Cleaning the Ivory Tower:
(De)constructing Neoliberal Discourse and Dignity in "Dirty" Work

by

Verónica Caridad Rabelo

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Doctoral Committee:

       Professor Ramaswami Mahalingam, Co-Chair
       Professor Lilia M. Cortina, Co-Chair
       Professor Jane E. Dutton
       Professor Sarah Fenstermaker

Verónica Caridad Rabelo

rabelo@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-6718-0550

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Abstract

The growth of neoliberal ideologies since the 1970s has (re)structured many organizations in the U.S., including education. University administrators in a neoliberal climate are pressured to expand facilities and matriculation while minimizing labor costs. One way they accomplish this is by privatizing services, including cleaning. Private commercial cleaning companies often provide staffing, training, workloading, and performance evaluation. Administrators contracting these companies are able to save money by displacing responsibility for human resources functions. Although neoliberal practices (e.g., privatization) appear to offer benefits for organizations' bottom-lines and senior leaders, less is known about the impact on frontline personnel.

Addressing this gap, my dissertation addresses two questions: *How does neoliberal discourse shape organizational practices? And how does such discourse affect the lived experience of cleaning work?* To answer these questions, I conducted a content analysis of a commercial cleaning company to examine the discursive strategies used to legitimize the regulation of cleaners and cleaning work. I then conducted a case study of four cleaners, and the ways their work has changed over time (as a function of working within or outside of the commercial cleaning system). The content analysis reflects the *intention* of the cleaning management system, whereas the case study reflects the *implementation* of the system from cleaners' perspectives.

In the content analysis, language around cleaning was couched in seemingly positive neoliberal language: progress, professionalization, profit maximization, and prescription as a means of efficiency. In particular, communication from the commercial cleaning management system reflected three primary 'discursive regimes' to justify its organizational strategy: *the need for a science of cleaning, professionalization,* and *environmental responsibility.* Yet, these discursive regimes often were referenced in service of greater regulation over cleaners and their work. The language of neoliberalism casts many service workers (including cleaners) as unskilled, unprofessional, incompetent, and unmotivated, thus justifying greater control over workers and their labor.

To examine how such discourse shapes the experience of work, I then conducted a case study of four cleaners: two of whom work under the cleaning management system content-analyzed in the first study, and two of whom were exempt from the system. Three themes emerged from participants' narratives: how the cleaning system shapes the experience and organization of work, how cleaners protect themselves, and the discursive resources used to narrate these experiences. I found that the approach to managing and organizing cleaning work prescribed by the commercial cleaning system contributes to dignity injuries for cleaners through four mechanisms: deskilling, objectifying, surveilling, and infantilizing. Cleaners responded to these injuries via four practices to restore dignity: distancing from work, idealizing the past, reversing infantilization, and narratively constructing a moral(ized) self. I found that narratives are an important resource for sharing stories of organizational suffering, as well as discursively constructing dignity.

This project demonstrates how power flows through ideologies, institutions, and individuals; and how neoliberalism shapes the experience of work. These results carry important

theoretical and practical implications for dignity, occupational health, and the (re)organization of service work in a neoliberal climate. Greater standardization of work may save money for institutions—but at the expense of service workers who enable these savings. Neoliberalism enables the expansion of ivory towers by exploiting the people who construct, clean, and maintain them. I conclude with a discussion about the production of suffering and (in)dignity in organizations, and possibilities for institutional transformation.

Keywords: neoliberalism; discourse; dignity; labor relations; organizational communication; cleaning

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Hauling trash, unclogging toilets, changing light bulbs, disinfecting surfaces, moving furniture, repairing equipment, shoveling snow, vacuuming, ushering lost visitors… these are some of the many tasks for which building cleaners are responsible (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b; Zock, 2005). Many researchers and managers have speculated about the increasing mechanization of service work, but cleaning labor remains relatively complex and unpredictable. Although it may be impossible to fully automate cleaning work, some industry leaders have endeavored to standardize, streamline, and simplify cleaning labor, resulting in changes to the organization of cleaning work. For example, cleaning tasks have been reorganized and compartmentalized, such that many cleaners today may perform just a *single* task (e.g., vacuuming) for an entire shift. These changes to the organization and experience of work dovetail with the rise and spread of neoliberalism, an economic philosophy characterized by government deregulation, privatization of service work, and individualization of social welfare and mobility.

Since the 1970s, neoliberal philosophies and policies have proliferated in the U.S. economy, including academia. Leaders of public universities in the U.S. often face decreasing financial support from the government, increased budget cuts, and greater privatization of services (M. Gray, Dean, Agllias, Howard, & Schubert, 2015). These pressures trickle-down to various academic units, including facilities management, whose managers are often expected to

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make budget cuts without sacrificing service provision. Thus, administrators and managers must contend with seemingly paradoxical demands for *efficiency* (doing more with less) and *effectiveness* (doing things well).

Dovetailing these trends, many largescale commercial cleaning companies were founded in the U.S. over the decades since the 1970s, often displacing smaller cleaning companies and work arrangements wherein cleaners were directly employed by the organizations they cleaned. Commercial cleaning companies provide a variety of services, including staffing, training, workloading, and performance evaluating. Many large organizations enter contracts with commercial cleaning companies, including universities, prisons, hospitals, military installations, and entertainment facilities. These contracting organizations are able to displace responsibility for several human resources functions, often saving money in the process. Typically, financial savings are made possible because the commercial cleaning companies rarely provide cleaners with full-time work, health insurance, pensions, or job security. Mendez (1998) describes these shifts as the "bureaucratization of domestic work" (p. 199), which together change the structure, meaning, and experience of work for cleaners.

Just as neoliberal philosophy has proliferated over the past few decades, so too has scholarship on the subject. Given that neoliberalism is a macro-level phenomenon, most scholarly work has examined neoliberalism at the market level of analysis. However, comparatively less research has considered the *impact* of neoliberal ideologies and policies upon workers, especially those that experience marginality and precariousness. As noted by Tomic, Trumper, and Dattwyler (2006), cleaners "have suffered the consequences of neoliberalism more than many, seeing their working conditions worsen as cleaning has increasingly been 'professionalized' and outsourced" (p. 509). They further contend that cleaners are "central to

the implementation of the new neoliberal project" (Tomic et al., 2006, p. 509). Although describing the political economy of Chile, I suspect that similar patterns would extend to the U.S. labor market, especially in the context of public higher education, which has experienced increasing "corporatization" (Magolda, 2016; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

To examine this possibility, I conducted an inductive case study of a commercial cleaning company and one of its customer organizations. I selected these two organizations as field sites so I could trace the impact of neoliberalism on organizational behavior, a link that is under-theorized and under-studied. Neoliberalism is an inherently political enterprise. Some people view neoliberalism as an improved iteration of capitalism, regarding its principles as an effective means of wealth accumulation and societal improvement. Proponents of neoliberalism often leverage its associated lexicon, which includes buzzwords such as "flexibility", "efficiency", and "optimization." Critical scholars, however, have described such "casualisation" (Bernstein, 1986) in less favorable terms, instead highlighting the greater precarity and vulnerability of workers embedded in such "flexible" arrangements (e.g., Cruz & Abrantes, 2014). These critics view capitalism as old wine in the new bottle of neoliberalism; a more insidious but no less potent means of imbibing inequality. For example, Springer (2016b) describes neoliberalism as "the most recent and virulent form of capitalism…the most persistent and pestilent disease of our time."

To make sense of the contradictions and practices of neoliberalism, I focus on discourse as the means through which neoliberalism circulates and is produced via praxis. That is, how does neoliberalism become cemented into organizational policies and practices via organizational discourse? And how does such discourse regulate workers and the organization of

their work? To understand the theoretical linkages among neoliberalism, discourse, and organizational behavior, I pose the following research questions: *What are the discursive strategies that a commercial cleaning company uses to legitimize the regulation of cleaners and cleaning work? How do cleaners experience and narrate their work, especially as a function of working within or outside of a commercial cleaning management system? And how does intersectional awareness shape how they make sense of their work?*

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Neoliberalism and the Social Context of Work

Defining neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an ideology whereby sustained economic

growth is the pathway to human progress (for a comprehensive review, see Harvey, 2005; see

also Robbins, 2014). Under neoliberalism, a productive and effective society is one in which the

greatest number of people are employed and are generating the greatest collective income.

Second, neoliberalism heavily values a free market, whereby companies are largely privately

owned and are encouraged to compete with minimal governmental oversight, theoretically

ensuring the lowest prices for goods. By discouraging state involvement and encouraging

corporate privatization, societies can promote the consumption of goods, competition, and

individual freedom and power. Finally, neoliberalism implies that governments should be

minimally involved, and that any involvement should primarily pertain to property rights and

contracts. In this way, neoliberalism is a collective of ideologies including capitalism,

privatization, deregulation, and globalization (Harvey, 2005; Liboro, 2015). As stated by Harvey

(2005),

> It has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent mask full of
> wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim
> realities of the restoration or reconstitution of naked class power... (p. 119)

More generally, neoliberalism describes a culture that promotes agency, or the ability of

individuals to act freely without constraint. Consequently, neoliberalism is a political economy

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that emphasizes self-sufficiency and meritocracy: anyone can achieve success as long as they 'work hard' and compete successfully. Neoliberalism ultimately involves a quest to generate new markets, which contravenes and minimizes the importance of collective struggles, public institutions, and social welfare. Professional success is deemed a consequence of one's effort, competitive advantage, and branding, rather than class privilege or exploitation.

Herod and Aguiar (2006a) identify five key components of neoliberalism underlying the contemporary political economy: faith in the privatized market; belief in the privatization of government business; lessening of government involvement in business; reduction of government services and expenditures; and support for individualism (over collectivism). These principles have been linked with several consequences for organizations and the people working for them. For example, Herod and Aguiar (2006a) note that in "the heyday of Fordism many firms were highly vertically-integrated" (p. 428); for example, service workers such as custodians, cafeteria workers, and secretaries were directly employed by the firm (see also Weil, 2014). However, under neoliberalism, these "support" staff are more likely to be privatized and subcontracted. Generally, firms reap financial savings when these positions are independently contracted, often by hiring fewer full-time workers in favor of part-time and/or temporary positions, paying lower wages, and offering fewer fringe benefits. Herod and Aguiar (2006a) argue that such changes to the political economy affects the (re)organization of work and workers' rights, primarily by lowering their quality of life and undermining collective bargaining.

Weil (2014) describes some of these changes to the meaning, experience, and (re)organization of work as the "fissured workplace", whereby third-party organizations assume responsibility for the selection, training, and management of employees. In "a fissured

workplace, employment itself becomes more precarious, with risk shifted onto smaller employers and individual workers, who are often cast in the role of independent businesses in their own right" (Weil, 2014, p. 9). Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the neoliberal state is a focus on "enabling individuals as economic actors" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 20). Weil (2014) extends this argument to describe the consequences of the fissured workplace for organizations and employees, including: lower wages, less job security, greater labor violations, decreased safety, and increased inequality. Workplace fissuring has changed the experience and organization of work across many industries, but perhaps most adversely affected are employees who are "concentrated at the low-wage end of the labor market" (Weil, 2014, p. 94), including cleaners.

     The impact of neoliberalism on cleaning and cleaners. In the latter half of the twentieth century, neoliberal ideologies and policies burgeoned, affecting the (re)organization of cleaning work around the world, including Canada (Aguiar, 2001, 2006), Chile (Tomic et al., 2006), South Africa (Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006), the UK (Herod & Aguiar, 2006b), Denmark (Søgaard, Blangsted, Herod, & Finsen, 2006), Australia and New Zealand (Ryan & Herod, 2006). The growth of industry and public infrastructure ushered in a need for industrial cleaning operations. For example, the growth of "modernity" as evidenced by skyscraper businesses and high-rise residential buildings helped create a need for larger-scale housekeeping and grounds keeping labor, including cleaning, security, laundry, window-cleaning, plumbing, and landscaping (e.g., Gottlieb, 2001; Ryan & Herod, 2006). Commercial cleaning services employ as many as 10,000 cleaners, and these companies bid for largescale contracts, especially with universities, medical facilities, and government institutions (e.g., Ryan & Herod, 2006). As of 2007, the U.S. commercial cleaning industry included 50,325 companies employing nearly one

million workers, resulting in revenue of nearly $35 billion (Weil, 2014). In the U.S., some 86 firms (amounting to fewer than 1% of companies in this sector) employed nearly one-quarter of all U.S. custodians (Weil, 2014). Similar trends have been documented in other parts of the world (e.g., Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006; I. Campbell & Peeters, 2008; Knutsen, 2014; Weinkopf, Banyuls, & Grimshaw, 2013).

One way that neoliberalism and "fissuring" produce precarity is via noncompliance. Put simply, "it pays not to comply" (Weil, 2014, p. 140). Although purported benefits of neoliberalism include greater competition and increased service provision, these benefits likely extend more to organizations and employers and less to frontline personnel. As Weil (2014) describes, "The large demand for services and the elastic supply of janitorial service providers create market conditions that push prices for services down toward the lowest costs of the existing supply base for a given quality tier" (p. 142). Lowered cost of services generally connotes lower compensation for service providers; customers (i.e., organizations that contract commercial services and the stakeholders who initiate these contracts) can save labor costs at the expense of the cleaners providing such labor. These dynamics are especially apparent in the domain of higher education in the United States, where neoliberal ideologies and policies have also reached over the past few decades.

The impact of neoliberalism on higher education. Higher education in the U.S. represents one site where we can observe the processes and consequences of neoliberalism. Leaders of many public institutions of higher education face pressures related to the current neoliberal political economy. Neoliberal practices and policies in universities include greater corporatization of administration, emphasis on entrepreneurship, service privatization (e.g., cleaning and food services) and centralization (e.g., administrative assistance; Gaffikin & Perry,

2009; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). For example, positions on boards of regents and trustees are increasingly filled by corporate executives, and many education initiatives are funded by corporate entities such as the Walton Family Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Baltodano, 2012). University administrators must carve out time to network and fundraise, and are subjected to corporate practices in the form of marketing and recruiting, standardization, surveillance, and performance bonuses (Baltodano, 2012; Gaffikin & Perry, 2009). Administrators also release 'strategic plans' for achieving diversity and inclusion, competitive advantage, and overall sustainability (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009). Instructors are tasked with "Fordist-style teaching of large numbers of undergraduates" (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009, p. 120) who act as consumers seeking a high "return on investment" (Zabudsky, 2008, p. 5). Institutions boast about their low faculty-to-student ratios (although similar ratios are not provided for the presence of other service workers on campus). Adjunct faculty—who are primarily graduate student teaching assistants and instructors hired on a temporary, contingent basis—are typically given lower wages, fewer employment benefits, and lesser access to opportunities for advancement and professional development (Zabudsky, 2008). Critics of these changes have admonished the "neoliberalization of higher education" (Hadley, 2015), pointing to the proliferation of "academic capitalism" (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) in "the corporate university" (Magolda & Delman, 2016, p. 248).

   Cleaners and cleaning in the neoliberal university. Administrators, faculty, and students are affected by neoliberal forces in academia, but perhaps staff are more affected materially. Support staff—including dining hall workers, custodians, groundskeepers, and administrative assistants—typically earn lower wages and have fewer opportunities for advancement and professional development. Other forces of neoliberalism that affect staff

include greater privatization, subcontracting, and temporary work, and fewer workplace rights in the form of union membership, tenure, health insurance, and retirement benefits (e.g., Magolda, 2016; Magolda & Delman, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Weil, 2014).

Building cleaners (custodians) may especially suffer from neoliberal policies, given that they are already less likely to earn a salary, receive health insurance, belong to a union, access sick leave, and earn a pension. Since the 1970s, working conditions have worsened as a result of the impact of neoliberalization, including greater precariousness in the form of subcontracting, temporary, and part-time work (Tomic et al., 2006). Building facility managers increasingly have implemented "lean, or lean-inspired" practices (Öhrling, 2014, p. 80), perhaps inspired from other industries including manufacturing and information technology. The origin of lean production is attributed to Toyota and their approach to engineering and work organization (Jordi, Lluís, & Nestor, 2008; Krafcik, 1988). As the name suggests, lean practices are often adopted to minimize time, money, and staff. However, I argue that the evaluation of work under lean practices is often measured along these metrics – that is, savings on time, money, and bodies – at the expense of considering costs associated with human capital, including work satisfaction and meaning, autonomy, absenteeism/presenteeism, and injury. Decades of organizational research suggest that these "human factors" can be just as important to organizational productivity and efficiency. Yet in the wake of neoliberal ideologies and policies, such human factors are rendered secondary, if not expendable.

In this dissertation, I seek to examine how the spread of neoliberal ideologies and practices at the societal and university levels of analysis "trickles-down" to affect the daily, material, embodied realities of workers. More specifically, I seek to trace the ways in which neoliberalism shapes daily experiences of work, and the consequences this holds for employee

well-being. Prevailing theoretical models of occupational health and stress tend to focus on individual-level predictors, but I seek to understand how economic ideologies (neoliberal political economy and "scientific management") shape the (re)organization of work and organizational behavior. To analyze these changes, I use an intersectional lens to examine *discourse,* or the ways that language is used (and brought into use) in ways that (a) reflect power dynamics and (b) shape human behavior.

Neoliberalism and discourse. Neoliberalism, like any ideological system or political enterprise, is marked by its own lexicon. Common 'code words' associated with neoliberalism include *flexibility, simplification, freedom, individualism,* and *choice.* However, practices that promote "flexibility" and "liberty" (Harvey, 2005, p. 119) often carry consequences, hidden or palpable, for the workers who are subcontracted, temped, outsourced, part-time, etc. For example, "flexible" contract arrangements generally are associated with shorter hours, unpredictable work schedules, work intensification, lower wages, and fewer benefits (e.g., Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006; Ryan & Herod, 2006).

An examination of neoliberal discourse reveals tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes. On its face, rhetoric associated with neoliberalism aligns with seemingly positive and popular values in the U.S., including freedom, flexibility, and individualism. Yet looking further "downstream" presents a different picture; neoliberal discourse helps construct knowledge and constitute social practices that may in fact be harmful for individuals, especially those in precarious work arrangements at the margins of social life.

Discourse at Work

Definitions vary, but discourse is commonly operationalized in organizational studies as "practices of talking and writing" (Bergström & Knights, 2006, p. 355; Hardy, 2001, p. 26),

"organizational language use situated within social practices" (Scott & Trethewey, 2008, p. 300), "a system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992, p. 5), and "sets of texts – statements, practices, etc. – which bring an object into being" (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000, p. 1231). What unites these perspectives is an understanding of discourse as communicative as much as it is constitutive. That is, discourses are "sites in which social meanings are formed and reproduced, social identities are shaped, and social facts are established" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 406). Critical discourse analysts assert that discourse is a means by which power circulates, often insidiously. Thus, discourse does the 'work' of power. Discourse both "describes" and "does", for example, by "legitimate[ing] and produc[ing] certain activities" (Hardy et al., 2000, p. 1230).

Dick (2013) defines discursive practices as "ways of talking and writing…[that] encourage individuals to make sense of their experiences in particular ways" (p. 648), often reflecting, reinforcing, and/or reimagining power relations. Put differently, discursive practices comprise "all the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities" (Wetherell, 2001, p. 193). There is a bidirectional (if not multidirectional) association between discourse and action (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Actions produce discourse, as in the production of texts. But discourse can also produce action, via the practices that discursive practices shape.

Discourse analysis in psychology and organizational studies. Discourse can be a valuable vehicle for understanding human behavior in organizational life—its many forms, antecedents, and consequences. As mentioned earlier, discourse at once precedes, follows, and co-constitutes action. For example, in an examination of the usage of euphemisms in communication materials surrounding the Penn State child sexual abuse scandal, Lucas and Fyke (2014) contend that "What they were saying and how they were saying it played a pivotal role in

how the situation unfolded" (p. 552). Scott and Trethewey (2008) used discourse analysis to demonstrate how seemingly objective social facts, such as occupational hazards, are in fact constituted through discourse. Ainsworth (2002) uses discourse analysis to challenge the stability of the "aging worker" as an identity and analytic category. Constructions of the "aging worker" are mediated by gender, and discourse that renders aging women workers invisible opens up sites for marginalization as well as agency. Analyzing conversational interactions between interviewers and prospective candidates, Bergström and Knights (2006) identified three "systematically recurrent discursive moves" (p. 361) that helped to construct interviewee subjectivity (response-control, enunciation of organizational discourses, housekeeping moves to control authenticity). As these empirical examples illustrate, language can be a springboard for examining various outcomes of discourse, knowledge, and power.

Discourse and expert languages. One 'function' of discourse is the production of legitimacy; "discourses provide the 'frames' with which people make sense of particular issues and give sense to them" (Vaara & Tienar, 2008, p. 987). These frames are closely related to what Foucault described as a "regime of practices" (Foucault, 1972), or "the regularities, logic, and self-evidence that connects what is said and what is done, the codes imposed, and the reasons given" (Mennicken & Miller, 2014, p. 17). Regimes of practice especially are evident in sectors (and organizations) associated with social power, including medicine. For example, "Medical discourse establishes a distinct sphere of expertise, setting out the domain of medical knowledge and the issues with which it is concerned" (emphasis in original; Tonkiss, 2012, p. 408). In much the same way, I am interested in cleaning management discourse, and how such discourse understands—and responds to—knowledge and issues related to cleaning work (and the people who does this work). Which 'expert languages' do commercial service work organizations use to

construct their legitimacy? Analyzing these expert languages can help inform consequences that organizational discourse might hold for the personnel who ultimately perform the service work being marketed. For example, organizational discourse and the expert languages it incorporates can inform how workers are viewed, socialized, motivated, and managed.

Intersectionality as Analytical Lens

I imbue this project with an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is a concept that stems from Black feminist thought (Beale, 1970; Combahee River Collective, 1995; King, 1988). Lawyer and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* and used a metaphor of a traffic accident to explain the concept:

> If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

Thus, intersectionality is an analytic to help understand the simultaneous and inextricably connected nature of social identity groups, and how identities are situated within a larger matrix of power (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). An intersectional approach casts identity as a *process* rather than a stable category, a process that is "dynamic, multidimensional and historically contingent" (Mahalingam, 2007, p. 43). I understand intersectionality as an "analytical lens" (Rabelo & Cortina, 2016, p. 180) that guides each stage of my research process, including an interdisciplinary approach to my theoretical framework, construction of research questions, and interpretation of results (Cole, 2009). Since its introduction in critical race theory, intersectionality has "traveled" to other disciplines, including the social sciences (May, 2015; Rabelo & Cortina, 2016). In organizational studies, intersectionality has been a valuable tool for understanding how the interconnectedness of social identity shapes organizational behavior

(Rabelo & Cortina, 2016), including identity work (Atewologun, Sealy, & Vinnicombe, 2016), workplace mistreatment (Cortina, 2001), and leadership (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Given the labor history of cleaning work, the occupational identity group to which cleaners belong is inextricably tied to gender, race, and nationality/immigration (regardless of cleaners' own personal identities). Further, cleaners' experiences of/at work are also likely shaped by their own social location, including (but not limited to) their experiences of gender, race, nationality/immigration, age, and disability status. Finally, cleaners may use *intersectional awareness* to help make sense of their work-lives. In this way, intersectional awareness refers to awareness about one's multiple (and intertwined) social identities, and the ways that these identities reflect larger processes of privilege and marginality (Mahalingam, Hajski, & Sanders, 2012; Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013). Across my two studies, I engage with intersectionality at the individual level of analysis (i.e., trait/mindset) as well as a tool to understand the larger context surrounding cleaners and their work (i.e., cultural/structural levels of analysis).

The Current Studies

The goal of discursive analysis, therefore, is to illuminate connections among institutional texts, discursive practices, and organizational behavior. Critical discourse analysis in particular foregrounds "the social and political context of discourse, based on the view that language is not only conditioned by these contexts, but itself helps to constitute them" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 408; see also Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Thus, one component of discursive analysis is attending to "the multiplicity of meaning" embedded within organizational discourse and, by extension, the discursive practices of employees (Dick, 2013). Discourse analysis, therefore, is especially suited for studying sites of struggle and the "fragility of…organizational life" (Hardy et al., 2000, p. 1232).

In this project, I am interested in organizational discourse from actors in the service industry. I focus on cleaning work, and two organizations in this industry: (a) a commercial cleaning company, CleanSci, that offers a prescriptive approach to cleaning work and management, and (b) a customer organization, a large Midwestern University, that has entered a long-term contract with CleanSci. Across two studies, I focus on how discourse associated with neoliberalism influences organizational practices, and in turn how these practices shape everyday life for workers. The first study theorizes (and partially addresses) the circuit comprising neoliberalism, discourse, and organizational policies and practices. The second study addresses how this circuit shapes the experience of work for employees—namely, sites of agency, constraint, and resistance, as mediated by intersectional awareness. Figure 1 contains a theoretical model for this study:
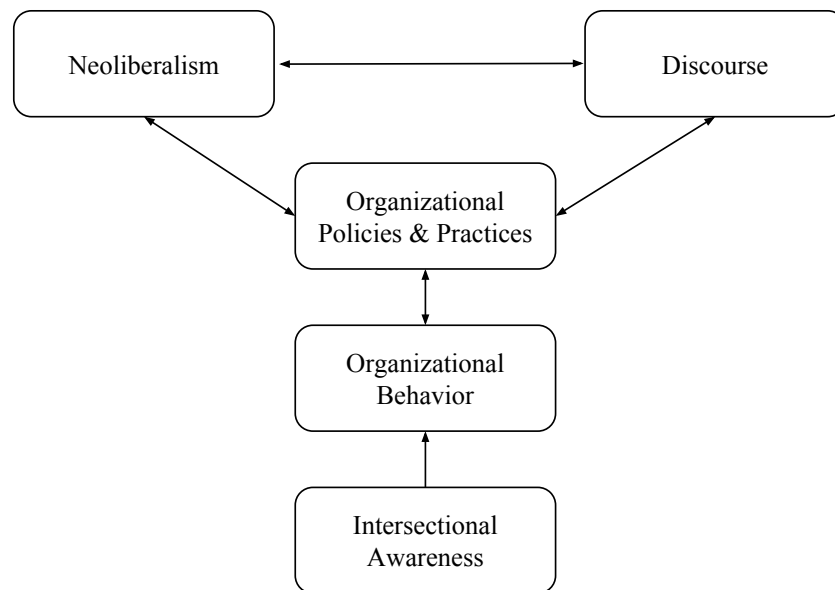
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

In my project, I seek to trace how neoliberalism "travels" through discourse and practices to ultimately shape behavior and the lived experience of work. The top half of the model—depicted by the triangulation of neoliberalism, discourse, and organizational policies and practices—demonstrates the multidirectional and fluid circuit among these concepts. Neoliberalism can be understood as a "set of social, political and economic arrangements in society" (Springer, 2016a, p. 4). Organizational policies and practices therefore represent the *application* of neoliberal philosophy and ideologies, with *discourse* serving as the means by which neoliberalism is implemented. Discourse provides neoliberalism with meaning; organizational policies and practices provide the materiality. A focus on discourse, therefore, helps me understand the *processes* by which neoliberalism is brought into use, as well as the institutional logics used to justify its implementation. This circuit of how neoliberalism "flows" through discourse and practice is the focus of my first study. In the first study, I content-analyze the discourse from a commercial cleaning company's archives, identifying and explaining the rhetorical strategies that reflect and justify neoliberal ideologies.

In the second study, I focus on the bottom-half of the theoretical model: that is, the impact of organizational policies and practices upon organizational behavior. I analyze narratives from cleaners to better understand how neoliberal ideologies, policies, and practices shape the experience of work and the construction of dignity. What strands of expert language can be traced in the discourse of frontline personnel themselves, and how do personnel actively engage with these expert languages? How do cleaners' social locations and intersectional awareness shape their interpretation of their work? And ultimately, how does neoliberal ideology, discourse, and practice regulate cleaners and cleaning work? Discourse analysis enables me to answer these questions, to better understand how "specific forms of text and speech produce

their versions of a social issue, problem, event or context" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 408). The text and speech I analyze in this project include organizational archives and employee narratives, respectively.

In Study 1 (Chapter III), I content-analyze the *organizational discourse* of the cleaning management system. This type of organization is appropriate because "[t]o analyse regimes of practices means to analyse programmes of conduct that have prescriptive effects concerning what is to be done, and codifying effects regarding what is to be known" (Mennicken & Miller, 2014, p. 17; see also Foucault, 1980). The overarching research question for this content analysis asks: *What are the discursive strategies that a commercial cleaning company uses to legitimize the regulation of cleaners and cleaning work?* In Study 2 (Chapter IV), I analyze how cleaners narrate and experience work as a function of CleanSci. Specifically, I am interested in asking: *How do cleaners experience and narrate their work, especially as a function of working within or outside of a commercial cleaning management system? And how does intersectional awareness shape how they make sense of their work?*

Discourse is especially relevant when analyzing processes of organizational change (Phillips et al., 2004). Although I am not conducting program evaluation, my study still addresses how the organization, experience, and meaning of work varies as a function of changes to the management of cleaning work. Given my interest in how cleaners make sense of their work vis-à-vis CleanSci, I will focus on their discursive resources, including *interpretive repertoires,* or their "lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 138). Power circulates through discourse on at least two levels of analysis: "on a structural level, through the turn and type of space speakers are given or can get access to, and, on an interactional level, through what they

can effectively accomplish in that space" (Thornborrow, 2002, p. 8). Study 1, the content

analysis, will address this structural level of analysis, while Study 2, the narrative analysis, will

address this interactional level of analysis by using an intersectional lens.

CHAPTER III

Communicating About Cleaning:

Discursive Content Analysis of a Commercial Cleaning Company

The purpose of this study is to better understand how organizations leverage discourse to generate and transmit knowledge about work; namely, the organization of work and the people who perform this work. I applied techniques associated with critical discourse analysis to conduct a content analysis of a commercial cleaning company. I used open coding to understand how the commercial cleaning company constructs knowledge about cleaning work and stakeholders in this sector. This is important given the ways that discourse shapes, and is shaped by, power relations. Critical discourse analysis of organizational communication enables me to better understand how different "expert languages" (Tonkiss, 2012) and "institutional logics" (Thornton & Ocasio, 2012) operate as *interpretive repertoires* (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990; Wetherell & Potter, 1988) and *truth regimes* (Foucault, 1972) to construct knowledge about cleaners, their work, and their bodies. Further, critical discourse analysis allows me to make visible the *power dynamics* in which these discursive regimes are embedded, raising implications for the (re)organization of work, (micro)management of workers, and the (in)dignity of and at work for frontline personnel (i.e., cleaners).

Method

Methodology & Epistemological Framework

To address my research question – *What are the discursive strategies that a commercial cleaning company uses to legitimize the regulation of cleaners and cleaning work?* – I synthesized methodologies associated with *content analysis* and *critical discourse analysis.* Content analysis is a method and analytic technique used to analyze linguistic and/or textual data, and – by extension – "deep individual or collective structures such as values, intentions, attitudes, and cognitions" (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007, p. 6). For this study, I focus on archival materials available from an organization's web presence. Archival sources are particularly useful to gain a "behind the scenes" glimpse of an organization, as well as offering the ability "to trace the genealogy of ideas" (Gidley, 2012, p. 266) and "see how particular languages or phrases came into use" (p. 267).

Content analytic techniques provides a better understanding about "sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message" (Weber, 1990, p. 9). Content analysis is particularly effective when combined with different types of data sources, especially when the project is critical and exploratory rather than confirmatory (Duriau et al., 2007). One complementary approach is discourse analysis, which "involves a commitment to examining processes of meaning in social life, a certain modesty in analytic claims, and an approach to knowledge which sees this as open and contestable rather than closed" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 418). In this study, I seek to understand how CleanSci—a pseudonym for a large commercial cleaning system—understands the science and organization of cleaning work, and uncover implications for custodians and their work. Given my general interest in this question, an inductive approach

is appropriate, whereby I examine how organizational communication affects not only business strategy, but also social practices and relations.

Thus, after following content analysis procedures to select, code, and categorize the data, I will apply procedures associated with deconstruction and discourse analysis. Some content analyses adopt realist approaches, whereby texts are taken "at face value", to be used "as evidence, as a representation of reality" (Gidley, 2012, p. 271). (De)constructionist techniques, on the other hand, are less concerned with the accuracy of texts, instead seeking to understand how discourses are "produced, shared and used" (Gidley, 2012, p. 271). Deconstructionist approaches derive from the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Louis Althusser, and more contemporary works of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Giles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault (Prasad, 2005).

In the context of management and organizational behavior, organizational communication entails "textual productions" that enable researchers to "(a) explore how certain themes and notions are at the center of the text, and (b) how these themes are employed to systematically exclude or inhibit other themes and categories" (Prasad, 2005, p. 241). Organizational texts are ripe with *discourse,* or collections of "speech, conversation, text, or a body of knowledge" (Prasad, 2005, p. 250).

Critical discourse analysis is therefore concerned with going "beyond the rhetorical or technical analysis of language to explore its social and political setting, uses and effects…[to understand] the ways that power is reproduced, legitimated and exercised within social relations and institutions" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 408). As Tonkiss (2012) states, "To the discourse analyst, language is not simply a neutral medium for communicating information or reporting on events, but a domain in which people's knowledge of the social world is actively shaped" (p. 406).

Foucault understood power not as a static entity or individual-level position in a hierarchy, but rather a fluid and dynamic matrix of social relations. Foucault, therefore, was interested in *circulations* of power, and the ways that power intersected with social institutions and practices (Prasad, 2005). *Expert languages* are one way that power circulates through language and the construction of knowledge. Tonkiss (2012) offers the following example:

> Doctors, for example, do not simply draw on their practical training when doing their job; they also draw on a medical language that allows them to identify symptoms, make diagnoses and prescribe remedies. This language is not readily available to people who are not medically trained. Such an expert language has a number of important social effects: it marks out a field of knowledge or expertise, it confers membership, and it bestows authority. (p. 408)

Expert languages involve more than terminology or jargon unique to certain occupational contexts. Rather, they 'do work'; for example, demarcate professional insiders/outsiders, enable interpersonal communication, socialize newcomers, contribute to organizational culture, shape institutional knowledge, and grant select speakers and claims with authority and legitimacy (Tonkiss, 2012). In this way, a core component of critical discourse analysis entails making visible what discourse 'does'.

After identifying and categorizing the key *expert languages* that emerge in organizational communication, I will then analyze these expert languages, with a particular focus on identifying contradictions and slippages in the discourse, as well as illuminate sites of power, control, agency, and resistance. It is my hope to illuminate "how texts *control* social encounters rather than merely uncovering metaphors and assumptions" (Prasad, 2005, p. 257; emphasis in original).

Drawing from procedures used by Lucas and Fyke (2014), I wish to "foreground organizational talk" (p. 552) about the CleanSci cleaning management system, as well as discourse about cleaning job tasks and labor more generally. Thus, my materials for the content

analysis will draw from primary source materials (company website, store, and newsletter). I will supplement these data with some secondary source materials, including third-party organizations referenced in the primary source materials (e.g., Green Seal; Environmental Protection Agency).

As noted by organizational communication scholars (e.g., Lucas & Fyke, 2014), intent cannot be inferred or validated in discourse analysis. What can be analyzed is the ways organizational discourse is constructed, as well as distal outcomes upon stakeholders. Put differently, "language provides a frame that influences how decisions are made and ultimately what actions are taken or not taken" (Lucas & Fyke, 2014, p. 553). I wish to extend this by further considering the downstream consequences of organizational language on frontline personnel who are influenced by the actions taken (or not). Bridging these approaches—content analysis and critical discourse analysis—I utilized the following procedures.

Materials & Procedure

Data selection. The first decision involves selecting materials for analysis. Focusing on a single organizational context is especially useful "for researching relationships, behaviors, attitudes, motivations, and stressors in organizational settings" (B. L. Berg, 2004, p. 260). I selected CleanSci as the organizational context for this case study for several reasons. First is its typicality; CleanSci represents one of many similar commercial cleaning companies. CleanSci— while geographically convenient— also was not dissimilar from other competitor commercial cleaning companies; thus, I expect findings from this study to generalize to other commercial service providers. Second, I chose CleanSci because it was established in the 1980s; thus, its development was contemporaneous with the rise of neoliberal ideologies, policies, and practices in the larger U.S. political economy. Finally, I selected CleanSci because of its ubiquity. CleanSci includes a variety of institutional contexts as customers, and covers thousands of

buildings throughout North America including arenas, government buildings, university campuses, and military installations. The data for this study are largely publicly available materials created and published by the cleaning management company selected for this case study. I began by familiarizing myself with the web presence of CleanSci, including their primary website, company store, company newsletter, affiliate links, and subsidiary sites (e.g., www.LinkedIn.com).

Most of the data analysis relies upon the company's website and newsletters. The intended audience for these materials is not stated explicitly, but I presume the intended audience to be customer stakeholders (namely, facilities administrators and, possibly, supervisors) because they are responsible for implementing the program. The website (last updated in 2017) includes fourteen webpages totaling 39 pages of document text. Thirty-nine issues of the company newsletter were available either through the company website or a host (www.Scribd.com). The newsletter has been published under three different titles; together, 39 issues were available, spanning a 4-year time period (March 2012 – May 2016) and totaling 306 pages of document text. To provide further context and clarity, I at times consulted additional primary and secondary sources, including the CleanSci store website (approximately 100 items), the website for the nonprofit subsidiary associated with CleanSci, and third parties described in primary and secondary sources (e.g., the Environmental Protection Agency: www.EPA.gov; Green Seal: www.GreenSeal.org; International Sanitary Supply Association: www.ISSA.com). Together these materials comprise *organizational talk* from CleanSci. This organizational talk likely was compiled by a variety of stakeholders, including executives, administrative assistants, and consultants. In my analysis, I have attempted to avoid anthropomorphizing and/or ascribing agency to the company (e.g., "CleanSci believes…"). In my interpretive analysis, I understand

organizational talk from CleanSci to represent the perspectives of a variety of organizational

stakeholders, and also understand this talk to be reflective of larger trends in contemporary

service work under neoliberal regimes. Although there is no explicit description of the audience

intended for the organizational communication I content-analyzed, I understand these materials

(namely, website and newsletters) as intended to serve customers, especially administrators of

facilities (and possibly frontline supervisors as well).

After downloading text- and image-based versions of these materials, I uploaded the

materials to Dedoose, a web-based program designed to facilitate mixed-methods research.

Dedoose is a program that helps users organize and analyze data. Dedoose enables users to create

parent-trees for codes, and allows for the iterative reorganization of themes, parent codes, and

child codes. It also facilitates synthesizing different types of data, including numeric, linguistic,

and visual. In sum, the data collection occurred at the *document* level of analysis (i.e., web

pages; newsletter issues), and data coding and thematic analysis focus on the following discourse

fragments: words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, sections, ideologies, and topics (B. L. Berg,

2004, p. 271).

Data coding. I integrated procedures for critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001;

Jäger, 2001; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2001) and content analysis (Weber, 1990) as

follows. First, I *defined the recording unit.* My units of analysis will include *words* and

sentences. Given my interest in describing how CleanSci describes its business practices, and—

by extension—its envisioned users and organization of work, analyzing sentences will provide

sufficiently meaningful (yet not overly complex) chunks of text to analyze. Next, I used an

inductive open coding technique to code the newsletters and website pages to *define and identify*

codes. I allowed myself to apply multiple codes to the same unit of text where applicable, so

codes were not mutually exclusive. Third, I *coded all text* submitted for analysis. My analysis of content primarily focuses on word fragments and sentences, at times using more fluid analysis and discussion of emerging themes. Fourth, I *identified categories and themes.* After coding the newsletters and website pages, I consolidated the codes into higher-level and more parsimonious categories (Rivas, 2012; Strauss, 1987). From these categories I distilled higher-order themes.

According to Tonkiss (2012), "Discourse analysis is an interpretive process that relies on close study of specific texts, and therefore does not lend itself to hard-and-fast 'rules' of method" (p. 412). That said, some scholars have offered "devices or tools for opening up a text, rather than a fixed set of analytic strategies" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 413), including van Dijk (1993) Wodak (2001), Fairclough (2001), Jäger (2001), and Potter (2012). In the discussion, I use the following guidelines from Tonkiss (2012):

1 Identifying key themes and arguments.
2 Looking for association and variation.
3 Examining characterization and agency.
4 Paying attention to emphasis and silences. (p. 413)

In the following section, I describe three themes that represent the recurring expert languages invoked across the archives: *cleaning science, university,* and *environmental sustainability.*

Results

Weaving together primary sources offers a collection of *discourse fragments* through which to examine how CleanSci understands cleaning work, the people who perform this work, and how this work (and workers) ought to be managed. I found that CleanSci appeals to dominant discourse frames related to three expert languages that function as regimes of truth that (re)frame and (re)define janitorial work. These discursive regimes include *cleaning science, university prestige,* and *environmental sustainability.* CleanSci appeals to these 'powerful' bodies of knowledge/discourse to justify its business strategy and institutional practices. I further

argue that these expert languages derive from neoliberal ideologies and practices, carrying consequences for the construction of cleaners' work and identities. Yet while engaging with these three discourse regimes, communication materials from CleanSci are also fraught with paradoxes and contradictions. In the following sections, I describe each of these three discursive regimes, provide examples of how they are utilized, and discuss how appealing to these discursive regimes grants CleanSci greater legitimacy, as well as ruptures for this legitimacy. Further, I examine how CleanSci appeals to these logics / discursive regimes to construct controlling images of cleaners, their work, and their bodies, which carries important implications for the (re)organization of work, (micro)management of workers, and (in)dignity in/at work (Bolton, 2007a) for frontline personnel.

Discursive Regime #1: Cleaning Science

The most prominent discursive regime utilized by CleanSci is *cleaning science*. Across the CleanSci website and newsletters, there is no clear or consistent operationalization of what is meant by 'cleaning science.' However, the collection of discourse fragments coded as 'cleaning science' suggests that they use this phrase to describe practices that optimize hygienic spaces, cleaners' efficiency, environmental sustainability, and customer health and satisfaction. The discourse fragments suggest that the identification and implementation of cleaning best practices ought to be 'scientific'; yet descriptions of 'cleaning science' and the 'science of cleaning' rarely reference specific empirical and/or peer-reviewed studies.

Despite a lack of clarity surrounding what is meant by "cleaning science", discursively aligning and associating with science may be one way for the organization to achieve legitimacy. Throughout the communicative materials presented by CleanSci, two major subthemes are

apparent: the *need for* and *importance of* a science of cleaning, and practices associated with

scientific (and, by extension, 'respectable') approaches to cleaning work.

The need for a science of cleaning. Throughout the website and newsletters, CleanSci

asserts the importance of (and urgent need for) cleaning science: namely, the *complexity of*

cleaning work, lack of professionalism in cleaning work, and *economic precarity of institutions*

that rely on cleaning work.

Complexity of cleaning work. First, CleanSci acknowledges that cleaning work is

complex and 'scientific':

> Cleaning buildings may not seem like rocket science, but it is a highly scientifically-based exercise. Understanding the science of cleaning requires a heavy emphasis on the means by which workers achieve healthy indoor environments. … But misunderstanding how heat helps the cleaning process could lead workers to overuse products, draining a department's budget. … good because employees don't fully understand what is involved in thoroughly drying a surface. … Ironically, cleaning staff do much to enhance the quality of life without really grasping the extent to which they contribute to occupant health and well-being. So providing them with the right chemicals and tools, as well as teaching them how to use these products, is not enough. They also must understand cleaning's purpose and the science behind their actions. Without this knowledge, workers could misuse products, causing more harm than good to the indoor environment. [N55]

In the opening of the quote above, CleanSci implies that, according to popular wisdom, cleaning

is simple and straightforward. CleanSci then compares industrial cleaning to "rocket science" to

demonstrate that cleaning is more complex than conventional beliefs might concede. Next the

cleaning of science is described in terms of "the means by which" cleaning occurs, but the

discourse quickly pivots to language about limited financial resources and the incompetence of

workers who squander such resources (custodians' "misunderstanding" leading to "draining"

budgets). In this way CleanSci frames workers as lacking knowledge about how to optimally

clean a surface while minimizing material and financial resources. CleanSci further paints

custodians as ignorant by describing them as "ironically" doing the right thing (improving the

quality of life for building occupants) without understanding how they are doing so, which in

turn *infantilizes* cleaners—that is, treats them like children without competence or autonomy, thereby in need of education and close supervision. No further evidence or explanation is offered to elaborate on how CleanSci arrived at this conclusion (e.g., field audits; survey of cleaning personnel). In this way, CleanSci justifies the importance of *cleaning science* by drawing upon assumptions of custodians as ignorant and unskilled ("teaching them how to use these products, [sic] is not enough"; "employees don't fully understand what is involved in thoroughly drying a surface"), as well as heavy-handed with cleaning agents. Further, this excerpt demonstrates how CleanSci uses economic and instrumental terms to make sense of environmental health and the wellbeing of building occupants, but in ways that do not center the health and wellbeing of cleaners themselves.

Unprofessional nature of cleaning industry. Next, CleanSci characterizes cleaning science as *nascent* and *necessary*. For example, on the homepage of the website, CleanSci states that its "mission is to professionalize the cleaning industry by teaching the *emerging* science of cleaning" [W1; emphasis added]. CleanSci acknowledges that while cleaning work itself is longstanding, up until recently this work has been haphazard, inefficient, and unprofessional. An organizational mission that seeks "to professionalize" an industry implies that cleaning has heretofore been *unprofessional*, in need of 'standards', 'regulation', and 'professionalization'. Further, describing the science of cleaning as "emerging" draws on language of chronicity and temporality, implying that cleaning heretofore as *un*scientific. This sentence appeals to the power regimes of scientific discourse, while also undermining existing accounts of cleaning knowledge—not only in empirical peer-reviewed outlets, but also almanacs, magazines (e.g., Martens & Scott, 2005), and oral tradition.

CleanSci claims that its package is based on a "distillation of scientific cleaning materials collected during the past 25 years" [W12]. Based on this "distillation", CleanSci has "developed a complete training and education program to professionalize the cleaning industry. From entry level janitors to CEO's and vice presidents of facility operations, we have a program for professional development" [W10]. Again, such language of "professionalizing" implies that the industry was heretofore unprofessional and backwards. Along these lines, CleanSci states that they want "cleaning personnel to think on the job, and we try to educate them to do that well" [N48], again implying that heretofore custodians lacked sufficient knowledge or skill related to their job responsibilities. Such discourse implies that until now, people have not known how to properly clean -- which undermines the expertise and autonomy of people, largely women (women of color) and other personnel in feminized labor characterized as "unskilled

Economic precarity of customer institutions. Finally, CleanSci justifies the importance of *cleaning science* by describing various issues related to shrinking institutional budgets. In doing so, they demonstrate an understanding of a central paradox faced by many contemporary organizations: pressures to improve services while cutting costs. For example, CleanSci describes itself as an "improved, more cost-effective system" [CGexp5], although there are no reference points provided; thus, it remains unclear which improvements CleanSci offers, and to which reference point it is more cost-effective. Thus, in a general sense, CleanSci acknowledges widespread reductions in operating budgets: for example, "with maintenance budgets shrinking as workloads grow" [N46], CleanSci promises to "drastically improve custodial results without increasing their operating budget" [W8] and "provide the educational elements to improve an organization's cleaning results while reducing operational costs" [W8]. CleanSci promises

reduced "Wasted Budget" [*sic*; W11] and "Return on Investment" [W11]. Appealing to generic

business language without providing specific practices, CleanSci markets the following process:

> We conduct a baseline evaluation to identify your unrealized savings and improvement opportunities. Then we'll provide a business plan to implement savings and improve performance. We'll work closely with your team to implement the best-practices, cost savings and program improvements from your Baseline Evaluation. [W9]

CleanSci also appeals to third-party entities when describing its "lean" practices that are more

commonly applied in business marked by high predictability and low variability: "The

[CleanSci] system of cleaning is engineered on the basis of Six Sigma lean processes, ISO 9001,

ISO 14000, Green Cleaning Recognition and the Malcom Baldridge quality program criteria,

with best of class peer organizations. The [CleanSci] process that produces standardized cleaning

results" [Nexp4]. "Leaning" via Six Sigma is typically accomplished via experimental design

and hypothesis testing (B. Smith, 2003). However, across the CleanSci archives, there is not a

single reference to empirical research and/or experimental studies, so it is not clear how CleanSci

is based on Six Sigma lean processes.

Appealing to language related to fiscal pressures and "lean" practices helps CleanSci

cement its organizational strategy. CleanSci offers to optimize customers' budgets without

attending to ways of protecting workers (i.e., cleaners) in the process. At times CleanSci

provides more specific examples of economic precarity faced by customers:

> University, college and school campuses are increasingly being exposed to numbers and are being asked numbers. … We have all heard about the financial woes of Detroit and other cities, but those seem far and distant unless you live there and are presented with the reality of a city that has gone into receivership. … Custodial operations are being exposed to expectations to provide increasing levels of service while decreasing costs. Universities and colleges are challenged to be more creative in meeting the expectations of students and parents to provide modern facilities with state-of-the-art technology and finishes while holding down tuition costs down [sic]. Something has to give. When the senior facilities officer looks at the budget of facilities one element that looms very large is the custodial budget; and the largest part of that budget is tied up in labor costs, and labor costs translates into people. Oftentimes the custodial manager will try to control the costs of supplies and chemicals, however, [sic] this represents 10% or less of any

custodial operation. The giant elephant in the room is the total costs associated with labor and benefits. Concentrating on supply costs is like grabbing the tail of the elephant, it will move costs very little [sic]. The major issue is to find a way to tackle the element. The numbers are in and some major universities have managed to do this, decreasing numbers while providing a level of service that is either equal to or higher than they had when the budget cuts took place. [N61]

In this newsletter, CleanSci appears to directly engage with readers who are involved in operations and facilities management. Although CleanSci holds contracts in a variety of institutional contexts, including military installations, prisons, civilian government offices, and athletic stadiums, here CleanSci is targeting stakeholders in academia. CleanSci is still rather vague in their language while trying to describe the economic reality of many university settings (e.g., "campuses are increasingly being exposed to numbers and are being asked numbers"; "labor costs"; "The numbers are in"). Universities contend with a variety of economic contradictions, including increasing the value of facilities while minimizing operational budgets and tuition fees. Although they do not provide empirical evidence for this claim, CleanSci suggests that most managers might try to save money by reducing the supply budget, even though this budget represents a small fraction of total operating costs. Here CleanSci suggests that a more effective means of reducing operational costs is to try to reduce labor costs—that is, hiring and compensation. Yet, CleanSci appeals to reduced costs associated with supplies and chemicals as a major selling point of their system:

> Prior to [CleanSci], Custodial Services' chemical program consisted of over 200 chemicals which is fairly standard for most cleaning operations of this size. Since the implementation of [CleanSci], that number has been reduced almost 88% to a total of 25 chemicals. This reduction is due in large part to Portion Pac, a company that provides environmentally responsible chemical concentrates which are packaged… [N46]

Practices of cleaning science and engineered processes. The second subtheme I observed involved ways that CleanSci understands and implements principles of scientific management. CleanSci appeals to the use of science and technology (e.g., "engineered cleaning

process"; W9) to communicate information about how cleaning work ought to be organized and managed. As stated on the CleanSci website [W9], "Cleaning operations thrive when they institute an engineered process management program based on the adoption of best-practices and competition with the best performing organizations nationwide." According to CleanSci,

> …the engineered elements of an effective cleaning program must include the processes of standardization, best practices, benchmarking, lean processes, and comparison and even competition with peer organizations. That seemed like a huge burden to bear for the janitorial manager or supervisor, [sic] how on earth was a manager to create such a program with limited resources? … We did not have to recreate the wheel, the wheel had been made and that was an engineered processed [sic], based on science and called [CleanSci]. The science of cleaning was supported by a time-tested engineering process that enables the janitorial industry to clean and not to pollute. [N60]

Indeed, CleanSci appears to align its discourse with these processes of "standardization, best practices, benchmarking, lean processes...even competition". According to CleanSci, "Engineering indicates that each step of the cleaning process has been mapped, simplified, standardized, documented and validated to produce repeatable best of industry results over and over again" [N4]. Here CleanSci implies that the process of cleaning is linear and, in spite of the unpredictable nature of building space and human behavior, that consistent and predictable results are possible. Further, CleanSci claims that standardized work processes produce financial savings, though no evidence is provided to substantiate this claim ["When cleaning is standardized…unbelievable savings are possible"; N49]. Next, I will highlight some of these processes that CleanSci affirms are crucial to cleaning as science, practice, and management.

Standardization. At the heart of the cleaning system that CleanSci offers is *standardization.* Throughout their communicative materials CleanSci describes such standardized processes and procedures in a very generic sense; for example, CleanSci "prescribes standardized cleaning tools and procedures" [MM2]; utilizes "scientific cleaning standards" [W9], "standardized cleaning procedures and training materials" [W9], and a "Cookie

Cutter" approach [N50]; and promises "standardized cleaning results every time!" [Nexp4]. CleanSci also offers "the Guide to Prescriptive Cleaning" [CGexp6], implying there's one right way to do things. A prescriptive cleaning system "means that each cleaning worker is trained and certified on specialized tasks… which have been bench marked as the best practice by the [CleanSci] Users" [W2]. CleanSci promises that a prescriptive approach to cleaning will offer a "simplification of the cleaning process" [W2] as well as a "safer, cleaner, healthier and happier working environment" [W2]. CleanSci promises greater safety, cleanliness, healthiness, and happiness, yet does not describe how these outcomes are measured. As described earlier, CleanSci characterizes the nature of cleaning work as complex, contrary to popular wisdom. But here CleanSci suggests that its system can reduce such complexity, and instead standardize and simplify cleaning work.

One specific standardized practice that CleanSci describes is the color-coding of cleaning agents:

> red, yellow, green and blue. Even the most color blind [sic] person can, generally, distinguish the four shades from each other. Over the years we've learned that sticking with those four basic colors is best. It's harder for people to distinguish and remember other colors or shades. [N47]

Yet, red and green are two colors that are typically challenging to differentiate among people affected by colorblindness, an estimated 2-8% of the population (Birch, 2012). Further, using superlative language ("Even the most color blind [sic] person...") is ableist and infantilizing, tokenizing people with disabilities to market its products (that might not even be suitable for people with some disabilities, such as colorblindness).

Although CleanSci generally frames cleaning work as complex yet predictable, at times there are slippages where the unpredictable nature of cleaning work is noted. For example, CleanSci states that "the proper response to non-routine situations is key" [W3]. Further,

There are good days and bad days in the life of a custodian as the work to protect the health of the occupants as well as our own health is precarious. We don't know what we are going to find in a restroom, an office, in the hallway, in the kitchen. We don't know if we will find someone who was sick and we have to clean it up. [N64]

Here CleanSci fails to specify the routines and events (or lack thereof) that are associated with "good days" and "bad days." Further, euphemisms and avoidant language are used to avoid mentioning the 'dirty' aspects of dirty work. For example, by stating that "We don't know what we are going to find", the 'what' likely refers to bodily fluids. Similarly, "find[ing] someone who was sick" and having "to clean it up" again implies the presence of bodily fluids such as vomit. In this way, CleanSci reveals the paradox inherent in its services: the desire to standardize and streamline cleaning work to make work processes predictable and efficient, while at times acknowledging the unexpected and unpredictable nature of this work (such as encountering vomit). Further, while CleanSci offers a process for cleaning up such messes, it does not offer guidelines or support for the psychological effect such messes may have on cleaners (e.g., disgust, fear, embarrassment, shame).

Best practices. The primary *best practices* advocated by CleanSci (not already described) include *task allocation* and *workloading,* for which they advocate a *team cleaning approach.* CleanSci offers "Revised individual job assignments based on individual Job cards and Core maps" [W9] as well as "benchmarked production rates and workloading tools to assess your staff and resource allocation" [W9], such as "Productivity (sq. feet per custodian/sq. feet per hour)" [W9]. CleanSci further describes that *team cleaning* is the best way to manage such staff and resource (re)allocation: "[CleanSci] is a comprehensive, high performance management system for cleaning organizations. [CleanSci] also incorporates the concept of Team Cleaning. It employs in-depth training, from the upper-management down to the cleaning worker level" [MM2]. CleanSci asserts that zone cleaning approaches are "broken" (although no detail is

provided to explain problems associated with zone cleaning), thus necessitating team cleaning approaches, which have "been proven in terms of work loading [sic] to be a very large part in the overall proper manpower assignment and usage and a large part of the success for the overall program" [N50]. Again, no further information is provided to explain how a team cleaning approach has "been proven…[as] a large part of the success" of CleanSci. Essentially, each team comprises four "Specialists"—Restroom, Light-Duty, Vacuuming, and Utility—each of whom have narrowly assigned job tasks that are "balanced and timed for each team to complete its tasks together and then move on to the next space" [N5]. Such an approach can result in cost savings for customers, since typically fewer personnel are hired in a team cleaning approach, and in the event of overnight work, electricity is only needed for the floor that is currently being cleaned by each team.

Benchmarking. Echoing the *time motion studies* popular with early applications of scientific management, one CleanSci newsletter describes the following 'study':

> We began by videotaping cleaning workers as they went about their assigned tasks. What we found was astonishing. When the workers had more than one chemical or tool on their cart they used them indiscriminately. For instance, if they were carrying glass cleaner and were near the toilets, they used glass cleaner to clean toilets. It didn't matter that disinfectant was on their carts. Whatever was close in hand was the tool of choice. The same was true with cloths, pads and sponges. If an abrasive sponge was in hand it was used—regardless of the cleaning surface. [N47]

Such benchmarking is for the purpose of identifying an "accepted industry standard" [W1] for cleaning. Indeed, CleanSci measures productivity in terms of square footage cleaned by custodian per hour [W9]. CleanSci claims to utilize "benchmarked production rates and workloading tools to assess your staff and resource allocation" [W9], but does not provide further detail regarding how these rates and tools were identified. Benchmarking practices also apply to the measurement of performance. As described by CleanSci,

buildings are not evaluated in a traditional 'white glove' inspection. Rather than look at

the symptoms of the cleaning process, we look at the cleaning and management elements that are in place. Those elements are measured to determine the basis in which to grow your cleaning operation. Currently, our Audit contains approximately 340 key factors that are predictors of success. The key factors are in the form of simple "yes" or "no" questions about the installed [CleanSci] elements in your organization. There is a set formula for scoring an audit. [W14]

Here, it is implied that dirt, dust, and other contaminants are "symptoms" of the ultimate underlying cause of dirt: "cleaning and management elements." It is not clear what these elements are or entail, but according to CleanSci, intervening at the management level is the appropriate way to improve and evaluate cleaners' performance.

[SuperSupervision] is a third party that audits us annually to assure that we are following the process, and it's a benchmarking opportunity. In addition, management audits each crew area twice a year in detail: a 512-point inspection that takes eight hours to complete. [N48]

According to Aguiar (2001), "The use of 'science' to ascertain the number of tasks and 'time-and-motion' studies to assign the 'appropriate' number of workers to a particular activity and the time which they have to complete the task, is essentially scientific management" (p. 257; see also Taylor, 1911). However, CleanSci archives state that organizational leaders *did not* conduct actual time-motion studies to inform their workloading and benchmarking metrics, so the practices prescribed by the CleanSci program are only nominally rooted in scientific management.

Lean processes. CleanSci advocates "lean processes" that help struggling operations managers keep or even curtail budgets. According to CleanSci,

We standardize cleaning as a lean operation using a minimum of equipment and cleaning agents, done by cleaning teams. It includes strategically designed workloads for each team member, ergonomic equipment, environmentally friendly materials, and an emphasis on safety. That helps assure consistent cleaning across a big campus. [N48}

CleanSci does not provide specific definitions of what is meant by "ergonomic equipment" or "environmentally friendly materials." Although CleanSci criticizes the practice of cutting back

on materials fees for trying to shrink overall budgets, given that these costs cover just 10% of the budget, they also spend time describing how their program helps consolidate chemical inventory, as well as reduce the amount of chemicals used. Under the CleanSci system, "The only chemicals on site are those specified by [CleanSci]" [W3]. CleanSci "dramatically reduces the amounts of chemicals most organizations use. Pre-measured chemical packets are stored in highly visible wall mount stations" [W3]. In this way, CleanSci can control "the exact measure of portion controlled packages" [W3], with possible added safety benefits: "Hazardous materials inventory becomes almost automatic" [W3].

CleanSci also advocates "lean processes" couched in language of efficiency and standardization. For example, one newsletter issue reported the success of CleanSci implementation at Midwestern University:

> By implementing [CleanSci], the university overcame budget cuts and shaved 2.1 million dollars off their annual maintenance budget. They improved efficiency, once cleaning 36,000 sq. ft. per custodian, now cleaning 40,000 sq. ft. per custodian as part of their [CleanSci] standardized operations.

Here, budget reductions are framed as a phenomenon to "overcome," and one means of doing so is to expand the square footage for which each custodian is responsible, which is framed as an organizational improvement (rather than increased strain and workload per employee). Understanding efficiency and productivity in these terms also carries the consequence of *objectifying* workers by reducing them to cogs in the process, which further contributes to *alienation* and *invisibility*.

Another component of lean practices is equipment. Another way that customers can save money is by reducing their equipment usage; by assigning the role of vacuuming to a single employee (rather than distributing this responsibility across "zones"), buildings only need one vacuum (rather than several). However, it is assumed that this approach yields financial savings

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for customers; yet it is possible that injuries and strain associated with repetitive work may incur

additional financial costs for organizations. According to CleanSci,

> Studies have shown that backpack vacuums, when operated by properly trained
> employees in a well-orchestrated program such as [CleanSci], can clean up to twice the
> area in half the time as uprights. Workers using backpacks comment on how comfortable
> and lightweight the vacuums are. Improved maneuverability, less muscle strain, and
> increases in productivity and cost savings are commonly reported benefits. [N46]

CleanSci does not provide citations for the studies described. My own review of the literature

suggests that vacuums may improve the environmental health of the building (given their

superior uptake of pollutants) but perhaps at the expense of their wearers (who often report

discomfort and injury as a result of backpack vacuums). The preponderance of backpack

vacuums, coupled with the standardization of work proceses and commodification of cleaners,

render cleaners collateral damage.

Discursive Regime #2: Education

The second most prominent and common discursive patterning found in CleanSci

materials is discourse related to *education and credentializing*. Such discourse tends to be used

when discussing internal and external training opportunities, for frontline personnel and

executives alike. In response to CleanSci's contention that cleaning ought to be more

professional and professionalized, they have developed a variety of training and education

opportunities:

> We have developed a complete training and education program to professionalize the
> cleaning industry. From entry level janitors to CEO's and vice presidents of facility
> operations, we have a program for professional development. [W10]

"Janitor University" is a three-day training program for the professional development of

"cleaning organization executives. Facility Directors, Managers and Building Service Contractor

CEO's make up the typical class" [W11]. For custodians, CleanSci has coined the "Janitor

University Philosophy of Cleaning" [W11], which involves the following tenets:

1. Clean for Health First Then Appearance

2. Treat Cleaning Workers as First Class [*sic*] Citizens

3. Simplify, Simplify

4. Utilize the Clean Syndrome

5. Go Beyond Compliance on Safety Regulations

6. Minimize Environmental Harm

7. Exceed Expectations

As stated on the CleanSci store's website (where a poster including these tenets is available for purchase), "Since its introduction at the first Janitor University in 1993, this has been the 'battle cry' of [CleanSci] organizations. It has been taught at every JU class since. The Philosophy of Cleaning is an important reminder to everyone why cleaning is so important." Philosophy is concerned with questions related to the essential nature of truth, reality, and knowledge; thus, a 'philosophy of cleaning' might be concerned with identifying the essential nature of cleaning work and its related structures of knowledge. The poster including the 'Philosophy of Cleaning' features a fake university seal/insignia as well as a cartoon of a pale-skinned male-appearing caricature sporting graduation regalia (gown and mortar board). This Philosophy of Cleaning melds guidelines targeted for cleaners, their managers, and executive officials, yet appears to be targeted for frontline personnel, and possibly customers as well (e.g., the poster's description in the store suggests that it be displayed "in your Check-in Areas and Training Rooms for everyone to see on a daily basis").

CleanSci also acknowledges custodians' role within the organizations they clean. At times, CleanSci suggests that custodians are not deserving of institutional resources provided by universities. For example, one customer university was described as "a pioneer in documenting

over $2 million in savings. They gave it back to the university" [N49]. At other times, custodians are viewed as worthwhile "investments" from managers and employers:

> For far too long cleaning workers have been treated as the lowest of the low in organizations yet the work that is performed by a cleaning worker touches everyone in an organization on a daily basis. The role of a cleaning worker is vital, and as such he or she should be treated as a professional, with dignity as a highly valued employee and as a first class [*sic*] citizen. Toward that end Walker explained a map that leads to progressive career development with positive reinforcement such as a passport with stamps to document achievements and skills validation. [N60]

CleanSci also offers training opportunities for custodians, whereby "…each cleaning worker is trained and certified on specialized tasks" [W2]. One such opportunity (referenced in the block quote above) is the Passport Certification, "a performance-based, [sic] personal documentation of an individual's [CleanSci] educational journey and career path" [W5]. The Passport Certification program utilizes a gamification approach to learning and professional development. Most training opportunities require exams for all levels, from specialist to executive.

Taken together, CleanSci constructs custodians as *students* and students as *customers*. At times, there are slippages where academic discourse blends into *military* discourse; for example, "Trainers" [managers] usher custodians through "Boot Camp" and "Basic Training." Custodians are "first class citizens…not just janitors using a vacuum, but they are specialist [sic] using a tool" [N48]. There is a clear and discernable occupational hierarchy positioning facility directors, managers, building service contractors, and CEOs, with custodian underlings occupying "specialist" roles (e.g., Restroom Specialist, Vacuum Specialist). Further, CleanSci rhetorically links militarized language with discourse about dignity and respect: "After a 2-hour Boot Camp, I see a young man who is more open, more human, more himself" [N47].

Discursive Regime #3: Environmental Responsibility

The third recurring discursive regime utilized by CleanSci concerns language related to *environmental sustainability and responsibility*. Reducing environmental harm is a central tenet

of the Janitor University Philosophy of Cleaning, as described above. Throughout the website and newsletter, CleanSci makes several references to the importance of environmental sustainability, and—to a lesser extent—its business practices that help achieve the goal of environmental sustainability (most often constructed in terms of 'harm reduction').

Overall, CleanSci makes several claims regarding its environmentally 'friendly' and 'responsible' practices, both for the preservation of ecological sustainability, as well as "the health of the building occupants and the cleaning staff" [W4]. Interestingly, the health of building occupants is listed first, and perhaps privileged over that of the cleaning staff.

CleanSci is rather vague when discussing how it practices environmental sustainability. For example, CleanSci claims to use a "green process of cleaning" [N45] and "Sustainable Cleaning" [W9] yet does not explain what is meant by these claims. One newsletter includes a definition of sustainability as follows:

> Its [*sic*] about leaving a place better than you found it. I agree with the most widely acceptable definition of sustainability, which is meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs…Everyone wants a reasonable standard of living and for most that means cheap energy and access to the latest technology. [N52]

Elsewhere, CleanSci states that

> Environmentally preferable cleaning strategies, procedures, training, and purchasing guidelines for consumables, tools and equipment are all part of responsible cleaning. All of the daily-use cleaning chemicals in the [CleanSci] Program have earned the Green Seal Certification or are EPA registered disinfectants. [W4]

CleanSci also claims that "Of our four daily use chemicals, three are Green Seal Certified and the daily germicide used to reduce pathogenic microorganisms is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency" [N46]. Seals and insignia for Green Seal and the EPA appear throughout the CleanSci website and newsletters; in this way, CleanSci appeals to powerful third-party entities

to craft associations between its practices and those of other purportedly environmentally responsible groups.

Although several claims are made about environmentally sustainable and responsible practices, these practices are rarely specified or tied to metrics. Despite the vague nature of corporate environmental responsibility, CleanSci does appear to engage in 'responsible' behavior. For example, CleanSci was awarded with an award for excellence in environmental responsibility from a self-professed third-party entity. However, I found that the 'third party' is actually the parent company of CleanSci, raising questions about the legitimacy and efficacy of 'green practices' from CleanSci.

CleanSci also oversees internal recognition programs for awarding 'green' behavior. Criteria for the "Green Certified Programs of Excellence" and "Green Certified Programs" include audit scores of greater than 90% and 80-89%, respectively [N59], though it is not clear which metrics are included in these audits. The newsletters include a list of customers that have been awarded as Green Certified Programs. Featured on these pages include a gold seal emblazoned with the CleanSci logo in front of an image of the planet Earth.

In addition, CleanSci claims to apply principles of environmental preservation and sustainability to its equipment. For example, backpack vacuums frequently are described and recommended in CleanSci newsletters, noted for their comfort, safety, and superiority with respect to enhancing cleanliness. However, as discussed in the following section, gains in environmental health may occur at the expense of the people who handle the vacuums.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to "foreground organizational talk" (p. 552) about the cleaning profession and key actors involved in this work. The 'organizational talk' foregrounded

in this study included written text from the archives of a commercial service work organization (website materials, descriptive articles, stakeholders' speech), and the expert languages invoked therein (i.e., cleaning science; education; environmental responsibility). I was interested in how organizational talk from a commercial cleaning company (a) explained and (b) justified its practices and ideologies. I found that, by appealing to three expert languages—discourse related to cleaning science, education, and environmental responsibility—the company reinforced assumptions about the (re)organization of custodial work, and the people who perform this work. More generally, these discursive regimes serve to legitimize organizational practices that construct the neoliberal cleaning subject. In this way, the discursive regimes function together to ultimately serve a *regulatory* function—over cleaners' bodies and their work processes. Together, these regulatory discursive regimes commodify and decontextualize the labor process, which ultimately strip cleaners of knowledge, power, and individuality. To help reach this conclusion, I relied on guidelines from critical discourse analysis, which includes the following position:

> Texts that are produced by actors who are understood to have a legitimate right to speak, who have resource power or formal authority, or who are centrally located in a field are more likely to become embedded in discourse than texts that are not. (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 643)

Following this assumption, I conclude that, while in the process of appealing to expert languages, the expertise of frontline employees themselves is taken for granted (if recognized at all). Organizational talk from CleanSci suggests that cleaners are actors who lack knowledge, authority, legitimacy, or power, *despite* their cultivated expertise from firsthand cleaning experience. Such a stance harms cleaners—by contributing to their subordinated subjectification—but also organizations, who may otherwise benefit from the tremendous

resources that cleaners can offer, including valuable feedback about equipment/techniques and institutional memory.

I join Rouse (2004) in arguing that "Even in the supposedly value-neutral sciences, the questions asked, the way they are framed, and the methods used to answer them are mired in…multiple 'regimes of truth,' which dictate what knowledge counts as fact" (pp. 373-374). In the following section, I discuss how pseudoscientific and/or incomplete applications of scientific management carries implications for the construction of knowledge about, and the lived experience of, custodial labor. Rooting my analysis in Foucauldian discourse analysis helps me demonstrate how CleanSci leverages expert languages to enforce "a particular regime of truth on the organization of work" (Barratt, 2003, p. 1072) in ways that benefit the customer organization's bottom line at the expense of health and dignity of the frontline employees adversely affected by such (re)organization of work (i.e., cleaners).

After presenting discourse fragments that reflect these three expert languages, I turn my attention to the following question: How is cleaning (and the people who perform and embody this work) understood via these expert languages? I seek to "go beyond [organizational talk] to the social context in which documents are produced, filed and archived" (Gidley, 2012, p. 276). Such a discursive approach "is concerned with the examination of meaning, and the often-complex processes through which social meanings are produced. …The discourse analyst seeks to open up statements to challenge, interrogate taken-for-granted meanings, and disturb easy claims to objectivity or common sense in the texts they are reading" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 417). In this section, I will elaborate on how CleanSci appeals to dominant ideologies to craft knowledge about cleaning work (and the people who do this work), concluding with a discussion of consequences for workers' (re)organization of work, occupational health, and dignity. A fuller

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discussion of findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications can be found in Chapter V.

Constructing a Science of Cleaning

The primary discursive regime that emerged in organizational communication was concerned with *cleaning science*. First, communication materials emphasized three primary reasons justifying the need for a science of cleaning: (1) *complexity of cleaning work,* (2) *unprofessional nature of cleaning industry*, and (3) *economic precarity of institutional customers*. Next, CleanSci highlighted several key practices associated with cleaning science: *(1) standardization, (2) best practices, (3) benchmarking,* and *(4) lean practices*.

Justifying the need for a science of cleaning. With respect to the first justification, CleanSci describes the cleaning industry as "complex" and "complicated". In this way, understanding the science of cleaning is presented as necessary to (re)structure and optimize cleaning work more broadly. CleanSci does not offer a clear or consistent definition of "science" or "cleaning science", instead relying on vague descriptions of cleaning (e.g., "it [cleaning] is a highly scientifically-based exercise"). At other times, cleaning was compared to other scientific enterprises, perhaps in attempts to 'elevate' the public image of cleaning, a devalued job, or "bask in the reflected glory" (Cialdini et al., 1976) of other more 'respectable' scientific pursuits, including "rocket science" [N55].

"Cleaning science" was typically mentioned in conjunction with descriptions of chemicals, equipment, and work tasks (e.g., time-motion studies). In this way CleanSci uses discourse related to "science" to justify its selection of chemicals, equipment, and workloading techniques. However, at times the "best" practices or equipment advocated by CleanSci conflict with scientific research on these issues. For example, throughout CleanSci organizational

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communication, the "backpack" style of vacuum was frequently described as more efficient (e.g., able to clean more surface area in a shorter timeframe), ergonomic, and environmentally "friendly". One newsletter described the backpack-style vacuum as "comfortable—more like an extension of the body" [N61]. One newsletter [N46] reported that "Workers using backpacks comment on how comfortable and lightweight the vacuums are. Improved maneuverability, less muscle strain, and increases in productivity and cost savings are commonly reported benefits."

Backpack vacuums appear to have popularized in many U.S. worksites after the year 2000. Backpack vacuums have been noted for cleaning more efficiently given their greater uptake of environmental particulates and "light" weight (though still weighing around fifteen pounds, such as the 6.8-kilogram ProTeam CoachVac™). To my knowledge, one study has demonstrated the benefits of backpack vacuums over upright vacuums with respect to efficiency and energy expenditure (Mengelkoch & Clark, 2006); however, these findings were based on a one-hour laboratory task, whereas many cleaners spend a few or even several hours cleaning during each shift. Some industry stakeholders have described backpack vacuums as "technological improvements" (Ellis, 2006, p. 3) that can "increase the comfort of the user" (J. L. Campbell, 2004, p. 207).

Researchers and cleaners alike have raised doubts about these claims. Across several (inter)disciplinary fields—including ergonomics, occupational health and safety, physics, physiology, public health, and sociology—scholars have amassed evidence on the hazards of cleaning work, including vacuuming (e.g., Cabeças, 2007; Søgaard et al., 2006; Wolkoff et al., 1998; Woods & Buckle, 2005; Zock, 2005; Zock et al., 2001; Zock et al., 2002). These studies include laboratory experiments, observational studies, semi-structured interviews, and surveys, both cross-sectional and longitudinal. Floor cleaning in general has been associated with

increased musculoskeletal and cardiovascular load, resulting in fatigue; heightened static load; wear-and-tear to cleaners' necks, shoulders, and backs; and increased heart stress rising to one-quarter and one-half of cleaners' maximum capacity (Cabeças, 2007; Søgaard et al., 2006; Søgaard, Laursen, Jensen, & Sjøgaard, 2001).

Additionally, many cleaning tasks, such as vacuuming, expose custodians to health hazards. Vacuuming can result in the emission of dust, which can include "indoor allergens, moulds [*sic*] and fungal secretion products, and bacterial endotoxin, among others" (Zock, 2005, p. 582). One study found that rates of asthma were nearly three times higher among cleaners who were tasked with vacuuming, relative to a matched control sample of workers whose work did not require vacuuming (Zock et al., 2001). Methodological issues make it difficult to accurately measure levels of dust emissions and resuspension, and likely underestimate the true risk of vacuuming for cleaners. For example, comparing amounts of dust in the vacuum and air before and after vacuuming can overlook the amount of dust that custodians themselves are inhaling (Wolkoff et al., 1998). Similarly, one custodial director reported that after switching to backpack vacuums, "Many of our occupants swear they no longer suffer from allergy and asthma symptoms like they used to!" (Leavitt, 2013), yet no outcome information is provided for cleaners themselves.

Other types of vacuums are also not without their problems; for example, "handheld", "tub", and "upright" styles of vacuums have required custodians to assume awkward and painful operating positions (Choi & Shin, 2016; Woods & Buckle, 2005), resulting in elevated levels of strain associated with risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders (Bell & Steele, 2012; Cabeças, 2007). Additionally, other variables moderate the negative impact of cleaning tasks, including vacuuming; for example, one survey of 712 custodians found that women were more

than 60% more likely than men to develop musculoskeletal symptoms after vacuuming (controlling for a number of factors, including time spent on task per day and years spent in cleaning work; Cavallari et al., 2016).

Any ergonomic design improvements that have been recommended (e.g., expanding grip length and diameter; elongating attachments; decreasing resistance of foot controls; Woods & Buckle, 2005) or implemented are likely moderated by the organization of work, including the duration and frequency of task assignments. Put differently, more ergonomically healthy design features cannot attenuate harm caused by the requirement of repetitive work including vacuuming. For example, in a study of the Justice for Janitors campaign, women custodians explained that vacuuming was not inherently challenging, but rather the speed and *presión* (pressure) made this task physically and psychologically unbearable. Similarly, Aguiar (2001) contends that backpack-style vacuums accomplish little more than work intensifying "through the speeding up of the cleaning process and the intensity involved in completing a task rapidly and in shorter time" (p. 254).

Some scientists have recommended task rotation to minimize repetitive work, given its association with greater monotony and boredom, increased exposure to environmental pathogens, and elevated risk of physical injury (e.g., Weigall, Simpson, & Bell, 2005; Zock, 2005). Yet in the name of "science" CleanSci advocates the very opposite; its "Specialist" roles (e.g., "Vacuum Specialist") function as a discursive mask for the (re)instatement of scientifically unsound practices, including greater repetitive work. Such practices are harmful to custodians' psychological and physiological health, as well as to their employers and organizations, given the elevated likelihood of absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover (Woods & Buckle, 2005). Further, reorganizing work in favor of repetitive workloading also demonstrates a lack of

attention given to the physical work environment. For example, Woods and Buckle (2005) surveyed custodians who reported moderate strain while vacuuming which could be exacerbated by different physical features of the work environment (e.g., the need to move heavy furniture to complete vacuuming; navigating awkward spaces such as a tiered lecture hall). Further, Bell and Steele (2012) found that a combination of the physical work environment (e.g., room layout) and type of equipment affected cleaners' musculoskeletal symptoms.

Taken together, describing cleaning as a "science" and cleaning work as "complex" also does 'discursive work'. That is, describing cleaning as scientific and complicated can serve to identify, differentiate, and legitimate experts from novices. Appealing to the expert language of 'science' or 'cleaning science' first legitimizes CleanSci as an authority on these topics, despite their demonstrable inattention to peer-reviewed research. Second, appealing to the discursive power of 'science' is made possible only to the extent that sociocultural ideologies view science as an objective, neutral, and value-free enterprise. However, feminist scientists have criticized this stance, instead arguing that scientific facts and theories—often lauded and branded as objective—are still subject to the influence of culture, history, and morality (e.g., Haraway, 1988). Further, appealing to a science of cleaning suggests that there are "objective" and "proper" means ways to conducting cleaning work. While this is undoubtedly true, appealing to a science of cleaning implies that lab experts are better suited to cultivate practices than custodians themselves. Descriptions of 'cleaning science' also contribute to the discursive infantalization of custodians, who are described as "ironically" following proper procedures without knowing they are doing so. Such discourse may carry further downstream consequences for workers, including increased work intensification, justification for controlling managerial behaviors (since

custodians 'don't know' any better), and the granting of expertise to managers and executives rather than cleaners.

Such discursive infantalization and denigration of custodians is also apparent when CleanSci characterizes the *cleaning industry as unprofessional.* Throughout the website and newsletters, numerous discourse fragments emerged that described cleaning work—and, by extension, cleaners—as unprofessional. To respond to the ostensible lack of professionalization in the cleaning industry, CleanSci promises standardization, regulation, and professionalization. In this way, CleanSci not only markets prescriptive procedures for conducting cleaning work, but also guidelines for the management of the bodies conducting this work. Promises to 'standardize' and 'professionalize' custodial bodies imply that, heretofore, cleaning work has been unstandardized and unprofessional.

Yet, scholars have documented the history of hygiene and cleaning in modern civilization (Douglas, 1966), demonstrating earlier evidence of codified best practices earlier than CleanSci suggests (e.g., Martens & Scott, 2005). Despite perceptions that women 'naturally' are better suited to cleaning work or 'inherently' are more skilled, cleaning work does in fact require training and experience. An ethnography and survey of housekeepers in Los Angeles revealed that fewer than 10% of *domésticas* had prior cleaning experience before migrating to the U.S.; rather, most housekeepers received informal training or participated in unofficial apprenticeships to learn how to clean, often from relatives or other close ties (e.g., Cranford, 2001, 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001).

Further, such perceptions of cleaning work as feminized and unskilled likely contribute to salary compression and restriction in this industry, contributing to gendered and racialized wage disparities. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that skill at work be treated as "a dependent

variable related to who is doing the work and under what conditions" (Cruz & Abrantes, 2014, p.

296; see also Cockburn, 1983; Gaskell, 1986; Herod & Aguiar, 2006a). As summarized by

Browne and Misra (2003),

> Domestic work is deeply imbedded in hierarchies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and
> nationality. Not only are domestic tasks associated with one gender (women), but
> gendered norms of childcare and housework being seen as "natural" for women devalue
> domestic work and workers. Historically, domestic work has been performed by ethnic
> minorities, and ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship-status construct an idea of domestic
> workers as "others," who do not deserve better pay or working conditions. (p. 502)

In this way, the social and material devaluing of cleaning work—and, by extension, the

characterization of employees as unskilled and incompetent—may reflect the embodied identities

of the people most likely to perform cleaning work: immigrants and/or people of color,

especially women belonging to both of these groups. Put simply, "Stereotypes of low-wage

occupations are serving to keep wages low" (Hilton, 2008, p. 69). The organizational talk from

CleanSci subtly cements this pattern.

Despite documented histories and ethnographies of cleaning work (and the necessary

skills involved), CleanSci describes cleaning work (and cleaners themselves) as unprofessional

and unskilled. This discourse subtly (and not-so-subtly) undermines the knowledge and practices

cultivated over decades (if not centuries). Casting cleaners as ignorant and unprofessional

demeans feminized labor and the bodies of people who perform this work—which, in the context

of U.S. labor history, largely includes women of color and/or immigrants (e.g., Browne & Misra,

2003; Dill, 1988; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). CleanSci therefore uses a revisionist, if not racist,

history of cleaning and blue-collar work that invalidates, undermines, and/or erases the

contributions of cleaners throughout U.S. labor history and society. Cleaners are able to see right

through the pseudo-empowering nature of organizational discourse that delivers "promises" of

greater professionalization. Further, describing cleaners as unskilled and unprofessional reflects

stereotypes of service workers as "ignorant, incompetent, apathetic, lazy, and slow" (Paules, 1991, p. 9). These stereotypes are especially pernicious when considering how members of marginalized groups are especially likely to embody custodial labor (i.e., people of color and/or immigrants).

The materials content-analyzed in this study likely were intended for managers and facilities executives—that is, people in positions of leadership and power (relative to cleaners themselves). Cruz and Abrantes (2014) depict commercial cleaning as a *complex interaction* (Brétin, 2000) that enables stakeholders—including executives, managers, cleaners, and custodians—to develop "elaborate representations" (p. 298) about each other. These representations are not without consequence. Absent empirical evidence to support claims made by CleanSci regarding the ignorant and unprofessional nature of cleaners, such claims could be cemented into *controlling images* (Collins, 2000, 2004), in addition to stereotypes that already exist about custodians as lazy, suspicious, stupid, unskilled, and/or unprofessional. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) conceptualized controlling images as "the gender-specific depiction of people of African descent within Western scholarship and popular culture…[that are] closely tied to power relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (p. 350). One example of a controlling image that Collins describes is the objectification of "Black women agricultural workers as mules [which] justified working them as if they were animals" (p. 56). Characterizing cleaners as unskilled and unmotivated can solidify perceptions of this social group as incompetent and docile, thus justifying their micromanagement. Of course, the system of slavery in the U.S. is radically different from the contemporary organization of service work, but there are some similarities in the relationship between controlling images and managerial behavior worth noting.

These harmful images are harmful in and of themselves. Deeper negative consequences are also possible, including the internalization of such beliefs (Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2017b). Appealing to commonsense views of custodians as unskilled and unmotivated—however inaccurate—could also justify leaders' micromanagement and hyper-standardized work processes, such as the one CleanSci offers and prescribes. Discourse analysts contend that texts often make categories "seem 'natural' and therefore unquestionable" (Gidley, 2012, p. 274). Painting the cleaning industry in broad strokes, characterizing it (and cleaners) as 'unprofessional' naturalizes and echoes and solidifies commonsense tropes about custodians.

Discourse about professionalization also 'does the work' of marketing, a "means of corporate branding [especially] as the number of firms in the industry has exploded in recent years" (Herod & Aguiar, 2006a, p. 430). At times this "facelift" of the sanitation industry has resulted in name changes; for example, cleaners sometimes enjoy titles such as "sanitation engineers" (Herod & Aguiar, 2006a; Stier, 2004) or, in the case of CleanSci, "Specialists". Other attempts to enhance the 'image problem' of custodial work include colorful uniforms (Tomic et al., 2006). Yet, it is not clear that "changing the discursive context within which cleaning is done" (Herod & Aguiar, 2006a, p. 431) also carries material improvements for custodians, including higher wages and more fringe benefits. Rather, such changes to custodians' job titles and uniforms are largely superficial and appear to more strongly do the 'work' of modernity (Tomic et al., 2006). Such practices "clean up" the industry on a superficial level, yet do little to intervene in the larger social context of cleaning work, such as materially improving safety, wages, or working conditions.

The third theme that appears to justify CleanSci's business and practices involves the purported economic precarity of customer institutions. Extensive organizational talk is laden

with promises to customer institutions that will reap various benefits, including more efficient workloading and greater cost-savings. In this way, facilities operators and custodial managers appear to be the intended audience for the organizational communication prepared by CleanSci staff. Such a focus on the purported economic precarity of customer institutions occurs at the expense of considering cleaners themselves. Similar patterns have been noted in South Africa, where commercial cleaning services have promised professional and efficient subcontracted staff while minimizing costs for companies that are also able to avoid accountability for the outsourced labor (Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006). One Australian group described this tension in terms of customers' desire for "champagne cleaning specifications" for "flat beer prices" (Building Owners and Managers Association International; quoted in Ryan & Herod, 2006, p. 68). In other contexts, outsourced cleaning labor often uses the guise of efficiency and cost reduction to challenge unionizing efforts, including South Africa (Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006), Australia and New Zealand (Ryan & Herod, 2006). Moreover, some scholars have contended that the budget reductions promised by commercial cleaning companies are less a byproduct of standardized work processes and controlling management styles, but rather a result of firing or failing to replace custodians who turnover, lowering wages, removing union benefits, reducing quality of the work environment, and intensifying the pace and workload for custodians (Aguiar, 2001, 2006; Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006; Öhrling, 2014; Ryan & Herod, 2006). Many commercial cleaning companies promise financial savings, but these claims may be overstated. For example, Öhrling (2014) argues that the cleaning industry "only makes investments that give quick economical results" (p. 82), and that such investments often undermine cleaners' working conditions (e.g., greater work intensification, outsourcing, job insecurity).

Practicing cleaning science. After justifying the need for a science of cleaning, organizational talk from CleanSci identified key practices associated with cleaning science: *(1) standardization, (2) best practices, (3) benchmarking,* and *(4) lean practices.* In organizational studies, these practices often are discussed alongside post-Fordism (Aguiar, 2001), neo-Fordism (Rinehart, 1996), and neo-Taylorism (Ryan, 2012). I found that the practice of cleaning science advocated and implemented by CleanSci relies on a retrograde understanding of management science. Although CleanSci aligns itself with "cleaning science", it does so without utilizing the scientific method or evidence-based practices derived from peer-reviewed research. Instead, CleanSci relies on the discursive power of "science" to better market its system as objective, efficient, robust, and technologically sound. However, I argue that implementing seemingly benign practices like "standardization", "benchmarking", and "lean practices" likely result in eroded work conditions for frontline personnel. For example, CleanSci defined productivity as "sq. feet per custodian/sq. feet per hour" [W9]. Yet, this formula could just as easily calculate *work intensification.* In this way, CleanSci measures efficiency, productivity, and performance in terms of "doing more work with fewer human resources." Such a formula—while undoubtedly attractive to customer institutions seeking to minimize costs—ignores or even degrades the working conditions of cleaners.

Consistent with discourse about neoliberal work arrangements, extensive organizational talk was devoted to the need for, and utility of, *standardizing work processes*. For CleanSci standardization applies to a variety of work components, including chemical usage and workloading. The "prescriptive" style of cleaning advocated by CleanSci implies that there is one (and only one) optimal method of cleaning, a stance consistent with scientific management. However, unlike the version of scientific management advocated by Taylor (1911), the work

processes embedded within CleanSci do not appear to derive from the scientific method. Some of the work processes instead appear related to management philosophies and practices that are considered outmoded. For example, elements of Theory X (McGregor, 1960) are apparent when employees are described as unmotivated, unskilled, and unprofessional. CleanSci partially uses scientific management when prescribing cleaning times to determine workloading assignments. However, the cleaning times were derived from Walker (2014) *612 Cleaning Times & Tasks,* which itself did not rely on laboratory-based time motion studies, much less based on a representative in vivo sample. Similarly, the organization of work promoted by CleanSci appears consistent with (post)Fordist labor processes. As described by Krafcik (1988), "Workers in early mass-production facilities had a narrowly defined, compartmentalized task—perhaps only of thirty seconds' duration, performed almost a thousand times a day" (p. 42). Although the CleanSci labor processes is less compartmentalized than this, it still relies on the sequential performance of a narrow set of job tasks, in the name of scientific management.

Aguiar (2001) situates such lean practices within the larger "post-Fordist labour process [that is] organized by work-teams, *kaizen*, lean production and flexibility in employment relations" (p. 241). For example, the "Japanese lean model combines short cycle jobs, standardized detailed work procedures applied to the whole organization, and worker involvement in rethinking and improving these same procedures" (Å. Sandberg, 2007, p. 24). Similarly, as Krafcik (1988) describes, Toyota took the

> minds + hands philosophy of the craftsmen era, merging it with the work standardization and assembly line of the Fordist system, and adding the glue of teamwork for good measure. Management did not think of workers as replaceable cogs in a great production machine; each worker was trained for a variety of jobs and skills…Rather than delegating the task of work standardization to a stopwatch-toting industrial engineer. (p. 43).

Companies such as CleanSci partially adopt this lean model, except often exclude *worker involvement* and *job / task rotation*. The newer organization of cleaning work tends to thwart

cleaners' ability to participate in unions and/or collective bargaining efforts. Further, managerial styles are often similar to the ideology underlying Theory X (McGregor, 1960), whereby characterizations of cleaners as unskilled and unmotivated justify managerial practices of micro-management, infantilization, and surveillance.

Although "lean practices" were developed and implemented in the context of manufacturing plants, some stakeholders have attempted to reorganize cleaning work as a lean system. I observed and documented this trend in CleanSci, but many other commercial service organizations have used similar approaches to the organization of cleaning work. One cross-occupational study found that cleaning work was the sector with the greatest amount of repetitive and monotonous work (Borg & Burr, 1997; cited in Søgaard et al., 2006), in contrast to the previously more widespread "zone cleaning" approach. In research contexts that have focused on cleaning work, many cleaners have reported daily experiences of low task variation and job rotation (e.g., Søgaard et al., 2006). More recent research, however, has addressed the benefits of varying the sequence of job tasks. For example, job rotation can enhance task performance and productivity, in addition to reducing injury and improving health (e.g., Keir, Sanei, & Holmes, 2011; Kuijer, Visser, & Kemper, 1999; Søgaard et al., 2006).

An "assembly line" approach to organizing cleaning work may appear efficient, yet obscures the toll taken on cleaners' minds and bodies. Organizational talk from CleanSci promises that standardized work procedures help to cultivate a "safer, cleaner, healthier and happier working environment" [W2]. However, it is not clear that the organization of work that CleanSci utilizes evidence-based practices for worker safety and health from research developed in such fields as human factors and ergonomics, physiology, biomechanics, occupational health, and epidemiology and public health. Research in these areas has helped to identify many ways to

more safely conduct cleaning work, and usually integrates proper equipment, techniques, and workloading (e.g., Choi & Shin, 2016; Mengelkoch & Clark, 2006; Wallius et al., 2016; Woods & Buckle, 2005). Summarizing research on the connections between work environment and well-being in cleaning work, Öhrling (2014) identifies negative occupational conditions that undermine cleaners' health: the lack of "job rotation, increased autonomy, [and] scheduling that allows time to rest between physically demanding tasks" (p. 82); yet, CleanSci proscribes these optimal characteristics of the optimal work environment. Thus, organizational communication from CleanSci expresses superficial claims about valuing cleaners' health, while disregarding practices that invest in, maintain, and/or improve cleaners' well-being.

CleanSci fails to account for the social context of cleaning work, and this is particularly evident in the lack of attention given to evidence-based research on cleaning work in vivo (as summarized above). The organizational talk of CleanSci also reveals how their standardized work system was not normed on a diverse group of cleaners in ways that reflect the actual demographics of this industry sector. Any attempts to establish "Cookie Cutter" [N50] approaches or standardized work processes run the risk of overlooking the unique experiences of workers who "deviate", which may include some older employees and/or people with disabilities. When stakeholders from CleanSci have attempted to foster inclusion for cleaners with marginalized identities, they miss the mark. For example, their color-coded chemicals are meant to help "even the most color blind [*sic*] person"; this language, beyond ableist and infantilizing, does not actually help many employees with colorblindness (who typically have difficulty differentiating between the very colors that CleanSci selected for its chemical identification system). Further, in the quest for simplification, CleanSci perpetuates *deskilling* of employees. For example, splicing the process of cleaning into its constituent tasks and

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oversimplifying the equipment identification system precludes custodians from developing deeper knowledge about handling chemicals and training on a diverse range of skills and tasks.

Additionally, executives and managers may be overlooking cleaners' expertise when they do not cultivate standardized best practices from cleaners' lived experiences. When executives and managers without prior cleaning experience attempt to standardize work processes in this sector, they may overlook work styles and techniques that could inform best practices. This not only undermines cleaners' skill, creativity, autonomy, and dignity, but also could harm workgroups and organizations (e.g., motivation, productivity). *Standardized* work processes imply that there is an objectively "correct" technique to perform each work task, time taken to perform each task, and number of workers required to perform such tasks. Further, standardization does not appear to account for work professes that could negatively affect cleaners, including greater time pressure, micro-management and surveillance, and loss of control. These negative aspects of the work environment could undermine cleaners' dignity, motivation, health, and productivity.

As described above, applying retrograde principles associated with Fordism and lean production suggests that a clean environment can be accomplished by parsing the work into a sequential series of optimized steps. These "mono-tasks" (Aguiar, 2001) are scrutinized heavily; for example, CleanSci uses a 340-point audit [W14] and a "512-point inspection that takes eight hours to complete" [N48]. This rigid performance benchmarking may be inaccessible for cleaners, who may find it difficult to manage hundreds of parsed tasks in their shift. Further, supervisors as well may encounter difficulty in remembering and managing such an extensive system for monitoring and evaluating performance. Such compartmentalization of tasks and corresponding performance evaluation echoes ongoing conversations about Foucauldian

approaches to human resources management (e.g., Barratt, 2003). Participants in these conversations acknowledge how white-collar work is "increasingly rigidly controlled and monitored", often through "sophisticated technological surveillance techniques, peer surveillance, and cultural controls which commonly accompany these developments" (Barratt, 2003, p. 1074). Similar practices are increasingly adopted in other domains, including teamwork (e.g., Sinclair, 1992) and, as I have demonstrated, cleaning work. I join this conversation by arguing that organizational policies (such as audits and inspections with hundreds of criteria) codify and justify managerial practices (such as surveillance), which ultimately undermine relationships between supervisors and subordinates, as well as the quality of work-life for frontline personnel (who already lack autonomy and control at work). Unfortunately, such "hyper-quantification" of benchmarks related to cleaning work are likely to increase. For example, Aguiar (2001) describes a computer program developed by The Systémes GES group containing the following modules: Inventory, Technical Specifications, Workload Analysis, Organization of Work, Stock Management, and Quality Management. This program calculates workloading by accounting for inputs such as building square footage, size of staff, and list of tasks required. However, the program does not account for other aspects of cleaning work that shape the experience and organization of such work, including characteristics of cleaners (e.g., age, disabilities) and their built environment (e.g., layout of floor space; presence of customers). Aguiar (2001) finds these trends, such as the Systémes GES group's program, "troublesome: the way in which cleaners are observed, studied, experimented with, all in order to produce more and more with less and less of their own discretion on the job. This is scientific management in pure form and without human relations school's input to boot!" (p. 260).

Some critics have suggested that standardized team cleaning approaches are *less* efficient systems. For example, under zone cleaning, cleaners could better familiarize themselves with "the idiosyncrasies of specific offices" (Aguiar, 2001, p. 262). Team cleaning also reduces workers' autonomy and intensifies the pace of work, as described earlier. Søgaard et al. (2006) suggests incorporating periods during the work day wherein cleaners could sit and collaborate on "some sort of planning task in a self-organized team" (p. 594), which could provide a rest period during the work day and improve cleaners' cardiovascular health. I believe that such a practice could offer additional benefits to employees, workgroups, and organizations, including facilitating the formation of high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) and grant cleaners greater voice and participation in their organization of work. However, Søgaard et al. (2006) expresses doubt about such an arrangement, "given the current employment trend towards ever greater micro-management and control of the workplace" (p. 594).

The quest for greater efficiency and effectiveness is not inherently problematic. Identifying faster and safer work techniques ideally would benefit many different stakeholders, including cleaners, customers, managers, and executives. For example, in the context of in-home cleaning, housekeepers often cultivate strategies for cleaning more efficiently, which are shared with relatives and other close ties who are newer to such work (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Cleaning "quickly and efficiently" (p. 45) is a crucial skill for housekeepers who are self-employed and/or manage a route of multiple houses per day (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). However, I argue that the legitimate quest for efficiency becomes a problem when organizational strategies and managerial practices for cleaning efficiently are not borne out of custodians' own experience, especially when policies and practices in the name of efficiency undermine cleaners' health and dignity. Field studies have demonstrated additional benefits of the associations among

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the work environment, workers' well-being, and organizational outcomes. For example, Berggren (1993) conducted field research at five plants, and concluded that deviations from "assembly line" approaches were associated with better outcomes for frontline employees, including improved personal growth, task rotation, autonomy, and skill development. "The further from traditional assembly a plant moves, the better the outcomes in terms of variation, prospects for personal growth, the taking of responsibility, and the opportunity to use one's skills, as well as decreasing monotony, fatigue, and physical strain.

More generally, CleanSci appeals to the discursive power of *cleaning science* and *scientific management* without demonstrating a nuanced or complete understanding of these constructs. For example, Taylor (1911) devoted extensive effort to the study of motivation and incentive structures, and even emphasized the importance of adequate wages and working conditions. Yet, I found that CleanSci selectively engages with Taylor's work, extolling the virtues of efficiency without sufficiently heeding the structural determinants thereof. While communication materials from CleanSci described the importance of identifying best practices and standardizing work processes, little attention is given to other determinants of worker motivation and productivity, including wages. As described by Tomei (2011),

> While employees of not-for-profit licensed enterprises may fare better than those employed by private individuals, the 'industrialization' of domestic work has not managed, however, to counter the under-valuation of domestic work and its characterization as a low-wage job. The depersonalization of the employment relationship and the shift towards more standardized employment relationships has, paradoxically, eroded the pressuring power that workers engaged in direct employment can exert on their employers, especially when the labour supply is relatively limited, and has made competition among employees fiercer. As a result, employment in the domestic sector remains fundamentally precarious. (p. 209)

Although Tomei is commenting upon domestic work, her arguments extend to commercial cleaning. Organizational talk from CleanSci suggests that company stakeholders are invested in workers' health; yet a discursive analysis suggests that the company abides by a very narrow

understanding of occupational health. Growing research on the privatization and commercialization of service work suggests that third-party employers "often act as brokers rather than actual employers, and represent the strategic interests of customers more than those of domestic workers" (Abrantes, 2014, p. 431). Although Abrantes (2014) focuses on domestic workers, my research suggests that similar patterns might extend to the public sphere. That is, CleanSci—along with other cleaning management systems—strategically utilizes discourses and practices that appeal to customer institutions, especially those seeking to implement 'lean practices' and institute budget cuts, including large public universities. While appealing to commonsense (though stereotypical) stereotypes of custodians and incomplete interpretations of science (e.g., environmental sustainability, organizational science), CleanSci and similar companies speak the 'language' of neoliberalism and lay business theories to appeal to companies. In the process, however, CleanSci markets and implements practices rooted in neoliberal ideology that benefit customer companies at the expense of the workers cleaning for these companies. As illustrated above, CleanSci accomplishes this through acts of commission (e.g., promoting practices that elevate cleaners' risk of repetitive strain injuries) as well as omission (e.g., failing to intervene in issues known to improve workers' health, including a living wage and stable employment).

More generally, my findings raise questions about how stakeholders understand, represent, and engage with science within organizational communication, and consequences this might hold for personnel affected by such communication (e.g., managers, frontline personnel, customers). Organizational communication in CleanSci, and other commercial service companies, are ripe with controlling images of custodians and incomplete understandings of science. This can become a problem when stereotypical and/or inaccurate beliefs trickle-down to

affect stakeholders who have direct contact with the frontline personnel reflected in and affected by these controlling images and beliefs. For example, stakeholders quoted in organizational communication created by CleanSci—including facilities managers—clearly 'understand' and 'speak' the expert languages leveraged by CleanSci. By appealing to these simplified and abbreviated understandings of science, management, and the intersection thereof, I worry that custodians ultimately suffer, whether from boredom, burnout, or worse.

In sum, CleanSci describes an archive of cleaning science that is ultimately incomplete, if not inaccurate. When engaging with bodies of knowledge such as *cleaning science,* CleanSci ignores particular bodies of knowledge (e.g., worker safety, dignity) while selectively engaging with others (e.g., granting legitimacy to some principles of scientific management without employing others, like living wages).The "rhetorical style" (Prasad, 2005, p. 251) predominant throughout CleanSci's organizational talk reflected simplified (if not superficial) business language and inaccurate understandings of science. This rhetorical style is also evident in the second expert language recurring throughout the CleanSci archives.

Deskilling Through Discourse

The second expert language recurring in organizational talk from CleanSci related to *higher education* and *credentializing.* CleanSci communication stakeholders tended to invoke this expert language when describing cleaners as unprofessional, as well as training opportunities for various industry participants (e.g., executives, managers, cleaners). Relevant discourse included miscellaneous symbols representing higher education—including graduation regalia, school seals, and other references to higher education (e.g., course titles and descriptions). However, I argue that the training opportunities that CleanSci markets *deskill* cleaners, in addition to overlooking whatever skills and professionalism they do already possess. Just as

CleanSci stakeholders appealed to retrograde understandings of management science, so too do they utilize outmoded understandings of best practices for training and credentializing.

As noted by Herod and Aguiar (2006a), "Indeed, it is fair to say that what may once have been considered to be the art of cleaning is increasingly being viewed by many as a science" (p. 429). This belief is evident throughout the organizational talk of CleanSci, not only through its partial application of scientific management but also through its training models. For example, CleanSci offers courses and modules in Scientific Management and Return on Investment. This trend is evident in other commercial service companies; for example, the British Institute of Cleaning Science at the University of York offers training in subjects such as "chemical competence" and "safe use and care of machines" (Herod & Aguiar, 2006a, p. 429). Aguiar (2001) notes that the Toronto Skydome is host to "a university campus" that instructs all personnel—including cleaners and executives—on how to improve quality of services. Similarly, Herod and Aguiar (2006a) note that a University of York laundry was rebranded as the "Cleaning Science Training School."

Additionally, many cleaners' titles have changed in recent decades, often in attempts to elevate and "sanitize" the image of a socially devalued career. Some of these job titles may function as discursive masks to attenuate stigma associated with performing and embodying dirty work, including Maintenance Engineer (McTavish, 1964), Garbologist (Sharman, Sharman, & Hayes, 2008), Building Superintendent (March, 1978), and Sanitation Engineer (Herod & Aguiar, 2006a; Stier, 2004). These titles are certainly more favorable to the names that many in-home cleaners are called, including "the help", "the maid", "Ma'am", or simply "Mrs." (Mendez, 1998). Such names likely reflect, and reify, the social and material devaluing of people who

perform feminized dirty work. However, seemingly innocuous changes to job titles are also fraught.

First, these titles represent a superficial attempt to elevate the image of cleaners. Yet, it is not clear if euphemistic changes to cleaners' job titles actually increase the respect and recognition they are usually denied. Second, there may be unintended consequences of euphemistic job titles. For example, supervisors and trainers may be more likely to shy away from acknowledging the very real taboos and stigmas associated with performing dirty work. Providing socialization and support for employees in dirty work around the very "dirtiness" of their work is typically beneficial for dirty work employees and organizations alike (e.g., Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, in press; Lopina, Rogelberg, & Howell, 2012). Yet, euphemistic job titles may discursively mask the "dirty" elements of such work, thus exacerbating the negative consequences associated with the stigma and taboo of dirty work. Third, changes to cleaners' job titles usually are not accompanied by other changes that would help elevate the quality of life for cleaners, including improved wages and working conditions.

Fourth, some of these changes to cleaners' job titles reflect the greater trend of compartmentalizing cleaners' job tasks. For example, the title "Vacuuming Specialist" may carry greater linguistic prestige than "janitor", if only superficially. Yet, compared to the "specialist", the "janitor" likely performs a wider array of job tasks and is provided with more transferrable training and skills. I therefore challenge the notion that a "Vacuum Specialist" is actually trained as a specialist. That is, in the case of CleanSci, the Vacuum Specialist does not learn about different types of vacuums, vacuum maintenance, or appropriate exercises to attenuate the negative bodily toll of vacuuming (e.g., stretches, self-massage). Rather, the "Vacuum Specialist" learns how to become a vacuuming robot.

I argue that the goal of "Specialist" titles is not actually to cultivate or develop cleaners'

expertise, but rather to render them as replaceable cogs in a larger mechanical, assembly line-like

approach to cleaning work. Such "fragmenting" of tasks (Aguiar, 2001, p. 257) reduces and

objectifies cleaners into a single, repeatable task, which ultimately *deskills* them. Aguiar (2001)

shares my skepticism, implying that such a "word game offers little to cleaners in terms of

delivering interesting work or increased wage rates" (p. 258). If anything, 'specialist' titles and

roles *deskill* custodians, given how they reorganize work to restrict the number of job tasks,

increase the repetitiveness and monotony of job tasks, and intensify the pace of work. It is the

customer organizations and top-level administrators who likely benefit most from such changes

to cleaners' job titles. Harkening the economic philosophy of Adam Smith, Braverman

(1974/1998) argues that "systematic deskilling by breaking down work tasks into simpler

components [can have the effect] of cheapening labor" (p. xvi). I suspect that cheapening labor

was a primary motivation for CleanSci's transformation of custodial labor into four different

specialist roles.

Closely related is the classification of jobs by larger enterprises, such as the Bureau of

Labor Statistics, Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), and the Occupational Information

Network (O*NET). Job titles are another discursive formation that both shape, and are shaped

by, larger cultural ideologies and social practices. Job titles delineate the purview of tasks

associated with different jobs, and corresponding issues (including training and compensation).

Job titles are often inextricably tied to occupational stereotypes, which are also gendered,

racialized, and classed. Thus, the stakes of discourse are high; for example,

> Stereotypes of low-wage occupations are serving to keep wages low. The common belief
> that service work is low-paid because it requires few skills may be wrong because it
> ignores the fact that many of these jobs require a range of complex skills. (Hilton, 2008,
> p. 69)

Yet, changes to job titles—for example, switching from "janitor" to "Restroom specialist"—compartmentalizes and narrows the purview of tasks associated with the job title, in turn carrying implications for training and compensation. Economists often describe and categorize service occupations as "unskilled" because they tend to pay low wages and typically do not require extensive formal education (Hilton, 2008). This is reflected in databases such as the DOT and O*NET, which sometimes underestimate the skills required of service occupations (Hilton, 2008). However, this underestimation of cleaners' skills may reflect larger misunderstandings about the nature of cleaning work. Some managers have attempted to "Taylorize" service work; for instance, McDonald's provides scripts for employees who intake customers' orders, and CleanSci attempts to standardize the process of cleaning. But in reality, service work can be unpredictable and unusual, requiring creativity and flexibility (Hilton, 2008), and this is certainly the case with custodial labor. Yet, these "soft skills" are missing from cleaners' job descriptions, which in turn may limit the training they receive.

Further, customer expectations also demand that service workers perform a number of "aesthetic skills" (p. 69) such as adaptability, nurturance, communication, and concern for customers' emotions (Hilton, 2008). Importantly, these aesthetic skills are regarded as "feminine" (Hilton, 2008). That is, skills such as communication, enthusiasm, and emotional labor are associated with women and femininity (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002). Further, women are not only deemed more adept than men at these aesthetic skills, but also are *expected* to enact these skills. These skills are therefore rendered *invisible* – expected but not rewarded, not noticed unless absent (England et al., 2002; Hilton, 2008). Yet, such skills are often overlooked when describing cleaners' job roles and designing job training and socialization.

Thus, the simultaneous process of euphemizing and compartmentalizing cleaners' job titles may (a) shortchange them of actual training they need, as well as (b) deskill them in the event they wish to re-enter the labor market. In this way, *discourse*—including smaller discourse strands, such as a job title—could carry more serious consequences for the organization of work and, ultimately, workers' health, well-being, and job outcomes. Here discourse does the 'work' of deskilling cleaners. As stated by Aguiar (2001), "working as a cleaner entails skill, though not so recognizable by employers" (p. 250). CleanSci appears invested in cleaners' professional development. For example, the Passport Program is intended to provide elective training opportunities for cleaners (despite the potentially prohibitive cost of $40 per applicant for the blank passport alone, not including costs of the actual courses and training modules). However, internal training and credentializing opportunities might instead reflect the increasing "rationality sponsored by modern neo-liberal governments" (Barratt, 2003, p. 1073), whereby workers are 'trained' to manage their own subjectivity. Under the seemingly positive and sanguine guise of "individualism", organizations insidiously displace responsibility onto employees themselves. In this way, CleanSci (and customer institutions, such as Midwestern University) express a commitment to worker training and empowerment, yet I argue the exact opposite. That is, the structure of internal training and credentializing programs may not offer transferrable skills, especially for "Specialist" roles, thus hampering cleaners' opportunities for job security and/or upward mobility. In sum, the seemingly innocuous discursive practice of changing cleaners' job titles in the name of 'image sanitization' and 'job training' may in fact invite the opposite outcome, and carry more downstream (and disastrous) consequences, including greater deskilling, hampered opportunities for upward mobility, and perpetuated (or exacerbated) income inequality.

Environmental Sustainability and Occupational Health – For Whom?

The third recurring expert language was environmental sustainability as truth-regime. According to Feindt and Oels (2005), "environmental discourse has material and power effects as well as being the effect of material practices and power relations" (p. 161). In this vein, our understandings of environmental issues relevant in industrial cleaning—including pollution and sustainability—shape and are shaped by discourse. The discursive framing of environmentalism in the CleanSci archives was largely rooted in cost-saving practices for customer organizations, and—to a lesser extent—the environmental health of building occupants (i.e., faculty, non-custodial staff, and students). The discursive framing of environmentalism was less rooted in practices that promote preservation of the natural environment and the environmental health of cleaners themselves. Thus, a critical discourse analysis can help shed light on "material practices" (e.g., selection of chemical agents) as well as "power relations" (e.g., which actors are centered in—and benefit from—policies ostensibly rooted in environmental sustainability). Feindt and Oels (2005) further contend that

> The articulation of an environmental problem shapes if and how the problem is dealt with. … These broader discursive formations are critical to the question of if and how a situation is understood, communicated and treated as an environmental problem. This implies that environmental discourse is not homogeneous. Rather, basic concepts, such as 'nature', 'progress' or 'sustainability' are contested. Moreover, the knowledge base of environmental policy remains fragile and contentious. (p. 162)

Indeed, I observed that the definitions of and practices around environmental sustainability in the CleanSci archives were very different from definitions and practices accepted by environmental scientists and/or ecofeminists. Overall, the organizational talk featured vague and abstract notions of environmental sustainability—including claims of "Sustainable Cleaning" [W9] through a "green process" [N45] and "environmentally preferable cleaning strategies" [W4]—without describing specific practices used to achieve these goals.

There are many resources available for guidelines on "green cleaning", including trade publications (e.g., Ashkin, 2003; Berry, 1993), textbooks (e.g., Jones, 2008), scholarly and popular press books (e.g., Gottlieb, 2001), and trade organizations (e.g., ISSA). Yet, the guidelines across these resources are inconsistent and sometimes vague (e.g., "Use environmentally preferable cleaning products"; Ashkin, 2003; Gottlieb, 2001). Some of these very resources acknowledge the vagueness of discourse surrounding issues related to environmental sustainability; for example, Jones (2008) warns that "executive housekeepers need to be aware of overinflated claims. There are very few recognized standards for green chemicals. Terms such as *biodegradable, safe for the environment, environmentally benign,* and even *nontoxic* are ambiguous" (emphasis in original; p. 107). Other resources include stronger claims about prescriptive guidelines for "green cleaning." For example, according to Jones (2008), "It is very safe to assume that any cleaning product having the Green Seal logo meets the highest available standards" (p. 107). Yet, other scholars have raised questions and concerns regarding Green Seal and similar governing bodies. For example, Light (2009) "found that out of 27 products approved by Green Seal as hard surface cleaners, 26 do not claim antimicrobial capability…[and] only one was registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as antimicrobial" (p. 24).

Organizational talk about environmental sustainability is a relatively newer phenomenon, given greater societal awareness of and interest in corporate social responsibility. Some scholars have dismissed the phrase *corporate social responsibility* (CSR) as an oxy-moron, contending that the drivers of capitalism inherently are at odds with efforts to reduce societal inequality and harm. Some of these scholars have warned that CSR "is dangerously limited to activities that intensify profit accumulation" (Varman & Al-Amoudi, 2016, p. 1932). Organizations like

CleanSci can continue to enact harm against employees in the name of "responsibility", yet they only engage in CSR to the extent that it promotes profits; for example, by saving money on chemicals, even if at the expense of cleaners' health.

More generally, the contradictions in CleanSci organizational talk about environmental sustainability reflect larger paradoxes and tensions that organizational stakeholders face. For example, controlling pathogens is an objective of industrial cleaning that may be at odds with the goal to use environmentally sustainable products. Similarly, equipment that improves environmental health may undermine cleaners' occupational health, thus representing a paradox between *environment* and *embodiment*. For example, as described previously, backpack vacuums may improve the air quality of the work environment and health of building occupants, yet harm the bodies of the people wielding them.

The most specific "environmentally preferable" practice described in the CleanSci archives pertains to chemical cleaning agents. Specifically, the CleanSci system includes pre-measured and concentrated packets of cleaning products from which cleaners then create solutions, and discourse related to environmental sustainability was invoked to explain and justify this practice. Organizational talk from CleanSci contended that many custodians make mistakes when creating chemical solutions, thus incurring considerable costs for customer institutions in addition to raising risks for chemical exposure. However, I argue that there are unintended consequences of this "environmentally preferable" practice, some of which may actually *undermine* stated commitments to environmental sustainability. First, the pre-measured packets themselves create considerable waste, given the increased materials required to produce individual packets (versus the considerably smaller amount of packaging materials required for larger storage receptacles containing concentrated cleaning materials).

Second, as described in the previous section, an oversimplification of cleaning work can deskill cleaners. Another unintended consequence of this work oversimplification includes environmental degradation. In his analysis of discourse and practice related to environmentalism, Gottlieb (2001) poses an interesting question: "How does the deskilling of work influence environmental outcomes and, conversely, how can the reintroduction of work skills contribute to environmental and social change?" (p. xv).

Other organizational practices that CleanSci advocates in the name of "environmental sustainability" actually undermine other concerns related to environmentalism, including occupational health for cleaners. For example, as described previously, the "backpack" style of vacuums that may be beneficial in terms of air quality may occur at the expense of the health of the cleaners wearing these vacuums. Additionally, another practice that CleanSci advocates is shutting lights off on floors not currently being cleaned. However, this approach may undermine worker safety, especially women, who face risk for violence (including sexual assault) while working on the night shift (Chen, Domenzain, & Andrews, 2016; Frontline, Univision, Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), Investigative Reporting Program (IRP) at UC Berkeley, & KQED, 2015).

Scholars invested in promoting the sustainability of the environment, building operations, *and* cleaners' health have recommended best practices that optimize sustainability in each of these domains. For example, Gottlieb (2001) presents a case study of Patagonia, an outdoor clothing company with a reputation for experimenting with and investing in environmentally sustainable operations. Like many Fortune 500 companies, Patagonia outsources its cleaning services via commercial contracts. At the headquarters facility, cleaners are responsible for completing all work tasks between 4:30 and 8 pm. This initiative may exacerbate the pace and

intensity of work, but was implemented in the name of "energy savings as well as a 'quality-of-life' initiative" (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 145). At the very least, this approach to the organization of work may fulfill the organization's mission of environmental sustainability without sacrificing worker safety (at least with respect to the matter of lighting and electricity).

Gottlieb (2001) goes on to describe how several changes to the reorganization of commercial cleaning work have resulted in an overall deskilling of cleaners, including suppression of and reduction in union activity, re-characterization of job titles, erosions in depth and breadth of training, and greater reliance on contingent and/or part-time labor. Further, Gottlieb (2001) provides a labor history suggesting that, since the 1950s, commercial cleaning agents have become increasingly concentrated, potent, and hazardous. Moreover, most buildings are constructed without cleaners in mind, so many spaces that require regular cleaning are not well-ventilated.

Another industry trend over the past few decades is the steady loss of control and participation for cleaners. For example, cleaners are rarely consulted when administrators in facilities/operations decide to implement, evaluate, and/or change the inventory of cleaning supplies. Perhaps because companies such as CleanSci characterize cleaners as unskilled and incompetent, cleaners are not perceived as valuable sources of insight for larger organizational decisions, including chemical inventory. This seems counter-intuitive, given that cleaners—and not their supervisors or administrators—are the ones who directly use chemicals and are the stakeholders best suited to evaluate chemicals, especially with respect to their impact (e.g., on building surfaces as well as cleaners' bodies). Many chemical agents—including "green" products—carry harmful effects for cleaners, including headaches, nausea, asthma, and skin

irritation (e.g., Charles, Loomis, & Demissie, 2009; Dumas et al., 2012; Gottlieb, 2001; Medina-Ramón et al., 2005; Wolkoff et al., 1998; Zock et al., 2002).

Gottlieb (2001) then describes an experimental initiative, the Santa Monica Sustainable Cities Program, which tasked the city government with implementing environmentally sustainable practices and policies. One outcome was an evaluation of chemical exposure among cleaners. The city then entered a contract with S.A.F.E. Consulting Group, founded by former cleaning workers in Wyoming who were interested in improving their sector via environmentally sustainable practices. Importantly, this initiative centered the involvement of cleaners, who participated in the bidding process for new cleaning products, as well as the program evaluation. One bid came from 3M, which—like CleanSci—was advocating a system characterized by pre-mixed portion packets of concentrated chemicals. As described by Gottlieb (2001),

> [3M] contended that the mixing process itself increased exposures because janitors frequently used improper ratios; they would dilute less because they didn't understand the process or because they wanted to use stronger solutions. … Even though janitors would be using more concentrated and therefore more hazardous product ingredients, there would be, 3M claimed, lower exposures overall since the janitors were not required to do any diluting or evaluation of appropriate dilution levels. [However, one staff member recalled that] "we preferred that the janitors establish a greater awareness of the products they were using." (p. 174)

This quote demonstrates how the systematic "deskilling" of cleaners—by commercial cleaning companies and direct supervisors alike—not only harms cleaners, but also efforts to achieve organizational goals, such as environmental sustainability. Some companies, like 3M and CleanSci, use environmental sustainability as a discursive guise to deskill cleaners. Cleaners have limited agency and input in the cleaning agents use, and their work becomes more mindless and robotic by the use of premixed packets. A more holistic and dignified approach, however, is actually providing cleaners with training about chemical agents, exposure, and other issues

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related to environmental science. As Gottlieb (2001) concludes in his description of the collaboration between Santa Monica and the S.A.F.E. Group,

> The productivity of the workers had decreased if judged by the amount of labor required for *participation* but had increased if defined by the outcomes associated with product performance, job satisfaction, and the desire to succeed in performing the tasks commonly agreed upon. (emphasis in original; p. 175).

In sum, "Taking a discursive perspective…allows one to ask if environmental policy is about nature and the environment at all or rather about a redistribution and reconfiguration of power in the name of the 'environment'" (Feindt & Oels, 2005, p. 163). Gottlieb (2001) provides anecdotal evidence for this trend when he describes a commercial trade cleaning meeting in which a session on "Selecting Environmentally-Friendly Cleaning Products" was sparsely attended, whereas a session called "Managing in a Downsized Environment" was jam-packed (p. 163). My findings suggest that the commitment of CleanSci to environmental sustainability is more concerned with financial savings than environmental preservation, environmental health, and social justice. Thus, environmental sustainability is a nominal discursive resource that further entrenches neoliberal organizational policies.

Conclusion

Cleaning work is a valuable site at which to examine the development and consequences of neoliberal ideologies, policies, and practices. As summarized by Cruz and Abrantes (2014), "cleaning services are located at the intersection of various pressures observed at the national level: the expansion of the service industry, the spreading of corporate flexibility strategies including subcontracting and outsourcing, a change of mind frame in public policy from full employment to employability, and the resilience of occupational segregation based on gender and ethnicity" (pp. 299-300). Although Cruz and Abrantes (2014) analyzed the cleaning industry in Portugal, similar trends are apparent in the U.S. market. In this study, I demonstrated how

some of these "pressures" are constructed, maintained, and reified by commercial companies such as CleanSci via organizational discourse. I found that CleanSci appeals to powerful and seductive regimes of truth—cleaning science, education, and environmental responsibility—only to leverage these discourse regimes to justify its neoliberal policies, which are practiced at the expense of workers' dignity and wellbeing. I now turn my attention to the frontline personnel who are implicated in such organizational talk: cleaners themselves. In the following study, I center cleaners' experiences and narratives to more fully understand the impact of neoliberal discursive regimes on workers' meaning-making, dignity, and health.

CHAPTER IV

How Four Cleaners Experience and Narrate Their Work

Storied Selves: Narrating the Lived Experience of Work

McAdams (1996) describes human personality and behavior as "exquisitely social and conditional, always oriented to the future as well as the past, and regulated by complex cognitive processes" (p. 300). Further, people's personalities and behavior are shaped by the larger sociohistorical context in which people are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), including "the macrocontext of modernity" (McAdams, 1996, p. 296). Thus, methods beyond experiments and surveys are necessary for gaining a rich, contextualized, and nuanced understanding of why and how people are the way they are—their motivators, beliefs, and lived experiences. Further, such methods for understanding people's personalities—their traits, motives, and schemas—are also appropriate for understanding people's lived experiences in other subfields, including organizational psychology (McAdams, 1996).

One such method is narrative inquiry, which begins with the assumption that people live "storied lives" which in turn shape constructions of the "storied self" (McAdams, 1996). Narratives involve "a non-random sequence of events that conveys some kind of action and movement through time … with the help of a 'plot' that creates a logical or meaningful connection between them" (Griffin & May, 2012, p. 443). Narratives are important for understanding people's meaning-making, the ways they make sense of the world, including their lives at work (and the fluid and dynamic ways that the "work/nonwork" boundary is eroded).

Narratives "can be used to show us *how* experiences are reconstructed and interpreted once they have occurred" (Griffin & May, 2012, p. 443; emphasis in original). Narratives serve many functions beyond recalling memories; they 'do work' of sharing one's truth, (re)affirming one's existence, and educating others who lack shared experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Frank, 2010). Narratives can also be therapeutic; the sheer act of storytelling can be healing. Taken together, "stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415).

Indeed, feminist researchers have long emphasized the importance of narratives and storytelling for meaning-making and theory generation, especially for people who have been silenced and marginalized. As Sprague (2005) summarizes, "Narrative analysis has great potential for identifying the perceptual frames circulating in a given culture and how they shape group members' sense of their own experience (p. 142). By gathering and centering the narratives of cleaners, I can identify and explain how perceptual frames related to CleanSci "circulate" in their narratives and shape meaning-making. Collecting and spotlighting narratives from members of marginalized groups can also help to make suffering visible and contextualize people's struggles for dignity and recognition (e.g., Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Nelson, 2001; Sprague, 2005; Stephens & Kanov, 2016). Narratives may be especially useful for cleaners, whose identities may be "damaged when a powerful social group views the members of her own, less powerful group as unworthy of full moral respect, and in consequence unjustly prevents her from occupying valuable social roles or entering into desirable relationships that are themselves constitutive of identity… [leading to] *deprivation of opportunity*" (emphasis in original; Nelson, 2001, p. xii). Cleaners' narratives therefore represent counterstories, especially to the narratives about cleaners constructed in organizational talk from companies like CleanSci.

Case studies and narrative inquiry in psychological research. "Small-n" studies of

lived experience have a rich history in psychology, including clinical psychology (e.g., Freud,

1905/1963; Freud, 1909/1963; Marks & Yardley, 2004), humanistic psychology (e.g., Churchill

& Wertz, 2001; Giorgi, 1970; Giorgi, 2012; Wertz, 1983), personality psychology (e.g., Allport,

1937; McAdams, 1996, 2006; McAdams & West, 1997), and developmental psychology (e.g.,

Robinson & McAdams, 2015). Storytelling and narrative inquiry have generated valuable insight

in organizational studies as well (e.g., Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004; Dick, 2013; Gill, 2014;

Phillips et al., 2004; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Scott & Trethewey, 2008).

For example, Dick (2013) used a discursive psychological approach to analyze people's

experiences of workplace sexism. One challenge of researching sexism rests with the unpleasant

nature of this experience; stigma and negative affect may lead people to avoid "labeling" their

experiences as sexism (Dick, 2013). Using a discursive approach enables Dick (2013) to

demonstrate how 'victims' "are actually demonstrating resistance to the disempowering idea that

they cannot or do not know how to interpret appropriately and deal with their own experiences at

work" (p. 665). Thus, the focus of this work was less on whether or not employees' sense-

making was "more or less valid" (p. 646), but instead on *how* people construct accounts of their

lives. In a similar vein, I am not interested in conducting a formal objective program evaluation

of the CleanSci program; such an approach would generate "a fundamental epistemological

dilemma – whose perspective on the interpretation of social phenomena should be privileged?"

(Dick, 2013, p. 646). A narrative approach, on the other hand, allows me to understand how

employee's social locations, prior experiences, and expectations about the future shape their

experiences of the system. Narrative inquiry is less concerned with "finding themes and more

about asking what stories *do*, which is to inform human life" (emphasis added; Frank, 2010, p. 2).

Further, using mixed methods—critical discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, and case study—allows me to conduct a "deep dive" to situate people's lived experiences within a larger social and historical context, with a particular focus on the circulation of power. In my analysis and discussion, I will demonstrate how "social facts" like organizational change are constantly provisional, "never guaranteed nor settled" (Dick, 2013, p. 665). Focusing on narratives from employees at the frontlines of organizational change can help reveal "the regulatory or power effects of discourse [as] manifest only in specific instances of interaction, demonstrating Foucault's (1980) argument about how power is located not in any grand or overarching structures, but in the minutiae of local practices, such as talk" (Dick, 2013, p. 665; see also Thornborrow, 2002).

The current study. The overarching research question for this study is: *How do cleaners (a) experience and (b) narrate their work, especially as a function of working within (or outside of) the CleanSci system?* Analyzing how employees narrate their work lives can inform larger processes of subject formation and the organization of work. I view discourse as a "cultural resource" (Hardy et al., 2000, p. 1232) that employees can actively leverage, mold, and enact to affect behavior, both their own and that of others around them. In this way discourse emanates from sites of struggle (Hardy et al., 2000); therefore, a focus on employees' discourse can help explain how employees experience struggle at work, and in the process illuminate moments and sites of agency, constraint, and change. My analysis will conclude with a discussion of how discourse "travels" through policies and ideologies to shape practices, which in turn shape employees' work, dignity, and health.

Method

In this study, I blend elements of case study research with narrative analysis. Case studies involve gathering data about an entity (e.g., person, group, event, institution) to (a) better understand how this entity operates and (b) generalize from the case (e.g., B. L. Berg, 2004; Rutterford, 2012). Case studies are better characterized as an approach or technique, rather than a method or methodology; Hartley (2004) describes case study research as "a heterogeneous activity" (p. 332) spanning multiple methods, levels of analysis, and field immersion. What unifies case study research is a desire to understand the richness of phenomena and processes in context. My case study utilizes a *descriptive approach* (Yin, 2013)*,* given my interest in providing a "snapshot" (B. L. Berg, 2004) of custodians' daily work lives, especially as related to (a) neoliberalism and (b) CleanSci as organizing features of their work environment. I'm also interested in the words cleaners use to tell their stories; I will remain attentive for discourse fragments related to neoliberalism and CleanSci that may enter cleaners' stories, whether they're internalizing, resisting, or re-imagining.

To examine these issues, I interviewed a group of cleaners working at a field site where CleanSci was implemented, Midwestern University. These interviews allowed me to gather stories about cleaners' lives "in the effort to show that people's behavior and experience are guided at least as much by internal factors as they are by the vagaries of external situations" (McAdams, 2006, p. 13). Narrative inquiry is a useful technique to understand interconnections among people's personalities and environments within a larger context (McAdams, 2006), including social, political, and historical.

In my narrative analysis, I also wish to adopt principles from critical discourse analysis. A critical perspective on discourse enables me to understand that the "what" and "how" of

custodians' lived experiences are embedded within larger systems of power relations. From this perspective, narratives are stories as well as accomplishments that are "strategic, functional and purposeful" (Griffin & May, 2012, p. 444). Thus, in my analysis, I will remain attentive to both *content* (what people say) and *structure* (how they say and organize what they say; Bauer & McAdams, 2000).

Ethics, Reflexivity, and Positionality

Narrative researchers must contend with several issues related to methods, methodology, and ethics, including: *positionality, reflexivity, voice,* and *trust.* Throughout the research process, I remained conscious of my social location as a queer and economically stable Latina woman who is a student at the field site. These identities and lived experiences have shaped my experiences of work, as well as the ways I relate to others. My feeling is that, while interacting with participants, the most salient aspects of my social location were my gender, age, and student status. Women custodians in particular invoked my gender and age when comparing their experiences to my own. My status as a student positioned me as an "insider" who shared space with participants, but also as an "outsider" given my lack of cleaning experience at the field site. Further, my status as a student was related to both favorable perceptions from participants (e.g., respect and prestige associated with my field; perceptions of my personality as someone who is driven and motivated) as well as embodying larger tensions that participants experienced with respect to students (especially given their rude and entitled behavior).

These dynamics undoubtedly shaped participants' level of trust in me. In general my sense was that participants entrusted me with their stories, and were largely concerned with being identified by supervisors consistent with other studies of cleaners (e.g., Mendez, 1998). That said, it is impossible to fully know the extent to which participants trusted me with their

stories; thus, all narratives presented in this study are provisional and time-bound. Further, I wanted to avoid creating an "*illusion of equality*" (emphasis in original; Sprague, 2005, p. 135).

Another epistemological issue I contended with was the matter of *voice*. I experienced anxiety over managing what Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe as "living on a knife edge as one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices" (p. 423). It is impossible to "resolve" this dilemma, but I have attempted to at least name and "work with" the power dynamics that imbue my relationship with participants, their stories, and my own lived experience.

To help negotiate these tensions, I drew from best practices for conducting research with marginalized communities. In particular, I endeavored to remain aware of my vast privilege and sensitive to the heterogeneity of custodians' lives (Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013). Specifically, I attempted to ground my analysis in (1) an intersectional framework, (2) a balance between risk and resilience frameworks, (3) phenomenological understandings of work-lives and life-worlds, (4) participants' own words, and (5) negative capability: "a sublime form of extreme empathy…[characterized by] (a) open mindedness, (b) attentiveness to diversity, and (c) suspension of ego" (Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013, p. 38).

Participants & Procedure

I began by familiarizing myself with the larger context surrounding cleaning work. I read books and peer-reviewed articles on cleaning work across several disciplines, including gender studies, sociology, economics, public health, ergonomics, environmental studies, and organizational behavior. I also collected cultural representations and productions of cleaners and

cleaning work, including blogs, interviews, message boards, poems, films, novels, visual art, and folklore. Finally, I also consulted archival documents, including trade publications and organizational history of the field site I selected (Midwestern University). Together, these materials helped me to gain a greater understanding of the larger context of cleaning work, as well as pay close attention to the heterogeneity of cleaners' experience (Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013) and the embodiment of cleaning labor.

I first entered the field site in Summer 2013, one month after the completion of the CleanSci implementation (which spanned May 2009 – May 2013). I began by meeting with different employees in facilities and operations management. This allowed to me to learn about the history of the organization and gain a sense of 'the way things work' at the field site. It also allowed me to gain 'buy-in' from the upper echelons of organizational leadership, which proved valuable for data collection. After developing these relationships, I then attended a meeting with about two dozen custodial supervisors at the field site. There I also had the opportunity to introduce myself and get to know the supervisors and the nature of their work. Next, from January to July 2015, I visited with each supervisor and workgroup during at least one of their shifts. I typically visited in the first or final hour of each shift. After spending some time getting to know the custodians in each workgroup, I administered a survey during each of these visits (for more information about these procedures, see Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2017a; Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2017b). I also spent an average of 15-30 minutes after each survey session conversing with custodians about their work experiences (as well as their reactions to the survey).

At each survey session, I invited custodians to indicate their level of interest in a one-on-one interview/conversation to be scheduled in the future. I met interested participants in a

location of their choosing, most often in my campus office, an empty classroom, or a local restaurant. I compensated participants $50 for their time, and stopped conversations around the two-hour mark in the interest of maintaining fair compensation. I received permission from all participants to audio-record and transcribe our conversations, ensuring to mask potentially identifying information (e.g., names of supervisors and coworkers, building names).

In this study, I selected four cases to analyze: Jay, Toni, Kiki, and Chad. I identified these four participants using *maximum variation sampling,* which draws from "the researcher's existing knowledge of the subject being studied with the aim of finding people with widely varying experiences" (Arolker & Seale, 2012, p. 576). Maximum variation sampling is also an appropriate technique given my interest in generalizing information about a behavior (namely, how neoliberal discourse and practices shape organizational behavior) rather generalizing information about a representative sample to a general population (Gillespie, Gillespie, Brodke, & Balzer, 2016). First, I intentionally selected participants who were between 40-50 years of age at the time of our interview. These four participants came of age during the rise of neoliberalism, making them uniquely situated to observe trends in the organization and experience of work amidst this climate. Second, I selected these cases to enable an intersectional analysis. My intersectional analysis blends an *intracategorical approach*, since participants share the same age and occupational identity, with an *intercategorical approach*, since participants hold different gender and race identities (McCall, 2005). Third, I selected these cases to allow for theoretical contrast along several dimensions of interest. For example, Kiki and Chad work within CleanSci, whereas Toni and Jay are exempt; Toni and Chad entered the organization prior to the CleanSci implementation, Kiki and Jay afterward. All four participants held prior cleaning experience

outside of Midwestern University, including restaurants, hospitals, offices, and private residences.

Although I am interested in participants' experience of work under (and beyond) the CleanSci system, this study is not a formal program evaluation of CleanSci. I am less interested in the "effectiveness" of the CleanSci implementation. Rather, I am more concerned with how its implementation has shaped the lived experience of work for its frontline users—especially with respect to meaning-making and the (re)organization of work—and the language that its users use in the process. Thus, narrative inquiry is an appropriate analytic technique to help analyze these processes of change, meaning-making, and agency.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. I listened to each interview recording several times throughout the analysis phase so that I could pay close attention to linguistic nuances and maintain my own memory of the conversations. In my analysis, I focus on recurring themes in participants' stories that reflect their lived experience of CleanSci, and work more generally. I am interested in how 'threads' and 'fragments' of CleanSci discourse (analyzed in Chapter III) 'show up' in custodians' stories—for example, internalizing, (re)imagining, resisting. In addition, I am interested in several narrative devices that custodians may use when telling their stories. For example, I remain attuned to the "regressions, progressions and turning points of a narrative as indicators of the main argument that the narrator is trying to convey" (Griffin & May, 2012, p. 446). Additionally, I wish to pay attention to *nuclear episodes* (high points, low points, turning points), *self-defining memories* (emotionally intense repetitive episodes related to a salient and/or unresolved issue), *role conflicts,* moments of *self-protection* and *protecting others*, and *contradictions* (McAdams, 2001; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

My approach to narrative analysis is *holistic* and focuses on both the "*told* (the content of what is said) and on the *telling* (how it is told)" (Griffin & May, 2012, p. 446; emphasis added). That is, I use themes that emerged from Study 1 (Chapter III) to organize the narratives collected in Study 2, and my analysis of these themes will remain grounded in the larger context of the narrative from which they emerged (B. L. Berg, 2004; Griffin & May, 2012). I hope that such an approach allows my narrative analysis to remain grounded in (a) the larger lived experiences of cleaners, and (b) the micro-, meso-, and macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in which cleaners are embedded. In the following section, I present narratives from four study participants: Jay, Toni, Kiki, and Chad.

Results

Narrative #1: Jay

Jay identified as a 40-something-year-old Black man and father to an adult son. At the time of our conversation, Jay was living alone. When introducing himself, Jay stated that custodial work "ain't the career path that I chose but you know, it's a job." Prior to entering the field site, he held several jobs, including fast food, foundries, and automotive manufacturing plants. Most of his jobs were on assembly lines. Just before being hired at Midwestern U, Jay had been working for a private commercial cleaning company. His shift was from 8 pm to 4 am, and he primarily cleaned the floors of offices and restaurants. Based on an enthusiastic referral from a friend, he applied for a temporary cleaning position at Midwestern U, and was eventually hired. He remained a "temp" for three years before being one of few temporary workers to be hired into a full-time position. At the time of our conversation, Jay had been working as a custodian at the field site for approximately four years (three years in a temporary position; one year working full-time). At Midwestern U, Jay has worked in the same place all four years, a

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building associated with one of the professional schools, exempt from the CleanSci system. He

works the daytime shift (7 am – 3 pm) and performs several job responsibilities, including

hauling trash, cleaning bathrooms, and assisting catering and facilities teams with the many

events held in the professional school.

When Jay first started working at Midwestern U, he received a modest amount of formal

training. But for the most part, more tenured custodians 'showed him the ropes':

> I mean you had the little training but basically the other people that's workin', you know
> – They show you how to get the job done. You know, put yo' own lil' twist on it. Or
> however you see fit about it. You know, you get the task done. So yeah, basically they
> show you.

Jay uses a diminutive descriptor ("little") to describe the formal training he received

when he was first hired. He also possessed some background knowledge given his prior job in

commercial floor care. But Jay expressed that he learned more from coworkers who assumed

informal training roles, who not only showed him "how to get the job done" but also how to put

his "own lil' twist on it". In this way, Jay's custodial colleagues embodied cultivated knowledge

based on their own expertise and experience in the given building, which they then shared with

Jay. They not only shared instrumental knowledge (e.g., how to use different pieces of

equipment), but also affective and artisanal knowledge (e.g., how to express autonomy or

creativity in the work via "twist[s]…[o]r however you see fit about it"). According to Jay, he and

his colleagues are able to put their "own lil' twist on it" without undermining the pace or quality

of service provision; "You know, you get the task done." The lack of adherence to a prescriptive

cleaning system (e.g., CleanSci) enabled Jay's colleagues to "show" each other how to complete

work tasks while also exercising some autonomy in the process. By working outside of the

CleanSci system, custodians' expertise was not only acknowledged and valued by supervisors,

but also transmitted to new employees joining the building or team. Moreover, the organization

of Jay's work enabled him to share knowledge, build community, and express creativity in work that is otherwise rendered predictable or ordinary.

This autonomy and creativity was especially important given the context of the building in which Jay and his colleagues worked. Generally, the professional schools at Midwestern U receive greater revenue from professional degree students' tuition and private donors. The relationship between building environment and financial capital shapes Jay's work. The influx of financial capital into the professional school presented challenges for some of the people working in the school, especially custodians. For example, there are large windows, glass fixtures, and works of art throughout the building, which present particular cleaning challenges, especially during the day shift (characterized by heavier foot traffic from building occupants). Having more flexibility and latitude about the cleaning work process helped custodians navigate the intricacies and complexities of the cleaning environment. As Jay described,

> I mean everything you see we clean. It's a lot. You see the building is all glass, so you know, we got our own little tricks and how we go about, you know gettin' the job done.

Jay chose to hold our conversation in the building in which he works, and he helped me see the building through his eyes. For instance, when he said "everything you see we clean", he invited me to engage in a perspective-taking sensory experience. Panning my eyes upon the built environment before us, I failed to appreciate the building as the state-of-the-art symbol of modernity. Rather, I now viewed it as ostentatious, full of needlessly intricate and difficult-to-clean nooks and crannies. Jay did not view these building features as interfering with the pace or quality of his work; rather, these building features were part and parcel of his work. In Jay's previous custodial job, he primarily cleaned the floors of offices and restaurants, mainly working in a linear fashion. In his current position, however, his work is more intricate and unpredictable;

the more relaxed and autonomous nature of his work team enabled this type of 'detail' work, especially given the unique features of the work environment (e.g., copious glass features).

In the excerpt above, Jay leverages "glass" as a synecdoche for the building in which he works. Here "glass" also functions as a metonymic synecdoche for projects of modernity. Jay asked me to "see" the glass to more fully understand the complex nature of his work. Materials such as glass make dirt significantly more visible, thus increasing the "stakes" of Jay's detail work. Jay's work could even be described as Sisyphean; by working in a mostly glass building during the day shift, smudges and messes accumulated almost as frequently as they were cleaned. This meant that Jay's work was not necessarily linear or predictable. For example, upon arriving to work, "You know, just walk around the buildin'…check see what you got to do, check make sure everythin' is done." As described in Chapter III, under CleanSci, individual employees are assigned Specialist roles that are performed repetitively and successively. Jay, however, performs the job tasks associated with all four "Specialist" roles, and has latitude to determine when and how these tasks are performed. Jay was able to cultivate and perform his "own little tricks" to get the job done, which is especially beneficial in a complex and unpredictable environment like the professional school in which he works. A prescriptive approach to cleaning (such as the process mandated by CleanSci) would likely make Jay's job more challenging, given its lack of attention to the context of the specific building environment. Free from the prescriptions of CleanSci, however, Jay was able to "just have your own little system of how you go about getting' thangs done," further granting him a sense of autonomy, meaning, and purpose at work.

Of course, Jay's job is not without challenges. However, the challenges he experiences are fundamentally different from those experienced by cleaners working within the CleanSci

system. Jay's job involves a lot of walking, especially since his work is not confined to a small zone. Many of the challenges he experiences at work have to do with features of the built environment, especially glass fixtures and artwork:

> I mean to me, it ain't rocket science. It's just cleanin'. You know. And so you know, it don't take a whole lot of, you know once you know all the way about goin' about – see like I say this building here is a little different. Cuz as you can see it's a lot of glass and a lot of little – see it's a lotta little ways you gotta, you know, you can't just, "Okay I'ma do some glass." And you just, you know, just grab some paper towel and some glass cleaner and just [clap] it's gone smear [laughs], you know so it's gon' look bad. So it's, I guess you know – I think everybody learn how to do the job. You know.

Here Jay reflects similar contradictions that appear in the CleanSci archives: he simultaneously (and paradoxically) understands cleaning as simple yet complex. To Jay, cleaning "ain't rocket science. It's just cleanin'", but he also states that "you can't just…do some glass." One factor that makes cleaning work complex is the particularities of the specific building environment ("this building here is a little different"). Here Jay talks about the unpredictable and dynamic nature of cleaning as a function of the work environment, including building layout, materials, and foot traffic. Jay implies that cleaning work does not take a lot of complex thought, but only after one undergoes sufficient training and on-the-job experience. Yet he also suggests that cleaners cannot rely on intuition alone ("you [can't] just grab some paper towel and some glass cleaner…"). In this way, learning creative cleaning techniques from coworkers with cultivated expertise facilitates Jay's work. Such techniques are especially important in buildings like the one in which Jay works, where the aesthetics and architectural features present added challenges for cleaning work. Jay has benefitted from receiving training from coworkers with more experience in the building, and he has played a similar informal trainer role for new and/or temporary workers who were hired after his entry into the field site.

Jay appears to adhere to a 'tabula rasa' approach to cleaning, whereby any person has the capacity to learn how to perform this work. This perspective, coupled with a work process

outside of the CleanSci system, allows for greater autonomy and creativity in work. Put another

way, Jay remarked that there is "More than one way to skin a cat"; and the less structured and

prescribed organization of his work allows him to observe, cultivate, and practice these different

"skinning" methods. Overall, Jay experiences his work as busy yet not stressful; he rarely feels

that he is "under time pressure" and described himself as "not really stressed" while on the clock.

Jay partially ascribes this more relaxed and manageable pace to his highly effective work team:

> You know so, we don't have really no problems. You know. If one's slackin', one'll pick
> up – cuz you know, you know I we been workin' togetha fo' a second. … We ain't in
> here, you know, goin' through a lot of changes, you know. We got kinda good people
> around.

When asked about difficult or challenging aspects of his work, Jay struggled to recall

specific problems. Reflecting on the question, Jay began talking about his teammates. One

criticism of zone cleaning is the risk of social loafing; when custodians have greater autonomy

over the pace and sequencing of work, many managers and executives assume that custodians

will just "slack off" (consistent with a "Theory X" approach to management and motivation;

McGregor, 1960). Jay challenges this concern, instead suggesting that autonomous teams can

still remain motivated and productive. Jay appears to describe the social loafing that managers

and executives worry will arise via a laissez-faire approach: "If one's slackin', one'll pick up."

Yet Jay lacks the affective resentment or frustration that often arises when assuming the

responsibility of slackers. Perhaps one reason for this is the relatively high level of collegiality

that Jay experiences on his work team. The team members do not always work in close physical

proximity, but do have more opportunities for social interaction relative to other cleaners

working under CleanSci. Importantly, Jay notes that his team is not "goin' through a lot of

changes", including the relatively high level of turnover that is endemic to custodial work,

especially when cleaners are hired on temporary, contingent contracts. Having more stability in

the work team facilitates cooperation. Jay notes that in his workgroup, they "got kinda good people around." Feeling that his colleagues are hardworking and reliable motivates Jay and helps him complete high-quality work, thus assuaging concerns that typically arise among stakeholders who question the effectiveness of zone cleaning approaches. Further, they developed a shared norm of "You see it, you get it"; in this way responsibility is diffused yet assumed. Jay went on to describe his team:

> You know, if you workin' wit a crew of people, know what they got to do and how to do it and when to do it, just runs smooth. So I, you know – not only the supervisor been through, she got some cool workers you know. So that's just how that worked for us. You know so, it's really nothin', no tension. Like, you know, so it runs smooth for us. I can't speak for other crews [loudly laughs]! … I think it's all on the crew of people you work with.

Thus, for Jay, effective motivation and performance at work are inextricably tied with teams – that is, their makeup and their training. Teams run smoothly when members "know what they got to do and how to do it and when to do it." CleanSci attempts to streamline and standardize this process (to varying degrees of success). Jay feels that his team is effective and successful, even without such a highly prescriptive work system. He also feels that his supervisor is relatively unobtrusive, perhaps because of the "cool workers" that comprise Jay's team. Another aspect of the organization of work that facilitates Jay's work is the temporary work system:

> But I mean, you got your slackers you know, you know. Like I say, a lot – majority of people start as a temp. So if you not, they not gonna bring you back – they not gonna call you back. You know, they weed out the good from the bad. You got people that just come in here, they just, you know, want a check and you know, just do the bare minimum. You know, with me I just feel like it's three categories. You know, which category you wanna follow? You know, the asset to the company, the liability, or just an ordinary worker. You know so, you pick which one you wanna fall into. You know, you know me – I wanna be a asset so you know, you gotta do a little bit behind, you gotta do what you gotta do. You know? That's just how I look at things. How other people might look at things differently. ... Regardless of what you doin', put your best foot forward and do what you gotta do. You know, the energy you sendin' round complainin' about thangs and situations, just wasted energy to me. You wanna change somethin'? Change it. You know? [laughs] ... Don't like your job, get another one. [laughs] You know! I just ain't the type of person to go wake up and be mad. It's just too much energy.

Despite the effectiveness of his team, Jay does view diffusion of responsibility and social loafing as inevitable ("you got your slackers"). He views the preponderance of temporary and contingent work contracts as a safeguard against social loafing. Jay has faith in the system that "bad apples" will be removed from the barrel, and that temporary work arrangements reward effort, motivation, and performance. Jay therefore views workers as agentic and personally responsible for their work fate, especially with respect to the provision of a subsequent temporary work contract. He does not understand the increase in temporary work arrangements to be a byproduct of neoliberalism or greater corporatization of academia, but rather a safeguard to identify and reward highly effective employees.

This is evident when Jay describes his tripartite typology of workers: assets, liabilities, and ordinaries. These roles carry instrumental labels that objectify workers by reducing them to their utility (or lack thereof) for the employing organization's bottom line ('assets' improve the bottom line; 'liabilities' diminish it; 'ordinaries' do neither). Jay believes that workers self-select into these roles, and that the performance of these roles carries different work outcomes. The "optimal" role—and the role to which Jay aspires—is that of an asset, which requires high motivation but with the potential for the greatest rewards (e.g., job security in the form of a permanent contract). To this end, Jay believes that "you gotta do what you gotta do…put your best foot forward and do what you gotta do." The counterfactual, therefore—if Jay were not an asset, but rather a liability or "ordinary"—would result low "returns" for the organization, and for Jay, lower pride and less security. Jay also links these beliefs with his easygoing demeanor. He views complaining as "wasted energy", especially when complainers fail to assume personal responsibility for their complaints. If cleaners do not like their jobs, then they should find work elsewhere. Jay maintains, though, that his current position is far more desirable than most of his

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alternative (and accessible) options ("I done worked worse jobs"). Most of Jay's prior work was performed in foundries or on the line, marked by greater competition, faster pace, fewer fringe benefits, and lower pay. His current job—even while under a temporary contract—was experienced as more relaxed and sustainable. Although Jay repeatedly mentioned that he does not like his work, and certainly does not view it as a calling, he is incredibly grateful for the stability and security:

> I just try to go with the flow you know. 'Specially could be worser. You know, so. That's just how I look at it. I'm just not a complainer. That just my personality. You know... It could be worse [laughs]. … I mean, I'm a God-fearing man. Where ever he feels, you know, he place me, you know? I walk by faith so you know, right now I'm here. You know, so…I'm alright here.

On the one hand, Jay assumes personal responsibility for his employment outcomes and work experiences. He tries to "go with the flow" and avoid complaining. This does not mean that he is complacent, but rather has experienced far worse job conditions that help him keep his work in perspective. Given his lack of access to postsecondary education and the economic conditions of the surrounding geographic region, Jay (like many cleaners in the industry) does not have many other accessible job options. These economic and political realities—coupled with his age and race—make custodial work seem far more desirable (even if the work is "nasty", in his words). Jay says that he "knew what [he] signed up for" when accepting this position—namely, interpersonal slights from customers and having to deal with bodily fluids. Even though Jay articulated negative aspects of his work, he still expressed that these aspects were not very bothersome:

> I mean [pause], me personally I just get in my mind that I gotta do what I gotta do. You know, so I won't let that really bother me. You know? I mean but, it's cleanin'. You know so, you know I really don't look at it like I wish they'd stop doin' this or doin' that. I just do what I gotta do. You know, it's a job. You know? Got it bad, work still.

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Jay views his ability to cope with the negative aspects of his work as a personal accomplishment, given the effort he invests in maintaining a positive outlook and easygoing persona. Even though there are "bothersome" aspects of his work, he does not "let" them bother him. Stating "but, it's cleanin'" implies that there are negative aspects of cleaning work that are inevitable and inextricably tied to the job description; he even views "preventable" events (like customers who don't flush toilets) as inevitable ("I really don't look at [my work] like I wish they'd [customers] stop doin' this or doin' that [like failure to flush toilets]"). Qualifying these statements with language such as "just do what I gotta do" or "it's a job" suggests that Jay views work as inevitably difficult and undesirable; he protects himself from this stark reality by adopting an accepting and easygoing attitude. Jay did not want to discuss specifics, but he did allude to experiencing negative events at work and in his community, including discrimination and violence. Subtle rudeness from entitled customers, by contrast, was "small potatoes" for Jay.

Jay went on to talk about how the embodiment of his race and gender identities shaped others' perceptions of him, as well as his own metaperceptions about how others view him:

> So you know, I'm not no sad person – happy-go-lucky, you know what I mean. Big teddy bear. It's all on the individual to me. You know, you look at it to be negative, you gone find negative things you know. You look it at positive and it is what it is, you know. Just got about yo' day. Be thankful, some people don't have a job. Some people can't pay they bills. So you know, that's how I try to look at it. It's just a job. Come in, do what I gotta do. You know, go home [laughs].

Jay takes pride in being "easygoing" and "happy-go-lucky", and has spent considerable time and effort cultivating this outlook on work and life more generally. He practices gratitude, and frequently tempers negative statements about his job by expressing thanks for his gainful employment. As mentioned earlier, this is likely due to his expectations about the labor market (i.e., few viable or superior alternative employment arrangements). He also likens himself to a "[b]ig teddy bear." In addition to describing his warm personality, this metaphor may also serve

as a disarming strategy to temper negative stereotypes (and the potential for experiencing violence) that is associated with being a large Black man (e.g., Livingston & Pearce, 2009). When describing his experiences at Midwestern U and the largely White town where it is located, Jay reflected that:

> You know I walk around the whole campus. You know the numbers is, you know, I mean. … I'm kinda big and you know, I mean I really don't – you know, I'm a big guy so people really don't disrespect me. You know so I'm more intimidating – I mean people more intimidated of me – until they can see that I'm a, you know, nice human. … I mean you go through your challenges. It's just how you deal with 'em. You know. You let certain things get you down, you just, you know, try not to let that consume you like that. Some people have their views, right or wrong, you know. It's hard, it's hard. I ain't gone lie to you. Yup so, just keep goin' you know. Try not to let ... You know, I'm older so I'm in a different place in my life - you know so. Alotta things that might have bothered me when I younger, just brush 'em off and keep 'em movin'. But you know, that's just me. You know [laughs]. … Some people, you know, you never worked with. You know I'm big in stature so I'm intimidating' anyway. "Oh he's nice." [laughter] You know. It's a stereotype, you know, especially when, you know … it is what it is. Get to know - I mean the dealing works both ways too. You know. … Some people, you know, they can't see past the skin.

Jay captures the experience of being hypervisible as a "big" Black man at a PWI (Predominantly White Institution) in a primarily White town. When he tells me "You know the numbers", he is recognizing our shared recognition of the demographic realities of the building, campus, and town. On the one hand, Jay expresses that his larger stature is protective: "people don't disrespect me." But Jay attributes this to the fear and racism of actors who perceive him to be "intimidating" to the point of dehumanizing him; other people fear Jay until they see that he is a "nice human." Jay protects himself from these microaggressions (and more overt episodes of racism) by trying to downplay such incidents and maintain a positive outlook. This is an important survival strategy that Jay has cultivated, given the frequency with which he experiences racism in daily life. He tries "not to let [racism] consume [him] like that", referencing the negative psychological and physiological toll that a lifetime of racism can take. He acknowledges that others prejudge him and "can't see past the [Black] skin", but also

attributes his older age as a resource in coping with such instances of stereotyping and discrimination.

> Jay concluded our conversation by stating the following:

> I liked talkin' to ya, you know. I ain't know it was gone be like this [laughs]. But alright, like I said it's, I ain't had no bad experience. Now you talk to somebody else, they might tell you different. Cuz I look at things differently, you know. I'm not no complainer. Just do what I got to do, you know. Do I like being a janitor? No. But I like paying my bills. It is what it is to me, you know. So I don't know, like I said, you talk to other people, they might have a whole lotta stuff to complain about. Too much energy. You don't like somethin' change it. If you can.

> This reflection echoes the therapeutic and reparative (Nelson, 2001) potential of narrative-sharing. This excerpt also echoes larger patterns that emerged while Jay told me the story of his work at Midwestern U – namely, the tempering of any affectively negative experiences with acknowledgements of gratitude for gainful employment. Jay took pride in identifying as "no complainer" as well as the ability to provide for himself and his family. He also acknowledged the heterogeneity in the lived experience of cleaning work, and suggested that his experiences and narratives were likely different from those of his colleagues. In this excerpt, he also echoed his adherence to a perspective rooted in personal responsibility for dissatisfaction. He concluded with a reminder that folks who complain ought to take matters into their own hands—provided they can. Jay implied that he has had limited success with respect to raising voice about negative workplace events, and thus found it easier to 'keep a low profile' and do his job. That said, Jay found little to complain about his work. Although he frequently expressed dissatisfaction or disdain for the nature of his work—"Do I like being a janitor? No"— he was able to enjoy relative autonomy and invisibility in his work, conditions that were cognitively and affectively 'freeing' given the challenges associated with his race-gender embodiment. In this way, the primary self-protective strategies that Jay demonstrated were (a)

the ability to exercise autonomy and cultivate expertise while working outside of CleanSci and

(b) idealizing the present given comparatively worse past employment experiences.

Narrative #2: Toni

Toni is a White woman in her late 40s and parent to an adult daughter. She was not

partnered and living alone. She first learned how to clean in the orphanage where she grew up,

stating that she started running a floor buffer machine at age eight. Toni began living on her own

at age sixteen, taking several jobs cooking and cleaning to support herself. She eventually

received a Bachelor's Degree in Human Resources and Master's Degree, but struggled to find

work in this field: "*no one* gives me the time of day. So, I've always fallen back on cleaning."

Perhaps because of several decades in the sector, Toni reported an embodied relationship with

cleaning work: "I've *always* been in cleaning and it's just something that—it's—I—I—you can't

say that I really like it, but I think it's more of who I am. Then—like I walk in a room and I

look—I don't look at the aesthetics or the art, I see what's wrong, where the fingerprints are and

stuff like that [laughter]".

At the time of our conversation, Toni most recently had been working at Midwestern U

as a custodian for nearly four consecutive years. However, she followed a non-linear career path

at this field site. She once ran her own cleaning service but struggled to cope with the stress of

maintaining a registry of clients and covering for unreliable employees. A desire to lessen her

stress initially led her to pursue a position at the university. She worked as a custodian for the

university in 1982 and 1996, mostly in libraries, before returning in 2011. In 2011, she was hired

as a "Tier 2" cleaner in a Midwestern U dormitory, a position that paid less than "Tier 1"

positions in other building environments (i.e., classrooms, offices, arts and athletics facilities).

She was then transferred to clean in other campus buildings, including a dining hall, classrooms,

and hospital rooms. However, the university then subcontracted hospital cleaners from a commercial service, and offered to reassign custodians to other campus locations or else allowed them to exit the organization. Toni took it upon herself to seek another position on campus, and ended up in a building that housed a dormitory, dining hall, and multipurpose rooms.

Toni has never had to work with the CleanSci system. She originally worked as a custodian at the field site prior to the implementation of CleanSci. When she reentered the organization in 2011, the implementation of CleanSci was halfway underway. However, as mentioned earlier, some campus buildings are exempt from the CleanSci system. The spaces where Toni most recently worked at the time of our conversation—dining hall and dormitory— were both exempt from the CleanSci system. As such, Toni's case—like Jay's—serves as an example of how cleaners experience work (as well as identity and meaning therein) when *not* part of standardized cleaning systems such as CleanSci. Toni spends a considerable amount of time in her narrative contrasting "the way things were" versus the negative changes she has observed and experienced over the years, namely with respect to coworkers and customers. Toni summarizes her perspective on changes in the cleaning industry like so:

> Well, I kind of wanted to let you know that there is a difference between the custodians of twenty years ago and I think that maybe it's the economy … more and more people just out of work are ending up in the cleaning and I think back twenty, thirty years ago, more people were in the janitorial because they chose to be. It was a deliberate effort. …the other real noticeable thing with custodians is the deception amongst their—they're getting cutthroat where they didn't use to be like that. And they used to be—a janitor used to—you could count on a janitor for being truthful with you, being for real. And you can't count on that now. And that's quite sad but I know it's like that in many other arenas like—anywhere you go, any profession almost has that. But I was surprised to see it in the janitorial. But, it's—you've got to deal with it.

> It like—they're used to be a very strong camaraderie between janitors [20-30 years ago, but now] there is not. But there's not even the same caliber that you're working with. Like I said, a lot of people are getting out of work—work and they're losing their jobs and they're just becoming cleaners. It's not like—they don't necessarily have a personality to serve and that's I guess the key word there, "serve."

Toni frequently expresses nostalgia for the 'good old days' and describes changes she has observed in her coworkers and work environment. She speculates an attribution for these changes that have weakened the quality of the talent pool from which the organization hires ("maybe it's the economy…"). She believes that in the past, people were more likely to self-select into cleaning work "because they chose to be" and had a desire to "serve." Now, however, she witnesses "deception", competition, and social loafing. In the past, Toni felt that cleaners had greater integrity and a stronger work ethic, but "you can't count on that now." These perceived changes not only create greater stress for Toni, but also make her feel "surprised" and "sad" by the state of her profession. Despite her humble origins, Toni made a life for herself in the cleaning industry; but now she laments the negative changes she perceives, which gives her greater concern for the future, especially the younger generation of cleaners and customers.

Toni held prior commercial cleaning experience in a variety of building environments, including hospitals, classrooms, kitchens, and dormitories. Toni's narratives reveal the importance of building environment for various aspects of work, including the sequencing and pacing of tasks; relationships with coworkers, customers, and supervisors; and perceptions of safety and wellbeing. Toni has spent several decades working cleaning jobs, and described the paradox of this work as difficult (given the physical and psychosocial demands) yet easy (given her experience and perceived natural aptitude for cleaning): "[cleaning for me is] *very, very* difficult. But once you've been cleaning as long as I have, it's all peanuts. It really is." Here Toni also reveals how even when sharing the same job title and organization with coworkers, aspects of the immediate context (such as type of room) can shape health and well-being (such as exposure to different biohazards, including chemical fumes).

Toni's narrative also illustrates how the work environment and building setting can construct perceptions of safety and danger among the people who must clean these spaces. For example, Toni stated that "you're better off in a place like this [dormitory]… for the most part, it's safer when you're in and around other people." Toni believes in "safety in numbers", but also remains wary of "deceptive characters" who might be hidden in plain sight. Yet, remaining in the physical presence of others does not necessarily ensure a healthy or productive work environment for Toni. This is apparent when she describes her experience cleaning the kitchen:

> I—I've learned a lesson in—in the dining rooms, there's a big difference in the work environment, even though you're cleaning, than the dorms. And it's a lot more stressful in the dining rooms and I think you're working with a lot of different personalities and with the dorms, you generally only have one supervisor…the supervisor that I have at [the dorm]…probably more employees under her than where I come from at the dining room. Guess how many—guess how many supervisors we have at—in the dining room? …Seven! And what happens when you get that—and from what I'm hearing from the other custodians, it's—that's what they do in the dining rooms for some odd reason I don't know. I mean, I believe in 'create a job', but this is like way over the top [laughter]! What happens when you get seven supervisors is you can imagine they're tripping over one another trying to justify their salaries, for one thing, and they're all micromanaging everyone. They're trying—they don't have anything to do! And all they do is like—it's almost like being stalked! You're—they're always there! It's like—do you girls drive?

> Have you ever been driving and you're not really doing anything wrong but there's a police car behind you and you're—you're checking everything out and you don't know why he just keeps staying behind you—or she [laughter]. And it's that kind of a thing. And that's 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Can you imagine every time that you went out in the street the cop was behind you driving? That is what it's like when you have seven supervisors. And it's very—it's a very toxic environment. But, I have—I've been putting in a lot of applications, so it shouldn't be too long and I'll be out of there.

In the above excerpt, Toni describes the important "lesson" she learned by working in different building environments, and how these environments help construct the experience of work. When Toni says that "there's a big difference in the work environment, even though you're cleaning", she reveals the dynamic and contextual nature of cleaning work. "Even though you're cleaning" suggests that there ought to be some consistency in the experience of work, regardless of building type or other contextual factors. Yet, Toni experiences "big" differences in her work

experience depending on these contextual factors, including timing of shift, room layout, and social interactions at work.

Toni expresses annoyance at the presence of several supervisors in the dining hall kitchen. She understood their micromanagement as a potential byproduct of their organizational redundancy. Paradoxically, the supervisors seemingly "don't have anything to do!", yet were "tripping over one another…micromanaging everyone." This is an example of "reversing" the gaze; to cope with the frustration of feeling micro-managed, Toni removes the spotlight from her and displaces it upon her supervisors. For Toni, supervisors are associated with discipline; their sheer presence makes her feel as though she has done something wrong, even when she has not. Toni then expresses greater frustration by using an analogy of driving in front of a police vehicle. Given Toni's positionality as a White woman, this metaphor is useful for capturing her frustration and annoyance. Toni's positionality as someone who does not live in fear of police brutality perhaps allows her to laugh at the image of being followed by a police car.

Toni's narrative demonstrates the low amount of control over her work experienced in the kitchen. In the dorms, however, Toni almost feels like a day laborer subcontracted for the day. Casual, contingent work arrangements often are marked by abuse, including wage withholding, exemption from labor protection laws, and lack of benefits (e.g., R. Smith, 2008). But for Toni, the experience of feeling 'subcontracted' is liberating, and she appreciates the "flexibility" offered by such an arrangement. In the dorms, she experienced comparatively greater autonomy and control over her work, perhaps in part due to having a single supervisor (versus several). This arrangement helps Toni feel more human, and ultimately more productive and satisfied. Moreover, this arrangement is notably different from the work process constructed by CleanSci. Toni's colleagues who work in the CleanSci system abide by prescribed "mono-

task" roles, standardized work processes, and limited task rotation. Cleaners like Toni, however, have markedly greater ownership over their work process, and are able to enact micro-practices of agency, including task rotation and sequencing.

Toni describes additional benefits of the autonomy she experienced while cleaning dormitories. Namely, she feels that she is able to "serve" and "provide for" students, despite their undeserving and disrespectful nature (described later in this section). One specific strategy that Toni cultivated in her work is the goal to make communal living spaces feel 'homier':

> Say—say that you—you're in charge of different—different areas. Like there's several things you can do—like the furniture's a certain way—change a furniture once and a while. You know? Change things, switch things up. Take—really try to see—pay attention. Like I serve people your age and so I know how they like to sit and I know how they like to congregate. So you kinda put the furniture that way. …And like I said, it depends on who you're serving and I'm serving people your age and I kinda pay attention to what they like to—what's—how they—I see how they put things and how they behave and I try to—I try to make it so they'll feel comfortable where they're at. It—it—it—to me, its important to make it like a home away from home. …You—you—I—I think it's important to create like a warm atmosphere and a lot of these kids have never been away from home ever and they're on their own—there's a lot they're being exposed to at one time and the least that we can do is make it comfortable—you know—physically [clears throat]. And any way that I do that, like sometimes it's moving the furniture or cleaning certain things—I've kinda had an advantage though because I've cleaned homes and so I kinda know what people that are used to having cleaners, I know what they're kinda used to and I bring it into—I do over my list of what my supervisor gives me.

Thus, one way that Toni 'takes advantage' of her autonomy is by attempting to (re)create more 'home-like' environments for student residents in the dormitory. Toni is able to incorporate creative practices into her work, such as rearranging furniture, that would result in disciplinary actions against CleanSci custodians (most likely two days of wage withholding). This difference also reveals how CleanSci assumes consistency and predictability in the building environment, whereas cleaning is a socially constructed process. Customers and cleaners co-construct and negotiate building space, and in doing so change the process, organization, and meaning of work.

Toni feels comfort and pride when she feels like she is "serving" students, such as by creating a "home" for them. Many other cleaners complained about the power dynamics of neoliberal universities, whereby students are ungrateful "customers" who hold more control than the people who 'serve' them. Yet, Toni flips this script by embracing her 'servant' role, viewing herself as a motherly steward or caretaker to help "young kids" feel comforted when "they're on their own" for the first time. This is especially striking given that Toni grew up in an orphanage and never experienced a residential college experience firsthand.

Toni also expresses some potential problems that arise when cleaners have greater autonomy over their work spaces. She appreciates the "creativity" afforded to her by working outside of a prescribed organization of work. At times, Toni subscribes to an essentialist view of cleaning: some people are 'naturally' better (or worse) suited to this type of work:

> …you know what, I think the sad thing about the cleaning job is that everyone thinks that they can clean [laughter]. And that's a very interesting concept because everybody's perception of what's clean is different. Some people, if there's a path from the door to the bed, that's clean [laughter]. And some people—it depends on what your level of cleaning is. So, sometimes when people say "It's clean," you gotta'—it's—see [laughter] it's a thing of perception. You—you—you know it's what their perception of clean is. So, they gotta be taught what exactly is clean [laughter]. And then even then, they try to improvise but we get a lot of people that are out of work and kind of land in cleaning and before I think more people used to choose cleaning.
>
> Now they're kinda—it's like they can't get a job so they figure anybody can clean so they just apply for cleaning and... So you probably see a lot of places that are kept up, some not so much. ... As you're getting people that really aren't' cleaners, they're just out of work and they figure anybody can clean; that's not the case. Some people have an eye for cleaning. And some people just don't.
>
> And so, I—I have learned to do this but you can tell right away—sometimes even by—by the way they carry theirself, by the way they perform the task, are they taking pride in it or—you know—that saying about—are you doing something—the same things if somebody were watching you, whereas when no one's watching you? You can kinda tell those cleaners after a while and it's very easy to pick up on—but, I don't have days that I don't clean well. I think my body kinda just goes in automatic and my body already knows what to do— it's a matter of do I have the energy that day? Did I get enough sleep? You have to. You—when you're a cleaner, it's strenuous. You have to eat the right foods, you gotta get exercise in order to be productive and effective in what you're doing.

It—you have to—you have to do that. You can't have—you have a—you can have a big fat tummy. But, you know what? You're gonna have a real hard time cleaning. You're gonna get real tired after a couple hours and you got eight hours to go. And so, you—you—I don't know. You would think some of the stuff is common sense stuff, but it's—I—I don't think people pick up on it.

As Toni has described here and earlier, larger societal problems such as unemployment and economic recession may have led some people to enter the cleaning profession who otherwise would not participate in this labor. Toni believes that, in the past, cleaning was a profession into which employees self-selected. Changes in the economic/labor market may increase the variability in cleaners' experience and expertise that Toni already views as a problem. This variability in experience/expertise causes variability in cleaners' perceptions of cleanliness. She uses a theatrical metaphor of "improvisation" to describe the lackluster performance she perceives among her colleagues, perhaps due to their lack of interest and inherent aptitude or penchant for cleaning. For Toni, being an effective cleaner is a matter of not just the accomplishment of cleanliness (however vague the benchmark may be), but also performance of an *embodied practice* marked by inherent skill, bodily comportment, and expressions of pride. Toni provides further description of the embodied nature of cleaning work when she talks about how bodily control predicts performance. She criticizes her coworkers who don't 'take care of themselves', admonishing coworkers with "big fat tumm[ies]". Despite her own expertise (whether inborn or cultivated), she still describes cleaning work as "strenuous", requiring deliberate bodily practices related to eating, exercising, and sleeping. Toni takes pride in her intense physical regiment involving daily cardio outside of work, viewing this disciplinary practice as inherent to her work performance. For cleaners who lack this 'discipline', she warns that they are "gonna have a real hard time cleaning" and "get real tired after a couple hours". Toni views these embodied practices as "common sense stuff," again returning to her essentialist view of skill and performance in cleaning work. In her narrative, Toni admonishes coworkers

who do not share her same 'discipline' about embodied practices. She also spoke at length about other problems she perceives in her coworkers, largely related to generational shifts:

> All custodians are not equal either. There are some that come to work that take pride in their job and many of the older janitors, they really do. They really come to work with the idea they're gonna improve the quality of a lot of people's lives. There are some that come to work and they get into trouble all the time, they're doing stuff, taking off work all the time, not calling in—just stupid stuff.

> …That used to didn't be in the janitorial I—I would say even 20 years ago. This is just— it's like the mentality of a nitwit [laughter]. You know? Why would you pay someone to come to work and to make trouble and not care about their job? Why would you even hire someone like that? … I think that in the last 10, 20 years is really changing.

> That is—it is—it has become a ridiculous thing where a lot of the older janitors are just looking forward to retiring rather than finding a way to confront or to deal with it. And I'm not so sure that really ignoring it or pretending that it isn't there. I don't think that really is good either. I think it's always best to be a light wherever you are at—whether you collect trash, no matter what you do I think that's it's best to be a light …

Here Toni describes her bifurcated nostalgia, wherein things were "good" in society and at work 10-30 years ago, but this is no longer the case. Around this time in our conversation, Toni also described her reverence for Donald Trump. We spoke approximately six weeks after his candidacy announcement, and a full year before he became the official nominee. Thus, Toni was an "early adopter" of his candidacy and politics, and shared his nostalgia for a mythical U.S. past. Like many of Trump's supporters, Toni shared an investment in—and betrayal by—the "Working Class Promise", a "constellation of values…communicated through a ubiquitous macro-level discourse" (Lucas, 2011, p. 347). Toni's critique of changes to work and broader society over the past few decades help form the foundation for her nostalgia for the past. Such idealization of the past is crucial for the narrative construction of the moral(ized) self, also evident in the "MAGA" discourse ("Make America Great Again").

In the above excerpt, Toni characterizes older custodians as having more pride and passion for their work, a stronger work ethic, and greater professionalism. Younger and newer

custodians can "put on a good front" and "smile" but ultimately lack commitment, respect, motivation, and productivity. She largely views union officers and supervisors as complacent in these dynamics, using infantilizing language when she describes supervisors who 'coddle' the 'trouble-making' cleaners. Toni views these trends as a larger problem in our culture and society; for example, she also believes that lawyers lack professionalism. Admonishing and infantilizing cleaners (and people in other professions, such as lawyers) may represent a micro-practice of self-protection. By characterizing young cleaners and lawyers as undisciplined, unprofessional, unskilled, and unmotivated, Toni is able to elevate her image and work identity. One way that Toni accomplished this is by describing the 'dirt' she has encountered in the various work assignments she has held. Dormitory trash bags include about 20% paraphernalia related to alcohol, but in the law school, Toni described the proportion of alcohol-related trash as closer to 75%:

> And that's when I made the connection—I said, "These people are making laws and—and this doesn't—this is not good." No wonder the—the—the world is going the way it is. I mean, really! It is just got no other place to go [clears throat]. You—if you girls, like I said, knew how it was thirty, forty years ago, you could probably appreciate my being amazed at it. But you weren't and so I can't expect you to, but—you know—maybe your grandparents, your Mom and Dad will tell you what it was like and—to me, I don't see very much positive in it. … And you've got to wonder—you see I—I call the lawyers on Capitol Hill alcoholics because I clean the law club for a long time and I'm telling you, there's no other place that has that many alcohol bottles! And so, I said to myself, and I told my other cleaners, these are our Congress! These are our House of Representatives.

To help make sense of her work, Toni observes and explains the 'dirt' she encounters on the job, including different types of trash, such as alcohol containers. She also imagines connections between the dirt and the people who generate the dirt. Here she uses imagery of dirt-artifacts to make sense of larger societal tensions she feels. To counter the invisibility and disrespect she experiences on the job, Toni is able to position herself as a moral authority—by providing J.M. and I, 'young girls', with 'cautionary tales' about how to navigate society as young women, and

by admonishing the moral deficiencies of occupational groups that hold greater social prestige, whether deserving or not (such as lawyers and law-makers).

Toni utilizes 'meta' language (e.g., "Let me tell you about…"; "The thing you need to know is…") throughout her narratives. This storied language helps Toni position herself as an expert uniquely positioned to divulge information about cleaning, especially meaning-making about the embodied nature of cleaning and changes in the integrity of cleaners. In particular she uses the strategy of moralized infantilization to position herself 'above' others who represent disrespect and/or threats, especially younger and/or novice cleaners, students, and organizational outsiders (e.g., lawyers). When talking about these actors, Toni also imbues a longitudinal analysis that essentially represents a nostalgic view of the past and cautionary, if not fearful, anticipation of the future. For example, she explained to J.M. and I:

> [W]hen I was your age [in the 1980s]…like smoking, getting caught smoking in the bathroom, even drinking wasn't hardly—nobody hardly did that…So, that's a big difference. …I don't get angry about it, I just see that times have changed. …the kids, like I said before, used to feel like camaraderie with the janitors. They were like—in a way—we were kinda like similar because you guys were just coming out into the world and we are like low men on the totem poles—we really are. And we don't get half the glory that we deserve. And—but still, you don't do it for the glory. And you don't do it for the pats on the back. You do it because you want to be a positive influence. You do it because you—hopefully you do what you're doing well and you're making a good contribution. But, you—you—the kids are different in that respect. They just don't have respect—they don't have—their—their hearts seem so hard.

This excerpt reflects the larger tone of Toni's narrative, wherein she has observed considerable changes among her coworkers and customers over the past few decades. When she was the same age as J.M. and I (20-somethings), she felt that behaviors such as drinking and smoking were uncommon among our age cohort. These changes don't anger Toni as much as they disappoint and worry her. One reason for her dejection is the commonalities she perceives between cleaners and students. Toni perceives cleaners and students to be on similar societal 'footing', since "you guys [students] were just coming out into the world and we [cleaners] are like low men on the

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totem poles—we really are." In this way, students are cast as lower status because of their youth and 'entry' into the 'real world', whereas cleaners are cast as lower status because of the low prestige and social valuing placed on their occupation. What is implied, however, is that students will experience upward mobility and advancement as they progress through university and beyond; their shared [lower] status with cleaners is liminal. Cleaners, however, are forever 'stuck' at the bottom of the proverbial totem pole. This is a difficult tension to reconcile, as acknowledging this power differential counters widespread ideologies in the U.S., including the myths of meritocracy and upward mobility.

To cope with the negative affect arising from these tensions—sadness, worry, disappointment—Toni reframes her role on the job. She acknowledges that she will never get "half the glory" cleaners deserve, which leads her to presume that recognition ought not to be a motivating factor for cleaners in their work. She revises this thinking by saying that cleaners should be motivated "to be a positive influence", especially for younger, naïve, disrespectful students who "just don't have respect" and whose "hearts seem so hard". Toni has most recently worked in dormitories and dining hall kitchens during daytime or afternoon shifts, so she has had considerable more opportunities for social interactions with customers (especially students) relative to most other cleaners at the field site. However, these interactions usually are not respectful, especially in more recent years, leading Toni to infantilize her customers. Infantilization is a logical strategy to help make sense of, and cope with, negative behavior that customers (namely students) display. This is clear when Toni goes on to speculate about students' bad behavior in other spaces on campus:

> …I betcha they're the same way in the classrooms. They're probably like that to their professors. They're probably know-it-alls, and they're probably disrespectful to their professors and then you'll probably get a small portion that are just the opposite. Like have you no respect? … You know—they—they don't. They never were taught it and so

you can't expect 'em to perform any other way. But we're getting *more* and *more*, is what I'm saying, that aren't being taught things or—I don't know. It's just—it seems like there needs to be a very big change and I don't just notice it in custodial—although when I came back in 2011, I could definitely see the difference in the group of custodians than the mid 90s and in the 80s. Very different ball game—very different altogether.

Here Toni surmises that students are just as disrespectful to professors in the classroom as they are to cleaners in other spaces on campus. This strategy allows Toni to formulate a self-protective attribution about students' disrespect. That is, students' disrespect is not a byproduct of characteristics about Toni or cleaners, but rather students' personalities, their upbringing, and the 'changing times' ("very different ball game"). In this way Toni leverages the role of time to make sense of her workplace experiences in a way that does not tarnish her character or occupational image. Instead, her infantilization of disrespectful students and lackadaisical cleaners leave her with feelings of sadness and pity. Such feelings may help Toni feel like an 'outsider' or 'ethnographer' observing trends she witnesses in the organization and larger industry, rather than feeling like an immersed actor who is directly harmed by negative behaviors exhibited by supervisors, coworkers, and customers.

Toni does not view herself as infallible, but she does view herself as a mentor and role model, both to novice custodians and students, especially young women ("girls"):

> And I gotta' look at myself in the mirror and you do your work and I can honestly sit here and say that—am I perfect? No. And I will sit with the—a girls sometimes just because it—it's like my way of saying to them—I know that this is not easy for you, you know? And I don't expect the—a lot of people don't have the discipline and the self-control as I do and I try to just show 'em, you know—I tell them. I say, but if all of us don't do our work because we're trying to get even, this is not—it—it's like the—the bottom line is, the people that are supposed to be getting served are not being served and that's really stealing. … That's stealing. It's like, be out there even. Be out there. So be there where people can, if they *need* you. But when you're hiding, then you can't—you're not any good to anyone. And to me, that is stealing. I don't care what our society—they—they seem to—you know—like I said, they're—it's just very backwards and I feel so sorry for the young kids today that they're being exposed to some really, really stinking thinking. I mean, really.

Emphasizing her own strong work ethic ("discipline and the self-control") helps Toni to elevate herself 'above' coworkers and customers, especially those whom she views as obstructing her work process and/or undermining her occupational integrity. She again expresses concern and pity she feels for students, and although she infantilizes them ("I feel so sorry for the young kids today"), she also does not overtly blame them for their disrespect, instead attributing this 'bad behavior' to "some really, really stinking thinking" from parents and popular culture.

Toni goes on to express that custodians who lack a strong work ethic are 'stealing', something she never does. Further, to be an effective custodian is to be physically present. Yet, this model may be inappropriate—if not impossible—for most other cleaners on campus, especially those who work under CleanSci. Models of team cleaning (such as CleanSci's) do not necessarily mean that custodians are working in close physical proximity with coworkers or customers. Thus, for many cleaners, it would be impossible to achieve what Toni perceives to be "out there" rather than "hiding". Yet such "hiding" is exactly what many cleaners experience as a byproduct of the (re)organization of work, such as the work process structured by CleanSci. What Toni perceive as "stealing" and a failure to serve is the exact organization of work that many of her coworkers experience. But experiencing social interactions with students—however positive or negative—is structured by the work environment. For Toni—who has worked in libraries, dining halls, and dormitories—interactions with students are a "bonus part of the job" that make it "well worth it." Toni sees herself as a role model, which also helps her show students "that you can have a demeaning job and still be content—still be happy."

Narrative #3: Kiki

Kiki was a 45-year-old Black woman living with her 24-year-old daughter. Kiki described herself (and came across as) a highly goal-oriented person with a strong sense of self.

Of note is her strong identity outside of work, which she discussed at several points throughout her narrative. Kiki made sure that I understood that she is "more than her work", and that her job is a means to an end. Prior to entering commercial cleaning, Kiki held many jobs, including retail associate, housekeeper, and housing management. At the time of our conversation, Kiki had been a custodian at Midwestern University for two years. She was hired for a temporary position and was one of few temporary employees eventually to be offered a "Tier 1" position. When she first started as a custodian, "it wasn't easy, especially being a woman." Kiki was assigned to a smaller building to which she and one other custodian were assigned. Kiki was hired as a temporary employee on a 6-month contract. Her assigned building included offices, classrooms, and communal spaces (e.g., kitchen) intended for university affiliates (i.e., faculty, staff, students). This building was once staffed by three employees; when two employees retired, only Kiki was hired to replace the two vacancies.

When describing her work, Kiki anchored her narrative to her identity as a Black woman, status as a temporary worker hoping for job security and upward mobility, and prior employment as a housekeeper. Kiki entered the organization several years after the implementation of CleanSci, so her temporal perspective is more episodic than comparative. Kiki made sense of her work through the lens of her social identity and job status – past, current, and future.

When describing the differences between in-home cleaning and industrial cleaning, Kiki essentially described her work through the lens of the structure CleanSci provides:

> Oh… and being a custodian, you have like a station, you go in and you do the same thing every day. I do restrooms; I clean the glass; I sweep and mop all the stairwells; I take out the garbage; it's [industrial cleaning] not the same [as in-home cleaning] because I thought it was, but when I went in applying as a custodian, they said this is different, forget everything your mother ever taught you. I said okay. And we had to go to bootcamp. Bootcamp was how they showed you how to take the vacuum cleaner apart, and clean it, and put everything together, mix chemicals together, you have to wear gloves, and you don't actually meet the people [customers; i.e., building occupants] as a

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custodian.

…Custodians, we have a set task that we do; we do windows, we do floors, we do bathrooms. And you work with like equipment. You know? I have like a cart that I'll have all my solutions and everything on. You have a certain water level that you have to be at when you mop. You have red mops, you have yellow mops; you have the Kentucky mops. There's so much to learn. You're not just using a cleaning product and wiping. You have to mix the chemicals and then dilute it with water, wear the gloves, and then that's how you clean. And then when you're inspected sometimes, you get like a Q and A, and then your supervisor will come through and she'll make sure your closets are stocked, make sure your cart is stocked, make sure the restrooms are stocked. And what you don't want is for anybody in the building to email your supervisor. Because she shows up, I think it's a problem. Because working unsupervised is fine, but when she shows up it's like, "What the hell does she want?" [laughter]. Like, "Oh, I didn't want anything. I just wanted to come see how you guys are doing." We're doing good. To me that's like you're coming over here to be nosey…

… So I'm at—I'm at a steady routine where I know what I'm doing. You know? I try not to pick my nose or dig in my ears somewhere [laughter]. Because I know somebody might be watching.

Here Kiki describes her experience of the standardized work process that CleanSci prescribes. Her work is repetitive; she reports to a "station" only to "do the same thing every day". When she participated in the CleanSci training bootcamp, she was told to "forget everything your mother ever taught you." It is not clear exactly who said this to Kiki (e.g., CleanSci trainer, direct supervisor), but clearly this lesson "stuck" with Kiki, who remembered these words two years later. This quote also reveals the gendered assumptions laden in cleaning work, namely that (a) cleaning is a feminized task, (b) mothers are expected to teach children (especially girls) how to clean, but that (c) such cleaning techniques are inappropriate for public life. These assumptions reflect the recurring discourse fragments in CleanSci organizational talk that characterized industrial cleaning as unprofessional and in need of "cleaning science." Elements of such discourse "show up" in the narratives of frontline cleaners, including Kiki, whose organizational socialization included a reminder that cleaning techniques from "mothers" are ill-suited to professional work.

Although Kiki began her current position two years following the implementation of CleanSci, her narrative suggests that she knows what organizational life was like prior to the implementation of this system. When asked about the negative aspects of her work, Kiki described the anger and dissatisfaction from "different custodians that had been there for years", specifically in response to the change from zone cleaning to team cleaning. Although Kiki joined the organization well after the implementation of CleanSci, she still experienced ambient aftershocks of this organizational change. Although her personal organizational history was not bifurcated in time by CleanSci (before and after implementation), this organizational event is still a part of her narrative. Further, the stress and anger experienced by other employees because of the CleanSci implementation represents one of the worst aspects of Kiki's work life.

Kiki goes on to describe how she experiences the CleanSci system daily. In general Kiki's job tasks appear clearly defined ("we have a set task that we do"), perhaps to the point of boredom and monotony. Now that Kiki is accustomed to the CleanSci work process, it provides a sense of comfort, stability, and confidence. Yet before Kiki reached this point, it was a challenge to manage the work process prescribed by the CleanSci system ("there's so much to learn"). For Kiki, especially salient features of CleanSci include the preparation of chemical solutions, selection of appropriate equipment (e.g., mop type), and the performance benchmarking. Although Kiki appeared to understand her supervisor's responsibilities with respect to quality assurance, she often experienced her supervisor's QA activities as nosiness, micro-management, and surveillance.

Kiki harkened back to the issue of supervisor nosiness and surveillance throughout her narrative. In the excerpt above, Kiki jokes about the surveillance she encounters at work—she shouldn't pick her nose because "somebody might be watching." Yet at other times, she is more

serious about and disturbed by the surveillance she experiences at work. Kiki describes being

"followed" by her "nosy" supervisor as a common occurrence, including encounters such as the

following:

> So she [supervisor] comes over to the building and I'm always working, and she'll ask my partner where I am and then she'll call me. That pisses me off. "Oh, I just wanted to call and see how you were doing." That pisses me off! [laughter]. So, I mean, she's okay… she's alright. She's alright. She's just too much sometimes. Yeah. Yeah [laughter]. [But the best part of my job is] no supervision.
>
> Then you hear a lot, you hear a lot, especially when temps [temporary employees] come through; it's hard for temps. 'Cause people that have been there a really, really long time—like 20-something years, they're not too happy to see temps come in. And they will—they will give you a hard time if they're trying to prove—you're trying to prove that you want that job and you can be trusted. …And then the supervisor will come flying around the corners, "Is everything okay? Is there a problem?" Ya know? And it's like, yeah, everything's fine.

Kiki experiences many interactions with her supervisor as needless and intrusive. Kiki, for the

most part, appeared to enjoy the relative solitude that her job provided. She and her cleaning

partner worked well together (though rarely were physically present in the same room at the

same time), and Kiki described the best part of her job as times when her supervisor was not

physically present. Yet, even after Kiki's job status changed from "temporary" to "Tier 1", she

still experienced "nosiness" and micro-management from her supervisor. When describing these

encounters Kiki often laughed and shrugged them off, yet continued to (re)tell stories about her

supervisor's nosiness. Further, when Kiki would attempt to negotiate the type of encounters that

she would ideally like to have with her supervisor, she was often met with dismissal. For

example, Kiki asked her supervisor to stop interacting with her during meal breaks, to which her

supervisor responded, "Oh yeah, I forgot, you don't like when—like to be bothered on your

breaks and lunches."

The surveillance that Kiki describes is also experienced as *gendered* and *racialized*:

… I'mma tell you this story what happened to me. I went to—when I worked in the

building—I worked in the building with my supervisor. And, it was two people that I had to work with. They've been there for years. Me coming in as a woman, I guess they didn't like that—a Black woman at that. So, of course, they thought I had a attitude. So, when I spoke my mind about somethin', a rumor went around that I had a attitude. …And I'm standing there trying to be really mature now because I don't wanna be the angry Black woman.

Kiki expressed feelings of tokenization that structure the type of encounters she experiences at work (e.g., being picked on by colleagues), as well as the types of responses (including agency) she is 'allowed' to perform (e.g., avoidance of emotional displays that might render her an "angry Black woman"). Kiki wishes she could be more blunt and direct when confronting her supervisor about behaviors she experienced as intrusive, yet felt that she had to refrain from expressing her voice, due to fears that she would be issued a disciplinary infraction for insubordination. Further, she developed a reputation for being "boojie" among coworkers, which further contributed to her social isolation at work. "Boojie" can be used as a pejorative to describe "performances [that] are critiqued as rejecting or abandoning some organic construction of black character and black people" (Alexander, 2011, p. 311). In this context, *boojie* functions as "a class epithet" (Young, 2011, p. 8) to regulate Kiki's performance of race, gender, and class. Thus, with superiors as well as coworkers, Kiki experiences tensions when attempting to resist stereotypes of Black women, while also protecting herself (and her job) in the process.

In addition to gender and race, job status was another fault line that structured Kiki's experiences (and, by extension, narratives) of work. When describing her early experiences of work, Kiki was keenly aware of her subordinate status as a temporary employee who likely would not be promoted to a "Tier 1" or "Tier 2" position. Yet, despite her low status and precarious position, other workers still perceived her as a threat. Kiki hypothesized that "Some people just don't like the new people coming in. Like, 'Oh, she might replace me' or you know?". Similarly, Kiki observed that custodians with longer tenure were "not too happy to see

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temps come in." Consistent with larger trends in neoliberal climates, the hiring of temporary

workers can signal negative organizational change (e.g., greater precarity) and incite

competitiveness and conflict among personnel. Further, Kiki's observation suggests that

custodians who had been working at the organization prior to the implementation of CleanSci are

dissatisfied with the reorganization of their work. Perhaps in response to their dissatisfaction

with their new work processes, they gave temps "a hard time" to "test" their commitment and

trustworthiness. Further, it is possible that more seasoned employees scapegoat temporary

employees to express larger dissatisfaction with organizational change, including changes in

personnel and the organization of work.

The heightened surveillance that Kiki experiences may be an unintended consequence of

the CleanSci system. For Kiki, managerial surveillance interrupts her work flow in addition to

signaling disrespect. Managerial surveillance is consistent with CleanSci organizational talk that

characterizes cleaners as unskilled, unprofessional, unmotivated, and untrustworthy. Such

discourse about the unprofessional nature of cleaners and cleaning helps to legitimate managerial

practices that are rooted in micro-management, infantilization, and surveillance. In turn, these

practices can make custodians feel incompetent and like children. Despite such discourse (and

the practices that it legitimates), cleaners find opportunities for agency, including Kiki:

> And to get me through the day, I listen—I have my Bluetooth in and I'll listen to like
> motivational speaking, I'll listen to Netflix, I'll listen to maybe some Joel Olsteen
> [preacher] or something, ya know? I'll listen to something—yeah, I think at one time I
> was trying to learn Spanish and it was a little hard because I couldn't watch on my phone,
> the lady—the lady's mouth. So it was like, okay. Alright. I'll listen to—oh, like
> children's Bible stories, I'll listen to—just different programs. I listen to YouTube a lot,
> I'll watch a lot of Net—or—excuse me, listen to a lot of Netflix. If it's a movie I can
> listen to, it'll, the day will go by really fast. I'm just… doing my thing. You know? And I
> get along with the person I work with because he does his thing and I do mine. And we're
> kinda similar, 'cause his birthday is in May. Mine is in—two days after his. So we come
> in, we speak, we have to be cordial to each other—that's it. And try to keep the gossip
> out of my head, because custodians are ruthless for gossip [laughter].

[I feel especially accomplished and proud at work when I am able to locate] something for—for—maybe somebody in the building. Like if they can't find something, stopping and helping a student 'cause a lot of custodians don't. Oh, let's see, working overtime when I know they have to have an event and they're counting on me to come clean up the building. … Just helping somebody out, somebody's moving out of their office, I'll go out of my way to take the gondola upstairs and trash down, recycling, and I guess my supervisor—some people say it's not our jobs to do that, I don't mind. I really don't mind. I don't mind helping—just helping somebody. That's it, just helping. Yeah. That's my biggest accomplishment being a custodian [laughter].

For Kiki, agency primarily takes the form of *job crafting, recalibrating,* and *performing organizational citizenship behaviors.* Job crafting refers to "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). Employees especially might be interested in job crafting if they have less control over their job tasks, a negative work identity, and/or a desire to craft high-quality connections with others. These three motivations are present in Kiki's narratives, given the lack of autonomy she experiences given the organization of her work, the stigma associated with participation in dirty work, and the lack of trusted, close connections with her supervisor, coworkers, or customers. These motivating factors, coupled with Kiki's general strong motivation in life, have helped her to create opportunities to practice job crafting. Outcomes of job crafting include changes to the *meaning* of work, as well as one's *identity* at (or of) work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). At first glance, Kiki's motivation for job crafting appears to be instrumental in nature (e.g., to make the day go by more quickly). However, the above narrative was extracted from a larger conversation segment about the best aspects of Kiki's work, suggesting that job crafting may offer Kiki higher-order needs, such as satisfaction.

One form that job crafting can take is (re)shaping "relational boundaries", typically accomplished by changing the quantity and/or quality of social interactions at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This form of job crafting often assumes that employees desire *more* and *higher quality* connections at work (e.g., Dutton, Debebe, & Wrzesniewski, 2016;

Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Yet Kiki practices this form of job crafting by wearing earphones during her job and carefully curating her media diet, which (a) *limits* opportunities for face-to-face social interactions at work while (b) *strengthening* her relationship with *herself*. This "twist" on (re)shaping relational boundaries may be a byproduct of Kiki's work environment, which is characterized by overnight work in a building that is (a) rarely occupied by customers during the work shift and (b) cleaned by just two people, Kiki and her work partner. Yet Kiki's own traits and motives may also influence her engagement in this form of job crafting. Some aspects of personality, including introversion and social anxiety, may discourage employees from desiring and seeking close relationships at work. Further, Kiki's strong sense of self *outside* of her work identity may lead her to practice a form of job crafting that helps create greater *distance* from work and the people associated with her work (e.g., supervisor, coworkers, customers). In this way, Kiki can further explore and solidify her personal pursuits during her work shift in a way that might *increase*, rather than impede, her productivity. Further, listening to personally curated media such as motivational speakers can serve as a strong "voice" to counter the negative images associated with cleaners, including the stigma of dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), portrayals of cleaners promoted by CleanSci, surveillance from her supervisor, and wider societal stereotypes of cleaners (e.g., More & Suchner, 1976).

The second form of agency that Kiki practices is *recalibrating*, or "adjusting the implicit standards that are invoked to assess the magnitude (how much) and/or valence (how good) of a given dirty work attribute" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p. 422). Put differently, recalibrating "magnifies" the "redeeming qualities" of dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p. 423). Kiki practices recalibrating by sharing positive aspects of her work that are not directly tied to her job tasks or occupational role. For example, when asked about the most positive or rewarding

aspects of her work, Kiki described the ability to consume media while on the job and help others. Given that Kiki works a late-night shift in a building with minimal foot traffic after-hours, it is unlikely that she encounters many other people during her shift. Indeed, she mentioned that she did not interact with customers every day of her shift, and that social encounters with others were rare (aside from her supervisor). Although Kiki highlighted her ability to directly help customers (e.g., help a student navigate the building), it's unlikely that there are frequent opportunities to do so. Thus, Kiki practices recalibrating by emphasizing the ability to help others as one of the best aspects of her job, despite the infrequent nature of such interactions.

Finally, the third form of agency that Kiki practices is organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB, also referred to as "good soldier syndrome", refers to "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. … the behavior is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable" (Organ, 1988, p. 4; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). The specific OCB that Kiki performs, and that brings her the greatest sense of accomplishment at work, is *helping behaviors* (Podsakoff et al., 2000), which she directs toward her supervisor (despite any resentment stemming from surveillance and micro-management), coworkers (despite their racism, sexism, and classism), and building occupants (despite worries about disrespect or potentially violent confrontations). In this way, Kiki also negotiates tensions between her desires to help others versus her desire to engage in self-protection and self-preservation.

Taken together, Kiki practices at least three forms of agency against the prescribed work process with an intersectional awareness: job crafting, recalibrating, and performing OCBs. For

Kiki, these strategies are also deliberately (and inextricably) tied to her understanding of health

and wellbeing:

> Even if I have to advance to a Supervisor or a [Tier 2 custodian] or a—even entering—it's [an Internal Training Program]. You know? And that is—I guess I was told that you transfer someplace for a year, and you can get paid by training—being trained. Like if I wanted to do some carpentry or some plumbing at the University, and if I don't like it, I can come back. If I do like it, I can stick with them. I was thinking about experiencing that 'cause it's a lot of stuff to do there, a lot of stuff. 'Cause every day you don't feel like cleaning up.
>
> …This is—I'm not gonna be here forever, ya know? And I see the breakdown of a lot of people's bodies too. Some people need—they have shoulder pains, they have wrist pains, back pains, so I'm not—you know?—I try to work with the equipment properly instead of—you know?—bending over a lot. You know? I found—I found different ways. Yeah, so if I had to train someone, I would teach them the ways that I do.
>
> And as far as keeping my mind right, you gotta be on something positive before you go to work anyway. And I hate to say it, but it's really good sometimes when my supervisor doesn't come to the building, because it kinda keeps shit down. 'Cause sometimes the supervisor's, they're over here and then they wanna come over here. And if I told a worker something, then she wants to come over and try to be nosey. She used to be a custodian too, so they—people try to play with your head a lot over there. I just think about a lot of crazy stuff [like pretending she and her coworkers are on a reality television program]. It's just crazy. Yeah, it—it keeps me going. It keeps me going. 'Cause I wasn't gonna' let the job break me down. And I'm still not gonna' let it break me down. No. Mhmm.

In the above excerpt, Kiki begins by describing an Internal Training Program (ITP) provided by

Midwestern University (separate from CleanSci). The ITP "is a career development program

designed to provide training and experience to qualified custodial employees who desire upward

mobility into maintenance mechanic and grounds positions. Employees in this program go

through a rigorous training schedule that combines on-the-job training with classroom work." It

is not clear which employees are eligible to participate in the ITP or how competitive, selective,

attractive, or effective the program is. Her desire to participate in this program comes from

dissatisfaction with the monotony associated with her work, especially given the lack of task

rotation prescribed by CleanSci. Further, she worries that continuing in this line of work—even after just a few years in the position—would lead to undesired wear-and-tear on her body.

Kiki goes on to describe (again) her perspective on her current position as a temporary job, despite her promotion from a temporary position to full-time status. Although CleanSci promises greater safety and health, cleaners who work within the CleanSci system still suffer from occupational injuries and chronic pain/strain. As such, Kiki endeavors to distance herself from her work, so she does not succumb to the same painful fate she witnesses among her coworkers, as well as to remain committed to her larger, extra-work goals. Distancing oneself from work can also be a strategy to minimize the negative impact of the stigma associated with dirty work. Such distancing also does 'other work' as well, including preserving one's health and wellbeing. While promising to herself that custodial work is not a lifelong career—"I'm not gonna be here forever, ya know?"—Kiki disaffiliates from coworkers with longer tenure. For Kiki, these coworkers' bodies are "breaking", and she is firm in her commitment to avoid a similar fate. In this way, she also assumes personal responsibility for her occupational health, perhaps implying that bodily injury and decline are inevitable features of custodial work.

Kiki also returns to the notion of wellbeing throughout her narrative, and subscribes to a holistic understanding of health that includes physiological and psychological components. Kiki feels most "well" at work when her supervisor is unobtrusive—for example, in another building or refraining from frequent calls on the two-way radio. However, given the frequent and seemingly relentless nature of supervisor interactions (and surveillance), Kiki also engages in reactive and precautionary measures to maintain her wellbeing. To keep her "mind right", Kiki listens to uplifting media during her work shift, including religious leaders and motivational speakers. These voices coming through her earbuds are a welcome presence during otherwise

solitary working conditions. Additionally, uplifting media provides motivating discourse that strongly counters the *demotivating* messages embedded in CleanSci organizational talk and supervisor practices.

Kiki also engages in creative "play" at work, including "crazy stuff" – like pretending that she and her coworkers are on a reality television program:

> I mean, you—sometimes you just think, like wow, if someone wrote a story about my life or let's say we did some type of reality show in here. You know? My mind is just somewhere else sometimes, you know? And I think, "Hm, this would be funny." Custodians' life reality show. And then somebody [a custodian] will go in [to a bathroom], every time you go in the bathroom you don't see the custodian, you'll just hear this "bleep, bleep, bleep, bleep" [laughter]. I just think about a lot of crazy stuff. It's just crazy. Yeah, it—it keeps me going. It keeps me going. 'Cause I wasn't gonna let the job break me down. And I'm still not gonna let it break me down. No. Mhmm.

Here, Kiki engages in creative play where she imagines her job as a comedic performance for an amused and respectful audience. Such play ultimately promotes Kiki's self-preservation in a job that otherwise lacks dignity, mainly due to the building environment, labor process, and work relationships (namely, supervisor). This play not only provides Kiki with amusing content to think about on the job, but also "keeps [her] going" in a job that would otherwise "break [her] down." Together, Kiki's micro-practices of agency—including an intersectional awareness, organizational citizenship behavior, job crafting, recalibrating, and playing/imagining—help her create greater joy, meaning, and satisfaction at work, while minimizing the negative impact of racism, sexism, boredom and monotony, and surveillance and other negative treatment from supervisors.

Despite these micro-practices of agency, Kiki still struggled to navigate some aspects of her work environment. Specifically, she shared some stories about how the reorganization of custodial work under the CleanSci system might have created unintended consequences.

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Specifically, the organization's quest for efficiency and environmental sustainability might carry

other consequences, including implications for custodians' safety and wellbeing:

> [O]ur building locks and shuts down at like what? 5:00? It shuts down about 5:00. And it was this guy, he was in the building – he looked like a student, right? So I had to call—I ended up calling [campus security] because he was sitting there and me and my partner was like, well he's a student, he's probably studying. He was sitting at the computer. I walked by, and then he did something. He was like, "Psst." So I was like, okay, he's not a student, 'cause he's fucking with me [laughter]. That's what I was thinking. So I go to the elevator and then I come back, we're about to go on break and the guy's still sitting on the computer. My partner, he was like, "Eh, he's not bothering anybody. He's probably just doing his schoolwork." I go take a break, I'm in a break room and I kept hearing something. What is that noise? And I'm wondering if my partner's having a hard time with something 'cause I hear a whole bunch of noise. My break is over, I go down the hallway, I come back and I was calling my partner's name and he didn't answer. And was like, I know he hear me. So I walk around the corner, and the guy—he got into a—a staff lounge, okay? Normally when we—when we clean, we keep the doors open and that lets the other person know that—to go in and vacuum.

> So the guy got in there—this guy come out [laughter], he come out eating food. We don't even go in the staff lounge and everything that happens in that building, or everything that happens in the building, they always blame it on the custodian. When things are missing, when lights are still left on, just anything. So I stopped; I wasn't gonna confront him, he was just like—he was just—he had to be about—what?—maybe 25—maybe. And I said, "Are you supposed to be in there?" And he said, "We can't go in here?" And I said, "No, that's a staff lounge." I said, "You're not supposed to be in there." He was still walking towards me, I'm walking backwards – I'm keeping my distance. I said, "You know you're not supposed to be in here." And he said, "Oh, no, I didn't know that." He's still munching and eatin'. So I'm walking, I'm looking for my partner, and I'm walking. He was like, "Yeah, I'm about to leave. I'm about to leave." I said, "Well, they're gonna call the police on you if…" …and I was a little… scared.

> Because the lights—the lights—some of the lights are on a timer. So when I saw him, it was dim. When I saw him—so he walking towards me, I'm backing up walking, had my phone in my back pocket and I'm walking and he looking at my phone. I thought, aw, shit, he gonna snatch my phone outta my hand. And I started walking to the elevator and he's like—he said, "It's cool baby, I don't want no problems. Baby, it's cool." So, I walked downstairs, I don't know where the hell he went but the police came and… but I'm more cautious now and I don't keep my—my Bluetooth up too loud. And… I don't know. I don't know. That was weird to me. Just by him lurking around.

> But I had heard stories, that some of the homeless people, once they get into the building, it gets cold. So when you open your closets, be careful. They'll sleep in the bathrooms to keep warm, they'll sleep in like the little closet areas and my—my equipment and everything is in the closet so I would hate to open the door and somebody's in there.

As described in Chapter III, *environmental responsibility* is one discursive frame through which CleanSci justifies its institutional logics and organizational strategies. One marketed benefit of the CleanSci system is the ability for facilities managers to save costs by engaging in certain practices, such as turning off the lights on floors that are not being cleaned in a given moment. However, this practice also assumes stability and consistency in cleaning work, and might make it difficult for custodians to, say, return to an area that was cleaned previously and/or retrieve equipment from another area. Indeed, these (un)intended consequences of strategies rooted in environmental sustainability and fiscal conservatism may undermine feelings of safety and wellbeing among cleaners. For example, Kiki describes how the building she cleans at night is dark, and how this can lead to "surprises" (e.g., unexpected encounters with building occupants or visitors) or even harmful situations (e.g., building squatters).

Repeated throughout the CleanSci archives is a stated commitment to the health and safety of custodians. Yet, safety is primarily understood in terms of chemical exposure to cleaning agents that CleanSci prescribes. Little attention is given to other occupational hazards that cleaners commonly experience, including exposure to chemicals in the building environment that are not cleaning agents (e.g., chemistry labs) and potentially dangerous interactions with building occupants or unwelcome visitors. Further, certain practices prescribed by CleanSci themselves may undermine cleaners' safety, including keeping the lights off and mandating repetitive work. Although CleanSci claims to standardize and streamline the process of work, little attention is given to unexpected (yet predictable) aspects of the larger social context of cleaning work, including social interactions that cleaners may have. Kiki's cleaning partner (a man) would not always take her concerns seriously, suggesting that she "brush off" incidents where she encountered strange people on the job. Kiki relied on her own intuition, as well as her

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lived experience as a Black woman, to handle such situations at work. Her livelihood was at stake; both her personal safety, as well as her job security (e.g., managing building visitors who steal food, a behavior of which she could be accused and endure consequences). This narrative also reflects the contradictions and paradoxes of visibility that Kiki experiences at work. For Kiki, invisibility often connotes *lack* of safety; the dark renders her invisible, making it difficult to anticipate and adequately respond to unexpected events. Yet, she also intentionally distances (if not invisibilizes) herself from coworkers and supervisors to minimize interactions with people who may disrespect her, especially on the basis of her race and gender. And finally, her experiences with supervisors reflect intrusive hypervisibility, especially given Kiki's own hypervisible identities as a Black woman in a mostly White workforce, campus, and town.

Narrative #4: Chad

Chad identified as a 49-year-old White man living with his wife, a hairdresser, and their teenage daughter. At the time of our conversation, Chad had been working at the field site for over twenty years, and had worked under approximately fourteen different supervisors during that time. He initially learned of the job from his father and uncle, who were also custodians at the same site. Chad's father told him "it's a pretty good job, good retirement, good benefits, people are nice and decent." Imagining a conversation with his father, Chad then stated, "'Hey dad I've listened to you all my life so' might as well go and follow the same rule, you know, and [I] followed him in here along with my uncle. My uncle also worked here. So, that was how I got in here." Chad is among the rare group of Tier 2 custodians, "one of the old ones. They don't hire [Tier] 2's anymore. They're hiring [Tier] 1's, to save money, and lots of six-month temps." At the field site, "Tier 1" custodians perform 'light' duties, including surface cleaning (e.g., mirrors, toilets), vacuuming, dusting, stocking, and collecting/transporting waste. "Tier 2"

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custodians, who are compensated more, perform 'heavier' duties including waxing, stripping, mopping, and shoveling. However, my observation showed me that the boundaries between the workloads of "Tier 1" and "Tier 2" custodians are often slippery, and often fall along gender lines.

By virtue of his expertise accumulated after two decades on the job, Chad was well-suited to observe firsthand the institutional shifts endemic to a neoliberal political economy and neoliberal management of universities. The dominant tension in Chad's narrative is the temporal contrast he draws between 'the way things were' before the implementation of CleanSci and 'how things are now' in the wake of the CleanSci system. I began our conversation by asking Chad there was anywhere specific he would like to start. He offered the following opening statement that demonstrates his *temporal comparative perspective* and idealization of the past:

> In a nutshell we're talking about the treatment of custodial staff at [university], and again I would like to reiterate that during my first five years—wonderful place to work. I enjoyed the staff, the department I worked under, facilities in [the] medical campus. I enjoyed them all immensely. It just seems that as the years have gone by that the era of friendly, you know, people and friendly managers and friendly facilitators kind of went by the wayside. And things are more like—the money's all gone. They're taking money away and with all that went all the happiness. Then it was more or less—the work became so important to them that they're…they lived every minute to make sure that we were doing everything that, you know, was on the list and I had never been so… underneath a microscope and had to worry about my professional performance, ever. And now I was and that created a lot of stress and a lot of uneasy feelings, you know throughout every—for everybody. So that was an issue that I had to get over.

Above, and throughout his narrative, Chad uses time and temporality to structure his narrative. His narrative interpretation is clearly demarcated in distinct stages of time. He begins by sharing his expectation for our interview—that we are generally speaking about how custodians are treated at the field site—and he wanted to begin on a 'positive' note, expressing his 'original' joy for his work. His first five years as a custodian seem to be the baseline by which he appraises future work experiences. Despite the changes he goes on to express, he still

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anchors these experiences with a past sense of work that was joyful and meaningful. He

attributes his original happiness to positive relationships with fellow staff members, the

customers he served, and the facilities personnel with whom he interfaced; in short, positive

relationships, consistent with the importance of interpersonal connections at work (Dutton &

Heaphy, 2003, pp. e.g.,). Next, Chad uses the transition phrase "It just seems that" to contrast

his current lived experience with his initial experience at work. For Chad, the previous "era of

friendly [work]" bygone.

Chad attributes these changes in work to mounting financial pressures faced by the

institution, and that these financial pressures directly impair workers' wellbeing. Further, these

changes ushered in an ethos of surveillance. Chad experienced this increased surveillance as

objectification, feeling as though he were "underneath a microscope", which he had never before

experienced at work. This was a watershed moment for Chad's sense-making about dignity and

wellbeing at work; along with surveillance came feelings of anxiety and stress, for him as well as

his coworkers. Foreshadowing managerial neglect of these issues, Chad concluded his remarks

by summarizing surveillance and stress as "an issue that I had to get over", also assuming

personable responsibility for larger changes occurring in his workgroup, organization, and

industry.

These opening remarks in Chad's narrative capture how forces of neoliberalism,

scientific management, and organizational policy changes trickle-down to shape the daily lives

of frontline personnel. Chad first started to notice these shifts about one decade ago, when

managers stopped rehiring new employees for vacant positions. Over the past several years,

Chad's workgroup

> …went from eight to five and now we have a full-time temporary so there are only four
> full-time people there. So every six months I have to spend my first two or three weeks

with a new person re-training them. I don't get paid to train people, and they just throw them in at us and unfortunately it doesn't matter how well they work out. It doesn't matter who they know. It's six months and they're gone. So unfortunately it's a vicious cycle that I'm constantly training people now, and, you know, I'm not getting paid to do that and I don't think I—I don't mind helping but I shouldn't have to hold someone's hand after putting twenty years in and making sure that each person that comes through the door has the full nine yards, only so they can leave.

…The happier things [about my job] again go back to my first five years here, being part of a team and the training that we got, amazing. None of the kids, or folk that come through the door now [i.e., new hires], don't get not one percent of the overall training that we got and that's sad. I'm thinking to myself, "Did we [at the university] really have that much money? Did the university or department really have so much money back in the day that they could offer us all this cool training?" and I mean training on everything, so… it was offered to us. We all took advantage of it. Now the poor people that come through the door [as new hires], they don't get anything [in terms of training]. They get us [more seasoned personnel], [whereas] there was a once upon a time where they used to have a place at the warehouse where new people would go and they would spend the first three days. It was like a break in period. They would show them all of the equipment and they would make them clean stuff out there at the warehouse you know and it would just be a nice little area for them to kind of get their feet wet.

Nope, they just throw them to us raw now. These people have no idea what is—So again our first day or two is like making sure you always got your rubber gloves on. Don't ever touch the yellow barrels with the magenta symbols, you know the radiation stuff. Never go next to the chemicals, watch the chords blah, blah, blah. It's on us [longer-tenured cleaners] because we're looking out for these people. Our supervisor is in the office, right? They're relying on us to make sure that not only is the safety of this person, who's brand new and knows absolutely nothing. I mean, we're basically giving them the orientation. I don't get paid to do that but again I feel…I don't know, I feel some type of responsibility to make sure that these new people don't get themselves hurt, you know, because we're in medical research and it can happen. There is something dangerous around every corner so if you're not aware of it things can hurt you. So that's stressful to say the least.

Here Chad narrates an experience that cleaners in many other organizations have experienced. In response to high turnover and curtailed budgets, many facilitators refrain from replacing all vacancies that arise from cleaners who quit, retire, or are fired. When vacancies are filled, temporary workers are often hired. Unlike full-time employees, who typically go more extensive training—whether under the CleanSci system or not—the training of temporary workers is often outsourced to "old-timers" like Chad. Chad—like many others in his position—was not provided

with training, support, or financial compensation to assume this new responsibility of (re)training new, temporary workers. Further, frequent turnover among temporary workers exacerbates these extra-role duties placed upon Chad. Chad's managers appealed to his perfect disciplinary record, strong work ethic, and long tenure at the organization.

These fluctuations to the workforce, coupled with the shift from team cleaning to zone cleaning, may also erode interpersonal dynamics and teamwork among custodians. Chad emphasized that "team camaraderie was an absolute key for our success in the early days", but the reorganization of work because of CleanSci made such camaraderie difficult, if not impossible. He laments his intensified work load as a result of CleanSci, both direct consequences (e.g., mono-tasking) as well as indirect (e.g., new informal and unpaid responsibilities, like training). Chad also feels immense responsibility over new hires, especially given their immediate work environment (a medical research facility with potentially dangerous equipment and chemicals). Moreover, this new organization of work presents new sources of stress for Chad. Chad adheres to a 'tabula rasa' perspective on cleaners—that is, any person has the aptitude to become a cleaner, provided they undergo sufficient training: "I don't know if it takes a special person to be a custodian. I think it—you do have to be able to, you know, bite your lip every once and a while." Here and throughout his narrative, Chad describes the self-silencing he has learned throughout the years on his job. He rarely voices issues to management, given past experiences of not being 'seen' or 'heard'.

When I began our conversation by asking Chad to describe his typical job responsibilities, he began his response by describing his work "prior to the [CleanSci] program," thus demarcating two distinct stages of work (before and after the adoption and implementation of the program). Chad described the old zone cleaning system, which since has been replaced by

CleanSci. In addition to describing core job tasks—sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, pulling trash, communicating with customers—Chad described the lack of prestige he anticipated he would encounter on the job ("I knew I wasn't going to be looked at as one of the premier staff or professors or whatnot, but I was lucky enough to mingle with them"). Language of 'luck' and 'mingling' suggests the palpable class divides that permeate organizations, especially when cross-class encounters arise (e.g., B. Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013).

Despite these cross-class tensions, Chad expressed that he never encountered conflict with his customers, but rather with facilities and management. According to Chad, highers-up in facilities management "always want 'more, more, more', and in the service industry it's so hard to judge." Others have noted the difficulty in measuring quality and performance in the cleaning industry, which largely involves the removal of foreign materials for health and aesthetics. Further, Chad feels the mounting pressures experienced by cleaners and managers in other sites, who experience heightened demand for superior service with fewer resources. As described by Chad,

> It's hard to record exactly what [cleaners] are doing on a day-to-day basis. If I was making parts you could count my parts at the end of the day and say 'Hey, he put a full day in he made a hundred parts.' Well when you're in the service industry the only thing you can do is look in my area and go 'It's clean' and that's—what's the word? It can be clean in someone's eyes and not-so-clean in other people's eyes. So it's a matter of opinion—and perspective.

Above, Chad describes the challenges of measuring performance, when the very act of doing one's labor renders it invisible (Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2017a). One justification for implementation of the CleanSci system is its attempt to standardize and benchmark performance, given the challenges of evaluating and measuring cleanliness. Although CleanSci offers highly visible performance metrics (e.g., a checklist with hundreds of dimensions), other members of the organization may disagree with these metrics—including cleaners and customers. According

to Chad, customers complained more about cleaners' performance after the implementation of CleanSci, suggesting that even clearly defined performance standards can still engender stress and conflict at work.

Chad also describes the importance of incorporating custodians' lived experience (e.g., cultivated knowledge and expertise) when evaluating performance. Chad expressed disdain

> …when they [supervisors and facilities executives] come and intervene and try to tell us [cleaners] that we don't know what we're doing and I'm thinking to myself, "I did this for twenty years, what do you mean I don't know what I'm doing?" Of course we know. We're the ones that are doing it. We're in the trench every day and they [supervisors and CleanSci representatives] want to come by and look and go, (in a posh voice) "Well that's not right." Well, you know, we've been doing it like this, no complaints [from customers]. Everyone [customers] loves it. They come in to do Q and A's so the people in the Q and A's think we're doing our jobs but the upfront manager, or supervisor, isn't so happy.

> …We no longer collaborate with other universities like we have in the past to share new ideas, work practices, different chemicals, floor machines, etc. These are a few things that made us proud to be a part of the university.

> … You know, [CleanSci] claimed that my dust mop is a polluter tool. It made more of a mess than it did clean up. We had a hard time, you know, believing that but this is what we were taught and there's so many—They tried to show us that their microfiber mops work better than Old Kentucky mops, and again that's a matter of opinion and I can clean with both really good, you know, very well but he [director of facilities] made us stick to the [CleanSci] program.

Chad talks about custodians' expertise, which is invalidated by the performance evaluation metrics prescribed by CleanSci, and relegated in favor of managers' opinions (many of whom who lack cleaning experience and had prior work experience in factory/plant settings). According to Chad, CleanSci ignores and erases the valuable knowledge cultivated by cleaners who are "in the trench every day." He feels infantilized by the CleanSci system, feeling that his expertise has been invalidated and ignored ("…what do you mean I don't know what I'm doing?"). Chad and his colleagues "had a hard time…believing" CleanSci's prescribed approach to cleaning, which often contradicted cleaners' cultivated knowledge on the job. Chad felt that

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the approach to cleaning advocated by CleanSci is "a matter of opinion", and expressed that he and his colleagues were just as effective and happy, if not more so, prior to the implementation of CleanSci. This is also reflected in the language Chad uses to describe how he and his colleagues experience work under CleanSci: they were forced to "stick to" the program, even though facilities did not have the buy-in of many cleaners.

Abiding by the prescribed CleanSci work process also destroys opportunities for communication, community, and collaboration with cleaners at other sites. CleanSci creates a "silo" to prescribe and standardize cleaners' work, whereas in the past Chad had opportunities to "talk shop" and exchange best practices with colleagues at other institutions. As a result, Chad and other cleaners suffer: lower pride, poorer quality of work, and fewer opportunities to develop connections with colleagues. When discussing these changes, Chad again echoes the stress associated with the organizational dilemma of 'doing more with less' time, money, and human resources: "They want us to do more, and it's like what more do you expect us to do; especially, when they keep taking people away. So that makes it difficult." He goes on to describe CleanSci as follows:

> Once [CleanSci] came online they liked the team idea but it was structured so much different…Yeah it was structured differently than what we were doing. It was no longer its own. It was individual jobs. 'Here it is. Go do it,' you know. Then these people would have to go do the same exact thing for four hours through the entire building. Um, the other idea of having—of doing zone work, and being able to do it piece by piece with the entire group is…We felt that the customers were getting by far a better service…

Above, Chad explains contradictions in a team-cleaning approach. The language of 'team' suggests collegiality, collaboration, and effectiveness. Yet, Chad has come to understand that the new "team-cleaning" organization of work often utilizes an 'assembly line' approach whereby team members perform repetitive tasks ("individual jobs"). This change to the organization of work also changed the *meaning* of work for cleaners, who now under the role of 'Specialist'

might think of their primary role as a 'vacuumer' or 'restroom cleaner' rather than 'custodian'. Although CleanSci and the field site concluded that the CleanSci system was a more effective and efficient approach, Chad draws upon his embodied knowledge to cast doubt on this claim, instead contending that the quality of service was superior under the zone cleaning organization of work. This was in part due to the greater visibility afforded to cleaners who were working in the zone cleaning system. Indeed, the greatest accomplishment of Chad's career was receiving an award for "Team of the Year", a recognition program no longer in existence under CleanSci.

Chad then went on to sense-make the reason for the policy shift, ultimately attributing the CleanSci implementation to a money-saving venture. Moreover, Chad states that one of the CleanSci employees was affiliated with state legislature and was able to influence policy in a way that protected and oversold the CleanSci program. However, Chad also is keenly aware of the limited generalizability of cleaning management programs. For Chad, programs such as CleanSci "can work for [the pilot site] but you know some things just don't work everywhere. Our whole theory is why did you mess up something that was so good to you in the first place?" In this way Chad again appeals to the collective expertise of custodians ("Our whole theory"), whose lived experiences positions them as well-suited to inform organizational change, yet are rarely involved in such decision-making processes. Chad acknowledges the financial pressures faced by institutions, describing him and his colleagues as previously "spoiled" by the availability of effective, high-quality resources (e.g., cleaning agents, equipment). Even though he works on the 'front lines' rather than in the 'office' of facilities, Chad is aware of the economic precarity that may have resulted in the implementation of CleanSci:

> I understand the reason why [CleanSci] came in on the financial end. It was all to save money. Our whole theory is why did you mess up something that was so good to you in the first place? For the opportunity to save money is why they did. I can honestly say that the University back then was buying us the chemicals that we needed to do our job and

we were probably a little spoiled on that end, lot of neat chemicals that did great work but it was the expense. They needed to figure out how to recoup some money and doing [CleanSci] with their chemicals definitely recouped them money. …The chemicals were not really [effective] but again we understand that money's an issue. Budgets are issues.

Despite financial pressures faced by institutions, Chad maintains that the CleanSci program ultimately does more harm than good, again appealing to the collective wisdom of custodians. For example, Chad described how cleaners reacted to changes in equipment because of the CleanSci program's implementation:

Does anybody like the new chemicals? No. Do we think they're very effective? No. Have we tried everything to go around actually using them? Yes, we have—I can be honest.

This excerpt also reveals ways that cleaners sought to enact agency against a policy change that they viewed as eroding their quality of life at work, as well as the quality of service provision. He uses the third-person plural to convey that these observations are not his alone, but rather more widely held by coworkers. He and his coworkers view the chemicals prescribed by CleanSci as less effective, despite their purported benefits for occupational and environmental health. To resist the perceived lower quality resulting from the implementation of the CleanSci program, Chad described micro-practices of agency such as hoarding old equipment and using personal funds to purchase the "old" cleaning agents used prior to CleanSci. Yet, Chad's enactment of agency was tempered by his social location and lack of job security. Chad expressed frequent worry about losing his job, especially given personnel changes he had been witnessing. He also lacked a college education, which led him to believe he would encounter difficulties finding an equally stable and well compensated position elsewhere. Thus, participating in CleanSci was a 'necessary evil' to retain his job and support his family:

The program itself, [CleanSci], I'm doing it because I need to keep my job, you know. I can't just not do it and say I'm not going to use the chemicals, say I'm not going to use the equipment and try to clean the building with the old stuff because my management is going to harp on me. That's not the way, but when it comes right down to it when the QA person comes through and they go, "Wow, you guys are doing a real good job," how do

they know if I'm using their stuff [laughter] or my stuff? All they know is that the building is clean, so.

According to Chad (and CleanSci), it is challenging to appraise and evaluate cleaning work. Chad further contends that it would be difficult to assess whether a clean environment was attained by adhering to the CleanSci program or following other (e.g., older) procedures. He believes that supervisors and building occupants alike could achieve—and notice—a clean building environment under the old zone cleaning system that predated CleanSci:

> And any one of my occupants would stand behind me and say, "This place is clean every time these people leave" so that was always—We always had them [customers] in the back supporting us but you can't fight, you know. You can't fight the big conglomerate [CleanSci] that says "We're going to go to this program. You guys gotta go with us. If you don't, there's the door."

> What kind of response is that? I need my job. Medium income here in America is what, 51 [thousand dollars]? And they're paying us 33 [thousand dollars]. I shouldn't have to be stressed to this point if I'm not even making the average. But they would tell you, "Oh we're very competitive." Really? I know there are universities out there that pay a little bit more and it's never about the money. I would take a dollar less, just treat me like I'm that, you know, and I'm all that and you appreciate me and it's not much of an issue. But you know the way our pay scale goes it doesn't even keep up with the cost of living.

For Chad, the risks of resisting CleanSci often outweigh the benefits. Throughout his narrative he expressed a lack of trust and faith in his supervisors, facilities managers, and union, feeling as though these entities were not receptive to hearing issues raised by cleaners. Over time, Chad learned to 'shut up' and 'deal with' negative treatment, whether disrespect from supervisors, subpar wages, substandard quality of life, or negative changes to the organization of his work under CleanSci. For Chad and his colleagues, the implementation of CleanSci represented a loss and dignity injury. His yearning for the past is a form of mourning for a time when he experienced greater voice and dignity at work.

Chad continues by saying "We had a hard time, you know, believing" information about cleaning practices provided by CleanSci. He concedes that CleanSci "might be a little bit of a

change to the better…[but] I don't think my building's any cleaner today than it was ten years

ago, so…". He goes on to acknowledge the immense financial resources available at the

institution that are earmarked for divisions other than facilities ("There's lots of money here at

this university, lots of endowment money and I understand that's for the kids, you know…").

Here Chad also acknowledges the unspoken hierarchy of members of the university community.

Chad (accurately) regards the university as wealthy, but that much of the money is "for the kids".

Using this infantilizing language to describe students (and, perhaps, staff as well) helps Chad

make sense of his 'lowly' status in the university hierarchy. Also embedded in his discourse is an

implicit class critique, whereby cleaners are not recognized as important or valuable members of

the university community, and by extension are undeserving of a share of the "endowment

money".

Although there "might be a little bit of" improvements after the implementation of

CleanSci, Chad generally expresses disdain for the change. Another reason he provides for his

dissatisfaction involves changes to cleaners' equipment:

> I am still in awe of the hundreds of thousands [of] dollars' worth of equipment that was
> sacrificed for [CleanSci]. We had the best equipment that money could buy but it was the
> actions of a few that ruined it for the rest of us. Management felt that the custodial carts
> were old and dated. (They may have been but definitely better than the plastic ones we
> have now); the stainless-steel carts cost $900.00 and would last a life time. They were
> sold to a scrapper for $25 apiece. The one I had looked brand-new after fifteen years
> because I took care of it. Unfortunately [facilities] has a huge turnover rate in personnel
> that proved to be the reason for the mistreatment of all the equipment that is given to us
> to use. So they replaced it all with plastic tools.

Equipment changes because of the CleanSci system have eroded Chad's quality of life at

work, in addition to making some aspects of his work more difficult. He expresses pride in the

way he maintained his equipment, only for this equipment to be treated with 'disrespect',

discarded for a fraction of its value. Chad seemed to take this change personally; he expressed

feeling just as disposable as the equipment, and started to feel this way after the implementation

of CleanSci. Chad is speaking literally as well as metaphorically. He genuinely feels shock and disappointment by the changes made to his equipment, but these feelings extend to himself and the treatment of cleaners more generally. The original organization of work was superior, in terms of the equipment provided and respectful treatment of personnel. But under CleanSci, the equipment is "plastic"—cheap and disposable, which is how cleaners themselves are treated under the new system of work. Here, plastic functions as a synecdoche for larger erosions he witnesses and experiences amidst the CleanSci implementation. Chad goes on to describe the discontent, loss, and indignity that he and his coworkers felt during the initial CleanSci rollout:

> We were very…irritated the initial day we came back to the building and we realized they'd taken our, you know, thousand-dollar Rolls Royce stainless steel carts and replaced them with plastic Rubber Maid things that were not really high quality. …and again these are just standard old crazy things that people don't think would mean a lot to a custodian but they do.

Chad again uses metaphorical language to contrast the old and new work equipment: "thousand-dollar Rolls Royce stainless steel carts" and "plastic Rubber Maid things", respectively. Describing old equipment in terms of a luxury car clearly conveys the high value and prestige that Chad and his coworkers placed on those work tools (especially considering a basic Rolls Royce model costs nearly ten times the annual salary of custodians at the field site). Having his "Rolls Royce" taken away and sold for a fraction of its value is experienced as a multifaceted form of disrespect for Chad. Managerial disregard for the high-quality equipment represents a dismissal of cleaners' preferences for work tools, as well as their knowledge about and respect for high-quality equipment. This excerpt also reflects the relatively low amount of control that Chad experiences in his work. Access to high-quality equipment helps him and his colleagues work more efficiently and effectively. Chad experiences the replacement of that equipment with lower-quality versions as an affront to his knowledge, preferences, authority,

satisfaction, and productivity. Chad and his colleagues expressed similar feelings when the

CleanSci system resulted in other equipment changes:

> They wanted to "eighty-six" the Kentucky Mop; they felt that that was a "polluter's tool." It's only a "polluter's tool" if the person using it is using it in such a manner where it turns it into a "polluter's tool." We all know what dirty water looks like, right? You can't mop a floor with dirty water because it just spreads out the dirty water. We all know this, it doesn't take a lot. We know that when you use a rag you can only use it for so long because it gets dirty. Now you're actually putting it back, right? You know, the wetter and nastier it gets now you're just smearing it up. We know this, so for them to come by and say, 'You guys are polluting this University." We took—I took offense to that hardcore because it's like, you go look in any one of my areas I'll lick the floor [laughter]. I'll show you that it's that clean, you know.

Again, Chad expresses a clear preference for the 'old' equipment supplanted by new,

inferior products under the CleanSci program. Chad felt personally insulted by the discourse that

CleanSci representatives used to describe the old equipment (e.g., "polluter's tool"). Chad felt

that this description was an insult to his knowledge and expertise cultivated over two decades in

commercial cleaning work. As described in the previous chapter, CleanSci appealed to discourse

about custodians as naïve and unskilled to help legitimize its product. Chad strategically engages

with this discourse to express agency against the CleanSci system. Specifically, when he states,

"We all know this, it doesn't take a lot", he appeals to the common sense of cleaners to

counteract the contradictory beliefs espoused by proponents of the CleanSci system, beliefs that

Chad perceives to be inferior and ineffective when translated into the practice of cleaning.

Elsewhere in his narrative Chad again emphasized that he experienced diminished work quality

and service provision under CleanSci:

> We're not, like, getting brand-new equipment [from CleanSci] to make our jobs any easier. We're just given the standard stuff that [CleanSci] had, like, "Here, do it with these tools" and it's, like, these tools are going to make my job longer and I don't think they're any more effective because if you're used to driving a Mustang for twenty years and all of a sudden they put you in a Corvette. Yeah they're both sports cars but they're two different cars so you have to get used to it and getting used to it for some people was just impossible they just couldn't make the jump over, you know. The chemicals were so irritating because they didn't do what they said they were going to do, or they made more

work for us. They gave us a bathroom cleaner and it was supposed to go into our mop water and our grout lines are light grey and after about three months of using this "great" chemical designed by professionals it ended up turning all of our grout black.

Despite the branding of the new equipment prescribed by CleanSci as higher in quality, safety, and effectiveness, frontline cleaners like Chad do not share these perceptions. Instead, Chad felt that the quality of his work diminished under CleanSci. His work took longer and was worse for the wear. He acknowledges that there will be an inevitable 'learning curve' when organizational changes occur: "you have to get used to it and getting used to it for some people was just impossible". But even accounting for this 'learning curve' and transitional period, Chad still felt degradations in his work process and service quality. For example, the "environmentally preferable" cleaning agents prescribed by CleanSci caused skin irritation for many cleaners, in addition to generating grimy buildup and discoloration to building surfaces that customers noticed (and complained about). As Chad acknowledges, even if there were overall measurable improvements as a result of the CleanSci system, these improvement metrics must not have accounted for a variety of factors, including cleaners' health, customer experiences, equipment preferences, and the experience of the changed organization of work. As Chad described earlier, the training component of CleanSci was lackluster, especially compared to the 'old' training model. He shared that "The education of university employees on the [CleanSci] program is nonexistent", which further eroded the quality of his work, including interpersonal relations with customers and customer complaints. Chad summarized his experience as follows:

> I would just like to think that the University would look at us custodians not as just a mere replaceable item and I think this day and age—the way they're using the temps is basically just showing that to everybody. It's like "Now, look if you're below a paygrade three or paygrade four here at the university we're never going to look out for you people because you're so replaceable and, you know, even though you put twenty years in you're just still so replaceable." And that's painful, you know…I want to stay here because, like I said, I like my occupants. I like my coworkers. The job ain't that bad. I do a go—I do well at it. It's just I don't need all the extra, you know, issues with facilities and management and some of the other departments, not wanting to play, you know, the

right game and that's treating us a little bit better.

…So, in saying that, I would just like to see the reflection of, again, a little bit of that respect for the guys that are doing what nobody else wants to do—not getting paid a lot of money to do it but I come in here I do it every day so don't treat me like I'm a freaking walk-off mat, at least treat me like I'm a poster on a wall…a little cleaner.

Chad places blame on the university for his eroded quality of service provision and life. Although he strongly criticizes the CleanSci system, he ultimately faults decision-makers in the facilities and operations department for entering a long-term contract with CleanSci, especially without consulting the cleaners who work in the CleanSci "trenches". Further, Chad criticizes the university for enacting practices that contribute to economic precarity, including the replacement of most position vacancies with temporary workers. More recently he has felt "replaceable" and expendable in his work—as a direct result of the reorganization of his work. He, like many of his coworkers I surveyed and conversed with, expected to be mistreated when entering this 'dishonorable' and 'unrespectable' line of work. Yet he did not anticipate disrespect from facilities management and supervisors, whether direct (e.g., dismissing his concerns) or indirect (e.g., altering the workforce by replacing full-time positions with temporary ones). Perhaps in part given his social location as a White man, Chad had no complaints about how he was treated by coworkers and customers. What was most upsetting to him were larger shifts occurring in the reorganization of his work.

Discussion

The four case studies presented in this analysis offer a "snapshot" into daily life in cleaning work, especially as mediated by (a) work within and outside of the CleanSci system and (b) the social location that cleaners embody. I spoke with four adults who were in their 40s at the time of our conversations. This is important given the temporal nature of narratives and narrative construction (Cunliffe et al., 2004; McAdams, 1996). Jay, Toni, Kiki, and Chad were born in the

1970s, which means that their developmental trajectories mirrored the rise and spread of neoliberalism in the U.S. political economy. This makes them uniquely suited to comment on the lived experience of work in an epoch of neoliberal policy and ideology. Their narratives also help to triangulate the content analysis described in Chapter III, and help "breathe life" (Dutton, 2003) into the archives. Combining multiple modes of data collection—such as archival analysis and narrative inquiry—is one approach to data triangulation (B. L. Berg, 2004; Seale, 2012). The content analysis reflects the *intention* of CleanSci through that organization's own eyes (mouth), whereas the case study reflects the *implementation* of CleanSci through the eyes (and hands, noses, and mouths) of cleaners who actually use this system (or are exempt from it). This shows the inherently *incomplete* nature of CleanSci implementation. Because it's an *idealized* system, it cannot ever be fully or perfectly implemented. Indeed, custodians demonstrate how they're still able to mold, twist, and tweak the "prescribed" practices expected of them. In the quest for *prescription* CleanSci fails to understand the *phenomenology* of cleaning – how it feels, smells, works, etc. In the following sections, I explore the three key themes that emerged from participants' narratives of their lived experience: how CleanSci shapes the experience and organization of work, how cleaners create and perform micro-practices of agency and self-protection at work, and the discursive resources cleaners use in narrating these experiences.

How CleanSci Shapes the Organization and Experience of Work

  Staffing and training. Jay, Toni, Kiki, and Chad each spontaneously discussed the type of training they received (and unexpectedly provided to others). Jay and Kiki both entered their current positions after the implementation of CleanSci. Jay works in a building that is exempt from the CleanSci system. He received some initial training in the facilities complex but primarily learned "on the job". He held prior commercial cleaning experience (in offices and

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restaurants), and was able to utilize some of his prior skills and experience in his current position. He also learned from his coworkers, who gave him advice for cleaning the peculiar and complex surfaces and objects that abounded in his highly modernized building environment. Finally, working outside of the CleanSci system afforded Jay modest autonomy, whereby he was able to cultivate and implement his own unique "tricks" and "twists" on the process of work. He and his supervisor both possessed relatively easygoing demeanors, and were able to complement each other's work process in a way that did not undermine service provision. He believed that anyone has the aptitude to clean, provided they have the proper training. If cleaners performed poorly, then the preponderance of temporary work contracts were a safeguarding strategy that would 'weed out' underperforming "liabilities". Whereas Jay took comfort in the contingent workforce, Kiki experienced this work arrangement as stressful. She believed that the increasingly contingent workforce created infighting and competition among coworkers, thus eroding interpersonal relationships among cleaners and, ultimately, their quality of work.

When Kiki joined Midwestern University under the CleanSci system, she was asked to "forget" the techniques and expertise she developed while cleaning homes. The "tabula rasa" perspective that Jay adopted for himself was forced upon Kiki and other cleaners hired and socialized under the CleanSci system. This perspective starkly contrasts to that of Toni, who adheres to an essentialist and embodied view of cleaning. That is, only "certain" types of people are well suited for cleaning work. She views cleaning as an inborn skill that is further mediated by body-disciplining, including exercise and weight control. This contrasts with Chad's perspective that it doesn't take anyone "special" to become a custodian, except for traits of silence and submission that may be socialized and/or rewarded from management. For Chad, working with novice custodians was stressful, given the demands placed on him to train new

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hires. Kiki also experiences stress as a function of the variability in cleaners' experience and skill.

Like Jay, Toni was exempt from the CleanSci system, so was able to exercise modest autonomy in her work. Especially while working in the dormitories, Toni was able to create "home-like" environments and took pride in the nurturing role she was able to offer to customers, who were primarily young undergraduate students. Whereas Toni was able and willing to rearrange furniture, Chad reported that he would be sanctioned for engaging in this exact same behavior. When he first joined Midwestern University, he underwent extensive training and, over the years, cultivated efficient techniques that enabled him to satisfy customers and preserve his body. He expressed that amidst the CleanSci implementation, however, that the quality of his work eroded. First, he and his more tenured colleagues disagreed with the prescribed process that CleanSci mandates; many of the newly mandated work processes contradicted the "best practices" that Chad and his coworkers cultivated. Second, Chad and his colleagues were forced to 'do more' and 'do better' with 'less'. For example, cleaners who quit or retired were not replaced in a 1:1 ratio, so Chad had to 'pick up slack' given the personnel shrinkage. His responsibilities were further increased and intensified when he was asked to train new hires, most of whom were temporary workers.

The implications of CleanSci for staffing and training also extend to other domains of organizational life, including control and autonomy for workers. Generally, workers exempt from CleanSci (i.e., Jay and Toni) experienced greater control over their work. Kiki and Chad, however, were socialized into "Specialist" roles that forced them to participate in more repetitive and monotonous work tasks. Such "robotification" was associated with a variety of injuries to

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workers' dignity, including invalidation of their expertise, boredom, and injury/strain. Under CleanSci, work is *prescriptive;* outside of the system, work is *personalizable.*

Pace and intensity. Generally, the organizational strategies of "lean practices" resulted in a shrinking workforce. When vacancies arose from cleaners leaving the organization, fewer were filled, and those that were filled were generally replaced with temporary workers. Such a practice created financial savings for Midwestern University, which could save money by hiring fewer employees and failing to provide new hires with higher wages, health insurance, or retirement savings options. The implementation of CleanSci resulted in a shrinking workforce without corresponding reductions to the amount of space needing to be cleaned. While CleanSci describes this pattern as *increased productivity* (i.e., relationships among workforce size, square footage, and time to complete tasks), cleaners experienced this pattern as *intensification of work pace and workload.* Organizational talk from CleanSci suggests that its prescriptive methods and superior equipment increase productivity, but increases in productivity may not be sustainable for the health, wellbeing, or dignity of frontline personnel.

Surveillance. The ways and extent to which Jay, Toni, Kiki, and Chad experienced relationships with management were mediated by the CleanSci system. As illustrated in Chapter III, one marketed benefit of the CleanSci system is its codification of benchmarking and performance metrics. Evaluating cleaning work is challenging, given the subjective judgments involved and the literal invisibility of microbes. CleanSci offers a solution for this challenge (e.g., 512-point checklist). What may represent a solution for facilities executives is often experienced as intrusion for cleaners. The benchmarked performance metrics offer a rubric for surveillance, leading supervisors to monitor behaviors that previously may not have been salient,

noticeable, or important. Some of these metrics may improve environmental health, but in the process, may contribute to an eroding quality of life for cleaners at work.

For example, Toni and Chad both held cleaning experience at Midwestern University prior to the implementation of CleanSci, and reported that prior to the implementation, they enjoyed greater autonomy and more respectful and productive relationships with supervisors. However, while working under the CleanSci system, both Chad and Kiki recounted unwanted experiences of micro-management and intrusion from supervisors, which then incited affective reactions of frustration and anger. Such surveilling behaviors not only "got in the way" of their work, but also represented an affront to their trustworthiness, autonomy, and expertise. Thus, the ways that these employees experience surveillance is qualitatively different, given their social locations and interactions with the CleanSci system (or lack thereof). As described, Toni and Jay currently work outside of the CleanSci system. Jay did not report experiencing supervisor surveillance, perhaps because of his more autonomous work arrangement as well as a job history marked by greater micromanagement in the past. Toni reported experiencing surveillance while working in the dorm kitchen, but felt that this was an artifact of supervisor redundancy and boredom. Chad, who began working at Midwestern U prior to the CleanSci implementation, reported an increase in supervisor surveillance following the organizational change. Kiki, who entered the organization following the implementation, also reported unwanted surveillance from supervisors, and further experienced this micromanagement as gendered and racialized. Thus, it appears that CleanSci shapes organizational culture in ways that are mediated by a neoliberalist attitude toward work.

Safety. Finally, differences in the organization of work within or beyond CleanSci co-constructed experiences of safety among cleaners. Safety was also inextricably tied to the social

context of work. As illustrated in the content analysis, CleanSci is invested in cleaners' health and safety. Generally, safety is understood in terms of proper equipment and posture. The CleanSci store offers additional products to help manage employee safety, including stretching techniques. However, other factors that contribute to employee safety are ignored by CleanSci, including psychological safety, occupational hazards endemic to different cleaning environments, as well as those that are unique to custodians' lived experiences. For example, Chad worked in a large medical research building, full of toxic (and even lethal) materials. However, the training he received to participate in CleanSci did not address techniques to handle these materials. Further, Chad was unwillingly tasked with training new hires, and felt immense personal responsibility for ensuring their safety, especially amidst the hazardous materials encountered on the job. On one occasion, he even needed to call OSHA, since the work procedures mandated by CleanSci conflicted with the proper techniques for handling toxic materials.

These narratives also showed how seemingly favorable aspects of CleanSci incited unintended negative consequences for cleaners. For example, one cost-saving practice advocated by CleanSci is electricity management; for example, turning off lights on floors that are not currently being cleaned. However, this assumes that cleaners are always able to progress in a linear fashion, which is not always the case. At times, cleaners must "backtrack", or attend to other situations, such as emergency calls or taking breaks, which may require them to travel through the dark. Sometimes cleaners do not even have control to manage the lights. Working in the dark threatens most people's perceptions of safety and ease, thus undermining their psychological health and workplace productivity. This was especially the case for Toni and Kiki, who also tied perceptions of safety to their gender (and, for Kiki, her race). These fears are not

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unfounded, given the elevated rates of physical violence and sexual assault that cleaners report, especially women working on the night shift (Chen et al., 2016; Frontline et al., 2015).

How Cleaners Respond to the Organization of Work

In response to these working conditions, cleaners—especially those experiencing dissatisfaction amidst the CleanSci system—created and performed several self-protective strategies. The most common strategies they described included *infantilization, invocation of personal expertise, discursive narrative constructions of the moral(ized) self,* and *idealization of the past.*

Infantilization was a paradoxical discursive resource. On the one hand, the CleanSci system infantilizes cleaners working within it; but on the other hand, cleaners manage to turn such infantilization on its head. I introduce *infantilization* as an analytic to describe the unwanted experience of being treated like a child when one is an adult. Infantilization is an injury to dignity, in that it erodes targets' ability to earn and receive respect. Organizational talk from CleanSci shows how the system infantilizes its frontline users, namely by (a) characterizing cleaners as unprofessional, unskilled, and motivated, and (b) ignoring and/or invalidating cleaners' expertise. CleanSci adheres to a "tabula rasa" ideology whereby cleaners ought to be impressionable "blank slates." This is evident in the organizational talk content-analyzed in Chapter III, as well as discourse fragments (e.g., when Kiki's supervisor tells her to forget everything she has learned or thought about cleaning). Chad especially feels betrayal and resentment in response to the infantilization he experiences under the CleanSci system, which has ignored and disrespected the decades of expertise he cultivated on the job.

The practice of infantilization also helps to substantiate supervisor surveillance. If custodians are incompetent and unmotivated, then they need to be controlled and watched

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closely (McGregor, 1960). When the complex occupation of *custodian* is reduced and parsed into its constituent tasks (e.g., Vacuuming Specialist)—via the CleanSci system and ideology— then supervisors have greater leeway to micro-manage these compartmentalized tasks. IT is not clear if such compartmentalization makes supervisors' lives easier, but such simplification seems to erode the quality of life that custodians experience on the job. In the name of efficiency CleanSci (and the stakeholders responsible for its implementation) may be unsuccessful, especially when ignoring the best practices cultivated by custodians with extensive institutional memory and efficient yet effective techniques.

Chad especially felt that his expertise was ignored and rendered disposable under the CleanSci system. He was still able to invoke his own expertise and impart some of this knowledge to the new hires whom he was responsible for training. He was also able to maintain friendly social relationships with the few remaining full-time custodians from his original cohort. Together they were able to commiserate about their resentment about organizational change, as well as feel less 'alone' or 'crazy' in their perceptions of CleanSci as an ineffective and inefficient system. Kiki lacked this camaraderie, since she cleaned a building with just one other coworker, from whom she was physically separated. Toni, given her greater autonomy by working outside of CleanSci, *was* able to maintain and apply her expertise cultivated from several decades of cleaning experience. This allowed her to customize her service work to the unique context of the building (i.e., cater to undergraduate students), take pride in her work, and derive meaning and satisfaction in the process.

The next strategy that I noticed, particularly in Toni's case, related to *discursive narrative constructions of the moral(ized) self.* Like Chad, Toni used time to bifurcate her narrative, and in narrating her lived experience of work, she frequently toggled between descriptions of her work

in the present as contrasted with her work in the past. Further, she tethered these time-bound experiences to larger societal trends she observed. Specifically, morality and time were intertwined to help position Toni as a stable, moral authority amidst turmoil at work in broader society. Toni felt that students and coworkers alike have fallen prey to forces of "evil", including rudeness, deception, theft, alcoholism, and even sexual predation. She felt that these forces of evil were not present when she first entered the workforce as a teenager in the 1980s, but have grown more prevalent and destructive in the decades since. To try to counter these forces, Toni discursively constructs a moral(ized) self, whereby she positions herself as a moral authority.

Toni's narrative parallels other narrative constructions of morality from immigrant women of color, who are able to construct counter-narratives rooted in their moral superiority to counter the dignity injuries they experience in wider society (e.g., marginalization, oppression). For example, Villenas (2001) conducted an ethnography of Latina immigrants living in Southern U.S., where they struggled with poverty, stress related to migration, and everyday racism. To express agency, the women Villenas spoke with constructed "counterstories" that painted themselves as superior managers of *el hogar,* preservers of Latinx culture, and providers of *bien educación*. In a study of Filipinx American immigrants, Le Espiritu (2001) found that gender—specifically, constructions of femininity rooted in chastity and sexual morality—was "a key to immigrant identity and a vehicle for racialized immigrants to assert cultural superiority over the dominant group" (p. 415). In much the same way, Mahalingam and Leu (2005) observed that Indian American women programmers expressed cultural superiority over White women, whom they believed to lack honor, loyalty, and morality in the context of sexual and familial relations. Across these studies, distancing from and denigration of outgroups whose members were

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complicit in their oppression (namely White women) allowed immigrant women of color to construct narratives rooted in cultural and moral superiority.

Positioning oneself on a moral high ground can be a strategy to both protect and bolster the self. The moral(ized) self is self-protective, since it allows Toni (and others like her) to discursively and metaphorically distance herself from depravity, and the people whom she believes embody depravity (e.g., students, predatory customers, young/novice cleaners, supervisors, lawyers). The moral(ized) self is also a means of self-enhancement, since Toni can position herself as a moral authority, which perhaps infuses her critique of dynamics at Midwestern University and the cleaning industry more broadly with greater credibility and gravitas. Together, narrating the moral(ized) self is a means of self-protection and self-enhancement, which together may also reflect Toni's politicized nostalgia (i.e., longing for a mythical construction of a bygone U.S.A. that people like Donald Trump can restore).

Finally, I noticed that time also served as a discursive resource to protect the self. In particular, Toni and Chad creatively leveraged time as a metaphor to make sense of their adaptation and resistance to organizational change. They both yearned for the "good old days", which they understood to entail higher quality in staffing, training, workloading, and supervision. Like Chad's experience, Toni's narrative uses a bifurcated understanding of time to make sense of herself and her work. Chad bifurcated his career 'before' and 'after' the implementation of CleanSci, whereas Toni narrates a general divide between how things were 'then' versus 'now'. Undoubtedly Chad's and Toni's social locations as White middle-aged adults in the U.S. shape their shared nostalgia for the past. Kiki and Jay, conversely, lack this same valorization of the past. Many people of color in the U.S. adhere to linear understanding of progress, whereby the present is experienced as more pleasant than the past. This is implicit in the narratives of Kiki

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and Jay, who—in the past—held comparatively worse jobs and experienced more negative treatment therein. Their current positions at Midwestern University offer security and stability to which they otherwise may lack access. In this way, time is a socially constructed phenomenon that is subjective and mediated by social location. Thus, an intersectional lens is crucial for understanding even seemingly "objective" phenomena, like time. In the following section I elaborate on this discussion of time as a discursive resource that is socially constructed and intersectionally mediated.

As mentioned, narratives provide a window into the self and one's life-story. Narratives often include descriptions and explanations of "human needs, wants, and goals, which connect the present self to the past and the future" (Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 97). In this way, *time* is a central feature of narratives, which become a provisional tool to make sense of the past, present, and future. Indeed, time served as a central organizing feature in the narratives of Jay, Toni, Kiki, and Chad. Time was not invoked linearly or diachronically. Rather, time was used metaphorically and synchronically. In this way, time was a metaphor and framework for understanding tension and struggle, and larger processes of sense-making, change, and resistance. Further, the participants' embodied identities reflected the ways that power circulated through their constructions of time. Finally, time helped custodians make sense of what it means to be a cleaner, and what it means to work within (or outside of) CleanSci.

Conclusion

These results speak to how rhetoric and practices associated with neoliberalism trickle-down to shape the meaning and experience of cleaning work. Specifically, neoliberalism is intertwined with policies associated with privatization, deregulation, and austerity. These policies encourage organizations to adopt budget-cuts and standardization, often associated with

shrinking service operations, outsourcing service work, and threatening collective work arrangements (e.g., autonomous work teams, unions). In turn, these organizational strategies are associated with changes to micro-practices to the organization of cleaning work, including more prescribed work processes, greater surveillance, and more intensified workloading and pace of work. Ultimately, these political and organizational changes are associated with several indignities for workers, including infantalization and devaluing of expertise, time pressure, stress, anxiety, job insecurity, and physical injuries. Such dignity injuries carry negative consequences for the health and wellbeing of cleaners and their customers alike, as well as the overall effectiveness of the organization. Despite these organizational injuries, workers find myriad ways to restore their dignity—such as idealization of the past, discursive construction of a valorized moral self, and reverse infantilization—while making sense of their embodiment of neoliberal subjectivities.

CHAPTER V

General Discussion

Today, nearly eight in nine U.S. employees hold service jobs, and the service industry is projected to grow even more in the coming decade (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015a). Just as the U.S. labor market has transformed into a "service economy", so too has the organization and experience of service work since the 1980s. Despite the general growth of the service industry, service jobs are shrinking and disappearing in academia, especially amidst greater neoliberalization and corporatization (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). While campuses expand their student bodies and state-of-the-art infrastructure, resources for "support" staff suffer. Many universities boast about their low faculty-to-student ratios while ignoring their increased custodian-to-student ratios. When the laws of capitalism are prioritized over a culture of community-building, people suffer—especially those with low social and political power.

Previously, many service personnel worked as direct employees of the organizations they served, whether as IT specialists, administrative assistants, food servers, or cleaners. Service work is increasingly likely to be subcontracted, and in such contract arrangements, service workers are unlikely to receive health insurance, pensions, full-time hours, job security, union representation, or even a living wage (e.g., Weil, 2014). These macro changes to the service industry are often couched in the seemingly positive (and neoliberal) language of modernity—progress, professionalization, profit maximization, and prescription as a means of efficiency. Yet

a closer examination of such discourse—and the metamorphosis of discourse into praxis—reveals the more pernicious underbelly of neoliberalism.

Such was the focus of this dissertation. My general interest rested in mapping and theorizing how neoliberalism shapes organizational behavior (Figure 1). I theorized that discourse would provide neoliberalism with "meaning"; organizational policies and practices, with "materiality". In this way, I theorized that neoliberalism would "travel" through discourse and policies to ultimately shape organizational behavior. I theorized a "circuit" linking neoliberalism, discourse, and organizational policies and practices. Together, I expected that this neoliberal "current" would continue flowing through policies and practices, ultimately becoming embedded in supervisors, who are tasked with implementing, managing, and evaluating neoliberal policies and practices. Supervisors are therefore the "conductors" through which the currents of neoliberalism flow. Ultimately, supervisor behavior would shape the lived experience of work for subordinates (cleaners), upon whom neoliberalism is enforced and inscribed. I conceptualized the embodiment of neoliberalism as *denials of dignity*—that is, undermining workers' abilities to receive and achieve respect.

To describe and elaborate on these theoretical linkages, I analyzed the language in organizational discourse and workers' narratives. I documented how the language of neoliberalism crafts images of many service workers (including cleaners) as unskilled, unprofessional, incompetent, unmotivated, and unreliable, thus 'necessitating' and justifying the application of more 'advanced' and 'appropriate' approaches to the organization and management of such work. Widespread attempts to give service workers a "facelift" have led to greater bureaucratization, in the form of third-party staffing and work management systems. This bureaucratization promises greater standardization and efficiency, yet fails to deliver other

promises typically associated with modernity – including more livable wages, higher quality of

work-life, greater autonomy, and—ultimately—more dignity "of" and "at" work (Sayer, 2007).

In the domestic cleaning sector, greater standardization has been associated with lessened control

and voice over work, for workers and customers alike (Mendez, 1998). I observed similar trends

in my case study of a commercial cleaning company and customer organization. Greater

standardization and regulation of work saves money for administrators and customers, but at the

expense of cleaners. Figure 2 illustrates this process:
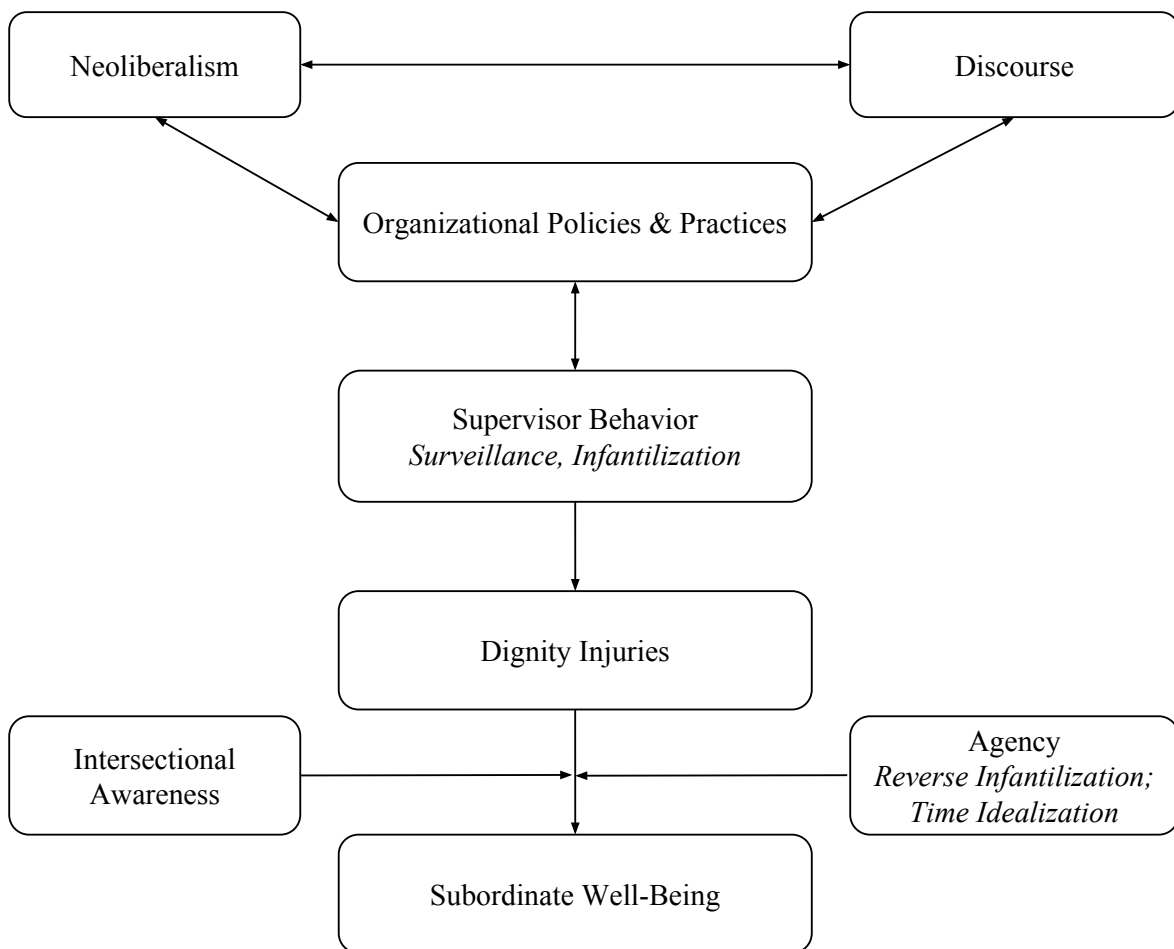
Figure 2. Neoliberal Discourse and Workers' Dignity: A Process Model

My overarching interest was in the experience of work in a neoliberal climate. The first part of my analysis examined the circuit linking neoliberalism, discourse, and praxis. I examined how neoliberalism is produced through discourse and is then materialized through organizational practices, and theorized similar relationships for organizational policies. The second part of my analysis focused on the 'flow' of this current through key actors, namely cleaners (subordinates), speculating on the role that their managers (supervisors) play. Focusing on the voices and lived experience of cleaners, I analyzed how neoliberal ideology—vis-à-vis discourse and organizational practices—shaped supervisors' internalization of neoliberal ideologies. In turn, I documented how such ideologies resulted in *dignity injuries* for cleaners via the mechanisms of deskilling, objectifying, surveilling, and infantilizing, ultimately affecting cleaners' well-being. In any matrix of power relations there are opportunities for (micro) resistance. I documented how the impact of dignity injuries on cleaners was shaped by their intersectional awareness and micro-practices of agency (including reverse infantilization and idealization of the past).

The process model (Figure 2) demonstrates how power flows through ideologies, institutions, and individuals; and how neoliberalism shapes the embodied, lived experience of work. Together, these results carry important theoretical and practical implications, especially as related to dignity, occupational health, and the management and (re)organization of service work in the 21st century. Below I discuss some of these contributions, concluding with a discussion of possibilities for social transformation.

Triangulating Study Results: Discourse and the (Re)organization of Work

Triangulating results from Study 1, the content analysis (Chapter III), and Study 2, the case studies (Chapter IV), allows me to understand how neoliberal ideologies influence discourse, the construction of knowledge, and the implementation of practices, ultimately

shaping employees' experiences at work, including dignity and well-being. The current state of the U.S. political economy is dominated by neoliberal ideologies and a "fissuring" of work (Weil, 2014). In response, leaders of many organizations—including administrators of public academic institutions—seek cost-effective "flexible" arrangements. Companies like CleanSci have capitalized on these needs, promising high returns on investment while also shrinking labor costs (primarily through workforce reductions). These organizational strategies are in part legitimized by discourse pertaining to the lean practices that a neoliberal market encourages, enables, and necessitates. These larger social, political, and economic changes carry implications for the organization of service work, including the cleaning sector. Companies like CleanSci sell a "total cleaning system" imbued with neoliberal approaches to work arrangements. Such companies not only sell cleaning supplies, but also *processes.* Many of these organizations also offer staffing (though CleanSci does not). In this way, companies like CleanSci contribute to the (re)organization of work for cleaners, defining their work tasks as well as their work roles.

In the first phase of this project, I examined how neoliberal ideologies are cemented into organizational practices via discourse. An analysis of the discourse used by one commercial cleaning company demonstrates how they achieve the neoliberal promise—for example, fostering greater individualization of and personal ownership over work, encouraging competition and profit maximization, and streamlining and prescribing work processes. I demonstrated how a representative commercial cleaning company leveraged particular discursive resources to justify its business strategy, construct knowledge about cleaners and cleaning work, and prescribe processes for conducting and managing cleaning work.

In this way, companies like CleanSci serve as conduits between neoliberal ideologies and supervisor behavior. CleanSci rejects custodians' expertise, strips them of creativity, and takes

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way control over (a) how job tasks are allocated across workers, (b) the order in which job tasks are performed, and (c) the manner in which they are done. Such a work arrangement also embeds practices of infantilization and surveillance within the purview of supervisor behavior. The system further fulfills neoliberal promises while producing conditions of precarity by encouraging organizations to trim costs and reduce human capital in organizations. CleanSci does so by appealing to the discursive power of science—namely, scientific management, the science of cleaning, and environmental responsibility. Yet, in the process, CleanSci demonstrates a flawed and incomplete understanding of science that ultimately fails to (a) account for the social context of work and (b) practices that would maintain and preserve the dignity and health of cleaners.

For Sayer (2007), "To be dignified or have dignity is first to be in control of oneself…dignity is about self-command, and autonomy" (p. 586). Yet, the ways that neoliberal ideology is cemented into organizational practices via discourse results in the denial of dignity for cleaners and of cleaning work. Triangulating results from my two studies, I identified four dignity injuries (i.e., mechanisms of dignity-denial) through which the downstream processes of neoliberalism ultimately regulate cleaners and their work. Two of these mechanisms pertain to the organization of work (*deskilling* and *objectifying*), whereas the other two pertain to supervisors' role in such work reorganization (*surveilling* and *infantilizing*).

Deskilling. First, companies like CleanSci regulate cleaners by *deskilling* them. Although CleanSci claims to offer high-quality comprehensive training, its frontline users feel otherwise. Further, a closer examination of the training offered by CleanSci reveals (at least) three disturbing trends. First is the inattention given to the larger social context of work, including the built environment and cleaners' social locations. For example, despite claims of investment in

workers' safety, CleanSci offers a very limited understanding of occupational hazards (including physical health concerns and psychological safety). By overly standardizing and simplifying cleaning work, no consideration is given to the uniqueness of different building environments. Toxic materials are present at many facilities that CleanSci considers as customers (including research labs at hospitals and universities), but CleanSci does not offer guidance for dealing with these potentially lethal materials. Another occupational hazard that CleanSci ignores is the risk of violence incurred by working on the night shift, whether from supervisors or building visitors (Chen et al., 2016). Further, practices advocated by CleanSci—such as keeping lights off during overnight work—may further elevate workers' risk for suffering workplace violence, including physical attacks and rape (Frontline et al., 2015). Finally, cleaners hold diverse social identities which may affect the completion of cleaning work. But, the prescribed and hyper-standardized work process ignores the potential impact of embodying certain social identities, including aging workers and/or those with disabilities. In 2012, an estimated 11.1% of building cleaners and 8.0% of maids/housekeepers were working with disabilities, and these percentages are expected to rise—to 31.2% and 14.8%, respectively—by the year 2022 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Janitors and building cleaners in particular are in the top twenty occupations with the greatest prevalence of people with disabilities, and ranks the third most likely occupation for men with disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Moreover, the rates of occupational injury are already disproportionately high in cleaning work, and injury rates are on the rise (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Together, these trends—coupled with my findings—exemplify the importance of accounting for age, disability, and context when organizing, workloading, and managing cleaning work.

A second way that CleanSci produces deskilling pertains to the reconfiguration of job titles. A shift from "zone cleaning" to "mono-tasking" under the guise of teamwork may simplify the organization and management of work for customer organizations, namely supervisors and administrators tasked with staffing. However, in the process, cleaners receive a fraction of the training they once received. Under the zone cleaning system, cleaners were trained on (and responsible for) all job tasks. Under CleanSci, however, cleaners adopt "Specialist" titles and roles. These titles, while discursively more appealing and prestigious, carry the opposite effect. Such deskilling exacerbates cleaners' precarity, both by elevating their risk for repetitive use injuries, as well as hampering their prospects on the job market (given their more limited training and narrower job responsibilities). Moreover, this deskilling can exacerbate gendered and racialized pay gaps. For example, "Specialist" roles are often allocated according to gender stereotypes (e.g., women are more likely to become "Bathroom Specialists"), and some roles are compensated differently (e.g., "Bathroom Specialists" often earn less than "Floor Specialists"). As a result, deskilling—coupled with a gendered division of labor—can exacerbate gendered and racialized wage disparities (e.g., Aguiar, 2001; Calvet, Riel, Couture, & Messing, 2012).

Finally, the training model deskills cleaners by invalidating their expertise. For example, Kiki was asked to forget everything she had learned as a housekeeper and homemaker, and after CleanSci was implemented, Chad was required to reconfigure his approach to work. Martens and Scott (2005) describe how, in the time between World Wars I and II, publications (e.g., books, pamphlets, magazines) routinely discussed methods of making domestic work more efficient (e.g., Frederick, 1920; Gilbreth, 1959; Richards, 1929), and many of these methods were designed and tested by people with actual cleaning experience (e.g., homemakers). Despite the precedent for codified and efficient cleaning techniques, CleanSci crafts a revisionist

understanding of cleaning work, claiming that no legitimate science of cleaning exists. Ironically, CleanSci ignores decades of social science research on cleaning—including consumer science, home economics, ergonomics, and environmental health—in order to position its organization as a legitimate and original author of (and authority on) cleaning science. Mendez (1998) describes the deskilling process (Braverman, 1974/1998) in domestic work: "workers' housekeeping knowledge and repertoire of cleaning skills are replaced by routinized cleaning practices" (pp. 132-133). I witnessed similar deskilling and sidelining in my case study. Together, these examples of deskilling result in greater commoditization of and alienation from labor (Marx, 1844/1970), which in turn undermine attempts to achieve "collective dignity" (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017, p. 105), similar to the processes of objectification.

Objectifying. The hyper-standardization and routinization of cleaning work not only deskills cleaners, but also *objectifies* them. CleanSci assumes that implementing an "engineered" process of work can solve organizational problems, including budget reductions. This is evident in the practices that CleanSci espouses, whereby productivity can be boiled down to inputs about building size and efficiency of tools, without paying attention to contextual factors including (but not limited to): cleaners' bodies, abilities, and ages; building space, layout, and usage; the presence, volume, and behavior of customers; and unpredictable events at work. For example, a CleanSci presentation states the following: "Tools dictate the task, time, training, safety, efficiency, frequency, and cost distribution". Cleaners are either absent from the equation, or are understood to be an embodied extension of tools. Either way, cleaners are paradoxically objectified yet invisibilized in the company's understanding of typical HRM functions (e.g., selection, training, performance). This discursive objectification is associated with Marxist

notions of commoditization, whereby "workers are often less valuable than the machines they work with" (Friedman, Rossi, & Ralón, 2015, p. 70).

Under CleanSci, cleaners are rendered into replaceable commodities that help organizations achieve their bottom line, rather than dignified artisans who offer vital services to the communities they serve and uphold. Thus, cleaners' work "produces not only commodities; it produces itself *and* the worker as a commodity" (emphasis added; Marx, 1844/1970, p. 107). This objectification and commodification is not without consequences: "commodity production turns the *worker* into a commodity to be bought (or not) in the market place, like any other commodity. Thus the worker is no better than the commodities she produces; she is stripped of her dignity and humanity" (emphasis in original; Healy & Wilkowska, 2017, p. 103). Another consequence of objectification is *self-objectification*; this is evident when Jay describes himself as an "asset", which may be a means of self-protection and self-distancing from workers he views as deficient and/or inferior ("liabilities").

Such objectification and commodification of cleaners' bodies relates to Foucault's (1980) notion of *bio-power*, a concept that is considerably under-examined in organizational studies, especially relative to his other work on discipline and surveillance (Mennicken & Miller, 2014). Bio-power refers to "a form of power based on the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Mennicken & Miller, 2014, p. 17). Foucault contended that accumulation and dispossession of capital was enabled by the "accumulation of men [and the] controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomenon of population to economic processes" (Foucault, 1980, p. 141; quoted in Mennicken & Miller, 2014, p. 17). Connecting Foucault's work on sexuality and the body with his work on social practices allows me to generalize my work beyond the particularities of the organization. In this

way, I can see how aspects of the political economy—which enshroud all organizations—construct knowledge and power in ways that ultimate shape practices and regulate bodies at work. For companies like CleanSci, profit maximization (for themselves and the customer organization) is made possible via the accumulation, maximization, and exploitation of bio-power (i.e., cleaners, especially those who are hired and trained to be replaceable and expendable). One mechanism by which bio-power is created and accumulated is through the joint deskilling and objectification of workers, who—in the process—are transformed from autonomous artisans into automatons.

       Infantilizing. The next mechanism of indignity, infantilization, is codified by CleanSci but enacted and enforced by supervisors. I conceptualize *infantilization* as a phenomenon to make sense of the childlike treatment of adults. Infantilization first requires that the actor/perpetrator views the target as childlike—naïve, unsophisticated, immature, irresponsible, and dependent. Some scholarship on dignity has documented how aging adults and/or people with disabilities often feel that they are treated like children, which is often experienced as a loss of independence and dignity (Jacobson, 2012), as well as some professional women (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). By contrast, recent research illustrates the *adultification* of Black youth, documenting how Black boys (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014) and girls (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017) are perceived to be *older* than they actually are, and therefore less innocent and more threatening. In this case, denials of dignity are inextricably tied to stereotypes and constructions of *age, disability, gender,* and *race* as analytics. However, to my knowledge, no scholarship has considered infantilization as inextricably tied to stereotypes and constructions of *work* and *class.* I therefore argue that infantilization can serve as an insidious form of classism that ultimately justifies managerial abuse, including surveillance. Indeed,

cleaners are characterized as childlike and docile across communication materials from CleanSci—especially in company newsletters, the intended recipients of which are administrators and supervisors at customer institutions. In turn, characterizations of cleaners as childlike and docile help justify the prescriptive and (hyper)standardized approach to work, as well as its management. Narratives from cleaners, especially Chad's, suggest that they feel like children as a result of changes to their work stemming from the CleanSci implementation.

Surveilling. The final mechanism of indignity, surveilling, is also codified by CleanSci but enacted by supervisors. Mechanisms of surveilling and controlling are most apparent in the context of benchmarking and performance evaluation. Providing supervisors with a checklist containing hundreds of criteria fundamentally alters their work process and, by extension, that of cleaners themselves. Surveillance is a form of dignity denial because it represents a "lack of trust in workers' competence and probity, and lack of respect for them as persons. To be told how to do things that one would in any case do perfectly well of one's own volition, and to be constantly under surveillance may be humiliating" (Sayer, 2007, p. 571). The denial of dignity via surveillance can take many forms in service work, including random drug tests, property searches, and scripted interactions with customers (Ehrenreich, 2001; Sayer, 2007).

Surveillance also exacerbates the alienation that cleaners experience from their work, especially when they must work under the "service, under rule, coercion, and yoke of" their managers (Marx, 1844/1970, p. 116). As illustrated earlier, organizational communication from CleanSci mirrors widely held stereotypes about low-wage service workers, including cleaners. CleanSci characterizes cleaners as unmotivated and incompetent, perhaps in service of justifying organizational practices, including surveillance. Such characterizations of cleaners and other service workers are "demeaning" and represent a failure of employers "to respect their

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dignity…[by] underestimat[ing] their capacity for virtuous autonomous action" (Sayer, 2007, p. 571).

Discourse and Denials of Dignity in Dirty Work

Together, these mechanisms—deskilling, objectifying, infantilizing, surveilling— represent injuries to cleaners' dignity. Dignity refers to a person's basic deservingness of respect and ability to receive such respect from others (Hodson, 2001; Lucas, Kang, & Li, 2013; Sayer, 2007). Dignity is often understood as a right to which everyone is entitled, a quality that is inalienable, rather than earnable or contingent (Kant, 1785/2011; Lucas et al., 2013; Sayer, 2007). For Sayer (2007), "to have one's dignity recognized is to be treated as an end in oneself, at least in part, and not merely as a means to someone else's ends" (p. 568). Thus, dignity is as much an ethical concern as it is a practical one. Injuries to dignity, by extension, should also be of ethical and practical concern for organizations, including commercial cleaning companies as well as customer institutions.

Scholarship on dignity and work has burgeoned in sociology (e.g., Hodson, 2001; Marx, 1844/1970; Sayer, 2007) and, more recently, organizational studies (e.g., Bolton, 2007b; Healy & Wilkowska, 2017; Kostera & Pirson, 2017; Lucas et al., 2013). Yet, dignity is largely absent from the industrial-organizational psychology literature. I find this epistemic absence both perplexing and troubling, given the stated commitment of I-O psychologists to improving work and the experience of work for people (e.g., Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, n.d.). I argue that dignity is central to a number of core tenets and concepts in I-O psychology, including training and development, performance, motivation, quality of work life, and structuring human factors. A dignity lens can guide the design and implementation of these issues, as well as research on these topics.

Further, I argue that dignity is relevant to both "I" and "O" enterprises (the design of workplaces/spaces and workers' lived experiences therein, respectively), in part because my research supports the notion of dignity as a *collective achievement*. Hood (1988) contends that "all workers need to maintain their dignity and protect themselves from undermining interactions and experiences" (p. 97). Although well-intentioned, this perspective displaces responsibility for fostering dignity upon the very people to whom dignity is denied—much in the same way that neoliberalism shifts and displaces responsibility for structural issues onto individual actors. I instead wish to argue for a *collective* and *structural* vision of dignity, whereby *workplaces* and *communities* need to be held accountable for workers' dignity, and protect workers from undermining interactions and experiences. Indeed, for Marx (1844/1970), dignity is inextricably tied to work itself—its organization and outputs—rather than "something external to the process" (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017, p. 101). Supporting this theoretical position, I found that denials of dignity were embedded in the organizational discourse of a commercial cleaning company. Below I expand on these denials of dignity, and elaborate existing theoretical frameworks of dignity. I then discuss sites of agency among workers who resist denials of dignity, and present possibilities for the design of work and work-space through a dignity lens.

Theorizing dignity injuries. As mentioned, dignity is a concept that has received considerable attention in philosophy, religion, law, and—more recently—sociology and organizational studies. Together this scholarship has examined the meaning of dignity, its dimensions, and its consequences if denied. Scholarship in this area generally converges on the position that the denial of dignity is a negative experience—metaphysically, affectively, psychologically, and even physiologically. However, denials of dignity—also described as dignity injuries—have not been sufficiently catalogued or theorized in this body of scholarship.

My findings suggest a number of dimensions that differentiate experiences of dignity-denial. First is the *frequency* of denials to dignity. I found that some dignity injuries are *habitual,* whereas others are *episodic;* at times the two blend together. For example, in Kiki's narrative, she experienced workplace mistreatment that related to her race-gender-class embodiment. The way that coworkers—namely, White men and Black women—treated her was inextricably tied to her identity-performance and accomplishment as a Black working-class woman. Although some injuries to her dignity were episodic, such as when a coworker tried to "set her up" to "test" her, other injuries were more perennial, given her hypervisibility as a Black woman. Similarly, Jay's physicality as a self-described large Black man shapes his daily experiences at work and in the surrounding community, and expose him to habitual dignity injuries, including expressions of fear from others. For others, dignity injuries are more episodic and nature. For example, Chad reported experiencing dignity in the heyday of his work, and he was able to pinpoint a precise moment when he experienced considerable dignity denial: the implementation of CleanSci and ensuing changes to the organization of his work. Future theory and empirical work should therefore consider the *frequency* of dignity denials—habitual or episodic.

Scholarship in this area could also consider how frequency of injuries relates to a second dimension of dignity-denials: its antecedents, including the *source*. The foundations of some dignity-denials are *structural*, including *occupational* and *organizational.* These more abstract foundations of dignity-denial are perhaps most apparent in Marx's (1844/1970) discussions of labor power-as-commodity, whereby workers are commoditized, alienated, exploited, and—ultimately—denied dignity. In this way, denials of dignity are embedded within the very process and organization of work, and are part and parcel of the capitalist enterprise. Given the structural nature of dignity, dignity can also be denied at the occupational and organizational levels of

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analysis. These dignity injuries are apparent in the way that companies like CleanSci leverage technology to (re)organize work, while paying little attention to the phenomenology of work in vivo. For instance, administrators use algorithms to calculate workloading that consider some inputs (e.g., building square footage) while ignoring other important inputs (e.g., workers' disabilities; building layout).

Other denials of dignity are *interpersonal,* such as the surveilling supervisor or the disrespectful customer. Dignity is an inherently social phenomenon, given the interpersonal nature of processes related to the conferral of recognition and respect. Dignity includes the capacity "to appreciate the respect of others" (Hodson, 2001, p. 3), so respectful social relations are crucial to the foundation and achievement of dignity (Bolton, 2007a). In the context of service work, dignity can be conferred (and denied) by several actors, including customers, coworkers, and supervisors. Finally, some denials of dignity are *individual*, which likely represent an internalization of injuries that stem from other people or one's organization or occupation. These denials, regardless of frequency or source, are also dynamic and enmeshed within the larger social context of work. For example, Friedman et al. (2015) note that "[t]he extent and kinds of dignity denial often change when economic conditions change" (p. 72). This is evident given the ways that a neoliberal political climate and academic environment shape the conditions (and denials) of dignity for lower-ranking, devalued organizational members.

A third dimension of dignity injuries is their *valence.* Valence may be shaped by the previous two dimensions I have identified—frequency and source. The valence of dignity injuries also may be shaped by people's social locations and intersectional awareness. For example, Kiki experienced dignity injuries as frustrating and unacceptable, and such affect (and her expression thereof) was mediated by her lived experience as a Black woman. Chad,

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conversely, had previously experienced relatively few dignity injuries, perhaps due to his social location as a White man; the valence of his dignity-denial was outrage, a reaction not afforded to Kiki (given her desire to avoid reifying racist/sexist constructions of the Angry Black Woman controlling image). In much the same way, the valence of Toni's dignity-denial included moral outrage. To my knowledge, this is the first study to consider how intersectional awareness, and intersectionality more broadly, co-constructs the experience of dignity (including its denial). Given the inherently structural and social nature of dignity, future theory and empirical work on dignity should take intersectionality seriously.

In this project, "dirty" work serves as a helpful site within which to examine and theorize these dimensions of dignity-denials. Hodson (2001) argued that "[l]ife demands dignity, and meaningful work is essential for dignity" (p. 3). However, it is very difficult for some workers to derive 'meaning' from their labor. Further, some workers are systematically denied dignity on the basis of their occupation, including occupations that are characterized by "dirty" work. Sociologist Everett C. Hughes is credited with conceptualizing dirty work, which he operationalized as occupations and job tasks that are widely viewed to be "physically, socially or morally beneath the dignity of the profession" (Hughes, 1958, p. 122). Employees in dirty work professions face stigma—and, by extension, strain—not only as a result of their labor, but also the ways their labor is perceived by occupational outsiders. Thus, denials of dignity are embedded within the very construction and organization of "dirty" work.

Missing from Hughes' work, however, is an intersectional analysis or consciousness. Many dirty work occupations are performed and embodied by people with other marginalized and "undesirable" social identities, including race/ethnicity, nationality/immigration, and social class. For example, "dirty" work is often relegated to subaltern subjects to help people with more

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social/political power distance themselves from dirt (and the people who handle it), thus

constructing their subjectivity vis-à-vis purity, morality, cleanliness, and Whiteness. As Palmer

(1989) describes,

> …sex, dirt, housework, and badness in women are linked in Western unconsciousness and…white middle-class women sought to transcend these associations by demonstrating their sexual purity and their pristine domesticity … [and creating] contrast with a woman who represented the bad in woman, a woman who does housework and also embodies physical and emotional qualities that distinguish her from the housewife … a servant. (p. 138)

This theory aligns with the dualism of "purity and danger" (Douglas, 1966), whereby phenomena

such as dirt, pollution, and taboo are viewed as "contagious" and therefore "dangerous"; these

associations are longstanding and cross-cultural. Many "dirty" jobs and tasks are crucial for

organizations and society more broadly, and therefore inevitable and necessary. As long as

people (generally those with greater social/political power) seek to distance themselves from dirt,

then dignity will be denied from the people who lack this epistemic/material distance from dirt.

Given the socially constructed nature of dignity as well as "dirty" work, all forms of dignity-

denial are likely to be found in dirty work (structural, organizational/occupational, interpersonal,

individual). Future research should explore connections between dignity and dirty work—

through an intersectional lens—to elaborate theory in both of these domains.

There very well are additional dimensions of dignity-denials beyond frequency, source,

and valence, but these are the three dimensions that were most apparent and salient in my case

study. Elaborating theoretical frameworks to include the foundations and dimensions of dignity-

denials could also shed light on possibilities for agency and social change.

Resisting denials of dignity. Despite the lack of concern for cleaners' dignity that

leaders of CleanSci and Midwestern University demonstrate, cleaners remain active agents in the

construction of their work-lives. Critical scholars contend that denials of dignity are part and

parcel of capitalism itself and, as such, "cannot be reformed away" (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017, p. 122; see also Marx, 1844/1970; Sayer, 2007). For Marx (1844/1970), the key to fostering dignity rested in the elimination of the commodification of labor, alienation from labor, and private property. These goals are unlikely to be achieved any time soon, especially in the cleaning sector. Yet, wherever there is power, there are opportunities for resistance and agency (Barratt, 2003). For marginalized and subaltern subjects, including cleaners, "autonomy may not be due to the job definition itself, but more likely to the imagination and creativity of workers as they adapt to their workplaces and the demands that are made of them. In this context, the workers make room for autonomy in performing their work" (Aguiar, 2001, p. 250), similar to notions of job crafting (J. M. Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and empowerment (Vallas, 2006).

As described earlier, organizational change is inherently incomplete and dynamic; with perhaps some totalitarian exceptions, very few institutions are able to exact total authority and impose top-down changes. Expressions of power and attempts at organizational change are inextricably tied to *agency,* or "the ways in which workers understand and respond to the changes they confront" (Vallas, 2006, p. 1678). Agency can also be understood as "capacity of individuals to act collectively or individually in a manner that either reinforces or undermines prevalent social relations and organizational structure" (Roscigno & Hodson, 2004, p. 18). Expressions of agency are apparent in the narratives from the four cases analyzed in this study. Chad generally opposes the CleanSci "takeover", and attempts to undermine the organizational structure by (re)asserting his expertise and hoarding obsolete equipment that he perceives to be superior. Yet he also reinforces the change by "playing along", such as training new hires (even though he is not trained or compensated for this new responsibility). He attempts to empower

himself while reinforcing the organizational change—for example, expressing concern that without his supervision, newer hires could risk chemical exposure to the toxic materials prevalent in the medical research facility they clean.

Kiki also expresses agency, especially while attempting to resist supervisor surveillance. She wears headphones at work in attempts to avoid unnecessary interactions with her supervisor; and by curating highly positive and motivational content, she is also able to temper negative metaperceptions stemming from her embodiment as a Black woman, racialized gender policing from coworkers, and the performance of "dirty" work. She also asserts agency by challenging prevalent social relations that construct her as an "Angry Black Woman"; despite her desire to confront others who treat her disrespectful, she feels she must restrain herself, lest she be viewed as reifying negative controlling images of Black women.

Idealization of the past and construction of the moral(ized) self also represent forms of agency and attempts to repair the dignity-injured self, especially for Chad and Toni, White middle-aged adults who feel "betrayed" and "failed" by their employers and wider society. Together, these expressions of agency and forms of resistance against denials of dignity are also mediated by people's social locations.

Designing work and space with dignity in mind. Other possibilities for fostering agency in the face of neoliberalism include the design of work processes and work spaces/places. How can a focus on dignity help negotiate organizational tensions between efficiency and effectiveness? Put differently, can organizations adopt lean practices without denying workers dignity? Critical scholars likely remain skeptical about this possibility, but some researchers— primarily engineers, including operational researchers—have attempted to reconcile these tensions (e.g., Shimizu, 2007). For example, Azizi and Liang (2013) introduce an algorithm

based on an "integrated approach to worker assignment, workforce flexibility acquisition, and task rotation" (p. 260) that appears to be an improvement upon the workloading algorithms used by CleanSci and the Systémes GES group (Aguiar, 2001). Embedding inputs such as job rotation may address some of the concerns described earlier, including employee boredom (Azizi, Zolfaghari, & Liang, 2010) and risk of repetitive use strain injuries. However, I suspect that any attempts to standardize work and optimize productivity will invariably ignore the social context of work, including "undesirable" inputs (like workers' age and disabilities) and "complicated" inputs (such as the layout of the cleaning environment).

Adding more "inputs" to optimization algorithms represents a reform approach, but a more radical approach would look to the root cause of employee suffering and denial of dignity. Beyond the structural determinants described above (e.g., capitalism; exploitation), we also might consider the work*space* itself. For instance, Jay describes the preponderance of glass and expensive, intricate artwork that characterize the building he cleans. Fortunately, Jay experiences a semi-autonomous organization of work, so is able to adapt his techniques and work process given the unique nature of the building he cleans (especially as contrasted with more "predictable" and uniform buildings, like some classrooms or hospital settings). Although Jay's work is made less unbearable via the process he is able to massage, it is also clear that the building was not constructed with cleaners in mind. Without firsthand cleaning experience, architects, engineers, and administrators may make decisions about the construction and design of workspaces that needlessly complicate work for the people who clean such spaces.

Mannen and MacAllister (2016) bridge work on symbolic interactionism and architecture to show how architecture is imbued with affect, action, symbolism, and power. Analyzing the context of healthcare, they describe how

> Humanistic approaches emphasize the value and agency of occupants, thus influenced by the physical space around them, and considers a more holistic personal experience building an internal, interpersonal awareness of physical space rather than the simply functional one often highlighted in standard planning and design processes. (Mannen & MacAllister, 2016, p. 231)

From this perspective, physical spaces are additional sites where dignity can be promoted or denied. Extending work by Mannen and MacAllister (2016), physical spaces can be a site of harm, as well as possibility and intervention. For example, we can regard night work itself as a form of dignity injury for people made to work in the dark (especially those who would prefer day shifts), considering the negative health outcomes of overnight work and reduced exposure to clean air and natural light—including elevated risk of breast cancer (e.g., Fritschi et al., 2013), violence (Chen et al., 2016; Frontline et al., 2015), insomnia, ulcers, sleep-related accidents, absenteeism, and depression (Drake, Roehrs, Richardson, Walsh, & Roth, 2004). Thus, physical space—including light exposure and air quality—can produce dignity injuries with more serious epidemiological and ecological consequences at the occupational and population levels of analysis (Navara & Nelson, 2007). Additional dignity injuries related to physical space include the construction of buildings using materials that are nearly impossible to clean and remain clean (e.g., Jay's narrative), and the removal of communal spaces for service workers, requiring them to engage in undignified behaviors (e.g., eating in bathrooms). Theorizing and examining linkages among physical space, dignity, and symbolic interactionism may open up new ways to think about dignity and its denial, as well as identify unexpected perpetrators of dignity injuries who could be transformed into potential allies (e.g., architects, engineers).

Contributions to the Literature

This project offers at least four contributions to ongoing conversations about and research on neoliberalism and work in the 21st-century U.S. economy. First, I have demonstrated how neoliberalism is not just a market philosophy or 'mere' discourse. Rather, there are material

consequences of neoliberal discourse—namely, the creation (and elimination) of public and organizational policies, which in turn shape organizational behavior (e.g., supervisor behavior; employee well-being). Second, I demonstrate the importance of intersectionality (including intersectional awareness) for organizational studies, which has heretofore not taken intersectionality seriously (Doyin & Mahalingam, forthcoming; Rabelo & Cortina, 2016). Intersectionality, and intersectional awareness, mediate many processes that are central to organizing and experiencing work—including the foundation of dignity, experiencing (and resisting) denials of dignity, and sense-making about the impact of neoliberalism on work (including supervisor surveillance). Third, I demonstrate how time is not on objective "social fact", but rather an important metaphor for intersectional identity management, especially in the life-stories of subaltern subjects. In this way, time can be understood as a discursive resource and self-protective strategy. Finally, I extend theoretical accounts of dignity, demonstrating three modes of "healing" dignity injuries through the narrated self: (a) idealization of the past, (b) reverse infantilization, and (c) constructions of the moral(ized) narrative self. Further, I begin to elaborate theory on dimensions of dignity denials, which (at the very least) include frequency, source, and valence. Together, these contributions help describe and explain previously ignored links among neoliberalism, discourse, praxis, and dignity. Linking these theories is important for opening up new ways to understand suffering and well-being in the neoliberalized work context. As we continue to witness and experience neoliberal modes of structure, governance, and organizing, more work is needed to understand the impact of neoliberalism on organizational behavior, especially how it is embodied and produces new sites of suffering and agency.

Practical Implications & Recommendations

  Implications for occupational health and safety. Researchers in epidemiology, physiology, and biomechanics have documented occupational health disparities. That is, variations in work environments across occupations—coupled with gendered and racialized stratification of the labor market—result in health disparities that are tied to specific occupations. For example, cleaners face elevated risks for obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and musculoskeletal disorders, perhaps related to the elevated physical demands of the job coupled with poorer cardiovascular and respiratory health (e.g., Sjögren, Fredlund, Lundberg, & Weiner, 2003; Søgaard et al., 2006; Unge et al., 2007; Zock, 2005). Given the demographics of the cleaning industry, people who already hold marginalized and subaltern experiences are disproportionately harmed by these occupational health disparities—namely, women, immigrants, people of color, and the intersections of these social groups. Further, cleaners generally lack health insurance or sufficient wages that enable them to receive adequate healthcare. Given substandard wages, many cleaners hold additional jobs—which are also often physically demanding—further eroding their body-minds.

  Socioecological models of workplace stress and health are needed to supplant the individualized models of health that dominate the literature. Scholars in fields such as social work, public health, and community psychology are cognizant of the larger social context in which people are embedded; for example, determinants of health are not simply a matter of people's choices, but also (if not more so) the zip code in which they reside and the policies that constrain their choices. Acknowledging the importance of context, some researchers have noticed that the rate of occupational injury in the cleaning industry has increased recently (e.g., Seifert & Messing, 2006; Søgaard et al., 2006; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Others

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have linked the vulnerability of precarious work to other negative workplace events and stressors, including bullying and harassment (e.g., Figueiredo, Suleman, & Botelho, 2016; Maboyana & Sekaja, 2015). In the specific context of cleaning work, researchers have identified a number of occupational risk factors, including job control and micromanagement; mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, boredom, and burnout; physical health demands that exacerbate respiratory, cardiovascular, and musculoskeletal load; air pollutants, environmental pathogens, and chemical exposure; and distal outcomes, including smoking and unhealthy eating habits (Sjögren et al., 2003). More research is needed to better understand how contextual factors—including the organization of work and public policy—shape workers' health and wellbeing. Next, I offer some recommendations that may address some of these issues.

Recommendations for cleaners. Companies like CleanSci explicitly avow loyalty to customer institutions (and facilities administrators) over cleaners themselves. As stated by Springer (2016b), "When the political system is defined by, conditioned for, enmeshed within, and derived from capitalism, it can never represent our ways of knowing and being in the world, and so we need to take charge of these lifeways and reclaim our collective agency" (p. 11). CleanSci is one such system that is "defined by, conditioned for, enmeshed within, and derived from capitalism" (Springer, 2016b, p. 11), especially in its current manifestation: neoliberalism. Just as CleanSci "can never represent [custodians'] ways of knowing and being in the world" (Springer, 2016b, p. 11), so too must cleaners identify transformative modes of working, being, and surviving. It is not my intention to reify the individualization of subjects that neoliberalism fosters, nor engage in victim-blaming. Rather, this stance reflects my skepticism that leaders of powerful institutions—especially those ensnared in capitalism and neoliberalism—will ever center the suffering and livelihoods of lower-power people. I join other critical scholars who

share my skepticism about the transformative potential of organizational policies and practices in improving cleaners' working conditions and livelihood (e.g., Healy & Wilkowska, 2017).

One possible site for solidarity and transformation is community-building and collective organizing. I found that CleanSci exacerbates social distancing and competition among cleaners. These dynamics, coupled with the compartmentalization of job tasks under the reorganization of work, make it difficult for cleaners to connect with one another—whether to commiserate, share knowledge, and/or organize. The personal and organizational benefits of community-building are evident in Jay's narrative. By working outside of CleanSci, he and his teammates were able to foster a climate of mutual respect and knowledge-sharing. These positive dynamics were notably missing from Chad's narrative, wherein he described eroding team dynamics amidst the introduction and implementation of CleanSci.

Some successful examples of more formal organizing among cleaners include the Justice for Janitors campaign (Cranford, 2001; Savage, 2006). Other examples of solidarity in higher education include Muhil's (2017) case study of Oberlin College, where several different service workers—including cleaners, painters, and workers in the dining halls and mailroom—banded together and joined the United Automobile Workers' Union. Another possibility is co-ownership over the means and modes of production. Some example case studies worth examining and extending include the co-ownership model of the San Francisco scavengers (Perry, 1978) and cleaning co-ops, such as the Si Se Puede! Women's Cooperative, We Can Do It! Inc. (http://www.wecandoit.coop/).

Recommendations for supervisors. Earlier I demonstrated how neoliberalism is produced and practiced in organizations, yielding dignity injuries. Such injuries are "part of the very fabric of capitalism via the commoditisation [*sic*] of labor; as such, it cannot be reformed

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away" (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017, p. 122). As stated by Healy and Wilkowska (2017), "a reliance on managers to deliver the policies is essentially an untenable position" (p. 121). Just the same, I offer some recommendations for supervisors who directly manage cleaners. First, supervisors should create and increase opportunities for cleaners' participation and involvement (Öhrling, 2014). One longitudinal study of an organizational change designed to increase participation among cleaners found that the program increased job satisfaction, work motivation, and pride; decreased sick leave; and improved service efficiency and quality (Öhrling, 2014). In an ideal world, supervisors and administrators would invest in workers' autonomy for reasons related to ethics and justice; but developing research suggests that increased participation can also benefit supervisors, administrators, and organizations as well.

Second, supervisors should enhance their research literacy to evaluate and implement evidence-based strategies and practices, including ergonomic techniques designed to minimize strain, repetitive muscle use, and injury (e.g., Lagersted-Olsen, Bay, Jørgensen, Holtermann, & Søgaard, 2016; Samani, Holtermann, Sogaard, Holtermann, & Madeleine, 2012; Silva, Barros, Cunha, Carnide, & Santos, 2016; Wallius et al., 2016). Supervisors might even form learning communities with faculty who research occupational health, safety, and ergonomics, as well as stakeholders invested in cleaners' well-being (e.g., students, union representatives). Together these groups could work closely to identify and implement evidence-based practices that improve working conditions, health, and dignity without sacrificing quality.

One possible practice is greater integration of health-promoting practices into the work schedule. For example, supervisors could lead cleaners in group stretches at the start of the work shift, and incorporate time for physically restorative and therapeutic motions within the work shift. Occupational therapy can help attenuate the physical exertion inherent in cleaning work,

coupled with high risks of on-the-job strain and accidents. Occupational therapy can be preventative or palliative, and appears promising for cleaning work (e.g., Fisher, 2016).

Researchers have designed interventions designed to improve health and reduce symptom risk among cleaners. One common problem for cleaners is *aerobic workload,* or the ratio of physical work demands relative to cleaners' cardiorespiratory fitness (Korshøj et al., 2012). Perhaps counterintuitively, one promising possibility is exercise, which can help improve cleaners' cardiorespiratory fitness (especially when reductions in the physical work demands are not possible). Research in this area suggests that aerobic exercise (built into work schedules; e.g., one hour per week) can decrease blood pressure, reduce recovery time, and overall improve cardiorespiratory fitness, which in turn can improve cleaners' health as well as their productivity (Korshøj et al., 2017; Korshøj et al., 2012; Korshøj, Lidegaard, et al., 2016). Some positive outcomes remained after 4- and 12-month follow-up periods (Korshøj et al., 2017; Korshøj, Lidegaard, et al., 2016; Korshøj et al., 2015; Korshøj, Ravn, Holtermann, Hansen, & Krustrup, 2016).

At first glance, this recommendation may seem to erode efficiency, given work time 'lost' from these activities. However, these activities may be a worthwhile investment, enabling cleaners to work more effectively, healthily, and sustainably. These services, if not integrated into cleaners' schedules, should be funded by the organization, given the institution's complicity in the etiology of these health problems, as well as representing a symbolic and practical investment in employees' health, likely ultimately producing financial gains for the organization.

Recommendations for administrators. Much of the "organizational talk" analyzed for this study was targeted toward facilities administrators (e.g., newsletters; descriptions of executive education). Administrators thus represent a major conduit for how everyday cleaning

work is taught, allocated, performed, and evaluated. I argue that academic administrators hold

considerable responsibility and power to shape the working conditions of support staff who

facilitate their work. I do, however, remain skeptical about the extent to which administrators

will center the experiences of service workers when making administrative decisions. Just the

same, I will offer some recommendations for them, however naïve or futile my efforts.

Generally, I recommend that administrators invest in improving the quality of life for cleaners,

and to redistribute power as much as they can.

First, administrators should get to know cleaners and learn more about their work-lives.

Doing so is important for shifting thinking about the role of cleaners themselves. One possible

reason for the persistent underpayment and devaluing of custodians is "because government and

private companies tend to view cleaning as a necessary expense to be minimized—rather than as

an activity integral to facilitating the companpany's main pursuit—and have increasingly sought

cost reductions from cleaning firms" (Ryan & Herod, 2006, p. 68). This trend is evident from

patterns of behavior in CleanSci and Midwestern University, and likely generalizes to other

institutions. Viewing cleaners as an expense that needs to be minimized further commodifies and

ojectifies cleaners themselves. Further, the relative invisibility of cleaners further contributes to

their dehumanization, especially as evidenced by administrators' behavior and policies that

undermine the dignity and well-being of cleaners. To help administrators see cleaners as human,

they first need to interact with and actually listen to them. One possibility is Photovoice, a

participatory image-based method to help powerful stakeholders listen to the voices and

experiences of marginalized group members. Photovoice has been demonstrated as an effective

technique to help cleaners identify occupational hazards and achieve greater participation in

organizational responses to occupational health and safety (Flum, Siqueira, DeCaro, & Redway,

2010). Photovoice, like storytelling, is a means of empowerment as well as boundary-crossing between more- and less-powerful stakeholders. Photovoice could be a helpful tool for administrators to collect, and take seriously, cleaners' experiences.

Second, administrators should examine the "fine print" of commercial cleaning companies with which they enter contracts, especially if these companies provide staffing services (i.e., outsourced hiring). Many commercial cleaning companies prohibit unionization among cleaners. Of course, unions are not infallible, but cleaners who are unionized generally enjoy higher wages, lower rates of occupational injury, and better overall working conditions (e.g., Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006). To the greatest extent possible, administrators should create opportunities for cleaners to participate in decision-making that affects their experience of work. In particular, administrators should work carefully—with commercial cleaning companies and direct supervisors—to eliminate overwork, expand job training opportunities, and provide a living wage. Further, cleaners should play a central role in the evaluation of programs such as the CleanSci implementation.

Third, administrators could keep cleaners in mind when making decisions that do not directly affect cleaners, such as the construction of new buildings. As noted by Krüger, Louhevaara, Nielsen, and Schneider (1997), "professional cleaners generally work in facilities planned for other work processes and other workers. Buildings and interior facilities are not typically designed to accommodate smooth and ergonomic cleaning and to provide the optimal workload for cleaners" (p. 9). This was especially evident in my study when Jay described the vast amount of glass surfaces and art fixtures that complicated his cleaning work. Other scholars have begun to theorize associations between the built environment and dignity (e.g., Mannen & MacAllister, 2016). What would it mean to center cleaners in the constructions of new spaces?

Recommendations for allies. The neoliberal project encourages greater individualization of personal responsibility. Neoliberal discourse is seductive, giving us the illusion of choice and empowerment. For example, books like *Lean In* (S. Sandberg, 2013) encourage people to assume personal responsibility over their work problems, even those that arise from structural issues. In addition to overlooking structural determinants of workplace disparities, *Lean In* also ignores the collective effort involved in enabling the professional success of women; for example, little attention is given to the working-class women (largely immigrant and/or women of color) who allow some professional (primarily White) women to "lean in" in the first place. People interested in issues related to social identity and (in)equality at work should not only seek to elevate underrepresented groups into the highest echelons of organizational leadership, but also to "lift others as they climb." In this way, *anyone* has the capacity to serve as an ally for working-class groups, provided they are interested in divesting themselves from power and privilege earned from neoliberal enterprises.

What would happen if we—as students, faculty, and administrators—viewed ourselves as in community with custodians? As privileged members of the university community, I argue that we have an ethical responsibility to campaign for issues including, but not limited to: living wage or standardized minimum income; universal healthcare and improved occupational safety; expansion and subsidization of public transportation; affordable housing; access to potable water and elimination of food deserts; on-site childcare; and resources for eldercare. To do otherwise is to willfully ignore the suffering of the service workers who enable our teaching, research, and stable livelihoods. Addressing these issues begins with awareness. Increased contact between cleaners and customers could be a first step (Abasabanye, Bailly, & Devetter, 2016). Learning more about the struggles of people with whom we share community could help facilitate

institutional and social change. For example, faculty, students, and staff at one South African university challenged a university ruling that prohibited unionization among custodians (Bezuidenhout & Fakier, 2006). In that context, a university's contract with a commercial cleaning company resulted in the loss of two thirds' of wages, health insurance, and tuition benefits for custodians' children. By remaining knowledgeable about the social context and lived experience of cleaning work (and other service labor), allies can help support efforts to improve the work and lives of cleaners.

As Springer (2016b) states, "Who the fuck supports neoliberalism? Only assholes…and by that I mean every last one of us, myself included. We all prop it up in our complacency, our indifference, our cognitive dissonance and the uncanny human ability to turn our backs on the suffering of others" (p. 16). Faculty, administrators, and students are members of the same community to which service workers belong, albeit on the periphery. Given the ways that neoliberal work arrangements benefit those of us with greater social and political power, we have a responsibility to redistribute this power, especially to the service workers who facilitate our work and job security.

Limitations & Future Directions

As in all empirical research, these studies are not without limitations. First, I selected one commercial cleaning organization and one customer institution to analyze for this case study. I have reason to believe that these two organizations are representative of other commercial service organizations and customer institutions, but one opportunity for future research would be to broaden the purview of organizations examined. One possibility could compare the experience of work for cleaners who work directly for the customer institution, such as is the case with

Midwestern University, as contrasted with cleaners who are employed by the commercial cleaning company (i.e., companies that offer staffing services).

Second, I failed to involve cleaners in the design of this study or interpretation of results. This is a major shortcoming for which I assume full responsibility. I hold tremendous social privilege but lack epistemic privilege that cleaners have to offer. In the future, it would be important to involve cleaners in different stages of the research process. One promising possibility includes Photovoice, which allows participants to determine issues of personal priority and salience, and which connects participants with stakeholders who hold power to help address those issues (Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013).

Third, I failed to incorporate narratives from cleaners who enjoy work under CleanSci. In the larger field survey I conducted, no one (out of 199 participants) expressed satisfaction with or improvements under the CleanSci system. It would be beneficial to include the perspectives of cleaners who expressed positive experiences amidst this organizational change. Though I remained open to this possibility, I was unable to identify a single participant who held this perspective.

Fourth, I treated the narratives I gathered as snapshots in time. However, I only collected data at time point, so I must treat these stories as provisional: "As people accumulate new experiences over time, their motivations, goals, and autobiographical priorities change and their personal narratives evolve" (Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 98). Further, "People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). Unfortunately, my cross-sectional design overlooks this richness and dynamism. An interesting future study would be a longitudinal study of personnel in dirty work, and how organizational practices and discourse shape the experience and meaning of work over time. It

also would be interesting to examine the longitudinal experience of work vis-à-vis opportunities for solidarity and agency. Given skepticism about the possibility for change within HR policies, Healy and Wilkowska (2017) suggest "looking at barriers workers' organisations [*sic*] have confronted when dealing with dignity denial" (p. 121). Future research could blend narrative inquiry with a longitudinal design to examine how these barriers—and the ways that cleaners confront them—over time.

Finally, it would be important to examine my research questions in other industries. As mentioned, most U.S. employees work in the service sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015a). Neoliberal discourses and practices have restructured many types of work beyond the cleaning sector; the changes to and consequences of changes to other work arrangements are worth exploring. Another major finding of my work pertained to the human costs associated with the organizational drives for profit maximization and work standardization. For example, Healy and Wilkowska (2017) describe the growing trend for IT professionals to be hired on temporary, unpredictable, and short-term contracts, and as a result, have lots a considerable amount of control over the work—especially the amount, sequencing, and evaluation. Similar organizational dilemmas can be found in other industries, sometimes with even more disastrous consequences. For example, a recent exposé on the program *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* revealed how greater government deregulation and privatization of services led to a rapid and widespread proliferation of for-profit dialysis centers. These for-profit centers are likened to fast food businesses, given their rapid expansion, standardization of work processes, and expediting of service provision, but in the process, sacrifice of service provision quality. As a result, patients risk receiving curtailed services, elevated risk of infection, which together reduce the effectiveness of dialysis and accelerate their likelihood of death.

While more extreme, this case suggests the generalizability of my original research question: How does neoliberalism affect individuals' dignity and health? This dialysis exposé shows how neoliberalism—vis-à-vis privatization, deregulation, and profit maximization—elevates risk of death for people who are already in precarious positions. In a slower but similar fashion, the implementation of neoliberalist ideology into practice erodes the dignity and health of cleaners. In future studies, I will continue to explore the links among neoliberalism, discourse, dignity, and health in other sectors, and search to identify noncapitalist modes of organizing, survival, and resistance that do not deny workers of dignity, especially those at the margins of social and organizational life.

Concluding Thoughts

Public universities are often regarded as bastions of free speech and political expression yet also are sites of oppression and exploitation. Most occupy land stolen from indigenous communities in the U.S. and remain ideologically and socially isolated from the communities they inhabit. Wealthier universities continue to expand their building space and student bodies while reducing the "support" staff who help build, clean, and administer these spaces and serve students, faculty, and administrators. Put simply, service workers construct and clean ivory towers to which they are denied access. Some service workers are provided with university identification cards but ultimately this is a symbolic gesture that contradicts the many ways that they are excluded from the spaces they build and clean. Amidst the greater proliferation of neoliberalism and "corporatization" of higher education, leaders of universities remain more loyal to capitalism than community-building. Faculty and distractors permit custodians to enter university spaces to clean them, but not to participate fully as members of the same intellectual community. Together these trends represent denials of dignity. Discourse helps to make these

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dynamics and dignity-denials seem natural, rather than the disturbing truths they represent. Synthesizing theories related to neoliberalism, discourse, dignity, and intersectionality helps me to make visible suffering at work, especially suffering that is constructed by institutions that are governed via neoliberalism.

The rise and spread of neoliberalism since the 1970s has coincided with transformations of labor in the U.S., especially service work. Many service jobs are increasingly likely to be privatized and deregulated, changes that reflect prioritization of financial costs over human costs (Aguiar & Herod, 2006). Organizational gains, including in academia, often emerge at the expense of custodians, whose work and bodies suffer (Öhrling, 2014). Öhrling (2014) describes the proliferation of lean practices as "short-sighted and not a sustainable solution" (p. 81), and speculates that such practices will produce rapid, but short-lived, economic gains. Thus, more long-term audits are needed to understand the lasting impact of neoliberalism (including lean practices), both for organizational financial gains as well as the bodies and livelihoods of people who perform such labor.

In this project, I attempted to place a spotlight on the human suffering that is often obscured and overshadowed when (over)stating the promise and effectiveness of neoliberalism. In his pamphlet "Fuck neoliberalism…and then some!", Springer (2016b) writes:

> Why should we be more worried about using profanity than we are about the actual vile discourse of neoliberalism itself? … Fuck the fear-mongering exclusion that sees 'others' as worthy of cleaning our toilets and mopping our floors, but not as members of our communities. Fuck the ever-intensifying move towards metrics and the failure to appreciate that not everything that counts can be counted. Fuck the desire for profit over the needs of community. Fuck absolutely everything neoliberalism stands for…We've swallowed the idea of the 'tragedy of the commons' hook, line and sinker; when in reality this is a ruse that actually reflects the 'tragedy of capitalism' and its endless wars of plunder. (pp. 5; 9)

As a result of this project, I share Springer's (2016b) visceral abhorrence for the neoliberal enterprise. My findings illustrate some of the hidden (and not-so-hidden) costs of neoliberalism.

The quest for greater organizational efficiency is orchestrated on the backs of the lowest-ranking members of the organization. It appears that neoliberal ideologies and its associated policies—including government deregulation and lean practices—benefit organizations, including financial savings and staff reductions. However, calculations that broadcast the 'success' of neoliberalism, including greater productivity and efficiency, overlook the human costs expended in enabling such success. My interest in this project began with a desire to understand the impact of neoliberalism upon individual workers, especially those with low social and organizational power. Organizational improvements are enabled by producing greater suffering and precarity among low-status workers. Academic administrators in particular ought to examine how their policies and practices affect all members of the university community, as a matter of business ethics as well as social justice. Neoliberalism enables the expansion of ivory towers by exploiting the people who construct and clean them. As members of the same university community, we can—and should—do better.

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