

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Latina farmworkers' experiences: Maintaining dignity in an oppressive workplace

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Funding information

President's Advisory Committee for Labor Standards and Human Rights Graduate Student Summer Internship Travel Award

Abstract

Farmworkers in the United States support the billion-dollar agriculture industry, but they and their work are largely undervalued and ignored. While workplace research has thoroughly examined mistreatment at work, there is little research that delves into non-traditional workplaces—like those that employ farmworkers. Moreover, a focus on women farmworkers is even rarer, given that farmwork is a field dominated by men. However, an intersectional approach reveals Latina farmworkers' position in the U.S. in terms of the multiple hierarchies of status, power and privilege that affect them. Our study used thematic analysis to examine Latina farmworker experiences. Interviews with 14 Latina farmworkers revealed that they experience an oppressive workplace where discrimination and harassment are present. Despite these indignities, women still name positive aspects of their place of employment and ways in which they maintain their dignity in these challenging work settings.

KEYWORDS

discrimination, harassment and dignity, Latinx farmworkers, oppressive workplace

1 | INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic made clear how crucial the work of Latinx farmworkers is to our survival; they provide food to the U.S. and other countries, yet their work is largely invisible and they remain marginalized. Regardless of their contributions, Latinx farmworkers were also left out of COVID relief options (Jordan, 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has illuminated how much the world relies on the labor of groups who make the least money in society. Precarious employment positions leave them with no recourse in the face of the indignities in their work settings, particularly when they are undocumented. Women make up about half of all migrants in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2006)

and face many of the same challenges men do in these work settings, but they also face unique ones. Therefore, we aim to examine farmworking women's' experiences with everyday discrimination and harassment, to which they are particularly vulnerable in the current political climate that targets women, immigrants and low paid workers.

1.1 | Intersectionality theory

One way to ensure that we are capturing the women farmworkers' experiences is by understanding their position in the U.S. in terms of the multiple hierarchies of status, power and privilege that affect them. Intersectionality theory helped identify how social structures and power relations make some aspects of people's identities visible (Cole, 2009; Combahee River Collective, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Soni-Sinha & Yates, 2013; Waugh, 2010). For example, a farmworker may be a woman, an undocumented Latinx immigrant, and also from Central America; in this case, they might experience discrimination from people in higher-status occupations, from men, from white people, and also from Mexican and Mexican American individuals. Those aspects of themselves that are made invisible are those defined by systems that were created without them in mind. For example, in the U.S., a patriarchal system that centers men over women is not readily able to center women's experiences in farmwork, which has been historically dominated by men (i.e., starting with the Bracero Program for Mexican men; Calavita, 1992).

It is vital to use an intersectional framework when thinking about Latina women farmworkers because individuals in this population are affected by several different hierarchical systems of privilege and domination, and each one renders them invisible to certain institutions in the U.S (Holvino, 2010). For example, their documentation status may make it difficult to navigate systems that are created with assumed citizenship. Moreover, the history of intersectionality as a legal framework is also relevant for women in farmworking communities, who must often grapple with legal matters about their documentation status in the U.S. (Crenshaw, 1991). Indeed, these are the reasons why they have been excluded from the organizational literature: their multiple positions of marginalization make their experiences illegible. We aim to contribute to the greater visibility of Latina farmworkers and to the current literature that focuses on them.

1.2 | Discrimination and harassment in traditional workplaces

Research has shown that individuals experience everyday discrimination and harassment in their workplaces (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Deitch et al., 2003; Schneider et al., 1997), and that individuals who have a marginalized identity are more susceptible to these discriminatory instances, or selective incivilities (Cortina et al., 2013; Mirpuri et al., 2018). While experiences with discrimination are not limited to certain identities, the Latinx population has been understudied in this regard. The lack of research with Latinx women farmworkers may be partly due to this general absence in the literature, as well as to their multiple identities as women, Latinx people and immigrants (Orupabo & Nadim, 2020). Further, as a group that encompasses many regions of the world and is racially diverse, the Latinx community can also seem to be a difficult group to study. However, the diversity of Latinx people should not serve as a barrier; instead, it should always be recognized, because not all research with Latinx participants can be generalized to all members of the Latinx community. The research that does exist suggests that discrimination and harassment are salient issues. For example, in a study of professional workers, 37% of Latinx people reported having experienced race-related bullying at work (Fox & Stallworth, 2005).

The consequences of discrimination have been thoroughly documented in both workplaces and more generally, but typically focus on settings that are professional or academic. Experiences with mistreatment have been associated with poor mental health outcomes, as well as engaging in behaviors that can lead to poor health (e.g., depression symptoms or binge drinking; Brondolo et al., 2011; Chavez et al., 2015; Lorenzo-Blanco & Cortina, 2013; Organista & Ngo, 2019). These consequences are especially problematic in the Latinx community, as Latinx people in general,

and specifically those of Mexican origin, are less likely to have employer-provided health coverage, due to their concentration in service-sector jobs (Spalter-Roth et al., 2005). In other words, Latinx workers as a group are more at risk to experience everyday discrimination, but are less able to seek medical help for the poor mental and physical health issues that discrimination can cause. Beyond instances of discrimination, sexual harassment of women also plagues organizational settings (Lim & Cortina, 2005). Harassment, like everyday discrimination, may also lead employees to leave their position (if they have other options), which in turn can cost companies money in replacement and training (Cortina et al., 2001).

1.3 | Discrimination and harassment in farmworking communities

Although research on discrimination and harassment has traditionally focused on professional and academic settings, non-professional workplaces provide contexts for similar issues, given the similar power structure. These environments are often referred to as “brown-collar” workplaces, and include places where Latinx people and immigrant people are employed (Catanzarite, 2002). Marginalized people in these spaces are not immune to instances of harassment, nor are they immune to instances of everyday discrimination. However, while research has explored harassment and discrimination in professional, white and even pink-collar settings, little research has been done in some work environments. Specifically, this research has excluded those who fall outside of the typical office or academic settings, perhaps because farmwork requires constant migration.

1.3.1 | Everyday discrimination

One form of everyday discrimination within workplace settings is selective incivility; instances of selective incivility are defined as subtle, everyday, disregard for others (e.g., ignoring them, being unresponsive or rude to them) in the workplace (Cortina et al., 2013). Moreover, farmworkers are also susceptible to explicit microaggressions (overt expressions of disrespect), and can experience them interpersonally or from their environment (Areguin et al., 2020). A person's position as a low-status group member or as a low-level employee can also influence how vulnerable one is to these forms of mistreatment. Therefore, we would expect that farmworkers are especially susceptible to these everyday slights because of their low-power positions in the workplace (e.g., as workers rather than supervisors,), and because of their low-power group identities (e.g., Latinx, documentation status, and low SES).

1.3.2 | Harassment

Similarly, the current organizational literature on sexual harassment has focused on settings that exclude many people, with some exceptions for working-class individuals (e.g., Cortina & Wasti, 2005). This form of harassment includes unwanted sexual attention and expressions of romantic or sexual interest that are unwelcome, unreciprocated, and offensive to the recipient (e.g., unwanted touching, pressure for dates or sexual behavior) (Leskinen et al., 2011). As mentioned previously, farmworkers are typically not included in research in this area. A major reason for this might be accessibility to this population: farmworkers often do their work in rural, out of sight areas because large patches of land are needed to grow the fruits and vegetables. This, however, only makes examining these experiences more important, as it also means that women are often working in secluded areas (Waugh, 2010).

Women also frequently work with men, both as pickers and packagers: when women are working in packaging houses they are usually under the supervision of men. Packaging houses often mirrors what you would see in a garment workplace where there are people working on the floor, and supervisors and managers work above them in offices and can see them from above. Thus, sexual harassment is likely an important concern for this population,

as it is more prevalent when men are in higher positions of power (Cortina et al., 1998). However, only one study has explored this specifically in Latina farmworkers; that study confirmed they also experienced sexual harassment (Waugh, 2010). Further, Waugh (2010) found that in the women's places of employment, the majority of men were in supervisor roles, while women were in lower positions of power. This power imbalance is often associated with higher risk of harassment and discrimination.

1.4 | Working conditions for farmworkers

1.4.1 | Defining the workplace

Farmworkers pick, package and handle produce before it arrives at local grocery stores. There are various positions within agriculture that farmworkers can hold; tasks can range from picking, packaging, and pruning to working in warehouses and driving forklifts. At all levels, farmworkers handle the produce before it is put on a truck and delivered to a local grocery store for the public to purchase. Despite agriculture's rural nature, 61 percent of hired farmworkers reside in metropolitan (urban) counties (Department of Agriculture, 2016). This indicates that farmwork is not only a rural issue, but that it is relevant across the country. Moreover, agriculture, food, and related industries contributed \$992 billion to U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015. The output of America's farms contributed \$136.7 billion of this sum (Department of Agriculture, 2016), and farmworkers make up 2.6 million jobs.

1.4.2 | Working conditions

Based on available research on the experience of farmworkers, we know that their working conditions vary by location. Most recently, during the 2020 years, farmworkers continued their labor through a pandemic and devastating forest fires in California (Mahoney, 2020). Along the east coast, farmworkers worked through hurricanes (Ramchandani, 2018). Beyond working through natural disasters and a global pandemic, farmworkers' conditions are generally poor. In his book, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*, Holmes (2013) describes the working conditions of farmworkers in the Yakima Valley of Washington. Migrant workers are made to live in inadequate housing with shared bathrooms and tin roofs. Moreover, farmwork involves hunching over in awkward positions to pick produce and to do so in a recurring manner. In *Pain and Prejudice*, Messing (2014) describes how these recurring movements have negative effects on musculoskeletal health. Farmworkers' working conditions were already poor prior to the pandemic, but these conditions have been worsened by the pandemic.

1.4.3 | Coping with difficult working conditions

Dignity. One of the issues that has been foregrounded in research on low-income work is the importance to workers of maintaining their dignity. Scholars who have focused on the issue of dignity have noticed that when working conditions involve intense surveillance, and allow workers little opportunity to control their work, self-realization and pride—important elements of dignity—are difficult to achieve. (Bolton, 2007; Hodson, 1996; Lucas, 2015; Mahalingam, 2019). Hodson (2001) identified four conditions that challenge dignity at work (mismanagement and abuse; overwork; lack of autonomy or control; and team-based approaches that increase pressure on individual workers). While all of these conditions can arise in farmwork, Hodson also identified strategies that employees use to counter each of these conditions and 'maintain and defend their dignity' (p. 4). Specifically, Hodson states that employees can use resistance (by directly challenging abuse and finding alternate work methods in the face of mismanagement), citizenship (to find solutions to work problems on their own), creation of independent systems of meaning

(to recognize their own skills and take pride in them), and development of social relationships (to support and help each other). These strategies are potentially available to farmworkers.

Other ways to cope. Research on how low-wage workers cope with difficult working conditions has documented other strategies for coping outside (but consistent with) the dignity-at-work framework. For example, Holmes (2013) documents how migrant farmworkers struggle to address physical pain resulting from their poor working conditions by pursuing both medical and traditional healing. At the same time, others resort to smoking, drinking and other unhealthy behaviors that they hope will alleviate their stress.

Mahalingam and Selvaraj (under review) suggest that the concept of “ordinary cosmopolitanism” (Lamont & Aksartova, 2002) offers a helpful way of understanding how those with relatively less power can nonetheless bridge the gap between themselves and those with more power. They argue that one approach is to build bonds horizontally, or with co-workers who come from similar backgrounds, through sharing of food and meals, and recognizing their similarity. Low-wage workers can also attempt “vertical cosmopolitanism” by forging connections with higher status individuals including customers or supervisors. In their study of women janitors in malls in India, they found evidence of both kinds of efforts to create bonds within and across status differences as a way of humanizing the workplace.

Finally, low-wage workers can and do cope with their work situations through collective actions (Messing, 2014). These may include organizing informal groups or “drama” to raise issues, or creating or drawing assistance from labor unions. Chun and Agarwala (2016) review the range of different kinds of collective actions low-status workers can employ by building group solidarity and using it to hold employers accountable for unsafe or unfair working conditions.

1.5 | Research aim

The aim of our research is to examine Latina farmworkers' experiences in their workplaces, including experiences of poor working conditions, harassment and discrimination, and strategies for coping with those challenges. Currently, there is a dearth of research on farmworkers' experiences at work, and even less that focuses on women; we hope to enrich our understanding of their work lives. For that reason, we interviewed Latina farmworkers and used thematic analysis to identify themes in their interview responses about their working conditions and how they coped with them.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

We recruited 14 participants from the Central Valley of California, specifically from Fresno and Tulare counties. All participants were Latinas of Mexican descent who worked in agriculture. Women either worked as pickers or packers at the time of the interview—with eight of the women working in packaging and six of the women working in picking, and their average time at this site was 12 years. Of the 14 women, one was born in the United States. The average length of time in the United States for all other women was almost 21 years with a standard deviation of almost 16 years. Of the 14 interviews, three were conducted in English and all others were conducted in Spanish. Of the 14 women, nine were partnered and five were not, and all but two women had children. More details can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Participant demographic information

Pseudonym	Time in current place	Type of current FW	Age	Kids (yes/no)	Time in the U.S.
Alejandra	1.5 months	Packaging	44	Yes	Couple months
Belhen	5 years	Packaging	34	Yes	13 years
Carolina	18 years	Picking	40	Yes	20 years
Diana	3 years	Packaging	47	Yes	15 years
Erika	64 years (overall)	Packaging	72	Yes	64 years
Fabiola	20 years	Picking supervisor	50	Yes	33 years
Griselda	8 years	Picking	50	Yes	24 years
Helena	2 months	Packaging	35	Yes	17 years
Itzel	< month	Picking	41	Yes	1 year
Jessica	< month	Picking	40	Yes	"Not long"
Karla	2 months	Packaging	19	No	Born in U.S.
Lourdes	1 month	Packaging	25	No	20 years
Marla	17 years	Packaging	59	Yes	27 years
Natalia	Not clear	Picking	27	Yes	16 years

2.2 | Procedure

Recruitment and interviewing procedures were reviewed by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board, which determined it was exempt. Throughout the results section and in Table 1, we use pseudonyms to protect the women's identities.

We recruited participants using a purposive sampling method, relying on a community informant to offer us a list of contacts to try. Once the community informant asked if they would be interested and collected their name and phone numbers, the first author reached out to them to ask to schedule an interview. Given the nature of their work and how busy they are, potential participants preferred to call her when they had some free time. Interviews were arranged and conducted between July 8 and 22, 2019. Participants were offered a choice of where the interview took place: in their home or the interviewer's home. Most interviews were conducted at kitchen tables.

The first author/interviewer explained the project, gave an overview of what would be covered, and asked for their consent both for the interview and for audio recording. The interview began with demographic questions, then moved on to questions about the nature of their work, and closed with a couple of questions about why they agreed to participate in an interview and what they want people to know about women farmworkers. A complete list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

2.2.1 | Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a term used to specify a particular kind of systematic inductive analysis of text advocated and explicated by Braun & Clarke and their colleagues (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020; Braun et al., 2017; Terry et al., 2017). We started out interested in women farmworkers' experiences at work, with a particular focus on experiences of discrimination and harassment. However, there is so little literature in the area of women farmworkers' experience at work that we decided to analyze all of the questions in the interview protocol, searching for information that would help us understand such experience broadly, including experiences of discrimination and harassment.

Both authors read all of the interviews once to identify passages where women were describing their work experiences in ways that seemed illuminating. We then discussed the kinds of things we each had noticed, resulting in

15 codes or categories of comments, of which 12 focused on features of the work environment. We both reviewed these 12 codes and noted that they readily combined into three broad themes:

the oppressive structure of the work (including features of the work schedule and practices, relations with the supervisor, and relations with some coworkers);

discriminatory and harassing treatment (including differential treatment, relations with men, comments about how employers aim to prevent harassment and fear/knowledge of retaliation for reporting harassment); and

positive experiences at work (including features of the setting, good relations with coworkers, avoiding stress, productivity, and the elements of a "good day" at work).

We then each reviewed all of the interviews to highlight passages that illustrate each of these three broad themes.

There is no simple quantitative "test" of validity or reliability with this method; while we must converge to agree on themes, it is assumed in this method that researchers' separate perspectives are valuable and contribute to a more complete understanding of the topic at hand. Standards for appropriate evaluation of qualitative methods generally, including thematic analysis, were outlined by an APA Task Force in 2018 (Levitt et al., 2018), and we adhere to their general recommendations about how best to conduct and describe qualitative analyses, as they apply to this study. These criteria indicate that researchers are expected to demonstrate the validity of their claims by offering evidence (in quotations or accounts of actions) that support them, and that is robust enough to be convincing—first to each other, and eventually to readers and reviewers. The goal of this kind of process is the development of a rich description of a phenomenon, and a set of propositions about it that survive examination of lots of evidence. The goal, then, is not some universal truth, or identification of a mechanism that should work across all people, but instead to generate a set of propositions about how the identified constructs operate together, or a sort of theory that applies to the individuals studied.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Oppressive work structure

The oppressive structure of work came up in every interview, though the women did not label these difficult working conditions as oppressive. The women farmworkers talked about their schedule being determined by the fruit and machines, surveillance by supervisors, and being verbally reprimanded by supervisors, to name a few of the experiences that make up this category.

3.1.1 | Fruit and machines determine workday

To begin, the fruit and machines that farmworkers work with were often personified in the farmworkers' recounting of their workdays. The fruit and how much of it there was, and how good it was, determined how good or bad farmworkers' days would be. For women who worked in packaging houses as packers, the fruit quality would determine how long they would stay in the packaging shed, and the machines and how fast machines were set to operate would determine how stressed they were on any given day. Alejandra described her own experience with this:

So, one day, I told the forewoman, "Hey, I'm getting a lot of fruit. They come and come, and they don't stop – it doesn't matter how fast I pick them, they are piling up." And she says, "No. That's because of the size of the fruit. You have number 35." And I tell her, "But my coworker has the same number,

and the machine is slower. It's the same size." And like an hour later, she reduced the speed of my machine – of my number.

Thus, Alejandra described how the fruit on the conveyor belts to be packaged can travel quickly or slowly, and the speed at which the fruit moves is determined by a supervisor. She says that fruits "don't stop" no matter how fast she is moving, and because the speed is controlled by a supervisor, it is clear that this is one of the ways that the work pace is controlled. Belhen similarly explains that her work pace is determined by the speed at which the fruit is distributed; she says, "Sometimes, they do it slowly, and you get sleepy. But there are other days when they come at you with everything they have." The fruit and the machine determine their work day in other ways too, as described by Erika:

But when there is the fruit, when there is not so much fruit, they send you home, to finish your work and you leave. But when the machine is broken, you have to wait there, or you have to remain inside. If you wait inside, they are paying you but, if you are close to the break time or if you are close to lunchtime, they tell you: "Go eat, and then you go back to see if we already fixed it."

To summarize, the fruit and the machines have power in determining workers' pay, and also in their having a good or bad day. Fabiola said, "I mean, all the work goes well, there are no problems when the fruit is being packed and everything. That's a good day." Moreover, Itzel comments on how the fruit variability can also influence the type of day farmworkers have. In particular, Itzel notes that when the packaging shed shifts between different types of fruit, this can create confusion since each fruit has its respective packaging and protocols.

Similarly, for women who worked picking the fruit in the field, the quality of the fruit also determined how their workday would play out. If the fruit was not ripe and ready to be picked, people would get sent home and this would then be a bad day for them because they were not able to work and make any money. Carolina explained how the fruit determines when the farmworkers, who work in the fields picking the fruit, are going to be dismissed for the day. When the fruit is too rotten, the people get sent home without filling their quota of boxes for the day. This is an example of their work and pay being decided by the quality of the fruit--something that is out of their control.

3.1.2 | Inconsistent work and pay

Women's work schedules were also variable, with no defined workday. This is exemplified in the ways that women described their days. Helena said, "It depends. Sometimes we work for five hours, sometimes six. Sometimes eight, sometimes nine. It varies." Moreover, not only is their schedule variable but so is their pay, either being paid by contract or per hour. Griselda described this experience,

When it's per hour, they tell us it's going to be per hour, that it's not going to be a contract. They say, "Okay, today you're going to earn per hour," and they tell us, "You have to make a certain number of boxes." However, we usually do more.

Jessica also described needing to be quick on their break so that they can get back to producing. "Right after sitting here, we get up because we also have to eat very quickly what we have." Thus, their daily schedule and pay are not standardized and can vary day to day, leaving room for uncertainty about scheduling.

3.1.3 | Surveillance at work

Another instance of the oppressive work structure was how women were under surveillance while they were working. Women described instances where they were being watched, by supervisors and by other coworkers. These instances included cameras or just watchful gazes that women described as sometimes helpful, to prove they had not committed an error that they may have been accused of, but also as a way to control them and their production. Alejandra said, "But there's a camera that watches us all. We're monitored, and I'm conscious about it." In another example, Carolina describes how they are kept from talking because it could distract them from the work they are doing, and they could accidentally pack rotten fruit. Carolina said, "They don't want that because they say that you're, um--that you're not focusing your attention and, well, some rotten fruit might get passed on." Again, this is another reason that farmworkers are being watched so that they can produce at a high caliber for their employers. Their production often matters more than the workers do, as described by Itzel, "Yes, on the third day. I just remained there, and no-one came to help me, no-one told me anything--I just had to wait for the pain to go away, and then I had to continue."

At the same time, while there is this surveillance going on, women struggle to know what to do when it is their first day at a particular job. Women described not knowing what to do when they began their job and having to figure things out on their own or by asking others. For example, Itzel stated,

So, you have to ask the others: Hey, what is this? What do I have to do?" in order to--in time, you start getting the hang of it, but it's not as if they told you, "Look, you have to do things like this. Here's the material." No, they don't tell you anything.

Jessica, like Itzel, mentioned not knowing how to work in the field and how to pick and what the appropriate attire is to wear and was not told anything before arriving to work: "when we got here, because we didn't know what we had to bring, but when we saw other people and that, well, we bought our clothing to be able to work there because the sun is very hot." Jessica also echoed these sentiments and announced that the supervisor is present and has given instructions, "but there were people who really didn't understand what he wanted and it was like -so we were all included because he started to scold us all."

3.2 | Discriminatory and harassing treatment

Most of the women described features of discriminatory and harassing treatment in their workplaces, though they virtually always contextualized these comments with descriptions of positive relationships and experiences in those same workplaces. Their descriptions of the negative experiences included differential treatment, negative interactions with men, accounts of ways the employers tried to prevent harassment, and their own and others' fear and awareness of the potential for retaliation against anyone who complained about their treatment.

3.2.1 | Differential treatment

Differential treatment was often noticed. For example, Fabiola noted that some workers are "under contract" and therefore get a different wage, and Natalia, who worked in the fields, noted that some people would not be criticized or blamed, if someone else "signed them in" for their workday. Itzel, who also worked in the fields, described how a supervisor might treat one worker differently:

They're friends, so when a worker is doing something wrong or isn't doing anything at all, they don't tell her anything.... [W]hen it comes to other workers, who may not be as friendly..., then the supervisors tell them they're doing things wrong, or "No, you have to move. Go help the others."

Some of the workers felt that differential treatment was inevitable. Marla, who worked in packaging, noted that "veterans at work [who] became close friends of supervisors....they are the best treated even in front of the others; it's obvious." She also commented:

Supervisors are never supposed to show favoritism to one worker or another, but they're human beings. There are people who like a person very much or become closer friends. ...Then we see that a person does inadequate things, but we already know that he/she is a friend of the supervisor. So there is favoritism.

Others simply described the preferential treatment. For example, Erika, who also worked in packaging, indicated that "there are preferences because they give more opportunities for easier jobs" to some people. How do they allocate those easier jobs? "There is a preference because she is the cousin, the aunt, anything...she is the niece of the steward." Preferences for relatives in assigning tasks were also mentioned by Jessica, who worked in the fields: "they give them less work, less heavy work."

Some workers reported that supervisors treated particular workers inappropriately. For example, Griselda, who worked in the fields, mentioned that sometimes differential treatment was due to "underestimating" others; other times it was hard to account for: "Sometimes it goes just like, 'Oh I don't like her because she was talking badly about someone else.' That's something the forewoman would say." In another example, she said: "if something happens to you at work...the foreman says 'you're making that up.' They just ignore you." If the worker then complains, "she gets mad and doesn't take them into account for future jobs"—obviously a form of retaliation.

3.2.2 | Interactions with men

Interactions with men were sometimes described as irrelevant because the work is so gender-segregated that the men are not around the women. When the women did the same work as the men, they reported that the men "teased" or harassed them about their presumed inability to do the work. Natalia reported that she received harassing phone calls from a supervisor after signing up for work and listing contact information, actions that escalated to quid pro quo sexual harassment, while at the same time he commented that women should be at home, not in the fields. She also reported not only men making crude comments to her with sexual meanings, but actually groping her at work. Other members of her family tried to defend her, but in the end, she could do little, "because of the whole fact that my family depended on" her work.

Here Itzel outlines the kind of negative behavior that the men engage in: She indicated that "the men are always annoying us," and elaborated that "The men, the boys, from our crew—our field crew—they sometimes made bets, saying we wouldn't be back, that we couldn't endure working in the field." She said that "it hurts your pride. We came back to show them we could do it, even if we didn't want to." She also noted that the men would talk about the women in demeaning ways, for example, "what an eye candy," and "I'd do her."

In a different example, Jessica reported that some men resorted to using English they thought Spanish-speaking women wouldn't understand to say discriminatory things. One man said he thought the women were "inept and ignorant." Jessica also heard a male worker say, "women only serve to have children because they do not serve to work." Similarly, Lourdes overheard a conflict in which one man said that his female colleague "should have stayed home making tortillas." She also reported that "some of them talk about how certain women are considered worthless due to--the, like--they can't carry a child" and indicating that for this reason "she's not even a real woman."

3.2.3 | Employers' efforts to prevent harassment

Employers' efforts to prevent harassment were often noticed, though usually in the context of describing rules that affected the women. For example, Belhen described the dress code in her packaging plant. First she mentioned the rules about jeans: "They don't let you wear skinny jeans. They are not allowed. You have to wear jeans, and they can't be ripped because of the same thing, they don't want anybody to disrespect you." She elaborated that "We're in the packaging company, and we cannot wear transparent blouses...or a blouse that you bend over and it shows your cleavage. The forewoman calls you and says, 'Put on a sweater if you don't want anyone disrespecting you. You know you're not allowed to wear that.'" So the women's dress is policed intensively, but the rationale is their protection from the disrespect of the men.

Jessica outlined disrespectful treatment of women in the field and pointed out that the men "are not stupid; they do it when people are not around." She also noted that in contrast "the man we worked with—he was a very respectful man with women... he tried to get people to be respectful to us."

Sanctions against the men were much less often mentioned, and when they were they seemed vague, perhaps because the men and women were addressed in gender-segregated meetings. For example, Fabiola, herself a supervisor of fieldwork, reported that the men are told in meetings that they should not disrespect the women; she outlined that, "they hear that they shouldn't disrespect anyone because if they do, then they have to call the office, and they give them a piece of paper, and there's a possibility of getting fired."

3.2.4 | Fear and knowledge of retaliation

Fear and knowledge of retaliation was expressed by several interviewees, including Carolina who works in the fields, and knew of someone fired unfairly. The retaliation can be fairly subtle; for example, Lourdes mentioned that some workers "stand up to defend the other ones that don't want to say anything," and those outspoken women are not treated well—that is, "basically they ignore them; they don't interact with them...and if she has a question, sometimes she... ignores her." Marla reported about this in a different way: "There have been many cases where some coworkers had to quit their jobs because they argued with a supervisor and things got to such an extent that the worker had to quit."

Some didn't elaborate, but described the fear of retaliation, as Alejandra did, in describing excessive demands from particular supervisors: "Many of them don't want to talk about it because they think they are going to get fired." In other examples, both Belhen and Alejandra described scenarios involving retaliation not against discriminatory mistreatment, but after workers experienced injuries:

This year a lot of women—some of them—had some type of incident, and they broke a finger or some tendons, and those were the first ones that were told to go home and got fired. They took them to their therapies and everything, right? But when the doctor said that they were fine, they were told that there was no job for them anymore...it's just too much of a coincidence that that always happens to someone who has an injury. (Belhen)

Alejandra indicated that she felt the workers "should be able to speak up [about their unfair firing after injuries] and the company should listen to their employees and let them keep their jobs."

3.3 | Positive features of working situation

All of the women interviewed for this project mentioned positive features of their work situation. They often described these positive aspects of the workplace environment as resources for coping with the more difficult features of it.

3.3.1 | Work setting and process

Although many of the women pointed to negative features of the physical workplace and organization of work, some pointed to positive features. These particularly focused on cooler temperatures due to air conditioning, and clean, attractive, and well-organized work processes. Sometimes the latter was focused on the nature of the fruit itself and its state when they work with it.

For example, Erika said that her workplace “is very...beautiful. Everything is spotless. Very clean.” Similarly, Belhen pointed out that “Our workplace is nice. We have air conditioning, the place is clean, and everything is done responsibly. The atmosphere is nice....” Karla commented that “it’s a very good environment.... [because] they are constantly cleaning.” Alejandra also had many positive things to say about the environment: “It’s nice because, well, as long as you don’t mess with others, it’s nice. Because we don’t talk much and it’s very fresh inside.... there are some big, very big fans. They’re giant. I mean, those fans keep it ...nice inside.” When asked about a good day at work, she noted that “it is very calm, very peaceful. We work in a normal way but without—without getting too tired. On a normal day, the fruit doesn’t come out that fast.” In contrast, Jessica, who works in the field, said “I like to be in nature, because I think it is pleasant. I like the field.”

3.3.2 | Good working relationships

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned feature of the workplace that women really valued was the good relationships they had there—both with some of their supervisors and with their coworkers. Belhen noted that one of her supervisors was kind about her need to get home to her children in assigning shifts and releasing her after eight hours. Even more, she said, “I have felt supported by her because whenever I need to get out early for my children, she’s always given me permission. She always understands.” Others focused on the support they received from and gave to coworkers, as well as from supervisors. For example, Alejandra said “We support each other a lot. We help each other out.” She also noted that “One of the forewomen has helped me a lot. When she sees me, she helps me clean; she helps me take down the fruit or put it in the right place or throw it away.” Diana described a supervisor who helped her when she started out, but stressed that with her coworkers, “we rely on each other for help” every day. Griselda noted that “when we get overwhelmed.... There’s always a partner who says: ‘Oh, let me help you finish, so we can all go.’” She noted that the forewoman also helped and “supports me by cheering me up.”

Many of the women noted that they simply enjoy working with coworkers (Erika referred to them as “very kind companions, all—as a family”) who share their values and style of work. For example, Belhen pointed to the ones who “seem to be hardworking. They do the same job that I do. They’re very modest, very responsible. We’re never late.” Similarly, Itzel noted that “you always find someone who you get along with, someone who works like you and goes at your pace.... We’re not just chattering around, and we don’t get mad if you give us more fruit to pack, you know? We just support and help each other.” Fabiola also described her coworkers as like a family and said, “we all try to get the job done right,” while Helena noted that “When I’m with my coworkers, the girls, we’re talking and the time flies—and suddenly the day is gone.” Natalia focused on the fact that some members of her family work with her: “it’s a little more time to spend with one another and we just make it fun.”

Itzel commented, as did many women, on the pleasures of interacting with her coworkers. She said she feels happy when “I talk to the other women, my co-workers, and—and time goes by quickly. Days are lighter when we talk.” She also noted that the women are sources of help and advice: “Many women show support. They tell you, ‘You’re doing it just fine.’ Or they remind you what you have to do and tell you how things are done.” Erika pointed to the support, but even more, she said “there is so much joy, much companionship. We always laugh at lunch. I did not see sadness.” Diana also pointed to the pleasure when they “chat and tell stuff about themselves; they laugh,” while Griselda pointed to the fact that they “celebrate each other’s birthdays.” Some described looking for particular

women to partner with, as did Helena; she said, “we work very well together; she looks for me, and I always look for her...[because] it feels right to work with her.”

Marla singled out the pleasure of working with people for a very long time. She said, We already have about 25-33 years of working here...We have a very—I think very notorious—affection for each other because we understand each other more than those who are younger. So, I believe we support each other all the time... I think that I identify with them. It's because maybe we have the same ambitions or we want the same thing, and we also put the same effort, we get along.

Similarly, Lourdes said, “there's actually a couple that—I feel like it doesn't matter where they are working at, they bring their joyfulness, their energy...they are there to cheer you up.”

Some women described particularly kind responses when something very difficult happened. For example, Karla described that when she pulled a muscle at work, her coworkers “were all in the office of the supervisors...and they were like, I can take your day—just go home or rest, and don't worry about it.” Later in the interview she summarized “They make going to work just good.”

3.3.3 | Coping with stress

Many women emphasized that they didn't focus on the negative experiences, but used a variety of strategies to let go of them. For example, when asked what she does to make herself feel better after a hard day, Carolina reported that “I talk or smile so that the stress I've had all day long goes away.” Karla noted that “I just tell myself ‘a couple more hours’ or ‘a break is coming.’” Griselda outlined her strategy this way: “At the end of the day, I thank God because, no matter what, tomorrow will be better.... I encourage myself and say, ‘God give me strength....’” Jessica mentioned that after difficult days, she would “Take a walk and return just to clear up a little.” Marla noted that “I think I motivate myself...I want to work because it's good for me, because I'm going to gain much more time.... I want to motivate myself financially.” Lourdes said that on bad days “I just shake it off and go to bed,” while Natalia focused on the fact that she could “just get home to my daughters and take them out to a park.... Anything that has to do with my kids just puts a smile on my face.”

3.3.4 | Pride and praise for productivity

Many of the women reported that they felt pride in their work. Belhen noted that praise from her supervisor was sometimes a positive feature of her workplace: “those moments when they tell you ‘Congratulations, you're packing very well.’ Or ‘Congratulations for putting the fruits like that: for respecting the colors.’” She also pointed to feeling proud “when I get my bonuses.” Griselda felt similarly proud when “they say, ‘you really nailed it...It feels good, I feel flattered....’”

Erika (who is over 60) said “because of my age, they are always telling me that they cannot believe that I worked so hard—just like a young woman. And I am proud that I am flattered.” In contrast, Carolina pointed out, “I always feel proud of myself because I finish my work, and I do it very well, and I'm talking about something that I hadn't—that I hadn't done before coming here [a month ago]. I learn fast. I can learn anything in the blink of an eye.” Marla commented on her pride in the experience she realizes she has gained:

You realize that you can do things better than your coworkers.... Even if you are older or whatever, you can beat the young people, even if they have more vitality. I think it's because of experience.

Several women noted, as Helena did, that they felt particularly proud when “the check's going to be big” (because they worked a lot of hours). Jessica noted that she felt good when she realized that “I am going to get money and send it to my children.” Karla was pleased when “I have extra time to go help something else” and Natalia noted that “I always take a lot of pride in what I do.”

4 | DISCUSSION

Three major themes characterized the accounts by Latina farmworkers of their experiences of work: the oppressive work structure; discrimination and harassment; and positive experiences at work. Although the women named experiences that we identified in the first two categories very clearly, they rarely explicitly stated that they viewed these conditions as unfair or oppressive. Many emphasized the more positive aspects of their work lives, which defined the third theme. This emphasis on the positive is clearly an important source of the women's capacity to tolerate the challenging aspects of their work experience.

4.1 | Oppressive work structure

The first theme is particularly important in helping to illuminate some of the unique aspects of the power structure encountered in farmwork by those with little control over it. This included aspects of the workplace itself and of ways it was indifferent to domestic and personal demands (Weigt & Solomon, 2008). In the packaging context, the women experience features of the fruit and the machines as impersonally determining their workday stress, although in fact employers and supervisors (who control the speed of the conveyor belt and set policies) are controlling the impact of both. Farmworkers also expressed how features of the fruit (such as how ripe it is) control the field work, but again it is the employers who set policies, and supervisors who implement them, who decide when and whether workers continue to work and get paid. These realities have many downstream implications for the women in terms of their inconsistent work schedules and pay—difficult features particularly for the large majority with family responsibilities.

Although few workers mentioned the human decision-makers behind these difficult working conditions, many noted the surveillance of their supervisors and employers. They were uncomfortably aware of that constant scrutiny and contrasted it with the absence of adequate help in learning new things.

4.2 | Discrimination and harassment

The importance of different intersections of women's social identities underlined by intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009; Combahee River Collective, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991) was particularly evident in the discussion of discrimination and harassment experiences (e.g., the assumption that women could not or would not tolerate the hard work). Moreover, there were occasions of discrimination that focused on identities that differentiated women from each other (e.g., as Spanish-speaking only; or as non-mothers). The gendered nature of the power structure described by Waugh (2010) --with gender segregation in tasks, and men supervising women in nearly all settings--was particularly evident and important in the women's accounts. Supervisors' power mattered in other ways too, particularly in the area of preferential treatment of friends and family members. The particular expressions of both gender-based harassment and incivility in treatment by some men were consistent with those documented in the literature in other kinds of work settings (Cortina et al., 2013; Cortina & Wasti, 2005). In this area, the women were quite aware that the policing of their dress and appearance was a way of making them unfairly responsible for the men's potential mistreatment of them. Finally, as has been demonstrated in other kinds of workplaces (Cortina & Magley, 2003), the women were very aware that complaining about mistreatment was likely to lead to retaliation by employers. Nat-

urally, this operated to constrain any inclination to take collective action (Messing, 2014) or directly resist policies (Hodson, 2001).

It is worth noting that some aspects of the oppressive conditions of work, and the discrimination and harassment, were experienced by the women as challenges to their dignity. We specifically saw examples of all four of the kinds of conditions Hodson (2001) outlined as potentially challenging dignity (mismanagement, overwork, lack of control, and teamwork demands that increase pressure on the individual). We also heard about conditions that increased physical pain and suffering (Holmes, 2013). These first two themes, then, provide evidence that the dignity-at-work framework (Hodson, 2001), as well as understanding of the importance of physical strain at work (Messing, 2014), are helpful--along with the theory of intersectionality and the literatures on everyday discrimination and harassment--in illuminating the experiences of Latina farmworkers' experience.

4.3 | Positive features of working situation

The women clearly focused on the positive aspects of their work experience as part of their own way of retaining dignity at work. Two of the strategies that Hodson (2001) outlined for dignity-maintenance--recognizing their own skills and taking pride in them and developing supportive helping relationships with coworkers--were particularly visible in many accounts. In addition, though, the women mentioned focusing on the pleasantness of the surroundings, and on the pleasures awaiting them at home, as internal or cognitive strategies they used to cope with difficult days. They also focused on the pragmatic motivation behind their work: providing for their families and earning money; they took pride in being able to do that.

The women also clearly built and drew strength from bonds with both coworkers (horizontal cosmopolitanism; Lamont & Aksartova, 2002) and some supervisors (vertical cosmopolitanism; Lamont & Aksartova, 2002). They were particularly vocal about these social ties, frequently describing them with pleasure and comparing them with the ordinary pleasure of friends and families. We note that although the women did not engage in direct collective challenges to workplace practices or policies, they did engage in some of the subtler collective actions described by Chun and Agarwala (2016) as available to those coping with precarious work. For example, they described occasions when workers supported each other in asking supervisors and managers to provide appropriate remedies for a particular individual with an injury.

These three themes provide an important perspective on Latina farmworkers' experiences at work. They confirm the applicability of some aspects of the literatures in which these workers have been underrepresented (the literature on discrimination and harassment in particular), and some features of the broader literature on low-wage and precarious workers (oppressive conditions with limited potential for resistance). At the same time, they illuminate how intersectionality matters even in these extremely unequal working conditions. Finally, the women's agency is underscored by their own emphasis on the positive features of their experience and the many ways in which they maintain their dignity, pride, and pleasure in their work.

4.4 | Contributions and limitations

We have provided a rare opportunity to understand the experience of an understudied segment of the labor market (farmworkers) with varying marginalized identities. We hope it is a contribution to several research literatures and increases the visibility of low-income Latina farmworkers. We interviewed women who played different roles in farm-work (particularly packaging and picking), and who were different in age and family situations.

At the same time, we note that we only studied Latina farmworkers in one area of California, whose families originated in Mexico. It is important also to study Latina farmworkers in other areas of the country, where working

and living conditions may be different, perhaps especially in not providing nearly year-round work opportunities (e.g., in the Midwestern United States).

5 | CONCLUSION

This qualitative study of Latina farmworkers provides a rare opportunity to understand this particularly understudied group of essential workers' experience. Our findings clarify the degree to which these workers experienced oppressive working conditions and discrimination and harassment, with relatively few avenues for mitigating or resisting them. Nevertheless, the women themselves emphasized their own pride in their skill and productivity, the warm social relationships they build at work, and their capacity to support each other and solve problems created for them by their employers and supervisors. Illuminating the problematic and painful pressures these women face at work allowed us also to make their strength and perseverance visible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, we want to thank the Latina farmworkers who participated in our interviews for sharing their experiences with us. Next, we would like to thank the President's Advisory Committee for Labor Standards and Humans Rights at the University of Michigan who provided funding so that these interviews could be conducted. Last, we would like to thank Dr. Sara McClelland, Dr. Lilia Cortina and the Identity, Discrimination, and Diversity in Organizations Lab for feedback during the preparation of this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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How to cite this article: Areguin, M. A., & Stewart, A. J. (2022). Latina farmworkers' experiences: Maintaining dignity in an oppressive workplace. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 29(4), 988–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12788>

APPENDIX A

Interview Question and Protocol

To begin, I will let them know: I want to get a sense of what it's like to do this work and what it's like to work with other people in this work.

Building a rapport

Where are you from? Where is your family from?

Can you share where you work and what you do there?

How long have you worked there?

Have you always worked the same job? If not, why have you switched either locations or tasks?

Some demographic questions

In what city/town do you live?

Do you live in your own residence or in someone else's house?

What type of home do you live in (apartment, house, trailer, field of work or other)?

How many people live in your house and what is your relationship with them?

How many years of education have you completed?

How old are you?

What is your marital status?

Which is your race?

Where is your place of birth?

How many years have you been living in the United States?

Where do you work?

What is your family income?

How many people contribute to your family's income?

Do you have children and how old are your children? For how many children are you financially responsible?

For participants who were born outside of the United States:

Why did they emigrate to this country?

What kind of work did you do in your native country?

Substantial questions

Tell me about a typical day at work?

follow up: What is your workplace like?

What is good day at work like?

follow up: How do you feel at the end of a good day?

What is a bad day at work like?

follow up: How do you feel at the end of a bad day?

follow up: What do you do to feel better after a bad day?

Are there times at work when you feel happy?

follow up: Angry?

follow up: Frustrated?

follow up: Pride?

As a woman, have you ever felt disrespected by your coworkers? If so, what happened?

follow up: who treated you this way?

follow up: was it a fellow Latino?

Is everyone treated the same at work?

follow up: Do some people get more perks than others?

Can you tell me about a time when you felt supported by a coworker?

follow up: Supervisor?

Are there certain people you like to work with?

follow up: What do you like about working with this person?

Are there people you don't like to work with?

follow up: Why?

Who do you work well with?

follow up: Who don't you work well with?

follow up: What are the things you like about them?

follow up: Dislike?

Are there people you don't get along with?

Do you see that some people are treated better than others? People treated worse than others?

Someone conducted interview similar to the ones I am conducting now and some of the women reported the experiences I am going to share with you, and ask you if you or anyone you know has experienced this

First, some women said, "There are always those jokes. They make jokes or sexual insults saying: 'Women are worth nothing except for having children and cleaning the home.'"

Second, "I have seen moments when people complain of a physical injury, and then they are fired."

Third, "The supervisor offered me money to have sex with him. I thought it was a joke, just because I thought he was a trustworthy person."

Last, "The men I work with make comments about my clothes, they tell me that I wear too many clothes. They say, 'Take something off so we can see you more.'"

Closing

Why did you agree to talk with me today?

What is one thing you would want people to know about women farmworkers?

Payment