

**Unmasking Workers in the Victoria, BC Restaurant Community:  
Women's Serving Experiences Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Carleton University, 2019

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We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

**Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

This exploratory study investigates the serving experiences of seven women with work experience in the Victoria, BC restaurant community before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Informed by work from Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis on social performance and Candace West and Don Zimmerman's ideas on *doing gender*, my overall goal is to answer the following research question(s): *How do women servers in Victoria, BC perceive their restaurant work and has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their serving experiences?* Specifically, if the pandemic has changed the industry, what are these key changes, and might they affect the future of restaurant work? The research findings reveal that Canadian restaurants are gendered worksites, and while the pandemic facilitated some positive changes for servers it also surfaced longstanding restaurant concerns.

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## Prologue: A Greeting from Your Host

“Would you prefer the nickname ‘new girl’ or ‘cunt’?” the restaurant chef in the back-of-house asked. In response, I remained silent. This experience is my earliest memory of working in restaurants. As a young teenager, I did not understand the full ramifications of his question, but I do remember the laughter from co-workers that ensued. I also remember how uncomfortable it made me feel. Of course, sexism in restaurants is nothing new. However, the fact that I experienced it during that first shift helped develop an understanding and inform my knowledge of worker mistreatment and restaurant subculture.

My serving experiences motivated my interest in studying the systems that encourage and normalize sexism toward women<sup>1</sup> workers generally and women servers, specifically. Despite knowing how I would be treated, I continued to work as a server on and off for years. Moreover, in doing so, I learned the ropes of the industry. I knew that being a server was similar to being a performer. I learned to see my role in the restaurant as an actor in a play. To prepare for my performances (shifts), I put on my costume, applied my makeup, styled my hair, and ensured I was in character before my performance.

For me, being a server can be best described as a love-hate relationship. Some days, I felt a powerful sense of solidarity with my co-workers. It was a fun environment to work in, and many of us could relate to each other and commiserate over similar negative experiences. Other days, I had to bite my tongue when management asked me to lower my V-neck t-shirt or when a customer asked me to bend over *again* to pick up a dropped fork off the ground. Over time, I

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *women and woman* refer to the social construction of gender and resist the problematic language of *female*. The term *female* denotes sex of any species and reduces folks to their reproductive organs (Brown, 2015; James, 2020; Yakovlev, 2019). When the word *female* is used in this thesis, it is only when sharing direct quotations from participants. Likewise, when I use the term *male* it is only in the context of the male gaze or from participants’ direct words.

internalized these gender performances that were required in the industry. In this way, I agree with Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche (2014), who wrote,

I am trying to unlearn many lessons of gender I internalized while growing up. But sometimes I feel vulnerable in the face of gender expectations (p. 38).

When conducting this research, I found that the restaurant issues I experienced years ago still exist today. I was disappointed (but not surprised) to hear some of the participants share similar stories to mine, where being called *bitch* or *sugar tits* were everyday occurrences and seen as part of the job. The normalization of gendered mistreatment was confirmed by participants who said, “I just grin and bear it” (Bailey), “I just kind of, went along with it” (Claire), and “it’s just part of the industry” (Emma). These comments reinforced my own experiences and confirmed that sexism continues to define much of this service industry.

While I understand, fundamentally, how sexism operates in restaurants, I wondered what effect, if any, the COVID-19<sup>2</sup> pandemic had on women servers’ experiences. In this study, I interviewed seven women servers to learn about their experiences working in restaurants before and during the pandemic. In the following introductory chapter, I provide a small taste of what to expect in this thesis. Here, I contextualize the restaurant industry, address the value of exploring the impact of the pandemic on this work sector in particular, and conclude with an outline for the rest of the thesis.

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<sup>2</sup>When referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, I use the term “pandemic” for the remainder of the thesis.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In Canada,<sup>3</sup> women continue to earn less than men for the same work, are more likely to fulfill part-time hours, and experience sexual harassment on the job (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020; Doorey, 2011; Green, 2016; Johnson & Madera, 2018; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2019). These are just a few examples of the many inequalities women face in Canadian workplaces. Many women in Canada work in precarious, part-time positions such as in restaurants<sup>4</sup> due to lack of affordable childcare, pressure to take on most domestic duties, and inadequate workplace leave policies (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020). In fact, Green (2016) argued that the precarity of working in restaurants "tend to weigh heavily on women in the industry" (para. 1). Other researchers have found that restaurants continue to promote and reinforce women's precarious relationship with work (Hall, 1993; Matulewicz, 2015, 2016, 2017; Tibbals, 2010).

The goal of this research was to examine how women servers perceive restaurant environments today, whether the pandemic has (or has not) influenced women's serving experience, and explore their insights into the future of restaurant work. To answer my research questions, I applied three integral theoretical lenses to sociologically understand women's lived experiences while serving in restaurants before and during the pandemic. First, I employed Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of *dramaturgy* to help me understand how individuals perform their expected roles in society. Emerging from one of the three most prominent theoretical paradigms in sociology, symbolic interactionism, Goffman's dramaturgical approach is useful for exploring how much of what we consider work, is also performance. Second, building upon

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<sup>3</sup>It is crucial to note that when I use the word "Canada" throughout this thesis, I refer to the colonial state that continues to exploit Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>4</sup> The term "restaurant" is inclusive of bars, breweries, and pubs.

my knowledge of social performances, I complimented this approach with Candance West and Don Zimmerman's (1987) theory of *doing gender* to examine how women servers perform their expected roles but in highly gendered ways. *Doing gender* suggests that individuals have been socialized to behave in ways that are deemed gender-appropriate "natures" of feminine and masculine (West & Zimmerman, 1987). I am using Goffman (1959) and West and Zimmerman's (1987) classic works to assess if they are relevant today and during the pandemic. Third, I adopted the conceptual theory of *institutional sexism* to understand how restaurants might uphold gender oppression in insidious ways. For this study, I investigated the experiences of seven women servers working in Victoria, BC, restaurants. I argue that examining the experiences of women serving in restaurants *before* and *during* the pandemic can shine new light on the gendered reality of women servers. Before delving into the effects of the pandemic on women's serving experiences, however, I will describe what working in restaurants is like to help readers appreciate the unique nature of this work.

### **Working in Restaurants**

Food service establishments, including restaurants, are the largest sector in the hospitality industry (Reynolds, 2019). In 2020, the food and beverage industry was one of the largest private-sector employers, with 1.3 million workers (Dingwall, 2020). Of these 1.3 million, more than 1 in 5 people under 24 were employed in this sector, and women outnumber men in food service positions (OHRC, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2016; UFCW, 2017). In 2016, Statistics Canada reported that 83,790 women in Canada aged 15-24 held "food and beverage server" statuses compared to 21,615 men. This reality confirms the fact that women dominate food and beverage server work in Canada. In fact, during this same year, more than 70% of people in restaurant serving positions were women (Charlebois, 2016).

Women dominate front-of-house<sup>5</sup> server and hostess positions where they are responsible for presenting the public image of the restaurant, while men dominate decision-making roles in the back-of-house<sup>6</sup> cook and managerial positions (Charlebois, 2016; Johnson & Madera, 2018; Sachs et al., 2014). Sachs et al. (2014) argued, “these divisions are metaphorical as well as physical in that the back of the house can easily be understood as hidden but is also often the seat of power in a restaurant” (Sachs et al., 2014, p. 6). While these power imbalances might challenge traditional gender roles of women belonging in the kitchen, restaurant culture holds women to a “higher standard than men, even at the same level of service...this is all too familiar” (McGaw, 2014; para. 4). Women also face discriminatory hiring practices and dress codes, endure heightened levels of emotional labour, and experience sexual harassment as an ordinary reality of the industry (Doorey, 2011; OHRC, 2015; Green, 2016; Johnson & Madera, 2018; Matulewicz, 2015; Matulewicz, 2016; McGaw, 2014; Zaman, 2017). It is understandable then that restaurants are very different places for women servers than the ones the customers see.

Restaurants provide a social environment for customers to enjoy food, drinks, and the company of friends and family. For restaurants, regular customers are vital. For regulars<sup>7</sup>, restaurants are comfortable and familiar spaces to frequent. Dean (2014) defined a regular as a guest who habitually comes to the establishment, has a regular “seat,” and may treat the space as a second home. Regulars play a crucial role in restaurants because they challenge the typical customer/employee divide by building relationships with the restaurant workers (Dean, 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> Front-of-house is a term used interchangeably with “servers” but refers to people in positions in restaurants that are customer-facing

<sup>6</sup> Back-of-house is a term that refers to people in positions in restaurants that are not as visible. This term includes chefs in the kitchen or managers in offices.

<sup>7</sup> A regular is a guest who is well known by staff and who regularly comes by the restaurant.

Regulars often receive special treatment from employees to recognize their support, including free drinks, discounts on their bills, or off-menu dish or drink accommodations (Morgan, 2021). These are some of the ways that restaurants show their appreciation for the regulars. Before the pandemic hit, an average of 22 million Canadians visited a restaurant each day (Statistics Canada, 2021). Today, regulars play an even more significant role in helping restaurants survive – an industry devastated by the pandemic (Farooqui, 2020).

### **Influence of the Pandemic on Women Workers**

The negative impact of the pandemic has disproportionately affected women in Canada (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2020). When I began this research, most Canadian research on the pandemic and restaurants focused on the economic costs and job losses associated with forced restaurant closures (Larue, 2020; Restaurants Canada, 2020). In March 2020, Statistics Canada (2020) found that over three million Canadians lost their jobs or suffered reduced work hours. Of these three million, most were women, and their participation in the labour force has “plummeted to levels not seen in 30 years” (BC Women’s Health Foundation, 2020; Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2020, para. 3; Statistics Canada, 2021). This reality highlights the more general but disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on working women.

According to Statistics Canada (2021), women made up a high proportion of essential front-line workers during the pandemic. Restaurant servers have been considered essential in Canada, and estimates suggest over 10,000 restaurants have closed since March 2020 (Burr, 2020; Doradea, 2021). This reality underscores the precarity of work for servers during the pandemic. In addition, the restaurants that did stay open faced temporary closures, multiple re-openings, and changing health protocols.

## Thesis Outline

In this introductory chapter, I aimed to contextualize the restaurant industry and highlight some of the gendered impacts of the pandemic. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature where two themes emerged – *women's work* and *restaurant work* and concludes by noting my research questions that intend to fill gaps in the existing literature. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that helped guide my study. To analyze restaurants and women's serving experiences, I relied on Goffman (1959) and West and Zimmerman's (1987) works on performance and gender. Chapter 4 outlines my research design and reviews why a qualitative approach was most suitable for this study. I then detail ethical considerations, recruitment procedures, participant population, data collection, and data analysis. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I present my research findings, and in Chapter 8, I discuss them. Finally, in Chapter 9, I answer my research questions and offer some concluding thoughts on how the pandemic may lead to lasting changes for the future of women's work in restaurants.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is little Canadian research on women servers' experiences in restaurants, and some suggest this area is overlooked and under-researched (Johnson & Madera, 2018; Ram et al., 2016). North American workplaces continue to enforce gendered expectations of women, regardless of industry (Heilman, 2012; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Smith, 2002). Although I use the term *women* throughout this literature review, I acknowledge that the existing literature largely excludes women of colour, immigrant women, queer women, and trans women's voices and experiences (Garcia Johnson & Otto, 2019; Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). Future research must uphold and prioritize these voices. For this particular project, I divided the literature review into two main sections: *women's work* and *restaurant work*. In the *women's work* section, I discuss the feminization of labour and draw upon traditional gender roles and social expectations that women are taught to comply with. I then narrow the focus to discuss how these social issues are reproduced and perpetuated in today's service industry. In the restaurant work section, I outline some typical power dynamics, hiring practices, and experiences of sexual harassment that women commonly face in this industry. These themes emerged as most prominent in the literature review on the topic of women and restaurant work. I conclude by restating my research questions and outline how I intend to answer them.

### Women's Work

The term *women's work* is socially constructed to denote occupations traditionally defined as extensions of femininity and is often associated with the domestic sphere (Christen, 2018; Hall, 1993). One of many influential feminist scholars, Angela Davis (1981), writes about the racist, sexist, and classist origins of the industrialization of women's work in *Women, Race & Class*. Davis (1981) argues that capitalism influenced the sexist divisions of labour and

intensified the idea that women should be subservient to men. Thus, the social construction of *housewife* became an increasingly popular narrative:

Although the ‘housewife’ was rooted in the social conditions of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes, nineteenth-century ideology established the housewife and the mother as universal models of womanhood (Davis, 1981, p. 237).

In this way, *woman* became synonymous with *housewife*. Of course, the very concept of *woman* and *womanhood* must be challenged (Butler, 1988; Davis, 1981; Hill Collins, 1990). These definitions of *woman* and *womanhood* reinforce socially constructed gender roles and social expectations (Butler, 1988; Davis, 1981). Consequently, today, women are most likely to work in *feminine* professions such as caregiving, catering, clerical, cashiering, and cleaning, otherwise known as the 5 Cs (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020). In 2020, over 90% of caretaking positions such as nurses and personal support workers were filled by women (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020). Women's work is traditionally understood as unpaid domestic duties in the private sphere while men, society's ‘breadwinners’, fulfill paid positions in the public sphere (Damaske, 2011; Mercier, 2019; Wooten & Branch, 2012). While gender-based workplace research has long challenged these traditional heteronormative divisions of labour, women's work in the home is not always recognized as “real” work because it is unpaid and devalued (Eisenstein, 1979; Christen, 2018).

Rooted in heteronormativity, traditional and binary gender expectations between *women's work* and *men's work* persist. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) define heteronormativity as the “institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders” (p. 441). In other words, heteronormativity is the ideological foundation for gender inequality. Heteronormative assumptions require men and women to adhere to specific gender expectations. Namely, Schilt and Westbrook (2009) argued that gendered expectations in the

workplace require men to “do dominance” and women to “do submission” (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009, p. 443). The idea of *doing submission* is central to the understanding of the feminization of work.

The feminization of work refers to certain occupations where women often outnumber men and *feminine qualities* are seen as necessary (Christen, 2018; Irvine, 2013). *Feminine qualities* are rooted in traditional and stereotypical ideas of being attentive, affectionate, and gentle (Christen, 2018; Kachel et al., 2016). Feminized work often restricts women to caretaking positions, which men are socialized to avoid because these roles could threaten their masculinity (Christen, 2018). Men’s work often requires physical labour, decision-making, and leadership skills (Garcia-González et al., 2019). Such gendered arrangements are a social norm through which any deviation is atypical (Huws, 2012). However, as Davis (1981) points out, equal wages do not simply lead to liberation. Under capitalism, women continue to be exploited and oppressed in both the home and work sphere. A brief historical overview of some of the literature on women’s entry into the labour force will provide foundational knowledge to understanding where traditional gender roles came from and how they persist in the workplace today.

Research shows that during the 1970s, there was a steady increase in women's participation in the paid labour force (Statistics Canada, 2017; Swinth, 2018; Yellen, 2020). During this decade, attitudes toward women’s work outside of the home began to shift, and legislation to protect working women emerged (Korabik et al., 2014; Yellen, 2020). In 1970, 39.9% of women over 15 were employed in paid work (Statistics Canada, 2017). In addition, gender-based legislation on equal pay and 17-week maternity leave policies became more common (UFCW, 2021). Between the end of the 1970s and 2015, the labour force in Canada

grew by 8.8 million, of which 5.2 million were women (Petersson et al., 2017). Despite the growth in women's labour force participation, many women continue to balance work in both private and public spheres (Glynn, 2018; Ray, 2019). Women are forced to balance work life and family life more than men (Glynn, 2018; Ray, 2019). Balancing home responsibilities is exacerbated for women who feel the need to choose between having a family or earning money (Zhou et al., 2018). The stress of adhering to gender expectations within the home has translated into similar expectations in modern-day workplaces where the stereotype of *housewife* prevails (Duffy, 2007; Ridgeway, 2008). As Adiche (2014) writes,

I know a woman who hates domestic work, but she pretends that she likes it, because she has been taught that to be 'good wife material' ...the problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are (p. 34).

Other researchers agree and argue that heteronormative, traditional expectations of femininity continue to be imposed on women in the workplace today (Sachs, 2014; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). In addition to women's heteronormative and conventional expectations, low-paying and precarious "feminine" occupations such as caretaking and customer service remain women-dominated (Duffy, 2007; McDowell, 2015). In 2017, Statistics Canada reported that women continue to be twice as likely as men to work in precarious part-time positions, and nearly half (45%) said they did so because of childcare responsibilities at home. For Huws (2012), this reality has "enabled employers to dictate poorer wages and conditions for the part-time work which is the only employment option for many women with childcare responsibilities" (p. 5). Nonetheless, women continue to endure emotional labour demands in both the private and public spheres, while men are "more likely to resist the emotional demands of such work" (Gatta, 2002, p. 90).

Emotional labour is commonly applied in the context of service industry positions where workers become emotionally invested in their work roles and “comply with expression norms” through surface acting and deep acting (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Surface acting means disguising and deceiving others about how one truly feels (Hochschild, 1983). In short, surface acting means the performer wants the customer to believe they are happy to be serving them by displaying expected emotions. Deep acting is the technique of convincing ourselves that we truly feel the way we are portraying ourselves (Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting means that the performer assumes their expected role and tries to convince themselves they are indeed happy to be serving the customers. These emotional display expectations disproportionately fall on women workers (Hackman, 2015; Hochschild, 1983; Mills, 1969). Sociologists Mills and Hochschild wrote extensively about the emotional aspects of worker performances. Both sociologists drew upon the necessary examples of women in service work positions. For example, Mills (1969) argued that salesgirls have been “quite aware of the difference between what they really think of the customer and how they must act...the smile behind the counter is a commercialized lure” (Mills, 1969, p. 183). His analysis of salesgirls remains relevant today as women continue to endure emotional labour expectations in various work capacities.

The emotional nature of women’s work was the focus of Hochschild’s work in *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983) where she introduced her concept of emotional labour. She suggested that women disproportionately balance physical, mental, and emotional roles in the workplace (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1983) writes,

The flight attendant does physical labor when she pushes the heavy meal carts through the aisles, and she does the mental work when she prepares for and actually organizes emergency landings and evacuations. But in the course of doing this physical and mental labor, she is also doing something more, something I define as emotional labor. This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward

countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others – in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place (pp. 36-37).

This passage shows that women perform specific tasks within the workplace and are encouraged to endure additional effort to hide hurtful experiences from customers because their internal feelings must remain invisible to others. In *Emotional Labor Since the Managed Heart*, Steinberg and Figart (1999) suggest that emotional labour requires workers to present a desirable emotional state while concealing and managing their true feelings and emotions. While Steinberg and Figart's work is somewhat dated, more current scholars have further expanded upon Hochschild's concept of emotional labour which confirms its enduring relevance when analyzing women and work (Aung & Tewogbola, 2019; Hackman, 2015; Hartley, 2018; Newcomb 2021; Tunguz, 2021). Indeed, in a more contemporary example, Hackman (2015) writes, “from remembering birthdays to offering service with a smile, life has a layer of daily responsibility that is hardly discussed – one which falls disproportionately on women” (para. 1).

Unsurprisingly, research into emotional labour often occurred in the service sector, where emotional labour is a fundamental part of the job, especially for women (Hotchkiss, 2019; Muller, 2016). Sederstrom (2016) summarizes the emotional labour of women servers when she writes,

I am your waitress, with a bright smile etched on my face as I jot down your drink orders and say with the syrupy sweet high-pitched voice, 'of course!', 'not a problem!', and 'my pleasure!'... I cut you off after you your fifth Jack and Coke. I am the one to whom you direct your drunken rage when I tell my manager to take the keys to your Lexus. You tower over me with your tailored suit, the veins bulge in your neck and spit flies from your wet, drunk mouth, as you ask me if I know who you are and who I think I am. I am your waitress who stands stiff and awkward in a vain attempt to maintain composure, fighting back angry tears and a cutting retort (para. 2)

The above excerpt provides insight into the emotional labour of women servers specifically. The passage also shows that these performances can be painful and exhausting, yet women are

expected to present a caring, attentive, and gentle manner (Christen, 2018; Kachel et al., 2016). In a similar observation, Jaffe (2013) writes, “no, that waitress isn’t flirting with you...pretending to love one’s work, to be overjoyed by the ability to serve you coffee or pizza...is an integral part of the job for service workers” (para. 1-3).

Research into women’s work has focused on the traditional feminization of work, gender divisions, and the emotional labour required by many occupations. However, there is limited research on women's serving experiences in restaurants. This section aimed to uncover how common issues in the precarity of traditional *women's work* ideologies are created, reproduced, and maintained in restaurants.

### **Restaurant Work**

Despite social efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace, restaurants continue to promote traditional gender roles and expectations (Hall, 1993; Matulewicz, 2015, 2016, 2017; Tibbals, 2010). In reviewing the literature on women's serving experiences in restaurants, three primary research areas emerged – power dynamics, discriminatory hiring practices, and sexual harassment.

As discussed earlier, women are more likely to work in lower-paying serving roles, in part-time positions, and receive fewer advancement opportunities than are men (Bliss & Collins, 2020; Hall, 1993; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2017). In restaurants, women are also more likely to hold lower-paying front-of-house positions, while men are more likely to hold higher-paying back-of-house positions (Charlebois, 2016; Gatta, 2002; Sachs et al., 2014). When men *do* fulfill server roles, they often work in formal, upscale, and fine-dining restaurants where they receive higher pay than women servers (McGaw, 2014; Reskin & Padavic, 2002). Men are also more likely to advance into more senior positions, such as sommeliers, than are women

(Case, 2017). When women achieve more senior roles, like sommeliers, their achievements are diminished (Case, 2017). To simplify, researchers suggest that men typically fill managerial positions in restaurants while women are used as objects to help sell the business (Matulewicz, 2016; McGaw, 2014). These gendered differences reflect the hierarchal power imbalances in restaurants (Case, 2017; Charlebois, 2016).

Sachs et al. (2014) explored restaurants work and found that existing power imbalances were largely based on gender. For instance, one U.S. restaurant manager in the study said that women are hired for front-of-house positions because they are “gentler” and “less prideful” (Sachs et al., 2014, p. 6). These remarks about feminine characteristics reinforce that traditional gender expectations are reproduced in restaurants by managers who are usually men (Statistics Canada, 2019). Moreover, since servers are responsible for selling food and drinks, their physical appearance is essential for attracting customers who are heterosexual men and reflecting the restaurant’s image. The importance of physical appearance is reflected in restaurant hiring practices.

Women working in front-of-house positions in restaurants are more likely to be hired if their physical appearance conforms to grossly narrow, Eurocentric beauty standards (Johnson & Madera, 2018; Matulewicz, 2016). In a 2018 study, Allen and Pinkstone found that men rated their dining experiences more favorably when attractive women served them (Allen & Pinkstone, 2018). Some argue that large breasts, blonde hair, and a thin body shape are desirable to men managers to help sell their restaurant to customers (Jacob et al., 2010; Jiang & Galm, 2014). In this way, we see how some restaurant managers hire conventionally attractive women with “less restaurant experience over less attractive women who have more” (Camarero, 2018, para. 4). In fact, Matulewicz (2016) argued, “for some restaurateurs and chain restaurants, hiring

‘attractive’ women is part of a business model that deliberately targets heterosexual men customers” (p. 136).

In Matulewicz’s (2016) Canadian study on institutionalized sexual harassment in restaurants, appearance-based hiring practices and a call for improved employment standards for restaurant workers was discussed. Matulewicz (2016) highlights the combination of precarious work and limits to legal protection as contributing factors to the normalization of sexual harassment in British Columbia’s (BC) restaurants. Servers in Matulewicz’s (2016) study shared their experiences with appearance-based hiring practices. They explained that hiring managers are vocal about the specific image they want to uphold in their restaurants. One participant of the study, Jenn, mentioned that the manager spoke to some employees after her interview, labeling Jenn as “hot” and, therefore, a suitable candidate for the position (Matulewicz, 2016). Jenn explained that she felt pressure to prove that she was good at her job, regardless of looks (Matulewicz, 2016). Similarly, another participant in Matulewicz’s (2016) study spoke to appearance-based hiring standards and said, “I don’t think he would hire anybody who he didn’t see as being profitable” (p. 137). The suggestion that managers *sell* the appearance of their servers, is revealing.

Another example of appearance-based hiring was practiced by the Canadian restaurant chain *Moxies* that tagged resumes with a “110” if the applicant was not attractive to their standards. The “110” was adopted because adding a diagonal line between the pair of ones formed the word “NO,” signaling an unsuccessful applicant (Doorey, 2011, para. 3). These examples show that discriminatory hiring practices exist and are even encouraged in some restaurants. Yuracko (2016) found that restaurant managers create sexualized atmospheres to

increase profits. Creating a sexualized atmosphere can be achieved by hiring attractive servers and ensuring that they *look the part* through specific dress codes (OHRC, 2015).

Restaurant dress codes can promote the sexualization of servers and potentially encourage sexual harassment (Matulewicz, 2016; OHRC, 2015; Zaman, 2017). Women servers often portray hyper-feminine ideals through makeup, short skirts, high heels, and showing cleavage (Matulewicz, 2016). The OHRC (2015) found that dress codes not only impede a women's ability to do their work, but they also exclude gender-diverse individuals. The OHRC states that people are "often judged by their physical appearance and for not fitting or conforming to manufactured ideas about what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman'" (OHRC, 2015, n.p.). However, the OHRC (2015) argues that employer expectations that sexualize women employees for the sake of increasing profits are "no excuse for violating employees' human rights" (n.p.). While legislative efforts have addressed sexualized dress codes, this gendered problem continues today (Matulewicz, 2016; OHRC, 2015; Zaman, 2017). Employers entice servers to accept sexualized dress codes and tolerate sexual harassment because doing so will likely increase their tips (Fairey & Matulewicz, 2016). Some restaurants intentionally create an atmosphere that may lead to sexual harassment, and when it occurs, women servers are deemed as "deserving" of it (Johnson & Madera, 2018, para. 6).

It's a hot button issue. There is no question that the restaurant industry has a harassment problem... 'Every woman I know has been harassed at work' (Coffey, 2018, para. 6).

In a recent Statistics Canada report, Burczycka (2020) shared that in general, women workers experience sexual harassment and discrimination at a greater volume than men. Furthermore, in the province of BC, this statistic rings true where women experienced heightened inappropriate behaviour and discrimination in the workplace (Burczycka, 2020). Researchers found that sexual harassment of women is so embedded in the restaurant industry

that it is seen as a “regular”, “inevitable”, or “normalized” – simply, *part of the job* (Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Johnson & Madera, 2018; Matulewicz, 2017). While *part of the job*, some servers do try to challenge it, as evidenced by the fact that restaurant employees in the U.S. file more sexual harassment claims than in any other work sector (Bliss & Collins, 2020). The difficulty of dealing with sexual harassment in restaurants is compounded when management perpetuates it.

In a case study entitled, *What is at Stake at JJ Steak*, Bliss and Collins (2020) introduced readers to Shelly, a woman server who routinely experienced sexual harassment from management (Bliss and Collins, 2020). Bliss and Collins (2020) explained how Shelly, a young server, felt uncomfortable when her physical appearance was commented on by a new manager who said, “I can see why your sales are so high”, and followed the statement with a wink (Bliss & Collins, 2020, p. 390). The manager later extended an invitation to Shelly to join a group of coworkers to go out and drink after work hours. Shelly obliged but was caught off guard when the manager was sitting alone, and greeted her with “well, I guess it's just the two of us tonight” (p. 390). To protect herself, Shelly told the co-worker that she had a partner and had no interest in pursuing romantic relationships with people from the workplace (Bliss & Collins, 2020). The manager laughed and dismissed her comments by telling other employees that Shelly “couldn’t resist his charm for long” (p. 391). Shelly reported these incidents to senior management, where she was told the harasser's behavior did not seem “that bad” (p. 391). This example shows how restaurant management can perpetuate sexual harassment by dismissing and downplaying its impact when reported.

In Canada, Burczycka (2020) found that 44% of women experienced harassment by a person in authority, and 1 in 8 women reported they had been sexually assaulted at work at some

point in their lives. In a restaurant context, Allen and Latimer (2018) interviewed a woman who reflected on her time as a 17-year-old server who experienced harassment when a supervisor put his hand over her shoulder, slid it down her arm, and cupped her breast. She explained that after her body froze, she felt “ashamed and alone, like there was no one to tell” (Allen & Latimer, 2018, para. 33). Alongside the physical and sexual harassment perpetrated by men in restaurant management positions, Matulewicz's (2016) study found that verbal harassment such as “sexually explicit banter, jokes, and innuendo were considered reasonable social interaction...between employees and managers” (p. 133). Indeed, when women do report workplace harassment, they often are met with victim-blaming (Bloisi, 2018).

The reality of victim-blaming in restaurants is “a tale as old as time” where harassment complaints can result in women being labelled attention-seekers or sluts (Goldsmith, 2018, para. 10). For example, a woman server in the U.S. rejected sexual advances from her manager but continuously faced harassment in other forms, such as receiving unwanted sexually explicit photos (Burstein, 2009). After reporting this issue to higher management, she was first ignored and then fired (Burstein, 2009). In another study, a woman server recounted a time where a chef groped her (Goldsmith, 2018). After reporting this to management, she was met with responses such as “he was just being playful” and “he didn't mean anything by it because he was drinking” (Goldsmith, 2018, para. 7). The server's actions were also called into question by coworkers with “I believe you *but...*” and “was it really that big of a deal?” (Goldsmith, 2018, para. 8-9). These accounts suggest that victim-blaming is a common strategy used to protect employees and managers who are men but also to protect the reputation of the restaurant.

Gender-based hierarchies in the workplace can contribute to sexual harassment but so does the influence of customer tipping (Coffey, 2018; Dixon, 2018; Matulewicz, 2016). Tipping

is an important feature of the serving industry, and with this reality, Duggan (2017) explains that women servers are placed in uniquely vulnerable situations. She writes,

Despite decades of progress in women's rights, as a young waitress, I often felt that male customers saw me as no different than a wench in a medieval tavern, someone for whom being pretty and young and pleasing can, in essence, be a transactional part of the job (Duggan, 2017, para. 3).

Servers rely on tips, but sexual harassment is often the 'price' they pay for them.

According to Fairey and Matulewicz (2016) "if workers do resist by, for example, speaking up against customers who are harassing them, they risk losing a tip" (para. 9). In a study about tipping and harassment, Abrams and Einhorn (2018) found that many servers are willing to tolerate harassment in exchange for tips. They share an example from a server who said,

There was a guy, he was like, 'Hey, can I get your number?' And then he was asking where I live, how old I am, what school I go to, a lot of personal questions that I didn't want him to ask. I breezed by it. You can't just say, 'No, don't talk to me that way,' or else you won't get a tip. Afterwards, he had the tip money in his hand — he was like, 'So you gonna give me your number?' (Abrams & Einhorn, 2018, para. 7).

In another study, Einhorn and Wichter (2018) interviewed women servers who gave examples of bribery through customer tipping. One server mentioned that a customer offered to pay her college tuition if she had an affair with him. In another example, Einhorn and Wichter (2018) describe why an underaged high school student tolerated a man flirting with her in front of his children. She did not want to risk losing a tip. Women tolerate this behaviour because standing up for oneself could result in lower tips or being chastised by management if the customer complains.

The literature shows that gendered practices and traditional views of *women's work* are reinforced in *restaurant work*. Women balance multiple social expectations, adhere to heteronormative gender roles, and are expected to invest and expend emotional labour. These traditional expectations apply to restaurants where women experience power imbalances

firsthand, sexist hiring practices, and experience sexual harassment. The existing research provides a backdrop to the pandemic experiences of women servers where those in essential serving positions are even more vulnerable than usual (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020). As discussed earlier, the impact of the pandemic has disproportionately affected women (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020). The pandemic has also made women's work-family responsibilities more onerous, forcing many to exit the workforce and focus on family needs (Desjardins & Freestone, 2020).

With experience as a pre-pandemic server, I was curious to see if the pandemic has affected women servers in Victoria, BC. I formulated the following research questions to gain insight into server experiences before and during the pandemic: *how do women servers in Victoria, BC perceive their restaurant work and has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their serving experiences?* Specifically, if the pandemic has changed the industry, what are these key changes, and might they affect the future of restaurant work?

Researching during a pandemic provided a unique opportunity to center women's voices and capture their experiences, insights, and concerns during a pivotal period of social change. While efforts are made across Canada to address gender inequalities through legislation and inclusive workplace policies, there is limited research exploring the influence of the pandemic on the experiences of women servers in restaurants. To guide this study, I applied three key theoretical frameworks.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

To build upon the existing literature and provide a theoretical foundation for the experiences of women servers before and during the pandemic, I relied on Erving Goffman's *dramaturgical approach* to social analysis, Candace West and Don Zimmerman's theory of *doing gender*, and the conceptualization of institutional sexism. First, I explored dramaturgical theory to examine how face-to-face interactions influence everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Second, while Goffman's dramaturgical approach provides an understanding of theatrical performance, I complimented this with West and Zimmerman's (1987) ideas on *doing gender*. *Doing gender* informs our understanding of how patriarchal expectations of women continue to perpetuate through binary thoughts of masculine and feminine *natures* (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Third, I drew upon the conceptual framework of institutional sexism, as outlined by Capodilupo's (2017) *Institutional Sexism* chapter in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender*. By applying these three perspectives, I aim to better understand women's experiences working in restaurants before and during the pandemic.

#### Dramaturgical Analysis

Goffman's approach to dramaturgical analysis is directly applied to women's serving roles in restaurants. Goffman (1959) defined dramaturgy as the theatrical performances in everyday life or, "the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others" (p. 15). In simple terms, Goffman argued that the social world is like a stage and humans are the performers. In our play, we can assume various roles. Some of Goffman's most insightful contributions to dramaturgical theory include metaphorical mask-wearing, social stages, and dramaturgical loyalty. These three aspects of dramaturgy are detailed below and then applied to restaurants.

Goffman (1959) introduces the idea of a *mask*. He claims that metaphorical masks are something performers display to an audience, but they are also part of the performer's identity. In this way, masks are part of the performers' costumes, but they also define the character's role, "the mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to" (Goffman, 1959, p. 19). In restaurants, women servers are expected to perform the feminine role that their audience expects. Their mannerisms, tone of voice, and facial expressions are adjusted to display this expected role.

Goffman's (1959) interest in metaphorical masks is particularly relevant to this research given that health orders during the pandemic required restaurant servers to wear literal masks (Basu, 2020; BC Centre for Disease Control, 2021; Government of BC, 2021). Wearing masks in this context was not to enhance the character's role but rather to protect servers and patrons. However, they did influence the serving performance and the customer experience, and to many, became the defining feature in their interactions. Mask-wearing, in a real sense, negatively influenced servers' ability to convey their metaphorical masks. For instance, for servers, facial expressions play an important role in helping them establish a rapport with customers.

Research has found that non-verbal communication, such as a server's smile, is monetarily significant in that it can increase their tips from customers (Riggio & Feldman, 2009; Wrench, 2013). With mandatory mask protocols in Canada, servers had to develop new ways to convey friendliness to their customers without relying on facial expressions. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of performance reinforces that social environments rely on the interactions between the performers and the audience, or in this case, the servers, managers, and patrons in the restaurant. Every character plays a necessary role in executing the dining performances that occur in restaurants across the country during the pandemic.

Informed by Goffman, the social stages apply to the physical stages of restaurants where décor, furniture, and staging props create the performance *setting* (Goffman, 1959). In restaurants, patrons might observe décors with rich textiles, artwork, televisions and music players, tables and chairs, and various props such as notepads and menus. Goffman (1959) suggested that the performance begins when the audience enters the theatre, and it ends when they leave. This idea relates to restaurant servers who play their expected role from when they arrive for work until they clock out at the end of their shift. Within the social stage, the *frontstage* refers to the required equipment so the audience can make sense of the social environment (Goffman, 1959). For example, in restaurants, the audience (patrons) might have expectations about what the environment would look like and who would be *taking care* of them during their visit. To expand, a customer in this context would likely expect restaurant signage, a waiting area, tables and chairs, menus, and a hostess station. In this way, the frontstage is the restaurant's front-of-house. While the *frontstage* refers to the standard practices *within* a social setting, the *personal frontstage* refers more to the individual performance for the audience.

The *personal frontstage* is one's physical characteristics, such as clothing, gestures, and facial expressions (Goffman, 1959). In restaurant work, servers' clothing matters because they often must adhere to feminine and sexualized dress codes. A restaurant's dress code reinforces the costumes they want their performers to wear, and these might include requirements for makeup, short skirts, and high heels to enhance their performance (Matulewicz, 2016). Next, performers must manage bodily gestures and facial expressions (Goffman, 1959). Restaurant staff and customers expect servers to convey an enthusiastic personal frontstage self to enhance the customer's experience. Goffman (1959) teases out what a personal frontstage is in the example of waiter in a café setting. He likened the waiter's performance to a *game* where all

movements, gestures, and voices remained mechanical and robotic during the performance. Seeing the waiter as someone playing a *game* applies to women servers who perform precise movements, gestures, and moderate their voices while serving, regardless of what is going on behind the scenes.

The idea of being behind the scenes or *backstage* refers to a remote region within the social stage hidden from the audience (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) argued that the backstage is a space where the performers could, in a way, drop their personal frontstage for a brief period. The backstage was a space to adjust their costumes to help ensure they remained in character (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, the backstage might be a space for servers to let down their guard and act outside of their expected character. One example of backstage could be in the back-of-house kitchen, where servers can temporarily drop their server persona. For example, servers might talk with coworkers differently than how they interact with customers. A server voice is often high-pitched and “squeals with theatrics” (Worrall, 2014, para. 1). In the kitchen, where the audience cannot see or hear what goes on, servers may speak in a more casual, less performative manner. In this way, Goffman’s conceptualization of backstage corresponds to the restaurant’s back-of-house area.

The walk-in freezer or staff washroom are other examples of backstage spaces in restaurants. These spaces are where servers can express emotion that is invisible to their audience. For example, walk-in freezers can be understood as *hurt lockers* where servers can reveal their genuine emotions (Nahman, 2020). As Green (2016) argues, sometimes there is no opportunity for servers to take off their masks, and “it can get to you...for me, that’s always been what’s been more tiring than the actual labor” (para. 19). Nonetheless, what occurs behind the

scenes in restaurants aligns with Goffman's (1959) idea of the backstage as a social space protected from the audience's view.

There are some exceptions to the idea of keeping the backstage guarded against the audience. For example, as Goffman (1959) explained, sometimes the audience may catch workers shifting between their personal frontstage and backstage. Worrall (2014) spoke to this when describing an observation of a shift in a server's behaviour. He mentioned that his server maintained a high-pitched voice and constant smile during their interactions, but her tone of voice voice changed when he overheard her talking with a co-worker. He explained that her body language also changed and became more *natural* (Worrall, 2014). This aligns with Goffman's (1959) illustrations on balancing frontstage with backstage in the example of a woman hosting a dinner party for friends. He argued that the woman would perform hostess and kitchen duties but also visit and talk with guests, switching back and forth between frontstage and backstage performances and role expectations (Goffman, 1959). Individuals who adhere to performance expectations demonstrate dramaturgical loyalty.

Goffman (1959) defined dramaturgical loyalty as players who must be willing to maintain an energetic performance "whenever, wherever, and for whomsoever" (p. 214). Goffman (1959) asserted that the performers must be convinced and taken in by their performances to prevent the audience from seeing it as an act. While Goffman's contributions remain widely studied in the social sciences, his publications face criticism from some feminists (Deegan, 2014; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2014; West, 1996). I aim not to discredit Goffman but rather contextualize how his dramaturgical work applies to my own. To exemplify some of the feminist criticisms Goffman has been subject to, Deegan (2014) reflected on her conversations with Goffman in her work *Goffman on Gender, Sexism, and Feminism*. In this book, Deegan

(2014) discussed how Goffman's writing was sexist in tone and often portrayed women as second-class citizens (Deegan, 2014). With that caveat in mind, I apply Goffman's dramaturgical ideas on performances and social stages independently from the gender analysis of my research because the performative lens allows me to understand how servers perform their roles in restaurants.

While Goffman explored gender in his book *The Arrangement Between the Sexes* (1977), I focus on his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) because it focuses on the conceptual intricacies of theatrical performances including masks, social stages, and dramaturgical loyalty. In this way, Goffman provides a helpful lens to deconstruct the complex social setting of restaurants and the *game* of serving performed within restaurants. While investigating women servers' performances are integral to this study, so is the exploration of gender. To build upon the Goffmanian approach of the performative nature of the self, West and Zimmerman's ideas on the performance of *doing gender* are crucial to understanding why women continue to reflect hyper-feminine ideals in restaurants.

### **Doing Gender Theory**

*Doing gender* is a concept showing that gender performance is rooted in traditional binary gender expectations and, like all social conventions, are sustained through ideology. I use this concept to explain how gender and feminine expectations play a significant role in understanding restaurants. Anchored in gender socialization theories, West and Zimmerman's (1987) *doing gender* theory entails both physical and behavioural aspects. Borrowed from Goffman, the term *gender display* also plays an integral role in *doing gender*. One's gender display refers to how gender "might be exhibited or portrayed through interaction, and thus be seen as 'natural' while it is being produced as a socially organized achievement" (West &

Zimmerman, 1987, p. 129). As we have already seen, women often perform in gendered ways (Smith, 2002). The literature confirms that feminine appearance-based standards continue to be imposed on women in the workplace. Like dramaturgical approaches to social analysis, physical gender displays are evident in serving roles. There is an expectation for women servers to portray hyper-feminine images through how they act and look.

Managing gender is the process of adhering to normative expectations deemed appropriate for one's 'masculine' or 'feminine' gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) describe the act of managing gender in their example of young girls learning to value their appearance as ornamental objects. For example, a woman's "normal" depiction would entail someone who cares about their figure, clothing, and hairstyle (West & Zimmerman, 1987). To parallel, women servers must also maintain a specific image via dress code stipulations. Women servers can be so objectified that scholars have posed the nickname *breastaurants* to refer to establishments that promote sexualizing women to increase profits (Bratton & Gold, 2017; Crain et al., 2016). Breastaurants are spaces that foster sexualization and capitalize on objectifying women (Tierney, 2015). This objectification reinforces the act of *doing gender*.

West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that *doing gender* goes beyond physical appearance. It is also performed. They draw upon the example of a man performing masculinity by taking a woman's hand to assist her across the street. In contrast, the woman would be performing femininity by passively accepting the help she does not need (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) share examples of normative feminine versus masculine behaviour. In restaurants, normative gender behaviour is displayed when a man pays the bill and tips the server. Or, when women servers tolerate abusive behaviour because they see themselves as

subordinate to men (Eisler & Fry, 2019). For women servers, doing gender, requires managing their physical appearance, being deferential to men, and acting in ways seen as socially desirable and acceptable to others.

West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest that physical and behavioural aspects of *doing gender* are also evident in the social divisions of labour. They outline the familiar example of *men's work* versus *women's work* and the attitudes and perceptions that accompany them (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Recognizing how gender divisions are socially constructed and maintained helps explain how work roles are assigned in restaurants. In restaurants, women are often portrayed as the face of the establishment, while men are more likely to be in positions of authority and seen as the brains behind the industry (Charlebois, 2016; Sachs et al., 2014). West and Zimmerman (1987) write,

An understanding of how gender is produced in social situations will afford clarification of the interactional scaffolding of social structure and the social control processes that sustain it (pp. 146-147).

The above excerpt applies to my research because it proposes a suitable framework that examines how the control exerted by management influences the treatment of women in the social structures of restaurants. Relating to Goffman, the above passage also demands an understanding of key performers and audiences within restaurants.

While West and Zimmerman (1987) do not exclusively claim a feminist lens in their work, they conclude by welcoming the practice of feminism into analyzing performance. They also highlight the value of feminism as it “can provide the ideology and impetus to question existing arrangements” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 146). In this way, applying a feminist lens to restaurants is both appropriate and necessary.

The binary masculine-versus-feminine framework employed in their writing is rightfully met with criticism. *Doing gender* “evokes the notion of creating difference rather than erasing it” (Deutsch, 2007). Some scholars propose deconstructing and actively *undoing* gender (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009). Understanding the construction of gender warrants an understanding of how gender can also be undone. For example, in *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler interrogated the notion of gender and argued that gender performativity is not a singular act but a set of constructed and repeated actions. Understanding the performance of gender in this way, it implies that it can also be undone. In short, *undoing gender* means challenging and rejecting feminine and masculine binaries (Butler, 1990; Risman, 2009). Risman (2009) provides the example of women, whether intentionally for feminists’ purpose or not, entering realms that are traditionally understood as arenas for men, such as sports. This example would be deemed a challenge to gender binaries.

While these scholars’ core works contribute to feminist theories and challenge the very construction of gender, I apply West and Zimmerman’s approach to *doing gender* because it provides a foundational sociological analysis into understanding how gender is performed in everyday social interactions in the workplace. To better understand why gender is performed in specific ways in the workplace, exploring the conceptual framework of institutional sexism is necessary.

### **Institutional Sexism**

An appreciation of institutional sexism is essential when exploring research that centers on women and work. Institutional sexism refers to practices of systemic gender discrimination structured into organizations, public institutions, and workplaces (Capodilupo, 2017). I adopt the concept of institutional sexism because it can be applied directly to my analysis of women

working in restaurants. Just as understanding the forms of *sexism* is essential to this research, recognizing how misogyny operates is also important. In short, Kate Manne (2018) argues that misogyny is not the hatred of women “rather, it’s primarily about controlling, policing, punishing, and exiling the ‘bad’ women that challenge male dominance” (para. 2). In a restaurant context, this example might look like a woman worker resisting restaurant norms or reporting incidents to men in managerial positions. As we know, men often dominate positions of authority and therefore women servers might not feel comfortable reporting incidents such as sexism to management (Charlebois, 2016; Sachs et al., 2014; Matulewicz, 2016). This is especially true when management is perpetuating the harassment themselves. Aligned with patriarchal social order, Capodilupo (2017) argues two main avenues of institutional sexism include 1) sexual harassment and 2) hiring, promotion, and salary practices. Institutional sexism can perpetuate sexism so insidiously that many women are unaware of it and may come to internalize it.

Common examples of sexual harassment might include subjecting women employees to sexual humour, unsolicited sexual photo sharing, and telling stories that objectify other women (Capodilupo, 2017). According to Capodilupo (2017), workplace *reactions* and *responses* to sexual harassment can reinforce institutional sexism. For example, Capodilupo (2017) illustrates how a woman employee might bring forward a sexual harassment report against her co-worker. In this context, Capodilupo (2017) suggests that responses to such instances will either be *supportive*, in that management might “grant the woman paid leave and issue a verbal warning to the male co-worker” or they will be *complicit*, meaning that management might allow the co-worker to “work uninterrupted with no penalty” (p. 941). When perpetrators of sexual

harassment go unpunished, workplaces perpetuate, tolerate, and normalize sexual harassment (International Labour Organization, 2018).

The idea of perpetuating sexual harassment applies to my research because it illustrates how women servers experience institutional sexism in restaurants. For instance, Matulewicz (2017) interviewed women servers in BC who discussed the normalization of *playing along* with sexual harassment. The participants in Matulewicz's (2017) study tolerated sexual harassment owing to the idea that the experience of it is an inevitable component of being a server. While sexual harassment is pervasive in the restaurant industry (Johnson & Madera, 2018), hiring, promotions, and salary practices also reflect forms of institutional sexism that can be applied to my study.

Unequal hiring, promotional, and salary practices disproportionately affect women (Capodilupo, 2017). Capodilupo (2017) writes, "women continue to occupy fewer advanced positions, receive fewer promotions, and receive lower wages than their male counterparts" (p. 941). Indeed, Capodilupo (2017) highlights the gendered concern of *likeability*, meaning women are not supposed to be assertive or fulfill dominant positions because of the pressure to be liked by others (Capodilupo, 2017). This relates to restaurants where women servers are expected to be liked by customers and uphold the *customer is always right* mentality.

Sexist gender expectations prevent women from being hired or promoted to senior positions in the workplace. If women display characteristics that do not adhere to their expected roles, they may face negative consequences. Capodilupo (2017) suggests that women "have to navigate a system that isolates them for being too dominant, whereas males are rewarded for being dominating" (p. 941). Salary differences between men and women is another expression of institutional sexism. Wage gaps continue to be an obstacle for all women workers in Canada. In

2018, Statistics Canada reported that, on average, women employees earn \$4.13 less per hour than men (Pelletier et al., 2019). Ferdman (2014) also found that in the U.S., women are being paid less than men in the food service industry, even after tips. This applies to food service ages in Canada as well. Statistics Canada (2021) reported that between 2016-2020, women aged 25-54 consistently earned less than men in the food service industry. These examples show how institutional sexism can contribute to a climate that normalizes sexual harassment, hiring and promotional issues, and gendered wage gaps. However, institutional sexism can also lead women to internalize their negative experiences in the workplace.

Institutional sexism operates so pervasively that women come to internalize their experiences of gendered mistreatment. Women's experiences with internalized sexism refers to enacting "learned sexist behaviours upon themselves and other women" (Bearman et al., 2009, p. 10). This relates to women servers in restaurants who see sexism as a regular part of the job (Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Johnson & Madera, 2018; Matulewicz, 2017). Understanding the internalization of sexist attitudes will help readers to better understand participants' insights into the gendered mistreatment of women servers in restaurants.

## Chapter 4: Research Design

Social research produces knowledge that helps us systemically learn, describe, engage, teach, and evaluate social phenomena (King & Sen, 2013; Leavy, 2017). Research requires one to carefully consider the design process and select a methodology that best suits the study. While *research design* refers to the plan, framework, and structure of the overall research, the *research method* refers to the tools and techniques used to collect data (Leavy, 2017). Research *design* is the *why* of the research while the research *method* is the *how*. I draw heavily from Leavy's (2017) work to support why capturing the participants' stories is necessary to answering my research questions.

In this chapter, I detail how I designed the research project and the process in which I used to conduct the study. I begin by outlining the steps I took to prepare for the study, explain the research paradigm, reference my positionality, share my reflexive techniques, and detail the overall research approach. Next, I outline my qualitative research methodology including interviewing, exploring ethical considerations, explaining the recruitment procedure, and detailing my data collection and analysis techniques.

The research design refers to the *planning* of the study (Leavy, 2017; Silva et al., 2016). In the initial stages of the research design process, it is crucial to consider some pragmatic issues. As Leavy (2017) proposes, researchers must ensure the topic they choose is researchable. She suggests that researchers must ask themselves if it is feasible to research the topic, given that some topics are impractical if you are not a member of, or familiar with the target community (Leavy, 2017). For example, I understood that my insight as a former server might enhance my understanding of this particular community. In addition, I recognized that including the pandemic perspective to my topic would be researchable, given that the pandemic is both timely

and topical. Another pragmatic issue to consider is one's influence *on* their research. According to Leavy (2017), researchers must recognize their own beliefs and perspectives before conducting research, which she refers to as one's research *paradigm*.

### **Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm can be likened to wearing sunglasses, “when you put on a pair, it influences everything you see” (p. 12). Leavy (2017) proposes the following model to identify the research paradigm: ontology + epistemology = paradigm. Ontology is a philosophical understanding of the researcher's world and their view of reality, while epistemology is how a researcher's thinking influences how they examine society (Leavy, 2017; Maruska, 2017; Stanley & Wise, 2002). In short, our epistemology relates to our value system and what we believe in, whereas our ontology relates to how we know these realities to be true. For example, both my epistemology and ontology refer to how I see the world, as informed by all my lived experiences as a woman, a daughter, a student, and a former restaurant server.

Understanding the importance of ontology and epistemology, especially in the social sciences, is vital. To explore the experiences of women servers before and during the pandemic, I needed to first recognize my own potential biases so that I could better reflect and explore what the women shared with me. According to Kienzle (1970), epistemological ideas are embedded in sociologists' understanding of individuals and their social relations. In addition, Giri (2017) asserts “the neglect of ontology is a crucial gap in modernistic sociology which continues to persist” (p. 29). The distinction between ontology and epistemology is blurry (Maruska, 2017) and there are various types of ontologies and epistemologies. For this study, I employed both *feminist* ontological and epistemological approaches.

Like ontologies in general, *feminist* ontologies are concerned with understanding human ways of *being* (Stanley & Wise, 2002). Human ways of being include both physical (body) and emotional (mind) components. However, feminist ontology rejects binary constructions of the relationship between the body and mind (Stanley & Wise, 2002). Instead, feminist ontological thought sees individuals as “historically, culturally, and contextually specific and also subtly changing in different interactional circumstances” (Stanley & Wise, 2002, p. 195). Feminist ontologies explore and reveal how gendered power relations permeate social structures (Maruska, 2017). As Stanley and Wise (2002) argue, feminist ontologies are “rooted in the acknowledgment that all social knowledge is generated as a part and a product of human social experience” (p. 192). Further, “nothing else is possible: there is no way of moving ‘outside’ experientially derived understandings/theories” and indeed, “nothing exists other than social life, our places within it and our understandings of all this” (Stanley & Wise, 2002, pp. 192-193).

Feminist ontologies apply to my research in that as a former server, I was already aware of how gendered hierarchies were at play in restaurants. Understanding some of the common gendered power relations in restaurants allowed me to formulate interview questions centered on women’s voices. Stanley and Wise (2002) argued that feminist ontologies are, in essence, the researcher’s “seat of experience” (p. 192). In this way, my seat of experience as a woman and former server allowed for a deeper understanding of the role of women servers in restaurants. Stanley and Wise (2002) argued that feminist ontology and epistemology are not separate entities, but are inextricably linked.

Feminist *epistemology* is how one understands the influence of their gender on social analysis and one’s way of seeing the world (Anderson, 2000; Grasswick, 2011). In other words, feminist epistemology situates knowledge within the embodiment of experiences (Anderson,

2000; Barbour, 2011). Various scholars unpack the understandings of feminist epistemology through prioritizing the value of knowledge production and dissemination. Notably, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) examines Black feminist thought, Dorothy Smith (1987) analyzes feminist standpoints, and Donna Haraway (1988) explores situated knowledges. Hill Collins, Smith, and Haraway are foundational to feminist thought despite their work not being contemporary. Their classical works on feminism in academia enhance feminist ways of knowing and learning.

Hill Collins' (1990) influential work, *Black Feminist Thought* challenges Western Eurocentric knowledge production and feminist epistemology. Hill Collins (1990) amplifies Black women's voices, experiences, and knowledge which are suppressed in Western scholarship (p. 10). She points out that epistemologies are created from the standpoint and interest of their creators and writes, "because elite white men and their representatives control structures of knowledge validation, white male interests pervade the thematic content of traditional scholarship" (Collins, 1990, p. 201). In this way, Hill Collins (1990) wants readers to understand that developing epistemological frameworks for Black women's perspectives is fundamental to feminist praxis.

In *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), Smith demands that we make space for women's lived experiences and unique perspectives. She posits that women have been traditionally excluded from knowledge dissemination due to *man's culture* (Smith, 1987). Within the socially constructed formations of *man's culture*, it is men's interests, experiences, and ways of knowing that are typically upheld and reinforced (Smith, 1987). Accordingly, Smith (1987) asserts that, in general, positions of power are "occupied by men almost exclusively" (p. 19). Similarly, Haraway explores social power in her work *Situated Knowledges* (1988) and asserts that knowledge evolves and varies from place to place and is, of course, produced in specific

contexts. These authors reinforce that there cannot, and should not, be one single feminist epistemology or way of knowing.

I argue that a feminist epistemology was essential to my research as a woman with embodied experience as a server. Indeed, Barbour (2011) argued, “my contention as a feminist is that the specifics of my embodiment are pivotal to epistemology too, just as the specifics of my cultural, social, discursive, and geographical context are also integral to what I can know” (p. 15). To summarize, Stanley and Wise (2002) assert that there is really “no way of moving ‘outside’ experientially derived understandings” and knowledge of the social world (p. 192). This research is rooted in an area where I have lived experience, and therefore, it is impossible to remain objective and unbiased (McHugh, 2014), nor do I want to. I believe that understanding my positionality and reflexivity are necessary steps in the research design process.

### **Positionality**

Before starting this research, I grappled with my positionality and how it might influence the study. Positionality is the practice of socially locating the researcher in relation to the topic they are investigating (Holmes, 2020). This includes recognizing how the personal characteristics and experiences of the researcher might influence the research (Berger, 2015). To reflect upon and mitigate my biases, I followed Berger’s (2015) three-fold model for assessing how one’s positionality can influence research.

First, Berger (2015) argued that a researcher’s positionality influences their access to the “field” because participants are more likely to share their experiences with researchers who understand and are sympathetic to their situation (p. 220). This idea applied to my research because I had been a server and understood restaurant responsibilities. With this insider knowledge, I was better able to contextualize servers’ stories, including insights on workplace

harassment and sexualization. I also understood how many of these practices become internalized. Given my own serving experiences, I felt well-prepared and equipped to understand the nuances behind what the participants were saying. I believe our shared experiences were part of the reason why participants felt comfortable sharing information beyond the scope of the specific interview questions I asked.

Second, Berger (2015) suggested that the researcher-researched relationship influences the information participants are willing to share. For example, Berger (2015) claimed that women participants might feel more comfortable discussing sexual experiences with other women rather than with men. Establishing connections with the participants was integral to my interview process. Before the interviews began, I introduced myself, reviewed my background in the serving industry, and explained how my experiences informed my current research. In doing so, I demonstrated some common ground to potentially diminish the existing hierarchal relationships between researcher and researched (Leavy, 2017). These conversations were essential to building trust and camaraderie with the participants. This camaraderie was evident when I recognized that participants made frequent comments such as “you know how it is” or “you’ve probably heard that before” during the interviews. Many also expressed their excitement by replying “yes!” or “exactly!” when I responded to their stories in a way that demonstrated I really understood what they were saying. Our shared experiences helped establish a connection that hopefully reduced any researcher-researched power dynamic that may have existed.

Third, Berger (2015) claimed that the researcher’s background influences the questions they pose, their language, and the lens they apply to the study. Even though participants knew I was approaching this research as a former server, I wanted to make sure that I was not asking questions in a way that would influence their answers. To appear as neutral as possible, I was

careful to ask open-ended questions without inflection or emphasis in my voice. I focused on listening carefully to the participants' stories, not the ones I wanted to hear. My insider knowledge helped me build trust and rapport with the participants by also using restaurant terminology and lingo when necessary. My insider knowledge assisted in the questions I posed, the language I used, and recognizing how my identity as a researcher aided my understanding of the power dynamics at play in restaurants.

Understanding my multiple identities (e.g., a white settler, cisgender, privileged, researcher, and former server) helped me check my biases. Feminist scholar McHugh (2014) offers practical advice on understanding researcher bias. She argued that researchers must analyze their positionalities and be aware that keeping a thoroughly objective and unbiased position is not possible or even desirable (McHugh, 2014). Given that my research was rooted in an area where I have lived experience, biases could certainly cloud my judgment. To help address biases, McHugh (2014) reminds readers that researchers should research in an open, non-exploitative way where participants' voices guide the study. I undertook a reflexive practice at all stages of the research process.

### **Reflexive Practices**

*Reflexive* practices refer to the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment of the researcher's relationship to their research (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018; Salzman, 2002). While *reflective* practices include learning, examining, and reliving the who, what, when, where, and why of social interactions, *reflexive* practices employ strategies to question how our values, prejudices, and attitudes may limit our understanding of social interactions (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018). I engaged in reflexive practice in my notetaking as well as numerous conversations with my supervisor. According to Leavy (2017), reflexive notetaking is the

process of regularly gut checking your role as a researcher through commenting on your feelings or personal questions to consider. Reflexive notetaking allowed me to jot down participants' demeanor and facial expressions throughout the interview process and to note my thoughts and insights during and after the interviews. Keeping a record of thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes is critical in reflexive practices (Leavy, 2017).

In addition, practicing reflexivity when talking with my supervisor helped me question the power dynamics at play between participants and myself (Etherington, 2004; Haynes, 2012). These reflexive conversations were a safe space for me to think aloud, potentially reveal my unconscious biases, and make sense of the stories that participants were telling me. Thus, acknowledging and addressing my personal biases played an ongoing role in the research process. Recognizing and assessing the research paradigm is a critical component in the research design process, as is the method one chooses to employ (Leavy, 2017). I carefully assessed which research method would be most suitable for the project.

## **Research Design**

The research design process is essential to ensuring that the researcher can answer their question as efficiently as possible. Leavy (2017) suggests that each research approach is characterized by different values and methodological practices (Leavy, 2017). There are five primary research designs and despite some overlap, it is useful to categorize them as mixed methods, arts-based, community-based/PAR, quantitative, and qualitative.

A mixed-method approach relies on researcher synergy, as it involves utilizing both qualitative and quantitative techniques to investigate social phenomena (Creswell, 1999; Leavy, 2017, p. 9). An arts-based approach relies on creative means of engagement such as music, dance, artwork, and performance to answer research questions (Leavy, 2017; Wang et al., 2017).

A community-based approach is referred to, by some, as participatory action research (PAR) and is an anti-oppressive, equity-seeking approach that involves both the researcher and non-academic community members (Leavy, 2017; Zhu, 2019). Community-based/PAR work is collaborative. Leavy (2017) sees qualitative and quantitative approaches as the most common in the social sciences and can be combined with the previous research approaches. Quantitative methods measure empirical variables to increase objectivity, while qualitative methods gather subjective information to reveal lived experiences (Leavy, 2017; Marvasti, 2004; Vyain et al., 2014). For this research, I assessed the research options and decided to employ a qualitative approach, as it seeks to document and validate participants insights and reflections of the participants than it was about counting the number of stories they told.

### **Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative methods aim to investigate, unpack, and understand the meanings people ascribe to their social lives (Leavy, 2017). This approach was more appropriate than a quantitative approach for a few reasons. First, while a quantitative method, such as fixed-choice surveys, can obtain valuable numerical data, this method does not allow respondents to share insights beyond answering the questions. Open-ended surveys can allow respondents to share as much or as little as they wish. However, this technique can be time-consuming and result in participant fatigue. Nonetheless, surveys are popular research methods because they provide statistical insight into popular opinions, trends, political issues and is appropriate for large-scale numerical analyses (Leavy, 2017). However, this method is too restrictive for my interests. I argue that using surveys, even if open-ended, do not allow researchers to probe participants on their responses and potentially uncover insights beyond the confines of the survey questions.

Second, a quantitative approach can measure social issues, but a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth analysis of participants' words, leading to richer data. Qualitative methods were better suited for this project because I examined how women servers' experiences have shifted during the pandemic. Third, qualitative methods give researchers the necessary time and space to unpack gender-based practices embedded in institutions (Smilde & Hanson, 2018). In this way, a qualitative approach can better reveal the gender-based assumptions and oppressive beliefs about women servers in restaurants today. While qualitative approaches are vital for social analysis, the researcher must be mindful of the *type* of qualitative research method they employ. Three of the most common qualitative methods are field research, content analysis, and interviews (Leavy, 2017). Field research involves participant observation, while content analysis documents narrative patterns in text or visual form (Leavy, 2017). Informed by my own serving experiences and academic background in women's and gender studies, I appreciated the value of listening to and centering women's voices. Therefore, this research employed in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews.

### **Qualitative Interviewing**

In-depth interviews are open-ended and allow participants to take the conversation where they want to go. Asking open-ended questions helps participants engage in conversations in ways that feel natural (Evans, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to listen actively and probe accordingly, two essential techniques to building rapport with participants and further exploring comments and insights as they emerge (Leavy, 2017). During the interviews, I relied on active listening techniques and eye contact to demonstrate my ongoing engagement with the information and the stories the participants shared.

I was also able to draw upon previous information that participants mentioned throughout the interview. For instance, most participants told me the names of restaurants in which they *used* to work. Thus, I asked questions such as “was this similar to your experiences at [previous name of restaurant]?” or “I know you mentioned the dress code at [previous name of restaurant] was...”. Because I had the context of their previous work histories, I could better explore their lived experiences before and during the pandemic and demonstrate my active listening. Leavy (2017) argues that probing is valuable for researchers to collect richer data. By asking open-ended questions, I probed as needed and helped guide the participants to expand on their comments when warranted. For example, “would you mind walking me through that?”, “can you please expand on that?” or “what exactly do you mean by that?” By using probes, I could preemptively fill in potential gaps and provide further clarity on what participants were sharing.

Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to gather information about participants’ body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Denham and Onwuegbuzie (2013) suggest “qualitative researchers have at their disposal an array of nonverbal behavior that can be collected” (p. 12). Qualitative research expands the social analysis to include information that would not be available through surveys or other quantitative methods. For my study, context and nuance were instrumental in helping me understand what the participants were saying. When one is hearing personal stories, researchers must ensure that ethical considerations are followed carefully.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Adhering to all ethical considerations is paramount especially when researching with human subjects. In the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) application, I assessed and outlined all the steps and considerations involved in my proposed

research. After receiving HREB approval (Appendix A), I was ready to begin the study. As defined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement's (TCPS2) *Ethics Framework: Core Principles* article 1.1., three ethical principles guided my research: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice.

*Respect for persons* recognizes the “intrinsic value of human beings” and promotes autonomy (TCPS2, 2020). The TCPS2 (2020) suggests that researchers can respect autonomy by obtaining informed consent from all participants. Therefore, I distributed consent forms through email and collected verbal, recorded consent before the interview began. Establishing initial and ongoing trust is integral to research. Leavy (2017) suggests that establishing trust with participants promotes higher confidence when making assertions.

For *concern for welfare* and *justice*, the TCPS2 suggests that participants should be treated fairly and made aware of the potential risks and benefits of the research. One of the risks for participants was being asked sensitive questions. Therefore, I ensured all participants were aware that their participation was completely optional, as outlined in the consent form (Appendix B) that reinforces participants could stop and leave the interview at any point. In no way would participants be encouraged to carry on with an interview if they did not wish to continue. In addition, given my experience of working in restaurants, I understood my interview questions might have provoked unwanted memories for the participants. I attached a list of gender-based mental health and anti-discrimination resources in the consent form for all participants.

I also assessed the benefits of this research. Providing a safe space for participants to be heard would hopefully allow participants to share experiences and concerns they may have never before discussed. Another benefit to the research is that the concerns and experiences of participants, as addressed in the data, may be beneficial for public educators or Canadian

policymakers who might use my findings to initiate workplace change. This study will also contribute to the historical understanding of the pandemic from women servers directly impacted.

### **Recruitment Procedure**

The recruitment for this study occurred via social media and snowball sampling. The participant criteria for this study were relatively narrow. Potential participants had to identify as women between the ages of 19-29, have at least one year of serving experience since 2015 in a restaurant located in Canada, and have at least 100 hours of restaurant serving experience in Victoria since March 2020, when the pandemic struck and caused significant disruptions to the industry. Social media platforms are valuable tools for recruitment as they offer a broad audience of potential participants (Gelinis et al., 2017). However, recruiting during a global pandemic meant that all correspondence with participants and the interview themselves *had to* occur virtually.

I first distributed the call for participants in the form of a digital poster shared on my personal Facebook page (Appendix C) but made it clear that people I knew personally would be excluded from the study. However, I did encourage my Facebook friend list to share the recruitment poster to their own social networks. By friends I know personally, my recruitment poster reached private Facebook groups of restaurant workers and a Victoria-based shift-swapping group. This recruitment strategy resulted in four participants for this study. Alongside social media recruitment, I also recruited participants through snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling relies on referrals from colleagues or friends who have connections to potential interviewees (Johnson, 2014; Leavy, 2018). For this study, I used snowball sampling through the means of reaching out to my supervisor, Dr. Ravelli, and a few trusted colleagues

and friends in Victoria. Through connections, Dr. Ravelli contacted former students at UVic who had serving experience. Alongside this, a few of my friends reached out to their social circles and shared the study information by word-of-mouth. Through the snowball recruitment strategy, I gathered two more participants for the study. At this time, I had six participants in total and was hoping to recruit at least one more. Thus, I reached out to the gender studies department at the University of Victoria (UVic) and asked them to share my recruitment poster. I was able to recruit the final participant through this means. In total, I gathered seven participants for this study (within my set goal of 6-8 participants). I did not reject any volunteers that expressed interest in this study. Due to time and resource constraints, seven case studies were most manageable. Smaller participant case studies are not necessarily a problem, but there is some debate about the quantity of participants that are desirable in qualitative research (Dworkin, 2012; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Vasileiou et al., 2018). According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), “given that an individual person can generate hundreds or thousands of concepts, large samples are not necessarily needed to generate rich data sets” (p. 1373). In this way, there is value in upholding individual stories and validating experiences through prioritizing quality over quantity of interviews.

In the recruitment poster, all potential participants were encouraged to email me directly if interested in the study. To ensure their eligibility, I sent all participants a mandatory questionnaire on SurveyMonkey (Appendix D). The first four questions directly assessed if the interested individuals met the eligibility criteria. The following three questions were *optional* because they pertained to demographic information about race, disability, and queer identity. I asked these questions to gain a general sense of participants’ backgrounds and to potentially provide context to their stories. After confirming participants’ eligibility, I distributed consent

forms to inform them about the details of my research interests. I established verbal, recorded consent at the beginning of the interviews. I also ensured participants had a clear understanding of their role in this study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

### **Participant Demographics**

As mentioned, the eligibility parameters for this research were relatively narrow, given that I was interested in exploring a particular demographic and *type* of food service industry where gendered or sexualized experiences of women servers is heightened. Therefore, I analyzed the experiences of servers working in alcohol-forward establishments where harassment is widespread (Abrams & Einhorn, 2018; Wallace, 2017). As Abrams and Einhorn (2018) argue, restaurants are often “casual environments where alcohol lightens the mood and erodes boundaries” (para. 8). I restricted the research to women because women workers are more likely to fulfill forward-facing serving roles in restaurants and are more likely to be sexualized due to a large customer base of men (Charlebois, 2016; Sachs et al., 2014; Matulewicz, 2016). I also implemented the age limitation of 19-29 because Statistics Canada (2019) recognizes the age range of “youth” being 19-29. Further, I believed that focusing on women close to my age might allow me to more easily establish camaraderie with participants.

Participants for this project had to have at least one year of serving experience since 2015 in restaurants located in Canada and at least 100 hours worked since March 2020, when BC Health authorities implemented the pandemic measures. The year 2015 was implemented to keep this research contemporary enough to capture some of these participants’ most recent social attitudes and experiences. Additionally, I wanted to establish familiarity with the longevity of participants’ serving experiences over these recent years, where they would likely be familiar with standard restaurant norms and dynamics. I also wanted participants to have at least 100

hours of serving experience since March 2020 to ensure they had a significant amount of experience working during the pandemic.

I interviewed seven participants that met the criteria for this research: Abby, Bailey, Claire, Dakota, Emma, Freya, and Georgia (alphabetical pseudonyms were created to protect the participants' identities). Most participants had experience working in various establishments from family-oriented to party-based environments. During the interviews, three participants spoke to their experiences working in breweries (Abby, Dakota, Freya), two participants were serving in pub and lounge environments (Bailey & Claire), and the other two were working in more local, family-oriented restaurants (Emma & Georgia). All participants had both past and recent experience serving alcohol. After gathering all eligible participants, I interviewed all seven of them at their earliest convenience.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data for this research through 1-hour, in-depth, semi-structured, recorded interviews via Zoom. All participants provided verbal consent for the Zoom recordings. For convenience, I did not request participants to both sign and verbalize consent. Only verbal consent was obtained. As approved by HREB, this method of receiving formal consent was sufficient. Participants could choose between Zoom video or audio interviews. All seven participants consented to video recordings and thus, all interviews were video recorded. I chose the platform of Zoom because of its popularity and because UVic researchers were not allowed to conduct face-to-face interviews during the height of the pandemic. However, virtual, video-form interviews were beneficial in that they allowed me to observe the participants' body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, all important practices of social analysis integral to qualitative research (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Leavy, 2017).

I designed an interview guide with a list of open-ended questions to ask participants. For qualitative research, interview guides include a list of topics that the interviewer “hopes to cover during the course of an interview” (DeCarlo, 2018). Leavy (2017) suggests that researchers should consider the *order* of the questions by beginning with broader questions and then narrowing them in on more specific ones. Accordingly, I divided the interview guide into two main sections (Appendix E). First, I encouraged participants to broadly reflect on their serving experiences in a *pre*-pandemic world from 2015 onwards. These preliminary questions aimed to facilitate some general discussion about participants’ perceptions of restaurants and experiences of serving. . To encourage participants to reflect on their experiences of serving *before* the pandemic, I inquired about four main topics:

1. the dynamics of their workplace
2. the dress codes
3. the expectations of how to maximize customer satisfaction
4. if their gender has ever played a role in an uncomfortable work situation

Following this, I asked participants to focus more narrowly on their serving experiences *during* the pandemic. Here, the inquiries became more specific:

- if/how the pandemic measures have impacted the way they provide customer service
- if they experienced any lay-offs or reduced hours since the pandemic
- how they would want things to change based on their serving experience during the pandemic
- what their biggest challenges have been with serving during the pandemic
- if they have felt sexualized or objectified in the workplace since the pandemic
- if they have any speculations on the impact of the pandemic on the future of serving

- if there was anything they would like to add based on their reflections from serving before and during the pandemic

While the areas of inquiry were few, these questions led to deeper discussions because participants were free to take the conversation where they pleased. To increase the depth of responses, when necessary, I relied on probes that I had prepared in advance in case participants answered questions with vague or minimal responses. I thanked the participants after each interview. Some participants expressed gratitude for having the space to reflect on their serving experiences. One participant (Dakota) mentioned that despite years of serving experience, she had not yet reflected on some of these questions. Another participant (Bailey) asked me to say hello if I am ever in the area where she works. Of course, I did not ask participants for any feedback regarding how they found the interview, nor did I expect their expressions of gratitude. However, these remarks helped gauge how I could continue to establish rapport with the remainder of the participants in the study. In addition, after completing each interview, I emailed the participants to thank them and provided each participant with a \$15 e-gift card of their choice. These gift cards served as honorariums for the time and energy they contributed to this study.

I reflected at all stages of the research. I journaled during the interviews and afterward. I wrote about my initial impressions and any notes that might become relevant as I reflected on the data later on. For example, I noted that one participant was in a public space during the interview (what appeared to be a coffee shop). I also noted how another participant kept glancing at someone who was in the same room as them during the interview. These analyses were essential to memo as they helped me to understand potential feelings of nervousness. In addition, I noted when their tone of voice changed when I asked specific questions. For example, two interview

questions commonly resulted in (what appeared to be) uncomfortable or nervous laughter. These questions were: 1) have you ever challenged a dress code? and 2) do you feel comfortable reporting workplace incidents to management? Using video-recorded interviews meant that I could re-visit the interview and further analyze and reflect upon their body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, allowing me to reconsider my initial thoughts and ensure they accurately represented what was said, and how.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis requires researchers to focus in-depth on the meanings behind participants' words rather than counting them (Schutt, 2018). To help look for these meanings, I transcribed all interviews. Leavy (2017) reminds researchers to consider whether to include participants' everyday colloquialisms and words such as "um" or "like" (p. 142). I decided to transcribe all interviews verbatim. In these transcriptions, I also included any laughs, sighs, or pauses that occurred. Including these elements helped to contextualize and derive meaning beyond the words the participants were saying. I saved all recordings and transcriptions from the interviews on a password-protected file on my laptop. When analyzing the data, I followed six thematic analysis phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006); familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining/naming the themes, and producing the report (of the findings/results from the data).

To begin familiarizing myself with the data, I typed the transcriptions after each interview. I found it helpful to do this immediately after each interview because personal thoughts, remarks, and considerations were still fresh in my mind. I saved electronic copies of the transcriptions but worked with printed, physical versions that I destroyed after completing the coding process. During this stage, I created handwritten analytical memos and mind maps as

marginalia on the printed copies. Analytical memos are short analyses that are “comparable to journals, lab notebooks, and blogs by allowing researchers to reflect and record” in a way that increases critical thinking (Rogers, 2018, p. 890). As a visual learner, I also created mind maps to help me organize my ideas. According to Ahlberg and Wheeldon (2019), mind maps are “useful tools for qualitative researchers because they offer a means to address researchers bias and ensure data are collected in ways that privilege the participant experience” (p. 1113). I preferred working with the transcriptions by hand rather than on a computer because it allowed me to become intimately familiar with the data. To deeply engage with the words participants were sharing, I manually coded all transcriptions from this study.

Manual coding is a laborious task (Basit, 2003), but it was practical given the fact I was exploring seven case studies. I began the analysis directly on the printed transcripts by highlighting key words and phrases. Following Saldana’s (2013) coding manual, I extracted keywords, quotes, or summaries and recorded each unique point on an index card, using a different colour ink for each participant. In total, there were 72 index cards containing keywords and quotes. I coded descriptively, meaning that I used nouns to summarize segments of the interviews (Leavy, 2017). Descriptive coding “summarizes the primary topic of the excerpt” (Saldana, 2013, p. 4). Sprawled across my living room floor, I sorted, grouped, and re-grouped the 72 index cards, resulting in 28 codes. Next, I created a codebook on paper where I defined the codes and included the frequencies of when these codes arose. To ensure the credibility of these frequencies, I imported the transcripts into *NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis* Software program and exported a “codebook” where accurate frequencies were detected and reported. I then created a new set of index cards representing each of the 28 codes. I searched for salient themes through thematic analysis by sorting and resorting the 28 index cards (codes).

Various themes are embedded in qualitative interviews, and therefore, thematic analysis “should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Thematic analysis is fundamental to qualitative research because the goal is to investigate participants’ lived realities (Evans, 2018). As Leavy (2017) points out, a theme or category might be an “extended phrase or sentence that signals a larger meaning behind a code or group of codes” (p. 152). Categorizing is the process of grouping similar codes together before finding thematic patterns (Leavy, 2017, Saldana, 2013). At this stage, Leavy (2017) suggests that researchers should ask themselves what the *essence* of the data are telling them. The first theme that emerged from working with the 28 codes was that restaurants are gendered establishments. The subthemes of this included division of labour, mistreatment, dress codes, and the need for better support. The second theme was the precarity of serving during a pandemic with subthemes of the influence of mask-wearing, health and safety, additional labour, and enforcing pandemic protocols. The third and final theme that emerged was the future of restaurants post-pandemic where the subthemes included challenging appearance-based standards, taking health and safety of workers seriously, and enforcing boundaries.

This chapter aimed to outline why my research design process centered qualitative methodology as most suitable for this study. In doing so, I outlined the research paradigm, explored the value of my positionality and reflexivity, explored the design process, highlighted the importance of qualitative interviewing, ethical considerations, participant demographics, data collection and analysis. All aforementioned methodological steps for this study were followed carefully to answer the research question(s): *how do women servers in Victoria, BC perceive their restaurant work and has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their serving experiences?* Specifically, if the pandemic has changed the industry, what are these key changes and might

they affect the future of restaurant work? To answer these questions, the following chapters will detail the key findings from this study.

## Chapter 5: A Taste of Gendered Restaurant Work

This chapter will discuss some of the participants' general perceptions of their serving experiences before the pandemic. The goal here is to provide readers with an understanding of some common restaurant norms before examining if these norms have shifted during the pandemic. The initial interview questions aimed to establish familiarity with participants' perceptions of working in restaurants by asking them to reflect on their experiences as servers before the pandemic. Within this finding, four subthemes emerged from the data: restaurant roles divided along gender lines, experiences of harassment, dress code policies, and the need for better support.

### **Restaurants as Gendered Establishments: Do you know what that is, sweetie?**

*I always like when they would name this drink Irish Car Bomb, they'd be like, 'oh, do you know what that is, sweetie?' (Bailey)*

Women workers experience the worst of sexist treatment from customers and coworkers alike (Charlebois, 2016; Hill, 2016; Jaffee, 2016; Sachs et al., 2014). In the above quote, Bailey speaks to how her role as a server has subjected her to gendered assumptions and patronizing comments. All seven participants reported having gendered work roles, tasks, and experiences across their serving careers. As described earlier, there is a clear divide in restaurants where men work in back-of-house roles such as cooking and management positions while women dominate front-of-house positions such as hostessing and serving. During the interviews, all participants confirmed that men typically dominate cooking positions. Two participants underscored that while scarce, some women do work in culinary areas. For example, one participant, Emma, explained that at her previous workplace, two women worked in the kitchen out of fifteen employees. Likewise, Bailey mentioned that "a couple" of women were working in cooking

positions, but “they were all in confectionary or the dessert area”. Historically, confectionary work has been a space reserved for women who are “relegated to the pastry section of the kitchen [and] removed from the hot line” (Tomky, 2018, para. 1). Research suggests that baking dessert is seen as feminine and cooking meat is considered masculine (Freedman, 2019; Tomky, 2018). In this way, we see how food and cooking positions are gendered, as are bartending roles.

Two participants mentioned that it is “rare” and “infrequent” for women to bartend, another area in the restaurant known to be men’s domain (Barleen, 2019). Abby, however, has experience in various serving capacities. She explained that bartending positions would be assigned based on a promotional basis. The typical hierarchy was dining room server, lounge server, and bartender. She explained, “females would go from lounge server to bartender, but if you were a male, you would go right from dining room server to bartender...so you would kind of like, in a way, skip a step”. Abby asserted that dining room service is more formal because there is a responsibility to serve families. In contrast, lounge service and bartending roles are more informal, and there is more leniency with rules such as dress codes. Likewise, Bailey has bartender experience and explained the flexibility associated with this role; “we did have a bar tab to give someone a free drink if they were having a bad day or give a regular one of their beers covered”. These quotes indicate more flexibility and discretion associated with bartending positions where dress codes are not as strict and giving out free menu items is acceptable. While there is a changing nature of women taking on bartending roles, sexist assumptions of *who* is most suitable for these positions prevail. As another participant, Georgia emphasized,

*When I first started, it was very rare for a girl to be behind a bar. It was only men. And they were like, a tight crew of men working behind the bar and servers were women most of the time...That was the job where I ended up working as a bartender too... and things were kind of, changing in that sense but I think the mentality stays for sure (Georgia)*

Similarly, Bailey shared that men consistently fill bar manager, sommelier, and other senior positions in her workplace. In fact, all participants but one, Dakota, who is presently a manager herself, spoke about the trend of restaurant managers being men. Dakota noted that out of a staff of “120 people altogether, all of upper management are male”. Dakota’s unique position clearly reinforces the gendered nature of the restaurant she works in.

Another participant, Freya mentioned there was not only a “huge gender divide” in restaurant roles but, “men were put into managerial roles even if they were unqualified for the job”. I asked her to expand on this. She shared an experience from her former job when upper management was hiring a new general manager. She detailed the hiring decision which came down to a woman with managerial experience and “a guy who was a bartender and didn’t really want the job”. She explained that the man was given the job over the more qualified woman. For Freya, this observation clearly reinforced that management favoured men with less managerial experience than women who are more qualified. Comparatively, another participant, Georgia, believes men are “the favorites” when applying for management positions, but beyond that, they are actually seen as having different approaches to their work. She said:

*I have a feeling that women servers are seen as an occupation and male servers, it’s a career. So, I’ve often noticed that guests are going to ask me, what else do I do? And it’s like, well, I’m doing this. This is what I’m doing now. Maybe I have other plans but why do you assume that I should have other plans? I don’t think those comments are asked to my male coworkers, it’s just kind of assumed that this is a career for him. And so, we’re not respected as much and it shows. (Georgia)*

It was vital for me to understand *why* participants believe management positions are still primarily reserved for men. When probing, several participants reported that men are treated differently than women in the industry. For example, Emma said, “I feel like men, just, their opinion is more valued”. Similarly, Claire believes “they are more respected”, and Bailey said, “the males were treated better, they were treated a little bit more professionally”. These quotes

demonstrate how women servers perceive gender-based differences in how they are treated compared to men in restaurant work. However, women also experience gendered treatment from guests. Four participants noted that they feel frustrated when customers doubt their knowledge. For example, the following quotes from two participants illustrate the perception that the four participants shared:

*A lot of customers ask beer-related questions towards males a lot more than they would ask toward females. (Abby)*

*The fact that I knew everything on tap, like beers. They'd be like 'hmm'. I'm like yes, I'm a female but it is my job to know what's on tap... If I spouted off about whiskeys or ryes or the difference between the two, guys wouldn't believe me. (Bailey)*

For Dakota, despite being in a managerial position, this knowledge-doubting has occurred more than once:

*There's been a number of times where folks will, customers, will ask me a question and then maybe they're not super happy with my answer, so they will go and ask the nearest man the same question. Even though I am in charge. So that's, that's been like, more than once that that has happened.*

These quotes underscore that some servers believe men receive more deference to their knowledge than women in restaurants. Even though men dominate managerial positions and represent a minority of servers, Emma argued that men “do a better job” in their serving roles. I asked her to expand on this. She justified the claim and stated:

*I think that they are allowed to be more themselves. When they go up to a table, they are just - they've been taught to be themselves. So, when they go up to a table, they can just work the table instead of just like, kind of, adhering to a social script as a woman that you kind of do. (Emma)*

Adhering to gendered stereotypes, such as expected social scripts, is typical for customer service workers (Brannan et al., 2013; Hall, 1993; Hodson & Sullivan, 1995). Brannan et al. (2013) argue that adhering to these social expectations become routinized. Participants mentioned that managers emphasize other routinized, typical service industry ideals such as

“service over everything” (Bailey), “seeking affection” from customers (Abby), and being “super friendly” (Claire) with guests. To gather more information on restaurant values, I inquired about other expectations from management that might be unique to restaurants. In doing so, I asked participants to speak about what restaurant managers expect from them. All participants recognized that their role expectations were gendered. For example, Claire mentioned that management expects women to serve groups of men even if they are not sitting in her assigned section. She stated, “managers wanted girls to serve guys”. Bailey also mentioned this issue by saying, “if a customer requested a server and she is on the other side of the restaurant, it doesn’t matter, they don’t give a rat’s ass about you walking the extra steps, they don’t care about anything”. These quotes capture some of the negative feelings that servers have when adhering to expectations from management.

### **Brushing Off Mistreatment: They Don’t Give a Rat’s Ass**

Similar to Bailey’s perception of management not giving a “rat’s ass” about servers, Abby explained that sexual harassment is often brushed off by management and sometimes by other servers. She claimed, “it was expected that like, you’re gonna have a creepy dude that sits at the bar”. She shared a time where she was mistreated by a co-worker and management brushed it off:

*One of our high-up chefs...had a really, really bad anger problem and he had kind of, like, snapped at a few of our servers and actually snapped at one of my close friends and like, so many people had reported him saying ‘this is not a safe working environment’...but because he was so close with all our higher-up managers, nothing ever happened. (Abby)*

Other participants echoed this idea of brushing off harassment despite feeling unsafe.

Emma shared an incident where she accidentally spilled part of a drink on her co-worker:

*He stands up and he's like 'you're lucky', something or other, 'otherwise I would strangle you!' ... He just looked up and down at me like, 'I can fucking take you, don't mess with me' ... I went to my manager and she was like, 'he's just that kind of person, you have to tolerate him' ... I was outraged but I couldn't do anything about it. It was a powerless situation. (Emma)*

This incident underscores how threatened Emma felt by a co-worker. Freya and Georgia spoke about similar experiences:

*I've put up with a lot of stuff that I didn't feel super comfortable with... There was this one guy who, I think it was on my first shift, grabbed my ass... I didn't even know this person's name and he didn't know mine. I was just like, "excuse me?" and he worked there for a year after... the managers knew about all the stuff he was doing... [he] was a frequent issue and I know I witnessed him making other staff members really uncomfortable... a lot of times it was just like, what comes with the job. (Freya)*

*We had some issues of a server being a little date-rapey with one of our coworkers. He quit and that was over but when he came back from wherever he was and knowing our complaints about him, management still let him back... we all went and complained. My partner lost his job that day because he was so frustrated about the fact that his comments have not been heard and the co-worker that felt that harassment, her comments were not heard... But it was, yeah, that didn't feel safe. (Georgia)*

The above excerpts underscore the reality of women tolerating harassment from their coworkers in the restaurant industry. Two participants continued describing *how* they manage these incidents where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe:

*Maybe I wasn't aware of it because it's just part of the job so it's like 'whatever!' (Freya)*

*You normally have to laugh it off. That's kind of the, the mode. (Emma)*

Some servers will laugh off the harassment they experience. Research suggests that, in general, a forced and fake laugh is used as a coping mechanism when women feel uncomfortable or do not know *how* to react to harassment (Fritz, 2014; Murphy, 2016; Olsen, 2016). Olsen (2016) argued that laughter is “almost a reflexive ruse” (para. 8). Serving requirements have sometimes gone beyond tolerating harassment from customers and coworkers alike. As Abby and Claire argued, servers are “commodified” to “sell” a particular experience and personality,

especially for guests who are men. Emma explained that women servers are “part of a cohort of sexualization” especially when management implements particular dress codes and objectification becomes inevitable.

### **Dress Codes for Women: Coming in Hot**

The term *coming in hot* is used in restaurants to warn others when turning a corner with a plate of hot food. However, in this context, I use the term to reinforce the expectations that women present themselves in highly sexualized ways through restaurant dress codes. At the time of the interviews, participants were speaking to their current experiences working in smaller, local establishments with more “casual” (Abby, Dakota, Georgia), “comfortable” (Dakota), “informal” (Claire), and “equalizing” (Emma) dress codes. This reality highlights the fact that servers had some degree of freedom, for the most part, with their current dress code requirements. However, when I asked participants about their broad experiences with restaurant dress codes in general, most participants reflected on the stricter ones enforced in restaurants where they had previously worked.

All participants were familiar with strict dress codes and spoke about the fact that these stipulations disproportionately target women. Women-specific dress codes are standard practice in restaurants:

*The females had like, 85 things they couldn't wear...it had to be a certain material. Like, it couldn't be cotton... tank tops had to be two fingers or more...but you could still wear a tank top because they wanted to make sure that in the summer, we could still wear tank tops and be kind of revealing. (Bailey)*

*You had a tight, black skirt, often quite short and then at the time, it was up to three inches of heels. (Georgia)*

Most participants expressed similar perceptions about women-specific dress codes. Others discussed the negative repercussions that could arise if one challenged the dress codes.

The perpetuation of heteronormative gender ideologies and even termination were two familiar negative repercussions for challenging the dress code:

*I think a lot of establishments' rules, regulations, and standards are women-specific standards. Like, the fact I have to wear makeup, if I don't wear makeup, it's 'why do you look so sad today?' The fact that when you go in, you're expected to be incredibly cheerful. (Emma)*

*So, one of the girls that was hired, she wore the same outfits a couple times... We only had to wear blazers like we were told. And she didn't have the money to go out and buy a blazer so she commented if you make it specific that we can only wear blazers, we should get money for our blazers...they let her go the next week, saying that we 'didn't have enough business' so she was basically fired for complaining about the dress code... If I complain, I'm going to be let go. Or I'm going to be given day shifts that don't get me any money. (Bailey)*

Two participants argued there is not much managerial forgiveness for women who stray outside of the confines of the dress code:

*If you have your top button undone because it's hot outside, you get called over and it's constant. And if you have earrings in that are too large, then again, they will come over and talk to you. If your hair is done up, they'll come over and talk to you...I don't understand why there has to be so many finicky rules they're fixated on. (Emma)*

*Your shoes for [air quotes] 'safety reasons' have to be one inch above the ground... I got in trouble 'cause you had to wear all black at the restaurant I was at and I had shoes that were black, and the heel was wood. I wasn't allowed to wear those shoes anymore, so I had to paint my shoes black. (Freya)*

I asked participants if they have ever challenged dress codes. Only one participant out of seven, Dakota, could recall a specific time she had vocalized concern about a dress code to management. Dakota mentioned that she once wore a long sleeve shirt underneath the required thin-strapped, tight black dress. Management confronted her by touching her under-shirt and asking, "what's *this*!?" in a disgusted tone. Dakota justified her decision to wear the long sleeve shirt by explaining, "it's a shirt and I'm wearing it and still look totally fine and presentable". After she spoke up for herself, Dakota continued to wear the long sleeve shirt underneath the required dress.

Two participants observed other servers challenge restaurant dress codes through actions. For example, Georgia discussed how one of the restaurants she had worked in required women to wear tight, V-neck t-shirts while men were required to wear a looser, scoop-neck t-shirt. She carried on sharing, “I saw some of my coworkers wear the man shirt and maybe wear a larger size than they probably needed, just to be looser in the fit”. Georgia made it clear that she felt management would not flag servers for wearing a bigger size than required. In Abby’s example of subtly challenging dress codes, she mentioned, “sometimes people wouldn’t wear heels”. These actions exemplify the way that some servers would subtly challenge dress codes by showing up in ways that are against the requirements.

Six participants spoke to the value of informal dress codes. Dakota explained that freedom with dress codes allow workers to “have fun with it”. Similarly, Emma described casual dress codes as “playgrounds” where “freedom of expression” feels empowering in the workplace. Emma continued explaining that she deliberately began to seek out serving jobs that *did not* enforce strict dress codes; “it’s actually quite important to me”. While Emma has not verbally challenged dress codes directly to her own employers, she has challenged dress codes *for* fellow servers in other establishments. Emma reflected on a time as a patron in a downtown Victoria restaurant when she asked one of the managers, “why do they have to wear heels? Isn’t that a bit misogynistic?”. I asked Emma to elaborate further. She explained:

*As a woman, I see these other women being forced to wear what they’re wearing and it makes me uncomfortable to be sitting there...I rather go somewhere that I can tell that person is comfortable in who they are and what they’re wearing. (Emma)*

This example was the anomaly in the data because not all participants shared this type of story. Some participants admitted that they feel they have no choice but to go along with the dress codes. As Freya and Georgia claimed, “you are aware that you are kind of, a piece of meat”

and “you’re there to be objectified”. I asked participants what they believe contributes most significantly to the sexualization of servers.

Two participants identified prominent systemic factors that allow for the sexualization of women to prevail. Georgia explained it is “patriarchy in general” and Abby used similar language of “misogyny in general” as the biggest contributors to sexualization of women servers. Others identified more traditional stereotypes of women’s submissiveness. Freya mentioned, “women are often seen as other, lesser, um, and have been subservient and passive”. Emma argued, “us girls go into a job expecting it; by not saying anything we are passive in allowing those practices to take place”. Building upon this idea of submissiveness and passivity, two participants described the discomfort they felt when serving men in particular:

*Having tables of men altogether, you can sense that they want you around. And they are kind of laughing at you, not with you, and there’s those comments that are not directly attacking you but there’s this underlying feeling that they are making fun of the fact that you’re the ‘sexy’ one giving them drinks. (Georgia)*

*Guys, I would literally not want to serve them if they commented on my appearance at a table. I’d be like ‘oh sure’, but then every single time they would want another thing, I would kind of dread going over there. ‘Cause you’re like, ‘are they going to keep flirting’? (Bailey)*

Participants identified a power dynamic between themselves, customers, and management. Claire asserted that managers are the ones who hold power in the restaurant environment and hire women to represent the face of the establishment to increase profit:

*A lot of things that are being sold are sexualized...it’s appealing because women are appealing, and they make the whole atmosphere more appealing if they are sexualized. Especially for men. (Claire)*

Bailey shared this perception of sexualizing women for profit when explaining that many servers accept sexualization as “part of the industry”:

*It's been going on for years. It's just part of the industry. That's the quote-unquote wording that you get told when you're in training. And then you find yourself repeating it to people you're training even if you don't believe it. (Bailey)*

While all participants pointed out that sexualization exists in restaurants, it is understandable then that most participants recognized the need for more support for women in the industry. Moreover, all participants shared that they have witnessed an inappropriate or uncomfortable situation happen to other servers during their serving experiences. Women servers believe it is challenging to obtain workplace support when sexualization occurs.

### **The Need for Better Support: Grin and Bear It**

In recent Statistics Canada data, it is reported that overall, 32% of women in Canada said their workplace did not provide them with information or resources on harassment, sexual assault, or discrimination (Burczycka, 2020). In my study, all participants, in varying capacities, expressed the need for more support for women working in restaurants. I asked participants three questions that would provide insight into what type of support would be helpful for their safety in restaurants: 1) have you reported a workplace incident to management? 2) are you comfortable reporting a workplace incident to management? And 3) are you aware of any policies or procedures in place to address sexual harassment?

Two participants out of seven recalled a time they reported an incident to management. However, one of these participants said, "I don't know if I would say I reported it, but I like, definitely followed up" (on an unsafe workplace situation she had to deal with on her own in the middle of the night). Six participants reported they *do not* feel comfortable reporting an incident to management, and one claimed they feel "decently comfortable" in doing so. I asked participants to explain why they might not feel comfortable reporting incidents to management. Some of the responses included:

*You're never going to say anything 'cause it's just the way it's been for so long...I think that's the thing too, people don't believe it's happening. (Bailey)*

*I don't necessarily think I could trust if it was coming from within 'cause there was, like a tight managerial kind of like, clique...it would not be taken seriously. (Abby)*

*I've never really felt comfortable talking to my managers 'cause a lot of times it's like, nothing gets done. They don't see it as their issue...I've only ever been managed by men. So that probably contributes. (Freya)*

The realities of perceiving a harassment report as a “complaint” and the fear of not being taken seriously are just two existing barriers preventing women from reporting workplace incidents to management. No participants shared specific sexual harassment policies or procedures they were aware of in all of their experiences in restaurant work. Five participants claimed they were *unaware* of restaurant sexual harassment policies or procedures at their current workplace. One participant, Georgia, reflected, “well, recently with the Chuck’s incident that happened...my manager made sure that we knew we could talk to him...and said if we didn’t feel comfortable talking to him, he will [refer] us to a senior server who is a woman”. In this way, circumstantially, the influence of Chuck’s Burger Bar<sup>8</sup> sexual assault stories motivated Georgia’s manager to highlight resources available to servers should they feel unsafe in the workplace.

While I did not ask specifically about restaurant protections in place, two participants mentioned the topic of unions and human resources (HR) on their own accord. For example, Bailey spoke about why unions might not exist in restaurants,

*The service industry is never going to get a union because then we would have to claim our tips and there is no way we could...no one wants to risk it. And I don't think anyone wants to risk the fact that like, people get away with a lot of shit. You get away with a lot of stuff. (Bailey)*

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<sup>8</sup> Chuck’s burger bar in downtown Victoria closed permanently after sexual assault reports arose against a bartender in BC and Ontario restaurant scenes who was arrested in June 2021 for numerous sexual assault cases across the two provinces (Cox, 2021; Egan-Elliott, 2021; Strain, 2021)

I asked Bailey to expand on this idea of “getting away with a lot of stuff”. She shared stories similar to my own, about previous management in other establishments that permit drinking alcohol on shift. Considering numerous restaurants are not unionized, drinking alcohol on the job is sometimes a normalized component of restaurant culture (Neufeldt, 2018). Bailey and Dakota alluded to the value of having HR in restaurants when explaining,

*When we did have HR, we were taken aback, like ‘oh, we can complain about this and this and this?!’ ...and then she quit because she didn’t like working there. (Bailey)*

*This particular job I’m in...it does not have HR and it’s a pretty big issue that’s not being addressed. (Dakota)*

In this chapter, I examined the gendered nature of restaurant work. Indeed, women servers are subject to gender-based treatment within their roles, adhere to highly gendered dress codes, believe they should “grin and bear” harassment, and largely feel there is a lack of support from management. Various participants expressed that they understood these gendered expectations to be widely accepted in sector of service work. One participant, Emma, referred to this type of embodied belief as simply knowing the “ins and outs of the industry”. These “ins and outs” of restaurant norms in pre-pandemic days serve as a foundation for understanding how the pandemic has shifted and complicated women’s serving experiences in Victoria, BC.

## Chapter 6: Precarious Pandemic Performances

All participants noted that their serving performances had been affected by the pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic has had devastating impacts on the restaurant industry in Canada, with many business closures and lay-offs. As one participant, Bailey, bluntly put it, “the service industry is dying”. For those who continue to hold positions in restaurants, this is indeed a precarious time to be working. To give readers some context into the reality facing servers today; I briefly draw upon a few quotes from participants about what it is like to serve during a pandemic:

*Everyone I know who is a server has gotten laid off in some way. (Claire)*

*At that point, I was the 17<sup>th</sup> server to be let go. (Bailey)*

*I got laid off and the company went under, which sucks. It was a locally owned business and they just couldn't afford to be renting anymore...so I was jobless. (Emma)*

This chapter investigates participants' experiences of serving *during* the pandemic, a topic not widely explored in Canada. The participants had differing perspectives on how the pandemic has impacted their serving performances. However, the four main subthemes that arose in the overall theme of pandemic performances include the influence of mask-wearing, the jeopardizing of their health and safety for customer satisfaction, the additional endured labour, and the complexity of enforcing pandemic protocols as women.

### **Influence of the Mask Mandate: He Wanted to See My Face**

Since November 2020, face masks have been mandatory in all Victoria, BC establishments (Basu, 2020; BC Centre for Disease Control, 2021; Government of BC, 2021). In restaurants, the face mask is “the most ubiquitous, and perhaps divisive, tool in an arsenal of protective measures, like disposable menus and plastic partitions, that restaurants are incorporating into an emerging culture of pandemic hospitality” (Severson, 2020, para. 7). I

asked participants to describe how masks have or have not shifted their serving experiences. Despite a range of responses, all participants identified some advantages and disadvantages of mask-wearing during their restaurant work. Aside from the general health and safety advantages of wearing masks, some participants discussed feeling less sexualized behind masks. Indeed, two participants believe that sexualization has *decreased* with the influence of mask-wearing. In the same context, however, three participants feel that sexualization has *increased* with mask-wearing, and the last two participants believe there is no change in sexualization since the pandemic struck.

To support the idea that one advantage of mask-wearing was reduced experiences of sexualization, two participants shared:

*I was hit on way less, probably because they couldn't tell if you were attractive under the masks, so they were not hedging their bets. (Bailey)*

*Because they can't see my face...there isn't much of a connection between customers and so in that way, everyone is just more distant. Whereas before, customers were more flirtatious and that's kind of stopped. (Claire)*

These quotes demonstrate that some participants believe there is less opportunity to be sexualized with masks on. Additionally, there is value in the ability to conceal part of their identities. Customers might not be analyzing them as deeply or “hedging their bets” on their level of attractiveness. While still striving to ensure customer satisfaction, participants underscored some benefits of wearing a mask:

*I felt like, less pressure to put on my serving persona and less pressure to perform, that's for sure. (Freya)*

*I like having to not smile, I like that aspect. Even though you kind of still do it because it's habit. (Bailey)*

Displaying a smile is an essential component to one's serving performance (Schultz, 2020; Spradley & Mann, 2008; Wrench, 2013). Given that their smiles are no longer visible, it is

understandable that masks might allow servers to take a break from this personal frontstage labour. Nonetheless, five of the participants believe their social interactions with customers have become more challenging. Sexualization and difficulty with social interactions were said to be two of the main *disadvantages* of mask-wearing during their serving performances. Three participants importantly noted that one of the main concerns about mask-wearing is the increase of sexualization from customers:

*I've had one instance where this guy asked me to take my mask off because he wanted to see my face, which was weird. But, and, he was like 'you look so beautiful with the mask on, still'. (Claire)*

*I'm seeing servers get sexualized even though they're wearing masks and like, because even though they're wearing a mask, they're still wearing tight dresses and stuff. (Freya)*

*I would say with the mask, people are more likely to look and that's because you can't give them a face, a face of 'I saw that you were staring', you know? And they also don't see you as a person as much...there are definitely more glances I would say... because people aren't looking at your face anymore, they're much more likely to be looking at other parts of you. (Emma)*

These quotes suggest that sexualization continues to occur despite having to wear masks while serving in BC. In this way, the idea of concealing part of one's identity is not relevant because customers might be “looking at other parts of you”. In a U.S. study on restaurant workers during the pandemic, servers wrote about some of the common mask-related sexual harassment they are experiencing today. Some of the survey responses included incidents where customers would make comments such as “pull that mask down so I can see if I want to take you home later” and “take off your mask so I can stick my tongue down your throat” (Times Up Foundation, 2020).

Participants in my study had varying perspectives on the influence of mask-wearing during their serving performances. Abby, Dakota, and Emma outline how the masks negatively influence their serving performances with guests:

*I don't enjoy wearing a mask. I think there are so many little micro expressions that are used when you're serving that actually get across your personality and make like, such a big difference. (Abby)*

*Interacting with people while wearing a mask makes it quite a bit more challenging. They don't see your expression, so things come across almost as colder to customers. (Dakota)*

*I hate the mask. I hate it. It pulls away a whole other element of connection with people. (Emma)*

These statements exemplify how mask-wearing can be frustrating for servers and limit their ability to convey their personalities. Nonetheless, servers jeopardize their health and safety to please customers. Keeping customers satisfied is important for servers, but with the influence of the pandemic, servers are at risk by simply going to work.

### **Jeopardizing Health and Safety: The Customer is (Still) Always Right**

*You're there to give somebody an experience and, you know, the customer is always right (Emma)*

Despite lay-offs and feeling overworked, the participants remained committed to customer satisfaction during the pandemic. As the above passage from one participant states, “the customer is always right”. This is a well-known and widely accepted service industry rule. Participants reported that they sometimes jeopardize their health and safety to ensure that customers feel comfortable dining. For example, Abby admitted that her “biggest goal right now is to make sure other people are comfortable”. Feelings of *more* concern for the well-being of customers rather than their own well-being circulated amongst participants. As previously outlined, Claire was asked to take her mask off by a customer who wanted to see her face.

Customers influence the safety of workers. The province of BC mandated a six-foot physical distancing measure in addition to the mask-wearing protocols (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2021). Maintaining this distance from customers is challenging for servers when taking orders, clearing tables, and conversing with customers. These expectations of close-proximity

interactions while serving during the pandemic were experienced by most participants. All participants expressed that as servers, the six-foot policy is challenging to adhere to. For example, Bailey outlined a perception shared by others:

*Our restaurant did the six-foot policy at some points, but then you had elderly people beckon you closer 'cause they couldn't hear you. You had tables that definitely just, you couldn't put a drink down and still be six-feet apart. There was no way. (Bailey)*

Two participants described two opposing extremes they observe from customers who dine in:

*Some people that come in are super respectful and patient and understanding. Then there's the other folks who don't seem super worried about COVID. (Dakota)*

*You have some customers who are like, "lean across me, just do it!" and I'm like "I can't do that!". And on the other hand, you have customers who literally flinch when you touch the plate. (Emma)*

These examples suggest that some customers are more cautious around servers and others do not seem too worried about their proximity to servers. Nevertheless, to ensure customer safety, servers must remain conscious of how they work with tables. While these above examples outline how customers feel about *servers* being too close, one participant, Freya, raised concerns about how the six-foot policy makes her feel. She described her serving position as being shifted to "more like a grocery clerk", where she took orders behind a plexiglass barrier and carefully handed customers their beers. Despite the fact she was no longer providing direct table service, she recalled incidents where customers did not obey the pandemic rules:

*I find that all of a sudden, the rules stop being a thing. People get drunk and they'll start talking to you behind the plexiglass...or people get angry that there's rules. I had quite a few people where I was like 'don't touch those menus, they're dirty, here's a clean menu for you' and they get mad at you. (Freya)*

Similarly, Bailey reported, "restaurants are all about service over everything, and so a lot of stuff would be like 'nope, you can disregard that if a customer wants it a certain way'". These quotes demonstrate the friction between *the customer's always right* expectation and pandemic

health protocols. Moreover, Georgia detailed a time where she felt that she was unable to speak up about the pandemic rules, given the following situation:

*It was 8 people, separated into 4 tables...If it was my table and not my managers, I would've definitely been more strict with them. They were talking to each other in between the divider and like, standing up and you know, being loud...So, yeah there's times where if it's not - if it's someone's table that is higher than me in management, I may not say as much. (Georgia)*

Servers' space is not always taken into consideration or respected by customers. Other participants spoke to their perspectives on customers getting away with not following the rules, especially regarding the permitted number of people per table. During the time of the interviews, six people per table was a government mandate. These six people must be from the same household. Two participants reported how difficult it is to monitor this protocol:

*As far as I'm aware, the rule is six persons to a table, but when they come together, you consider them part of the household because they're not meant to be associating with anybody outside of their bubble...if those rules were enforced, the restaurant industry would be dead. (Emma)*

*The regulations say that it should be just your household in those groups of six or whatever but it's not up to establishments to monitor it. So, we really, even though I feel like you shouldn't be doing that, I still have to welcome these groups that are obviously not from one household. (Dakota)*

When customers do not follow the six-person per household rule in restaurants, servers are at risk of exposure. Considering the dangers of contraction for essential workers in precarious situations is critical. The *Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety* (2021) argued that the risk of contracting COVID-19 in restaurants is high because these spaces are populated by people from different households all in “close-range conversations” occur (p. 1). Despite this, groups of people living in different households continue to be warmly welcomed and served by women in restaurants.

In addition to conversations about welcoming and serving guests, discussions about abusive customer incidents arose. In December 2020, a customer in Victoria became abusive and intentionally coughed on a server who asked him to wear a mask (CBC News, 2020; DeRosa, 2020). Coughing or spitting on someone is a criminal charge in Canada (Hayes, 2020; Pinkesz, 2020). While participants in this study did not experience coughing incidents during the pandemic, the fear of this reality did arise in conversation. In a discussion about the Victoria, BC, restaurant coughing incident, one participant stated:

*If someone's getting coughed on, biological warfare, man! It's bizarre to me that I can go to work and customers at their table aren't wearing masks and I have to wear a mask, and I'm like touching all their dirty dishes and all this jazz. It just seems like you know, we're protecting them but we're not protecting our servers and we're not protecting our staff in any of our institutions right now. (Emma)*

Relatedly, a U.S. server, Hannah Cerasoli (2020) documented her experiences with serving in the early days of the pandemic:

My job puts my customers and me at a huge risk. I touch their dirty napkins all day — napkins which they sneeze into, cough into, wipe their mouths with, blow their noses with. I touch their plates of half-eaten food and scrape it into the garbage with silverware that has been in their mouths. I wipe tables down, and I'm always within 3 feet of my customers when they're ordering (para. 14).

Other participants echoed these sentiments when speaking about their thoughts on adhering to customers' desires against the pandemic protocols. However, stereotypical expectations of women prevail:

*I think specifically for women, they should be more worried about COVID than men. I think that it is, we are considered to be more nurturing and so when we go to a table, the standards that table has for a woman server are much higher than the standards for a man. (Emma)*

All participants prioritized the health and safety of their customers. However, it is clear that *the customer's always right* expectation becomes potentially harmful, especially during a

pandemic. In addition to servers putting themselves at risk to maintain customer satisfaction, servers were also working harder, emotionally and physically, during the pandemic.

### **Enduring Additional Labour: Working a Double (Burden)**

In the restaurant industry, *working a double* means working shifts that exceed 12 hours in length. However, my use of the term illustrates the *additional* emotional and physical labour that servers expend beyond their traditional roles during the pandemic. First, I outline the emotional labour that servers endure. Here, participants share concerns over customers' perceptions of their tone of voice and body language. Next, I highlight participants' reflections on the additional tasks they are undertaking during the pandemic.

My findings indicate that the pandemic has exacerbated servers' emotional labour. The emotional labour of serving is worrying, managing, and protecting customers and themselves during the pandemic. As Emma stated, "women have been taught in a really you know, discourse sense, that within the service industry, to act in a specific way" and not be perceived as "bitchy" as defined by their tone of voice. All seven participants reported that they are aware of how vital their tone of voice is, especially since the pandemic:

*You have to be super careful with your tone now. Because like, as females too, as soon as your tone gets slightly not happy, in your non-server voice, you get that you're being a bitch. (Bailey)*

*I use my tone of voice a lot more now. I'm very aware of how I'm - what my tone is and how what I'm saying is coming out. (Claire)*

*A lot of more verbal communication, cadence of voice. Because before you might be able to go up to a table and be like, "hey, how are you?". Kind of more quiet, more kind of, just like, small in your body and your voice. (Emma)*

These quotes show that there is an added layer to servers' emotional labour during the pandemic. How one's tone of voice is perceived by others is a powerful indicator of how they are feeling. One's tone of voice can, socially, reveal more emotion than their facial expression

(Seppala, 2017). For servers, managing their tone of voice is essential (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Civitella, 2020; Gabriel & Diefendroff, 2013), but it is even more critical to their performance with the influence of the pandemic as is being conscious of one's body language:

*It's like, a lot of being aware of not just what your mouth and face is doing but what your whole body is doing and how you can kind of like, be welcoming to them without being too close or them having to see your face. So just being more aware of your body and how you're using it and how it's being interpreted. (Emma)*

*I'm also conscious of my movements around them. Sometimes I'll try to take a step back if I notice that I'm a little too close or things like that. (Georgia)*

These quotes demonstrate how servers are mindful of their body language and customers' interpretations, particularly during the pandemic. Further, *reading* the table in a more attentive manner is another way in which servers endure additional emotional labour than pre-pandemic.

*I would say just being self-aware and like, trying to make other people self aware, it's a real difficult line to walk. In terms of, yeah, just, just trying to work out the social situation every time you go to work and having to read the table and having to ask all these questions and enforce these rules, it's just, it's not so much like the worst, as it is just really constantly on your mind. (Emma)*

*I don't like not knowing how they're feeling. Like, whether I'm getting too close or whether I'm making them feel scared somehow because of COVID. Um, yeah, I feel like it was easier to just kind of guess what people were feeling before. (Claire)*

The reality is that during a pandemic, there are clear safety concerns for both servers and customers that do not exist in "normal" times. With this added layer of emotional labour, servers fulfill roles that were not typically required of them pre-pandemic. These include balancing new tasks while at the same time keeping an eye on customers. The following quotes outline some of the additional tasks servers are taking on:

*Honestly, my biggest challenge is managing the phone. Since COVID began, takeout orders have been like growing exponentially; everyone wants to do takeout instead of eating in. So, on top of my job as normal, it's like you're constantly on the phone taking orders from people. (Emma)*

*We have to keep groups apart and at a distance and seated. So often times it's like you are like, babysitting or monitoring people and what they're doing and it's hard to do that in a friendly way or a way that looks friendly, when they can't see your expression and you're like, telling them what to do. (Dakota)*

*I do more in the back, like, we have lost a kitchen in our restaurant and we only use one of the kitchens for both restaurants. So now there are some appies I need to set up by myself and we don't have a dishwasher...so I end up doing a little bit more that is maybe not seen. (Georgia)*

The pandemic has presented unique challenges for women servers. All participants acknowledged that the increase in hours and understaffing contribute to more responsibilities, and they recognize that their work feels different. As Emma and Georgia explain:

*It's like your job as a server, it goes beyond what it used to be which was like have some nice chit-chat, bring them their food. Now it is easing their conscience for coming to eat at your establishment. (Emma)*

*I feel like before, we were just serving food and bringing food but now I am also regulating things in my own restaurant. (Georgia)*

Women servers are working harder during the pandemic. Participants feel the need to manage their tone of voice, remain hyper-aware of their body language, and take on new tasks in addition to their typical serving roles. Participants reported that they endured this additional labour to preserve their job and hopefully increase their tips.

### **Enforcing the Pandemic Rules: Bitches Don't Get Tips**

Customer tipping is a leading motivation for why people choose to serve (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Raspor & Rozman, 2016). For perspective, some servers can earn enough money from tips in one night to cover their monthly rent (Hopper, 2018). As one participant reported,

*And if they asked me to come back, even though it sucked and was awful for mental health, I probably would. Because when you make \$500 in two nights of working, you can't give that up. That's the thing. No one will ever want to give that up. (Bailey)*

To understand what tipping culture looks like during the pandemic, I asked participants if they feel tipping practices have shifted. All participants reported that tips are consistently

fluctuating, and they recognized the financial burdens some are facing as they live through the pandemic. Three participants provide insight on this reality of fluctuating tipping practices:

*So, like, at the beginning of COVID, people loved to tip. It was like, you know, it's the thing to do. They know that restaurants are not like, doing very well and losing their livelihood because they don't have as much people coming in. So, people were tipping very nicely... Tip culture was amazing but it's slowing depleting as people become more conscious of money. (Emma)*

*It goes in waves. So, some people are just way more generous because of COVID, like specifically when we came out of lockdown and everyone got to go back to doing normal things. It was really good for tips. It was incredible. People were tipping really, really well. And then, as COVID has progressed, it's gotten kind of the opposite, where people are not as excited because they haven't been able to go out for so long. So, it's not as exciting, I guess. (Claire)*

*It's definitely decreased. But it's also like, for us we have way less customers and we've totally cut back our hours, so it is hard to compare. I feel like some folks are overcompensating and tipping higher and then others are just not tipping at all. (Dakota)*

Although tipping practices have shifted during the pandemic, servers work hard not to jeopardize their tips, even if it costs them their health and safety. Tips are essential to servers, and the fact that many restaurants closed during the pandemic, cut hours, or had reduced occupancy rates, resulted in decreasing the amount of money servers could earn. As Abby said, “the fact that like, the occupancy that is allowed in each place is cut in half, means that your tips are gonna be cut in half”. Therefore, it is understandable that servers want to maximize their tips, but they are also responsible for enforcing the pandemic protocols.

Six participants indicated they did not feel comfortable enforcing the pandemic measures. I asked participants to expand on why they felt this way. Many attributed this discomfort to a fear of jeopardizing tips or being perceived as “bitchy”. In fact, three participants used the word “bitch” throughout their interviews in multiple contexts. In one example, Emma summarizes a perspective echoed by others when recognizing that being “bitchy” is a stereotype reserved for women. She said:

*I feel like men have a way of being down to earth and some people think 'oh, they're down to earth and super chill' but if a girl walks in with the same demeanor, it's taken differently, it's taken a bit more bitchy... 'the nice young girl', that's the stereotype we're prescribed to. Especially in the service industry. (Emma)*

In two other examples, participants used the word “bitch” to describe situations where customers or staff have upheld this feminine stereotype:

*We had a man in a MAGA hat come in... it was a slow day. My co-worker is my age too, she's of Indian descent and queer, and I'm also queer, and it was just the two of us there. He walked in; I noticed the hat right away, she didn't... So she welcomed them, big smile, led them to their table, and I mentioned the hat to her... She said that I was going to take care of them. And he got very frustrated for some reason, insulted her, called her a fucking bitch, and left. (Georgia)*

*In December, I was laid off. A 4-year, senior staff server, I was just like – it was right before Christmas, they're like, 'we gotta do more lay-off's and you have a complaint against you from a support staff' from, being like, from years ago, just like, on my file, it said 'bitchy', 'bitchy'! (Bailey)*

All participants mentioned that they know the pandemic rules they must enforce, such as mask-wearing, maintaining a six-foot distance from customers, and seating six people at a table. However, in keeping with their feminine expectations of remaining compliant, participants indicated it is sometimes difficult to be assertive and enforce these rules. According to Freya:

*I had to continue to be nice and passive because that's what was expected of me and if I didn't do that, I wouldn't get money. (Freya)*

Three participants mentioned that they wish the onus of enforcing pandemic rules did not fall upon them:

*Maybe management would feel more comfortable. But yeah, not as much for me. (Claire)*

*Even just policing masks because you still get people in every day that are not wearing the masks or aren't wearing the masks properly...I just wish someone else could do that. (Dakota)*

*Sometimes enforcing masks can be really awkward. (Abby)*

The above excerpts show that some servers feel uncomfortable enforcing pandemic rules, especially when their tips are on the line. Bailey and Freya expanded upon the fear of losing tips when describing incidents with customers during the pandemic:

*Or they tell you they're travelling and you're like 'well, why? Why are you travelling?' ...And you want to say something. But you're not going to say anything! You can't really say anything until after they pay you. Because if you do before that, you're not getting tipped. (Bailey)*

*Again, with the drunk people when they're like, trying to talk to you through the plexiglass or like, doing things that are against your protocol, it's super hard to be like 'hey can you not do that? It's against our protocol', 'cause, tips. (Freya)*

It is evident that servers continue to put their health and safety at risk, as well as their tips. Being a server during the pandemic is precarious. The influence of mask-wearing, maintaining the *customer's always right* mentality, the reality of enduring *more* work than pre-pandemic, and the complexity of enforcing the pandemic measures all complicate women's serving experiences. To summarize, the influence of the pandemic has changed women's serving experiences and has shifted their speculations about the future of the industry.

## Chapter 7: The Future of Post-Pandemic Restaurants

This research has surfaced longstanding restaurant concerns. In other words, the pandemic has allowed restaurant workers an opportunity to reassess current restaurant norms. Most participants were optimistic that the pandemic would result in lasting restaurant changes. I asked participants to expand and speculate on the future of the industry. Their responses coalesced around three main areas: a desire to shift appearance-based standards, the need to take the health and safety of workers seriously, and the ability for servers to enforce boundaries with customers and coworkers alike.

### Challenging Appearance-Based Standards: I'm Not Here to *BE* the Experience

Participants are hopeful that the influence of the pandemic will encourage less appearance-based standards in hiring practices and defining dress codes. Hiring attractive women to represent the face of restaurants is one of the “oldest and most misogynistic conventions of the modern restaurant” (Camarero, 2018, para. 1). Although, this practice of hiring conventionally attractive women for forward-facing restaurant positions remains a common practice. The pandemic presented a unique opportunity for progressive industry change. Three participants were optimistic that hiring practices would be less appearance-based. Bailey, who had recently started a new serving job, described her audio-based Zoom interview:

*We did a Zoom interview...it's the first time I've done an interview where I can't see someone's face and I was like, that's very interesting...Honestly, I think if we did this forever with service industry, there'd be way, way less appearance-orientated protocols. (Bailey)*

Most job interviews during the pandemic have shifted to being conducted on virtual platforms (Maurer, 2020). Virtual interviews do not give employers the ability to assess one's entire figure. In a conversation about this, Bailey reflected on the days when attaching a headshot photo to one's resume was often required for restaurant applications (Mintz, 2017). Bailey stated,

“but now I’m thinking, they can’t even do that! If you go in for an interview and have a mask on, they can’t ask you to take it off”. Bailey reiterated that she is hopeful to see a change in restaurant hiring practices where employers will allow resumes to speak louder than appearance. She concludes this discussion with, “the service industry is going to be massively impacted for the better”.

Likewise, Claire asserted that hiring based on resumes rather than one’s appearance would “definitely” be a promising opportunity for restaurants post-pandemic. She even went as far as to argue that sexualization would decrease if there was less focus on one’s appearance. Finally, Claire highlighted that the pandemic had presented an opportunity for serving to be “more of a role to fill of doing your actual job rather than being salesmen...like, less salesmen, more server”.

Similarly, in rejecting the notion of women’s appearance being the most vital factor to serving positions, Emma quipped:

*I’m a background character in terms of their experience. I’m here to make their experience the best it can be but I’m not here to BE the experience. (Emma)*

Other participants outlined the importance of shifting dress code policies during the pandemic. As Freya stated:

*Cut me some slack. I’m serving during an unsafe time. I’m putting myself in danger. I’m going to wear a sweater to work! (Freya)*

Beyond the desire for restaurants to cut servers some slack during the pandemic, Emma and Bailey pointed out a demand for leniency with dress codes:

*Sometimes you have to walk to work and can’t avoid getting your shoes muddy or sometimes you need to wear a jumper and not a shirt because it’s cold outside. We need flexibility to understand people as people with lives outside of the workplace. (Emma)*

*You have to wear the mask they give you. So, I have glasses and I have to wear glasses when I work. I had to eventually be like, ‘I’m just going to risk getting written up and wear my own*

*mask' ...So I wear my black mask with the nose wire so I can put my glasses over or underneath and they won't fog up. (Bailey)*

These quotes demonstrate how some participants feel that managers should not be harsh with dress codes, especially during the pandemic when servers are already jeopardizing their health and safety to work.

### **Taking Health and Safety of Workers Seriously: We Probably Should've Done That**

In Canada, there was a spike in COVID-19 related deaths and hospitalizations at the beginning of 2021, a month before my interviews occurred (Government of Canada: COVID-19 Epidemiology Update, 2021). The pandemic has presented a unique opportunity for restaurateurs to re-evaluate and reconsider their health and safety procedures. Participant comments regarding health and safety focused on two areas: general sanitation of restaurants and the need for employers to take employees' health more seriously. Before the pandemic, not all restaurants followed a rigorous cleaning schedule. Three participants commented on the cleanliness of the restaurants they worked in, pre-pandemic:

*I wouldn't say that every table got wiped down all the time...I would say that like, sanitizing the tables every single time is a good call in general. (Emma)*

*Honestly, the sanitizing that they're doing, it's, it's better...it's a bit excessive but I feel like they just should have been doing it like that the whole time. I feel like the sanitizing has gotten to, just a normal point...I'm surprised they weren't doing it like that before. (Claire)*

*So, we didn't need to have our hair up. After COVID, we did. Like, [during] COVID, we did because as soon as you touch your face, you gotta go wash your hands. Which, now that I think of it, we probably should have done that pre-COVID, too. (Bailey)*

Of course, most restaurant cleaning practices have increased with the impact of the pandemic. In fact, all restaurants in BC are required to have COVID-19 safety plans beyond the provincial pandemic protocols (WorkSafeBC, 2020). One participant, Georgia, discussed how

she admires how her workplace has implemented permanent health and safety measures. She described how the value of plexiglass barriers and handwashing make her feel safe while working in restaurants:

*The dividers look permanent. It's not just a piece of plastic, we put some nice ones with like stamps on it and designs on it so it looks more inviting and part of the décor, which I like, 'cause it doesn't change too much experience for the guests but it keeps us all safe...and you know, I've always washed my hands but now you really think about it and every time you touch a table you go and wash your hands... Which makes me feel safe in our restaurant. (Georgia)*

A clean workplace is vital for employees, especially in an industry where, as mentioned, they do not always feel safe. In addition to the general safety of employees, some servers highlighted the fact that the pandemic has also forced management to take employees' overall health more seriously.

Before the pandemic, many food service industries expected their employees to work even when sick (Aratani, 2020; Cardoso, 2017; Filloon, 2015). Cerasoli (2020) argued that calling in sick was “hugely frowned upon” in the restaurant industry (para. 29). This reality suggests there is an unwritten rule but widely accepted norm of working when ill. While the *Centre for Disease Control* provided some pandemic recommendations for food and service workers, Saxena (2020) argued that “anyone who has ever worked in a restaurant probably sees these recommendations as a fantasy” (para. 2). This suggests that it is unrealistic to believe that restaurants will not convert back to their regular norms. Examples of this were outlined by various participants who shared their experiences of being expected to work when ill. For Abby and Bailey, calling in sick was not always well-received by managers:

*I remember serving before like, if you had a really bad cold, they're making you go to work. They don't care. (Abby)*

*It doesn't matter if you feel slightly gross, you're working... You're touching food and you're touching drinks! And now that I think about it, I have worked so many times where I'm dying – coughing and fever, but like, mixing someone's drink! (Bailey)*

The above quotes show that continuing to work when sick was indeed a restaurant norm, pre-pandemic. As Cardoso (2017) writes:

*It would be nice if the manager said, 'take care of yourself. We will get this covered for you and just call us back tomorrow and let us know how you are feeling'. How wonderful would it be for a server if, when we were sick, we would be able to focus on getting better than having to worry about getting our shift covered? We can dream, can't we?' (para. 5).*

In contrast, two participants described the shift of managerial response when calling in sick today:

*It's like, when you call in sick now, they're like 'don't come in' ... they were so supportive and I was thinking like, you're not supportive about when anyone calls in sick, you want people to push through, especially in service... it's definitely more accepted by management now. (Bailey)*

*I think everyone can learn from what we're having to do. And to be more understanding when people are sick and taking more precautions to keep everyone a little bit healthier. (Abby)*

One participant in this study was COVID-19 positive at the time of the interview and two other participants spoke to the reality of being tested. We see how the pandemic indeed affects women servers in essential positions. Further, the pandemic has encouraged restaurateurs to understand the importance of taking the health of their employees seriously. The severity of the pandemic has given restaurant workers a reality check:

*I had to get tested for COVID in November... I had a fever, so I instantly had to go get tested. (Bailey)*

*We did have someone test positive on our team and so that's why we're all isolating right now. Which has been like, a pretty big reality check for all of us, I think. (Dakota)*

One participant was COVID-19 positive during the interviews, reflecting the idea that working when feeling sick must be challenged. Four participants said that other pandemic

measures have been helpful to ensure they feel safe in the workplace. For example, enforcing physical and social boundaries with customers and coworkers arose as a typical example of a pandemic measure that some servers would like to hold onto post-pandemic.

### **Enforcing Boundaries: An Opportunity for Change**

Although most participants do not always feel comfortable enforcing pandemic measures with guests, some noted how these temporary measures might permanently affect the future of serving. For example, for safe social interactions, the Government of BC implemented pandemic *bubbles*. A bubble is a small social circle of people with whom one is in regular contact (Government of BC, 2021). Three participants described how pandemic bubbles could provide servers the opportunity to enforce physical and social boundaries with customers and coworkers alike post-pandemic:

*I feel like, because we are allowed to kind of put our foot down for like, COVID-related things, we might in the future be able to do that just on a constant base. On things that are just not acceptable and just kind of, have a set of rules of what is acceptable behaviour in a restaurant and what we accept or not. (Georgia)*

*I think that COVID has definitely helped give women servers tools to enforce boundaries. I think if anything, at least for me personally, but I think this applies to a lot of people, it kind of teaches you, it's like, it teaches you how to enforce boundaries because all of the sudden, you're having to. And it's like, okay, this is good practice for when COVID is over, and I can try to enforce boundaries with people. (Abby)*

*I feel COVID gave me a good excuse to enforce boundaries with people where I had a reason to be like 'woah, you can't sit there' or 'woah, you can't be that close to me, please get away'. Instead of just being like, 'can you please get away? Because you're in my personal space' now it's like, 'can you please get away? Because I don't want to get COVID'. (Freya)*

The pandemic has provided lessons that servers should hold onto after the pandemic.

Two participants discussed the benefits of enforcing physical and social boundaries:

*I really like not touching people. I always found it weird. Like, you don't really realize now but like, hugging a regular, is probably not normal, probably not super sanitary. (Bailey)*

*I think it's been really empowering for the staff, in a way. Just because you do need to have so much more control on this space and sort of, the customer experience. (Dakota)*

The above passages outline some of the optimism that participants shared and hope to hold onto for the future of serving post-pandemic. In addition, all participants demonstrated, in some capacity, an urge to challenge current restaurant norms. Less appearance-based hiring and dress code standards, restaurants' health and safety, and the idea of enforcing boundaries with customers and coworkers alike are avenues in which participants hope to see progressive change. We are living in an era where the future of serving is evolving. Therefore, the pandemic has presented a unique opportunity for lasting and beneficial social change for restaurants.

## Chapter 8: Discussion and Analysis

This chapter shares my interpretations of the data as informed by relevant literature and theory. In this discussion, I draw upon and apply Goffman, West, and Zimmerman's theoretical relevance and the conceptual framework of institutional sexism. I use these as lenses to explore what I heard from participants to answer my research question(s): *how do women servers in Victoria, BC perceive their restaurant work and has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their serving experiences?* Specifically, if the pandemic has changed the industry, what are these key changes and might they affect the future of restaurant work?

My findings highlight three fundamental issues in restaurants before and during the pandemic. First, my data demonstrate that restaurants are gendered establishments. In these discussions, participants reflected on the reality of sexist divisions of labour, experiences of harassment, biased dress code policies, and the need for better support for women workers. These issues were commonly identified as pre-pandemic experiences of being a restaurant server, or in other words, some restaurant norms. Second, the influence of the pandemic brought other prominent issues to light. For example, participants felt that the influence of mask-wearing, enduring additional labour, jeopardizing their health and safety, and the complexity of enforcing pandemic protocols have shifted their serving experiences. Third, participants optimistically shared their hopes for fundamental changes in the restaurant industry, including less appearance-based standards, taking the health and safety of restaurant workers seriously, and enforcing physical and social boundaries with guests and coworkers alike. I discuss each of these three findings in detail below.

First, to contextualize and establish familiarity with the restaurant industry, I learned about servers' pre-pandemic experiences. While this research was not a comparative analysis, I wanted

participants to share their broad experiences with restaurant dynamics to lay the groundwork for understanding the gendered nature of this work. My findings reveal that divisions of labour are sexist, experiences of harassment are prominent, problematic dress codes are enforced, and there is a need for better support. These were all outlined as standard restaurant issues pre-pandemic.

Every participant spoke to the *sexist* divisions of labour; where men hold positions of dominance and authority while women fulfill submissive and forward-facing restaurant roles. This division is consistent with West and Zimmerman's (1987) ideas on heteronormative binary work positions reserved for *women* and *men*. An abundance of literature demonstrates how notions of *women's work* have been equated to the domestic realm but are sustained in public settings today (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020; Damaske, 2011; Mercier, 2019; Wooten & Branch, 2012). In the context of domestic labour, West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest, "what is produced and reproduced is not merely the activity and artifact of domestic life, but the material embodiment of wifely and husbandly roles" (p. 144). Reflecting on West and Zimmerman's (1987) ideas on embodiment and subordination, participants described instances of embodying and internalizing some of the sexism they experienced while serving. I draw upon a notable example shared by a participant who found herself teaching new hires to tolerate sexual harassment from coworkers. Bailey explains,

*When we were training girls, we always had to like, what our senior staff does, is that we always said, 'this person will flirt with you, they don't mean anything by it', 'this person will flirt with you, don't flirt back or they'll think something of it'. And to me, it was always uncomfortable. Just, unfortunately... the way it is. If you want to work here, deal with them flirting inappropriately. (Bailey)*

Even though Bailey mentioned that teaching restaurant norms to new servers felt "uncomfortable", it reinforces the reality of institutional sexism operating in restaurants. Remember Goffman (1959) argued that theatrical performances become routinized, and

eventually, the performers *believe* in the role they are playing. My data suggest that servers believe in their roles but also recognize them to be problematic. The above example reflects this idea because the participant has embodied, accepted, and even taught sexist restaurant practices to other women. Institutional sexism can lead women servers to internalize such common and normalized practices. Indeed, Bearman and Amrhein (2021) assert that internalized sexism can result in women enforcing gender roles on one another. Similarly, Emma referred to restaurant norms as the “ins and outs” of serving. She claimed, “as I’ve grown through the industry, I’ve been taught the facts, you know?”. Other participants shared related stories and highlighted the various sexist norms in restaurants. One of the norms on which participants elaborated on was about how dress codes perpetuated gender discrimination.

Dress codes continue to play an integral role in serving positions. As Goffman (1959) argues, one’s clothing is part of their *personal frontstage*. Most participants recognized that stringent women-specific dress codes are implemented to appeal to customers who are men. One participant, Freya, who formerly worked at Earls, admitted that she has seen vehicle bumper stickers that read: “I Heart Earls Girls”. Freya followed up with, “you go there with the expectation that your server is going to be an attractive woman wearing a dress”. In this way, it is clear that how servers present themselves to customers is valuable to maintaining business.

Following West and Zimmerman’s (1987) ideas on gender ideals, we know that women are conditioned to value their appearance. In this way, restaurants also function as institutional agents of enforcing gender ideals through implementing sexualized dress codes for women. In 2016, CBC News reported some Canadian dress code cases that resulted in human rights tribunals. I will share two examples to underscore the value of recognizing this ongoing issue. First, a server from Ontario complained about the required tight-fitting shirts while she was

pregnant. In response to her concerns, management reduced her scheduled work hours. This type of consequence is one of the realities servers face for speaking up in the industry. In the human rights tribunal, the adjudicator ordered the bar to pay the server for lost income from cutting her hours and required management to attend online Human Rights 101 training (Ireland, 2016). In another example, a server from BC spoke out against requiring high heels, short skirts, and cleavage-showing dress policies of her employer. In this case, her concern was “resolved before it went to a formal hearing” (Ireland, 2016, para. 22).

Participants expressed similar stories about restaurant dress code discrimination. In a conversation about three-inch high heel requirements, Georgia, noted, “it’s not meant to be practical, it’s for you to sell beers to men”. This quote speaks to her clear understanding of why restaurants enforce dress codes that target women. Another participant mentioned that her co-worker intentionally exposes her cleavage. She stated, “she purposefully wears a push-up bra...it’s like, ‘if you’re going to look, I might as well make you aware that I know you’re looking’”. In both examples, participants recognized that their bodies are commodified. Servers’ appearances matter to customers, especially men (Charlebois, 2016; Sachs et al., 2014; Matulewicz, 2016).

When I inquired about participants’ perspectives on receiving appearance-based comments from customers, there was a consensus that their reactions depended on who made the comments. A perception shared by most participants was detailed by Abby, who stated, “I’ve found it offensive and [other times] I’ve found it polite and yeah, flattering”. Most participants reported that when appearance-based comments come from men, they are not well received or welcomed. However, when women comment on their appearances, it feels less threatening. For example, one participant, Bailey mentioned that appearance-based comments from women seem

more playful. She asserted when women comment on her appearance, “it’s always like ‘yes, it’s got pockets!’ you know what I mean? It’s a compliment” versus when men comment on her appearance, she claimed, “I would literally not want to serve them”. Another participant, Dakota, who has a flexible dress code, contended that she typically chooses to wear overalls to work. However, when she decides to “dress a little more feminine...at least four people comment on it...I don’t know how to take it sometimes, it makes me honestly not even want to do it”.

One participant, Georgia, explained that most appearance-based comments have been from women customers since the pandemic. She claimed that women customers would sometimes say things like “oh, we can’t see your beautiful face” but she interpreted that as “more of an auntie comment rather than a sexualizing one”. Another participant, Emma, did not focus on many of the negative appearance-based comments she has received. Instead, when I asked if she has received appearance-based comments, she responded, “Yeah! All the time. People love my style”. She continued by saying that when dress codes are not enforced, and servers have the freedom to wear what they please, “I think people are more likely to connect with what you’re wearing versus objectify what you’re wearing” (Emma). In this way, dress codes diminish the ability to present yourself as an individual. Without dress codes, your style is your own. Although some participants did not explicitly focus on the negative appearance-based comments, most participants recognized the need for better managerial support when feeling uncomfortable at work.

Reporting instances of workplace harassment to management has not been easy for servers. My data suggest that when participants feel uncomfortable in the workplace or believe they will receive inadequate support, some servers accept that reality as part of the job. For example, two participants, Bailey and Emma, used the expression “grin and bear it” when

sharing work-related incidents that made them feel uncomfortable. Comments such as “it’s just the way it’s been for so long” (Bailey) and “nothing gets done” (Freya) also speak to the reality of not reporting incidents or trusting management. This aligns with Capolidupo’s (2017) argument that institutional sexism prevails when managers are complicit in allowing predatory behaviour to go unpunished. Fundamentally, there is an expectation that servers must accept the pervasive mistreatment they face. This harmful reality indicates that institutional sexism in restaurants prevails. In an era when mask-wearing procedures exist, one might assume that experiences of sexual harassment would decrease. As Goffman (1959) argues, individuals wear various social masks depending on the setting because they are constantly performing in all their social interactions.

Second, my findings suggest that servers’ performances have shifted since the pandemic hit. For participants, the influence of mask-wearing, the fear of jeopardizing their health and safety for customer satisfaction, the reality of enduring additional labour, and enforcing pandemic protocols were all areas that influenced their serving experiences. Adding masks to servers’ costumes has changed their performances. As mentioned, on one side of the spectrum, some servers find mask-wearing *beneficial* for their serving performances. For example, two participants describe benefits such as not being asked to smile and feeling a decrease in sexualization without much of a face to look at. On the other side of the spectrum, other servers find mask-wearing *detrimental* for their serving performances. For example, three participants mentioned that mask-wearing encourages people to focus more heavily on different parts of their bodies. In this way, some participants feel increased sexualization, given that people might be analyzing other parts of their bodies without much of a face to show.

Nonetheless, mask-wearing has not stopped customers from harassing women servers. Research shows that the influence of mask-wearing (though necessary for protective measures) has only inflated the experiences of sexual harassment for women servers (Arnold, 2020; Cerullo, 2021; Kanik, 2020; Kitchener, 2020). One of the most common issues circulating today concerning the pandemic and servers is the reality of customers asking them to remove their masks (Arnold, 2020; Cerullo, 2021; Kanik, 2020; Kitchener, 2020).

Mask-wearing can perpetuate sexual harassment. Claire obliged when a man customer asked her to remove her mask and proceeded to call her “beautiful, with the mask on still”. Unsurprisingly, one of the leading factors of women servers being asked to take their masks off during the pandemic is because customers want to see their faces before tipping (Arnold, 2020; Times Up Foundation, 2020). In short, Arnold (2020) captured participants’ experiences in this research when stating, “women are being asked to risk exposure to the virus for the pleasure of male customers” (para. 4). The notion of risking their health and safety for customer satisfaction was another area expanded upon by participants in my study.

Servers comply with customers’ demands because they do not want to risk losing a tip. This reality corresponds with Goffman’s (1959) ideas on dramaturgical loyalty because servers are committed to their performances to ensure they do not jeopardize monetary gain. Goffman (1959) asserted that performers must be wholly taken in by their performances to prevent the audience from suspecting it as inauthentic. In fact, during the interviews, two participants, Claire and Georgia, subconsciously detailed this fear of inauthenticity. Interestingly, both contexts were not concerning inauthenticity suspected by customers but from me. To contextualize this, I will share two examples.

In one instance, Claire claimed that she earned the tip by maintaining an “overly nice and enthusiastic” persona. She quickly proceeded to clarify, “I was in a good mood, it wasn’t fake”. I found it notable that this participant so quickly justified their serving performance by sharing that it “wasn’t fake”. In another instance and similar context, Georgia claimed that maintaining a bubbly persona is part of her “serving self”. However, she, too, quickly followed up with, “but I wanted to. It didn’t impose on me, but it just felt right to have that attitude”. These quotes suggest that some servers become so immersed and taken in by their performances that they feel the need to justify to others that they are not behaving in an inauthentic manner when receiving large tips. I relate this to Hochschild’s thoughts on deep acting, whereby one must convince themselves that their portrayed feelings are genuine. I can also apply Goffman’s (1959) ideas on performances when he asserts, “in the end, the conception of our role becomes second nature” (p. 19).

Though perhaps not intentionally, these two participants seemed defensive when asked how they had received large tips. My impression was that participants feared I would judge their performances based on a lack of authenticity, a notion that, through my own serving experiences, I was able to relate to. Sexism and misogyny drive women, in particular, to *play by the rules* and remain hyper-aware of how they are perceived under the male gaze (Capodilupo, 2017; Fader, 2014; Manne, 2018; Rawley, 2020). In my serving experiences, I remember adhering to ideal feminine standards, which I can now reflect on as influenced by misogynistic structures that expect women to conform to these standards. In a similar vein, my findings reveal that women are enduring additional emotional labour at work during the pandemic.

Aside from the additional restaurant tasks that servers are taking on during the pandemic, my study indicates that servers are enduring more physical and emotional labour. For example,

one participant, Freya, mentioned her shifts were scheduled for 10 hours per day. However, she described the 10-hour workdays as “manageable”. Physically, some participants mentioned they are fulfilling roles that were not always required of them. Working in the back-of-house to help prepare food, answering phone calls for takeout orders, and keeping an eye on customers (one participant, Dakota, described this reality as “babysitting”) are just a few examples that participants described as extra tasks they are enduring because of the pandemic. Of course, owing to the reality of the pandemic and issues of understaffing in various sectors, it makes sense that employees are taking on more work than before. While all participants spoke about how their work roles have shifted since the pandemic hit, nobody explicitly used the term *emotional labour* to describe their shifted experiences with their work roles. However, they all described incidents that detailed how they are over-exerting themselves emotionally to ensure customer satisfaction.

Since the pandemic struck, servers must read their tables in new ways. *Reading the table* refers to a skillset that servers need to adequately perform their roles where there is an emphasis placed on getting a “feel” for customers, matching their “pace”, and anticipating their needs (Ho, 2012; Nassauer, 2012). From my own experience, *reading the table* involves many informal rules that servers have been taught to follow. These rules might include maintaining a kind customer service voice, giving guests their time and space, not hovering or asking too many questions, attempting to upsell certain items for better sale numbers, making recommendations that may or may not be honest, and knowing which tables appreciate humour and those that do not. Assessing the social dynamics and *reading the table* during the pandemic has shifted. Emma explained, “trying to work out the social situation every time you go to work” is challenging.

This reality demonstrates one example of how servers are enduring additional labour during the pandemic in a way that might not be visible or accounted for by others.

Aligned with West and Zimmerman's (1987) ideas on how doing gender is a performance that goes beyond physical expectations, servers ensure they are *behaviourally* performing their service in a way that patrons would expect. Participants reported becoming extra conscious of how customers perceive their voice and body language during the pandemic. In this way, my data reveal that servers are enduring *more* emotional labour than pre-pandemic. This reality is consistent with Hochschild's (1983) thoughts on women concealing their emotions to display desirable ones for others. Servers are especially mindful of this when wearing a mask. In fact, in a 2020 interview with Stix, Hochschild discussed the continued relevance of her work, applied to workers during the pandemic. She explains that her concept of emotional labour is an instrumental theory to understand when examining the role of customer service workers during the pandemic. There is an emotional balance that one must juggle between their safety and adhering to their required employee expectations (Stix, 2020).

For servers to portray their expected enthusiastic server role, the tone of voice is especially integral during a pandemic when mask-wearing is mandatory. With respect to their tone of voice, participants used language such as "careful" (Bailey) and "aware" (Claire) when describing their experiences of serving behind a mask. As Bailey summated, "as your tone gets slightly not happy, in your non-server voice, you get that you're being a bitch". Alongside being conscious of their tone of voice, some participants highlighted the reality of being mindful of their body language and managing their tone of voice during social interactions with others.

Some participants reported that they are "conscious" (Georgia) and "more aware" (Emma) of their bodily gestures and how others interpret them during the pandemic. Goffman

(1959) argued that performers must manage their bodily gestures during their performances. With the impact of the pandemic, servers are mindful of how close they are to restaurant patrons. For example, Claire explains, “I don’t like *not* knowing how they’re feeling. Like, whether I’m getting too close or whether I’m making them feel scared somehow because of COVID”. Other participants echoed this sentiment and explained that the pandemic has made it challenging to predict guests’ reactions to their service, which servers are expected to do. Women are held to a high standard of managing their bodily gestures and adhering to feminine ideals in social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In adhering to feminine ideals, Bailey, Emma, and Georgia acknowledged the *bitch* stereotype that they can quickly be ascribed to them during their serving performances. Feminist sociologists define the term *bitch* as a sexist insult used to police women’s behaviour (Brown, 2016; Kleinman et al., 2009). Being labelled a *bitch* means behaving too assertively, a trait reserved for men, which is more often equated to confidence (Fader, 2014; Rawley, 2020). It is clear then that enforcing pandemic rules is frightening to some women because they do not want to deviate from their expected feminine expectations.

In addition to the extra labour that servers are experiencing, my data reveal that enforcing pandemic rules is complex for women servers. Some participants described enforcing the pandemic rules as “awkward” (Abby), “hard to manage” (Dakota), and “challenging” (Freya). The participants who described the enforcement of these rules recognized that they were expected to adhere to feminine expectations. Furthermore, by enforcing pandemic protocols, servers would be perceived as too assertive. Freya detailed a perception shared by other participants when she explained she had to “be nice and passive because that’s what was

expected of me”. She continued explaining, “and if I didn’t do that, I wouldn’t get money”. The fear of jeopardizing tips by enforcing the pandemic rules was a common pattern in my study.

Building on Goffman’s (1959) theories of dramaturgy, tipping is the act of applauding the performer and their performance. In general, servers do not want to risk losing tips (Coffey, 2019; Einhorn & Abrams, 2018; Kanik, 2020). This is especially true during the pandemic when tipping plays such an integral role in many servers’ livelihoods. Gross (2020) describes the importance of tipping for servers as living “tip to mouth” (para. 26). Pre-pandemic servers would “ignore comments about their bodies, laugh off proposals for dates and deflect behavior that makes them uncomfortable or angry — all in pursuit of the \$2 or \$20 tip that will help buy groceries or pay the rent” (Einhorn and Abrams, 2018, para. 2). My data indicate that servers continue to tolerate sexual harassment and become concerned with enforcing pandemic protocols during the pandemic because they do not want to jeopardize their tips. Even though participants reported they are uncomfortable enforcing pandemic protocols, they are still required to implement them in some capacity.

I asked participants to speculate on the future of serving and how it might change after the pandemic. When examining participants’ speculations on the future of serving, my findings indicate that most participants recognize the need for progressive social change in the restaurant subculture to repair the industry. The results also reveal that there are various problematic practices and procedures in restaurants that have become normalized. Diminishing appearance-based standards, taking the health and safety of workers more seriously, and the desire to enforce boundaries with people were common threads of discussion that arose during the conversations with participants. In this way, these are areas that participants recognize to be pre-existing issues within the restaurant industry that require social change. With the influence of mask-wearing,

some participants are optimistic that appearance-based standards will shift in hiring processes and dress codes. Some participants are hopeful that the managerial hiring of servers will be less about their appearance and more about their resumes. The pandemic has provided the unique opportunity for interviews to be conducted via Zoom audio and video where an employer cannot see the full self-presentation of the interviewee. In addition, some participants hope that dress codes will be more lenient post-pandemic. As one participant, Freya, explains, “cut me some slack! I’m serving during an unsafe time”.

Alongside the notion of serving during an unsafe time, participants reflected on the reality of not being taken seriously when they have called in sick pre-pandemic. Since the pandemic began, participants believe that employers are now authentically considering the health and safety of restaurant employees. As one participant, Bailey explained, “calling in sick is now a good thing”. In addition, it is interesting to note that while most participants described they are uncomfortable with enforcing pandemic protocols out of fear of jeopardizing tips, some participants shared that they are hopeful of enforcing boundaries with coworkers and customers in a post-pandemic world. Regardless of the varying perceptions of the future speculations of work, institutional sexism in the restaurant prevails. Women overexert themselves in their serving positions, and restaurant work fosters a subculture where normalized practices of gender mistreatment persists.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

This study aimed to determine how women servers in Victoria, BC experience their restaurant environments before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three significant findings emerged from this study. First and foremost, my research found that the pandemic was, indeed, associated with changes in the serving experiences of women in Victoria, BC restaurants. Some of the fundamental changes include the shifting of performances for women servers with respect to conflicting experiences of mask-wearing, risking their health and safety to serve, enduring an increased burden of emotional and physical labour due to both interpersonal and operational changes in the workplace, and experiencing challenges enforcing pandemic protocols. Second, this study found that restaurants are grounds for spreading institutional sexism of various forms both before and during the pandemic. Third, overall, my data indicate that the shifts in performances of women servers might influence the industry's future by adjusting appearance-based standards, prioritizing the health and safety of Canadian servers, and ensuring servers can enforce physical and social boundaries with customers and coworkers alike.

While the restaurant industry is a subculture where community members recognize, perpetuate, and normalize institutional sexism, there is a unique opportunity for structural change. I was moved by the note of solidarity that one participant made clear during their interview, Emma; “there’s an unspoken camaraderie for the most part I would say, among servers...you have each other’s backs...and I do like to believe that”.

### **Contributions**

This research contributes to feminist sociological knowledge in various ways. First, there is little written in sociology or gender-based journals about how pandemics shift the serving experiences of women in the restaurant industry. I found that most of the publications on this

topic were related to law, business, economics, or psychology. Themes of sexual harassment, consumerism, and tipping surfaced from these types of research. There is a need for further contemporary sociological, gender-based restaurant research examining the influence of pandemics on women servers. Second, much of the research that does exist is based on the American experience. Therefore, a Canadian context is useful because the findings from this study might be helpful to public educators and policymakers who can lead workplace change in the country.

This research also has implications for restaurant managers and employees alike. In understanding some of the sexist norms and the precarity of serving during a pandemic, restaurateurs can reassess their current protocols and procedures that serve as barriers for women to feel safe working in restaurants. The research might also encourage restaurant management to consider union presence and invite anti-sexual harassment training workshops. Third, publications on women servers' experiences during the pandemic are virtually non-existent, though not a surprise given the pandemic is so recent. This research will be available and publicly accessible through the University of Victoria sociology theses digital library. Lastly, this research contributes to a historical snapshot in time and provides empirical evidence on the influence of the pandemic on women servers' performances and gender-based experiences.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this research. First, the study is limited in its scope. For example, the participant size of this study included seven participants. While there are benefits to working with small numbers of people, this study is not generalizable or representative of all Victoria, BC restaurant servers. Future research could expand the amount of case studies increase the number of participants involved. Second, while this research is generalizable to cis

women, future research must prioritize an intersectional recruitment approach and include participants of all genders, ages, races, and social statuses. Restricting the research to women between the ages 19-29, situated in Victoria, BC, limited the voices of servers.

Third, while qualitative research was most suitable for this study because it allowed for open-ended questions and the facilitation of natural conversations, this approach has some limitations. As Leavy (2017) asserts, “when using personal experiences, people have a tendency to overgeneralize, make inaccurate observations, perceive things selectively, and close off inquiry as soon as they have developed an idea” (p. 4). Reflecting on this, I identified two areas of contradictions within some of the stories that participants told. At the beginning of the interviews, I asked participants if they feel safe in their restaurant environment. This question was broad but encouraged participants to answer in whichever manner they pleased. In response, most participants reported that they *do* indeed feel safe working in their restaurant environments. However, the stories that some shared did not indicate that they felt safe working in restaurants. In fact, some participants who initially reported that they *do* feel safe, ended up using language such as *unsafe* and *uncomfortable* to describe feelings they have experienced at their current restaurant workplace.

In addition, I identified some inconsistencies in some of the participants’ stories. Six out of seven participants reported that they *do not* feel comfortable enforcing the pandemic protocols with guests. They do not want to risk losing a tip by frustrating customers. However, toward the end of the interviews, some interviewees speculated on how they hope to enforce boundaries with customers and coworkers alike, post-pandemic. In this way, some participants want to enforce boundaries post-pandemic but have difficulty in doing so currently. Lastly, to gain deeper social insight into the restaurant subculture, future research should consider interviewing

workers in all areas of the sector. While this research focused on analyzing women's experiences working in front-of-house serving positions, future research should include workers in other positions such as the back-of-house in cooking, cleaning, hostess roles, and management positions.

### **Epilogue: Clocking Out**

In this study, I investigated the social relations and gendered dynamics amongst women servers in the Victoria, BC restaurant community. This project provided insight into harmful restaurant norms that women tolerated before and during the pandemic. In an already vulnerable industry, women servers' restaurant work is more laborious and precarious than before. Further, restaurants exhibit a subculture where sexism is part of the job. Thus, there is both a need and a hope for pandemic-initiated restaurant change. This section will offer a brief personal reflection on this project.

Conducting this research was a profound way to mark time. When I began the initial research process back in March 2020, the world was shutting down due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As I wrap up the writing of this thesis, the world is returning to a state of "normalcy". In Victoria, BC restaurants have increased capacities, and patrons are now permitted to dine indoors with people from different households so long as they provide proof of full vaccination (Government of BC, 2021). Masks are mandatory, bar codes are commonly used on tables in place of physical menus, and plastic partitions remain common to see.

Between the beginning and end of my thesis-writing journey, the Victoria restaurant industry and general community members were informed of the sexual assault reports concerning a bartender in downtown Victoria. As mentioned, four participants in this study brought forward some of their knowledge and experiences with the perpetrator. In light of this local news, some participants mentioned that their employers assured restaurant workers that they were safe and cared for in the industry. However, as Emma believes, "I just feel like people only say that now because it's so publicized". Emma is one of the participants who had an encounter with the perpetrator. She shared, "I went to Chuck's this summer and I met [him] and

he gave me free drinks and he invited me to this brunch on Sunday's...when I heard all these stories of these women coming forward, it was really hard... it hit close to home" (Emma).

Around the same time as my interviews occurred for this research, I attended a protest outside of the perpetrator's former workplace, Chuck's Burger Bar, which permanently closed its doors after the news became public (CTV News, 2021). Numerous victims and allies joined together to shed light on the injustice. In my years of serving experience, it was the first time I attended a solidarity action where the focus was on restaurant accountability. It felt long overdue.

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## Appendix A

### Certificate of Ethics Approval



**University  
of Victoria**

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board  
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada  
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

#### Certificate of Approval - Amendments

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	<b>Bruce Ravelli</b> (Supervisor)	<b>ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER</b>	<b>20-0576</b>
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	<b>Jen Kostuchuk</b> Master's student	Expedited review - delegated	
UVIC DEPARTMENT	<b>Sociology SOCI</b>	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	15-Jan-2021
		APPROVED ON	22-Apr-2021
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	14-Jan-2022
<b>PROJECT TITLE</b> The Experiences of Women Servers in Victoria, BC-Based Restaurants and Bars During COVID-19			
<b>RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS</b> Aaron Devor - Co-investigator / committee member, UVic			
<b>DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING</b> None			
<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL</b> Final Interview Guide:Questions.docx - 26-Nov-2020 Final Follow-Up from Interview Email.docx - 26-Nov-2020 CORE completion Kostuchuk.pdf - 27-Nov-2020 Jan 12 Consent Form.docx - 12-Jan-2021 Jan 12 Implied Consent Form.docx - 12-Jan-2021 Jan 12 Survey Monkey Questions.pdf - 12-Jan-2021 Participants Needed Recruitment.pdf - 14-Jan-2021 Verbal Consent Jan 15.docx - 15-Jan-2021 notification_of_change_of_principal_investigator_Kostuchuk.doc - 21-Apr-2021			
<b>CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL</b>			
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.			
<b>Modifications</b> To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.			
<b>Renewals</b> Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.			
<b>Project Closures</b> When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.			
<b>Certification</b>			
This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.			

## Appendix B Consent Form



**University  
of Victoria**

## Participant Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study titled *Unmasking the Servers? Gender Performance and the Sexualized Experiences of Women Servers in Victoria, BC-Based Restaurants and Bars During COVID-19*. Please find attached information pertaining to the consent you will be required to give verbally, if you wish to be interviewed for this research.

As an M.A. graduate student in the department of Sociology, this research is required for the completion of my degree. This study is being conducted by Jen Kostuchuk ([jenkostuchuk@uvic.ca](mailto:jenkostuchuk@uvic.ca), 204-872-1777) under the supervision of Dr. Aaron Devor ([ahdevor@uvic.ca](mailto:ahdevor@uvic.ca), 250-721-7577).

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

### **What is this study about?**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women servers in Victoria, BC-based restaurant and bars during COVID-19 as this area has received little academic attention. I am interested in learning about your workplace relationships and expectations. Your voice and experience will take the forefront of this study.

### **Importance of Research**

While efforts have been made across Canada to address gender inequalities in the workplace, there has been little scholarly work exploring the experiences of women servers in the Victoria, BC-based restaurant and bar industry during COVID-19. It is clear that workplace environments impact the health, safety, and future of Canadian workers. The aim of this research is to spark conversation and action to ensure women feel safe in the restaurant and bar industry.

### **What is involved?**

If you consent to partake in this study, your participation will include a one-hour long semi-structured interview on Zoom (audio or video) at your earliest convenience. This recording will only be accessed by myself and my supervisor, Dr. Devor. With your consent, interviews will be audio or video recorded and transcribed verbatim. The recordings will be securely stored in password-protected files on a password-protected computer. After the study is complete, the recordings will be completely destroyed two years after the anticipated completion of my MA program by December 31, 2021. During the interview you will be asked about your perspective, involvement, and serving experience in restaurants and bars before and during COVID-19.

### **Is my participation voluntary?**

Yes. Participation is completely voluntary. However, should you choose to participate, it is

important to note that you should not feel obligated to answer all of the questions. Further, you may withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and up to four weeks after the interview date without consequence. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview, please email me at [jenkostuchuk@uvic.ca](mailto:jenkostuchuk@uvic.ca).

**Benefits?**

I will provide a safe space for all participants in this study to speak freely about their experiences in the restaurant and bar industry. The data of this study will be useful for public educators and policymakers who have the ability to lead workplace change to Canadian workplaces. Further, you will be contributing to a historic snapshot of the experience of serving in restaurants and bars during a global pandemic where restrictions such as mask-wearing and physical distancing measures are in place.

**Risks?**

There are no major risks to this study. However, some of the questions in the study may cause emotional discomfort. There are no consequences to stopping the interview or withdrawing entirely.

Victoria Sexual Assault Centre

<https://vsac.ca/>  
250-383-3232

HONE Consulting

<https://www.honeconsulting.com/discrimination-harassment-bullying-training/>  
250-413-3170

BCFED Health & Safety Centre

<https://www.healthandsafetybc.ca/event-category/bullying-harassment/>  
604-433-1453

Work BC Resources for Women

<https://www.workbc.ca/Resources-for/Women.aspx>

Canadian Mental Health Association (At Work Victoria)

<https://victoria.cmha.bc.ca/programs-services/at-work-victoria/>  
250-216-4228

Family Caregivers of British Columbia

<https://www.familycaregiversbc.ca/toolkit-for-employers/>  
25-384-0408

Crisis Centre BC

<https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/>  
1-800-784-2433

**What will happen to my responses?**

All research data including audio-recordings will be safely secured on a password protected laptop. All research data will only be accessible by myself and the research supervisor, Dr. Devor. Your identity and personal information will not be included in the study. Pseudonyms will be created to protect your identity indefinitely. This data will be used for the completion of my MA in Sociology at the University of Victoria. However, it may also be used for future presentations or publication opportunities. All data from this research will be electronically destroyed two years after the completion of the study.

**Will my identity remain anonymous?**

Yes. Participant safety is my top priority. Precautions will be taken to protect your identity. Should there be any concerns during or after the interview, you may request that certain responses not be included in the final project.

**What happens after the interview?**

After the interview, you will be given a debriefing document. If you are interested, I will also provide you a digital copy of the research findings.

**Honorarium**

If you consent to participating in this study, a \$15 e-gift card will be provided as a thank you. This honorarium will not be dependent on how you answer questions or which questions you may or may not choose to answer. Further, if you withdraw from the study during the data collection or anytime up to four weeks after, you will still receive the \$15 e-gift card.

Appendix C  
Recruitment Poster

# PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

**FOR A STUDY ON RESTAURANT OR BAR SERVING EXPERIENCES IN VICTORIA, BC DURING COVID-19**

*Study* 

This research aims to examine how gender-based experiences of women servers in restaurants or bars shift under COVID-19 restrictions. I am seeking 6-8 participants who meet the eligibility criteria. A 1 hour interview on Zoom (audio or video) is required.

*Eligibility* 

- Do you identify as a woman?
- Are you between the ages of 19-29?
- Do you have at least one year of serving experience since 2015 in a restaurant or bar located in Canada?
- Do you have at least 100 hours of restaurant or bar serving experience in Victoria, BC since March 2020?

*Interested?* 

Please contact:  
MA student, Jen Kostuchuk at  
[jenkostuchuk@uvic.ca](mailto:jenkostuchuk@uvic.ca)



University of Victoria

**There is no pressure or obligation for folks that I know personally to volunteer for this study. You may verify the ethical approval of this study by contacting: The Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca))**

## Appendix D

### Participant Survey

**1. Do you identify as a woman?**

Yes

No

**2. Do you have at least 1 year of serving experience in a restaurant or bar in Canada since 2015?**

Yes

No

**3. Do you have at least 100 hours of serving experience in a Victoria, BC-based restaurant since March 2020?**

Yes

No

**4. Are you between the ages of 19-29?**

Yes

No

**5. Do you identify as a member of a racialized group?**

Yes

No

Prefer Not to Answer

**6. Do you identify as a person living with a disability?**

Yes

No

Prefer Not to Answer

**7. Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ2+ community?**

Yes

No

Prefer Not to Answer

## Appendix E Interview Guide

*[Questions pertaining to server experiences pre-COVID]*

1. **Can you describe the dynamics of the restaurant or bar environment in which you worked in prior to/before COVID-19?**
  - a. What words/adjectives would you use to describe the workplace environment?
    - i. *Describe the relationships between staff and management*
  - b. Would you say you felt safe/comfortable at work?
    - i. *If yes, what made it feel safe/comfortable?*
    - ii. *If no, what did not make it feel safe/comfortable?*
  - c. What were your roles and responsibilities at work?
    - i. *Were your tasks different than others who you understood to have the same role as you?*
  - d. Were workplace roles divided along gender lines?
    - i. *(i.e., front of the house was women and back of the house was men? Bartenders were men and servers were women?)*
  - e. Did you believe that men (customers, coworkers, managers) were treated better compared to women servers in the workplace?
    - i. *If yes, in what way?*
    - ii. *If no, what made it seem that all staff members, regardless of gender were treated fairly?*
  
2. **Did your workplace require a formal or informal dress code?**
  - a. *If yes, describe how you were expected to dress*
  - b. Did the dress code depend on the gender of the employee?
    - i. *Were there differences or similarities in the dress code expectations for men and women?*
  - c. Did you feel comfortable in the expected clothing?
    - i. *Why or why not?*
  - d. Have you ever questioned or challenged the dress code?
    - i. *Why?*
    - ii. *What happened?*
  - e. *If no dress code, how did you choose to dress for work?*
  - f. Has the way you dress been commented on?
    - i. *By whom (coworkers, management, customers)?*
    - ii. *In what way?*
    - iii. *Do you take comments about your appearance as compliments?*
  
3. **Do you feel motivated to maximize customer satisfaction?**
  - a. *If yes, in what ways were you expected to do this?*
  - b. *How do you make customers feel good about having you as their server?*
  - c. Can you recall a time or two where you received a large amount of money in tips at once during one shift at the restaurant or bar you worked at pre-COVID-19?
    - i. *If yes, how did you achieve this? (appearance, banter, physical gestures?)*

d. If you are not motivated to maximize customer satisfaction, why not?

**4. Can you think of a time or two where your gender was a factor in an uncomfortable, inappropriate, or otherwise sexualized workplace experience?**

- a. Was this with a co-worker, customer, manager?
- b. Did you report this to management?
  - i. *Why or why not?*
- c. Did you ever witness someone else experience an uncomfortable, inappropriate, or sexualized situation? If yes, what happened?
  - i. *Did you report it to management?*
  - ii. *If yes, were there repercussions for you or the other person involved in the situation?*
  - iii. *If not, why not?*
- d. Was there a procedure in place to address sexual harassment in the workplace?
  - i. *What was it?*
- e. What do you feel contributes to customers/staff sexualizing women staff?

*[Moving on to questions pertaining to server experiences during COVID-19]*

**5. How have COVID-19 measures impacted the way you provide customer service in the restaurant or bar?**

- a. How have dress code expectations shifted since COVID-19?
- b. How have your serving practices changed since wearing a mask and physical distancing?
  - i. *In what way?*
  - ii. *If no, why do you think may this be?*
- c. How do you keep customers satisfied with a mask and physical distancing measures in place?
- d. Have you noticed a difference in the tipping culture since COVID-19?
- e. In your opinion, has customer response to your service changed?
  - i. *If yes, in what way?*

**6. Did you experience your hours be cut or hear of any lay-offs occurring in your workplace during COVID-19?**

- a. Do you feel that cut hours and lay-offs were dependent on gender?
- b. Do you feel that your scheduled hours are fair in relation to co-workers?
- c. Do you have an idea of who was affected most by lay-offs and reduced scheduled hours? (Front-of-house? Back-of-house? Based on seniority?)

**7. Based on your experiences serving during COVID-19, how would you want things to change?**

- a. Do you believe there are some positives with the implemented COVID-19 restrictions?
  - i. If yes, what are they?
- b. Are there procedures in place that you feel should stay the same once restrictions lift?

- i. If yes, why and what are these?*
      - ii. If no, what do you miss?*
    - c. What is it about the restrictions that you do not like?
- 8. **In addition to health and safety measures, what do you feel have been the biggest changes or challenges in the restaurant or bar environment during COVID-19?**
  - a. Do you feel comfortable enforcing COVID-19 rules with customers?
  - b. Do you feel safe in the workplace with the current COVID-19 restrictions?
    - i. If not, why not?
- 9. **Have you felt sexualized in the workplace since COVID-19?**
  - a. More often or less often?
  - b. If more often, in what way?
  - c. By whom?
  - d. How does this make you feel?
  - e. Do you tell anyone about it?
    - i. Why or why not?*
  - f. If less often, what do you think may contribute to this?
  - g. Is there anything else that comes to mind, or that you would like to say in terms of sexualized incidents in the restaurant or bar pre-COVID versus now?
- 10. **Do you have any speculations about the impact of COVID-19 on women servers?**
  - a. Any additional stories you would like to share about your serving experiences during COVID-19?
- 11. **Is there anything else that you would like to discuss about your serving experiences before and during COVID-19?**