

Researcher explains why ex-'Cosby Show' actor endured 'job shaming' for his Trader Joe's gig

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Most teenagers have heard a similar admonishment from their parents:
"Why don't you get a real job?"

The same kind of cultural expectations were on display when Geoffrey Owens, a former "Cosby Show" actor, endured "job shaming" after a photograph of him bagging groceries at a Trader Joe's store went viral, exposing the American stereotype of respectable work, said Robin Clair, author of *Why Work: The Perceptions of a 'Real Job' and the Rhetoric of Work through the Ages*.

"In my research, I've especially looked at the expression of a 'real job,'" said Clair, a professor of communication at Purdue University. "You hear people say, 'When am I going to get a real job?' or, 'When are you going to get a real job?' or, 'I can't wait to get a real job.'"

The practice of "job judgment" dates back as far back as Adam Smith's "Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations," which explores how some [jobs](#) are more important or valuable in a capitalist society, Clair said.

"Job judgment or job shaming is a real thing and exists in a lot of different situations," she said. "When people describe their idea of a real job, it's 9-to-5, it's working full-time, it's well-paid, it's well-organized. We have this picture of what people are striving for, and other jobs get marginalized. People who are temporary workers or people who aren't working in management get belittled."

Workers are judged not only by their jobs, Clair said, but also by the company for whom they work, the status of their employment, such as temporary, part-time or full-time, and many other factors.

"There are relationships to how reputable the company is that you [work](#) for, so you might be doing the exact same thing at a different company, and there's this whole newfound respect for what you do. Similarly, [temporary workers](#), who are often demeaned as 'temps,' don't get the same respect as someone who's been hired by the company."

Provided by Purdue University

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