexual harassment to one of the assistant managers, but she was like, 'Oh no, he's like, my favorite employee' and 'he's like, my child, he wouldn't do that'. Yeah, so it's like, depending on what you're reporting, depends on what manager you go to, if and who you, like, depending on if it's about a certain person, you have to go to a specific manager, because some managers will be like, 'Oh no, I love them', and just completely deny your claim, while others will take it seriously.

In this case, management's idiosyncratic favoritism caused a sexual misconduct incident to be downplayed. Management's solution to the problem, according to the participant, was to schedule the two workers to work different shifts. No other disciplinary action was taken. The participant described their rationale for strategic reporting due to managerial favoritism and lack of formal recourse. Favoritism, then, determines who is and is not believed, punished, or protected. Ironically, the unstructured, non-corporate environment of many restaurants appeals to tipped workers. Tipped workers at corporate-owned establishments generally viewed corporate (i.e., upper-management, HR) with scorn, while workers at non-corporate environments were happy to be outside of the inflexibility of corporate structure. Unlike traditional workplaces, policy rarely supersedes the interpretations of management in the restaurant industry. Managers personally decide what rules apply and to whom. A participant shared this story while discussing being caught by management for repeatedly violating a policy:

> I was hitting my vape and my manager came around the corner and was like 'oh, my god, don't make me fire you. Don't make me fire you'. He wasn't ever going to fire me, but he walked away. And then I was in the SA closet one time, and one of the other managers walked in there, and she goes (sniffs) 'don't let me see you doing that'. And then she walked away.

This participant's experience exemplifies the situational, idiosyncratic policy enforcement exercised by restaurant managers. At this specific workplace, management told workers that there was a zero-tolerance policy for vaping at work.

> I wasn't the only one, too. Everybody would hit their vapes as well. Even the managers would come out in the back, like when you were on the patio. The managers sometimes would come on the back patio and hit our vapes with us. And we'd give it to them.

This quote illustrates how management was willing to bypass stated policy on multiple occasions and even took part in violating the policy. In this form, selective policy enforcement exacerbated volatility and blurred the boundary between friends and management. Managers maintain control not merely through strict discipline, but also via personal discretion, which simultaneously endears them to workers while also reinforcing their power to exercise arbitrary control.

Favoritism and selective enforcement function as tools of simple control, shaping both who has voice and to whom policy applies. Accordingly, resistance is conditioned by volatile social dynamics and is thus situational and fragmented. Before reporting and resisting, workers contextually evaluate their relationship with each manager to determine the associated social, economic, and professional risks.

Unprofessionalism

The social relationships between management and tipped workers oftentimes extended outside of work, resembling casual friendships rather than formal hierarchies. Again, the highly social nature of restaurant labor contributes to the formation of these casual relationships, thus blurring professional boundaries. As a function of simple control, personal relationships go on to affect various aspects of the tipped workplace such as scheduling, disciplinary action, and distribution of potential tips via seating sections. Simply put, being friends with managers is generally positive for tipped workers. When managers begin to treat workers as friends more than coworkers or employees, unprofessional behaviors emerge. For example, a participant reported being put into awkward positions when managers would gossip to them about other managers:

> So I'm friends with all the managers, so all of the managers come up to me and like, bad-mouth the other managers. And it puts me in this awkward position, you know, because I like all the managers, I don't want to bad-mouth them, and it just kind of makes like an unprofessional work environment.

According to this quote, the participant defined relationships with various managers akin to friendship. However, this is not a conventional friendship and is instead far from egalitarian. The tipped worker could not reciprocate gossip out of fear of other managers becoming aware and retaliating. Social relationships with managers, while perhaps offering situational protection and enjoyment, nevertheless reinforce the dynamics of simple control.

Unprofessional behavior was not limited to these blurred relationships. When addressing an issue with a worker or the workplace, managers sometimes yelled at and insulted workers. A participant had this to say when discussing the varying temperaments of their managers:

> Well, they're all different. One of them is very bossy. She'll yell at you. She's literally called employees stupid before. She can be quite mean, and she'll just, like glare at you and silent treatment you, if, like, if you're not doing things the way she thinks it should be done.

Again, this quote revealed how managers execute arbitrary control at their discretion. Akin to evaluations of fairness, tipped workers must constantly evaluate managers' moods. Will they be kind today, or abusive? It is impossible to know beforehand. In the restaurant workplace, perceived unprofessionalism both stems from and contributes to the uncertainty, volatility, and precarity that define the industry.

Resistance

Tipped workers enacted workplace resistance primarily through spontaneous acts inspired by perceived situational fairness. When conditions at work were evaluated as unfair, tipped workers, in their own way, tended to react and resist. In an environment as volatile and uncertain as the restaurant service industry, these evaluations of fairness are constantly in flux. Therefore, long-term planning of resistance is rare, while reactive, episodic resistance behaviors are more common. Below, various resistance behaviors are discussed; These acts include: resistance in the context of low-income, direct confrontations, false compliance, exit threats, and quitting.

Reparational Resistance

Situational evaluations of income fairness were the most common impetus to resistance for tipped workers. A participant described the situation as this:

> As a server, if you're not getting any tables, for example, and you're quote-unquote making $2.13 an hour, which is more like minimum wage, which in 2025, is not a lot at all. I mean, sometimes you feel like 'dang, I don't like- I'm not gonna bust my ass for something that I'm not getting paid for', you know? So, sometimes there'll be those mornings where you're just like 'I'm not gonna do this till I till I make above, like, a certain amount of money'.

This quote exemplifies the day-to-day, sometimes even hourly, income fairness evaluations tipped workers engage in before foot-dragging. When compensation was contextually evaluated as unfair, participants resisted in various ways. To avoid boredom and expending effort on non-service labor, tipped workers frequently spent time on their phones, ate food in a breakroom, used nicotine vaporizers, and interacted with coworkers. Sometimes, physical labor shifts (e.g., cleaning shifts, prep shifts) are scheduled to servers and bartenders. These shifts are dreaded by tipped workers: They are low-paying (around $8/h), seen as disrespectful of their time, and often rushed through. The message is clear. If tipped workers aren't earning tips, they see little value in exerting themselves. Instead of a reaction to managerial control attempts, resistance for tipped workers can be a response to the insecurity of the low base-wages endemic to the industry.

In some cases, opportunities arise for tipped workers to take matters into their own hands and fairly correct their compensation themselves. In one case, a bartender reported witnessing their bar manager ordering extra bottles of liquor on each liquor order. At this establishment, the bar manager was a tipped worker, even though they were responsible for managerial duties such as scheduling, ordering liquor, and maintaining quality. To fairly adjust their income for the unpaid hours spent as bar manager, they took bottles of liquor home. According to the participant, management was likely aware of this situation, but did not take any disciplinary steps to avoid it.

Direct Confrontation

Tipped workers directly confronted management when they had close, positive relationships with management, especially at small, non-corporate restaurants. For instance, a participant described confronting the owner about a new employee's behavior:

> And the way that we navigate that is, we take it to our GM, and then if the GM, within a reasonable amount of time hasn't, you know, reported back to us, I'll be the one to be like, 'hey, owner, you're here for a beer. Your Oklahoma craft brew. Come on. What's going on? Did the GM even talk to you about this?'

At this workplace, workers had direct, positive relationships with middle and upper management, allowing them to confront management to negotiate workplace conditions. This workplace, though, is small and close-knit, with fewer than ten tipped workers employed there. The participant's experience shows that in smaller, more flexible environments, direct confrontation can function as an informal negotiation tool. When workers have direct communication channels with upper management, they can hold management accountable when they feel that concerns have been overlooked.

In contrast, at tipped workplaces with larger teams, especially corporate-owned establishments, the efficacy of direct confrontation was often viewed as unsuccessful. A participant working at a franchised restaurant explained:

> And there have been times where I've gone up to the managers and I'm like, “Hey, I think this would work better if you did it this way”. And they'd be like, “No, you don't get to say. It’s not up to you because it's not up to any of us. Really, it's up to corporate and corporate doesn't listen”. I mean, I've talked to them about like, scheduling before, and they don't listen. I've talked to them about ways we can maximize training because we're really falling flat when it comes to training people. They don't listen.

This quote shows the almost inherent distrust towards the corporate owners while also explicating the frustration of being unable to influence workplace conditions. Even management expressed antipathy towards corporate, indicating that local management is also frustrated by the inflexibility of corporate structure. When worker and management agency is curtailed, especially when practical recommendations are raised, feeling of unfairness arise. Simply, for tipped workers at large, corporate-owned restaurants lack much democratic input in the workplace. Chronic disengagement and seeking alternative employers are therefore logical as resistance outcomes, manifest in these experiences.

False Compliance

Much of the restaurant service industry is unstructured and volatile, lacking formal rules and policies. Therefore, there are few policies for tipped workers to disobey. Curtailing management, though, still does occur. These forms of false compliance typically involve mundane, everyday behaviors that undermine managerial control. Examples of such behaviors include bartenders giving out extra alcohol to regular customers, workers sneakily hitting a nicotine vaporizer, servers taking and eating undelivered food, and workers engaging in "clopening" (at the detriment of quality and standard practices, executing closing duties to allow for quicker opening duties). Fairness evaluations are not always considered when tipped workers decide to engage in acts of false compliance. Sometimes these acts, such as sneaking off to hit a vape, need no impetus of perceived unfairness. They simply break boredom, restore autonomy, or provide relief during a stressful shift. False compliance acts were rarely premeditated but rather spurred opportunistically.

In some cases, participants reported deliberately taking leftover or falsely ordered food from work. One particularly creative example involved a participant organizing fake to-go orders with outside friends. Their friend would call the restaurant to place a large to-go order and never arrive to pick it up. Knowing that leftover food is often divided among servers and bartenders, this worker organized a plan to ensure that there will be food to take home. These experiences show that even in an environment with few formal rules, false compliance still occurs. Tipped workers find their own way, opportunistically and at times strategically, to alleviate stress, restore autonomy, and disobey management's rules.

Exit Threats and Quitting

When servers and bartenders feel they have reached their limit of tolerance, they often engage in exit threats or outright quitting. Sometimes, this decision resulted from a buildup of unfair occurrences, other times from a single particularly stressful or unfair shift. While not always in response to managerial control attempts, these exit threats were often communicated directly to management. The decision to leave, or threaten to leave, was both based on perceived managerial incompetence and poor working conditions. For example, a participant walked out of the job after being repeatedly scheduled to work alone:

> So after like a month of working Tuesdays alone and they weren't finding anyone to help me, I was like, I'm just- I can't do this anymore. So I'm leaving. I think she (the boss) sent me a text (about leaving), but I don't even know if I responded to her.

This quote highlights the participant's frustration and the tipping point that ultimately led them to exit. While being understaffed for a shift generally means more tables and therefore more tips, the mental toll of constant emotional labor became too much. The manager's subsequent attempt to communicate was met with indifference, showing that the participant had already mentally and symbolically disengaged.

The status of their employment is one of the few formal aspects that tipped workers may leverage to change individual working conditions. As such, turnover in the restaurant industry is notoriously high: A participant described the constant flow of new and old coworkers akin to a "revolving door." With such high turnover throughout the industry, tipped workers have little trouble finding a new employer. Quitting, or threatening to quit, is therefore a relatively low-stakes decision for tipped workers that achieves immediate personal change. Frequent exit threats and quitting rarely impacted underlying, collective working conditions. Instead, the revolving door seems to contribute to the volatility and precarity that characterize the industry.

Resistance: Fairness Evaluations of Control

The interplay of managerial control, fairness evaluations, and workplace resistance showed that resistance behaviors were often triggered by arbitrary, idiosyncratic managerial decisions that were situationally perceived as unfair. On the other hand, managerial decisions that were perceived as fair, consistent, and respectful were often met with acceptance rather than resistance. Drawing from Edwards' (1979) concept of obtrusiveness, workers are therefore more likely to perceive obtrusive managerial control forms as unfair. When control forms are grounded in policy and consistently exercised, resistance acts are rare. For example, a participant explained their logic when making reports at work:

> …this is obviously a problem I need to bring up with the GM (general manager), because he is a super unbiased guy. Like you can bring him any problem. He's super professional. He does his job, what he's supposed to do.

The problem discussed in this participant's experience is the same sexual misconduct case that was downplayed by management as discussed in the favoritism and selective enforcement section. Compared to the manager that arbitrarily downplayed the participant's sexual misconduct report, this participant views their GM as objective and professional. As such, the participant feels comfortable making reports to their GM when possible. This contrast helps to show how workers may react based on their fairness evaluations of how different managers exert control. Tipped workers recognize that no manager, and therefore no control form, is the same. As simple, obtrusive control forms are ubiquitous in the restaurant industry, fairness evaluations of managers' arbitrary decisions constantly reoccur, thus often influencing resistance acts to be chronic, situational reactions to perceived managerial injustice and incompetence.

Negative Case Analysis: Collective Resistance

The inspiration, and original goal, of this research was to identify ways in which tipped workers enacted collective resistance to achieve meaningful change in the workplace. Conducting a negative case analysis, as discussed earlier, revealed that collective resistance proved to be rare, but did still occur. Notably, a participant reported creating and circulating petitions among coworkers in order to influence management. After a newly hired manager had been inappropriately interacting with female servers, the participant created a petition and individually queried their coworkers for signatures against the change. As a result of a petition, the unprofessional behaviors of the new manager were brought to upper-management. An investigation of the new manager soon followed. Ultimately, it was revealed that this manager had a background as a sex-offender and was consequently fired. In this case, the conduct of a new manager negatively impacted a large group of servers, prompting a collective resistance response.

Despite being uncommon, collective resistance in the form of coworker petitions can be an effective form of resistance for addressing workplace injustices and pushing back against managerial control. The strong social bonds made in tipped workplaces seem well-suited to facilitate collective resistance in precarious work environments: As compared to individual constructions of fairness, collective sensemaking about unfairness has been shown to facilitate more extreme, confident, and cohesive evaluations of unfairness (Lind et al., 1998; Roberson, 2006). Nevertheless, the volatility and precarity of the industry, namely via high turnover, individualized income, and arbitrary managerial control forms, limit the situations in which tipped workers deem collective resistance and organization as worthwhile.

Discussion

The goal of this research was to better understand the nature and symbolism of tipped workers' resistance acts in the context of managerial control and industry dynamics. The episodic and contextual nature of resistance observed in this study aligns with Scott's (1985) notion of everyday resistance, emphasizing that in precarious and volatile work environments, organized, collective, and premeditated resistance acts are rare. Instead, resistance tends to be individual, reactive, and shaped by moment-to-moment evaluations of fairness and well-being.

Everyday Resistance and (Un)fairness Evaluations

Drawing from both Prasad and Prasad (1998) and Scott's (1985) notions of worker resistance, this research contributes to the transferability of existing resistance typologies by investigating a novel resistance context. Scott's conception of everyday resistance shows that resistance is typically covert, informal, and fragmented. Similarly, Prasad and Prasad highlight how these small, subversive acts can be both an expression of autonomy and a critique of managerial control. This study confirms these conceptions.

The investigation of everyday resistance in the context of tipped labor shows that precarity intensifies the need for subtle resistance. In precarious work environments, where uncertainty and insecurity define the workplace, workers rely on covert resistance behaviors (Scott, 1985). The high turnover rates and vulnerabilities of tipped work mean that overt, organized resistance is often too difficult to organize and too risky to enact. As workplace conditions are constantly in flux, what bothered workers yesterday may not be the case tomorrow. Instead, workers often rely on everyday resistance acts as strategies of situational adaptation to perceived unfairness, even if only to reduce insecurity temporarily and restore a valued sense of self.

These findings contribute to the resistance literature the idea that ongoing (un)fairness evaluations help to explain tipped workers' everyday resistance behaviors. While scholars have noted various forms of major and minor resistance (Mumby, 2005; Prasad & Prasad, 1998; Prasad & Prasad, 2001; Zanin & Bisel, 2018; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007), less clarity has been provided regarding the underlying interpretive attributions that drive the enactment of those behaviors. When ambiguity about unfairness exists, one can perceive themselves as "the victim of injustice", thus unsettling conceptions of self-value (Cropanzano et al., 2003). For servers and bartenders, the fairness of the employment contract is being constantly re-evaluated. Judgements regarding unfairness that arise within a single work shift can trigger resistance behaviors that attempt to "right the score" and restore agency.

Everyday resistance is a legitimate act of communication. In precarious labor contexts, these acts are not trivial; they are symbolic expressions of autonomy. In an industry that seldom affords workers a clear voice, everyday resistance communicates: Resistance symbolizes violations of security, agency, and fairness. To address the underlying issues of the tipped workplace, managers should focus on the symbolic value of resistance rather than the physical act. Resistance does not exist in a vacuum: It is performed in the context of the workplace, influenced by managerial control and industry dynamics.

Good Tips, Bad Tips

This research contributes to Kalleberg's (2011) notions of precarious service labor. Precarity, manifest in the volatile industry dynamics (e.g., tipped income) and arbitrary control forms (e.g., scheduling, selective enforcement), was discussed in every interview. Aligning with Edwards' work on control, this study shows that restaurant industry management still commonly exercises simple forms of control. Such conditions resemble what Edwards called the 'petty tyranny of the bosses': As opposed to policy, managerial control permeates nearly every aspect of the workplace. Even in corporate-owned restaurants, the whims of management often control more than formal policy. Restaurant workplaces resemble the pre-industrial, socially close-knit workplaces that Edwards said exemplified the simple control epoch. Akin to the factories and foremen of yesteryear, tipped workplaces are rife with favoritism and paternalism. Tipped workers understand this: They consciously strategize communication and interactions with management for increased security. Despite workers' efforts, these simple control forms often exacerbate already precarious industry dynamics.

The restaurant industry is an environment of uncertainty. Like other service positions, long-term job security for tipped workers is difficult to come by. Upward career mobility is negligible, retirement plans are absent, labor regulations are often skirted, and insurance benefits are practically nonexistent. Historically disenfranchised groups, such as women, non-whites, and immigrants, disproportionately fill low-paying, precarious service roles, exacerbating existing socioeconomic strains (Kalleberg, 2009). To alleviate precarity, institutional protections and regulations are recommended by Kalleberg. A participant gave their recommendation for the industry: "I think tipped wage needs to be a thing of the past. I've felt that the entire time I've been a tipped wage worker". Relying on tipped wages is a gamble. Nevertheless, the allure of the nightly jackpot keeps many tipped workers playing the game. Future studies should explore this dynamic, investigating how servers and bartenders enact resistance in non-normative tipping cultures.

Conclusion

This study has limitations. Namely, interviews with managers were not conducted. Therefore, managerial control was interpreted solely via the experiences of workers rather than triangulated with managers' experiences. Additionally, interviews were conducted with tipped workers from various establishments. In-depth case studies of specific restaurants may elicit better contextual analyses of the interplay between managerial control, industry dynamics, and resistance. Prolonged observations of specific tipped workplaces and the collection of multiple data types (e.g., recording manager-worker interactions) would likely result in data that would have otherwise been hidden from the researcher (Banas et al., 2019). Future studies should examine resistance behaviors and managerial control in cultures in which tipping is nonnormative. As income volatility contributes so much to the general precariousness of the industry, a standardized livable wage may alleviate feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Therefore, resistance behaviors and managerial control forms may also differ.

The tipped workplace is a unique one. The industry attracts all walks of life, either as patron or worker. Food service remains one of the oldest industries of human history, and the ritual of sharing food with friends and loved ones will continue long into the future. Many tipped workers believe that everyone, for at least a while, should work in food service to not only understand the dynamics of the industry, but also human nature. A participant explained: “I feel like serving really taught me how, it sounds weird, but how to be human in a way”. In tipped workplaces, close personal friendships and impactful social interactions develop and occur often. After all, the industry is rooted in hospitality. However, due to its precarious nature, there are fundamental issues within the industry that negatively affect the wellbeing and security of tipped workers. Resistance is often a reaction to these issues. To this, the experiences of the participants in this study are testament. Workers, in their own way, symbolically push back against the insecurity and stressors they face.

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Appendix A

Chronological Interview Guide	

Pre-interview	• Distribute demographic questionnaire
	  o Informed consent
	  o Schedule Interview via Calendly
	• 1 day prior to interview, automatic greeting/reminder email and options for rescheduling
	  o Zoom link
	  o Primer with basic study info

Intro & Rapport	**1.** Introduce the researcher to the participant.
	  a. Ask them how they are doing, be friendly and warm while remaining professional.
	2. Briefly remind them of the goals and nature of the study.
	  a. Perhaps explain too that I am a former waiter and bartender in OK.
	3. Tell participants how long the interview should take.
	  a. ~50 mins. This will be more accurate after pilot interviews/experience.
	4. Explain to the participant that they may stop the interview at any time
	5. All data will be **confidential and de-identified** via pseudonyms, and to try and avoid using personal names.
	6. Explain to participants that they may ask questions and tell stories during the interview, but they should do their best to stay on topic.
	7. Ask them when they started to work as a server or bartender.
	  a. When did you start, why did you decide to work there?
	  b. Would you say you generally like or dislike where you work?

	i. Favorite part about this job? *ii.* Most disliked aspect?
Talking first about **workplace structure**, then shifting intermittently to: RQ1a: describing **resistance** behaviors; RQ1b: changes in workplace control via resistance; RQ1b: changes in workplace	**1.** Tell me a bit more about where you work. How is your workplace environment? a. Ask to whom they report, how they are paid, and any hierarchy amongst workers. b. Ask about policies. Reveal as little or as much as you like. c. Ask about clocking in/out and how scheduling works. d. How are you compensated? e. Do you work in a team or alone? i. Do you receive an hourly wage or purely tips? ii. Are there uncertainties you experience regarding your compensation or the way you receive your salary? 1. How so? Is there an example that you can think about? 2. Don't ask about the amount, just if they can plan ahead. iii. Are there any incentives in place for good performance/behavior/loyalty? **2.** How would you describe your relationship with management? a. How would you describe their management style? b. How, if at all, do they monitor what goes on at work? i. E.g., surveillance tech, report systems, hierarchies **3.** Does the boss/management include you and your coworkers' opinions when making decisions?

resistance via control; RQ1c: changes in workplace relations via resistance.	a. If so, how? **4.** Has there ever been a situation in which several coworkers had the same gripe about management. If so, please tell the story. **5.** Tell me about a time when you or someone else at work had a confrontation or disagreement with management. a. Without naming anyone, how would you describe who was involved? **6.** Tell me about a time you 'slacked off' or felt disengaged while at work. **a.** Describe your thoughts and feelings at the time. **b.** Did it feel wrong or justified? **7.** Tell me about a time in which you felt limited at work. **a.** E.g., you felt like you couldn't say or do something. **8.** Have you or have you heard of anyone ever doing something intentionally against management's will? a. Explain the situation and what and why you think this happened. i. What was the act? ii. Why do you think you/they did what they did? iii. Any changes in workplace rules or policy? iv. How did this change the way you see/saw the people involved? v. Did this change other coworkers' perceptions? vi. How did this incident change your view of the management? **9.** Tell me about a time that you spoke with your coworkers about a rule/policy at work.

	a. How many people were involved? b. How was this communicated (e.g., text, in-person) **10.** Have you and your coworkers ever spoken about working together to change something in the workplace? a. If so, explain what happened and if anything changed as a result. b. If not, try to think of a time when something felt wrong at work. Did you or anyone raise any concerns to other coworkers or management? **11.** Tell me about a time when a coworker was fired? a. Describe why you think this happened. Was it justified? **12.** How is employee turnover at work? **13.** What would happen if you were to quit working? a. How would your coworkers react? b. How would management react? **14.** If you could implement a new rule or policy at work, what would it be? a. How would you enact this change? b. How would expect your boss to react? c. How would you expect your coworkers to react?
Closing	• Is there anything that you'd like to share that we may not have covered? o What do you think was the most important thing we talked about today? • Thank them for both their time and thoughtful answers. • Remind them that I may be sending them findings and themes for member checking. • Explain honorarium.

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

The UNIVERSITY *of* OKLAHOMA

Research Participation

Are you a **server** or **bartender** in Oklahoma?

I'd love to hear about your experiences!

To be eligible, you must:

1. be a current or former server or bartender in OK,
2. with at least 6 months work experience in OK, &
3. be 18 years or older.

Eligible participants will receive a $10 Visa Gift Card.

If you want to participate or learn more,
contact Logan Cherry at **logancherry@ou.edu**
or scan the QR code above.

Appendix C

Forwarded Recruitment Text Message

Hello, my name is Logan Cherry, and I am conducting research with the University of Oklahoma about restaurant industry workplaces and the experiences of tipped workers. If you are a server or bartender with 6 months of working experience in Oklahoma, I would love to hear about your experiences in a Zoom interview. If you decide to participate, you will receive a $10 Visa gift card. If you have any interest, you may go to the following survey link or email me at logancherry@ou.edu. Thank you!

https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bK4EeXT07imgO1g

Footnotes

1. The title of this study contains what Keating et al. (2022) label stylistic cues. Stylistic cues have been increasingly used in communication publications. On one hand, stylistic cues may not provide as much information as traditional titling practices. On the other hand, stylistic cues can help to differentiate studies from one another in a crowded marketplace of ideas.