

“IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY”: WOMEN RESTAURANT WORKERS’
EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION

By

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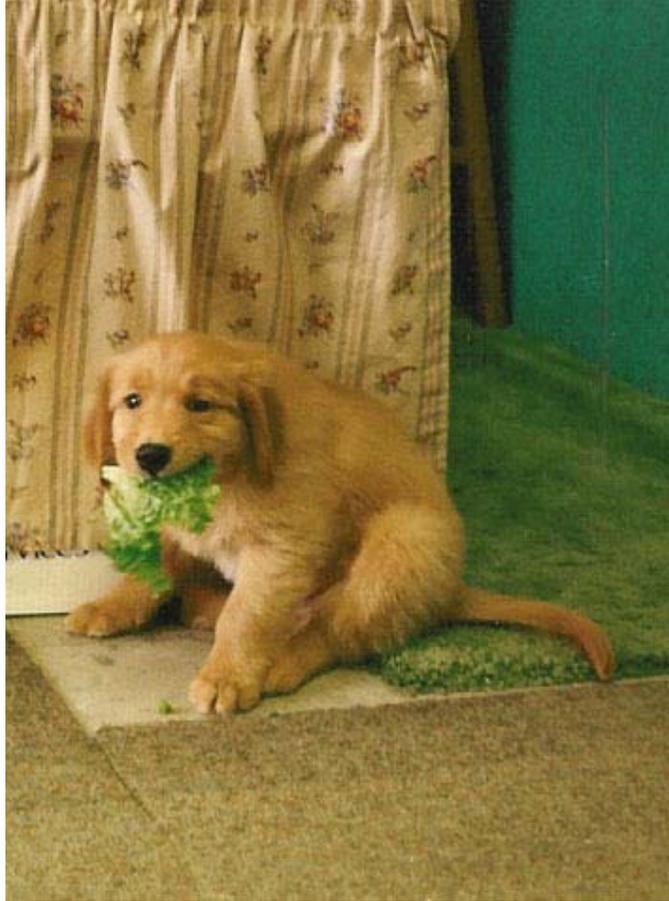
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Trevor, you have been my best friend since the fourth grade.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Chair: Joe R. Feagin
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Sexual harassment and gender discrimination have emerged as important social issues over the last two decades. In fact, some authors have suggested that approximately half of all American women will be targets of sexual harassment either in school or in the workplace over their lifetimes. As a number of researchers have suggested, women who work in the restaurant industry may be at an increased risk of being harassed or discriminated against given the informal work atmosphere and “highly sexualized nature” of this type of customer service work.

Women who work in customer service industries not only face harassment in the forms of *coworker* and *employer-employee harassment*, but also as a result of having to deal with customers. Given the levels of sexual harassment and objectification faced by women restaurant workers and the restaurant industry’s documented history of racial harassment and discrimination, women’s experiences of harassment and objectification need to be explored in the context of an industry that is plagued with both sexism and

racism. These experiences also need to be explored in relation to women's lived experience as targets of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification in the broader society.

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the extent to which women experience sexual harassment and sexual objectification in their current and/or previous employment while working as managers, servers, bartenders, and hostesses in a variety of restaurants. Further, this study aims to examine the organizational culture by which sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification coexist as institutionalized factors shaping women's workplace experiences. Using snowball sampling methods, 25 women participated in feminist focused group interviews or individual interviews to share their experiences of and thoughts on sexual harassment in the restaurant industry.

Findings indicate that the restaurants represented in this sample typically mirror the broader sexist, capitalist society in which women's bodies are objectified and used as commodities in the service sector. As a result, the women in this sample faced institutionalized and interpersonal forms of sexual harassment and sexual objectification from coworkers, customers, and managers. Women's treatment as sexualized and racialized bodies was thus linked to their self-objectification in their restaurant work and this may perhaps explain how women's bodies thus *become the service* in the restaurant industry. Policy implications and ideas for further research are also discussed.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“I’ll buy you a pair of breasts if you sleep with me!”

Recently while dining at a seafood restaurant, my friends and I chatted with the young white woman who was serving us that evening. As everyone at the table talked with her, I mentioned that I had just finished up a study on racial relations in restaurants. She asked me how the study went, and I briefly summed the results for her and mentioned that a peculiar phenomenon occurred while interviewing the women in the study: nearly all of the women shared their experiences of sexual harassment while working in restaurants, even without being solicited for such information. At this point, I mentioned to her that I also had worked in a number of restaurants and had seen and experienced a great deal of sexual harassment while working. It was then that I shared with her that I always thought it would be an interesting topic to explore.

She then nodded her head in agreement, and went on to explain that she had recently been “propositioned” by a male customer earlier that month. She said that this man was a regular customer, often coming in during the week for lunch. On this particular occasion, he was drinking at the bar at night in the restaurant when he said to her: “I’ll buy you a pair of breasts if you sleep with me!” Shocked, she nervously laughed and walked away from him, not knowing what to make of such a comment. The next day, this same customer returned to the restaurant during lunch, and feeling unsettled, the server approached him and asked, “You know, you were probably pretty drunk when you were in last night, but do you remember what you said to me?” The customer quickly

replied, “Yeah, and the offer still stands!” At this point, the server again walked away, and at the time of the sharing this story, she had not talked to him since.

In telling her sexual harassment narrative, this server offered her own analysis of the event: “First of all, he’s a married man! How do you just go around offering to buy women breast implants and hide that from your wife? Second, (looking down at her chest) I think I’m doing just fine! I don’t need bigger breasts! Sorry that they’re apparently not to his liking, but how could he assume that I am dissatisfied with what I have? And how do you just go around saying things like that to people?” Hearing this woman’s narrative, and viewing the many stories of sexual harassment I have been witness to and heard about in my work in the context of women’s persistent sexual harassment and sexual objectification in the broader sexist society, I decided at that moment that I must do a study on this.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual harassment and gender discrimination have emerged as important social issues over the last two decades. In fact, Fitzgerald (1993) has suggested that approximately half of all American women will be targets of sexual harassment either in school or in the workplace over their lifetimes. As a number of researchers have suggested, women who work in the restaurant industry may be at an increased risk of being harassed or discriminated against given the informal work atmosphere and “highly sexualized nature” of this type of customer service work (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001; Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Hall, 1993a; Hall, 1993b; Hughes & Tadic, 1998; Loe, 1996; Rusche, 2003; Woods & Kavanaugh, 1994).

Women who work in the service sector of society not only face harassment in the forms of *coworker* and *employer-employee harassment*, but also as a result of having to deal with customers as well (Hughes & Tadic, 1998; LaPointe, 1992; Loe, 1996; Rusche, 2003). Given the levels of sexual harassment and sexual objectification faced by women restaurant workers and the restaurant industry’s documented history of racial harassment and discrimination (Dirks & Rice, in press; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Watkins, 1997), women’s experiences of harassment and objectification need to be explored in the context of an industry that is plagued with both sexism and racism. These experiences also need to be explored in relation to women’s lived experience as targets of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification in the broader society.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Although sexual harassment in the workplace was made “theoretically illegal” with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a legal definition for sexual harassment did not exist until the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) set out to define two types of sexual harassment: *quid pro quo* and hostile environment (Crouch, 2001; EEOC, 1980; Fitzgerald, 1993; Welsh, 1999). *Quid pro quo* partially characterizes how sexual harassment was originally thought of: as the attempt to extort or bribe sexual cooperation with the use of subtle or explicit threats of employment related consequences. *Hostile environment* captures the pervasive sex-related verbal or physical conduct, such as sexual jokes, comments, and touching, that interferes with one’s ability to do one’s job or creates an “intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment” even absent the threat of employment related consequences (EEOC, 1980).

Although gender harassment and sexual harassment are defined differently, the EEOC guidelines include gender harassment as a form of sexual harassment as it represents sexist and derogatory comments, jokes, and gender-based hazing directed toward or about women (Welsh, 1999). While there exists some unresolved debates about what constitutes sexual and gender harassment, Sev’er (1999) writes, “What is clear is that sexual harassment is a pervasive, serious, and injurious form of violation of a person’s right to a safe or any other living environment” (471).

The extant literature on workplace sexual harassment suggests that varying conceptualizations of sexual harassment as well as the sampling technique and the type of workplaces in which the study was conducted may account for the diverse prevalence rates among samples (Ilies et al., 2003). However, incident rates from one of the most cited study by the U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1981, cited in Fitzgerald, 1993)

suggests that women working for the federal government experienced a wide range of harassing experiences including unwanted sexual remarks (33%), physical touching (26%), and pressure for dates (15%). In the same sample, some 12,000 women reported that they were victims of rape or attempted rape by supervisors or coworkers in a period of two years. Also, sexual harassment was also persistent, with a number of women reported extended periods of continuing sexual harassment in their government workplaces.

Given that the type of workplace that is studied provides varying degrees of reported sexual harassment, incidence studies have focused on the factors that may indicate higher rates of sexual harassment. For example, Gutek (1985) suggested that workplaces in which women are underrepresented have the highest incidence rates of sexual harassment. More recently, researchers have begun closely examining the organizational aspects of workplaces as well, indicating that workplaces where sexuality reigns serve as breeding grounds for sexual harassment (Folgero & Fjeldstad, 1995; Hughes & Tadic, 1998; Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 1999). Customer service oriented positions within the service sector also may have cultural norms that institutionalize sexual harassment or disregard sexual harassment as a problem (Folgero & Fjeldstad, 1995; Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Hughes & Tadic, 1998). Certain organizations- such as restaurants, may also enhance women's working roles as sex objects, thus institutionalizing sexual harassment and sexual objectification in the service sector.

Women as Workplace Sex Objects

Very few researchers have commented on the fact that as a victim of sexual harassment, a woman essentially becomes an object of attention. Gutek (1985) stated that there are three traditionally female roles that women can be (either by choice or force) in

the workplace: pet, mother, and sexual object. With regard to the role of sex object, she writes, “Women workers are likely to be regarded as sex objects when two conditions are met: 1) when the occupation and the job are numerically dominated by women, thereby facilitating sex role spillover and 2) when these women are in work groups with more men who may emphasize the sex object aspect of the female sex if they wish” (135).

“Sex role spillover” occurs when the sexuality aspect of the female “sex” role merges into workplace roles in which women are expected to be sex objects: “cocktail waitresses, receptionists in some engineering and manufacturing firms or actresses” for example (Gutek, 1985, 135; Spradley & Mann, 1975). A key point here is that women as sex objects cannot be viewed beyond that. That is, when a woman is viewed as a sex object (either by personal choice as an achieved status or by force as an ascribed status by those around her), this role overpowers other aspects about her person: her ability, her skill, and her competence, and she is only seen as an object—a body. Women often choose not to be sex objects and actively resist being labeled or viewed as sex objects in their workplaces. However, women are often hired specifically to fulfill the role of sex objects in a number of positions- especially those in the service sector, including restaurant workers.

Bartky (1990) provides some of the key features of being viewed as a sex object. She writes, “A person is sexually objectified when her sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from the rest of her personality and reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (26). The notion that sexual harassment objectifies women- that is, treats them as sexual objects to be viewed, harassed, or harmed, has not been discussed extensively in the sexual harassment

literature although sexual objectification is certainly a key aspect of sexual harassment behavior.

Thus, workplace sexual harassment serves not only to remind women that they exist in subordinate positions in the workplace, but in the larger society as well. As Fitzgerald (1993) explains,

Like rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment simultaneously arises from and reinforces women's subordinate position in society. Women who experience it are frequently faced with choices that hardly constitute choices at all: to comply or resist, to report or be silent, to submit or be ostracized, demoted, fired, or worse. (1072)

Koss (1990) describes some of the more insidious aspects of how the processes of sexual harassment and sexual objectification operate together: "sexual harassment defines women as objects, sometimes turns them into victims, and frequently changes their lives" (cited in Fitzgerald, 1993, 1071). Given the intertwined nature of sexual harassment and sexual objectification, it is important to identify how, "making a woman the object of sexual attention can also work to undermine her image and self-confidence as a capable worker" (Schultz, 1998, cited in Welsh, 1999, 170). For a growing number of positions in the service sector specifically seek to use hire women as sex objects, these processes are increasingly important topics of study.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification in Service Work

In a theoretical piece by Williams (1997), she writes, "Some of the behaviors that researchers define as constituting sexual harassment are in fact *requirements* of some jobs. A great many jobs in the service and entertainment industries require that employees submit to hostile or degrading sexual stares, language, and even occasional touching" (22, italics in original). For individuals who enter service work, they may or may not be aware that they by agreeing to work in certain jobs, that they will be subjected

to objectification, harassment, and other sexualized behaviors as part of their jobs. Hired to be sex objects, Adkins (1995) writes that dominant notions of sexuality are so highly embedded into many service positions, that women are largely seen as “sexual commodities.” And as a result, “the actual work of women [becomes], in part, the work of being and dealing with their location as sexual objects” (134). In her study of the British tourism industry, she found that women employees were often subjected to verbal harassment, physical harassment, and gaze. As such, women became objects of male gaze in “which the observer has the right to gaze at for as long as, and in whatever way, pleases [them]” (129). As part of their jobs, they were also expected to engage in sexual interactions with men as if were part of their job. Women in such service institutions are also told that they must accept this behavior as one woman manager explained, if the women, “complain, or say things like they can’t cope, I tell them it happens all the time and not to worry about it ... it’s part of the job ... if they can’t handle it then they’re not working up here” (Adkins, 1995, 130).

In another study of service workers in Canada, Hughes and Tadic (1999) found that a majority of the 83 women in their sample reported being sexually harassed not only by coworkers and managers, but by customers as well (in retail and security sectors). As a result of the inherent unequal power dynamics that shroud service work, women felt “highly constrained” in regard to dealing with such behavior. The authors of the study argue that service work 1) privileges the customer; 2) emphasizes customer satisfaction; and 3) as a result, women are very reluctant to seek redress. The women in the sample reported engaging avoidance behaviors of male customers, as well being less friendly, thus jeopardizing their work roles and inviting job related consequences as a result. These

findings present the many dilemmas faced by women in service work in light of customer sexual harassment.

Folgero and Fjeldstad (1995) in a study of Norwegian service workers, found that five themes emerged from their study: 1) a reluctance to admit to experiences of sexual harassment, 2) an obligation to keep the guests happy at all costs, 3) submission to persons of power, 4) role playing, and 5) the “uniqueness of the work setting” (306).

Their most interesting contribution to the literature on service work sexual harassment is their examination of the cultural norms that exist in the workplace. “In a cultural setting where sexual harassment is generally accepted as part of the job, feelings of harassment may be suppressed to the degree where the victim actively denies that the problem exists (311).

Perhaps even more interesting, was that they found that coworkers actively discouraged those who complained about sexual harassment and told others to “take it or leave it” as part of the sexual demands of the job. These results may begin to examine then how institutionalized forms of sexual harassment and sexual objectification set forth in service work organizations shape cultural norms of disclosing- or not disclosing experiences of sexual harassment. This is important given the organizational norms where sexual harassment and sexual objectification are considered “part of the job.”

Institutionalized Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification

Some of the best examples of organizations that institutionalize sexual harassment and sexual objectification can be seen in the restaurant literature. One of the most cited prime examples of this type of organization is Loe’s (1996) ethnography of “Bazooms” as described below:

Bazooms is an establishment that has been described both as “a family restaurant” and as a “titillating sports bar.” The name of the restaurant, according to the menu, is a euphemism for “what brings a gleam into men’s eyes everywhere besides beer and chicken wings and an occasional winning football team.” Breasts, then, form the concept behind the name the O’s look like breasts [in the displayed name] (399).

It may not be surprising then, that with the institutionalized sexual objectification of women’s breasts, that the sexual harassment policy includes this statement: “In a work atmosphere based upon sex appeal, joking and innuendo are commonplace” (Loe, 1996, 400). Loe’s analysis is an interesting one, in that she hopes “to show that women are not merely ‘objectified victims’ of sexualized workplaces, but are also active architects of gender, power, and sexuality in such settings” (400).

However, the fact that “The slang term Bazooms is usually used in the context of male desire and breast fetishism; it is a term that treats one part of the female body as an object of sexual desire” (407) points to the sexual objectification that occurs to all women in the workplace. Being subjected to harassment, objectification, and gaze by male customers hardly constitutes power in such settings where women’s experiences epitomize Bartky’s (1990) definition of feminine domination.

This work however is an excellent example of how women come to be viewed and treated as objects, and then come to self-objectify themselves as a result of internalizing an outsider perspective on their bodies. This outsider perspective is largely enhanced by the constant appearance and body surveillance that women workers undergo as it is created and reproduced by the men in economic and social power in the restaurant-employers and customers. Perhaps most interesting (or perhaps most dangerous) about the processes of these women’s objectification and resultant self-objectification is that women not only incessantly monitor their appearance, but that this appearance is so

inextricably linked to their feelings of self-worth as employees and as women. This may be one possible explanation for the high turnover rate for restaurant workers. Other authors in the restaurant literature have also focused on less formal means of institutionalized workplace sexual harassment and sexual objectification, and how women cope with these in the restaurant industry.

Sexual Harassment in Restaurant Work

In one of the most well-cited sexual harassment studies on labeling, Giuffre & Williams (1994) found that in a qualitative study of restaurant workers, that both waiters and waitresses engaged in a great deal of flirting, sexual banter, and some playful touching, although they often do not label these experiences as sexual harassment if the coworkers were similar to them in terms of age, class, sexual orientations, and race/ethnicity. In other words, those that were viewed as “others” or “outsiders” were more likely to be labeled as sexual harassers in the context of restaurant work. Although this study only focuses on sexual harassment that occurs among coworkers, the current study begins to apply some of these ideas to customer sexual harassment in the restaurant.

In the Folgero and Fjeldstad (1995) study, they noted, “In customer contact jobs, women’s appearance is typically of great importance. Strictly enforced dress- and grooming codes are found in all kinds of service operations, particularly evident in airlines, hotels, restaurants, banks, health services, and personal care services; and “attractiveness” is always at the core of these codes” (303). This may have particular consequences for women whose bodies are placed at the center of their employment in the restaurants they work. Because cultural norms in service organizations thus allow sexual harassment to be institutionalized in treating women as objects, perhaps inviting

sexual harassment, this may disallow women in restaurants to 1) see sexual harassment as a problem, and 2) allow women to see themselves as victims of sexual harassment.

In an ethnographic study by LaPointe (1992), she points out that women restaurant workers can “resist” sexual harassment in their jobs, “By defining abuse as part of the job, waitresses can continue to work without necessarily internalizing or accepting the daily hassles and degradations as aspects of their self-definitions or sense of self-worth. In other words, if women enter into a waitressing job expecting crude remarks, degrading uniforms, and unnecessary management-based power plays, they may prepare themselves for the worst by setting personal boundaries, with conditions attached” (391). Coming to view sexual harassment as a normalized aspect of restaurant work is one way of coping with sexual harassment and objectification as Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger (1999) write, “Thus, in work contexts where subjection to sexual harassment is part of the job, the concept of “consent” is problematic, yet many workers tolerate and even endorse these features of their jobs. In these cases, the boundary between sexual harassment and sexual consent is often blurred, from the vantage points both of employees and of researchers interested in documenting and ultimately eradicating sexual harassment” (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 1999, 77). Thus, restaurant sexual harassment and sexual objectification need to be viewed and explored in the contexts in which they exist.

Purpose of the Current Study

As Welsh (1999) suggests, there is a serious need for qualitative studies of the organizational and more ambiguous aspects of sexual harassment. Although there has been some focus on sexual harassment in the restaurant literature, very few researchers have examined the links between sexual harassment, sexual objectification, and women’s subsequent self-objectification in the workplace. The purpose of the current study is to

investigate the extent to which women experience sexual harassment and sexual objectification in their current and/or previous employment while working as managers, servers, bartenders, and hostesses in a variety of restaurants. Further, this study aims to examine the organizational culture by which sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification coexist as institutionalized factors shaping women's workplace experiences. As mirrors of a sexist, capitalist society, restaurants may provide an excellent opportunity to explore women's lived experience of sexual objectification and its consequences.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

The aim of much feminist research has been to “bring women in,” that is, to find what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women’s lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible. A key method for doing so—drawn in part from the legacy of consciousness raising—has involved work with the personal testimony of individual women. (Anderson et al., 1990; DeVault, 1996, 32-33)

The feminist sociologist, in her formulation, must refuse to put aside her experience and, indeed, must make her bodily existence and activity a “starting point” for inquiry. From this beginning, the inquiry points toward an analysis of the social context for experience, the relations of ruling that organize daily life and connect all members of a society in systematic interactions. (DeVault, 1996, 39; Smith, 1987)

In speaking to a number of women about sexual harassment both personally and professionally, I have noted that women experience and think about issues of harassment, objectification, and gender oppression in incredibly diverse ways. For the purpose of this study, I desired to explore women’s experiences of sexual harassment in the restaurant workplace for a number of reasons. First, my own experiences as a restaurant worker (mainly as a hostess) shaped my knowledge of the pervasive nature of sexual harassment in restaurants. From an organizational standpoint, I have always questioned what it is about restaurants that makes them “anything goes” types of establishments in regard to the overt sexism and racism that ostensibly coexist without resistance or question. This has led to a research agenda trying to examine this question, beginning with a preliminary study on racial relations in restaurants (Dirks & Rice, in press).

The interview data from this study helps explain the second reason for wanting to explore sexual harassment among women who work in restaurants. During the racial

relations study, I found that a number of the white women I interviewed shared their own personal experiences of sexual harassment with me, even without being solicited for such information. The breadth of information these women offered indicated that sexual harassment and gender discrimination appeared to be rampant in the restaurants they worked in, offering a host of new questions to be explored with regard to gender relations.

When I asked the male coauthor of the study if he too was receiving information about sexual harassment, he stated that he had not, which may not be surprising given some of the literature on gender effects and interviewing (Padfield & Proctor, 1996).¹ It could be possible that the women in the racial relations study felt more comfortable sharing sexual harassment information with me as a result of 1) sharing the same gender, 2) sharing the same racial background, and 3) sharing the experience of working in restaurants.

Hearing the experiences of these women and recalling my own experiences of sexual harassment (even as an adolescent and as a teenager), allowed me to view the issue of restaurant sexual harassment in the broader context of girls' and women's daily experiences of sexism- including sexual harassment and objectification, as a worthy topic of study. It is here that I believe a feminist approach to the theoretical development and methodological approach of this study is well suited. By using feminist focused group interviews and individual interviews, women's experiences of sexual harassment can be

¹ Maureen Padfield and Ian Proctor did an empirical study to compare data from interviews conducted by a man and by a woman. Attempting to minimize the impact of gender between interviewers, they found no significant differences in responses to direct questions in their interviews with 39 women. However, for the woman interviewer, women were markedly more likely to voluntarily offer personal experiences (e.g. having had an abortion) with her than with the male interviewer.

explored in a qualitative manner to provide meaningful analysis, critique, and directions for change.

Feminist Methodology

Feminist researchers have long placed women's lived experience at the center of a field of inquiry rooted in consciousness raising, feminist activism, and feminist critique of standard social science practices. While there is no universal "feminist methodology," feminist researchers have been pioneering in their efforts to create an interdisciplinary scholarship generally based on the following principles: 1) including (all) women's lived experiences in the study of society; 2) minimizing the harms and consequences of research; and 3) supporting changes that will improve the status of all women (DeVault, 1999; Montell, 1999; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Smith, 1987).

A number of researchers have outlined the basic elements of what a feminist methodology should look like (DeVault, 1996; DeVault, 1999; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Nielsen, 1990; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Smith, 1987). Some of these principles involve 1) highlighting the significance of gender in research and the broader society (Cook & Fonow, 1986; Montell, 1999); 2) challenging the positivistic norm of objectivity and the divide between the researcher and the researched (Smith, 1987); 3) using consciousness raising and women's standpoint as methodological tools in transforming and deconstructing patriarchy (Mies, 1983; Smith, 1987); 4) emphasizing and understanding the role of and politics surrounding feminist research as an empowerment tool (hooks, 1989; Opie, 1992); 5) paying close attention to the ethical implications of research (Kirsch, 1999); and 6) perhaps more recently, deconstructing the notion that there is a universal women's experience, while recognizing the diverse intersectionality of all women's experiences (Collins, 2000 [1990]).

With these in mind, some feminist researchers have extolled the virtues of feminist methodology, suggesting that, “Feminist researchers are more likely to grant the interviewees the status of ‘expert’ on the topic or discussion, in keeping with the feminist principle that women are experts on their own experience” (Montell, 1999, 46; Reinharz, 1992). Using the standpoint of women as Smith (1987) suggests, allows women’s personal narratives and testimony to be placed at the center of research, thus “giving voice” to women’s diverse lived experience. Some feminist researchers have noted that in creating a space for women’s voices as participants, researchers may also be able to make sense of their own voices and experiences as well. As a woman who has experienced and been witness to a great deal of sexual harassment over my lifetime, a feminist methodology aimed at elucidating the patterns and shared experiences of women’s lives is very appealing.

Rationale for Engaging Feminist Methodology

Mies (1983) emphasized that feminist researchers should shift from individual interviewing to group interviewing to not only obtain more diverse and complex data, but to aid in revealing and deconstructing women’s structural isolation in understanding the shared nature of their collective experiences. In a similar vein, group interviews can also serve as consciousness raising platforms in encouraging women to recognize patterns in their shared experiences (Montell, 1999). With this in mind, I decided to employ both feminist focused group interviews and individual interviews to explore women’s experiences of sexual harassment in a manner that may be supportive of building collective understanding and collective resistance to experiencing, dealing with, and coping with sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment as a “Sensitive Topic”

Before launching into a more exhaustive discussion of the methods employed, I want to explore the risk that sexual harassment could be viewed as a “sensitive topic” of research. Although the term “sexual harassment” has gained more visibility in the last two decades, sexual harassment itself still remains a controversial topic as its legal and empirical definitions are imprecise and the parameters of what constitutes sexual harassment are not agreed upon (Crouch, 2001). As a result of sexual harassment involving both “political and moral views about the proper relationships between the sexes and the proper role of the law in sexual matters,” (Crouch, 2001, 4) the controversy surrounding sexual harassment does not appear to be nearing a foreseeable end.

Beyond legal and societal controversies, sexual harassment often involves unwanted sexual attention, unsolicited sexual remarks, unwanted sexual touching or coercion, and sexual violence that can be threatening, hostile, degrading, and offensive (Fitzgerald, 1993). A growing body of literature has begun to document the dire consequences to women’s psychological, emotional, physical health and well-being as a result of the severity, duration, and frequency of sexual harassment (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Koss, 1990; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997; Sigal et al., 2003; Stockdale, 1998; see Fitzgerald, 1993 for more detailed discussion). Given this, talking about sexual harassment may trigger some of the more uncomfortable aspects of remembering incidents in group interviews as well as individual interviews, and this was considered in keeping with the feminist principle of reducing the harm of research.

As Morgan (1996) points out, “Because group interaction required mutual self-disclosure, it is undeniable that some topics will be unacceptable for discussion among some categories of research participants” (140). With this in mind, I 1) let women whom

I asked to participate know up front that the study would be about sexual harassment and their experiences as women working in restaurants, and 2) offered the option of participating in an individual interview or a focused group interview (with similar peers) based on what they thought would feel most comfortable for them.

Interestingly, none of the women whom I asked to participate stated a preference² or declined to participate, with only one woman sharing that she had indeed *not* experienced sexual harassment while working in a restaurant.³ That is, for every woman whom I asked to participate, they indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment, with many of them sharing their most recent experience with me openly. In the interviews, every care was taken to ensure participants were comfortable with the topics being discussed, and perhaps unsurprisingly, women in group interviews were remarkably supportive of each other's experiences.

Feminist Focused Group Interviews

As Sim (1998) suggests, "Focus groups tap a different realm of social reality" (350). Although traditional focus groups have long been a tool for collecting qualitative data, feminist focused group interviews have proved to be a valuable resource for studying women's lives (Montell, 1999; Morgan, 1996). Morgan (1996) defines focus groups with the following:

² For women who chose to do individual interviews, this was more a result of scheduling difficulties for scheduled focus group dates and times rather than a personal preference for an individual interviews however.

³ While she stated this in the beginning, during her participation in a group interview, she later recalled that she was harassed and stalked by a regular customer; management was notified and responsive. Reporting no sexual harassment and then later describing or recalling sexual harassment experiences is similar to a qualitative study by Folgero & Fjeldstad (1995) in which 6 of their 10 participants at first denied having experienced sexual harassment but then later described unwanted and unpleasant episodes of sexual harassment.

...a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. This definition has three essential components. First, it clearly states that focus groups are a research method devoted to data collection. Second, it locates the interaction in a group discussion as the source of the data. Third, it acknowledges the researcher's active role in creating the group discussion for data collection purposes (130).

Focused group interviews though have been defined somewhat differently, "if they: 1) are conducted in informal settings; 2) use nondirective interviewing; or 3) use unstructured question formats" (Morgan, 1996, 131). Both of these techniques were employed in the current research, keeping in line with feminist methodological principles.

Beyond collecting a lot of data in a short amount of time, feminist researchers have noted the appeal of focus groups because they allow participants to exercise a fair degree of control over their own interactions (Morgan, 1996; Montell, 1999). In allowing women to be experts about their own experiences, "group interviews may allow the researcher subjects to be experts to a greater extent than one-on-one interviews" (Montell, 1999, 50). Instead of the researcher acting solely in framing issues and composing questions, "Group interviews allow for a more egalitarian and less exploitive dynamic than other methods, and the interaction among participants produces a new and valuable kind of data (Montell, 1999, 44).

In fact, as Montell (1999) indicated in her work on sexuality, that, "people can and do challenge and contradict each other. They ask each other questions, provide examples from their personal experience, and collectively produce accounts that would be difficult if not impossible to elicit in individual interviews" (51). In the three focused group interviews for this study, women certainly queried each other, attempting to explore and compare the experiences of others with those of their own. These lines of questioning

produced thoughtful and provocative interactions, while creating a space for meaningful self-reflection and openness among participants.

In this respect then, the collective narratives that arise in focus groups are products of a particular group context, just as individual narratives are products of an individual interview context (Rose, 2001). The narratives that women provide in a group context thus allow participants to interact with each other more so than with the researcher, thus providing a broader understanding of the issues at hand. Feminist focused group interviews provide a meaningful way of exploring what women have to say, but also provide a means of shaping questions and issues to explore in more in-depth individual interviews. For example, using these two methods together in the current research allowed the issue of sexual objectification to be explored further in depth in individual interviews as a result of it being a relevant theme in the focused group interviews.

Feminist Individual Interviews

“Investigators’ reasons for combining individual and group interviews typically point to the greater depth of the former and the greater breadth of the latter” (Crabtree et al, 1993; Morgan, 1996, 134). Thus, many researchers have used the combination of both methods to explore specific experiences in more depth, as well as to gather narratives to explore the continuity of personal experience among those individually interviewed. While it may be difficult for researchers to negotiate both professional and personal identities while conducting individual interviews (as well as other methods), feminist researchers offer some means of resolving these dilemmas. DeVault (1996) asks us to view the researcher as a “resource rather than contaminant” in the research process (42). Smith (1987) has argued that feminist researchers should embrace subjectivity to center

women's experiences (as well as one's own experiences) in the research process, rather than attempt to view objectivity as the legitimate authority in research.

Often in the individual interviews, women would ask how I became interested in studying sexual harassment in restaurants. Relying on my own experience of having worked in restaurants for over a decade (beginning at the age of 10 in a family friend's restaurant as a "busgirl"), I often shared my own thoughts and experiences with participants who queried me on my own experiences. Given that nearly all women revealed uncomfortable experiences of sexual harassment, I often would share some of my own harrowing experiences of sexual harassment with these women. To not do so, in my opinion, would have created an incredibly exploitive dynamic between the "researcher" and "researched," thus thwarting any notion of feminist research. The self-revelatory and self-reflective nature of the individual interviews therefore provided a platform similar to the consciousness raising that occurred in the focused group interviews. My own experience as a restaurant worker provided some preliminary contacts to begin recruiting participants, as well as provided some insight into the development of the questions posed to women.

Participants

Twenty-five women between the ages of 19 and 46 participated in either focused group interviews or individual interviews.⁴ All but six women were in their twenties. Twenty-three women identified as white American and two women identified as Asian American (one Filipina American woman, one Chinese American woman). All but three

⁴ The mean age for all participants was 23.36 years (without the outlier of 46 years of age, the mean was 22.42 years).

women had at least the experience of attending either a community college or a university; two women had earned a GED.

This sample is partially unique in that unlike much of the restaurant literature available, this study includes current and former restaurant workers. Twelve women were currently working as managers, chefs, hostesses, servers, cocktail servers, and bartenders; thirteen women had formerly worked in these positions in a variety of restaurants across the Southeast and Northeast regions of the United States. Participants' experience working in restaurants ranged from four months to 25 years.⁵ Women reported working in a variety of restaurants including chain, non-chain, family owned, fine dining, country clubs, and "gentlemen's" establishments. Given that women provided an estimate of the number of restaurants they had worked in, one could estimate that approximately 80 restaurants are represented as workplaces in this sample. This is important given the organizational context and reasons women provided for why they believed sexual harassment existed in the restaurants they worked in.

Methods

I was able to recruit a number of participants who had restaurant experience through personal contacts and word of mouth via snowball sampling (Babbie, 2001). Using focused group interviews also aided in the addition of participants through a type of snowball sampling in which I asked participants to ask women friends or coworkers with restaurant experience if they would also like to participate. Although this proved to be very helpful in recruiting additional participants, it also produced a sample that was very homogeneous in terms of racial background, age, and education level. Very much

⁵ The mean length of working in restaurants was 6.4 years (without the outlier of 25 years, the mean length was 5.63 years).

like the restaurant literature available (Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Hall, 1993a; 1993b; LaPointe, 1992; Loe, 1996; Rusche, 2003), this sample primarily consisted of white American women. I will discuss these issues further as serious limitations of this research in the discussion section. As Smith (1987) argues however, the validity of findings in feminist research should not necessarily refer to how much the research participants represent the some larger population, but how well the data represent the particular experiences of larger social processes for those particular participants.

Two focused group interviews similar to focus groups were conducted in a room at a university. Food and drinks were provided. A third informal group interview was also conducted in the home of one of the participants (this group included friends who knew each other). I usually began the focus groups with sharing the example in the introduction, and then saying, “I know this may be an extreme example, but has anyone ever seen or experienced anything similar while working in restaurants?” Usually women would quickly pipe in, sharing that they had either been witness to or experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention, comments, or touching in the restaurants that they worked in. Once women began talking, participants in the group interviews often asked excellent questions of each other, thus guiding this process. I rarely interrupted the dialogue, and only asked new questions informally when I felt the conversation lulled after a lengthy discussion of a topic.

In nearly every one of these “group conversations,” the topics of discussion touched upon the sexualized nature of restaurant work in comparison to other workplaces, the experiences of sexual harassment (including when it was labeled “sexual harassment” and when it was not) from coworkers, customers, and managers, the

processes of hiring and working, and how women cope or resist sexual harassment in their workplaces. In keeping with a feminist framework, I attempted to follow these words of advice: “While it is difficult to assess, a project will be empowering to the extent that a researcher is attentive to the ways her project can provide not only a critique of conditions that exist, but also a vision of alternatives for the future (DeVault, 1996, 56). I made it a point to ask toward the end of interviews, 1) if participants thought the restaurant industry could change, and 2) what we could do to make change in the industry regarding sexual harassment. I must admit that this line of questioning produced some disheartening dialogue in the group and individual interviews.

During the group interviews, I often took notes, and these notes later served to guide a more in-depth line of questioning for the individual interviews. The individual interviews were conducted in a number of places, with most being done in the participant’s home or in a room reserved on a university campus. The only substantial difference in the questioning between group and individual interviews was that the individual interviews included questions directly about sexual objectification as part of the job. This in-depth line of questioning provided richer detailed data in regard to how women’s bodies are placed at the center of the restaurant working experience. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. All transcriptions were then read and coded for relevant themes using a grounded-theory approach.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

“Restaurants are like, open places, like you can get away with anything! I mean, the way everybody talks to each other, it’s- you don’t see it anywhere else. Like, any other job I’ve ever done.” - Donna

The results of the current study focus on four relevant themes that came out of the group and individual interviews: 1) how restaurants institutionalize sexual objectification as part of women’s gendered work; 2) how this sexual objectification is linked to women’s extensive experiences sexual harassment and sexual objectification from coworkers, customers, and management; 3) how women’s treatment as sexualized and racialized objects in the restaurant fosters women’s own self-objectification; and 4) how women cope and respond to the pervasive sexual harassment and sexual objectification they experience as “it comes with the territory” of working in restaurants. Overall, the findings suggest that women’s restaurant work is persistently characterized by the threat and reality of sexual harassment as a result of both the organizational and interpersonal aspects of the work.

Institutionalized Forms of Sexual Objectification

Bodies for Hire

Recall that Bartky’s (1990) definition of sexual objectification suggests that it “occurs when a woman’s sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (35). Women in the study shared that women’s workplace experiences neatly represent these aspects of sexual objectification in the hiring,

uniforms, and language in the restaurant. Many of the women in the study indicated women's bodies and appearance were of the utmost importance in being hired and working in the restaurant industry. Interestingly, women often cited that this was no coincidence on the part of restaurant owners and managers who strategically desired to hire front of the house (FOH) staff (those who deal directly with customers such as hostesses, servers, bartenders, and managers) who were thin, attractive, young, outgoing, and mostly white.

As Kirsten explained, "they only hire really attractive people, and I started when I was a lot thinner, like, I would never get hired now." Interestingly, Kirsten sustained a work-related injury at the chain restaurant that she worked in, and consequently "gained a lot of weight" as a result of her back injuries. She notes too, the psychological harm caused by being viewed as a body rather than a skilled person,

I had a customer once told me that he wanted a "pretty girl" to take him to his table ... instead of me. And I told him that we were fresh out of them, so he was out of luck and stuck with me. And so, I guess at that point I guess I got the first inkling that I was starting not to fit in anymore as far as being in the attractive crowd Yeah, I guess that was the first time I started kinda thinking like that it didn't matter how good of a hostess I was, like that's what that man wanted ... **[I: So, how do you cope I guess with the fact that people look at you, or say comments like that one rude comment?]** I used to cry. Like, I used to take it really personally, and now, I'm just kinda like *whatever*. I mean, like, I am on a diet and I'm going to the gym to try and kinda fit better It gets upsetting and stuff, like my parents have huge issues with it, because of all my injuries. So, I feel like I'm still trying to conform, but now I'm like, I don't care. I don't get upset about it, but um, I haven't had any problems with customers in a long time.

Other women noted the role of management in only hiring people deemed attractive, thus highlighting the fact that restaurants may be attempting to portray a certain image to entice customers to the restaurant. Loe's (1996) ethnographic work in the euphemistically named "Bazooms" is one example of such, in that attractive women and breasts characterize the restaurant's theme. Here, women's breasts are the center of attention, and

are even reflected in the name of the restaurant. Kirsten's example reflects this and Gutek's (1985) assertion that women's role as workplace sex objects subjects women to gaze, thus making viewed as objects rather than skilled employees.

Body as Uniformed Sex Object

With an attractively hegemonic workforce, management also can use uniforms and language as a means by which to further sexualize women's bodies in the restaurant. LaPointe's (1992) work highlights this aspect of restaurant work as women in her study were often made to wear uniforms that were sexually degrading, childish, or physically confining (and physically harmful at times) as part of their jobs. Some of these restaurants attempted to create sexualized public images by exploiting women's bodies and sexuality as service workers. Donna shared an example of this with her male manager,

The restaurant that I worked in was next to a bar where they [the women who worked there] wore like ... nothing. [Laughs] He said, "Ok girls, we're getting new outfits!" And he took us all to the mall, and he bought us little mini skirts, little suspenders and little shirts, because of the fact that we had to compete with those girls.

Donna points out that because the restaurant and bar were in competition with each other fiscally, that her manager resorted to have the women dress as "schoolgirls" to entice people (men I assume) to the restaurant where she worked.

Lysa shared a similar example from a golf course restaurant where she worked,

Well, I drove a golf cart on a golf course for a while too, and my boss would be like, "wear a tank top and shorts" And I would wear short shorts, but I was still covered. Well, then it went under new management, and I didn't make very much money every day, and um, now the girls out there wear their bikinis, you know? And all of them have these little triangle bikinis, and they make so much money! And everyone talks about how much money they make!

It's important to note here that again, women's bodies are used to 1) present a public image to lure customers (men in these cases), and 2) allow restaurants to be viable and competitive in the market economy. Note here too, that women's increase in tips as a result of wearing bikinis is more likely to be a latent function of the uniform switch, and that the owners and managers were manifestly attempting to increase their own profits by having women's bodies adorned in next to nothing. Women's participation in wearing bikinis appears easily co-opted as well as a result of the relatively large amounts of money they are making, suggesting that for some women to make "good money," they must use their bodies. However, as Williams (1997) points out, "While some women may enjoy and even profit from sexualized interactions at work, resisting these behavior may be impossible" (24).

Restaurant Language and Labeling of Women

The language used in the restaurant also appears to play a part in the institutionalized sexual objectification and labeling of women. For example, Annette shared that, "We were said to work at the Texas Whorehouse instead of Texas Roadhouse." Another veteran server shared this as well,

Oh yeah! We have "to-go hoes" and "door-whores." **[Laughing]** Yeah, door-whores. **[I: What's a door-whore? A hostess?]** Yes, we have to open the door for every guest, so they're standing at the door the entire night, and um, they're kinda the ones for people who are waiting on their table, they kinda talk to or flirt with or whatever. Guys come over from the bar, and are like, "Heeyyy, is this your job? Is this what they tell you to do?" That's why we call them door-whores.

While customers may not be aware of the backstage language presented above, restaurants in which referring to women as whores is part of the everyday banter may present a highly sexualized public image of the women who work there, thus increasing the possibility for sexual harassment from coworkers, managers, and customers.

Some restaurant literature has pointed out that sexualized language is mandated in the language used to describe drink or food items. For example, Giuffre and William's (1994) study revealed the following drink titles: "slow comfortable screw," "sex on the beach," and "screaming orgasm." This language is also revealed as it was discussed below in one of the focused group interviews,

Donna: I saw girls handing out drinks called like, "Pussy Juice!" ... **Angel:** Like "blow jobs," we used to make blowjobs, that was like men's favorite drink! Like men would always ask, "Lemme buy you a shot, I'll buy you a blow job." Like it was the funniest thing ever! **[Everyone laughs in agreement]** **Lysa:** I heard of another one the other day called "Sand in my Crack!"

Given that customers use the sexualized language that they are aware of and that they use this language to "flirt" or proposition women into drinking (or more), one might assume that they would also be willing to engage in the backstage language that refers to women's alleged sexual availability as "hoes" and "whores" in the restaurant. Another interesting aspect of the language presented in the interviews was that all women who worked in restaurants were referred to as "girls" throughout every interview, thus infantilizing these women rather than viewing them as capable adults.

As these preliminary findings suggest, the highly sexualized nature of restaurant work can be viewed in terms of the institutionalized forms of sexual objectification set forth by those in power in restaurants- whether they be white male managers or private owners or white men in the hospitality corporations that govern these restaurants. All of the women in the sample worked for white, young to middle-aged men, with very few citing women or people of color in management positions. As these individuals in power ostensibly govern the policies that support the exploitation and use of women's bodies as commodities in the restaurant, it becomes important to examine the organizational links to the sexual harassment and further sexual objectification that women experience in

these institutions. In the case of many of the restaurants represented here, women's bodies, parts, or functions are certainly used as "mere instruments" in capitalistic endeavors and profit seeking of white men in power.

Women's Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification

Every woman in the sample shared that sexual harassment in the restaurant industry was certainly unparalleled in comparison to the other workplaces that they had worked in. While women offered many possible reasons for this, many of them first highlighted their own experiences and placed them in context when labeling certain experiences sexual harassment and others not (similar to Giuffre & Williams, 1994). Women experienced sexual harassment in the forms of unwanted attention, comments, and touching (mostly that which characterized hostile environment sexual harassment), yet some women were hesitant to label these actions as such. One piece of sexual harassment is the persistent sexual objectification that is inherently embedded in sexual harassment's ability to draw attention to one's body as an object. Women shared that they experienced nearly all forms of sexual harassment and sexual objectification from coworkers, customers, and management.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification by Coworkers

As Gail points out below, coworker sexual harassment is quite common in the restaurant, even at a younger age:

I have stories about coworkers, I could probably write a book on all that stuff, just because I've been there so long, I started right before I turned 16, I just remember that I had so many experiences, and I was so young and stupid back then, that I didn't really understand it then. I would get servers ask me, "Do you want to work at Pure Gold? You should work at Pure Gold," and that's a strip club ... and I actually had another server say the same thing to me, he was like, "I want to personally interview you, come back here in this room," and he was like 45, 50 years old as a server. They're all just stupid things like that. You have guys

grabbing your ass, you're like 15, 16 years old, and they were at least, you know, 25.

Here, even while still a teenager, Gail has male servers propositioning her to work as a “stripper” although she worked as a hostess (with her clothes on). The age difference that she reports is also worth noting that women are more likely to label sexual harassment as such when the harasser's age is much different from the victim's (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). Here, as in the account below, women's bodies are placed at the center of sexually harassing comments and behaviors.

Annette shared this story of a coworker who physically harmed her by his physical “joking”:

I experienced one instance in which one of the male bussers popped me in the tale very hard with a wet towel ... leaving a welt. The behavior was like, uninvited and ... inappropriate. You know, like, had it been my boyfriend, I might not have minded so much, but since he saw me bending over to get something, he thought he would “jokingly” take a swat at me. I- I was so furious because that is something that I would never do to a casual coworker.

Women's bodies appear to be at the mercy of male coworkers who often touch women when the can, as Gwen shared as well, “You can be standing at the counter and you can have a guy come up and smack your ass, sexual comments from the bussers, like, “your boobs look bigger today” or “you got big boobs” or you know ...” Both of these women share that bussers- usually those positions that are filled by male men of color, were the culprits in these incidents. Gwen later went further to share a racialized account of the sexual harassment she experienced,

Haitians will say shit under their breath, like, “I'm gonna touch your breasts,” and “lemme smack that ass!” and “Why don't you come over and gangbang?” I mean, it's just, you know what they're saying because I have friends in the kitchen who understand them, 'cause they work with them all the time. And you'll say, “What'd they say?” and they'll tell you. And you're just like, “that is disgusting. That is utterly disgusting.”

It is interesting to note that none of the respondents made racial references to the white men who worked in the restaurants when they were the sexual harassers described in stories. Gwen's racialized account suggests that perhaps the racial characteristics of the harasser may be more objectionable than the actual comments being made, as she describes these particular forms as "utterly disgusting" but does not label comments made by white coworkers in the same way anywhere else in her interview.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification by Customers

Sexual harassment and sexual objectification by customers in the restaurant was defined as the most problematic of all forms in comparison to that of coworkers and managers. Because women cited that they had come to expect such behavior from them as part of the organizational culture of restaurant work, they were most often "caught off guard" when customers acted inappropriately in sexual ways. Women's narratives about customers were also most shocking to other participants, and women reflected on these events more than any others in the group and individual interviews. Women certainly viewed customer's sexual harassment most egregiously and this may be a result of being made aware of one's powerlessness when relying on men for money in the service sector. Women are also caught in a double bind when it comes to customer sexual harassment if they feel that management will not respond to one's reports of customer sexual harassment (and this will be discussed in the next section).

Customer sexual harassment and sexual objectification mainly took two forms: unwanted sexual comments and unwanted sexual touching. However, most of the events described involved both. One of the most shocking accounts came from Jaclyn in one of the group interviews, in which a male customer requested that she insert a wine bottle into her vagina for him and his friends at their table,

I actually worked in the same restaurant for three years, making money for college after high school. So, it was happy hour, and I went out to the dock and greeted my table and there were three guys, and I'm like, "Hi, my name is Jaclyn," I introduced myself, the usual, and "What can I get you?" and they were you like, "You, on the table, naked." I'm like, "Ok" you know, laughing it off, they hadn't had any alcohol yet, and I was like, "What can I get you to drink, sir?" and um, they're old, you know, like 35, 40, 45 Came back a little bit later and I was already a little bit intimidated by them, and um, I went back and I was like, "Can I get you anything else?" and the one guy was like, kinda like, brushed my arm and was like, "Come here sweetheart," and I'm just like, "Oh God," he was like, um, "I have a question for you," and this like totally offended me, he was like, "Have you ever taken a bottle of wine?" And I'm like, like, at first, I'm all like stupid, like, "What?" and I didn't understand what he was saying, and he was like, "Oh, it's really easy, my wife used to do it all the time," he was like, "Climb up onto this table right here and I'll show you how to do it, go get me a bottle of wine, I want a bottle of wine." And, I'm just like, "Yeah." **Madison:** What?! **[I: So he was talking about inserting a bottle into you?]** **Jaclyn:** Yeah. **Madison:** Holy crap!

Here, we see that a customer has the audacity to ask for such a request of a server at a well-established, high-end seafood restaurant and expects her to do such an "act" for him and his friends openly in front of other tables. Interesting to note, that he made such a request in front of his friends, accenting not only his need to painfully remind Jaclyn that she is merely a body- one that functions solely for his fantasized sexual pleasure- but also remind her publicly in an attempt to possibly humiliate and degrade her further in the presence of other men- those whom she rightfully reports feeling intimidated by.

While participants above like Madison were shocked at such an event, other women shared similar accounts. Gwen shared a story of two men who repeatedly made sexual comments to her during their meal,

One time I had a customer grab me by the arm as I was pulling his check off of the table, and he says, "Don't go anywhere with that, I'm not ready, I haven't tackled somebody your age in a long time and I wouldn't mind doing it." Yeah, his wife was sitting right next to him, and him and his friend laughed and said, "Yeah, I wouldn't mind joining in either." **[I: So, essentially they were talking about gangbanging you from before?]** Yeah, I'm an innocent party here; all I'm trying to do is do my job!

Here, even in the presence of another woman (one man's wife), these men feel it acceptable to tell Gwen that they would like to "tackle her," a term with violent connotations regarding a sexual act they would like to do *to* her (and not necessarily *with* her), hinting at the threat of sexual violence that is often common in workplaces (Koss et al., 1994).

Yvonne also shared how men felt that they could push sexual boundaries of appropriateness with hostesses,

When we would be hostessing, we have these little pager thingies that vibrate. Guys, when they vibrate [would] come up to you and put them on your butt or like in the front of you when they vibrate, and would be like, "Do you like that?" "Oh, do you mind if I take that home with my wife?" **Madison:** Like, what do you mean guys, like random people or workers? Like random guys, like customers. **Madison:** What? **Yvonne:** It happened like three times to me and I only worked there for six months, so ... **Madison:** Because they get trashed? **Yvonne:** Because the wait at the restaurant where we worked at, it could be like 2 hours for outside, so they get trashed at the bar, so by like the time we'd page them, they'd be like, "Cool!"

Alcohol is accentuated as a key factor in this account, as in many of the accounts from women who worked in "bar and grille" and "restaurant lounge" types of establishments.

Angel, Donna, Sunny, and Daphne all worked as "cocktail waitresses" and had this to share,

Angel: First of all, when you're cocktailing, customers feel *no* boundaries whatsoever. If you're walking around holding a drink tray or your arm's up like this, they think that's every reason to grope every part of your body. Oh yeah. I but I think the more alcohol involved ... **Donna:** Alcohol is a *huge* factor. Like, when I worked here ... the ones here was ten times worse, I think it had to do with the age, college kids, grabbing you, lifting up your skirt ... and then I see it I see the guys treat the waitresses like that.

Daphne: And you could be in Denny's and actually have the nicest guy, you know, who actually respects you as a waitress, you know, compared to someone at the Purple Martini or somewhere where you'd be a cocktail server and they look at you like an object. There could be nice guys there, there could be nice anywhere else. It all depends on the person- the *guy*, not the girl- the server.

Here, again, we see that women's bodies become centers for sexual harassment in the restaurant- particularly those that serve alcohol. Serving alcohol is certainly one way to increase revenues, and serving lots of alcohol is even more appealing to those in power in restaurants, however this places women in precarious situations in regard to dealing with inebriated customers who view women as objects to be touched, fondled, or grabbed. As we will see below, management does not always provide the level of support necessary to guard women against unwanted treatment by customers, thus placing them in further compromising positions.

One interesting thing to note in all of the customer accounts is that they involve men. When asked if any of the women in the sample had experienced anything "unwanted" or "inappropriate" from women, many of them stated that they indeed had not. While women shared that women customers would come in and perhaps comment on their bodies (e.g. as in giving compliments to their clothing or bodies), most women did not view these comments as problematic, although Jaclyn shared, "If you're commenting on my body, whether you're a man or woman, that's just weird." The narrative accounts of sexual harassment by customers that involve men acting in inappropriate and unwanted ways often warranted women to call upon management when they felt that they could.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification by Management

As all women reported working for (white) men, nearly all women in the sample reported sexual harassment and sexual objectification by those in management positions. In fact, only two women (Teri and Raquel) in the sample shared that they felt they had a male manager whom they could rely on if they were having issues with harassment from coworkers or customers. They acknowledged that they felt these managers 1) did not

participate in or contribute to the sexualized atmosphere of their workplace; 2) would take their claims seriously; and 3) would respond in an appropriate way. In Raquel's case, her manager was a close family friend whom she trusted. When Raquel had a customer who began to stalk her, management responded in a way she felt was appropriate in helping her deal with a "very strange" customer.

Other women acknowledged (Sunny and Daphne) that women managers were much more responsive in regard to sexual harassment by customers, but other women disagreed. Clearly this is an area for further exploration, especially in light of male managers who are assumed to be able to uphold and follow sexual harassment policies, yet fail to do so in a number of ways described below. When asked if they had ever been witness to or experienced anything unwanted or inappropriate sexually by management, Angel and Donna had this to offer:

Angel: There were three owners. And there were instances of like, you walking into an office, and a waitress would be giving an owner a blowjob or something like that. Like, that was the worst thing.

Donna: So, I think that they thought that there really were no boundaries. I mean, my head manager, has put his hand down my shirt and caressed my breasts. I mean, if he's gonna do that, basically every other [pause] There were about four other homosexual waiters who would just sit, and put their hands down our shirts. I mean, it was like a very normal thing. **[I: Not just yours, but other women too?]** Oh yeah! Other woman, yeah, mostly like the lounge girls though, the girls who work in the lounge

These accounts highlight how owners and management are crucial to setting the organizational tone for dealing with (and fostering) sexual harassment and sexual objectification. As Donna begins to point out in her own analysis, if management is going to behave inappropriately by fondling her breasts, then what is to stop other coworkers (or customers) from doing so as well? Both Angel and Donna pointed out in their interview that this was seen as a "normal thing" although Angel's example shows that

seeing other waitresses giving blow jobs to owners in the back offices of the restaurant was “the worst thing.” It is also important to note the consequences of these actions in light of *hostile environment* sexual harassment, but also the possibilities in regard to *quid pro quo* sexual harassment in which women could possibly face employment-related sanctions if they do not willingly participate in sexual acts such as having their breasts fondled or giving blowjobs. One interesting point to note in Donna’s account is that she shares that her manager and four other employees are “homosexual,” thus highlighting the fact that while the sexual harassment literature nearly always focuses on (hetero)sexual harassment, these acts can be perpetrated in a number of ways.

Another example of how management may set the organizational tone is an example shared by Cheri about one of her managers,

Our boss wasn’t much older than us and, I think, he took it a little too far. I don’t remember specific things he said but, like, he would ... jokingly proposition us, like, the waitresses or bartenders ... or ask us very personal questions about ourselves, like, our sexuality. He liked telling us his fantasies ... Oh, he liked to be peed on! Or about things he had done with certain people. He got a kick out of being a pervert and I think he thought it lightened up the atmosphere, I guess. It was hard to take him seriously sometimes.

Sharing or being asked very personal sexual questions places people in precarious positions, but also accents the intimate nature of some restaurants and relations between employees and employers. Lysa pointed out that she felt like she was on an equal playing ground with her boss, as she shared,

When you go into the restaurant, you kind of anticipate that, and, I don’t know, I mean, I have a relationship with my boss right now, like, he says things all the time like, “Can I grab your ass?” And you know, my response is “Yeah, when I can get a raise.” You know? I give it right back. To me, it never bothers me, because I know A) that he’s never gonna actually grab my ass, and B) that I’ll get raises and promotions anyway because I work hard and he’s made that clear too.

The threat of being touched by this manager is apparently never realized, as Lysa's boss only suggests a desire to grab her ass and does not act on it. It is possible that Lysa views this as acceptable because she feels valued by her boss more for her ability than her appearance or body as he had made that clear to her. One might question however how he views her as a competent woman employee though, if he still expresses a desire to grab her ass, thus accenting her body part rather than her ability as a whole person. In light of the other experiences shared in the interviews, some might jokingly point out that asking first to grab one's ass might be a step in the "right" direction, in comparison to other members of management who might grab (breasts or asses) without asking first.

Given the amount of sexual harassment apparently ongoing with managers, I would argue that some women in the restaurant may experience a double (or triple) bind when dealing with sexual harassment and objectification from customers and the same from managers (and coworkers)- those who are apparently there to handle such situations should they arise. While some of the women in the sample did share some hearsay of customers being asked to leave the restaurant for treating staff inappropriately sexually, it did not appear as if women relied much on management. In fact, when Sunny and Daphne were asked if they had relied on management to deal with "problem" customers, they responded in shock,

Daphne: Any manager I've had to complain about a disrespectful customer, has *never, ever, ever* been helpful. **Sunny:** "Oh, they're spending money." **Daphne:** Their theory is that, "Oh, they're spending money, they're a good customer." So basically, whatever they say goes.

These managers appear to be operating under the two aphorisms of successful customer service and marketing: "The customer is always right," and "Sex sells" (Williams, 1997, 24). Inherently, these business mottos place employees, and women in particular, in

disadvantaged positions when dealing with customers and managers who exploit and harass them.

Also, if management is currently involved in litigation regarding their own sexual harassment, as in the case of Gwen below, they may not be viewed as the appropriate authority to ask for help,

Yeah, our District Manager was taken to court, or whatever, he was suspended for a week, because he sexually harassed two girls at work. Because he touched their butt and their boobs. 'Cause he likes to come up to girls and touch them, he's a very touchy feely kinda guy. He likes to "fix" people's ties. I remember when I first started working there, Katya said that he made a sexual innuendo to her, he's like, "Um, I'll let you go [home] if you suck my dick."

Although the statement above, "I'll let you go [home] if you suck my dick" appears less like an innuendo and more like a direct and unwanted sexual proposition (with job related consequences clearly of the *quid pro quo* harassment type), it is clear that male management does not appear to be the most helpful resource in the restaurant when it comes to dealing with sexual harassment. As in the case of Jaclyn and the man who wanted her to insert a wine bottle into her vagina, she shared that she relied on a male friend who was serving that day rather than her manager,

I had my guy friend waiter go over there, like, I transferred the table to him, and I'm like ... **[I: Were you able to talk to your manager about it?]** Yeah, and my bartender was like, you know, I'm sorry, but that happens all the time, like he can't even really do anything about it. And like I was just so offended, and my guy friend went over there, and he was like, "Do you have a problem?" And he was like, "Oh, can I get another drink?" Just like chill with him but he was so horrible to me and um **Charlotte:** So, that's just something that comes with the territory with the job? Yeah, like, I was upset and was really offended, I was just like, I just felt, violated in a really weird sense, like, I don't even know him, and I was just like all upset, like you know, whatever.

Here we see that the customer treated the male friend with respect although Jaclyn was treated in a manner she describes as "horrible." This account also indicates the bartender's (perhaps the person in charge at the time) apathetic response to the situation

in that he reports, “he can’t really doing anything about it.” Clearly, there are many responses that could have been taken to send a strong message to this particular customer that his behavior was reprehensible on many levels, including asking him to leave the restaurant.

By having an apathetic attitude toward sexual harassment and sexual objectification generally, it sends a strong message to women restaurant workers that they are valued less than the money spent by customers such as the ones above. It also sends a defeatist message that if indeed one does have a problem with sexual harassment, that it will not be addressed in the ways that it should be in a professional or legal manner. And again, if managers actively participate in sexual harassment or objectification (in their hiring practices, through their weak policies, or disregard for legal policies), how can women rely on these individuals to provide them with the protection afforded by the law in regard to sexual harassment from coworkers, customers, and management?

As women are doubly and triply bound by sexual harassment on all fronts in the restaurant workplace, they are also bound as well as the broader sexist society that denies them victim status or denies the experiences of sexual harassment in the courts and other areas, thus creating a rash of consequences for women in these positions. If sexual objectification and sexual harassment are organizationally sanctioned in restaurants, what are the consequences for women working in these positions? It appears as if women in this sample describe a process of self-objectification in their work as we will see below. As a result of this organizationally mandated sexual objectification and resultant sexual harassment, women’s narratives here include how they cope with sexual harassment, thus highlighting some of the issues with sexual harassment that is embedded into one’s job.

Women's Self-Objectification in Restaurant Work

Recent work on women's sexual objectification posits that women's routine experiences of objectification socialize girls and women to come to view themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated, effectively internalizing an outsider's perspective on their bodies (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Self-objectification, therefore, is characterized by a heightened state of body consciousness and body surveillance, in that women's bodies essentially become objects even to themselves. While the psychology literature has begun to examine the links and numerous detrimental consequences of self-objectification, it has yet to be explored qualitatively in regard to women's persistent objectification as lived experience. This work is indeed unique in its ability to add to the scant literature that focuses on women's role as "objectified victims" in the workplace as in the case of Loe's (1996) ethnography of "Bazooms girls."

Selling One's Self

Using a grounded theory method of analysis allowed women's descriptions of self-objectification to emerge on their own, and these processes of "selling one's self" and "selling one's body" highlight how women come to view themselves as objects or commodities in the workplace. As in the case of Loe's (1996) work, women appear to be under constant surveillance about their appearance, and they work very hard to control their self-presentation and appearance in order to make money as servers, hostesses, etc. This self-presentation and appearance work is rooted in heterosexual norms of sexuality and women often describe a process of treating one's self as an object in "prostituting" one's self as part of one's work in the restaurant, as Kirsten describes: "your job is to sell

yourself, and as a server, you kinda sell yourself to other people, and the girls kinda use their sexuality, to, you know, to sell themselves.”

Here, we can see how management’s use of women’s bodies as part of the “sex sells” maxim spills over to the women themselves in how they use their bodies to make money as well. Many women in the sample acknowledged that they realized that they were being treated as objects, and some shared that they had begun to view themselves as such, but yet they were not willing to cross boundaries that they deemed unacceptable.

Sunny shared this about a regular customer of hers,

I have a man who’s totally infatuated with me. Doesn’t want sex with me. He just wants me to become, an upper class citizen, a millionaire’s princess, whatever. He paid \$5000 dollars to get all my teeth fixed already and I’ve never done nothing with him. And he credits my account every month just so I don’t have to do anything stupid ... he gives me two grand a month, just to, uh, smile. Be nice. I guess They want trophies ... I know that Bob just wants a trophy. He’s like, seventy years old and he’s happy that I go to lunch with him.

Here we see that Sunny does not appear to mind acting as a trophy or princess for Bob in the context of going to lunch. She later shared however that she had no plans of entering a sexual relationship with him, perhaps reflecting an ultimate realization of objectification or self-objectification for her. Angel also described a situation in which she could pretend to treat herself as a willing sex object to her customers, but only up to a certain point,

I remember there, we used to get treated badly, but I looked at it, like you know, there’d be a group of four guys drinking, and I mean, if their bill was going to be \$300, the way I felt about it, is if you tip me 30%, you can say whatever the hell you want to me. And that’s basically the way I felt about it, ‘cause they’re not gonna- I don’t actually have to go home with them, and if they wanna believe for two hours that I’m gonna sleep with them, and I’m gonna walk out making \$100 because they think that, off one table, in my mind, I was like, “who cares?” and that was kinda the idea.

Here, treating one's self as an object is justified by the fact that 1) she does not actually have to follow through with her self-objectification in presenting herself as a sexually available woman, and 2) she makes an amount of money worthy of being treated in a manner she finds unacceptable. These two examples perhaps begin to highlight the various relationships between women restaurant workers and their customers in an organizational context that treatment such as this is mandated if one wants to be successful and make money in their jobs.

Selling One's Body

Similar to the work of LaPointe (1992) and Loe (1996), women in this sample described how uniforms and dress served as part of the way in which women's bodies were objectified in the restaurant. Although the above descriptions of Lysa's bikini uniforms and Donna's schoolgirl uniforms were set forth by restaurant management in clear examples of institutionalized objectification, some women had some agency in choosing what to wear to work. Here, we can see that women use dress in enhancing the visibility of their bodies, thus one part of self-objectification if they are anticipating how they will look through the eyes of others- customers. Stacey talked at length about how she and others dressed in the restaurant where she worked,

No, we had our uniform ... but the girls were allowed to wear khaki skirts. Easily, the days that I wore skirts, much better tips. Aw, hell yeah But even the servers, their tips would go up, and I don't think anyone was doing it purposely, like consciously, I would- I definitely noticed that. Like, cause my mom would ask me, why are you wearing your skirt so much? **[everyone laughs]** "Um, I don't know Mom!" **[more laughs]** Yeah, it's just sooo hot in there, when you're leaning over on tables.

Here we see that Stacey admits to wearing skirts consciously as a technique to increase her tips, a common occurrence with the women in the sample who had some control over their attire. Her expectation that her tips would increase if she dressed in

skirts rather than pants or shorts reflects how she has come to view her body through the eyes of her customers, rather than herself. Angel summed up the consequences of having to do so though: “It’s hard because you wear less clothing to get more tips, and the harassment goes up ... a lot.”

Annette commented specifically about this phenomenon, and her thoughts reveal the complexity of the processes of formalized objectification and women’s self-objectification,

Often I feel that females dress in a way that is sexier than should be, like Hooters girls wearing short shorts and midriff shirts, you know? These girls display themselves as sex objects, which then elicits like, sexual comments ... stares, touching. If a girl doesn’t want to be treated like a sex object, then she shouldn’t act or dress in such a way, you know?

Here Annette places women at the center of blame for their sexual objectification in how they “choose” to dress, which would be an example perhaps of self-objectification.

However, Hooters is perhaps not the best example to get her point across however, in that women who work at this restaurant are specifically required to wear small tank tops and very short shorts (that often resemble undergarments rather than shorts) and are hired based on their appearance and ability to have the “look” of a “Hooters girl,” which is perhaps a better example of institutionalized objectification (Williams, 1997).

As we saw above however, sexual objectification set forth by policy or praxis by those in power often shapes women’s own self-objectification. When Annette was asked to explain her thoughts on women’s dress, she shared,

I don’t know, I- just by acting normal, women and men are sexually harassed. I don’t have a clue as to how to make this to change, but I can be sure to not purposely make myself look sexy! And- and if I feel that someone is acting inappropriately toward me, I simply tell them that I feel that they’re being inappropriate and that I don’t appreciate their behavior. If you don’t want something to happen ... you have to be sure to be assertive enough to stand up against sexual harassment.

Annette's thoughts mirror the sentiment of many individuals who believe that women are responsible for their sexual harassment in the workplace by dressing "sexy" or playing the role of "sex object." In stating that she would not purposely make herself look sexy, Annette highlights one response of dealing with sexual harassment in making one's self "asexual" in the workplace (Gutek, 1985). For women, this is often marked by stripping away anything that may be indicative of one's gender role in an attempt to eschew the label of sex object in the workplace. However, for women who are hired as sex objects—knowingly or unwittingly, they often face sexual harassment as a result of the sexual objectification set forth by organizations as part of their jobs.

Annette's final statements about what she would do if she were sexually harassed (and according to her, she was, as you may recall a coworker painfully snapped a wet towel at her when bending over) reflect perhaps the ideological chasm between what society expects women to do about sexual harassment and what women actually do when faced with experiences they find unwanted or inappropriate in their workplaces. Annette shares that women have to be assertive to stand up against sexual harassment if they "don't want something to happen." This tone indicates that women are culpable if they experience harassment, and that they also are responsible for making sexual harassment end in their workplaces. While the links between formalized sexual objectification and women's self-objectification are just preliminarily being explored in this paper, studying women workers who experience these as part of their jobs, may provide ways of understanding these processes in more nuanced and detailed ways as we see below in women's responses to sexual harassment.

Women's Coping and Responses

As these accounts shared above indicate, unwanted sexual advances and the constant threat of sexual abuse often characterize women's work in restaurants. Some of extant restaurant and sexual harassment literature has begun focus on women's coping and response styles when dealing with subjective and objective experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace (Folgero & Fjeldstad, 1995; Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Hughes & Tadic, 1998; LaPointe, 1992; Paules, 1991; Rusche, 2003; Stockdale, 1998). Some of this literature suggests that like other workplaces, women who experience sexual harassment often 1) do not view their experiences as sexual harassment, and 2) do not report their experiences (and those who do report often face severe job-related consequences both interpersonally and organizationally) (Williams, 1997). And, as sexual objectification is still such a newly emerging theme in the organizations literature, we still are not sure how women conceptualize and cope with these experiences in their daily lives as well.

What we do know about coping and responses to sexual harassment is that women tend to vary in their responses to sexual harassment. LaPointe's (1992) work on restaurant workers reveals that although some of the women in her sample did resist with countering phrases or humor to diffuse uncomfortable situations, many of the women in her sample tended to quit in the face of unwanted sexual harassment. As one server noted, "I do see a lot of waitresses just put up with the abuse as though it's *part of the job*" (390; italics in original). LaPointe suggests that this coping technique may allow women to tolerate the daily hassles and degradations of their workplaces in a way that does not affect their self-worth as people. As LaPointe suggests, "waitresses emerge

resilient as they cope with the job and gender hierarchy they encounter” (391). The women’s narratives in this sample reflect various coping responses, representing how women who work in organizations where sexual objectification and sexual harassment are formalized as part of their jobs.

Dishing It Back

Similar to the servers in LaPointe’s (1992) work, many of the women in this sample shared how they dealt with coworkers and customers who acted inappropriately by giving it back to them. Gwen shared that when her coworkers “talked dirty” to her, she would use that to respond back to them,

And when it comes from servers, what I’ll do is turn around and say sexual comments right back to them and make them feel just as big, because if you’re going to say sexual comments, if you’re going to dish it out, you better take it. Cause I can come up with something ten times worse! **[laughing]** I mean, that’s what I have been told by some servers, you should become a porn star, you should be a stripper ... they said to me, you’ve got such a dirty mouth! **[laughing]**

Sunny’s response is also similar to Gwen’s in how she would “bark back” at customers treating her poorly,

Well, I have a different attitude, ‘cause sometimes I’ll bark back at them. And they like, and then they just realize that’s my attitude. Cause some girls, like, they’ll be subservient, but I’ll be subservient to a point, ok, then I’ll be like, ok, stop.
Daphne: I wish I could just bark back in a nice way. But I take it too personally.
Sunny: I bark back nicely. Yeah, she (Daphne) takes it too personally, she goes too deep into it, but me, I’m just like, “Ok dude whatever” or I’ll just say something like that. And they’ll take it like, “Ok, she’s not mad at me, but I-I might have made her mad” so they kinda back off.

In contrast to her coworker Daphne, Sunny says that she is able to deal with her customers by snapping back at them in the same way they treat her. Some authors would argue that although women are attempting to regain control over an uncomfortable situation by participating in such language or banter, they are still not on an equal playing ground socially or economically in the broader society, nor in the restaurant where

exploitive dynamics often play out. In a rare incident, Madison was one of the few women who shared that she directly confronted one of her coworkers about his sexual touching when she first began her job,

I remember this one dude, he walked behind the hostess stand and I felt this little knick on my butt, kinda like this [**flicks her finger**]. Ok, I've been accused of being- like, blowing up too fast, especially when it comes to my rights as a woman. My brother will just be like, Madison, it wasn't meant like that! [**everyone laughs**] You know, ok, I'll let it go- maybe, I don't want to start a fight because it's like my coworker. But, the next time it happened, I turned right around and I looked at him, and he just had this, he just had this "shit eating grin, I just grabbed your ass" look and I just- I looked at him, and I just said, "If you ever do that again, I'll punch you in the face."

She continued after Jaclyn (a woman much shorter than Madison) commented:

Jaclyn: You probably like intimidated him. Like me, telling someone that I was going to punch them in the face probably wouldn't have the same effect [**everyone laughs**]. **Madison:** Like, that's the other thing, with the shoes and the skirt, I also had to wear heels, so like, I was 6'2" with heels on, and the way I said it too, like I said, "I'll fucking punch you in the face" like, under my breath, but I said it, you know? And that was the last time that happened.

We can see that Madison's response to her coworker was effective in preventing him from touching her again, although she admits her size may have had something to do with her ability to stand up to him (and apparently stand a few inches taller than him). Jaclyn's response and the laughter from other women suggest that this perhaps is a rare occasion, as they agreed with the fact as a smaller woman, Jaclyn would perhaps not be as effective in ending her harassment. Unfortunately for other women in the sample and in numerous other workplaces, women's attempts to end sexual harassment may often result in retaliation or the loss of their jobs, as we will see below.

Firing and Quitting

Unfortunately, LaPointe's (1992) work suggests that when women restaurant workers attempt to resist sexual harassment in its various forms, they may often face

severe retaliation in the loss of good shifts, wages, or their jobs. Angel shared an experience like this,

I ended up losing my job because my manager, I guess it was kinda threatening, but the manager. ... he kinda yelled at me one day and said some really rude things to me one day. I actually pulled him aside afterwards, and said, "You really can't speak to me like that, like, I have find it uncalled for, I have to draw the line somewhere, and you really can't say these things to me, especially in front of other people, blah blah" and the next week I called for my schedule and he was like, "You're not on the schedule, I don't think it's a good idea if you work here anymore." Like, after I had said something to him- because he really just crossed the line, but like, he never put me back on the schedule. And that's when I went to work at the pub. And I never did anything about it, I guess I could've.

Interestingly, Angel later shared that this incident with her manager was not so much about sexual harassment, but about the way he called her a, "fucking moron, he insulted my intelligence, he bothered me more because- I don't care if you say things to me, like, I want to be sexy, I want to be attractive, it wasn't a sex thing ...". Similar to numerous other women who have lost their jobs when attempting to stand up for themselves against workplace abuse, she poignantly added, "So why don't women do anything about it? I could've absolutely done something about it."

One thing that women have notably done in response to sexual harassment is to quit their restaurant jobs as suggested by a number of researchers (LaPointe, 1992; Loe, 1996; Rusche, 2003). This sample of women is unique because it includes women who previously worked in restaurants, and perhaps captures women who were not "cut out" to deal with the sexual harassment that apparently comes with the territory of restaurant work. As Cheri explained,

If you worked for a big chain or a place that had a general manager, or if the abuse was coming from a coworker, then you could always complain to someone higher up. But who ever does? If guess if you saw it happening and it was bothering someone you knew, you could convince them to tell, but usually girls just let it go. They never say anything, if they don't like it, they just quit, you know?

Three women (Sheila, Teri, and Daphne) in the sample shared that they specifically left working in restaurants as a result of their experiences of sexual harassment. Daphne, the woman above that Sunny described as taking things “too personally” while working, shared this about her reason for quitting restaurant work: “Well, that’s what made me decide not to stay with it. Money wasn’t worth it anymore. I couldn’t deal with being objectified and having to grin and bear it. And just smile, and pretend that I don’t just want to punch you in your face.” Here, Daphne clearly verbalizes the connection between the sexual objectification and sexual harassment she experienced while working, one of the few research respondents to do so. And while Teri elaborated more fully on her reasons for leaving restaurant work, I noted that on the bottom of the demographic question she filled out before her individual interview that she wrote: “Never working for restaurants again.”

Why Women Do Not Report

According to Williams (1997), “Many people today work in jobs in which they are routinely subjected to deliberate or repeated sexual behavior that is unwelcome, as well as other sex-related behaviors that they consider hostile, offensive, or degrading. They rarely label their experiences sexual harassment, however, because they are institutionalized as part of their jobs” (20). Given the organizational culture in which sexual objectification and sexual harassment are embedded in the structure, policy, and praxis of the restaurant industry, women often do not report sexual harassment 1) because they do not recognize their experiences as such, and 2) the organizational culture may indeed discourage reporting (Folgero & Fjeldstad, 1995).

As the above accounts indicate, while women knew of incidents in which they felt they could have (and felt they should have) done something about their sexual

harassment, they often did not. I would argue (as others might) that this is a result of the “normalization” of sexual harassment as part of an “acceptable” organizational aspect of the restaurant workplace. As Gail suggests,

I think, like, it comes with the territory, working in the restaurant business, that it’s going to be a flirtatious type of environment. Like, customers, and everyone’s just like, like I’ve had managers be like, “Do you have a boyfriend? I’ll be your boyfriend.” **Jaclyn:** Or like, you look pretty in that outfit ... **Gail:** And like I’ve never been offended, I’ve never really been like, oh my god, that’s sexual harassment. I kinda like smile back ...

It’s interesting to note here that these behaviors are viewed as “normal” aspects of this work when dealing with customers and managers as part of one’s job. Madison began to pontificate on these paradoxes of normality in dealing with sexual harassment in one’s daily life and in other occupations with that of restaurant work,

Madison: Yeah, It’s like we’ve all shared experiences and it’s obvious that there’s obviously sexual harassment, but like, the reason it’s happens, and we go along, it’s like, why is it such a big difference? Like, you guys think it’s like easier to take it from someone that you do know, like your managers, but don’t like- like, when you’re walking on the street and a total stranger says like, “Hey! Nice ass sweetheart!” **[everyone laughs]** You can just be like, “Whatever.” Because there is a sense of that, because there’s also a sense of like, it’s not cool- it’s not cool, to be like, “No, you’re not going to do that to me” You know? Like, it’s cool to put on your smile with guys ... and it’s like, it’s cool to let them fix your bra, and let them, you know, talk about your bra. It’s not cool to say like, “No, look, I don’t want you touching me.”

Here, Madison begins to explore the reasons why women do not report sexual harassment with people that they have to deal with on a daily basis, and later sums this up with: “You don’t want to be seen as the feminist bitch!” Not reporting requires that women can still be seen as “cool” and allows them to not identify themselves as feminists around the men and women they work with everyday.

As suggested by a number of women in the sample, as awkward as it is to endure sexual harassment, they often pointed out that it would be even more awkward to do

something about it. Jaclyn directly quoted a 1990s television commercial on sexual harassment when discussing why women do not report sexual harassment, “Like, it would make it even more awkward to be like, “No, you’re not touching my bra, and *‘that’s sexual harassment, and I don’t have to take it!’*” This particular commercial shows a shrinking white woman standing next to a large white man in an office setting. As he says sexually harassing comments to her, she shrinks in size even smaller, until she says the quote from Jaclyn above, and grows back to normal size when standing up for herself. Interestingly, the other respondents agreed that it would be awkward to say something about sexual harassment and most agreed that it was most likely best not to do anything because “it’s not really worth it.” And perhaps Donna’s assertion sums this idea up best in economic terms, “I mean, I’ve never, it’s never happened to me that badly where, you know, I mean, the money is just so good.”

While these accounts suggest that women restaurant workers are resilient to the sexual objectification and sexual harassment they experience, some women in the sample objected to the notion that we should find these experiences acceptable. Charlotte shared, “I mean, to me, that’s *completely* ridiculous that somebody would come into an establishment and act that way toward a waitress. There’s no excuse for that, and um, I think that’s part of it. I don’t think we should have to accept this as ‘normal.’ I don’t see why we have to just accept this at all.” While not all women are in the social or economic position to be able to agree and make comparable money in other occupations, Charlotte’s words certainly illuminate the dilemmas faced by women who must work in the service industry and endure sexual objectification and sexual harassment as their livelihood hinges on their ability to deal with such experiences.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

The findings of the current study strongly suggest that sexual harassment is much more than an individual behavior occurring on an interpersonal level, and that sexual harassment and sexual objectification are at times, organizational norms in workplaces such as restaurants. As a result, women restaurant workers often face institutionalized forms of sexual objectification and sexual harassment as part of their jobs. Women's institutionalized sexual objectification occur in the forms of appearance-based hiring, uniforms, and the sexual language in the restaurant, and consequently, women often face "normalized" and "acceptable" forms of sexual harassment and objectification from coworkers, customers, and managers. Given that sexual objectification and sexual harassment are organizational norms in the restaurant, women often do not label their experiences sexual harassment as they have become "normalized" as part of their jobs.

Using a grounded theory analysis allowed for these nuances in women's narratives to be explored in terms of the sexual objectification and sexual harassment they experience on a daily basis from coworkers, customers, and managers. While many of the women did not label their experiences as such, women often described in detail how their bodies are placed at the center of their objectification and harassment experiences as a result of those in power in the restaurants they worked. Often, women were hired to be sex objects, disallowing them victim status and co-opting their participation in their own self-objectification. The processes of institutionalized objectification and later self-

objectification manifested themselves through women coming to view their own bodies through an outsider's perspective- customers and management. Restaurant work requires women to be performative bodies- they must become part of the service they provide, and using their bodies in sexual ways appears to be mandated if women want to make money while working.

Clearly, as these accounts indicate, the restaurant industry is plagued with sexism, sexual objectification, and sexual harassment. Essentially, the restaurant industry is a reflection of the broader sexist society in which women are exploited for their bodies and labor everyday. Sexual objectification and sexual harassment are just pieces of women's pervasive gender oppression in the United States and abroad, and organizations such as restaurants rely on the sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist, and capitalist society to ensure that women will continue to experience sexual harassment and objectification in their attempts to earn a living. Perhaps most striking is that as a result of these processes, women come to view their experiences as normal in the workplace, as they often face such experiences outside of their employment as part of their lived experience.

These results suggest that for women working in restaurants, harassment and objectification are not only experiences of being a woman, but even more so as a working woman. Overall, women's work in restaurants is characterized by the persistent threat and reality of sexual harassment, sexual objectification, and sexual abuse as a result of the organizational and interpersonal aspects of the work. One of the most disturbing aspects of these results is that women do not view these experiences as problematic because of the normalization of these experiences in their work and in their daily lives.

Although there are a number of limitations to the current study, there are a number of important research and policy implications for this work as well.

Limitations

One of the most glaring limitations of the current study is the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among this sample, which is at odds with the feminist methodology employed. This is a serious drawback as Murrell (1996) has pointed out that few studies in the sexual harassment literature focus on the experiences of women of color. This is also important as Collins (2000 [1990]) clearly states that methodologically, researchers need to include African American women's "subjugated knowledge" as part of the lived experience of coping with interlocking and intersecting gender, race, and class oppressions. Clearly, the sampling techniques employed here are at fault, as Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung (1988) suggest that researchers may often include participants who are relatively available to them in small-scale qualitative projects, thus excluding participants of diverse race and class backgrounds.

As this work is preliminary, including women of color in future samples is important for a number of reasons. As many of the participants noted, there are few people of color working in restaurants in the first place. There are even fewer women of color working in restaurants, as men of color are often relegated to back of the house positions doing menial work as dishwashers or "busboys." (Dirks & Rice, in press). Also, as Teri, the Filipina American woman pointed out, women of color may only be able to obtain jobs in restaurants that are linked to their ethnicity. For example, Asian American women may only be hired as "exotics" in restaurants serving Asian fare and Latina women may only be hired in "Mexican" or pan-Latin restaurants to serve as part of the restaurant's ambience and attempt at "authenticity." It is plausible then that these women

are hired more often because of their appearance than their skill than white American women, thus perpetuating their roles as sexual and racial objects in the restaurant. This is certainly an important area for further study.

Perhaps most importantly, examining the links between sexism and racism (as well as classism) is crucial to understanding the experiences of women of color as they may experience a “racialized sexism” or a “gendered racism” in their workplaces as well as in their daily lives. Some authors have suggested too that examining these links is crucial as black American women may actually underreport experiences of sexist events or sexual harassment as a result of seeing racism as a more profound shaper of women’s daily experiences of oppressive events (Murrell, 1996; Sigal et al., 2003). As sexual harassment may be a pervasive experience in the lives of many women who continually face racism in their daily lives, examining the unique experiences of multiple oppressions is certainly an important topic for further study (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998).

Another possible limitation to this study is that it does not include men. In my informal discussions and interviews with men who work in restaurants, they have acknowledged that they are quite aware of the pervasive nature of sexual harassment of women in the industry. When asked about their own personal experiences of sexual harassment, one man jokingly shared with me, “I can’t get sexually harassed enough!” In light of the other responses by men and the literature on men’s sexual harassment, I assume that this person implies that he cannot get “harassed” enough by women. As the heterosexual men in Giuffre and Williams’ (1994) restaurant study suggest, men label sexual harassment such when they experience unwanted attention from men whom they

perceive to be gay. Some men have also shared these types of experiences with me as well, and I think this also would make an excellent area for study. As MacKinnon (1979) points out, sexual harassment impacts women differently than it does men, partly because men sexually harass women specifically because they are women. Examining what this means for men who perceive sexual harassment, especially in light of a growing examination of same-sex harassment in the legal arena is also an important area for further research.

One additional limitation to this study is that includes a sample of women who for the most part have access or experience to higher education. Some of the women shared for instance, that they were working in restaurants as a means to support themselves while going to school or while doing work related to their other future endeavors (that did not include doing restaurant work). Given that women who were seeking education viewed restaurant work as a temporary means of employment, they may have viewed their experiences of sexual harassment as merely a provisional inconvenience while seeking “better” workplace possibilities.

For women who work in customer service positions for a living, workplace sexual harassment may be a lifelong possibility. Sexual harassment then may then be viewed as an inescapable aspect of the service work that is 1) available to them and 2) provides enough income to support them or their loved ones. For women who lack the opportunities, education, or desire to seek other employment, how might sexual harassment come to be viewed “as part of one’s job” in the service sector? This is certainly not to suggest that women do not face sexual harassment in other employment areas as this has been well documented, but the unique experiences of women who deal

with coworker, management, and customer sexual harassment certainly need to be explored given the growing service economy and the availability of these jobs to underemployed women.

Implications

Research Implications

The results of the current study have a number of research and policy implications. As stated above, there is a need to qualitatively study the experiences of sexual harassment and sexual objectification in the lives of *all* women. While (mostly feminist) psychologists have recently begun to quantitatively examine the sexual harassment and objectification experiences of mostly white, middle to upper class college women, these studies often fail to provide a more nuanced and detailed look at the impact of these on all women's daily (working) lives. The current reliance on survey data in this area fails to examine the organizational cultures and structures that institutionalize forms of sexual harassment and sexual objectification. Within these organizational cultures, the role of "consensual" sexuality in the workplace and in daily life, also need to be examined as, "Sexuality takes many forms in the workplace, and it has multiple and contradictory meanings and consequences" (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 1999, 91). This is certainly evident from the various narratives provided by the women in this sample.

Beyond the need to examine sexual harassment and sexuality in workplaces and organizations, there has been very little empirical work exploring women's experience of sexual objectification. Although Bartky (1990) provided an excellent definition and theoretical framework for understanding the sexual objectification of women, it was not until Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) *Objectification Theory* that the specific processes of objectification, self-objectification, and mental health consequences created a

promising research agenda for those interested in women's sexual objectification. This is specifically an area of research that is lacking in qualitative exploration, particularly in the context of a burgeoning number of capitalist organizations and structures that seek to objectify and exploit women's (racialized and sexualized) bodies in the service sector—such as the restaurant industry.

It is also interesting to note that the women in this study talked at length about the objectification of their bodies and their labor without verbally situating their experiences in a sexist, racist, and capitalist society. This may point to the fact that sexual harassment and sexual objectification are such “normal” experiences of girls' and women's socialization, that it may be difficult to begin to problematize and resist such forces, thus making them important topics in the feminist literature for empowerment and change. Although the women in this study offered some hope in offering thoughts on change within the restaurant industry, very little of this involved policy change in restaurants, although there a number of industry implications in this area.

Policy Implications

First, nearly all of the women in the sample stated that the restaurants that they worked at had some form of sexual harassment policy. However, the narratives here indicate that these policies are openly ignored or very weakly enforced by employees and employers alike. In fact, every woman reported sexual harassment in the restaurants that they worked, yet only one woman knew of a situation in which two women servers were taking legal action against a male manager for sexual harassment. In this particular case, this manager was reportedly suspended for one week before being able to return to work while awaiting the trial. If managers do not follow policies regarding sexual harassment, this may set the organizational climate by which employees may not feel the need to heed

these policies as well, placing women in a precarious position as they may face sexual harassment not only from coworkers, but from management and customers as well.

Clearly, the sexual harassment policies currently in place are weak and nearly unenforceable in regard to customer behavior. Also, the restaurant industry must desire change in the first place in regard to the sexual harassment that is ostensibly embedded in the organizational structure and culture of the industry. Given that the industry can most likely increase revenues by creating hyper-sexualized establishments that use women's bodies to entice and sell to customers, change appears to be unlikely in the near future. However, restaurants dedicated to eradicating sexual harassment can make policy and praxis changes and can enforce these seriously not only among employees, but customers as well.

Some would also argue that creating policies regarding customer sexual harassment is nearly impossible (Wagner, 1992), but changing the organizational and institutionalized policies that support sexual harassment or create sexual objectification may be one way to make change. For example, policies regarding grooming and uniforms may be changed to not highlight or objectify women's bodies in the restaurant. Also, some would argue that restaurant workers could unionize and fight for better working conditions, but this is problematic given the high turnover rate and temporary nature of restaurant work. However, for professional restaurant workers (bartenders or chefs for example), unionizing could be an option to fight for more equitable treatment in the industry.

It should be made clear here that some in the industry have come to view sexual harassment as a "fun" part of the job with coworkers and they may not actually desire

change to occur (or report that change will *never* occur). The women in this sample acknowledged the pervasive nature of sexual harassment in their work, yet pointed out that restaurant work did have many positive attributes. While this may be an attempt to reduce the cognitive dissonance created between the degrading aspects of the work and the money it provides, this paradox is certainly something that needs to be explored further as it appears that women in this sample did not necessarily problematize sexual harassment in the restaurant as much as one might expect. This analysis is important in viewing the social exchange that occurs between customers and women workers, as sexuality, sexual harassment, and tipping create interesting imbalances in power between men and women.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the ways in which women restaurant workers experience sexual harassment and sexual objectification as part of one's job. Those in power in restaurants- mostly white men as this sample indicates, appear to strategically hire and place women in roles that require them to fulfill the "sex object" work role that has been delineated to women for as long as women have been working outside of the home. This "sex object" role requires that women's bodies and appearance take precedence over their skill and ability. In a sexist, capitalist society, women's bodies therefore are exploited and commodified, and thus, women *become the service* in restaurants and other service sectors of the economy.

In this light, organizations that create or support policies or structures intended to sexually objectify women's bodies (and labor) must be implicated as they create a workplace climate in which sexual harassment is come to be seen as an "acceptable" part of one's job. The fact that women restaurant workers face pervasive sexual harassment

and persistent sexual objectification from coworkers, customers, and managers while working suggests that the restaurant industry has not yet begun to take issues of sexual exploitation in the workplace seriously, and in fact may be exacerbating this situation with weak policies and an open disregard for laws regarding sexual harassment. This disdain indicates that many in the restaurant industry disregard ideas of equality and safety for women from workplace sexual harassment, violence, and exploitation, thus furthering the subjugation working women face in a broader sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist, and capitalist society.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding in this research is that as a result of the sexual harassment and sexual objectification that these women face in their workplaces daily, that these women have come to view these as “normal” aspects of working and living within a sexist society. Girls and women have thus become socialized to view themselves as objects without recourse. As such, sexual harassment and sexual objectification will continue to exist, and those in the patriarchy who perpetuate these systems of oppression cannot only benefit socially, but financially as well as we have seen in this study. There are a number of areas for future research, as we have only begun to see sexual harassment and sexual objectification as important topics of study recently in the literature. We can only insist that future work provide practical solutions to aid *all* women in deconstructing an oppressive capitalist society that systematically exploits half of its members.

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