

I'M A WAITRESS NOT A DANCER: EMOTION WORK
AMONG CLOTHED EMPLOYEES

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*For My Parents
Phil and Janice Bailey*

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ABSTRACT

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Fifteen waitresses were interviewed to explore emotional labor processes in a strip club environment. In-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted to examine how a waitress's decision to work in a strip club influences her sense of self, and her management of emotions while on the job. Employing place claiming techniques, distancing tactics, and by alternating between true and false self displays these waitresses are constantly negotiating an identity they can feel proud of. Due to their freedom from organizationally imposed display norms, these clothed employees have a choice of when, with whom, and to what extent they employ emotion work techniques. Waitresses in this study consistently *do service* for regulars, and for new customers that tip them well, but refrain from it with customers who do not tip, who touch them inappropriately, and when specifically requested to. Overall, these women maintain a sense of self they feel proud of because they do not remove their clothing, and make good money anyway. By employing emotional labor techniques when they choose, and by only doing so with customers whose impressions follow their own individual and situationally determined

guidelines, these fifteen women show that the environment they choose to work in does have a significant influence over how they do emotional labor.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The brightly colored building sits perched among gas stations and used car lots with a neon sign flashing *the best girls in town*, or something of the sort. With no windows and an attendant at the door, what goes on inside is meant to be kept hidden from the onlooker's gaze. Once inside, the smoke filled air and the DJ's announcements take over the senses. Topless women are dancing on the stage, and several are seen talking and interacting with customers. Dressed in black, from head to toe, is the waitress. Several are talking with customers, others are scurrying to the bar, and some are walking among tables. Unlike their female coworkers on stage, these women are fully clothed. The subject of an array of sociological research, exotic dancers pay a valuable price for removing their clothing, as they are often stigmatized and ostracized by society at large for how they make a living (Murphy 2003, Thompson et al. 2003, Wesely 2003, Wood 2000). In the dark shadows of the smoke filled room stands, what a lack in sociological research shows, is the insignificant waitress. Although she chooses to remain dressed, what these few women share of their experiences at this one particular club, prove to be anything but.

The Managed Heart (1983) challenges sociologists to study the management of emotions across many occupational fields. This qualitative study is one answer to that call. Hochschild defines emotional labor separately from wage earning efforts, focusing

on the on-the-job experiences of flight attendants. Hochschild (1983) claims that flight attendants “manage their feelings to create publicly observable facial and bodily displays” that are “sold for a wage” (p.7). Emotional labor, the commodification of feeling, is the area of interest for this research study. I will use Hochschild’s (1983) conceptualization of emotional labor, to frame a qualitative study of the lived experiences of cocktail waitresses who currently work in exotic dance clubs.

Taking a symbolic interactionist perspective, emotions will be viewed as a joint collaboration between “generalized arousal and specific sociocultural factors (i.e. definitions of the situation and cultural labels)” (Thoits 1989:320). Opposing a positivistic viewpoint, emotions will be accepted as a fluctuating entity with social interactions and societal norms playing a significant role in an individual’s choice to elicit a particular emotion. As a whole, symbolic interactionists stress the importance that social influences have upon how individuals define their social worlds and their own self-identities (Shott 1979). During processes of interaction, individuals interpret the actions of others, which in turn influence the behaviors they choose to display (Blumer 1969). I will examine emotions and emotional labor from this framework.

Applying a symbolic interactionist perspective to the management of emotions may further explain how individual feelings and emotions are influenced by processes of social interaction. In comparison to Hochschild’s findings in *The Managed Heart*, exploring the experiences of these clothed strip club employees will bring a greater understanding of how emotion rules and norms, across various occupational environments, influence processes of emotion management. It will also serve to fulfill a gap in the sociological knowledge of the experiences of strip club employees who choose

not to remove their clothing, specifically attempting to uncover the influence such a decision carries over the ways in which these women define their sense of selves.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Norman Denzin (1984) states “people are their emotions,” a claim that implies the significant role emotions can have during the innumerable social interactions individuals encounter in their everyday lives (p.1). Early symbolic interactionists, like Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969), introduced ideas regarding the reflexive thought processes of human beings, social understanding of the members of society, and how they process information about their own and others’ actions. Emotions are not only embodied experiences; they reside in both individual experiences and physiological processes (Denzin 1984). Recognizing emotions as a significant element in social interaction brings a greater understanding to the symbolic behaviors of society as a whole, and the individuals who reside in it. In this literature review, I present previous research on each of the major constructs characterizing this study, symbolic interaction theory, emotions, the management of emotions, and relevant information on the employees and environmental conditions of restaurants and exotic dance clubs.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Using ideas introduced by Mead (1934) and later expanded upon by Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionists place the role of individuals, and the interactions that occur between them, at the forefront of sociological thinking. Positing a difference

between body and self, Mead regards the self as a reflexive being, that is “both a subject and object” to itself (1934:137). In the *conversation of gestures*, Mead cites reflexivity as a process that not only occurs *within* human beings in society, but in the communications occurring *between* human beings. A self can only exist as a reflexive entity, where it witnesses its own actions and can change such actions during the coinciding interaction. The self not only adjusts its attitudes and actions for others, but is affected by this adjustment process as it occurs in others. Accounting for an “I” and a “Me,” Mead (1934) depicts both a spontaneous and reflexive part of a human self (p.174).

Building upon Mead’s (1934) ideas, Blumer (1969) not only coins the term symbolic interactionism, but identifies three main premises which construct the foundation for this school of thought, including: humans react to things by reflecting on the meaning these things have for them, that individuals find meaning for things through social interaction, and that an interpretative process occurs which manages the meaning of things for each individual (Blumer 1969). Most interactionists agree that a “self is not an object that has inherent meaning, but is a construct that is given meaning through an actor’s choices, mediated by the relationships, situations, and cultures in which she or he is embedded” (Fine 1993:78). Human behaviors and actions continuously evolve during social interactions, and various external factors and symbols, like that of the cultural environment, influence how people decide to act (Blumer 1969). Utilizing the ideas of Mead (1934) and Blumer, individual selves, the environment, and the interactions taking place between them will be accepted as playing a significant role in an individual’s choice to elicit a particular emotive response, a contention way beyond one biological based point of origin (Mills and Kleinman 1988).

Defining Emotions and Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is of growing concern in sociological research, spurred by Hochschild's (1979, 1983) introduction of the concept over twenty years ago. Understanding emotional labor requires a conceptualization of an emotion. Reshaping Hochschild's classification of emotion as a "bodily cooperation with an image, a thought, a memory—a cooperation of which the individual is aware," Denzin (1983) argues for a more defined role of self-reflectivity in emotions (p.551). Defining emotions as "self-feelings," Denzin (1983:404) posits that, while bodily reactions are important, it is an individual's own self-reflexive processes that *define* how the individual is feeling. The body does not tell individuals what they are feeling; instead it is individuals who interpret these feelings as specific emotions. For the most part, an emotion represents feelings and affects that individuals label as various emotion types through cultural and societal delineations (Thoits 1989).

David Franks (2003) agrees with Thoits (1989), Denzin (1983, 1984), and Kemper (1978) on the power social environments have on emotions experienced and expressed by individuals. Franks posits several reasons as to why symbolic interactionists need to pay interest to the ongoing processes of emotional experiences occurring in society. Without emotions, communicative interactions are undeniably bland, and lack the enthusiasm necessary for effective communication and action to occur between individuals and society (Franks 2003, Johnson, Ford, and Kaufman 2000). In symbolic interaction, individuals communicate with one another by helping each other to act in acceptable ways, a reflexive process that is hindered by a deficient level of

emotional employment (Franks 2003). Building off of Shott's (1979) conceptualization of role-taking emotions, Franks claims that socialization processes depict what is good and bad, and without emotional endorsement these two extremes represent "disembodied symbols, whose role-taking would just as well produce a society whose 'understanding' of others would be used only for their manipulation and dominance" (Franks 2003:789), emphasizing why emotions are a fertile area for symbolic interactionists to explore.

Denzin (1984) agrees that emotions are a significant part of processes of interaction, as first introduced by Mead (1934), but finds that Hochschild (1979, 1983) and Shott (1979) limit the potential importance of emotions to sociological understanding by seeking answers as to the origin or causality of various emotions, instead of accepting these emotive experiences as ongoing processes occurring during interactions.

Advocating that *self-feelings* represent an emotional process, Denzin calls for future emotion research that remains focused on emotions as interactive processes *occurring in* social interactions, not that which is concerned with discovering causal direction. By defining emotions as *self-feelings*, Denzin (1984) posits that emotion researchers will not get caught trying to define the point of origin of various emotions, and can instead focus on emotionality "as arising out of the self-interactions that individuals direct toward themselves and out of the reflected appraisals of others, both imagined and real" (p.54).

Cultural environments contribute to the emotions individuals experience (Denzin 1984, Franks 2003, Shott 1979, Shilling 1997). How an individual defines and interprets a situation and/or environment can be an influential factor in the types of emotions the individual not only experiences, but exhibits to others, as "internal states and cues, necessary as they are for affective experience, do not in themselves establish

feeling, for it is the actor's definitions and interpretations that give physiological states their emotional significance or nonsignificance" (Shott 1979:1323). Expressed emotions reflect those feelings that individuals sense coincides with the environmental characteristics of a particular social situation (Kemper 1978). Taking a structural approach to emotions, Kemper (1978) posits power and status as influential facets of every societal interaction, where an individual's position in this dimension can influence expressed emotions. During these situations, social actors also relay relevant information about themselves, as they simultaneously decide upon the best way to express themselves, hoping to be perceived by others in the specific way desired (Goffman 1959).

Defining *reflexive role-taking* and *empathetic role-taking*, Shott (1979) delineates two types of emotion. When individuals take on the standpoint of another person they are experiencing role-taking emotions. It is these role-taking emotions that lay the foundation for social control, and, because of reflexive processes, the individual feeling of self-control. Shott conceives empathetic role-taking emotions as being used when emotions are evoked out of compassion and understanding for the position of another individual. While not all emotions are considered as role-taking, consider the momentary fear experienced when slamming on your brakes to avoid an accident, most emotions can either be classified as *reflexive* or *empathetic* (Shott 1979). Kemper (1978) expands upon these two types by differentiating between *anticipatory*, *structural*, and *consequential* emotions. Kemper differentiates these types as, "responses to how an actor views the future state of a relationship," their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with "their own and other's positions on power and status dimensions," or the "consequence of a relational outcome of an interaction episode" (p.49). Regardless of their differences,

both Shott and Kemper's typologies of emotion claim that individuals, social interactions and cultural environments have a significant amount of control over which emotions are expressed and in what manner they are expressed.

Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), Franks (2003), Denzin (1983), and Hochschild (1983) all posit that reflexive processes have significant control over how individuals shape their thoughts and feelings. Mills and Kleinman (1988) challenge this contention by arguing that individuals can suspend their reflexive processes, implying that individuals are not always involved in emotion work. Analyzing ten in-depth interviews with battered women, Mills and Kleinman propose, "numbness, spontaneous action, and organized spontaneity are three situations in which individuals suspend reflexivity and experience intense feelings" (1988:1011). Supporting Mead's (1934) position on the self, Mills and Kleinman state that individuals can suspend their capacity to think reflexively and become passive, letting the intensive feelings they are experiencing to take over action. Distinguishing between *routine action* and *numbness*, where numbness hinders action and routines free up cognitive processes, Mills and Kleinman support that individuals can be both unreflexive and unemotional during routinized action, and rational and reflexive without feelings. By exploring these assumptions, Mills and Kleinman claim that humans can respond to situations in a variety of ways, and how each defines her/his situation impacts this process.

Although never a self-defined symbolic interactionist, Goffman (1959) produces significant insights about processes of interaction, processes which have a significant amount of influence over emotive expressions (Denzin 1983, Franks 2003, Shott 1979, Kemper 1978). Through the dramaturgical perspective he introduced to sociology,

Goffman (1959) shows how individuals manage their impressions to others in ways which control how others perceive them. Upon entering an interactional environment, individuals want to “understand the factual nature of the situation,” a practice that forces them to predict “social facts” about a situation in accordance with what is apparent and observable in order to make judgments about what is unobservable (Goffman 1959:249). This practice highlights the important role emotional expression can play in relaying pertinent information to others about you as an individual. Similarly, Hochschild (1983) finds that feelings and emotions can be intentionally concealed so that social harmony reigns, a phenomenon that clearly defines the important role emotions have in social environments and interactions. However, without connecting how emotions are manifested and suppressed, Goffman leaves the link between the rules that guide sanctioned emotive displays and those guiding behavior and individual interests disconnected (Hochschild).

Hochschild (1983) fills the gaps she perceives in Goffman’s (1959) research on self and interactions with her theory on emotions. While Goffman recognizes the “awareness of the effort it takes to pay our ‘emotional dues’ to an occasion,” he does not recognize how taxing these dues can be to the self (Hochschild 1983:229). These taxing procedures are often what cause individuals to try and change their emotive conditions, which is how individuals in society *manage feeling*. Emotional labor requires individuals to manage parts of their selves that many consider a part of their private selves, which correlates highly with their sense of individuality in society. Similar to Denzin (1983), Franks (2003), and Shott (1979), Hochschild’s interactional theory of emotion posits a combination of the cognitive and the social. Emotions represent the physiological

processes human bodies go through in their attempts to prepare themselves for both real and anticipatory actions, processes that individuals can be both aware and unaware of. From this perspective, emotions are “A bodily orientation to an imaginary act. As such, it has a signal function; it warns us of where we stand vis-à-vis outer or inner events” (Hochschild 1983:28). These signal functions prepare individuals about which emotions are not only acceptable to portray, but which emotions they *should* feel.

Emotions can also relay significant information about one’s self as an individual, and the individual’s place in a situation (Gordon 1989). How an individual sees oneself is largely determined by the individual’s *self-concept*, the “continuity—however imperfect—of an individual’s experience of himself in a variety of situations” (Turner 1976:990). Humans often connect their emotional expressions with their self-concept, an association many individuals use to define their *real self* (Gordon 1989). Expressions of emotion that individuals feel are most authentic are representative of the appearance of one’s real self. Turner (1976) posits that individuals define their real selves in either an *institutional* focus or an *impulsive* focus. An *institutional* focus occurs when individuals feel in total control of their emotive experiences, and *impulsive* meanings of emotion occur as unstructured and uninhibited expressions when individuals feel ungoverned (Gordon 1989). When *individuals* value an institutional emotional culture, the real self is conceptualized at its best when following institutionalized norms and standards. In opposition to this, an individual who values “the gratifications of personal wishes and inclinations” favors an impulsive approach to emotion culture (Gordon 1989:124). Individuals feel they display their *real self* when they uphold the norms of the emotional orientation they value most. Where Turner advocates a historical shift in how individuals

appropriate emotions to the self, Gordon posits this is a selective and reflective process that accounts for norms, culture, and individual “self-feelings” (Denzin 1983:404).

Sociological Research on Emotional Labor

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1983:18) defines the concept of *feeling rules*, or the societal norms and standards that guide the acceptance or rejection of various emotional elicitations in social situations. Attempting to understand how individuals manage emotion, Snyder and Ammons (1993) choose to explore the processes of emotional labor from a baseball player’s perspective, and find that some player’s are able to control the gap between what each feels and what is appropriate to feel. Where Hochschild’s research on flight attendants cites feelings of estrangement as commonplace, Snyder and Ammons reveal a very different case. In researching baseball players, Snyder and Ammons find the emotion work these players experience does not lead to “feelings of estrangement or inauthentic presentations of the self as they play their roles as baseball players” (p.128). Instead these two researchers report the emotion work their respondents partake in as a relatively harmless process, representing a phenomenon to which they have clearly adapted (Snyder and Ammons 1993).

One expansion on this concept assesses the positive and negative implications for a population of individuals who manage emotions in not just *one* career role, but in a variety of roles (Wharton and Erickson 1993). Wharton and Erickson explore the implications of emotionally laborious roles that occur both in the paid labor force *and* at home. Assessing how varying amounts of emotional labor, occurring in both the work and family role, influence relations between the two, may show that the type of display

norms individuals use can act as influential variables upon the levels of role conflict and role overload individuals experience.

Display norms play a powerful role in determining which emotions individuals deem acceptable to express in various social situations, and are largely based on coveted societal norms (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). Display norms require individuals to perform processes of either surface acting or processes of deep acting, both of which trigger the portrayal of an acceptable emotion for the situations individuals find themselves in (Hochschild 1979, 1983). During *surface acting*, individuals modify their verbal and nonverbal signals to appear in a more acceptable manner to others, whereas during *deep acting* the individual will truly attempt to *feel* the emotion she/he is trying to display. While acknowledging Hochschild's two methods for accomplishing emotional labor, or "the act of displaying the appropriate emotion," Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) propose a third method that accounts for the possible spontaneity of emotive experiences. Individuals may spontaneously express the warranted emotion during an interaction without really trying, representing a phenomenon where emotion is genuinely expressed with little emotional labor involved (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993:89).

In response to Hochschild's (1979, 1983) concept of emotional labor processes of surface and deep acting, Hallett (2000) proposes an added dimension to managing emotions. In a qualitative study of table servers working in a sports bar and grill, Hallett explores the role small group cultures, day waitstaff versus that night waitstaff, have on processes of emotion management. Where Hochschild (1983) distinguishes emotional labor as "feeling rules that govern emotions in private life," and emotion work as the "emotions commodified in the public sphere," Hallett posits the existence of both in a

process he calls *socio emotion management* (2000:4). Socio emotion management allows servers to display surface acting measures during interactions with customers, these measures can in turn influence their *self-feelings* (Denzin 1984). Hallett's socio emotion management processes answers Denzin's call for emotion research that posit self-feelings as a process occurring *during* interactions, encompassing an emotion management process that accounts for both the self and others:

What makes this process complex is the fact that the interactions are embedded in situation structures that also affect how the interaction and emotions emerge. To avoid confusion with emotions management in the form of deep-acting, I label this highly structured and highly interactive process of impression management/surface-acting and emotion change "*socio*" *emotion management*" (Hallett 2000:7)

Where Hochschild proposes emotive dissonance and self-alienation as consequences to emotional labor processes, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) find that how well individuals identify with their work role is also significant. They understand emotional labor through identity theory, finding that the level of identification with a role position may moderate emotional labor processes. If a worker identifies well with the required display rules of her/his job, then emotional labor is less likely to represent a threat to that individual. This benefits managers and supervisors, as employees will be more apt to project their company's display rules if they feel in tune with their position of employment (Mann 1999). Conversely, if employees do not identify well with their role on the job they are more likely to feel alienated, dissonant, and stressed by their emotional labors (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993), consequences Mann (1999) finds can arise in positions of employment where workers interact with customers both in person and over the phone. Quantifying emotional labor into a measurable likert scale, Mann

reports that the more emotional labor an employee feels they do during an interaction, the less *successful* they perceive their communication with customers to be.

Utilizing survey data on hospital and bank workers Bulan, Erickson, and Wharton (1997) examine how authenticity and emotional well-being are influenced by service sector work. In most service sector jobs, success depends upon an individual's ability to do emotional labor, a process that requires individuals to project specific *affective requirements* (Bulan et al. 1997). *Affective requirements* consist of the "formal and informal rules that workers perceive to be governing their on-the-job emotional displays" (Bulan et al. 1997:237). Building off of Hochschild's (1983) work on emotional labor, *affective requirements* represent the "organizationally imposed rules" that require workers to emotion manage (Bulan 1997:237). Bulan and others set out to discover not only the negative implications to emotional labor, but to uncover any positive repercussions upon emotional well-being. Like Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), Bulan and others find that the more control individuals feel they have over their working environment, the less likely they are to feel alienated and inauthentic on the job. They cite inauthenticity as also being influenced by the amount of contact employees have with their coworkers, the more contact, the less inauthentic workers felt. Testing for *affective requirements*, their results show that if knowing how to "handle customers well" is a job requirement, workers experience a heightened sense of inauthenticity with their self.

Mann (1999) posits when employees feel in tune with their jobs, they are more likely to comply with the display rules required of them while on the clock. This is true in the case of some youth shelter workers, as Karabanow's (1999) research exhibits. In this study, many of the youth shelter workers had a strong sense of love for children

before beginning their job at the shelter, but if not, that feeling would have to be induced in order for that worker to keep her or his job. Instead, the employees at this shelter cite their work as a “natural extension of their personal and intrinsic being,” a perception that lessens the negative implications of performing emotional labor on the job. Karabanow’s findings coincide with Ashforth and Humphrey’s (1993) and Bulan et al.’s (1997) research, supporting that the more a worker identifies with the work role, what Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) describe as “emotional harmony,” the less amount of emotional labor and inauthenticity will be required and experienced (p.32). Where a large portion of emotional labor research lies in the service sector, very few researchers look to studying environments where workers like their jobs and identify with its purposes, an influential variable that is showing up time and again as neutralizing the negative effects of emotional labor (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Bulan 1997, Mann 1999, Karabanow 1999).

How individuals present themselves on the job is of increasing importance to managers and organizations in many industries today (Morris and Feldman 1996). Emotions carry a significant weight in service interactions, as employees represent the face of an entire organization. This leaves many managers and supervisors concerned with how to control their employee’s emotional displays. Taking an interactionist perspective approach, Morris and Feldman support the research that finds individual emotions as partly constructed by environmental conditions. However, in opposition of to Mann (1999) and Karabanow’s (1999) research, they posit even the emotions workers identify strongly with are laborious to display, as “felt emotion must still be translated into appropriate emotional displays” (Morris and Feldman 1996:988). Where Hochschild

(1983) focuses on how feelings are managed, they choose to focus instead on how emotions are expressed while on the job.

In identifying four main dimensions to the construct of emotional labor, Morris and Feldman (1996) show how varying demands on emotional display affect employees' processes of emotional labor. The frequency, duration, intensity, and diversity of display rules require different emotional projections from workers, projections that influence the amount of emotional labor a worker experiences based on the demands of the job. Agreeing with Hochschild (1983), Morris and Feldman state the greater the distance between an individual's genuine emotions and displayed emotions, or emotional dissonance, the greater amount of labor in producing the display. However, in opposition to Hochschild, these researchers pose this as not a consequence, but another "dimension of the emotional labor construct," as it varies depending upon each individual worker's level of "control, skill, and attentive action" (Morris and Feldman 1996:992).

Hochschild's (1983) original research on flight attendants utilized only the frequency of contact dimension to operationalize emotional labor. Morris and Feldman (1996) maintain that the conflicting results presented in a number of emotional labor studies are due to the need for more than one construct of emotional labor, a conflict they believe can be solved by operationalizing the four dimensions they propose. Researching the interactions between convenience store patrons and employees Rafaeli and Sutton (1988) explore the "duration of emotional display" construct suggested by Morris and Feldman (1996:989). Employing both quantitative and qualitative research strategies, Rafaeli and Sutton (1988) report a negative relationship between the sales of a 576 convenience stores and positive emotional display by store clerks. Further qualitative

research revealed the pace of interactions, between the store clerk and customers, influenced store sales, as the convenience store display norms dictate it acceptable for clerks to contribute a low level of “emotionality” (Denzin 1984:3) during busy times (Rafaeli and Sutton 1988).

Convenience store employees can alternate between high levels of emotional display and low levels of emotional display, and not lose their jobs, because of the existing norms that guide their working environment (Rafaeli and Sutton 1988). Like societal norms, individuals struggle to align themselves as best they can with the display norms dictating acceptable behaviors of a job (Johnson et al. 2000), as “the cultural values of an establishment will determine in detail how the participants are to feel about many matters and at the same time establish a framework that must be maintained, whether or not there is feeling behind the appearances” (Goffman 1959:241). Goffman (1961) describe these behaviors as *role-performances*, activities an individual engages in because of the environmental norms pressuring her/him to do so (Goffman 1961). The individual is left responsible for making sure the impressions given off during role performances adequately fulfill and match the qualities of the role trying to be displayed (Goffman 1961). Although feeling norms do not exclusively foster individual emotion and behavior, they do represent a significant cultural influence, one integrated and enacted by individuals every day (Simon et al. 1992).

The Restaurant Environment and Its Waitstaff

Studies examining the role of emotional labor are abundant for high status occupations like doctors and lawyers with very little research on blue collar workers, or

what Howe (1977) posits as *pink collar workers*, such as waitresses (Hochschild 1983). Sociological research on waitstaff in the restaurant industry is limited, with available studies focusing on topics such as gender relations (Hall 1993), group culture (Hallett 2000), and sexual harassment (Giuffre and Williams 1994). Waitresses must be capable of not only working efficiently in a sometimes inefficient and irregular environment, but condition themselves to service “a stream of customers who enter with needs that vary from the physiological, and the emotions that attend hunger, to the desire for public intimacy” (Rose 2001:12). It is up to the waitress’s individual abilities at managing emotions, situations, and customer interactions as to whether or not she is able to meet these needs (Rose).

Restaurants in the service industry are highly gendered environments (Giuffre and Williams 1994, Hall 1993, Rose 2001). Waitresses are often subjected to gender specific stereotypes because of restaurant policies, socialized norms, and a societal expectation of what classifies an appropriate service encounter (Rose 2001). The detection of inappropriate service encounters is largely dependent upon the waitress’s perception of the customer’s actions, as the waitress can be forced into having to decide whether or not a customer’s behavior constitutes sexual harassment (Giuffre and Williams 1994). Being a good server and playing up gender stereotypical behaviors can influence the tip a customer gives, a significant factor in why a waitress might decide to play up these characteristics (Hall 1993, Rose 2001). However, the environment of the restaurant itself can hold significant power over how women feel about indulging in gender specific behaviors (Hall 1993, Hallett 2000). Consider upscale restaurants where managers refer to both men and women as a “waiter,” and uniforms are gender neutral, versus that of the

casual restaurant environment where women wear skirts and are referred to as “honey,” “cutie,” or “sweetie” (Hall 1993, Howe 1977).

In the restaurant industry waitresses can experience both a sense of solidarity (Hallett 2000) and a sense of competition (Rose 2001) with other coworkers. Servers will be more likely to feel a good deal of camaraderie with their coworkers if there is little competition over getting tables (Hallett 2000). If a higher sense of competition over tables does exist, waitstaff may be less likely to interact with one another or display group cohesion. As a female dominated industry (U.S. Department of Labor 2002), clashing competitive interests during interactions of waitstaff could show that females no longer use “use apologies and excuses to mitigate their behavior,” or to “avoid competition in favor of tactics that diffuse conflict and preserve interpersonal harmony” when interacting with other women (Campbell 2004). Today women use techniques to compete with one another, without having to engage themselves in face to face altercations by employing exclusionary or stigmatizing tactics that can ostracize their competitor, or in this case a coworker (Campbell 2004).

The Strip Club Environment

A growing body of literature examines the lives of the dancers, bar patrons, and the interactions in strip clubs. Research on exotic dancers leaves the discipline largely saturated with information on who these women and men are and what their lives are like, but largely ignore the waiters and/or waitresses that represent the rest of the working staff at these establishments. The lived experiences of female dancers may or may not be comparable to female waitresses who work in exotic dance venues, but are an entry point

into understanding female waitresses' experiences. Female dancers who work in this industry often struggle with identity issues that both drive them to differentiate themselves from other dancers and at the same time conform to a dominant image of beauty that patrons expect and want (Wesely 2003). Utilizing "body technologies," exotic dancers often alter their bodies, temporarily and/or permanently, to conform to the dominant idealized and fantasy image of the female body.

Female exotic dancers work in an environment that Murphy (2003) cites as a "sexploitation organization, where sexuality is exploited for the benefit of the managers and owners" (p.307). While Hochschild differentiates between a true and false self, the true self only appearing in private moments away from the public eye, female exotic dancers struggle to achieve these distinct selves when they find their private selves are on constant display in a public environment. By working in this type of environment, dancers often struggle with a fluctuating self-identity, having to constantly redefine and reposition their self-concept as a coping mechanism against the stigmatization that is a prevailing characteristic of their occupational environment (Murphy 1993). Not always an objectified sex object, exotic dancers do hold some power in their interactions with customers (Wood 2000). Taking a feminist-interactionist approach, Wood posits that "power is not inflicted by men onto women but is enacted by men and women together primarily for the benefit of men through interactions that affirm cultural notions of masculinity" (p.27).

While the study currently being proposed does not include females who work as dancers in a strip club, this research provides significant insight into the type of environment women who work in strip clubs may or may not encounter, either as a

dancer or waitress. Where a dancer's monetary success can be dependent upon the dancer's ability to fake a realistic level of intimacy with the customers (Montemurro 2001), waitresses may or may not do the same. For waitresses, flirting and maintaining an image of sexual appeal are fundamental aspects of a job in the restaurant and bar industry (Giuffre and Williams 1994). For many women, sexual exploitation in the work environment is not defined as a problem, and, depending upon the source of the harassment, some find it both appealing and pleasurable. In comparison to waitresses who work in strip clubs, how each views the sexualized environment, as overly exploitive or not, may influence processes of emotional labor. Consequently, how cocktail waitresses may or may not manage their emotions can bring about important implications concerning Hochschild's original findings.

The literature review presented here on symbolic interaction theory, emotion, the management of emotion, the restaurant environment, and exotic dancers leaves adequate room for necessary inquiry on the experiences of non-dancing female employees. Cocktail waitresses are a forgotten entity in the existing research on exotic dance clubs and the women that work in them. While dancers do represent a significant part of the strip club environment, research has yet to explore the experiences of female cocktail waitresses who work in the same environment. As *clothed* females their interactions and experiences with customers and other employees may or may not be different than those of the dancers and other service related employees. While it is clear that some dancers perform emotional labor for a variety of reasons (Thompson et al. 2003), it is unclear if waitresses do the same. While Thompson and others posit that dancers struggle with managing the stigma of their occupational choice, and their overall self-identities

(Wesely 2003), it remains unclear as to whether cocktail waitresses working in this same environment will battle similar issues.

By capturing the lived experiences of cocktail waitresses who work in exotic dance clubs, this qualitative study will attempt to uncover how these few women manage their emotional selves. This study will build upon prior research on emotions and emotional labor processes to explore how each waitress's identity, both on the job and outside of it, influences her management of emotions. A focus on the clothed employees in a strip club will also fill a gap in the existing inquiries on exotic dance clubs and the women that work in them. Further, exploring the lived experiences of waitresses who work in this specific environment will not only fill a gap in exotic dancing literature, but also expand upon the sociological knowledge of how social forces and self-feelings combine and contribute to emotive experiences. Gaining a better understanding of the ways individuals interpret their feelings in order to express specific emotions will not only advance research on emotional labor, but further solidify its empirical importance in sociological research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To explore the lived experiences of cocktail waitresses who work in strip clubs I chose a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to “see human beings up close, get a sense of what drives them, and develop claims of how their personal as well as collective lives have been created” (Orum et al. 1991:11). Further, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, uncovering how individuals in any social environment manage their interactions, and engage in social actions with others is a phenomenon best studied through naturalistic methods that observe and analyze interactions up close, in their natural settings (Blumer 1969). For qualitative researchers, the most authentic data is revealed when they are able to grasp how individuals participate in social interactions, a process that accepts each individual’s account as a significant one (Orum et al. 1991). For this study, I used one-on-one in-depth interviews that questioned and explored the self-reflexive processes that waitresses use to define how they feel in various situations, as they were best suited for capturing the lived experiences of these women.

Research Questions

I identified three research questions to guide my exploration of the experiences of cocktail waitresses working in a strip club. Instead of focusing on proving or disproving

one hypothesis, these research questions outline three points of sociological inquiry regarding emotionality on the job. A grounded theoretical approach accounts for significant concepts and themes that emerge during data collection and analysis procedures, even if they are not a reaffirmation of my original expectations (Marvasti 2004). The following research questions were my empirical focus, and guided the qualitative processes I employed in capturing how cocktail waitresses manage their emotions while working in an exotic dance club: 1) How does a women's decision to work in a strip club influence her sense of self? 2) How do these women manage their emotions both on the job and outside of it? 3) Do these women engage in emotional labor? I constructed an interview guide to reflect these three points of inquiry.

Methods

The interview guide I utilized consists of three sections (See Appendix A). The first section questioned background information; specifically asking respondents about work experiences prior to their current job, the length of their stay at the current occupation, and their reasons for wanting to work at a strip club. The second section questioned respondents' experiences at work, specifically focusing on their preferred styles of interaction with customers, their moods and attitudes while at work, and how and why these emotions may or may not change depending on the type of internal and external stimuli they experience. The third section inquired about respondents' experiences when outside of their working environment, focusing on if and when they disclose where they work, who they may or may not disclose this information to, and how and why they make the judgment to disclose or not to disclose this information.

After posing significant inquiry into their feelings and emotions during various social interactions, taking place both inside and outside of the strip club, I concluded each interview by questioning where each waitress expected herself to be in five to ten years, and what, if anything, she would improve about her working environment if possible.

Prior to each interview, respondents signed a document acknowledging informed consent (See Appendix B). This document indicated the purpose of the study, the positive and negative repercussions they may experience by my inquiring into their life experiences, and the confidentiality agreement their signature ensured. Before questioning began, respondents also filled out demographic information regarding their age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, highest year of school completed, and marital status (See Appendix C). In qualitative research, taking field notes is necessary for recounting the nonverbal actions and behaviors of the respondent that researchers miss during tape recording (Esterberg 2002). In addition to tape recording all face-to-face interviews, I also took field notes immediately following each interview, as a reminder of how I thought the interview went, and any other observation I felt as pertinent to this study. For example, I took notes of waitresses' work attire, their nonverbal actions (i.e. nervousness, anxiety, enthusiasm), and any other relevant information shared before the tape recorder started and ended.

During each interview, I employed active listening techniques to probe respondents in areas needing greater attention, and to keep the interview on task (Arendell 1997). During active listening, researchers have to "think on their feet," deciding when to probe specific questions further, and when to inquire with additional follow-up questions to explore expected and unexpected topics of interest (Esterberg

2002:104). In in-depth interviewing, it is easy for both respondents and researcher to get off track, and, while some significant insight can occur during these episodes (Esterberg 2002), when I judged the episode was heading too far from becoming anything significant I would gently guide respondents back into the direction I felt the interview warranted. In-depth interviewing is a skill, and, this being my first attempt at qualitative research, my interviewing abilities grew significantly better with each interview I completed.

Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen cocktail waitresses employed at an exotic dance club in a southeastern Texas metropolitan area. Utilizing a purposive sampling technique, I gathered a “snowball” sample of cocktail waitresses who were all employed at a local exotic dance club. In qualitative research, purposive sampling allows researchers to collect a sample that reflects their theoretical purpose, thus I attempted only to recruit non dancing female waitresses who were all employed at the same venue (Marvasti 2004). After discussing my thesis topic with co-workers at a local restaurant where I was employed, one acquaintance identified herself as a former strip club employee, and stated she could get me in contact with her previous manager. After a phone conversation with this manager, in which I explained my need to recruit waitresses for a master’s thesis on which I was working, he invited me to attend an upcoming employee meeting. Over fifty waitresses were present at this meeting, and after sitting for over three hours, listening to various employee policies, I had the opportunity to explain my study and ask for volunteers. In my speech, I made no attempt to divulge that

I was studying only waitresses working in strip clubs, I merely made a point to discuss that I was interested in studying waitresses and their experiences both on and off the job. Ten of the fifty present did stop and sign their names as willing participants.

Nine of the fifteen waitresses included in this study signed up, and I later contacted them by phone to set up an interview. Only one respondent who initially volunteered decided not to be included in the study, by choosing not to attend her scheduled interview and never returning any of my subsequent phone calls. The remaining six respondents I recruited through the recommendations of waitresses I had already interviewed. All the interviews conducted for this study took place between October of 2004 and February of 2005, with the first six being completed in October and the remaining nine during January and February. Five of the fifteen interviews took place in the office located above the strip club, one took place in the dancers' dressing room, one in a storage room at the club, and the remaining interviews took place at the respondent's locale of choice: apartments, homes, or local coffee shops. In the interviews taking place at the club, waitresses seemingly had no problem with openly discussing how they felt about other waitresses, management, and the dancers, both good and bad. Each respondent who began an interview completed it in its entirety without any obvious hesitations, with interviews ranging from a half hour to an hour and a half in length.

As a young female graduate student I was concerned with various factors that may or may not have affected the data I have gathered. For qualitative researchers doing in-depth interviews, it is necessary to consider the type of image the researcher wants to portray to their respondents, as how they look, speak, and behave can all have a

significant impact on what respondents feel comfortable saying and doing during the interview (Esterberg 2002). I decided the best way to approach these women would be as their equal, as strip club employees are already subject to a somewhat significant amount of stigmatization from the outside public (Thompson et al. 2003), and to get the most authentic data I wanted to approach them in the least threatening manner possible. In preparation for each interview I dressed in tennis shoes, jeans, and a sweatshirt, and I openly conveyed my occupations as both a graduate assistant and a waitress. I do feel this was the best decision, as the women all seemed very comfortable with me from the beginning, and I had little difficulty establishing a good amount of rapport.

Having never been to a strip club before, and never doing a qualitative in-depth interview, my first interview, held at the strip club, was a trying experience. The interview lasted a little over thirty minutes, and I am fairly certain my naiveté to numerous factors played a significant part in how the interview transpired. I felt uncomfortable being in the strip club environment, I felt I had no idea what I was doing, and I wanted to leave as quickly as possible. After the interview ended, and I returned to my car I had little faith I would be able to return to the club for anymore interviews, but, as many waitresses cite, it was fairly easy to become somewhat numb to the environmental stimuli, a factor I found did influence my ability to get through the rest of the interviews fairly comfortably. After my first interview, entering the strip club and finding the waitress I intended to interview became easier, due to familiarity with the door attendant and previously interviewed waitresses who happened to be at work that day. It is necessary to identify these factors, as I feel they most certainly could have influenced the data I have collected.

Sample Description

In Table 1 (page 34) entitled “RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS,” a summary of the demographic information each respondent provided is presented, and as per the consent form, pseudonyms are used in place of their proper names. All respondents included in this study were women who ranged from 20-27 in age. Thirteen of the fifteen respondents were heterosexual, one described herself as bisexual, and another waitress admitted that although she had engaged in homosexual behavior before, she now described it as “just not for me.” Three of the waitresses were married, and two respondents had children. Brooke, a mother of three, stated that her ten year old knew where she worked, and, after explaining the concept of a strip club, her daughter reacted, “and guys pay for that...idiots!” and she responded to her, “exactly.”

Eleven of the fifteen identified themselves as single, and one waitress described herself as in a committed relationship. Nine of the fifteen cocktail waitresses cited that working in a sexualized environment does not affect their personal relationships outside of work, and four waitresses agreed that they were less attracted to men in various ways due to their experiences on the job. One respondent stated, she experienced both positive and negative repercussions as she sometimes felt more sexually charged, but at the same time “turned off” by the environment. Only one waitress claimed that she had never viewed men sexually until working in a strip club, and only since her marriage, eight months prior, had she found the presence of “so many hot boys” a problem.

Discussing their prior work experience, eleven of the fifteen waitresses cited their primary employment history included jobs in either the retail or service industry. Layla,

a twenty-year-old white female, who has worked at the strip club for five months, worked as a leasing agent and as a daycare attendant prior to her employment at the club. Gwen stated her previous work experience included telemarketing and a job as a theatre usher. In addition to her restaurant jobs, Mischa stated she worked for US Airways as a flight attendant before coming home to take care of her ill father. Also previously employed in the airline industry, Francie stated that she had previously worked for Delta Airlines, managing a restaurant at the local airport before quitting to work at a strip club. Five of the fifteen women included in this study had worked at another strip club at least once before, and three of the fifteen had worked at more than two different exotic dance clubs. Thirteen of the fifteen respondents interviewed cited that they would not be working at a strip club when I questioned where they expected to see themselves in five years. One waitress discussed only short term goals, such as going back to school and working at the club to make ends meet, and another waitress, who has a seven year reign at the club, cited that although she would like to become a social worker, she may still be working at the club.

Data Analysis

After completing the fifteen interviews, I transcribed each tape and began the process of data analysis. I read the transcripts several times and coded them using open and focused coding techniques (Esterberg 2002). In open coding, a qualitative researcher will identify any theme or pattern that presents itself, and, during focused coding, narrows these ideas and patterns down as best as possible. Utilizing these techniques, I identified several recurring patterns and themes concerning waitresses' processes of

managing their emotions that were present in the data. I made every attempt to avoid what Silverman (2001) cites as “anecdotalism,” or the use of “brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interview...to provide evidence of a particular contention,” by organizing the data into themes, and supporting these themes with valid and relevant empirical data (p.34).

Reliability and Validity

In sociology, the accuracy with which research is tested against largely reflects how reliable and valid a researcher’s data is (Marvasti 2004). A study low in reliability or validity can discredit the applicability of a study’s results. Silverman (2001) states, a qualitative research study high in reliability cannot be judged against quantitative requirements. Where quantitative researchers criticize qualitative research for its inability to systematize its research procedures, a major condition for good reliability, Silverman (2001) argues that qualitative researchers can employ *low-inference descriptors*, or processes that increase reliability *in* qualitative research procedures. These descriptors suggest that researchers should tape-record all in-person interviews and avoid using audio-typists, as transcribing one’s own audio taped interviews is a more accurate methodology. By employing both of these techniques I feel my research emanates a satisfactory level of reliability. In reference to the findings of this study, in no way is the data presented here a representation of the majority of cocktail waitresses working in exotic dance clubs today. However, by interviewing fifteen respondents who were all employed at the same club, I feel they are representative of an accurate and valid

sample, one that clearly represents an accurate account of the life experiences of a cocktail waitress employed at this particular club.

TABLE 1
RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Length of Employment	Worked at more than 1 strip club
Amy	F	26	White	Some College	1 yr	No
Jill	F	20	White	Some High School	1 week	Yes
Eve	F	27	Hispanic	College Degree	1 yr	No
Chrissy	F	22	Black	Attending College	3 yrs	No
Chantel	F	23	White	Some College	2 yrs	No
Brooke	F	27	Hispanic	High School	7 yrs	No
Tina	F	20	White	Attending College	5 months	No
Katrina	F	25	Asian/Vietnamese	College Degree	6 yrs	No
Layla	F	20	White	High School	5 months	No
Jackie	F	24	White	Attending College	6 months	Yes
Erika	F	24	White	College Degree	7 months	No
Gwen	F	21	Hispanic	Some College	8 months	Yes
Tessa	F	21	Hispanic	Attending College	10 months	Yes
Mischa	F	23	Hispanic/White	High School	8 months	No
Francie	F	24	Asian	High School	3 months	Yes

Average Age of Respondent: 23

Average Length of Employment (in weeks) 171

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

During everyday interactions individuals commonly induce or suppress their emotions to portray a socially acceptable image, and to bring about or sustain various emotions or actions in others (Hochschild 1983). In the service industry, it is a common practice for waitresses to employ techniques that make angry customers less dissatisfied and satisfied customers ignorant to the ill mood their waitress is in (Paules 1991). At Starlet's, managerial expectations, customer clientele, and the interactions between management, coworkers, and customers influence the waitresses' processes of emotional labor. It is in the choice of self, that a waitress determines whether or not to employ such techniques to hide her true feelings in order to make a good tip. To understand how waitresses interact with one another, with customers, and with management it is necessary to identify the expectations required of waitresses at Starlet's, the display norms that characterize this environment, and how both of these factors contribute to a waitress's choice of self and her subsequent employment of emotional labor techniques.

Setting the Table

Working in a service related position can often subject a worker to a highly stimulating environment where customer flow, interactions with managers, interactions

with coworkers, and other environmental conditions can subject waitstaff to both physical and emotional exhaustion (Paules 1991). Where low levels of prestige are typically equated to waitresses working in restaurants (Paules 1991), even less is given to women who work in “exploitative organizations,” or strip clubs (Murphy 2003:307). In this strip club, waitresses’ interactions with managers, coworkers, and customers set up organizational display norms that vary greatly from what a dancer experiences while working at a strip club (Murphy 2003). Managerial expectations, new employee socialization, and some of the organizational processes that characterize this working environment need addressing in order to capture the display norms of this club. Waitresses at Starlet’s often find themselves subjected to a variety of conditions that not only challenge preconceived notions regarding standard service industry protocol, but often challenge their own sense of self.

Sell, Sell, Sell. Thirteen of fifteen waitresses reported that expectations from management largely center on alcohol sales. Constantly encouraged to “sell, sell, sell,” these waitresses mentioned few job requirements that came anywhere close to the frequency of management’s reported encouragement of liquor and beer sales. When questioned about the expectations of management and owners, Tina expressed a sentiment in agreement with what twelve other waitresses stated:

They just want us to sell alcohol. They don’t care about anything else as long as we are selling alcohol...if your sales are high enough then you...the higher your sales the more you can get away with. The cuter you are the more you can get away with...because they feel like if you are cuter you’re selling more.

Typically, managers working in the service industry are most often concerned with the restaurant's image, and members of the waitstaff with higher sales quotas, knowing that higher sales equates to higher tips (Paules 1991). While waitresses' at Starlet's mention they are expected to "take care of their customers," the manner in which each waitress fulfills that requirement is up to her own discretion. In comparison, management's encouragement for good customer service is of remarkably less concern than that of alcohol sales, as Tessa explained:

When you get hired they tell you that you need to be friendly because people go there to have a good time, but they don't enforce it; they don't tell you how to act toward customers. They just expect that you're always busy, even when you're not you pretty much have to look busy. They just want you to sell a lot of alcohol.

In exotic dance clubs, managers want the *dancers* to keep customers happy, as they are the central source of entertainment (Murphy 2003). Serving as focal points in the club, dancers are constantly under the microscope of managers and customers, leaving waitresses under little supervision. At Starlet's, not providing outstanding customer service as a waitress will not get you fired, it probably will not even get you reprimanded. As Murphy's (2003) research shows, good customer service is of greater value when it comes from the central object of attention, a dancer. In this club, waitresses make it clear that as long as they are selling drinks they can act however they wish. This environmental freedom represents a significant facet in the job experiences of these fifteen women, proving to influence a good portion of the interactions taking place in the club, and waitresses own emotions and attitudes while on the job.

Alcohol sales are also a driving force behind management's treatment of waitstaff at Starlet's. A waitress with high sales gains privileges that other waitresses do not get.

Chantel explains how the amount of alcohol each waitresses sells can determine their treatment by management:

Once I was talking to a manager and I asked him for a shot. He had a print out of our sales and stuff and I didn't know that he had already looked it over, and he said "yes." Then another girl comes up behind and asks for the same thing, and he goes "no." He says, "See where she is here?" And I was like at the top, and this other girl was like at the bottom, "Do you see where you are...go sell me drinks and then you can." If you are a good worker you get treated better.

A waitress's physical appearance and length of employment also play significant roles in the privileges she is allotted by management. Managers favor "cute" waitresses by allocating them the "VIP" tables, or customers who are friends of managers, owners, or "regulars." The longer a waitress is employed at the club the more status she attains. Veteran waitresses receive privileges allowing late arrivals to work, and no prior permission before taking shots or using the restroom.

With managerial pressure solely focused on alcohol sales, one object these women do not have to sell is their body, if they choose not to. All fifteen waitresses reportedly "loved" their work attire, and felt overwhelmingly comfortable in their mandatory uniform. Often required to wear uniforms that reflect their position as a servant, with restaurant uniforms often resembling maid's apparel, work attire can often stigmatize a waitress as a lower class member of society (Paules 1991). While employees that work in a strip club can be stigmatized, due to the environment they choose to work in (Murphy 1993), Starlet's dress code for waitresses is not a contributing factor, according to these fifteen women. At Starlet's, waitresses wear what they feel comfortable in by making the required uniform "their own:"

We wear tiny tees and black pants. We use to have to wear tuxedo shirts with a bow tie and black pants, which is not flattering to your body at all.

I don't care what size you are, it's not flattering. It was horrible. I guess they thought it was going to be classy or something. It just changed this year; girls make them their own now. They cut them and will have their boobs hanging out, yeah girls make them their own. You have the choice of just wearing a regular tiny tee or cutting it up however you want. You know, it's better than what we use to wear. (Brooke)

Many of the waitresses added that they often wear "hoodies," or small sweatshirts, over their tiny tee due to the low temperature setting in the club, without any repercussions from management. Jackie's feelings reflect the common opinion held by many of the waitresses when questioned about their dress code:

Oh, I love it, it's perfect. I could wear a turtleneck, pants and a [Starlet's] t-shirt on over it, and they wouldn't care. The dress code is awesome; I wear what I'm comfortable with.

When questioned about their work attire many of the women expressed that they loved their uniforms because they felt as if they got to wear their everyday clothes to work. By wearing clothes each feels comfortable in, one waitress explains it makes it easier to come in and "try to be yourself." Working in an environment that objectifies the female body (Murphy 2003, Wood 2000), Starlet's waitresses have the option to expose very little of their skin. Only four of fifteen waitresses either admitted, or were observed, wearing an altered t-shirt at work. Responses similar to, "I have something between my skin and you for a reason," emphasize the attire each waitress wears plays a significant role in fabricating a less objectified presence while working in the club.

Don't Step On My Toes. Thirteen of the fifteen waitresses interviewed acknowledged the presence of competition among coworkers, and one of the waitresses, who denied the presence of competition, is in her sixth year of employment at Starlet's. Describing the environment as "cut throat," and many of the veteran waitresses as

“mean,” story after story confirmed that new employees encounter high levels of resistance against any help that would decrease their odds of quitting. In the following, Katrina explains that new hires represent a threat to the well defined clientele base of a tenured waitress, one major reason why tenured waitresses do their best to intimidate new employees:

Yeah...it's competitive. Like a lot of the new girls will be like “Oh...it's so cut throat here, and none of the older waitresses ever talk to me.” I don't know, yeah it's competitive because being an older girl you don't want new girls stepping on your toes. We've established our clientele, and we don't want anyone trying to move in on our territory.

When asked whether or not she felt that she fit in, a fairly new employee, Layla replied:

I'm learning to, it takes a while. I've been there five months now...I can't believe that...it took a while for anybody to be polite or nice and I totally didn't feel like I fit in.

New employee socialization patterns and the rotation of tables among waitresses represent two factors that significantly increase the frustration encountered by new employees at Starlet's.

In most restaurants, waitresses have sections, or areas of a restaurant they treat as their domain (Paules 1991). In charge of rotating incoming customers to tables in these various sections in the restaurant, managers and hostesses ensure that each waitress gets her fair share of customers (Paules 1991). This is not the case at Starlet's. There are neither sections nor a rotation pattern to fairly distribute tables among both new and tenured waitstaff. Chrissy describes the table distribution process in discussing what a typical shift at Starlet's consists of:

I get here at nine on Mondays and Wednesdays, I get in at nine, go to the back and set up my tray, usually it's dead from the time I get here until about eleven, and I just walk around and shoot the shit. Then when it starts to get busy we have the whole deal where you wait in line and you

get the next customer that walks in the door and that's pretty much how it works. If I'm not doing anything, then I'll just wait in line and wait on a customer. That's why it helps to have regulars that come in, so you're not counting on maybe I'll get lucky tonight, maybe I won't. And that's pretty much all there is, go back and clean the tables and we get off at two.

At eight o'clock waitresses are allowed to line up near the front door on a ramp that leads down into the club. "Getting in line" is the only method at Starlet's that attempts to give each waitress equal opportunity for getting a table, and many of the veteran waitresses discussed how they manipulated this process to gain an advantage over new hires. In the following, Mischa explains how older waitresses can "run over" the new hires:

When there's a whole bunch of girls there, and half of them are new and you don't even know their names then you'll totally run over them because they don't really know what's going on. Like three girls stand up at the door and they're just clueless when there is no secondary line and they'll just wait and when someone walks in the door you can totally go ahead of them and be like "Oh, well there's no secondary line." But, it's like whatever; you just have to get over it.

For new employees to survive at Starlet's, tenured employees confide that a waitress needs to be aggressive, without guaranteed sections, everyone is looking out for her own best interest. Where veteran waitresses often rely on the hope that a "regular" will come in that evening, and their club experience, new hires have to rely solely on being assertive as possible. In describing her own personality characteristics Chrissy describes the qualities it takes for a waitress to succeed at Starlet's:

I'm outgoing; I'm assertive, kind of a bitch. I think this place has kind of made me that way, or more so that way. Actually, being assertive is a thing that goes along with this job because if you're not you won't make good tips, you won't work here very long. I'll know right away when someone walks in this door if they are going to make it or not. Like, if she's shy, I can tell you she's going to quit in a week.

Asking all fifteen waitresses to describe their personality characteristics, many of the responses echo Chrissy's response, with the most common being "outgoing,"

“outspoken,” and “loud.” On any given night there may be 16 to 22 waitresses working the floor to fill drink orders, and in order to “walk” with a good amount of tip money a waitress needs to be aggressive.

In the restaurant industry, Hallett (2000) finds that group cohesion among waitstaff increases with low levels of competition. If there is less rivalry for tables, employees are more likely to interact with one another and subsequently work better together. While there is rivalry between new and old waitresses at Starlet’s, once a waitress passes through the preliminary weeks, veteran waitresses will slowly begin accepting the new employee, a process that respondents’ state can take several weeks or several months. Even after the adjustment period, if a waitress doesn’t fit in, the consequences can be tough:

Once you’ve been there for a little while everybody’s super nice and really friendly, but if you’re just a bad waitress, or even if you’ve been there for a long time [and you are disliked] they’ll be bitches, just down right rude to your face. I’ve seen it happen to other girls. If they [veteran waitstaff and bartenders] want somebody to quit they will do everything they can to make their job more difficult so that they will quit, or so they will screw up and get fired. (Erika)

It’s Just Part of My Job. Stepping into any new environment, individuals will evaluate the actions and behaviors of others to better understand how they should behave in the presence of new coworkers or acquaintances (Goffman 1959). As characteristically gendered and sexualized environments (Giuffre and Williams 1994, Hall 1993, Rose 2001), the restaurant industry often subjects women to gender specific stereotypes that classify them as caretaking and largely indifferent and accepting of a customer’s actions. For waitresses, uncomfortable situations with customers often arise

when their behavior becomes considerably close to sexual harassment. At Starlet's, waitresses openly acknowledge the existence of sexual harassment, and accept it as an experience that "just comes with this job." Classifying sexual harassment in the workplace is difficult, as episodes are both contextually and situationally based, which adds to its obscurity (Giuffre and Williams 1994). While these waitresses recognize harassment as a part of their job, they admit there are varying amounts and levels of harassment each waitress will handle:

I mean we work in a titty bar, there is a certain amount of sexual harassment that you are going to expect and you're going to deal with, but everyone has their threshold. Like, being groped by my customers is not in my job description, and I don't feel like the manager would punish me for saying something to a customer for doing that. (Tina)

These women choose to work in the sexualized environment that they do, and, acknowledging this, they accept that sexual harassment is going to happen. By watching their coworkers, waitresses explained how they learned to deal with customers once a situation goes beyond their threshold of acceptance:

It takes a little while to learn because when you first start here, or at least for me, I didn't really know what to expect, I had only ever been to a strip club once so I didn't know what to expect at all. So, I was very used to this attitude where it's like "I'm your waitress I'm suppose to make you happy or whatever, when you want." Then you finally start to realize that, it's just like, others [waitresses] talk about the way that they handle a certain similar situation, or you just get sick of it. Honestly, it depends upon your personality. It took me a little bit longer than it probably does some other people to realize, "Hey, I don't have to take this." Once you realize that it's much better for you at work. (Erika)

Once a waitress establishes her personal boundaries, or "what's okay and what's not okay," waitresses are better equipped to handle inappropriate interactions with customers. By comparing their current position to previous work experiences, these women are able to lessen the objectification they feel as a waitress working in a strip club. Repeatedly

acknowledging how much money they make at this job, and the freedoms they have at the club against previous employment positions, many of the waitresses are able to neutralize the negativity attached to their decision to work at a strip club. Jackie emphasizes the importance of money in the following example when asked if she enjoys her work at the club:

Sometimes, it's nice that you get to meet different people; it's not always the exact same thing. It gets annoying though, for example I just walked up to a table and the daytime waitress was like "Here, this is Jackie; she's going to be your waitress for the rest of the evening." She walks off, and the guy goes "Oh, well at least you've got bigger boobs than the last girl." You know what I mean, you wouldn't say that to you waitress at Olive Garden, but whatever, I make more money than a girl at Olive Garden, so I deal.

Balancing negative aspects of her job, regarding harassment from customers, with the advantages of more money is a common pattern occurring in each of the fifteen interviews. Not only do these women deal with sexual harassment, up to varying levels, because they make good tips, but the tips are largely what keep these waitresses working at the club. While a majority of the waitresses report that working at this club allows them greater freedom from the typical rules of most restaurants and bars, each stressed that if it were not for the money they would not put up with what they do.

Self Defense

Emotions are a powerful resource for individuals in society. A symbolic interactionist perspective emphasizes how an individuals utilize their emotions, or "self-feelings," to make sense of who they are as a person, what they represent to society (Denzin 1984:404, Hochschild 1983), and who and what they believes others in society should conceive of them (Clark 1990, Hochschild 1983). Self-feelings play a significant

part in a “self’s interactional experience,” as “the self is not merely a known object to itself, but also a *feeling* object of itself” (Weigert and Gecas 2003:278). During interaction, emotional displays can illicit both desired and undesired responses which give individuals control over how selves are displayed and their corresponding identities are conveyed.

For individuals who are stigmatized and ostracized by society, emotional displays can play a significant part in negotiating a situational identity they feel is congruent with their “real” or “true self” (Clark 1990, Hochschild 1983:187). Waitresses at Starlet’s feel stigmatized by customers and society at large because of their association with a strip club, and employ several strategies in an attempt to protect some sense of self-worth. Stigmatized individuals are often credited with having a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963:19), or a *suspected* “social identity” that is deeply discredited by society (Goffman 1963:2). Enacting emotional place claiming, distancing techniques, and by fluctuating between false and true self displays these fifteen women attempt to protect their selves against the notion of a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963:19).

Claiming Place. Waitresses at Starlet’s often use “place claims” or “emotional micropolitics” to counteract the stigma they feel is attached to their decision to work in a strip club (Clark 1990:305). Emotions can not only send messages to the self depicting an individual’s place during an interaction, but also relays to others where they do or should stand (Clark 1990). Place claiming emotions can serve either to reaffirm or contradict the identity of one’s self during interaction, shaping both the selves involved and the encounter one is involved in (Clark 1990). Similar to the homeless (Snow and

Anderson 1993) and exotic dancers (Murphy 2003, Thompson et al. 2003, Wesely 2003, Wood 2000), waitresses at Starlet's are often targets of negative societal attention due to their association with a strip club. This stigmatized position can often cause a disparity between how they feel they are perceived by society, and their own self-concept.

To counteract this, Starlet's waitresses utilize "negative-other" emotions to "claim place" (Clark 1990:320). By talking back to customers, and not taking "their crap" these women are attempting to counteract the preconceived notions they feel customers and society at large have of them. In each service interaction, waitresses are consistently reconstructing and renegotiating situational selves they can feel proud of. In the following statement, when asked to describe her personal boundary lines with customers, Brooke reveals how she feels customers view her as a person:

Just being treated like shit. You can't do that, like a piece of meat, like don't talk to me like I'm just a piece of trash, you can't do that. A lot of people come in here and they have no clue, they think ...they have a stereotype that we're all crack whores. They think we will do anything for a dollar or do anything for a hit of crack or something.

Feeling stigmatized by the stereotype Brooke describes, it is not uncommon for most of these waitresses to display argumentative, and defensive attitudes to customers. She expands on this in the following:

Like, to me, I don't care whether you are a customer or not, you should not cuss at anybody, you can't do that. Like, I had a customer last week like he was pissed off, and I had nothing to do with it, I was just his waitress. I was like "So, are you okay because I noticed that you all were arguing or whatever?" He looked at me, yelled in my face, "Close my fucking tab you fucking bitch." And, I had nothing to do with it at all. I said, "Look, I'll close your fucking tab, in a god damn fucking minute, don't you ever fucking talk to me again!" He still tipped me forty dollars. If you're going to cuss at me, you're going to get it right back.

Talking back to customers is not typical protocol in the service industry, but the typical waitress does not carry around the burden of being ascribed as a “crack whore” because she works in an establishment where all her female coworkers are clothed. While it is not known whether waitresses negative-other emotions *actually make* the customer feel inferior, as this data does not cover the experiences of these waitresses’ customers, it does have some sort of influence on these fifteen women. If it did not, they would cease to employ such abrasive emotive responses. By standing up to customers, Starlet’s waitresses are attempting to counteract the stereotypes (i.e. “trashy crack whores”) customers identify them with, a tactic they use for negotiating a higher “sense of place” (Clark 1990:307). An individual’s place can be manipulated in any direction during various interactions, as it is situationally determined (Clark 1990). Utilizing negative-emotive techniques, such as the profanity Brooke uses with deserving customers, these waitresses attempt to gain the upper hand during the service encounter.

Where “status shields” typically protect superiors, like that of the male customer, from negative emotive responses from inferiors, like that of a female waitress (Hochschild 1983:163, Clark 1990), this is not always the case at Starlet’s. Jackie exemplifies this in the following when asked to describe her experiences with irritating customers:

I don’t deal that well with...like when people talk down to me, I’ll say, “Screw you, you don’t know anything about me!” That’s the way I feel, it really really frustrates me when people talk down to me because they assume that I’m working in a place like this that I’m not intelligent, that I don’t have anything going for me, that I’m just some stupid little waitress that they can talk to however they want. It frustrates me to no end, first of all you shouldn’t look down on anybody for working here, I mean it’s a living! You’re making a living, but these people don’t know anything about anybody in here so when they make judgments about

you, it pisses you off. Like, I'll be like, "Who are you to judge me, you're hanging out here!"

Having freedom from organizationally imposed display norms, these "inferior" waitresses are able to send emotive messages that, they believe, increase their place, while reducing the "superior" place of the customer (Clark 1990:319). In doing this, these women are attempting to counteract the spoiled identity customers are stereotyping their selves as having. For Jackie, by emphasizing upon a customer's choice to hang out at Starlet's, she posits the discredited identity a customer might attribute to any waitress as ludicrous, as they are the individuals whose own money keeps these women continuously employed in this discrediting environment.

Waitresses at Starlet's do not always choose to "talk back" to demanding, irritating, or "handsy" customers. If the customer is a regular visitor of the club, and known to be a good tipper, Starlet's waitresses will often choose to employ "deep acting" techniques instead of imposing negative place relaying messages into the interaction (Hochschild 1983:33). Through deep acting, each of these waitresses is able to rely on her own imagination to make up a scenario, in an attempt to substitute the current interaction with an experience she can display positive emotive responses to. Where "negative-other emotions" are attempted sources of empowerment, so are deep acting methodologies (Clark 1990:319). By suppressing angry emotional reactions, with illusions that conjure up feelings of gaiety during their interactions with "scumbags," these fifteen women are able to manifest a sense of situational control. As Clark (1990:321) posits, "Evoking another's emotions while controlling one's own can also enhance place and create "superior" self-emotions." Tina expresses this in the following:

Sometimes it is like you just have to be friendly and nice and smile and kind of go along with the conversation or with whatever they are saying even if you are like, “God, you’re such a sleazy bastard!” [Laughing] That happens a lot, like you are thinking in the back of your head that this guy is disgusting. I usually just laugh it off and act like it doesn’t, like, oh yeah, that is completely acceptable. Go ahead and say that [laughs]. Give me your money and walk away, and in my head I’m just thinking I’m taking your money [laughing], and then, once I have it, I’m gone.

In the statement above, Tina is clearly expressing the empowerment she feels by taking a customer’s money that she finds repulsive, and how helpful this illusion is in controlling the anger she feels toward him.

Distancing. In their study of the homeless, David Snow and Leon Anderson (1993) conclude the incongruence between the stigmatization the homeless feel and their own self-concepts initiates their use of distancing techniques. They state, “When individuals have to enact roles, associate with others, or utilize institutions that imply social identities inconsistent with their actual or desired self-conceptions, they often attempt to distance themselves from those roles, associations, or institutions” (Snow and Anderson 1993:130). By differentiating themselves from the dancers, and monitoring with whom to reveal employment information to, these fifteen women attempt to distance themselves from having the spoiled identity typically attached to some strip club employees (Murphy 2003, Thompson et al. 2003).

Where a majority of these women stated they are often asked to perform table dances for customers, each reported it as something they “would never do.” Differentiating themselves as non-dancing waitstaff, several respondents utilized this

distancing technique (Snow and Anderson 1993), as Amy does in the following, to separate their role as a waitress from the role of a dancer:

I mean, I'm not, I'm a waitress. I'm not here for their [customers] entertainment; I just serve them their drinks. I'm not going to sit in their lap and make them feel good about themselves because that's not my job.

Another waitress commented, when an "old, eccentric biker guy" asked her to perform a dance she replied "tray, hand, waitress!" While careful to not discredit the dancers, several of the respondents agreed that they could never become a dancer themselves.

When asked what kinds of standard responses she uses when customers try to touch her, Mischa stated:

I'm usually like, "Don't ever do that again, I'm not a dancer." Or, I'll say, "That's not my job; don't be touching me like that." "See this tray, I have clothes on."

Like their employment of place claims, if these fifteen women achieved nothing from constantly differentiating their role as waitresses from that of the dancers, they would not continue to reiterate this message. By consistently stating this to customers, Starlet's waitresses are able to distance themselves from the stigma associated with taking one's clothes off for money, lessening the stigmatization they feel as strip club employees. In short, each of these women feels better about who they are and where they work because they do not remove their clothing.

Waitresses at Starlet's also commonly withheld their employment information from others, another technique they employ in an attempt to neutralize their stigmatization from society. They closely monitor with whom and at what point during an interaction they will reveal where they work. These women withheld this information from a parent, both parents, and/or their entire family from periods ranging from five

months to six years. Several waitresses cited that knowing another's cultural background, political and religious affiliation, or age is a foretelling factor of their openness and acceptance of strip club employees. Gwen states the following when questioned about whether she freely reveals her occupation to others:

Mostly no, I don't. I guess it just depends on who it is that I meet, like if it's someone I meet downtown that will be like "Where do you work?" I don't really trust them, so I'm not going to say "Oh, well I work at Starlet's." It just doesn't sound good and right away they assume I'm a dancer, and you can't really trust anyone. Older people, I don't tell them either.

Refusing to tell her in-laws for a three year period, Brooke cited her husband's cultural background as the issue:

When we first moved here, and I'm like, I lived in Houston and he never lived anywhere else except El Paso, and it is very closed minded over there. He came from a macho dad total Hispanic family and he was like "I can't let you do this." He was real secretive with his family, like he would never tell them where I work [nor did I].

A majority of these women agreed that they felt uncomfortable revealing to people where they work, as they are consistently judged according to that one aspect of their life. Jackie sums up this feeling when she commented, "the good little Christians only know what they've seen on TV, and think you're shady."

The Self of Choice. For the homeless, salvaging a sense of self-worth involves the use of "identity talk," where street dwellers attempt to verbally discount their current appearance as a display of their true self-worth (Snow and Anderson 1993:127). During social interactions, it is common for individuals to attach situational identities to one another in an attempt to make sense of the interaction they are in (Blumer 1969, Snow and Anderson 1993), and for waitresses working in a strip club, like that of dancers

(Murphy 2003), this equates to a consistent pattern of negotiating and renegotiating a positive identity, or a self they can feel good about. Waitresses at Starlet's actively choose between both "true" and "false self" (Hochschild 1983:132) displays in an attempt to portray to customers, and convince themselves, that their work role at the club is not a defining characteristic of their self-worth.

Waitresses at Starlet's are aware that they are working in an environment conducive to a man's "fantasy world," and due to their control over self displays, can choose when to role-play, or when to project a false self to customers, unlike exotic dancers (Murphy 2003). Erika displays this in the following:

When I want to be nice to someone I can, when I don't want to I don't really have to. The only time is if something is really bothering me from outside of work, and there's like *a customer that I know* and I want to be in a good mood, that's really the only time.

For a majority of these waitresses, they can feel good about what they do because, although they are being "fake," they are making money by employing "counterfeit intimacy" techniques (Murphy 2003:316). Early in her interview, Chantel states that while she often puts on facades for customers, she later emphasizes these actions as worthy for the amount of money she makes each week:

I don't like trying...I *try* to be as much of myself as possible, but there are elements that you have to create some sort of façade [with customers]. Like certain people...you know you have to flirt with. I make people laugh, or I try to.

Later, Chantel stresses the amount of money she makes at Starlet's when questioned about whether or not she tells others, outside of work, where she works:

Most of the time I tell them "I love my job and I make so much money." Like the most popular reactions I get are like "What's it like...you get to see naked chicks all day?" Yeah, I'm like "Yeah it's fantastic, and I make

a shit load of money.” Like whenever I go out I never want for anything...I’ve never had that kind of life...like I have the perfect job.

Starlet’s waitresses feel empowered through their façade-like displays, as they can “work three days a week and make rent.” Choosing when to put on a façade, is up to each waitresses own discretion, and with the capability to take a “scumbag’s” money, “create your own way of serving tables... and cater your job to your own moods,” these women feel content with being illusion makers during interactions with various customers.

Waitresses at Starlet’s also display their “deep inner impulses” or “real selves” (Turner 1976:991) when they feel a customer goes beyond a comfortable and acceptable situationally determined boundary during the service encounter. Hochschild (1983) states, the employed false self can protect the true self from being imposed upon by external demands. In the case of flight attendants (Hochschild 1983), when negative comments made to an employee are not taken personally, the false self is successfully representing the airline as a whole. In opposition, when workers bring their true self to work, displaying it in place of their false self, they are unable to depersonalize inappropriate behavior, as their self is too closely attached to their work role (Hochschild 1983).

For these fifteen women, true self displays are enacted to defend what the true self stands for, with a majority of the true self displays occurring during interactions where customers attempted to touch them inappropriately. If these women reacted graciously with the kindness and respect typical of false self displays (Hochschild 1983), they would be counteracting many of the techniques they practice to prevent themselves from further stigmatization during their encounters with customers. All fifteen women stated they did

not appreciate any sort of unwelcomed physical contact from customers, as Chrissy exemplifies in the following:

Once there was a guy that tried to grab my ass and I racked him in the balls and got him kicked out. Yeah, just because I work at a strip club doesn't mean that I want to be touched.

Another waitress stated:

I don't like people touching me period. I get that sometimes because I have really big boobs, like and they're real and people are like, "Oh my god!" I hit. I'll hit people, I'll say, "Don't fucking touch me. Get away from me." (Chantel)

If a waitress employs false self displays when a customer grabs her inappropriately she will only serve to promote a stigma that she is largely trying to distance herself from, by utilizing place claims, distancing techniques, and true self displays, in the first place.

Hochschild (1983) states, a worker's lack of control over display can lead to burnout. While Starlet's waitresses do have control over their work self displays, and are able to clearly choose when they want to act, or employ their false self, and when they do not, they still suffer feelings of burnout, as there is quite a disparity between the display rules of an airline and those common to a strip club. Hochschild (1983:189) posits that "having a say" in one's environment, or the ability to control one's "entrances and exits and the nature of her acting in between," could potentially lessen feelings of burnout among service workers who do emotional labor for a living, but this is not the case for these fifteen women.

A majority of these waitresses admitted they often felt burnt out due to the environmental conditions of their job, as Layla states in the following:

I use to work five or six nights a week, but now I'm down to four because that is the max that, I can't...I can't work five, I've tried, but I'll have to call in or go home early because my skin's not thick enough.

[Beth: What do you mean?] Like a week ago I had to...like...the way men would look at you, it was like my fifth night in a row or sixth night I don't remember and it just made me want to cry and I couldn't do it so I was like "Joey, I can't help it I want to cry, what should I do?" He was like, "Go home, get over it, come back...please, be away." I just get weak. I mean disgusting people go in there that come up and grab your back or just stand next to you or somebody that stinks...it's just gross sometimes when you can't put that layer over your eyes I don't know...maybe I'm just a weenie when it comes to it.

While having control over their self displays, they cannot control the self presentations of their customers. When the ability to place a layer over their eyes tires, waitresses are often unable to neutralize the "skankiness" of the club. Erika expands on this in the following when asked about the environment at the club:

It's a difficult place to be all the time, I can't work more than like three days a week, I can't really be in there. It really drains you, it just takes a lot...its because we work really long shifts, we don't...we work like eight or nine hour shifts so that's a long time, and we put up with a lot of stuff and it's dark and it's loud and it's skanky...it just takes a lot out of you.

Hochschild's (1983) flight attendants may encounter degrading and objectionable behavior from customers, but customers do not typically have the same stereotypes of flight attendants as they do of some strip club employees (i.e. "trashy whores" and "crack heads"). Where men on an airplane may inappropriately touch a flight attendant, knowing that behavior is inappropriate, these women reiterate that men regularly come to strip clubs to get away with such behaviors.

The stigmatization society imposes upon exotic dancers (Murphy 2003, Thompson et al. 2003, Wesely 2003, Wood 2000) is not isolated to only those women who remove their clothes, but is a common experience to these fifteen waitresses at Starlet's. Mead's (1934) position on the self, as a structure arising during interaction, is a clear depiction of the experiences of these fifteen women. Feeling stigmatized for their

decision to work at a strip club, these women are constantly negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self, or a situationally determined identity that portrays each of them as strong, dignified, and unspoiled women who do not fit the profile they are commonly attributed as having. Through place claims, distancing techniques, and the alternating of true and false self displays these women attempt to refute the stereotype they feel customers see each of them as fraught with.

Making Money

Most working environments have rules and norms that guide the behaviors employees' express (Hochschild 1983). These display norms guide feeling rules, or what an individual decides they "have the right to feel" or "should feel" (Hochschild 1979:564). Display norms and feeling rules are important to processes of emotional labor, as they channel the "surface acting" or "deep acting" methodologies that enable workers to achieve the correct emotive display. The most successful display norms in a strip club, or the most monetarily beneficial, require strippers to appear as though they are interested and find their customers desirable (Wood 2000). For Starlet's waitresses, this is sometimes the case, and sometimes it is not. While it is apparent, that as long as they are selling alcohol, these fifteen waitresses have a fair amount of latitude in their conduct with customers, coworkers, and self presentation, making money is the most significant reason why these women show up for work. To make money, these women employ various display rules and norms that originate from processes of *impression management* (Goffman 1959). At Starlet's, these fifteen women are not only managing

impressions of themselves, to prevent further stigmatization, but those of customers to determine which actions will earn them the most money.

Reading the Customer. For these fifteen waitresses, processes of *impression management* (Goffman 1959) control the display norms that characterize and depict many of the interactions taking place between Starlet's servers and their customers. Utilizing "sign-vehicles," or "clues from [an individual's] conduct and appearance," to "predict his [/her] present and future behavior" (Goffman 1959:1), each waitress is able to distinguish between which sequential actions will be the most monetarily beneficial. Waitresses use their initial impressions to categorize each customer (i.e., regular customer, tab opening, etc.), and attempt to predict how much the patron will tip, and whether it is worth their time. The impression a waitress forms of a customer can determine how that customer is treated for the remainder of his stay at the club.

When questioned about their initial interactions with customers, twelve of fifteen waitresses responded that interactions with customers are entirely dependent upon what type of customer they seat:

I think it really depends upon the customer, and how the customer reacts to me. If a customer is really cool with me, and willing to talk to me, or lets me do my job and be a waitress, then I'll be really friendly to them, but then there are some customers that as soon as you get up to their table they just want to act like they're in some strip club and they just don't understand that there is still a certain level of respect that you have to show to the girls in there, and I just don't ever go back to them...then I'm rude. (Erika)

For many of the women, like Erika, there are two faces a customer can present, either the respectful kind or the disrespectful kind. With little restriction from management on how to interact with customers, waitresses make a reading of each customer to determine

which act to put on for the “respectful” customers, or which *line* to choose during the interaction, so as to get the best possible tip (Goffman 1967). How each waitress expresses herself is largely determined by the situational aspects of the interaction and how she evaluates her customers, a common attribute to most social interactants (Goffman 1967). For many of the women, if a customer is disrespectful they do not choose a line, but instead refuse to further service that customer.

During social encounters, individuals have several faces and lines of action to choose from (Goffman 1967). By choosing a *line*, one’s verbal and nonverbal actions of depict various *faces* to others (Goffman 1967), and for these fifteen women these faces fluctuate by and during their various service encounters. Constantly in flux, the better a waitresses is at acknowledging the faces of a customer, and modifying her own, the more money she will make. By “playing off the customer” each of these women will attempt to present the desired face they feel is required of a particular customer, based on that particular customer’s *line* of action (Goffman 1967). Amy depicts this in the following when asked to describe how she typically approaches her customers:

I play off what the customer wants. If they want some girl that’s like, “Yeah, let’s take some shots!!” [laughing] Or, if they’re like, “Leave me alone,” or “check on me every twenty minutes and I’ll be okay”...I just read the customer. I’ve been doing this for a long time so [I know what I’m doing.]

Amy explains how reading, or her initial impression of a customer, can indicate what a customer wants out of her as a waitress. If she *chooses* to fulfill such expectations, she knows her tip could be significantly increased.

In everyday interactions, individuals call upon first impressions to know “what line of treatment to demand from and extend to the others present at the beginning of an

encounter, and can alter that line of treatment once the interaction is underway” (Goffman 1959:11). For dancers, the way a customer looks at her during table dances can relay significant information about a customer’s likes and dislikes, information that is necessary for receiving the best possible tip (Wood 2000). At Starlet’s, a customer’s status in the club, and how they pay for their drinks, influences their treatment by waitstaff. Although many of the respondents state they don’t like being fake, most freely alluded to the modification of their emotions and behavior with various customers, such as regulars and those customers who, instead of paying cash, open tabs.

The Regular vs. the Stranger. Patronizing Starlet’s on a frequent basis earns you status as a regular. When a regular comes to Starlet’s he typically requests a specific waitress, and if she is not working that particular shift another waitress will stand in as a second. A second acts a substitute for the originally requested waitress, and, for some customers, there may be three or more substitutable waitresses on their list. The treatment of a customer who frequents the club regularly can be entirely different than someone who does not. By describing her experience with one extremely demanding customer, one waitress exhibits how differential treatment during interactions with these two types of customers can occur:

I have regulars that are demanding. I have a regular that comes in here probably once a month, his name is Joe, when Joe comes through that door Joe wants two cigars he wants them cut in a certain way, he wants a napkin around his glass, he wants a dancer, and he wants her to be dressed a certain way. He wants his food a certain way...everything is exactly the way Joe wants it. Joe will come in here and spend six or seven hundred dollars and he’ll tip me four or five hundred dollars, and he’ll stay for two hours. So, Joe gets what he wants. If they are a friend of the owner or the managers then they are going to get what they want...regardless of how much they pay me ...because I like my job here. If a customer is paying

cash and they aren't tipping me, and they are being demanding then I tell them to fuck themselves and I don't serve them anymore. I'll let every other waitress know... "Don't serve that guy anymore because he's an asshole." I just try to take it as it comes...I'm not rude to people, but I'm not going to take your crap. Like if Joe is going to pay me to be anal then I'll do whatever he wants. (Chrissy)

If a customer is a regular and is a good tipper these waitresses will be more accepting and friendly to fulfilling their service related requests, as their reputation bestows that fulfilled expectations equates to higher gratuities. For customers new to the club, if their waitress makes a negative read, they may have to get their own drinks from the bar.

Francie exhibits this mentality:

I just read people, and if you're an asshole I'm not going to spend anytime with you because I know I'm not going to make any money off you anyway. Even if that person has so much money to give and you're annoying to me, like too perverted, I'm not going to sell myself to you, spend my time with you...when you're an asshole. I don't do that.

New and unfamiliar customers are a financial threat to waitresses at Starlet's. Waiting on a regular usually means a waitress will leave that evening having made good money, but when a waitress approaches a new customer, this is not always the case. With a new or strange customer, there is no guarantee that his expectations can be met, that a Starlet's waitress will deem it necessary to fulfill his requests, or whether or not impeccable service will receive the appropriate gratuity.

Workers in the service industry have little control over the monetary outcome of a service encounter, a significant factor in why they employ tactics that attempt to predict what their gratuity will be (Paules 1991). For waiters and waitresses, it is not uncommon for them to categorize customers they wait on by their length of stay at the restaurant, and by the number of people in their party, in an attempt to make a valid prediction of a tip (Paules 1991). Adapting to various service encounters and customer typologies gives a

worker a sense of control over how much they are tipped, a monetary decision that is somewhat out of their control (Paules 1991). At Starlet's, waitresses attempt to take control of the service encounter by treating regulars in a way that matches any prior conduct which earned them a good tip with that customer, and by refusing service to a new customer whose initial impression came off as too "perverted," "snotty," "dirty," or "cheap."

Cash Paying vs. Tab Opening Customers. A customer that opens a tab with a credit card will get a purple colored card placed on their table with a waitress's name on it, and a customer paying cash will get a white place card. These cards establish which customers already have a waitress who is running a bill with them, and which customers any waitress can take a drink order for. Starlet's waitresses are less likely to be concerned with what sort of impression they make on cash customers, as these patrons pay for one drink at a time, and can be somewhat considered "not worth the effort."

Chrissy explains how she deals with cash customers in the following:

I'm very very direct with my customers. I like this job because when I used to wait tables... when you get sat with a table you're stuck with them, they have to eat, and you're stuck with them until they go. Here, if I don't like a table, or if they don't tip me, or they tip me wrong I can tell them to fuck off, and never walk back to their table.

Cash customers encounter many of the same treatments that a new patron to the club experiences. If a waitress feels a customer is a "scumbag," as "60 percent of the people that come in [to the club] are," or "is just going to be cheap and suck" she will refuse service or discontinue her service with that customer after one drink order, if she deems it necessary. These fifteen waitresses work to make rent and bills, and a one dollar tip from

a cash paying customer is not worth their time, thus they will move on to a more lucrative customer.

In opposition to the cash paying customer, is the customer who starts a tab with a waitress. Customers who open tabs are more likely to spend money, equating to a higher gratuity for the waitress, and are given greater leeway in their actions. Tina explains in the following:

If they are a cash customer and they are demanding or pushy I just walk away because I don't have to deal with it, and I'm not going to. If they are my tab and they are demanding or pushy it is usually not the issue...I can chat to them and figure out why, but usually if they are demanding and pushy it is because they are drunk and you just have to handle it as their being drunk and watch them and calm them down because you can't rationalize with them.

Customers who open a tab are treated better; unless they get too out of hand, with each drink refill the waitress increases her contact and interaction with a customer in hopes of influencing the gratuity rewarded to her at the end of the night. "Buttering up" and having a "friendly rapport" is one method waitresses use to "manipulate the material rewards of their work" (Paules 1991:24). Waitresses at Starlet's are more likely to employ this technique with customers who open a tab, as they are more likely to be the type that is "going to spend a lot and get a whole bunch of dances." A tab opening customer is a more lucrative time investment than only working cash paying tables, as a bigger bill and more chances for buttering up can significantly influence a patron's tip, according to these fifteen women.

During a waitress's initial interaction with a customer she makes a judgment as to what type of customer he will be. In this time, the waitress relies on processes of impression management to predict what type of customer he will be, by classifying him

as someone familiar or unfamiliar, and who is paying with cash or, if handed a credit card, is opening a tab. Waitresses at Starlet's calculate a customer's impressions in an attempt to predict and explain what gratuity could be earned. It is clear that these women are far less concerned with the impression a customer makes of them unless he is a regular, or is a new customer that opens a tab. Goffman (1959) cites the service relationship as a sequence of "first impression encounters," and for these participants it is highly important to "get off on the right foot." (p.11). For waitresses working in a restaurant environment, it is a common desire to grasp the upper hand, or have control over, the service encounter, especially when they feel of a lower socio-economic status than their customer (Goffman 1959). For Starlet's waitresses, the control of a service situation is rarely relinquished to the customer. These waitresses utilize initial interactions and impressions to judge whether a customer is a worthy candidate of their time. For those customers that do open a tab, and begin acting "perverted," and "rude," waitresses still proclaim control by ignoring and delaying their service related requests:

I just blow them off...if I'm the one that sat them down then I have to wait on them for their first round [of drinks], and if they do end up opening a tab and they're assholes then I just won't go over there that often and I won't talk to them like I would if they were a nice customer....I stay away. (Francie)

By avoiding tab customers who are rude these waitresses remain in control of their situation, even when their customer is out of control. From the moment a customer enters the club, a waitress is interpreting what type of customer he will be. Each of these waitresses largely controls who, how, and when they *do service* while on the job, with each decision being significantly influenced by a customer's status in the club, and how he chooses to pay their bill.

Doing Service

Working in a strip club is largely considered by society as a deviant choice among a multitude of socially acceptable occupations (Thompson et al. 2003), with a majority of the women who choose to being classified as “dirty workers” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:413). As previously stated, waitresses working at Starlet’s are entirely aware of the stigma that is attached to their choice of employment, and, through their own discourse, exhibit that these environmental conditions have a significant influence on how each of these women not only manage their sense of selves and the impressions of customers, but in how they *do service*. Just as West and Zimmerman (1987) propose that individuals in society “do gender,” waitresses at Starlet’s choose when, with whom, and to what extent they create, maintain, and break down the illusion of good service (p.126).

By either manifesting the warranted emotive display a patron typically expects from a waitress during a service encounter, or by refusing to *do service* when a customer steps too far outside of what each waitress considers standard service industry norms, these fifteen women are creating and breaking down the illusions strip club patrons come to expect from this type of environment. Waitresses at Starlet’s consistently *do service* for regulars, and for new customers that tip well, but refrain from it with customers who do not tip, who touch them in a way they are uncomfortable with, and who they simply find annoying.

Creating and Maintaining the Illusion. Like exotic dancers, waitresses are exposed to a variety of different clientele, and how each waitress manages these encounters can have significant impact on her tip (Rose 2001). While these waitresses do

choose to participate in emotional labor processes, that make them appear as though they have left “their personal problems out of [the club],” the display norms that guide a customer’s behavior during social interactions in a strip club are very different than those experienced by Hochschild’s (1983) flight attendants and a variety of other working environments (Bulan, Erickson, and Wharton 1997; Hallett 2000; Karabanow 1999; Wood 2000). While the acceptable norms present in a strip club environment not only allow crude behaviors from customers (Montemurro 2001), according to the present study, they also permit some waitresses a fairly unrestricting platform to express their uninhibited emotions.

While a majority of these waitresses express their dislike for façade-like behavior, respondents are not completely unaffected by emotional labor processes, as they clearly still employ “surface acting” and “deep acting” techniques to make their rent, and pay their bills (Hochschild 1983:33). In Hochschild’s (1983) research on flight attendants, she found many of the women disliked the fact that they had to be “phony,” but agreed that phoniness represented a significant part of their performance as “illusion makers” (p.187). Although, like flight attendants, many of the respondents reiterate they don’t like being fake, most of the respondents alluded to the modification of their emotions and behavior with various customers, such as regulars and those customers who open tabs, so as to take the best possible angle for earning the most money possible. Early on in her interview, Katrina expressed her dislike for façade-like behavior, but later exemplifies how she utilizes this behavior with regulars to earn better gratuities:

High maintenance customers are annoying because...if they are really high maintenance it’s okay as long as I know they will take care of me at the end of the night...like tip me really well. There are like... a couple of them I get annoyed with because they talk too much. Like, I’m here for

them as a waitress, but there is like a couple that like to talk *a lot*, and I don't have interest in what they are saying, but I have to fake it. So, I guess that part I have to fake, because you don't really want to be like, "I don't really want to hear about this."

Katrina expresses that if she is honest and forthcoming with her true feelings of annoyance with regulars who talk too much she might be putting her guaranteed tip money on the line, the only reason these fifteen women choose to work in the environment that they do.

With very little pressure from management, concerning the presentation of organizationally sanctioned emotions as discussed in *setting the table*, it is these waitresses' individual needs, and up to their own discretion as to when to employ surface and deep acting techniques. For these fifteen women, money is the only reason for continuing to work at Starlet's, and the one driving force in a waitress's ability to deep act. Mischa exemplifies this in the following:

I think if I'm in a bad mood that it affects my money because I don't even want to be there, so I don't even try. But, I've always found that if you have fun then you make a lot more money because if you're in a bad mood you don't, for some reason you don't make money. So, you have to be in a good mood to go there [the strip club] because you're not going to make money and that is why you're there...the main reason you are there. Yeah...I think, I need to make this money...I need to make this car payment or whatever so I have to be in a good mood.

During processes of deep acting an individual will "make up a world they can honestly respond to," and attempt to "dwell on what it is that they want to feel and on what they must do to induce that feeling" (Hochschild 1983:44). Mischa is not concerned with being in a good mood because that is what is required of her by management in order to keep her job, but because, if she stays in a bad mood, she will not make any money.

Layla reiterates this point when explaining the thought process she goes through to make herself feel happy while working at the club:

I think...I'm leaving with more than I came in with and that's what I have to tell myself and remind other girls when they just want to go home or they whatever... "We're here to make money...think about the money!" "Pay one more bill." That's my life right now, getting caught up and money...need money.

When interacting with a customer they find "disgusting" or identify as a "pervert," Starlet's waitresses think of the good feelings that come when they "walk" with "good money," and apply those feelings of happiness into their current interaction. Waitress after waitress referenced to the illusions of good money when explaining how they continued to interact with customers that they found frustrating. Chrissy exemplifies this in the following when questioned about what kinds of emotions she commonly experienced while waiting tables at Starlet's"

I don't really love coming to work. I mean I love my job because it's, like I said it's a great job because I make my own schedule. I make really good money I couldn't make anywhere else, but once I'm here I'm usually in a pretty good mood. But, yeah, people piss me off...I get really really happy when I get great tips.

These waitresses utilize their emotions and the display of these emotions as a resource for making money for themselves, where Hochschild's (1983) flight attendants do so to keep their jobs and make money for the airline. Due to the "high rates of turnover," these fifteen women say characterizes their industry, even if a waitress is not the highest selling employee she is not concerned with losing her job at Starlet's, and is instead fully concerned with making money for herself.

In order to display themselves as pleasant waitresses, many expressed attempts at evoking positive feelings by conjuring up pseudo lives for their customers, or made up

lives that they could emotionally respond to. Describing her typical interactions with patrons, Tessa reveals how she envisions the lives of her customers:

I'm pretty friendly for the most part just because it is a business and I try to respect the people that do go in there...because they are probably stressed out or something.

By thinking of customers as “stressed out,” and in need of some “respect,” waitresses are better equipped to evoke “empathetic role-taking emotions” that make them want to be nice and polite, so as not to add extra pressure and conflict into the life of an already strained person (Shott 1979:1324). For many of these women, it is easier to do emotional labor, convincing their customers that they are happy to serve them, when they envision a customer as stressed out, or a man who is possibly patronizing the club to get away from, what Brooke describes, a “nagging and bitching wife.”

Where organizations attempt to control the emotions of their workers (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Bulan et al. 1997, Hochschild 1983, Morris and Feldman 1996), emotions and feelings themselves can be constructed as a form of social control (Shott 1979). Individuals employ empathic role-taking emotions “by relieving the unhappiness of those with whom they empathize, or by increasing their happiness, are able to relieve or increase their own corresponding feeling (Shott 1979:1329). Layla utilizes these emotional role-taking techniques in the following:

When they [customers] are very forward...I try to be nice about it...I don't want to ruin anybody's evening or make them look stupid because I know they don't intentionally do that. They are just in the atmosphere where men think with their other head and they don't know...they don't know better...it is like they become twelve year old boys.

She later states:

You have to keep the right mindset that you are just there to work and this is just a pretend place in the titty bar world. Customers, this is their way

of fun and they think they are falling in love with these girls and we all get all in...it is just pretend...I don't know...it just seems pretend...I just have to think of it as pretend. Pretend in a way that we have to pretend to be happy, and we're happy, and everybody's happy and this is an okay thing to be doing.

By thinking of her working environment as “pretend” and empathizing with her customers as “twelve year olds” who don't know how to act around women she is able to relieve her uneasiness and feelings of “ickiness” about the working in the environment that she later describes she chooses to work in. Layla is able to let some of the actions customers portray occur without any repercussions, on her part, that might embarrass them, as she identifies them as simply “not knowing any better.” Positing that women working in the club are able to convince these men that they are in love with them, when in reality this is not the case, Layla is able to see the women working in the club as in control of what is actually going on. This process is analogous to the “place claiming” processes many of these women employ to salvage a positive sense of self-identity discussed earlier (Clark 1990:321).

Waitresses at Starlet's control when to employ emotional labor techniques, but on two occasions waitresses mentioned a manager did advise them that they might make more money if they thought of the club with a “Cheers like mentality, like where everybody knows your name.” While sitting in on a waitress meeting, I also heard a manager make the exact same illusion for myself. One other waitress also commented that a manager told her to think of customers as “rock stars,” and that better tips would result if she would make them feel as if they were indeed famous. These illusions, suggested by management, represent two deep acting methodologies that waitresses can employ if they *choose*, although, in actuality, “management really doesn't care how you

act with customers.” For these fifteen waitresses, doing emotional labor is easiest with regulars, as they can draw on reliable feelings of happiness experienced by past interactions with that same customer which resulted in a good tip:

Whenever I see like a regular customer I’ll just be like, I am happy to see them so I’m not like faking it, especially if I’m in a down mood or a not so great mood. Then if I see like one of my regulars come in that like boosts me up because I’m like, “Oh yeah, potential money!” So, that already puts me in a good mood because I’m happy to see somebody I know.
(Katrina)

Display norms and feeling rules in the service industry largely dictate that waiters and waitresses need to be cordial, accommodating, and somewhat tolerant to poor treatment (Paules 1991). While a majority of service industry workers do emotional labor because it is required of them by their employer (Hochschild 1983), at Starlet’s, waitresses do emotional labor to make money, and if they are able to conjure up the empathizing techniques necessary. Due to low organization pressures to “act a certain way,” and the prevailing environmental conditions that commodify the bodies of women (Murphy 2003), these women have the freedom to *not* employ techniques of emotional labor when they so choose. Similar to the Route waitress Paules (1991:2) researched, that “don’t take no junk,” if a customer crosses the service boundaries of unacceptable behavior with any one of these fifteen waitresses, on a day when they are just not “in the mood,” it will most likely be made clear that she is not going to “take your crap.”

Breaking the Illusion: Poor Tippers. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, emotions are used reflexively to relay to social interactants which sentiments and behaviors are acceptable to feel and display (Franks 2003). Hochschild’s (1983) flight attendants often talked of going “into robot,” or surface acting mode, by only

“pretending” to feel the warranted emotion (p.129). During such modes, these attendants make no attempt to employ deep acting techniques that “cover up their lack of genuine feeling” during interactions with customers (Hochschild 1983:129). Similar to Hochschild’s (1983) flight attendants, waitresses at Starlet’s will frequently refuse to practice *any kind* of emotional induction or suppression (p.129). Refusing both surface and deep acting techniques, these fifteen waitresses blatantly exhibit their true feelings and emotions to customers when they feel it is warranted. At Starlet’s, waitresses have no problem approaching customers that either do not tip, or do not tip the appropriate gratuity for their bill.

When questioned about their favorite aspect of working at Starlet’s, most of the waitresses responded with statements alluding to their freedom to approach customers about mishaps, or to openly confront customers when they feel it necessary. Several of the waitresses also expressed this same sentiment when discussing the differences between their prior and current employer, exemplifying differing displays norms between Starlet’s and other restaurants:

When I was working at Red Lobster if somebody tipped me horribly or something you won’t say anything, you just take it, but at the strip club it’s very different. If somebody is just getting under my skin, like really badly, I can tell the manager and he can tell them to leave me alone, I can give the table to somebody else, I can refuse to serve them, or I can talk back to them. If somebody didn’t tip me enough, like if somebody really screwed me over I have no problem going up to them and being like, “Look, I did a really good job; you need to tip me appropriately because this is not appropriate.” And people are always like, “Oh, I’m sorry, here’s more money.” Every single time, nobody has ever said that they wouldn’t tip me...you can’t do that anywhere else. (Erika)

Where Erika takes a cordial, somewhat professional approach in her confrontation with this customer, Francie does not:

I've been doing this for a long time so I stay away from the assholes, but there are certain times, like if they don't tip me, I'll snap at them. If I'm having a bad day or whatever, I'll tell them, "Do you work for free?" and they will be like "No," and I'm like "Well, I don't either! We work for tips!" (Francie)

Due to the low presence of managerial authority over the delegation of customer service, or "affective requirements" (Bulan 1997:237), waitresses have the freedom to openly express inquiry into the nature of an unfair tip, and do so in either an aggressive or non-aggressive manner. This is not a common service industry practice, as many of the waitresses pointed out in their comparisons to prior employers. If a customer walks into Starlet's and leaves a poor tip they will most likely be confronted by a waitress, unless they are a regular or a friend of an owner or manager. A regular who tips badly or treats the waitress poorly is not of the norm at Starlet's, but, on the rare occasion this occurs, the waitress generally chooses to "just walk away."

There's a lot of regulars that go in there [Starlet's] and some...they know the managers really well, so you can't really complain about them, or if you do they won't do anything...like the manager won't say anything because it's a regular and you know that, so that's why I don't say anything because if it's a regular...like I won't complain, I'll just walk away. (Gwen)

For many of the waitresses, like Francie, a poor tip makes a waitress feel badly, and adds to the stigma many of them already feel. Thus, from the pattern present in this research that depicts these waitresses' freedoms in emotional display, a poor tip will largely warrant an angry and confrontational response on the part of the waitress.

Breaking the Illusion: I'm not smiling for you. Understanding that "the expression of emotion is shaped by cultural expectations," (Shott 1979:1320) is highly relevant to capturing the emotional labor processes these respondents employ, or in this

case, choose not to employ. Restaurant and bar patrons expect waitresses to smile, as an unsmiling service employee equates to someone who is “cold, unkind, and unhappy,” and customers who frequent Starlet’s are no different (Hochschild 1983:128). When asked if customers ever commented on their moods or attitudes a strong majority of the waitresses responded that they were consistently questioned as to why they weren’t smiling. A question that many respond negatively to and take very personally:

Lots of time I get from people... “Why aren’t you smiling more?” I’m not one of those people that walk around with a sunshine face and stuff. Nothing’s wrong, get out of my face! I hate it when people ask me why I don’t smile. (Chantel)

Chantel responds aggressively for what many customers might assume as only a simple question, but many of the waitresses acted as if the customer was out of line. Chrissy reiterates this message, and exemplifies that not only is she not smiling, but she is not even willing to change her facial messages, an unemotional surface acting technique, to make the customer happy: “Yeah, people tell me I need to smile more. I get that every shift. I’m not going to walk around with a smile on my face. This is what you get.”

An unsmiling flight attendant would fail if a customer graded her on her self-presentation (Shott 1979). By choosing not to smile she is undercutting her situational identity, an identity that posits her as a friendly and accommodating airline hostess, an image that she is paid to uphold (Hochschild 1983). Waitresses at Starlet’s have no regrets about failing to project the situational identity customers frequenting the club expect. By talking back to some customers who request a smile, these waitresses claim their emotions, and facial expressions as their own, entities that are entirely out of the control of a Starlet’s patron. While many admit that putting on a happy face is part of

their job, when it is requested of them by a customer it is suddenly found offensive in nature.

In the strip club environment, men hold a significant amount of power as they are the spectator, or master of “the gaze,” who posit the female body as “an objectified body that exists only for his own subjective desire” (Murphy 2003:309). Waitresses at Starlet’s are fully aware of this, and such information significantly influences why many of these women choose to break the fantastical illusions customers expect when patronizing a strip club. Chantel explains in the following:

I’m a person, not an object and like the girls [dancers] are people, not objects, but that’s how the whole strip club thing is...you’re supposed to be able to detach, but some guys are like...they act like it’s a whole different world...like I was walking through here the other day and I had my shirt cut real low and some guys starts yelling and yelling and I was like “What!” I go over there and he was like “I just want to look at them, you know this is a strip club.” I looked at him and was like “You’ve got to be kidding me!” and I walked away. Those are the kinds of customers that I don’t like at all. Like I try not to think of myself as an object but I know that there are some people that do, like some people that don’t realize that they can’t say certain things to me...like they will say stupid shit to me and I’ll get all pissed off and I’ll be like “Fuck you!” But, you just have to realize that it just comes with this job, I try to make it known that I’m not an object.

Men come to Starlet’s for attention from women, for “counterfeit intimacy” (Murphy 2003:316), a point made by waitresses and managers alike. As the only clothed female employees, Starlet’s waitresses get a significant amount of agency out of their ability to talk back to customers. Their ability to choose when to do service, and when to refuse it makes each of these women feel a sense of power, respect, and control in their environment. Only these fifteen women get to choose when they want to buy into a customer’s illusion and become part of the entertainment, and this is most often not when it is requested of them.

Breaking the Illusion: No Touching, I'm a Waitress not a Dancer. Fourteen of the fifteen women interviewed stated they were often asked to perform table dances for customers, and all reported it as something they “would never do.” Where waitresses vary situationally on when, with whom, and to what extent they *do service*, each makes it vividly clear unwarranted physical contact is never part of the service package. Differentiating themselves as non-dancing waitstaff is not only a distancing technique they use to protect their self identities, it is also a direct refusal of emotional labor processes. When touched unwarrantedly it is difficult for a waitress to surface or deep act, as suppressing their offense and anger for a customer who invaded a part of their self each regards as “off limits” is not an easy task. Respondents expressed sentiments familiar to what Katrina reported when talking of physical contact with customers:

Some customers will try to like touch you and I'll be like, “Oh, I'm not the dancer here. I'm just the waitress.” So I'm like, “Oh, do you want me to find you someone to keep you company, like a dancer.

Another waitress commented, when an “old, eccentric biker guy” asked her to perform a dance she replied “tray, hand, waitress!”

Waitresses at Starlet's have little tolerance for any unwarranted touching by customers. Reiterating that they, on average, do not “hug,” “sit in laps,” or “entertain” their customers, each of these waitresses make it clear that there is a significant difference in what their job is and the job of a dancer. In all fifteen interviews, each of the waitresses commented, at some point, “I'm a waitress, not a dancer.” A comment they made apparently clear is used somewhat frequently:

I think I carry myself well and discretely so that...I guess they know how far...you know they don't try that type of thing or I'll keep my distance if

they seem like handsy, like if they just want...like...some customers...try to touch you and I'm like "Oh, I'm not the dancer here. I'm just the waitress." So, I'm like. "Oh, do you want me to find you someone to keep you company, like a dancer?" Or...something like that. (Katrina)

Where dancers are consistently modifying their selves to appear as closely as possible to what the customer desires (Wesely 2003), Starlet's waitresses do not when it comes to physical contact. With "entertainment" being provided by the dancers, waitresses have little emotion work involved when it comes to "handsy" customers and their own bodies.

Although these waitresses posit there to be little emotional labor involved in their choice to talk back or approach a customer who does not tip well, who requests a smile, or touches a waitress in a way she is uncomfortable with, Morris and Feldman (1996) reiterate that even those emotions workers identify with can be laborious to display, as "felt emotion must still be translated into appropriate emotional displays" (p.988).

However, for these fifteen waitresses who work in an environment where the female body is objectified (Murphy 2003), a body each clearly shows up to work with everyday, is a significant part of their private self. A self that is not difficult to defend, and, although Starlet's is a strip club, these fifteen waitresses are clearly not dancers:

Yeah, what are they going to do...fire us for saying something, they can't...they can't do that. They can't fire you...because it's your body...and how you want to be touched and whatever...because it's yours. They can't be like, "You can't talk to your customers like that!" Because it's your body, I mean, if it happened in another place and they [the waitress] went and talked like that, something would happen to that person [the waitress]. I don't think they could tell them, "Don't ever touch me like that again." But, whatever. (Mischa)

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to discover the lived experiences of waitresses who work in exotic dance clubs to uncover how these women manage their emotions and corresponding self identities in one specific type of environment. Numerous research studies show that emotional labor is prevalent across a variety of service sector jobs (Bulan et al. 1997, Hallett 2000, Hochschild 1983, Karabanow 1999), but the existing research on strip clubs largely ignores the women who get paid to leave their clothing on. The present findings concur that, like other service sector employees, these fifteen women clearly do emotion work. However, due to Starlet's freedoms in emotional display, these women have the ability to decide when, with whom, and to what extent they do or *do not do service*. This research also shows that how these women define their sense of self significantly influences their employment of emotion work techniques.

Working in a strip club carries a significant amount of stigmatization for exotic dancers (Murphy 2003, Thompson et al. 2003, Wesely 2003, Wood 2000), and, based on the present research, is not isolated to only those women who remove their clothing. These fifteen women are constantly defending their self and their bodies against unwarranted contact and attributions. By utilizing place claiming techniques, distancing tactics, and alternating between true and false self displays they attempt to maintain a sense of control over both their encounters and how their identities are conveyed.

Largely, these women feel good about themselves, and where they work, because they choose to leave their clothing on.

These fifteen women consistently do service for regulars, and for new customers that tip well, but refrain from it with customers who do not tip, who touch them in a way they are uncomfortable with, and with customers who demand specific emotional displays (i.e. a smile.) Although these waitresses employ both surface and deep acting techniques, like Hochschild's (1983) flight attendants, they do so to make money for themselves, whereas flight attendants do so to make money for the airline. Men come to the strip club for attention from women, and, as the only clothed employees, these fifteen women get a significant amount of agency out of their abilities to choose when to buy into a customer's illusion, and when not to.

Prior to writing *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1979) called for sociological research that explores processes of emotional labor across various occupational environments, specifically, research that explores where "the right of women to open anger is extended over a larger, sanction free zone" (p.572). While this study did not set out to answer this call, this research makes strong implications concerning the influence that emotional display freedoms can have over a woman's ability to express anger openly while on the job. These fifteen women state when it comes to unwarranted touching by customers they have no reservations about expressing their uninhibited emotional reactions, as physical contact with their skin breaks the illusionary boundary lines they find acceptable. Sociological researchers should take note of this, and explore the variation of display across various occupational environments, while specifically focusing on the variations between both women and men.

Emotional labor is about maintaining the illusion of good service, either through deep or surface acting measures, and an illusion that is largely left in the hands of these fifteen waitresses. Attempting to counteract the stigma that is typically attached to strip club employees, these women receive a significant amount of agency from their ability to utilize emotional labor techniques only when they choose. They have the choice of when they want to maintain “the pretend world” customers come to Starlet’s to find, and when this illusion becomes too much of a threat to their own self-identities or self-worth. This research exposes this one specific occupational environment does play a key role in how emotion work is done, as the display norms indicative of this environment allows each waitress to control when, how, and to what extent service is distributed to customers. This working environment also allows waitresses the freedom to negotiate identities that portray a self they express doesn’t deserve any sort of stigma, as they make money in a strip club without having to remove any clothing.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

I. Background Questions

- A. Can you describe your work experiences prior to this job?
- B. How long have you worked here?
- C. What job(s) did your parents have while you were growing up?
- F. Why did you start working here at the [*name of establishment*]?
- G. How would you describe yourself to others?

II. Experiences at Work

- A. Do you enjoy your work here?
- B. What does a typical shift consist of?
- C. How do you feel about your dress code here at work?
- D. How do you typically interact with customers? Are you flirty, direct, sarcastic? Do you have a specific *style*?
- E. Do you feel that you “put on a happy face” for customers?
- F. When or if you come to work in a bad mood what do you do change that? How do you pump yourself up?
- G. Do customers ever comment on your moods and/or attitudes? When has this occurred? How does this make you feel?
- H. Describe your experiences with demanding and/or pushy customers?
- I. How did these experiences make you feel?
- J. What kinds of customers do you find most annoying and/or frustrating?
- K. How do you define your personal boundaries here?
What happens when someone crosses these boundaries?
- L. What kinds of special requests have customers made to you?
- M. What kind of emotions do you commonly experience while working? Are you happy when you are here? Why or why not?
- N. Describe the expectations that management/owners have of you?
- O. Are there any rules about how you’re supposed to act, for example towards customers?
- P. Do you feel a sense of competition with the other girls that work here?
- Q. Do you feel that you fit in here?
- R. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working here?

III. Experiences Outside of Work

- A. Do you inform others, outside of work, where you work?
- B. Is this something you freely reveal to people? Do your family and friends know?
- C. How do others react to your working at a strip club?
- D. How do you feel about working at a strip club?
- E. Do you find yourself ever down playing or playing up the positive and/or negative regards of your job? To whom do you this with? Does this vary depending on the person?

- F. How do you unwind from a typical shift?
- G. Working in a sexual environment, like a strip club, do you find yourself more interested or less interested in pursuing sexual relationships?

IV. Concluding Questions

- A. Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?
- B. Would you describe yourself as content with your life right now?
- C. If you could improve anything about your working environment, what would it be?

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

A Study of Cocktail Waitresses in Austin, Texas

You are invited to participate in a study of cocktail waitresses who work in the restaurant and bar industry in Austin, Texas. I am a graduate student at Texas State University in the Department of Sociology working on a project for a sociology class and final master's thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of the type of environment you work in. You will be one of 15 people chosen to participate in this study. I will ask you questions about your experiences, for example, how other people treat you based on your working environment, and how this treatment makes you feel.

If you decide to participate, you will take part in a one-on-one in-depth interview with me. The interview will be conducted in a nearby restaurant, or another place that we choose and will be tape-recorded. The interview should take no more than one hour of your time. The possible risk to your participation is psychological harm from describing/re-living past events and interactions that may have been negative or damaging. At the end of the interview, I can give you a list of agencies providing services you may need. The possible benefit is being able to discuss events in your life that you haven't prior to the interview.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain strictly confidential. I will not transcribe any name you mention during the interview. Tapes will be assigned a code number so your name will never be attached to the tape. Only I, the interviewer and my supervising professors, Dr. Harold Dorton and Dr. Patti Giuffre, will hear tapes. When I describe the information obtained an alias or false name will be used in place of your true name or identity.

If you decide to take part in the interview, you are free to stop the interview at any time. You don't have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have any additional questions later, feel free to contact Dr. Harold Dorton in the sociology department at Texas State University (512-245-2113). You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your signature means that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time after signing this form should you choose to do so.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C**Demographic Information**
Information About You

1. Name: _____
2. Sex: _____
3. Age: _____
4. Race/Ethnicity: _____
5. Age when you started your very first job: _____
6. What is your sexual orientation (heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual)?

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