

ARE FRONT-LINE SERVICE OCCUPATIONS TRANSITIONAL OR DEAD-END?  
THE CASE OF WAITERS AND WAITRESSES

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## ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Arne Kalleberg)

Two streams of literature portray waiting tables as either transitional or dead-end. The flexibility of serving jobs enables students to combine work and school, yet the lack of mobility opportunities means most movement is lateral, from one service occupation to another. Using matched CPS data, this paper employs logistic regression to analyze movement out of serving and into another service occupation, an unrelated occupation, or unemployment. While gender is related to lateral mobility, it fails to predict movement into unrelated occupations or unemployment. Education, conversely, has little influence on lateral mobility, but influences movement into unrelated occupations or unemployment.

To Lee Matzig, whose unshakeable belief in my abilities  
sustained me when my own faith faltered.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflicting views on front-line service occupations portray them as either transitional--the bastion of students and adolescent workers--or dead-end occupations--the last refuge for women in the labor force. The schism in the literature points to the likelihood of two separate mobility patterns among servers. On the one hand, for students--mostly young workers who have recently entered the labor force--the occupation is indeed temporary and vacated upon the completion of schooling. Research in this vein focuses on young workers' need for part-time employment, for which serving provides a ready solution (Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Lucas, 1997; Spradley & Mann, 1975). Conversely, serving is portrayed as a permanent job with little chance of advancement--the exclusive domain of the career waitress (Owings, 2002; Elder & Rolens, 1985; Paules, 1991). Given these two views of front-line service occupations--transitional and dead-end--which most accurately describes the actual mobility patterns of workers? Are some groups more able than others to avoid becoming trapped in service occupations? Among front-line service workers, who gets out and who stays behind?

#### Waiters and waitresses in the literature

Although journalistic curiosity in the American waitress dates back to the turn of the twentieth century--evidenced by Francis Donovan's *The Woman Who Waits* (1920)--sociological interest in service workers did not arise until several decades later, and did not garner significant attention until the late 1970s and early 1980s. William Foote Whyte's *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry* (1948) signaled a nascent sociological

awareness of what was at the time the emerging service industry and its attendant interpersonal dramas. The service industry has only gained momentum since that point; the number of scholarly works published about service workers, and the waitress in particular, has accordingly followed suit. Interest in waitresses and the restaurant industry in general lagged for several decades after Whyte, but Spradley and Mann's 1975 ethnographic classic *The Cocktail Waitress* heralded an era of sociological fascination with the nation's front-line service workers--of which waitresses have served as the archetype--that has resulted in a plethora of richly-detailed qualitative research.

In the several decades since Spradley and Mann, the waitress and, by extension, the fast-food worker have dominated ethnographic research on women in front-line service work. As a result, the waitress has inadvertently become the standard-bearer of gender issues in the labor market: sexual harassment on the job (Loe, 1996; Owings, 2002; Ginsberg, 1996; LaPointe, 1992), gender-biased hiring practices (Neumark, Bank, & van Nort, 1996; Bills, 1999), and especially power differences between male customers or managers and female employees (Leidner, 1993; Butler & Snizek, 1976; Owings, 2002; Loe, 1996; Paules, 1996). Several attempts have been made to explore general patterns in gender differences among restaurant industry employees, as in Detman's examination of women's movement into bartending between 1970 and 1980 (Detman, 1990) or Neumark, Bank, and van Nort's 1996 audit study of discriminatory hiring practices among restaurant managers in Philadelphia, yet these stand out as exceptional cases. By a sizeable margin, interviews and participant observation have proven to be the preferred methods of sociological inquiry into the inner workings of the working life of the waitress.

The ethnographic approach to researching women in front-line service occupations was popularized by *The Managed Heart* (1983), in which Hochschild explored the experiences of flight attendants and bill collectors in terms of the emotional labor required by the job. Emotional labor, considered endemic to front-line service occupations, “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Extrapolating from Hochschild’s case studies of flight attendants and bill collectors, other researchers then expanded the theory to apply to the front-line service industry as a whole. Since its publication, *The Managed Heart* has been cited in almost every work on waiters and waitresses to date; its strong influence shows little sign of abating, as evidenced by the wildly successful *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich (2002), which drew heavily on Hochschild’s theory to explain the interpersonal dynamics of her various jobs, from waitressing in a family-style restaurant to working as a Wal-Mart employee.

### Models of mobility

Qualitative interest in front-line service work, while important to our understanding of individual experiences within these types of occupations, yields little insight into either the demographic composition of service workers or the ways in which people move through these occupations. Front-line service occupations are generally described as requiring little in terms of skill or education, and offering little in terms of opportunity for upward mobility into better-paying or higher-prestige jobs. Despite these claims, few researchers have attempted to develop a generalizable model of mobility patterns into and through service occupations.

### *A Combined Approach: Occupational and Employment Status Mobility*

A handful of researchers have attempted to fill this lacuna by examining both the origin and destination positions of workers. This more nuanced approach provides a richer view of occupational mobility by concentrating on employment status--usually dichotomized as the straightforward categories of employed and unemployed--and occupational status, variously defined in terms of wage (Rosenfeld, 1983), gender composition of occupation (Rosenfeld & Spenner, 1992), or sector type (i.e., core or periphery; skilled or unskilled; white-collar or blue-collar) (Howell & Reese, 1986). This dynamic view of occupational mobility focuses on the differences between the origin and destination status--whether it be movement into or out of unemployment; or upward, downward, or lateral mobility. Lichter, Landry, and Clogg (1991) develop a model that encompasses various states of employment and joblessness, but also qualitatively classifies destination occupations as "good" or "bad" based on income, hours worked, and employment status of workers.

The development of a model including movement into or out of the labor force and upward or downward occupational mobility is also undertaken by Evans (1999), who examines whether British workers elect downward mobility to a less-skilled occupation over transitioning into unemployment. Wolf and Rosenfeld (1978) combine the structural characteristics of the destination occupation with an individual's unemployment status and length of unemployment, focusing especially on the interaction between unemployment and the gender composition of the destination occupation. The attempt to qualitatively rank destination occupations--even as a basic dichotomy of good and bad, or skilled and unskilled--improves the evaluative capacity of mobility models in that we gain insight into the characteristics of destination occupations.

### *Mobility and Dual Labor Market Theory*

The tendency to dichotomize occupational classifications--jobs are skilled or unskilled; good or bad; or white-collar or blue-collar --is rooted in dual labor market theory, in which occupations can be classified as being either in the stable and high-paying core, or the unstable, low-paying periphery. Research on the dual labor market frequently finds a high level of lateral mobility: unskilled workers who change occupations, for example, usually move to yet another unskilled occupation (Rosenfeld, 1983). Howell and Reese (1986) provide corroborating evidence for lateral mobility, and also find a significant gender difference: workers who begin their occupational career in the peripheral sector are likely to remain there, although men move out of the periphery into core sector jobs at a much higher rate than women.

Gender disparities in movement from the periphery into the core are also evidenced by Pomer (1984), who concludes that being female significantly impedes upward mobility. In particular, Pomer finds that “[s]ervice work is generally the least likely to lead to a well-paid job” (p. 437). Considering that women proportionally dominate service work, it is thus unsurprising that women would thus experience less mobility than men. Occupational mobility research frequently assumes constant employment; the extant literature thus provides little insight into the proportion of service workers who transition out of the labor market entirely.

The inclusion of joblessness, neglected in much of the mobility literature, makes salient that work careers frequently do not follow the traditional labor force model of continuous employment and upward mobility. A large portion of research on occupations deliberately excludes women and adolescents for particularly this reason: their erratic occupational

trajectories--spells of employment frequently punctuated by transitions into joblessness--make them less than ideal candidates for research on occupational trajectories, especially when a career is defined in terms of constant employment. Mobility researchers must acknowledge that many career paths follow a non-linear trajectory, at the risk of providing an incomplete and therefore inaccurate portrayal of people's movement through the labor force.

### Measuring Mobility among Waiters and Waitresses

The aforementioned models have contributed significantly to our understanding of occupational mobility, yet the quest for generalizability has left sizeable gaps in the literature. Specifically, broad groupings of occupations mask the subtle dynamics of mobility within individual occupations--dynamics that simply cannot be captured in analyses of aggregated occupations. Waiters and waitresses serve as representatives of front-line service workers in general, and are thus ideal candidates for a preliminary analysis of the processes underlying mobility among these types of workers. By taking only those employed as waiters and waitresses as the starting point, I hope to identify antecedent individual-level characteristics that influence mobility when all other factors are held as equal as possible.

### *Lateral Mobility and Front-line Service Occupations*

Drawing from the detailed occupational descriptions in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook, I classified the destination status of waiters and waitresses into five categories: (a) still waiting tables, (b) working in another food service occupation, (c) working in another front-line service occupation, (d) not working, or (e) working in an unrelated occupation (neither foodservice nor front-line service occupations). The specific occupations included in each category are listed in the Appendix. The first three categories measure the extent to which waiting tables is provides little mobility. Occupational category

*a* measures stability--who is still waiting tables one year later?--whereas occupational categories *b* and *c* provide an indicator lateral mobility in terms of movement within the same industry (category *b*) or an occupation with similar characteristics as waiting tables (category *c*).

The prevalence of lateral mobility and the greater likelihood that women will remain in female-dominated occupations while men move on justifies the separate categorization of front-line service and foodservice occupations: front-line service occupations tend to contain a high proportion of women, whereas foodservice occupations--which may not involve customer interaction--tend to be either male dominated or gender balanced, yet still represent a form of lateral mobility. The gender composition of each occupation is provided within the Appendix. Occupations were classified according to Dictionary of Occupational Titles classifications: retail sales occupations and service occupations other than protective (i.e., police officers and guards) or household (such as private childcare workers) were categorized as front-line service occupations.

#### Individual-level Influences on Mobility

##### *Gender and Racial Differences in Mobility out of Service Work*

Overall, employed women are consistently less mobile than men: in Lynch's (1993) study of gender inequality in on the job training, 45% of men changed both employers and occupations within three years of completing school (versus changing occupations yet remaining with the same employer), as compared to 34% of women. Conversely, 18% of men and 26% of women remained in the same occupation with the same employer. Similarly, research based on dual labor market theory frequently finds that transitions out of the peripheral sector differ dramatically for men and women, with women becoming trapped in

the periphery more frequently than men (Howell & Reese, 1986). In keeping with the literature, I predict that men will move out of waiting tables at a higher rate than women.

Although its influence is much less pronounced than gender, race also affects rates of mobility into higher-paying and higher-prestige occupations. In the aforementioned study by Howell and Reese, gender effects on the destination labor market sector were identical between blacks and whites. Yet his finding is contradicted by McBrier and Wilson (2003), who find significant racial differences, but because their study focuses exclusively on mobility out of white-collar occupations--whereas Howell and Reese concentrate on peripheral occupations--these two findings are not necessarily incompatible. The discrepancy may simply indicate that patterns of occupational mobility are not identical between high-level white-collar occupations and low-level white collar or blue-collar occupations. Overall, blacks have historically been less mobile than whites, and when an occupational transition does occur, it is more likely that this shift will be into a job with similar or less-desirable characteristics (Sandefur, 1981; McBrier & Wilson, 2003). Thus, I predict that when blacks leave serving, they will be more likely than whites to experience lateral mobility into either another front-line service or foodservice occupation.

#### *Balancing Obligations: Combining Service Work with Education or Family*

It has been repeatedly documented that young workers go through a period of “churning,” or movement through several short-term jobs, before settling on a job that will last for at least several years (Pomer, 1984). Adolescents “try on” several jobs before finding one that suits their temperament and credentials. Thus, it stands to reason that younger workers will tend to move out of waiting tables at higher rates than older workers, who are more inclined towards occupational stability. The effect of education on mobility can hardly be overemphasized:

education is one of the strongest predictors of occupational prestige and income. An increase in education enables workers to abandon jobs in which they were previously trapped due to a lack of requisite human capital; education is the key that opens the door to occupational mobility. As succinctly stated by Pomer (1984, p. 433), “Schooling increases the probability that a low-paid worker can qualify for an alternative job with higher rewards.” Ethnographic research on front-line service workers occasionally hints at this possibility. Spradley and Mann mention in *The Cocktail Waitress* that several of the waitresses were simultaneously enrolled in the nearby university, and would likely leave their jobs upon graduation. The possibility that an increase in education might lead to a shift out of waiting tables is introduced, but we are never told what actually becomes of the waitresses.

The scheduling flexibility of service occupations—part-time work is generally readily available, as are morning or evening shifts—enables workers to attend to other obligations while maintaining constant employment (Lucas, 1997; Curtis & Lucas, 2001). The ease of combining service work with school or family may account for the high numbers of students in these types of occupations. However, with regard to students who combine work and education, service occupations may be abandoned once schooling is completed. Upon attaining a degree, students are freed from educational obligations and thus no longer require the extreme flexibility that service work offers. I thereby predict that the higher one’s education, the more mobile one is likely to be, and when an occupational shift does occur, it is more likely to be a transition out of front-line service work.

Women, for whom parental obligations frequently tightly restrict employment opportunities, often find their employment options limited; a spotty labor market history means one often lacks the requisite experience for many jobs, and time constraints limit the

number of hours one is available to work. Part-time work and flexible hours provide a means of combining work and family. Part-time workers, who usually have other significant obligations impinging on both their time and their energy, are generally more tenuously connected to the labor market. For part-timers, shifts out of the labor market are far more common than for full-time employees (O'Reilly & Bothfeld, 2002; Lucas, 1997). This same line of reasoning--that extra-occupational influences lessen one's commitment to the workforce--applies equally to students, for whom it is predicted that labor market exits will also be more prevalent than non-students.

In sum, the hypotheses under investigation are as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Women are more likely than men to remain in waiting tables.

*Hypothesis 2:* Blacks are more likely than whites to move laterally between occupations.

*Hypothesis 3:* Attainment of a formal degree is coterminous with leaving serving for an unrelated occupation.

*Hypothesis 4:* Among servers who move into another occupation, women are more likely than men to move into another front-line service occupation.

*Hypothesis 5:* Of servers who change occupations, men are more likely than women to move to occupations with a lower proportion of women.

## CHAPTER 2

### DATA AND MEASUREMENT

#### *Matching Current Population Survey Data*

Matched data from the 1983 to 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS) Labor Extracts provide a nationally representative sample of waiters and waitresses. The survey design of the CPS provides a suitable--although as will be later explained, not ideal—data set for examining large-scale trends in occupational mobility. Samples are drawn according to household, and one adult member of each household gives an account of themselves and all other household members. Each household is interviewed for eight non-consecutive months. Upon entering the CPS, a household is interviewed once per month for four months. The household then drops out of the survey for a span of eight months, after which point it is re-entered for another four monthly interviews. Surveys from the outgoing rotation groups, households that are either on their fourth month (the last month of interviews before temporarily leaving the survey) or on their eighth month of interviews (the last month of interviews before permanently exiting the survey), are included in the Labor Extracts.

There is no agreed-upon set of variables used to match CPS data across years; researchers are thus left to determine for themselves the variables on which years will be matched. Although the CPS provides unique household identifiers, the basic variables used in matching are commonly a trio of variables used to identify each household and its various members: (1) the household identifier, a code number assigned to a single household; (2) person line number in household, which uniquely labels each individual within a household;

and (3) household number, which is designed to flag those households in which inhabitants change because one group moves out and another moves in. According to Madrian and Lefgren (2000), who discuss methods and issues with CPS matching at length, these three variables should theoretically provide sufficient information with which to match respondents across years, yet coding inconsistencies in the CPS make the perfect matching of respondents realistically unlikely. As they note, the CPS was not originally intended for use as longitudinal dataset. Thus, matching along several other stable dimensions provides additional insurance that the data are matched as accurately as possible.

For this study, years are matched according to the following: household identifier, age, race, and gender. Madrian and Lefgren (2000) recommend matching individuals according to household and person line number in the household, yet these codes are unreliable for several important reasons. With regard to household ID, this code refers specifically to the physical residence. If the inhabitants move out, they are thereby removed from the study, and the new residents take their place in the survey. Considering that the United States is a geographically mobile society--and that occupational mobility and geographic mobility are strongly linked--basing the survey on a household rather than the individual inherently creates issues of consistency.

Person line number, which provides a separate tag for each household member, is especially unreliable: according to the CPS Labor Extracts codebook, the person line number may change for any given individual. Before 1994, person line number was assigned according to the number of persons in a household. If the household expanded or decreased in size, the remaining household members may have been reassigned to a new person ID. Obviously, this discounts the usefulness of this variable for matching respondents in any year

prior to 1994. For these reasons, respondents were matched primarily according to demographic variables. While it is possible that a household's respondents leave and are replaced by a family with the exact same demographic composition, such an occurrence is unlikely.

As explained by Madrian and Lefgren (2000), several years cannot be matched due to changes in the CPS that were implemented to ensure confidentiality. Thus neither 1984 and 1985 nor 1994 and 1995 can be adequately matched. For this reason, and because of the small number of waiters and waitresses contained within any single matched set of years, data from years 1983 to 1999 are collapsed into one dataset which subsumes any respondent who waited tables at any time point within that fifteen-year span. I chose 1983 as the earliest year because it is the first year the CPS began using the 1980 Dictionary of Occupational Titles occupation codes. Prior to 1983, the 1970 DOT codes were used. Although the occupational category of "waiters and waitresses" remained constant between the two classifications, I am also examining destination occupations, for which some occupational codes changed drastically between the 1970 and 1980 classification schemes. I ended my analysis in 1999, after which point the measurement of several variables of interest, such as student status, were either seriously altered or omitted entirely, and thus could not be resolved with previous years. The years 1983 to 1999 both contain all desired variables, and survey questions with disparate response categories were able to be adequately recoded into a single merged variable.

By matching across years, data on individual respondents are available for two time points, one year apart. From amongst all respondents in the CPS, only those who had waited tables at either time point were eligible for use in this study, thereby creating three categories

of occupational mobility. The first group consists of those who waited tables at time 2, but not at time 1. Respondents in this group were either jobless or employed in some other occupation prior to waiting tables. The second group consists of respondents who indicated that they waited tables both at time 1 and time 2. This group, within the span of the survey, does not experience occupational mobility. The third group includes all respondents who worked in the occupation of waiter or waitress at time 1, but were either jobless or in a different occupation at time 2. For those who exited waiting tables, information is available on subsequent occupation; the data set provides prior occupation for those who entered waiting tables. The dataset was limited to only those CPS respondents who, between 1983 and 1999, were employed full-time or part-time as a waiter or waitress at the time of their first outgoing rotation group survey. Those who indicated a non-waiting occupation at the time of the first outgoing rotation group survey, but had moved into serving by the second outgoing survey were excluded from analysis; this group provides information on inflows into serving, but such is not the focus of my research. Because I wish to focus exclusively on outflows from the occupation and on the destination occupational status of waiters and waitresses, I limited the sample to only those who were in the occupation of serving at the first time point.

It may be argued that collapsing data across such a long span of time deliberately ignores structural factors that may differentially impinge on labor force activity over the course of years. Unemployment varies widely across years, the gender composition of an occupation may shift dramatically over time, or an occupation may gain or lose significant numbers of employees. Although these claims are valid, a single year of CPS data would not provide nearly enough cases for meaningful analysis. To illustrate, extracting all waiters and

waitresses from 1983 to 1999 CPS yields a sample size of 15,825. Because the occupation of waiting tables is predominantly female, as are most low-wage service jobs, an overwhelming 84.6% of the total sample is female. Thus, I culled a mere 2,444 men from fifteen years of surveys; due to missing data and various other issues, not all of these are eligible for analysis. To account for possible influences of historical factors, I control for time in the model. Because it is unlikely that historical changes in mobility follow a linear pattern, I created five temporal categories, each of which contains a three- to four-year interval.

If so few cases can be gotten from a large-scale survey such as the CPS, studies such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics or the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which likely provide more accurate information on occupational trajectories but are conducted on a much smaller scale, would not provide sufficient numbers of waiters and waitresses for statistical analyses. Thus, despite the limitations of matched CPS data, the large number of cases makes it the most appropriate for use in this study.

#### *Standardizing Discrepant Educational Codes*

Many CPS variable codes changed over the course of the survey. Categories were added or removed, and in some instances the level of measurement shifted from interval to ordinal; discrepancies between variable categories had to first be resolved before I could conduct data analysis. In particular, measures of educational achievement underwent significant revision over the course of the CPS from 1983 to 1999: from 1979 to 1991, education was measured in terms of the highest grade attended and completed. In 1992, the CPS shifted to a credential-based system that measured grade completed until grade 12; for education beyond grade 12, respondents indicated the highest degree they had achieved. The earlier interval measurement was converted to match the more recent ordinal codes. Although measuring

education in terms of years of schooling implies, rather than directly indicates, that a degree was received, I will assume that (1) a respondent has received a high school degree if twelve years of schooling are completed, (2) a respondent has earned a bachelor's degree after completing sixteen years of schooling, and (3) eighteen completed years of schooling signifies that a graduate degree has been earned.

Due to the earlier coding system, in which respondents were asked two separate questions regarding the highest grade attended and whether that grade was completed, respondents who completed degree requirements needed be separated from those who did not. If a respondent indicated, for example, that twelve years of school were attended, but that the twelfth year was not completed, that respondent is thus coded as having less than a high school education. After synthesizing the variables, the recode contains an four-point ordinal scale of increasing credentials. The categories of educational achievement are as follows: (1) less than high school, (2) high school degree, (3) some college or associate's degree, and (4) bachelor's degree and higher.

Coding education in terms of degree achieved enabled me to measure whether a respondent increased their level of formal education in the year span between interviews. Respondents who moved from less than high school to a high school degree, or from some college to a bachelor's degree were coded as increasing their educational level. Although moving from a high school degree to some college (or an associate's degree) also indicates an increase in educational level, I am interested only in those respondents who have received a further degree during the course of the survey. Because occupational attainment is highly correlated with educational credentials (not years of schooling, per se), I tested for both the

effect of educational level and the effect of additional formal educational achievements on occupational mobility.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

#### *Characteristics of Waiters and Waitresses in the CPS*

Table 1 contrasts the characteristics of male and female servers in the sample, all of whom were employed (either full-time or part-time) at the first time point (month four of the respondent's inclusion in the survey). The sample is 86% female, which accords with the occupational gender composition calculated from Census data: from 1980 to 2000, the average composition of the occupation was 84% female and ranged from 90% in 1980 to 78% in 2000. A similar slight downward trend was found in the CPS dataset; from a high of 90% female in 1983 to 79% in 2000, the occupation has trended toward increasing male representation, yet is still overwhelmingly female.

Men are, in general, younger than women: waiters in the CPS average 28.6 years, whereas women's ages average 31.8 years. Of the women in the sample, 60% are currently married, compared to only one-quarter of male servers in the survey. The racial and ethnic composition of servers varies by gender: 93% of sampled waitresses are white, whereas 81% of waiters are white. Blacks are underrepresented in the sample, comprising 8% of male respondents and 3% of female respondents.

Male respondents are better educated than female respondents. As shown in Table 1, one-quarter of waitresses have less than a high school education at the first time point. Men fared slightly better in terms of educational achievement: One-quarter of male servers (24%) and two-fifths of female servers (42.5%) had a high school degree at the outset of the survey;

Table 1. *Attributes of Male and Female Servers at Time 1, 1983 to 1999 Current Population Survey (N=8269)*

Attributes	Male (N=1203)		Female (N=7216)	
	N	Percent or mean (sd)	N	Percent or mean (sd)
Gender (%)	1177	14.23	7092	85.77
Age [mean (sd)]	1177	28.60 (11.25)	7092	31.69 (13.02)
Marital status				
Never or previously married (%)	887	75.36	2848	40.16
Currently married (%)	290	24.64	4244	59.84
Race				
White (%)	951	80.80	6588	92.74
Black (%)	93	7.90	235	3.31
Other racial or ethnic group (%)	133	11.30	280	3.95
Education				
Less than high school (%)	231	19.63	1800	25.38
High school (%)	283	24.04	3028	42.70
Some college or associate's degree (%)	515	43.76	1920	27.07
Bachelor's degree or beyond (%)	148	12.57	344	4.85
Current student				
Yes	325	27.61	1339	18.88
No	852	72.39	5753	81.12
Increased educational level between times 1 and 2				
Yes (%)	140	11.89	795	11.21
No (%)	1037	88.11	6297	88.79
Employment status				
Part-time (%)	576	48.94	4532	63.90
Full-time (%)	601	51.06	2560	36.10
Average hourly wage in 1999 dollars [mean (sd)]	1177	\$6.94 (5.01)	7092	\$5.86 (3.25)

one-fifth of waiters and one-quarter of waitresses have less than a high school degree upon entering the survey. In sum, 44% of men and 68% of women have no education beyond high school. Slightly over two-fifths of men (44%) have at least some college or an associates degree; 27% of women, conversely, have some college education. Men also outpace women in college degree attainment: 13% of men have at least a bachelor's degree (i.e., they may have a bachelor's or graduate degree), whereas a mere 5% of women in the sample have achieved a college degree or beyond.

At the time of the first interview, a large proportion of both male and female respondents indicated they were currently attending school, either full-time or part-time, in addition to waiting tables. Among male respondents, 28% were current students; 19% of women in the survey combined school and work. In the year span between interviews, 12% of male respondents and 11% of female respondents gained a further degree, meaning they either moved from less than high school to a high school degree, or from some college to a bachelor's. Overall, 59% of women and 43% of men who were in school at the time of the first outgoing rotation group survey had received a formal degree by the time of the second outgoing survey.

Although men were more likely than women to combine school and work, women were far more likely than men to wait tables part-time. Of all servers included in the CPS, 49% of men and 64% of women worked part-time. Not only did women work less, they also earned less. The average hourly wage (in inflation-adjusted dollars calibrated to the year 1999) of male servers at time 1 was \$6.94, which exceeds women's hourly earnings of \$5.86 by a significant margin.

#### *Who Leaves and Who Stays? Descriptive analysis of the sample*

The occupational mobility patterns of waiters and waitresses is modeled using a five-category dependent variable: at time 2, servers 1) remain in waiting tables, 2) move to another foodservice occupation, 3) move to another front-line service occupation, 4) move to an unrelated occupation, or 5) leave the labor force. Gender differences in the mobility patterns of waiters and waitresses will first be examined using a chi-squared test. Multinomial logistic regression will then be employed to evaluate the personal characteristics

of waiters and waitresses that significantly influence their occupational standing one year after the initial CPS interview.

A chi-squared test is used to evaluate whether the mobility patterns of men and women are indeed dissimilar. The results are displayed in Table 2, and graphically depicted in Figure 1. Among servers, the patterns of mobility are significantly different for men and women,  $\chi^2 (4, N = 8269) = 87.16, p = .000$ . Less than half of the men in the sample were still waiting tables by time 2 (46%); a slightly higher proportion of women (51%) stay in the occupation. Although men and women exhibit similar rates of occupational immobility, those who leave experience disparate outcomes. Almost forty percent of men had moved into another occupation by the time of the second CPS interview; 16% had transitioned into unemployment.

Table 2. *Chi-squared Test of Gender Differences in Servers' Employment or Occupational Status at Time 2, 1984 to 1999 Current Population Survey (N=8269)*

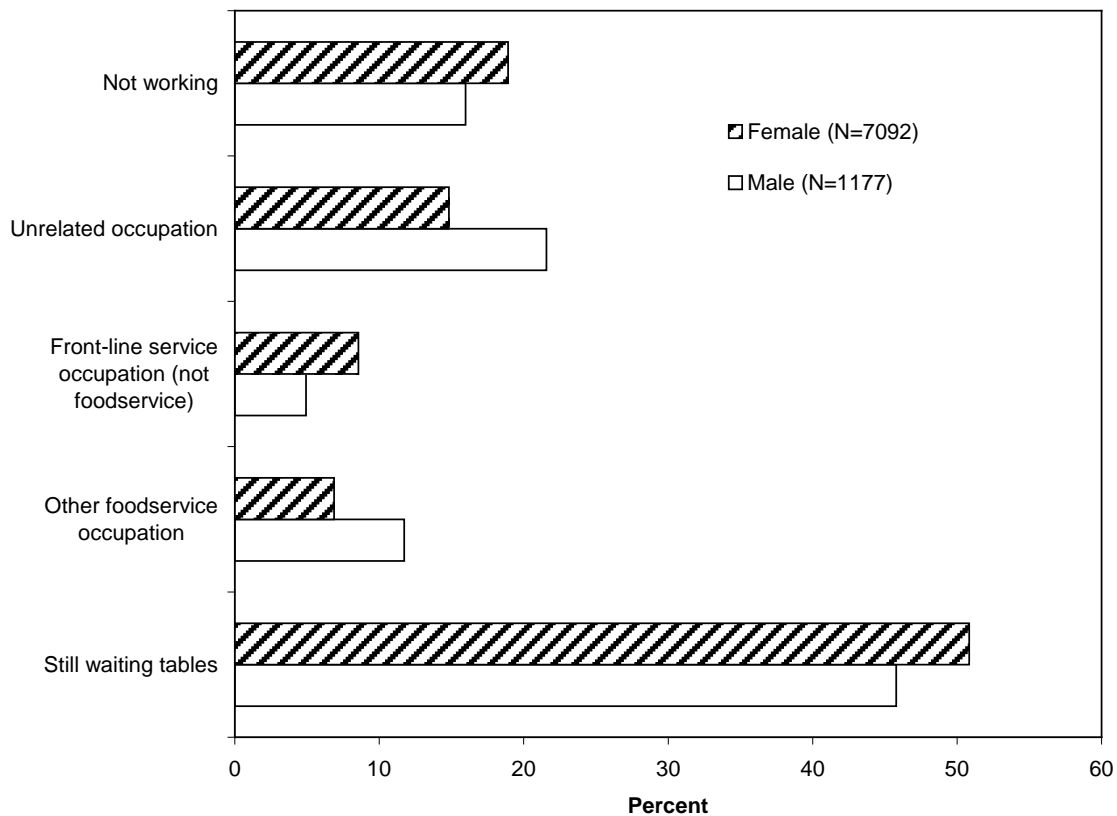
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Still waiting tables	539	45.79	3605	50.83	4144	50.11
Other food service occupation	138	11.72	487	6.87	625	7.56
Front-line service occupation (not foodservice)	58	4.93	607	8.56	665	8.04
Unrelated occupation	254	21.58	1051	14.82	1305	15.78
Not working	188	15.97	1342	18.92	1530	18.50
Total	1177	100.00	7092	100.00	8269	100.00

Chi<sup>2</sup> (4) = 87.16  
p = 0.000

Of men who remained in the labor force, only 5% went to another front-line service occupation, the average gender composition of which is 78% female; men were more likely to either move into another food service occupation (which averages 55% female representation) or an unrelated occupation, which is neither in the foodservice industry nor a front-line service occupation. Overall, 17% of men experienced lateral mobility, either into an occupation in the same industry or into an occupation with similar characteristics as

serving, while 22% of waiters moved out of the service industry entirely. Women, on the other hand, exhibited higher rates of mobility into other front-line service occupations (9% of women at time 2), yet lower rates of mobility into other food service occupations (7% of women in the sample). Less than 15% of the total sample of women had moved into an unrelated occupation one year after the initial survey, while almost 19% had transitioned into unemployment.

Figure 1. Occupational status at time 2 of CPS respondents who are either full-time or part-time waiters and waitresses at time 1



*A Logistic Regression Model of Mobility: 1) Demographic predictors*

However, when all variables are considered in a multinomial logit model (shown in Table 3), gender fails to be a consistently significant predictor of mobility. While gender strongly predicts whether an individual will move into a related occupation rather than remain waiting

tables, education takes over as the most significant predictor of mobility out of serving and into an unrelated occupational status, be it unemployment or an unrelated occupation.

Table 3. *Log likelihood estimates and odds ratios of mobility among servers who were employed at Time 1*

Variable (comparison category)	Other foodservice occupation		Front-line service occupation (not foodservice)		Unrelated occupation		Not working	
	$\beta$ (sd)	OR	$\beta$ (sd)	OR	$\beta$ (sd)	OR	$\beta$ (sd)	OR
Gender (female)	-.507* (.115)	.602	.620* (.151)	1.859	-.202 (.090)	.817	.098 (.097)	1.103
Age	-.020* (.004)	.980	-.046* (.005)	.955	-.043* (.004)	.958	-.018* (.003)	.982
Marital status (married)	-.377* (.102)	.686	-.443* (.109)	.642	-.097 (.079)	.907	.021 (.073)	1.021
Race (white)								
Black	.605* (.188)	1.832	.596* (.199)	1.814	.185 (.173)	1.203	.436* (.158)	1.547
Other	.085 (.186)	1.089	.157 (.206)	1.170	-.514* (.177)	.598	.051 (.143)	1.052
Education (College)								
Less than HS	.701* (.227)	2.015	.090 (.217)	1.094	- 1.300*	.272	.416 (.161)	1.517
High school	.368 (.219)	1.445	-.023 (.208)	.977	(.141) -.957*	.384	.010 (.156)	1.010
Some college/ associate's degree	.116 (.225)	1.123	-.213 (.125)	.787	(.123) -.703*	.495	-.014 (.159)	.986
Current student (yes)	-.115 (.139)	.891	.044 (.125)	1.045	-.075 (.100)	.928	.313* (.096)	1.368
Increased educational level between times 1 and 2	-.063 (.157)	.938	.336 (.131)	1.396	.669* (.108)	1.952	.497* (.100)	1.643
Employed part-time at time 1 (yes)	.040 (.095)	1.041	.290* (.098)	1.337	.009 (.071)	1.009	.568* (.071)	1.766
Hourly wage at time 1	.042* (.095)	1.043	-.005 (.014)	1.005	.027* (.009)	1.028	.019* (.009)	1.019
Time period (1983- 1986)								
1987-1990	-.142 (.131)	.868	-.063 (.127)	.939	-.004 (.099)	.996	-.055 (.090)	.946
1991-1993	-.049 (.138)	.952	-.162 (.138)	.851	-.111 (.106)	.895	-.113 (.097)	.893
1994-1996	.184 (.158)	1.202	.136 (.157)	1.145	.176 (.122)	1.192	-.112 (.118)	.894
1997-1999	.039 (.158)	1.040	.121 (.154)	1.129	-.013 (.123)	1.013	-.103 (.114)	.902
Constant	-1.306		-1.077		1.008		-1.192	

\*p<.01

In accordance with the hypotheses, men are indeed far more likely than women to move into another foodservice occupation rather than remain waiting tables. On average, foodservice occupations contain proportionately fewer women than the occupation of serving. Women are almost twice as likely than men to be working in another front-line service occupation one year after the initial survey. These occupations are generally overwhelmingly female, with an average gender composition of 78% women. Overall, men are more likely to move into male-dominated or gender-neutral occupations: other foodservice occupations are an average 55% female, and unrelated occupations contain 57% women.

Demographic characteristics in general seem to better predict mobility into occupations related to serving than mobility into unrelated areas. Age proved to be the only consistent predictor of staying versus leaving: Servers seem to be increasingly inclined toward occupational stability as they grow older, as each year of age made one more likely to stay in serving rather than transition into any other destination status. A variable testing for possible interaction effects between age and gender failed to be significant. Men are no more likely than women to leave the occupation as they age. Marital status was only predictive of movement out of serving and into related occupations, with married servers being far less likely than single servers to leave waiting tables for another service occupation.

Blacks experienced higher rates of mobility out of serving, but this higher mobility did not translate into movement out of service work. Black were 80% more likely than whites to be found in another foodservice (83%) or front-line service occupation (81%) rather than still waiting tables one year after the first survey, and they were also more likely to transition into

unemployment. Blacks were not however, more likely than whites to move into an unrelated occupation rather than remain in serving.

*A Logistic Regression Model of Mobility: 2) Educational predictors*

Gender in and of itself does not predict movement out of waiting tables into unrelated areas. The educational variables proved to be far more significant overall in determining who leaves serving and similar occupations. Educational status at time 1, as measured by the highest degree held by a respondent, strongly predicted movement into an unrelated occupation: respondents with at least a bachelor's degree are more likely than any other group to be found in an unrelated occupation rather than still waiting tables one year later. The gap between the mobility chances of non-degreed respondents and college-educated respondents narrows as the educational level of the non-degreed increases. For example, servers with less than a high school degree are only one-fifth as likely as those with a college degree to transition into an unrelated occupation rather than stay in serving, yet the odds rise to one-half among those with some college or an associate's degree. Respondents' initial levels of educational attainment did not provide much predictive power with regard to moving into related occupations or leaving the labor force.

Servers who are currently-enrolled students at time 1 are not more likely than non-student servers to experience an occupational shift, although the probability of leaving the labor force is significantly higher. Current students exhibit greater mobility than non-students, with students being 37% more likely than non-students to leave the labor force rather than stay in waiting tables. Gaining additional educational credentials in the interim between times 1 and 2--whether a high school, bachelor's, or graduate degree--increases occupational mobility. Not only does an increase in educational level make waiters and waitresses almost twice as

likely to transition out of serving and into an unrelated occupation, but it also significantly raises their chances of leaving the labor force. I initially hypothesized that mobility patterns might be different according to degree earned (for example, that servers earning a bachelor's degree during the course of the survey would abandon serving for another occupation, whereas servers who earned a high school diploma and began college between surveys would be more likely to be jobless at time 2, but the disaggregation of educational change according to degree added nothing to the model. All tests of interactions between education and gender also failed to yield significant results.

*A Logistic Regression Model of Mobility: 3) Occupational predictors*

One unusual finding was that higher wages actually increased one's likelihood of leaving serving rather than staying. For each dollar added on to respondents' hourly income at time 1, the likelihood increased of moving into an unrelated occupation, moving into another foodservice occupation, or leaving the labor force. A comparison of full-time and part-time servers shows that those who waited tables part-time at time 1 were 34% more likely than full-timers to leave serving for another front-line service occupation, and two-thirds more likely to have left the labor force by time 2. These results are consistent with other research that finds part-time workers have a tenuous grasp on employment; part-time workers are significantly more likely than full-time workers to transition out of the labor market rather than remain working. Once again, the interaction between gender and part-time work failed to reach significance; the variable was thence omitted from the model.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to initial hypotheses, gender was not always a significant predictor of occupational mobility when other factors were considered. While chi-square analyses revealed significant gender differences in mobility patterns, gender predicted mobility only among serving and related occupations. The failure of gender to significantly affect whether one transitions into an unrelated occupation or out of the labor force directly contradicts many previous findings (Pomer, 1984; Lynch, 1993; Howell & Reese, 1986). However, most other studies cover a longer time span between measurements of occupations, from five to ten years. A one-year gap between surveys may simply have not been enough time for gender disparities in occupational mobility to emerge. Occupational segregation may be a process of slow accretion—a gradual accumulation of mobility differences eventually resulting in noticeable disparities in labor market outcomes.

Women were no more likely than men to remain in the occupation of serving, yet the occupational outcomes of those who left differed greatly. In particular, women who left waiting tables tended more so than men to transition into another front-line service occupation, whereas men exhibited a greater tendency to move into other food service occupations, such as cook or bartender. This hints at one possible mechanism of gender segregation: although both groups experienced lateral mobility into other service occupations, women tended to move into those occupations traditionally dominated by women, while men moved out of serving and into occupations with a higher level of male

representation. Future research in this vein might, then, focus on the occupational gender composition of those who leave female-dominated occupations. Of workers who begin in a predominantly female occupation such as waiting tables, do men who leave transition into occupations with lower levels of female representation than do women?

The high proportion of waiters and waitresses who abandoned serving—approximately half of the sample remained servers after one year—points to the need to further explore why service workers change occupations and where they go after an occupation shift. Among waiters and waitresses in my sample, gender, education, race, and age were especially predictive of whether one continued or left waiting tables. The sizeable percentage of both men and women who were without a job at the time of the second interview indicates that, at least among front-line service workers, movement into unemployment must be included in models of occupational mobility. Analysis of occupational shifts alone provides an incomplete picture of the ways in which workers move through occupations such as waiting tables. To have only included workers who were employed at both time points would have excluded almost 19% of individuals in the sample.

The finding that only half of servers are still waiting tables one year later implies that the occupation is, as frequently proposed, generally considered temporary employment. While this may be true in the aggregate, rates of turnover are not constant between all groups in the sample. The increased proclivity for servers to remain in the occupation with every additional year of age signals that occupations such as serving may indeed be temporary, but mostly for younger workers. Additionally, minorities appear to experience greater mobility than whites, yet they are less likely than whites to move out of service occupations, implying that

minority racial and ethnic groups—and blacks in particular—tend to get trapped in the secondary labor market.

For the most part, one of the strongest influences on mobility patterns among servers appears to be education. In particular, gaining educational credentials seems to enable servers to leave waiting tables in favor of employment outside the service industry. Few studies have tested the simultaneous termination of education and service occupation employment, but my conclusions strongly suggest that the interplay between school and work needs to be more thoroughly analyzed. While the suggestion has been made that students will work in service occupations only until their schooling is completed, (Pomer, 1984; Curtis & Lucas; 2001) very little empirical work has been done to support this claim. This points to an intriguing new direction for human capital research. The positive correlation between human capital and occupational prestige or income has been firmly established, yet little work has been done on the correlation between gains in education and gains in occupational status. My conclusions suggest that an increase in education enables one to move out of waiting tables, suggesting that education provides a ticket out of the secondary labor market.

Studies of occupational change in which occupations are aggregated into two or three broad categories appear to have inadvertently masked several important influences on occupational mobility and immobility. The dynamics of mobility among waiters and waitresses, and front-line service workers in general, almost certainly differ in important ways from other types of occupations. The vastly different patterns of mobility between students and non-students, older and younger workers, and whites and minorities workers points to the possibility of two separate mobility patterns among front-line service workers. On the one hand, for students--mostly young workers who have recently entered the labor

force--the occupation is indeed temporary and vacated upon the completion of schooling. Conversely, among older workers, minorities and those with low educational levels, waiting tables becomes a trap--a permanent job with little chance of advancement. Front-line service work, generally portrayed as the domain of women and students, must be explored as a unique occupational type to fully understand why these jobs tend to attract the aforementioned groups, and why some move on to other occupations, whereas others find themselves trapped in a series of service occupations which they seem unable to escape.

## APPENDIX

### Detailed occupation codes and gender composition

Dictionary of Occupational Titles 3-digit occupation codes	% female
<hr style="border-top: 3px double #000;"/>	
Waiters and waitresses:	
Average percent female	84.6
<hr style="border-top: 3px double #000;"/>	
Food service occupations (waiters/waitresses and supervisory positions omitted): Average	
percent female	54.8
<hr/>	
434: Bartenders	59.0
436: Cooks	50.6
437: Short-order cooks (1983-1992)	53.5
438: Food counter, fountain and related occupations	80.5
439: Kitchen workers, food preparation	71.2
443: Waiters'/waitresses' assistants	50.3
444: Miscellaneous food preparation occupations	54.3
<hr style="border-top: 3px double #000;"/>	
Front-line service occupations (foodservice occupations omitted)	
Average percent female	78.0
<hr/>	
Health service occupations	
445: Dental assistants	98.4
446: Health aides, except nursing	82.8
447: Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants	91.0
Cleaning and building service occupations, except household	
449: Maids and housemen	86.0
453: Janitors and cleaners	35.7
454: Elevator operators	29.4
Personal service occupations	
458: Hairdressers and cosmetologists	91.7
459: Attendants, amusement and recreation facilities	41.0

461: Guides and ushers	34.3
464: Baggage porters and bellhops	22.3
465: Welfare service aides	80.7
466: Family child care providers	86.1
467: Early childhood teacher's assistants	95.4
468: Child care workers, not elsewhere classified	95.3
469: Personal service occupations, not elsewhere classified	64.3
Sales occupations	
263: Sales workers, motor vehicles and boats	10.0
264: Sales workers, apparel	84.0
265: Sales workers, shoes	63.5
266: Sales workers, furniture and home furnishings	52.7
267: Sales workers, radio, TV, hi-fi, and appliances	33.1
268: Sales workers, hardware and building supplies	26.3
274: Sales workers, other commodities	74.5
275: Sales counter clerks	69.0
276: Cashiers	83.0
277: Street and door-to-door sales workers	76.2
278: News vendors	41.5
<hr/>	
Unrelated occupations	
Average percent female	57.4
<hr/>	

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