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## Unsavory

Clay Ewing (University of Miami)

### Abstract

You're a fast food worker, preparing burritos and making minimum wage. Without a living wage and no paid sick days, you're forced into a situation where you have to work even though you've got a cold.

### Introduction

Policies engineered by lobbyists can be shortsighted. The National Restaurant Association aggressively opposes mandated sick day legislation because they assume it will increase operating costs ("Cities and States Debate Paid Sick Leave", 2013). While a well-paid employee can easily take days off to recover from a cold, for a minimum wage employee, the decision to stay home could mean financial suicide. And in the restaurant industry, employees going to work while sick could result in a public health crisis ("Backed into the Corner", 2012).

Unsavory is a mobile game designed to put the player in the precarious position of choosing between their personal health, public health and their financial wellbeing. Like other activist games, the intention is to create awareness and empathy around an issue that is best understood as part of a larger system. Additionally, the game seeks to be a catalyst for change by embedding a social media campaign into gameplay that encourages players to share meaningful facts and statistics regarding restaurant workers, access to health care, and paid sick day legislation.

### Game Play Description

The objective of the game is to pay all of your bills at the end of the month by working at a minimum wage job. Your job is to prepare tacos, quesadillas and burritos by tapping on the ingredients in front of you that match each order slips. Each round equals one day, and the game difficulty increases by introducing a new type of order slip. Every 5 days, the time allowed between orders is reduced to increase player difficulty. A player is allowed to screw up an order twice in one day without being penalized. However, if the player makes a third mistake and receives a third strike, they can either quit for the day or use a "re-shift" to play the round over again. If a player is out of re-shifts and goes home early more than two days out of the month, they're fired.

At the end of each week, the player is paid for time worked. Typically, this is a full 40-hour week but if the player went home early the time they were unable to work is deducted for their paycheck. After work, the player is transported to their apartment where they are able to pay their bills, take medicine, and call in sick. To ground the game further in reality, the bills to be paid by the player are a simplified version of a financial plan created for McDonalds employees by Visa (Weissmann, 2013).

## Getting Sick

The key lesson that *Unsavory* attempts to teach players is that a person making minimum wage without paid sick days is systemically forced to work while sick. In the second week of the game, the player catches a cold, which introduces an additional mechanic of wiping your nose to stop yourself from sneezing so as to not alert your boss of your sickness. When the player sneezes, the boss sends them home for the day. The player can opt to buy and take medicine or take a day off from work to increase their health, but they are not paid for that time. This makes paying the all of the bills impossible if the player takes more than one day off from work.



*Figure 1. When the player doesn't swipe their nose in time, they sneeze on the food trays.*

## Social Media Campaign

When the player first becomes sick, they receive a letter from an advocacy group that informs them about paid sick day policy in the United States. The player continues to receive messages with additional

information about paid sick day legislation each time they come home from work sick. The letter invites them to participate in a social media campaign within the game. From this campaign screen, they can select various tweets that highlight the issue through different lenses (with regards to business, public health, human rights concerns) and target specific hashtags and accounts related to the campaign. Thus, the game promotes a call to action that allows players to go beyond the gameplay and get serious about trying to fix a real-world problem.

## Downloads

The game can be downloaded at the following places:

- iOS: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/unsavory/id959296519?mt=8>
- Google Play: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dataplayed.unsavory&hl=en>

## Additional Resources

- Game Play Video: <https://vimeo.com/126556061>
- Game Play Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/125715103>
- Game Website: <http://playunsavory.com>

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## References

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