Serving Consumer Expectations: Women Servers' Interpretations of Job Requirements in the Food Service Industry

by

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Abstract

The food service industry remains relatively understudied, especially in the Canadian context. However, many avenues of research exist on the labour performed by workers in this sector. In focusing on servers who rely on tips to supplement their income, this thesis explores how specific traits are commodified under management supervision to maximize corporate gain and consumer satisfaction. Utilizing aesthetic labour theory and feminist political economy with an intersectional lens, I argue that employers rely on attributes such as appearance and personality to sell the restaurant experience through the assignment of job requirements and duties. In doing so, servers become part of the product being sold. This has gendered and racialized implications. This thesis uses in-depth interviews to prioritize women servers’ experiences negotiating their assigned job requirements and their observations of the gendered and racialized divisions in the food service industry.
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1 Chapter: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Before I began my shift at the restaurant, I looked at my reflection in the bathroom mirror and gave myself a once over. I ensured that my dress shirt was pleated and had no visible wrinkles. I tucked my shirt into a pair of black slacks, held up by a belt. My hair was plaited in a braid, not a ponytail. I tied my apron around my waist. The apron was grey, held up by two brown suspenders. When I received it, the package called it “industrial.” In my apron, I counted the utensils I would need for my shift: four pens, all of the same color and brand, my crumber, which was used to swipe away any stray crumbs guests dropped, and my orange wine opener. I prepared to walk out to the side of the main dining area to my manager, who would check that I met all the uniform requirements to begin my shift. I lined up next to all the other servers. My manager eyed us all, pointing out things some of the others were missing. I managed to pass the visual examination. Later, my manager looked me up and down and told me he liked my makeup. I thanked him. He continued, “But, I think you should go for a more dramatic look. Like you’re going out for a night at the club.” He pointed to one of the other servers. “Like her, try to do something like that next time.” I sighed, thinking that there was always something else to be added to the list of requirements.

The previous description is one of many similar experiences I had while working in the food service industry\(^1\), where I worked in various positions for over three years. I often felt pressure to adopt a certain appearance, never fully feeling as though I could live up to the expectation of management. Therefore, my master’s thesis intends to explore how restaurants commodify certain traits, such as appearance and personality when recruiting, hiring, and

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\(^1\) The food service industry can refer to any business, institution, or company responsible for serving food outside the home (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2020). I will use the term to refer to full-service restaurants.
training servers in the food service industry. In utilizing aesthetic labour theory, I contribute to literature that looks at the way that employers choose certain “types” of workers, stratified across gender, race, and class. In my own experience as a server, I noticed the emphasis placed on appearance, especially for the benefit of the customer. I was encouraged to wear more makeup or dress a certain way. I was told, both explicitly and implicitly, that these were part of the job requirements, even though this was not stated in any manual and was not expected of my male counterparts.

After serving in the United States, I moved to Canada to obtain my master’s. When thinking about topics that interested me, my mind gravitated toward my experiences in the food service industry. In addition to wondering how these processes played out in the Canadian food service industry, I was also interested in talking with other servers and hearing about their experiences in relation to my own. With that in mind, my thesis asks: (1) How does management commodify “typical” feminine traits in order to meet consumer expectations? (2) How does this commodification contribute to the precarity, racialization, and gendering of service work? (3) What sort of job requirements are expected, and how does relying on consumer expectation (i.e., “the customer is always right”) further the gendered and racialized divisions in this industry? (4) How do servers challenge, embrace, or assign meaning to the gendered aspects of their labor? Using the theories of aesthetic labour and feminist political economy, I argue that restaurants hire employees based on characteristics, personality traits, or appearance and then mold those employees through hiring processes and job requirements so that the employees embody the aesthetics of the organization they represent. The characteristics employers look for are usually stratified along race, class, and gender (Williams and Connell 2010; Walters 2018).
1.2 Methodology

Following an outline of the theory I rely on in this project, I discuss the methods I used. I performed semi-structured qualitative interviews in order to center the participants’ experiences and explore their perspectives. Seven participants who had experience working as servers in Ontario for at least six months were selected. All of the participants were women; anyone who self-identified as a woman was eligible for participation. The restaurants the participants worked for varied, with the most common style being premium casual\(^2\).

The interview questions were primarily open-ended, allowing participants to discuss the topics they considered most important (Dobson 2014). Many of the interviews happened along the lines of a conversation, where I divulged some of my own experiences, and in turn, the participants discussed theirs. This interviewing method allowed space for the data to reflect what was important to participants and to include common themes that were observed but may not have been included in the interview guide. I hoped to engage with feminist methodology by allowing for a fluid conversation and establishing a level of rapport with participants (Oakley 1981; Collins 1998; Tang 2002). At the same time, I have allowed myself to critically reflect on my positionality as a researcher and the research process as a whole (DeVault and Gross 2012; Thwaites 2017). The entire interview process is a construction where power may be more or less shared as both parties negotiate their identities throughout the interview (Collins 1998). I was drawn to qualitative interviews because I genuinely cared about hearing participants’ experiences, and because interviews allow for an intimate understanding of participant perspectives (DeVault and Gross 2012). This is

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\(^2\) Premium casual restaurants originated in Western Canada and include chains such as Moxie’s and JOEY. They are described as upscale casual, typically found in upscale areas and featuring a dining room section and lounge section with multiple televisions (“Types of Restaurants” 2022).
especially pertinent in the restaurant industry, where I seek to understand the labour processes and job requirements from the viewpoint of the workers they affect (Williams and Connell 2010). Nevertheless, I allow for space in my thesis to acknowledge the inherently exploitative nature of research extraction (Thwaites 2017). I am to maintain reflexivity, which is also an essential goal of feminist research methods (DeVault and Gross 2012; Thwaites 2017).

The interview questions focused on job requirements and hiring processes. Following pre-existing American scholarship on the restaurant industry, the interview data indicates gendered and racialized divisions present in recruitment, hiring, training, and assigned job duties. The interview data provides a unique lens on the work organization of restaurants in Ontario, utilizing both aesthetic labour theory and feminist political economy to provide an intersectional analysis of how managers actively commodify certain traits to appeal to consumer expectations, fractured along the lines of gender, race, and class.

1.3 Contemporary Implications

The service industry is one of the largest growing sectors and is predicted to continue growing (Autor and Dorn 2013, as cited by Walters 2018). In the US and Canada, going out to eat is a common occurrence. The majority of food service workers are women (Matulewicz 2016), and 1 in 5 Canadians aged 24 and under are employed in the food service industry (UFCW Canada 2017). Restaurants are the number one attraction in Canada for spending time with family and friends (UFCW Canada 2017). Despite this, literature about workplace organization and the type of labour performed in the Canadian restaurant industry is sparse. The work performed in the food service industry is often seen as simple, and the workers deemed as “low-skilled” (Korczynski 2009), when in reality, the work performed can be complex, and the experiences of workers in the industry vary widely. Further, there must be a reflection on why
workers in the food service industry are perceived this way, given the historical gendered and racialized divisions in the industry.

The current food service industry started with fine dining restaurants in hotels, where lodgers were welcomed to service by crews of black men (Cobble 1991, 18). However, as Cobble (1991) attests, “Black men… lost the more desirable service jobs to white men by the end of the nineteenth century, and they fell further behind once feminization gathered speed in the early decades of the twentieth century” (18). Following a shortage of male labour after World War I that coincided with the growth of restaurants outside of hotels that catered to the middle class, women became the most readily employed servers (19-20). Employers not only preferred women for cheaper labour but also emphasized “beauty, sex appeal, and a pleasing personality”, in addition to believing that women were more suited for the role of a decorative object (21). Black women were marginalized, with few restaurants choosing to employ them (23). These racialized and gendered working conditions have carried on into the 21st century and are reflected in hiring practices and job requirements.

My research will contribute to an emerging body of literature that explores how skills and qualities are commodified to reflect a company’s values, which often upholds a hierarchy of gendered and racialized divisions (Williams and Connell 2010; Walters 2018; Jayaraman 2020). Race, sex, ethnicity, and ability are protected categories in both the US and Canada, meaning it is illegal for employers to discriminate based on any of those aspects. But what happens when employers use other factors to discriminate against workers, and those factors are interwoven with identity markers?

Employers get away with hiring discrimination by justifying their choices based on
consumer expectations. In an industry where “the customer is always right”, employers and managers can feel justified in prioritizing candidates that look a certain way, creating a barrier for racialized workers and other marginalized people who do not fit conventional beauty standards. The appearances and personalities of workers are seen as their embodied symbolic capital (Walters 2018); how outwardly beautiful or friendly they are may also be how valuable they are to the company. Scholars such as Megan Rivers-Moore (2013) have conceptualized thinking about beauty in the sex industry as “value, something that circulates, can be exchanged, might produce more value, and is ultimately relational” (154). This can be applied to the food service industry as well, where employers view beauty, appearance, and personality as products to be bought by consumers. If the definition of beauty that employers use to make hiring and training decisions is one based on Western standards, this can uphold gendered and racialized hierarchies.

This discrimination begins at hiring but continues in job training and requirements, where workers are sorted into positions and assigned job duties based on their aesthetic appeal. In my interviews with participants, they reinforced what previous qualitative data has revealed about gendered and racialized divisions in the service industry. This provides a unique view into how this occurs in the Canadian context, one in which the literature is underdeveloped but sorely needed. I anticipate that further research opportunities will come out of this project, as the restaurant industry is one with many avenues for analysis. I hope that my research contributions will impact how the public views servers’ roles and that legislators will consider historical gendered and racialized divisions.

1.4 Chapter Overview
This thesis is separated into five central chapters. Chapter 2 describes the theory underpinning this thesis, discussing the decisions to utilize aesthetic labour and feminist political
economy to aid in the analysis of this research. Chapter 2 also discusses the research methods used in this project and the choice to use qualitative interviews to employ feminist research methods. This chapter also details the interpretation methods and how NVivo was used to code the data collected from the interviews.

Chapter 3 is a literature review broken down into four sections. The first section provides a historical context for the gendered and racialized divisions present in the food service industry, the second section discusses the segregation between the front of the restaurant and the back of the restaurant, the third section looks at other applications of aesthetic labour theory in framing the “ideal” employee, and the fourth section discusses the importance of the mechanism of tipping in deciding job requirements for servers and upholding gendered and racialized divisions.

Chapters 4-6 each outline the data attained through the interview process, separated into topics based on repeated themes in the interviews. Chapter 4 looks at the types and variations of job requirements, both explicitly laid out during hiring and training, and those that were implied by management. This chapter emphasizes the usage of aesthetic labour by management to decide what kinds of duties are required based on the goals of the restaurant and analyzes the way that employees may either embrace or resist those given requirements. Chapter 5 explores the relationship between managers and servers, focusing on management enforcement of job requirements along with levels of conflict resolution. This chapter finds that there are low levels of trust between managers and employees, along with managers’ encouragement of servers to individually figure out problems, while at the same time high levels of expectation that employees will adhere to management wishes. Chapter 6 examines hiring processes, including recruitment, interviews, and training. This chapter contends that management hiring processes
uphold gendered and racialized divisions, as managers use aesthetic labour to pinpoint a certain “type” of employee, which is stratified along lines of race, class, and gender.

The final chapter situates this research in the broader socio-political context, discussing the importance of contributing to research on the food service industry. For political economists and feminist scholars, the food service industry is often overlooked and underappreciated, but in which many avenues for future research exist.
2 Chapter: Theory and Methodology

2.1 Aesthetic Labour

In order to understand the way that feminine traits are commodified through job requirements and processes of hiring and training servers in the food service industry, the theory of aesthetic labour is instrumental. Aesthetic labour branches off Arlie Hochschild’s (1983) groundbreaking study on emotional labour, which explores how emotions are modified according to customer satisfaction in interactive service work. Hochschild originally developed the concept of emotional labour to analyze the work performed by flight attendants, and Hochschild’s research provided a framework that has been used extensively by scholars to explore the way that emotional labour is deployed in other occupations (see Korczynski 2003; Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Thwaites 2017).

The concept of emotional labour is useful in exploring industries such as the service and care sectors, as the work performed is often stratified along the lines of gender and race. However, Hochschild’s concept of emotional labour may not fully describe how employers actively take advantage of and seek out certain embodied characteristics in employees. Hochschild’s analysis of the harm of emotional labour for flight attendants was focused on the damaging psychological processes within individual workers (Korczynski 2003), not within the service sector as a whole or about the dynamic present between employees and managers, and the way that employers and managers may influence the type of emotional labour performed by workers. As scholars of aesthetic labour have argued (Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Korczynski 2008; Macdonald and Merill 2008), aesthetic labour can be witnessed in all aspects of the service sector, especially as companies place emphasis on face-to-face service interactions and positioning the customer as in charge of the service interaction. Warhurst and Nickson (2007) argue that in the lens of aesthetic labour, “embodied dispositions” are
commodified to appeal to the senses of customers (Witz et al. 2003, 37). As Warhurst and Nickson (2007) point out, these embodiments are “a feature of employer demands [and] should be analytically foregrounded” (106). Due to the emphasis on appeasing the customer in the context of full-service restaurants, aesthetic labour provides a theoretical framework to understand how servers interpret their job requirements and how those requirements may depend on the type of branding the restaurant is seeking to display.

Aesthetic labour not only focuses on the type of skills needed for service jobs but also sheds light on how employers actively construct an employee's image through hiring, training, and the implementation of requirements such as uniforms, dress codes, or employee manuals. Aesthetic labour is a valuable framework for this project because of the emphasis on appearance and attitudes and the theorization of employers seeking out certain types of employees and then continuing to shape them through training practices. Servers in full-service restaurants certainly perform emotional labour (Korczynski 2003)³. Still, it is the way that typically feminine traits are commodified by managers to satisfy customers that concerns this research project. This thesis explores the relationship between managers and servers, as well as the process by which managers envision what appeals to customers, then impose those goals onto their employees. Pinpointing the organization/employer as an active agent in upholding these requirements is essential to understanding how this affects servers’ individual experiences.

Intersectionality

Emotional labour is shaped by intersectionality, as the prevalence of emotional labour and the type of person chosen to perform that labour is stratified according to race, class, age, and gender (Macdonald and Merrill 2008). Similarly, aesthetic labour is shaped by

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³ Servers perform emotional labour in numerous ways, including through caring for the customer throughout the service transaction in addition to the expectation of maintaining empathy and understanding for the customer.
intersectionality. Macdonald and Merill (2008) note that employers seek varying gender, ethnic, and class markers in employees depending on the type of service provided. Intersectionality is a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to describe the multiple dimensions of discrimination against black women. Rather than an additive approach that considers social identities as a sum of their parts, intersectionality provides a lens to view how intersecting identities of marginalized groups occur simultaneously. As scholars such as Macdonald and Merrill (2008) and Walters (2018) have argued, previous applications of aesthetic labour theory have not gone far enough in conceptualizing how race, class, gender, and age serve as signifiers in the service encounter. Intersectionality is a tool to frame our understandings of hiring practices, as ethnicity, race, and gender shape hiring decisions because they shape service interactions (Macdonald and Merill 2008). Beginning with the “type” of person hired for the service position, managers attempt to match service providers to meet customer expectations. Companies in the service sector use hiring practices to “identify and develop good-looking employees”, which has led to “white-dominant branding”, as those are the workers who tend to be selected by managers and employers (Walters 2018). Applying a version of aesthetic labour theory that utilizes an intersectional lens will help reveal the gendered and racialized divisions in the food service industry. As we will see in the following chapters, intersectionality is a crucial tool for understanding the findings of this thesis, particularly in terms of the ways that identity markers are salient in the service interaction and in the space of the restaurant, where workers are often sorted based on gendered and racialized characteristics.

Most studies using aesthetic labour have been conducted with businesses such as high-end retail or grocery store chains, expensive hotels, and couture fashion. This may be because the aesthetic component in these industries is obvious. The aesthetic element of the labour performed
in full-service restaurants may not be immediately pinpointed but is something that has grown over time (Genc and Kozak 2020). Studies exploring the full-service restaurant environment vary; some focus on management’s emotional competence and the effect that has on the aesthetic labour of employees (Genc and Kozak 2020), while others focus on customer experience (Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue 2015). In focusing specifically on server experiences and centering women, my project affirms Macdonald and Merrill’s (2008) contention that aesthetic labour is something that occurs in all customer service jobs and in which race, gender, and class coalesce in different job settings “to create the norm of the worker who will ‘look the part’ given a particular service” (123). This can be seen when comparing the “type” of worker chosen to be at the front-of-house in a restaurant versus the type of worker in the back-of-house. Both types of workers are performing a form of aesthetic labour, but they are meeting different customer and management needs.

As the participants’ experiences will reveal, applying an intersectional aesthetic labour lens provides a framework through which to view the tactics deployed by management and employers in hiring, training, and job requirements. This project contributes to the literature on aesthetic labour in the restaurant industry, focusing specifically on Canada, which is inextricably linked to that of the US. The history of the restaurant industry in both the US and Canada is one based on historical gendered and racialized divisions, which continue to be upheld by employers in the restaurant industry.

2.2 Feminist Political Economy

Analytically, I also rely heavily on contributions made by feminist political economists. As a field, feminist political economy combines feminist and political economic theories. Feminist political economy sees social relations as conditioned by economic structures and explores how these structures are maintained and reproduced through systems of ideological
control (Luxton and Maroney 1989). Feminist political economy allows a holistic approach to viewing social relations from a materialist perspective and how society reproduces itself in evolving ways (Luxton 2013). This allows for an understanding of how gender inequalities may operate in the labour force, with a focus on the state’s role in structuring and maintaining gender hierarchies “and how those hierarchies relate to other structures of domination such as race, class, and imperialism” (Luxton and Maroney 1989, 6). Feminist political economists have criticized traditional political economy for its “sex-blindness and androcentrism” (5). Feminist political economy offers a unique lens through which to view how gendered and racialized hierarchies operate in the context of feminized occupations in the labour market.

Feminist political economic scholarship exists mainly in the Canadian context, where the Canadian women’s movement shaped it. Within the movement, a socialist-feminist current existed, which was integral to the body of thought produced by feminist political economists. Marxist feminists have significantly contributed to investigating women’s role in labour market construction and capital accumulation (Luxton and Maroney 1989). This project looks at the way that women are chosen explicitly for roles of service due to perceived attitudes that women are more “naturally” suited to work that is focused on caring, nurturing, or serving others. Feminist political economists such as Leah Vosko, Meg Luxton, and Heather Jon Maroney have attested to the ability of feminist political economy to offer a reflexive view of how specific features of socio-political environments shape its theoretical development (Vosko 2019; Luxton and Maroney 1989). The neoliberal governance of Canada has shaped feminist political economy since the late 1980s, which has increased precarious and nonstandard work, especially for women (Vosko 2019). Scholars in this field have demonstrated how precarious jobs are prevalent

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4 Though I do not expand on the impact of neoliberalism on the labour market, it is important to mention due to its relevance to feminist political economy.
among women, migrants, and racialized workers (Vosko 2019). In taking a point of departure from Vosko’s (2019) contributions to explorations of precarious work, my research aligns with the contention that labour legislation intended to protect workers must acknowledge gendered and racialized divisions in order to be useful.

In seeing feminist research as motivated by strategic concerns (Armstrong and Connelly 1989), feminist political economy prioritizes the experiences of women while at the same time considering the different social locations and identities that influence those experiences. Overall, feminist political economy is concerned with understanding “the way in which women experience the intersection of class, gender, race/ethnicity and regionality/nationality and the way in which women have acted… to make their own history” (Armstrong and Connelly 1989, 6). Rather than seeing women as victims to larger structures such as capitalism, sexism, and white supremacy, feminist political economy sees women as active agents in their own lives while at the same time exploring how social constructions may influence women’s roles in the labour market. In contrast to aesthetic labour, intersectionality has been integral to feminist political economy since its origin. Relying on intersectional paradigms can allow for new ways of thinking and explanations for the organization of social and cultural structures (Collins 2000). Feminist political economy prides itself in its ability to include a range of perspectives and offer a reflexive and intersectional theory.

By relying on the theories of aesthetic labour and feminist political economy, my research pays attention to how management influences servers to be a certain “type” of employee and how servers negotiate this in their workplace. The labour market has shifted so that management is increasingly focused on meeting customer needs (Korczynski 2008). In the service interaction, the customer plays a central role in funding the server’s wage through the
mechanism of tipping. By placing the onus of the server wage partially on the customer, needs can be individualized, giving customers a sense of power and sovereignty (Korczynski 2008). In the food service industry, this can be further witnessed through tailoring customer wants and needs based on worker appearances and attitudes.

Feminist political economy aligns well with aesthetic labour as they both consider social locations and their impacts on labour. Feminist political economy offers a better intersectional lens and has a strong foundation of scholarship on women’s work in a capitalist labour market. Although traditional uses of aesthetic labour theory may not have gone far enough to encapsulate the identity markers that signify why a worker may be chosen or recruited for a particular type of work, feminist political economy offers a more nuanced understanding of how social location and historical divisions affect this process.

**Conclusion**

This portion of the chapter outlines the theories of aesthetic labour and feminist political economy, and the justification for using two theories to outline this project. Both theories allow for an understanding of the way that social locations may affect the labour market. Aesthetic labour focuses on the usage of embodied dispositions in employees for organizational gain, while feminist political economy provides a holistic approach to viewing women’s roles in the labour market. Utilizing intersectional analysis along with both theories creates a practical framework that allows me to explore the way women servers may perceive their given job requirements, how they negotiate this in the context of management influence and gendered and racialized divisions, and the way these divisions are indicative of a labour market characterized by precarity and a focus on consumer satisfaction.
2.3 Interview Methods

To remain consistent with the theoretical notions underpinning this research, I have employed feminist research methods to conduct interviews. This section will discuss my reasonings for using feminist research methods and how they were applied during the interviews. I provide details of the respondent sample selection and the methods by which the interview questions were selected. I walk through the interview process and the stages of recruitment, ethical considerations, the manner of interviewing over Zoom, and finally, I reflect on the usage of feminist research methods.

Seven participants were selected who worked in the food service industry in Ottawa within a year of the start of the interviews. Initially, I was looking for servers who had worked in the food service industry within six months prior to the start of interviews. Due to the ongoing pandemic, and the closures (some temporary, some permanent) of many food service businesses, I had to be more flexible with eligibility requirements. During the Ontario-wide lockdown, which took place between February-April 2021, dining indoors was forbidden. With this limitation in mind, I extended the length in which the participants may have been previously employed in the food service industry. Six of the seven participants were employed for full-service restaurants. The style of restaurants varied, with the most common type being premium casual\(^5\). One of the participants worked for a banquet hall where she was paid minimum wage, with no tips to supplement that income. The act of tipping is important to the research but not prioritized; therefore, the participant’s interview has been included in the data. As this research prioritizes the experiences of women, all chosen participants identified as women. As long as participants self-identified as women, they were eligible to be included in the study.

\(^5\) Five of the seven participants had been employed for at least one premium casual style of restaurant.
Participants must have been at least 18 years old\(^6\) and have had at least six months of experience working in the Ottawa food service industry. Attached as Appendix A is the poster used to recruit participants, which included eligibility requirements and that participants would be awarded a $10 Visa gift card for donating their time to this project. The interview questions were formed as a script; using a semi-structured interview format allowed for conversations to develop freely between participants and discuss in detail certain questions which may have been more pertinent to participants based on their experiences. Attached as Appendix B is the interview script with the questions used. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews took place over Zoom, and the audio was recorded. NVivo was used to transcribe and code the interviews.

Recruitment took place through my personal social media. I shared the recruitment poster on my Instagram and Twitter accounts, and my friends and colleagues circulated it through their social media accounts as well. Initially, I got several responses to my poster. Following up with the initial responses was challenging, as some people never replied beyond a first message. I intended to use snowballing and have participants tell their friends and coworkers about the project, but all participants were recruited through my own social channels. Two of the participants had worked at the same restaurant, as they were both friends of a mutual friend. Neither of the participants was aware of the other’s participation.

In order to protect participants’ privacy, several precautions were taken throughout the interview process. Firstly, all interviewees were sent a consent form prior to the interviews. For those unable to sign the consent form electronically, I read the consent form aloud and asked for their verbal consent. Participants were told that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

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\(^6\) The age of 18 was chosen to minimize risk to participants, and because servers must be at least 18 to serve alcohol in restaurants in Ontario.
over the course of the interview, at which point the interview would end and I would delete the recording. The consent form is attached in Appendix C. Participants were also randomly assigned pseudonyms, and no identifying information was used to interpret the data. This decision was made to minimize the risk of employer retaliation should the details disclosed become known to the restaurants being discussed.

For this reason, no restaurant names are included. Although I recorded the interviews over Zoom, only the audio was retained; I deleted the video components after the interviews took place and saved the audio. The audio recordings were securely saved to my computer, which is kept on my person or locked in my office at all times. The recordings were saved to an encrypted folder, and my computer is accessible through a password known only to myself.

The potential harms identified through the ethics process were minimal. The participants may have experienced backlash from their employers for speaking with me, but because none of the participants were recruited through restaurant channels, there was little chance that their employers would know about their involvement with my research unless they chose to disclose that information. Additionally, many of the participants no longer worked for the restaurants we discussed. The other potential risk identified was that of emotional harm. Participants did disclose details of their experiences as servers, and some of the participants did recall events that could be emotionally triggering. However, none of the interview questions explicitly asked this; these memories emerged throughout several interviews. I believe that due to the rapport we developed (Oakley 1981), participants felt comfortable sharing details that may have been more difficult to recall.

Participants would still be awarded with an honorarium even if they decided to withdraw their consent.
Feminist research methods were employed in the hopes of establishing a reciprocal relationship between myself and the participants. Qualitative interviewing has been prized as a feminist method because it allows participants to contribute equally to research projects (Oakley 1981; DeVault & Gross 2012; Thwaites 2017). An important aspect of feminist methods is the idea of reflexivity, or the ability to critically look at one’s research and be honest in discussing the research process (Thwaites 2017). As a feminist researcher, it is important to me to reflect on the methods I used and to maintain a “reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power, [but] always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance” (DeVault & Gross 2012, 13).

My aim in using feminist research methods is to prioritize women’s agency in their labour as servers and participants while at the same time remaining aware of the implications my research may have. Initially, I was drawn to Ann Oakley’s seminal work on qualitative interviewing. Feminist research methods allow for personal identity to be invested in the research relationship, and Oakley (1981) argues that this advances the goal of finding information. Oakley has also argued strongly for building rapport, which is created through mutual sharing and a sense of trust between the interviewer and interviewee. The intent behind building rapport is to establish a non-hierarchal relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Oakley 1981). However, scholars such as Rachel Thwaites (2017) have argued that building rapport can be a performance and construction of the research process rather than something that occurs naturally on the basis of gender or similar social locations.

Further, applications of intersectionality reveal that gender alone is not enough for full “knowing” (Riessman 1987), as larger power structures and attributes such as race, class, age,
and ability may affect the power dynamic. As Thwaites attests, “Rapport has an impact on what we hear from interviewees, how we interpret their stories, and therefore the knowledge we produce and use in the world; it is highly important to consider how it works and its relation to a wider feminist approach” (4). In critically reflecting on my intended usage of feminist research methods, it is important to analyze the building of rapport, as that is something I aimed to do in my interviews. I hoped to appeal to the participants through our common interests as women with experience working in the food service industry. Even though we shared these similarities, the level of rapport varied among participants. With some participants, I was able to elicit more responses than others. I found that the semi-structured interview style helped allow conversations to flow, and I did not shy away when participants asked me questions about my own experiences. At times, contributing something that had happened to me allowed the participants to think of something similar, leading to more data being collected.

Although I compensated the participants for their time through $10 Visa gift cards, we differ in that I am no longer in the position where I need to be in the food service industry, while some of them remain working there. The interviewees and I are placed differently on a spectrum of social locations; therefore, I see it as beneficial to view the power dynamics during the interview process as fluid (Tang 2002), while at the same time acknowledging that this was a research project, and there will always be an element of exploitation (Thwaites 2017). This does not mean that the interviewees and I cannot establish a reciprocal relationship, but rather that I can acknowledge our similarities as well as our differences and remain aware of my positionality as a researcher.

Even though there were differences between myself and the interviewees, we were relatively similar in that we were all women, most of the interviewees were white or appeared to
be white-passing\(^8\), and all of them were aged 30 or under. Exact ages were not specified or mentioned as part of the eligibility requirements, but some of them mentioned their ages in passing or told me how old they were when they started serving and their number of years of experience in the industry. This led me to conclude an approximate age. All of the interviewees expressed interest in helping with my research, and several stated at the end of the interviews that they hoped what they discussed would help me and seemed unsure if what we discussed would aid my research. This expression of wanting to ‘help’ me could be seen as a result of our amicable relationship (Oakley 1981). It could also be because of the low social status attached to service work and the idea that there is nothing “important” to be said about performing that type of labour (Williams and Connell 2010). Although each interview was unique and consisted of varying levels of questioning versus conversation, in all of the interviews, I felt I was able to establish a base level of rapport, enough so that there was thoughtful consideration on behalf of the participants.

Over the course of the interviews, I found that probing questions were an excellent way to seek more information about a specific topic. The semi-structured format allowed me to probe with specific questions about certain responses. Participant responses to questions varied depending on the length of their experience in the industry and their comfort in talking with me. All of the interview participants were aware of my experience in the food service industry, as I made that clear from the start and included it in my reasoning for conducting the research. I believe that disclosing my similar experience helped to establish my role as a peer rather than solely as a researcher (Dobson 2014), which aided the flow of conversation and allowed for common restaurant industry terms to be used. Some of these terms include being “stiffed”.

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\(^8\) One of the interviewees was Middle Eastern, which she disclosed to me.
discussing “tip outs”, “back-of-house” versus “front-of-house”, and “side work.” Knowing that I had experience in the industry allowed participants to fully divulge their experiences without having to explain how being a server works. And on the other hand, I could ask the participants questions based on my intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the restaurant environment. Even so, I remain aware that the established knowledge may mean that some aspects were not explained as thoroughly, as the participants may have assumed I was already familiar (Rießman 1987; Thwaites 2017).

Interviewing over Zoom created a bit of an awkward atmosphere from the start; it was harder to read social cues that would be more visible in person. Additionally, some technical difficulties arose when the Internet lapsed, resulting in distorted audio or frozen screens. Some of the participants seemed more at ease with an interview taking place over this format. At the same time, some regarded it more as a traditional interview, in which they only answered the questions I asked, with little to no other contributions. It is hard to say if this would be different had the interviews taken place in person. However, the research that is beginning in this area notes that researcher personality and familiarity with technology may influence their ability to develop rapport with the interviewee (Gray et al. 2020). Qualitative interviews have traditionally taken place in person, so the research on video interviews is in its nascent stages. Overall, it offered a relatively easy, cost-efficient way to meet with the participants, but may not have been as favourable as in-person interviewing for developing rapport and identifying mannerisms such as facial expressions and hand movements.

Studies utilizing aesthetic labour as a theoretical framework have commonly distributed surveys to participants to capture a larger sample size (Genc and Kozak 2020; Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue 2015; Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Although my sample size is small, qualitative
interviewing can be a way to legitimize labour practices from the viewpoint of the workers (William and Connell 2010). In discussing job requirements from the point of view of the servers, I was interested in exploring their perceptions of their roles as employees rather than a sample that included both workers and employers.

Overall, using feminist research methods allowed me to remain consistent with my theoretical framework while giving agency to the participants’ experiences as servers. Additionally, it provided an opportunity for me to reflect on the methods I chose to use and to note what could have gone differently or been improved upon. I did not find it difficult to maintain what I perceived as a primarily non-hierarchal relationship, although I am conscious that perceptions of me as a peer versus academic researcher likely varied among the participants. Disclosing some of my own experiences and allowing for parts of my identity to be seen by participants allowed for a broader range of data to be collected. Exchanging jokes with the participants, laughing, and maintaining a positive demeanour aided in the flow of conversation and seemed to lighten some of the uneasiness that may have registered in interviewing over Zoom. Although there are concerns about becoming too “friendly” with participants and whether this may skew the data (Oakley 1981), participants seemed to answer honestly, even when I asked them questions which took them a moment to consider. Many participants expressed pleasure in talking with people and described it as one of the things they enjoyed most about serving. The interview process benefitted from their familiarity and comfort with making conversations with strangers.

One thing that must be reflected on is the line of questioning. Most of the questions were relatively straightforward. Many of the questions did not have to be explicitly asked, as the answers came up naturally in conversation. However, some of the participants asked for
clarification on the open-ended questions. During question 11, some of the participants asked what I meant by “job requirements”, which signaled to me that we might have different ideas about what that means, or the possibility that no job requirements existed at all. I explained that this would be the type of thing listed in a job posting or employee manual; these were the restaurant’s expectations for the role of a server. Because some of the participants were not hired through traditional means (i.e., job postings or online job ads), the interpretation of the meaning of “job requirements” differed. Another question that participants conveyed confusion about was question 14. The question may have been worded too ambiguously, but I aimed to see what being a server meant to each participant and what kind of labour, emotional or physical, they performed in that role. Changing the wording of the questions to allow for more specificity may have been beneficial. Interpretation of the questions will inevitably vary depending on the participant but ensuring that the questions are worded unambiguously allows for more consistent data collection.

2.4 Interpretation Methods

The interview transcripts were coded using NVivo software. The codes were separated into three broad categories. Those categories include interpretations of job requirements, management enforcement of job requirements, and workplace organization/hiring processes. Under these categories were subcategories to pinpoint specific sections of each interview that may have been included under the umbrella of a larger category. The subcategories under interpretation of job requirements included “embrace versus resist”, which refers to the techniques employed by participants to either embrace their job requirements or resist them, “appearance”, which signals the level that the participants felt appearance was important to the job requirements, and “personality”, which refers to the way that servers may have relied on their personalities as part of the tools of their job. Under management enforcement of job
requirements included “favoritism”, referring to management preference for certain employees, “management style”, which referred to the techniques used by management to enforce job requirements, and “conflict resolution”, which referred to the level at which management was able to provide resolution to employee conflicts or disputes. Under workplace organization/hiring processes included “working conditions”, referring to the general conditions of the job. A subcategory under working conditions was “pay or benefits”, which analyzes how much participants were being compensated compared to the working conditions they were expected to endure. Working conditions are often indicative of how much is asked of the participant overall and how much they either embrace or resist their job requirements.

TABLE 1
Visualization of NVivo codes and how often they appeared in transcripts
In evaluating these categories, Questions 1-3 were intended to establish a brief background of the participant’s experience. Depending on the type of restaurant, the experience in each category may differ. Question 4 directly questioned if the participants had ever been employed full-time, and if so, if they had ever received benefits. Question 5 asked if they had been paid less than the minimum wage due to their titles as liquor servers. Most participants answered that they had been paid a “server wage”, which is less than the minimum wage. This relates to the evidence that servers in the restaurant industry are generally paid low wages with little to no benefits (Vosko 2019; Jayaraman 2020). Additionally, this contributes to the hypothesis that servers are given implicit job requirements and may not be fully compensated for performing those duties.

Question 6 explored the workplace organization of employees. Since there has been an established hierarchy of women working front-of-house service positions while men make up managerial or back-of-house positions (Cobble 1991; Hall 1993; Paules 1991), I was interested to see if this aligned with the participants’ experiences. Question 7 was concerned with detailing the duties servers may have outside of customer service, taking orders, and delivering food, reaffirming the aforementioned hypothesis. Question 8 asked about “preferential treatment”, investigating the management practices that may enforce or ignore job requirements to a varying degree. Questions 9 and 10 explored managerial styles and hiring processes, while questions 11-13 asked about the interpretations of job requirements. Question 14 asks the participants to describe their interpretation of the role of a server, with many taking the word “role” literally and describing the persona they used while serving. This aligns well with the findings of aesthetic
labour theorists in employer commodification of embodiment dispositions; some participants viewed being perceived a certain way by customers as part of the job.  

I kept the listed questions focused on hiring processes and interpretations of job requirements. The questions do not explicitly ask about tipping, although that theme came up repeatedly on its own and impacts the performance of job requirements. This is briefly discussed in Chapter 4, as servers may embrace or resist certain job requirements depending on whether or not those requirements will aid them in gaining tips. Sexualization and sexual harassment from both managers and customers is something that also came up in several interviews. This is a well-documented phenomenon in the restaurant industry (Cobble 1991; Hall 1993; Matulewicz 2016), although not the focus of this research. Components of these topics are covered in Chapters 5 and 6 when they have to do with managerial style and conflict resolution, as well as working conditions under workplace organization.  

Using qualitative interviews allows for a detailed account of servers’ experiences with given job requirements. Exploring how servers may have embraced or resisted their job requirements provides insight into the role of the server, prioritizing the perspective of the employee. This research contributes to an emerging literature that explores aesthetic labour and the ways in which gendered and racialized skills or qualities are commodified to reflect a company’s values. Service work is not merely a low-level occupation that requires only “soft skills” (Warhurst and Nickson 2007), but a complex occupation in which server, manager, and customer dynamics constantly shift and influence job duties and responsibilities. The aim of this data is to emphasize the need for organizational responsibility, non-discriminatory hiring practices, and the reflection of the historical racialized and gendered divisions in this industry.  

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9 Chapter 4 provides more detail about what the participants considered as “part of the job.”
2.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the reasoning for utilizing aesthetic labour theory and feminist political economy to highlight the commodification of certain attitudes and dispositions and how that is deployed in the labour market. The interview process and methods were discussed, along with the decision to use feminist research methods. A reflection of the usage of feminist research methods was offered, noting some of the challenges it may bring, yet regarding its overall usefulness for this form of academic inquiry. Finally, the interpretation methods and the way questions were situated to explore categories and subcategories of interest were outlined.
3 Chapter: Contextualizing the Restaurant Space

3.1 Historical Gendered and Racialized Divisions

In order to understand the extent to which job requirements reflect larger gendered and racialized divisions in the food service industry, it is essential to understand the historical context from which the food service industry was formed. The food service industry was brought about through gendered and racialized divisions that continue to be reflected in hiring practices and restaurant workplace organization. This section will go over the beginnings of the restaurant industry and its evolution into the multibillion-dollar sector it is today.

The origin of the restaurant as it is known today has a complex history. In looking into the history of restaurants, little data exists for Canada itself. Instead, the literature focuses on the U.S. For the first century of the United States’ existence, inns and taverns provided the only dining services (Mentzer 2013). These meals were primarily included in boarding services offered to guests staying overnight. It was not until around the 1850s that the first American eating establishments outside of overnight lodgings were noted (Berger 2011, as cited by Mentzer 2013). After the 1850s, these restaurants became more common due to industrialization. The emerging middle class needed somewhere to get a quick meal in between their factory shifts. These customers were predominantly “industrialized white factory workers” (Jayaraman 2020, 33).

Up until the 1920s, the majority of commercialized food establishments employed men, while women worked in boardinghouses, tea rooms, coffee shops, and cafes (Cobble 1991, 17). As Cobble (1991) notes, “Before the twentieth century, most women food servers worked in private homes as domestic [workers]” (17). These trends are similar for Canada, where it was the
leading occupation for women in 1891, with 77,644 Canadian women working as servants, by far the leading occupation at the time (Dobson 2014).

As the hospitality industry expanded to include commercialized restaurants in the decades following the Civil War, employers who relied on waiting crews consisting entirely of black men began to rely more heavily on white men; black men lost even more jobs as the feminization of the industry began in the early twentieth century (Cobble 1991). Following a labour shortage during World War I, more restaurant and hotel owners looked to hire women. Additionally, many male culinary workers joined the labour walkouts of the postwar era, forcing employers to look for alternative employees (Cobble 1991). As employers hired more women, they came to see them as “superior employees: they were more obedient than waiters and cost much less” (19).

Restaurant and hotel employers looked to women not only because they were a source of cheaper labour, but they also felt that waitresses\(^\text{10}\) were more adept at making customers feel “at home.” As the middle class expanded, new types of restaurants prospered and “eating out” became more readily available. As being waited on at home was a quickly diminishing luxury following World War I, former servants left domestic service to find jobs in factories, hotels, and restaurants (Whitaker 2005). Older women and college students were found to be more ideally suited to make patrons feel at home (Whitaker 2005). According to Cobble (1991), the loss of domestic help in the early 1900s sent many wealthy patrons into the public sphere, hoping to find a recreation of the domestic servitude the Anglo-European home was accustomed to (Whitaker 2005; Cobble 1991).

\(^{10}\) “Waitress” is a gendered term that Cobble (1991) uses. For linguistic clarity, I use it when referenced by other scholars. Generally, I use the terms “woman server” or “server” more frequently.
Not only were women preferred in service positions as an extension of domestic servitude, they were also more suited to play the role of a decorative object (Cobble 1991). Restaurateurs began experimenting with décor during the 1920s, realizing that “restaurant dining could fill psychological and social needs as well as dietary ones” (Cobble 1991, 22). Restaurants began styling their aesthetics to fit consumer demand. Different kinds of restaurants employed various “types” of women. As Cobble (1991) attests, “…one industry analyst in Restaurant Management observed that ‘a corp of waitresses of uniform style and color’ could add as much to a restaurant interior as expensive or unusual furnishings” (22). The employment of a particular “type” of woman to serve as a waitress perpetuates the idea that servers must commodify a socially feminine ideal in order to earn money.

Black women had never comprised a large percentage of the restaurant industry workforce, but by 1930, only 7.6 percent of waitresses were black (Cobble 1991). Due to their gender, black women were excluded from waiting jobs offered to black men in more formal dining establishments, such as hotels, trains, or other situations that catered to travelers (Cobble 1991). Because these establishments “did not require a homelike, formal, or intimate atmosphere” (Cobble 1991, 23), they were more available to black men. However, black men lost many of these jobs to white women based on their race. Because of black women’s disadvantages based on both race and gender, they were not readily employed at restaurants looking to embrace a certain image. Instead, as restaurants became more concerned with their public images, they looked to hire waitresses who embodied the white American standard of beauty (Cobble 1991). Black women were sparsely employed in black-owned restaurants or those that served an all-black clientele, and some were hired because they could be paid lower

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11 Cobble (1991) discusses some employers preferring blondes, brunettes, or redheads, depending on the décor and style of the restaurant. Notably, all of those categories are of white women.
wages (Cobble 1991). However, in the 1920s, a minimum wage law was passed for women and minors, and most restaurants immediately removed their black workers and took on white ones (Cobble 1991).

The depression era saw the rise of the feminization and segregation of the restaurant industry as employers readily employed women, and black male and female servers saw heightened job discrimination (Cobble 1991). Black men decreased from 25 percent of the labour force to 12 percent, and black women hit a low of just 4 percent of the workforce in 1940 (Cobble 1991). Black workers who managed to retain their jobs suffered downward mobility; they were relegated to the “worst-paying jobs or reduced to the status of ‘busgirl’” (Cobble 1991). With a labor shortage during World War II, men and women of different races and ethnic groups could join the workforce (Cobble 1991); however, the industry divisions had already been drawn. Commercially prepared eateries continued to expand, and “the abandonment of home cooking became a permanent habit for the average American, opening thousands of jobs for waitresses” (Cobble 1991, 27). By the 1950s, four out of five servers were female, and waitressing was the sixth-largest occupation for women; by 1970, women comprised 92 percent of servers (Cobble 1991, 27).

White men persisted as the majority employed at fine dining establishments, while women were consigned to casual restaurants and family-style eateries. Even among individual restaurants, gender divisions exist among the delegation of shifts and station assignments (Cobble 1991). Women worked in establishments where cheques were relatively low; in neighborhood cafes or low-grade steakhouses, women worked breakfast and lunch shifts while men were able to work more profitable dinner and weekend shifts (Cobble 1991). The racial stratification also persisted, as many men and women of colour were forced to take lower-paying
positions such as busser or dishwasher or drop out of the occupation altogether (Cobble 1991). Cobble (1991) offers this summary of the food service industry, which persists into the 21st century: “Women could always be found dishing out midnight specials at lonely truck stops and twenty-four-hour cafes, while tuxedoed male waiters served elegant lunches to corporate executives” (Cobble 1991, 28). Women and racialized workers have been cut off from higher-paying positions within the food service industry; little upward mobility exists (Jayaraman 2013). Fine-dining establishments with enforced gratuities and livable wages are dominated by white men (Jayaraman 2013). This stratification means that women and racialized workers in the food service industry are economically disadvantaged.

The food service industry's historical context provides insight into why today’s restaurants look12 the way they do. Because of the reliance on aesthetic appeal to customers, employers recruit a certain “type” of worker (Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Williams and Connell 2010), which is often stratified based on gender, race, and class (Witz et al. 2003). This has led to continued occupational segregation in the food service industry. This thesis contributes to the idea that jobs are given based on both the type of worker and the requirements (Hall 1993). Young, white women are prioritized for serving and hosting positions, while workers of colour often perform custodial jobs such as dishwashing and bussing. Because there is not a wealth of literature available on these distinctions in the food service industry in Canada, this project highlights these instances. The U.S. has largely shaped Canada’s restaurant industry; these patterns are consistent when looking at the demographics of restaurant staff. This can be further witnessed in the separation between the front and back of house.

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12 The “look” of restaurants refers not only to their décor, but the demographic of their staff.
3.2 Setting a Segregated Stage: Front of House vs. Back of House

The front and back of house are terms commonly used in the restaurant industry to refer to two different working spaces. The front of house is the physical front of the restaurant, which is seen by the public, customers, and onlookers. Meanwhile, the back of house refers to the area out of sight from the public, typically including the kitchen, dishwashing, and preparation area. Not only are these areas spatially separated, but they are also segregated based on social locations (Sachs et al. 2013; Restaurant Opportunities Center United 2015; Jayaraman 2020). Recent work by scholars of aesthetic labour suggests that in retail industries, there also exists a separation between who is chosen for front-facing customer services roles compared to positions in the stockroom or out of the public eye (Timming 2017; Walters 2018). There tends to be a division between “visible and invisible positions” based on a gendered and racial hierarchy (Walters 2018) in both the retail and food service industries.

In looking at the divisions of the front of house and back of house, several observations have been made about the gendered and racialized divisions that separate the front and back of house of the restaurant. Sachs et al. (2013) draw attention to the sociological separations that exist in food work in the US. Using a combination of in-depth interviews and focus groups from people working in the farm and restaurant industry in California and Pennsylvania, Sachs et al. (2013) found that there is consistent spatial segregation in restaurants on both gendered and racial lines. Respondents reported that the back of house was made up of white men in head chef or cook positions, with men of colour working as line cooks or dishwashers. Conversely, the front of house consisted of white or light-skinned women. Similarly, a study conducted by Walters (2018) also performed qualitative interviews, but with workers in the retail sector. Both Walters (2018) and Sachs et al. (2013) employed a method that prioritized participants’ diversity to better understand the gendered and racialized divisions in these sectors. Walters in particular...
stresses the importance of hearing about these instances from workers of colour and the need for aesthetic labour theory to examine the racial and colour-based inequalities in the service sector, noting that there has been a gap in this sort of literature. This study is intended to bridge some of that gap by pointing out the gendered and racialized processes that underpin the restaurant industry and the discrimination that managers and employers uphold by prioritizing a certain “type” of worker. However, because this project consists of mostly white participants, future analysis is needed on the experience of these divisions from racialized workers.

While Walters (2018) centers the experiences of workers, Sachs et al. (2013) also spoke with restaurant owners and managers. When speaking with owners about the differences in men’s and women’s jobs in restaurants, the employers justified their choices through self-selection bias, where it just so happened that there were only men in the kitchen because women did not usually apply for those positions. One reason that there may be fewer women applicants is because women may not feel as though they “belong” in the male-dominated space of the restaurant kitchen, or feel they are not qualified to perform the tasks associated with it. Further, both manager and worker perceptions of feminine and masculine traits were given as reasoning for the gendered segregation in restaurants, as “beauty, dexterity, and personality assigned women to the front of house… Shared perceptions of men’s strength and toughness assigned them to the kitchen and delivery work” (Sachs et al. 2013, 11).

Although the authors found that no restaurant owners or managers specifically stated that they were looking for people with certain appearances, “this pattern became obvious in interviews with restaurant workers” (14). Managers may not intend to separate workers based on gender and race, but their preconceived notions about the traits certain workers should have creates the opportunity for segregation to be justified. Sachs et al. (2013) provide a unique
framework for viewing how food work in the U.S. is both spatially and sociologically disparate. While Sachs et al. focus on food work as a whole in the U.S., including farm workers and restaurant owners, this project prioritizes restaurant servers’ experiences in witnessing the separation between the front and back of house. Workers’ voices are essential to listen to, as they may have different perceptions of management practices than management or owners themselves. Owners may not want to admit their shortcomings, while managers may also skirt the truth to protect their interests. Since servers themselves do not benefit as much and have firsthand accounts of management practices, it is crucial to prioritize their experiences.

Like Sachs et al. (2013), the advocacy group Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) United found extensive evidence of continued racial and gender segregation in the restaurant industry. This happens not only spatially but systemically. There are significant barriers to entry for people of colour, particularly women of colour, to service positions that may pay a livable wage, like those in fine dining establishments (ROC United 2015). These barriers include lack of training and social networks, transportation, cost of childcare, and interactions with the American criminal justice system. One of these barriers to entry is employers’ reliance on word-of-mouth hiring and connections from current employees, which was the primary way that interviewed employers reported seeking new hires. Workers of colour may not have the same social networks as white workers, which is only worsened when the makeup of front-of-house employees is already heterogeneous. The report attests that “…social networks are essential not only for hearing of job openings, but receiving informal training, perpetuating the current racial and gender dynamic” (19). My project adds to the idea that word-of-mouth recruitment greatly contributes to discriminatory hiring practices. If workers of colour are not represented on the staff, and managers encourage referrals from their mainly white staff, they are not likely to
receive a diverse pool of applicants, which was one of the justifications stated by employers surveyed in this report.

Similarly to Sachs et al. (2013), the report views this as self-selection bias, where workers choose not to apply for new positions because they feel as though they “will be unwelcome or unable to perform the required duties” (20). Each of these barriers uniquely disadvantages workers of colour. These barriers provide the foundation for the system that “channels workers into particular occupations and create self-justifying rationales for self-selection bias among workers, implicit bias among employers, and bias from customers” (20). The report asserts that workers of colour are ousted from opportunities at higher-paying restaurant jobs or those at the front of house. Instead, workers of colour are overrepresented in back-of-house positions such as busser or dishwasher and are less likely to be hired in service positions overall (Dirks & Rice 2004; ROC United 2015). This points to a clear disenfranchisement of workers of colour in the restaurant industry.

In exploring the perceptions of race and responses to customers of colour from restaurant workers, Dirks and Rice (2004) used in-depth interviews with white restaurant servers. Dirks and Rice set the scene by providing the demographics of American restaurants: Although black workers make up 10 percent of all those employed in the U.S., they constitute just 13 percent of those in food-service jobs. Additionally, black people make up far more cooks and kitchen workers than they do front of house workers, where only 5 percent of servers are black. This points to deliberate hiring choices to place people of colour in back of house positions, away from the public eye. In focusing on restaurant personnel as potential instruments of discrimination, Dirks and Rice (2004) revealed through their qualitative research that hiring practices at the restaurants covered in the study “suggest a pattern of differential hiring practices
and a form of employee ‘steering’ toward front-of-house and back-of-house positions” (35). The respondents consistently reported that white people filled front-of-house positions, while back-of-house positions were given to people of colour. Overall, the authors found that although there is a friendly “frontstage” façade, the backstage/back-of-house of the restaurant is filled with racist rituals, which are reflected in both the restaurant’s organizational structure and interpersonal relations.

There is much to be said about the front-of-house and back-of-house separation that exists in the restaurant industry. It can be seen across varying styles of restaurant and organizational levels; in fine dining, workers of colour are largely underrepresented (Jayaraman 2020). However, most of the literature on this phenomenon is based in the U.S., where racial inequality in the food service industry has persisted since the dawn of commercialized restaurants (Cobble 1991; Jayaraman 2020). This does not mean it does not exist in Canada; more research needs to be conducted to explore the segregation in the restaurant industry in Canada. This project hopes to add to that, as most of the study participants discussed race as a consideration in hiring processes and described the front of house staff as being made up of mostly or all white people.

3.3 How Hiring Processes and Job Requirements Construct the ‘Ideal Server’

Aesthetic labour refers to the commodification of embodied dispositions such as appearance and attitude to refine a corporate image and ultimately provide monetary gains for an organization. The idea of aesthetic labour is that employees are selected or molded through organizational practices to present a style that appeals to customers (Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue 2015). Scholars have claimed that staff skilled in “manifesting aesthetic labour such as looking good or sounding right tend to attract a high number of high-paying customers” (Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue 2015). Employers understand that encouraging employees to
appeal to consumer senses can bring in more money for the company, thereby encouraging the use of techniques such as hiring practices, dress codes, and uniforms to refine a corporate image and prioritize customer pleasure.

Studies that utilize aesthetic labour theory have predominantly focused on hotels or upscale retailers (Sherman 2007; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Williams and Connell 2010; Leslie and Brydges 2019). Retailers are well-known for utilizing aesthetic labour to hire certain “types” of workers to appeal to the “type” of customer they want to visit their stores (Williams and Connell 2010; Leslie and Brydges 2019). The beauty standard is a significant component of the deployment of aesthetic labour in the retail industry, as brands actively market an ideal image and hire workers that embody that image. The beauty standards that operate in countries like the US and Canada revere slender, cisgender white women while othering larger, gender-nonconforming, and racialized people. Walters (2018) refers to this as “tri-racial aesthetic labor”, where the beauty standard is hierarchized in clothing retail so that white people are seen as “ideal employees”, Asian, Black, Latinx, and multiracial workers are exoticized, and darker-skinned Black women are discriminated against (128).

The usage of aesthetic labour by retailers is more straightforward to pinpoint as the product sold in fashion is “literally worn on the body and becomes part of” someone’s identity-typically white, middle-class women (Leslie and Brydges 2019, 269). Viewing the way that aesthetic labour is witnessed in the retail industry can be similarly applied to employer techniques in the restaurant industry. Walters (2018) points out the need for more studies that utilize an intersectional lens in aesthetic labour to focus on beauty and gender and other components that simultaneously affect worker status, such as race. This study is unique in that it focuses on aesthetic labour in the restaurant industry and how gender and race affect job
requirements. Job requirements as tools of aesthetic labour have been documented (Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007), though not in the restaurant industry and not utilizing an intersectional lens. Exploring the role of intersectionality in aesthetic labour is integral to understanding how employers deploy tactics in selecting certain employees and continuing to mold them through training and assigned duties.

Warhurst and Nickson (2007) provide a comprehensive look into the usage of aesthetic labour across retail and hospitality industries in Glasgow, Scotland, and have paved the way for many other studies based on their work. The authors used combined methods of surveys and focus groups, focusing on employee responses to the importance of soft skills by employers. Employee selection is integral to aesthetic labour; employers actively look for certain “types” of employees based on how well they might represent the company’s brand. The authors found that the most popular recruitment method for potential employees was through word of mouth. Some respondents also mentioned speaking with employers in person and getting hired on the spot. By presenting themselves in person, potential employees allowed employers to “screen for aesthetic attributes and capacities” (110). When employers did use interviews, they were often informal. One focus group participant recalled an interview that lasted less than five minutes at a fast-food shop. Because employers mainly rely on intangible skills such as appearance and personality, “a long, structured interview is not necessary; the employer can make their decision within a few minutes of meeting the potential candidate” (111). This can have detrimental consequences for those who are transgender or gender-nonconforming or may have visible disabilities. If employers only need a few minutes to decide if a candidate is suitable for the position, appearance and attitude precede skills and qualifications. And when workers at the front of house are largely white or lighter skinned, this also negatively affects racialized communities.
Williams and Connell (2010) apply the theory of aesthetic labour to look at the hiring patterns and job responsibilities of upscale retail organizations in the U.S. They hypothesize that to distinguish themselves from competitors, brands have begun advertising their associations with certain “lifestyles” (354). This has gendered, classed, and racial implications. Performing in-depth interviews with 30 workers from a wide range of corporate retail stores, the authors found that upscale retail brands seek out workers to be brand representatives who embody the particular styles associated with the store’s merchandise.

The strategies used to recruit these workers range from hiring customers off the floor to offering discounts instead of higher wages. By approaching people who are actively shopping at the retail locations, employers identify people who already have a base knowledge of the company, who may “look” like someone who would work at the store, and who are more likely to be loyal to the brand. Offering discounts was a method that was a primary draw for many retail workers; many applied where they liked to shop because they wanted to secure the discount. This reflects the middle-class disposition of the workers, as the majority of the employees interviewed worked part-time and used the job as a supplement for their income. By using the discount as a hiring practice, retailers could find people who did not “need” their paychecks to survive (360). In fact, all of the participants were monetarily supported by their families in some way. As the authors attest, “Without this subsidy, they could not embody the lifestyles that made them desirable employees” (360). Overall, the authors found that the demand for aesthetic labour justifies continued job segregation, which holds employees and customers, rather than employers, responsible for sorting workers “on the basis of class, race, and gender” (362). In the restaurant industry, this can be seen through sorting workers in either the front or back of house based on their physical appearances and attributes.
When employers prioritize hiring workers who “look good and sound right”, they uphold barriers for many marginalized communities. While studies in aesthetic labour have typically focused on the “looking good” component, there has also been recent data on the “sounding right” portion. Timming (2017) analyzed American recruiter hireability ratings during phone interviews to explore this auditory dimension. Looking at five different accents (American-, Chinese-, Indian-, Mexican-, and British-accented English), Timming (2017) found that Chinese, Indian, and Mexican accents all scored significantly lower than the American accent, while the English accent was rated higher than the native-speaking control group. This presents a clear hierarchy with English and American accents at the top. Secondly, the study found that Chinese, Indian, and Mexican accented voices were rated significantly lower in customer-facing jobs compared to non-customer-facing, behind-the-scenes jobs.

This means that those with more apparent accents were more likely to be sorted into “invisible” jobs, away from interacting with the public. The study’s results “raise interesting questions about the extent to which employment discrimination against first generation migrants is driven by recruiters’ perceptions of customers’ expectations, rather than, perhaps, by their own personal prejudices” (22). Timming also looked at the impact of gender, as previous findings have indicated that female voices are interpreted differently. Timming (2017) found that female job applicants who spoke with a foreign accent appeared to suffer up to three times as much employment discrimination as men, and “comparatively lower hireability ratings among women were found across all four foreign accents and in both customer-facing and non-customer-facing roles” (23). This emphasizes the need for the application of an intersectional lens to studies utilizing aesthetic labour theory, as the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.
compounds the discrimination that workers face. As Timming points out, race, ethnicity, and gender are protected by law, while accent is not. It is these subtler attributes that managers may use to define their “ideal” worker, skirting past hiring regulations and upholding the gendered and racialized status quo.

Along with the gap in the literature about front and back of house segregation in Canada, there also exists a gap in the literature about aesthetic labour in Canada. The research that has been conducted is mainly concerned with retail workers rather than those in the food service industry. Even so, the research points to employers in Canada also utilizing aesthetic labour to sort employees based on perceived characteristics (Szabo 2012; Leslie and Brydges 2019).

In looking at fashion retailers in Toronto, Leslie and Brydges (2019) drew on interviews with female owners, managers, and employees of independent fashion boutiques in Toronto to explore the ways they might reflect broader trends in aesthetic labour. Leslie and Brydges (2019) depart from typical explorations of the use of aesthetic labour by looking at independent boutiques, which often have different organizational structures than corporations. The authors found that independent retailers have a greater degree of alignment for one’s personal style versus the aesthetic appearance they are expected to adopt. However, employers of these retailers still sought employees who could “curate and qualify aesthetic goods as well as embody alternative styles and aesthetics and display their knowledge of fashion on their bodies” (277). Additionally, employees are still expected to wear store merchandise, even if it is not their personal style. This suggests that the expectation of a particular style still exists from employers, even if it differs depending on the brand.

13 This is especially pertinent for front-facing service jobs, where employees are judged by a number of attributes, including appearance, ability, age, accent, body size, gender, and race.
Szabo (2012) conducted in-depth interviews to explore young employees’ perceptions of the service encounter and usage of aesthetic labour by coffee shops in Southwestern Ontario. According to Szabo, baristas are high-end aesthetic labourers, as the clientele who frequent the coffeehouses of the baristas included in the study could afford “a more expensive daily cup of coffee”, and the coffeehouses themselves projected an upper-class image of “preoccupation with leisure” (51). This echoes the retail companies’ goals in maintaining images that appeal to upper-middle-class customers. The participants of the study described the struggle of having to look and act like their coworkers while maintaining their own self-identity.

This sense of what Szabo terms “fitting in” entailed meeting hygiene standards, having the “right attitude” toward service (101), and the ability to appear or dress middle-class. Participants were aware that the dress codes enforced by their employers lent them a professional appearance, demonstrating that the participants were also aware that baristas are hired for certain embodied characteristics. This suggests that the concept of “looking good and sounding right” (Williams and Connell 2010) is also pertinent to baristas. Coffee shops fall in the category of the food service industry, as they sell food and beverages. However, they differ from restaurants in the length of the service encounter and the reliance on tips. There is also a large variety of styles of coffee shops, ranging from locally owned cafes to large corporations. The findings from Szabo (2012) provide insight into similar practices that occur across the service sector. My research provides insight into the specific circumstance of the restaurant industry, where reliance on tips produces another dynamic where customers play a role in the service interaction that allows them to be agents, along with managers and employers, in the enforcement of aesthetic labour.
Data collected from restaurants looking at aesthetic labour suggests similar trends, though much of the data has been conducted in countries outside the U.S. and Canada. In looking at customer responses to dining experiences in Taiwan, Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue (2015) found a positive correlation between aesthetic labour and customers' positive emotions. In surveying managers and employees at a restaurant chain in Turkey, Genc and Kozak (2020) found that management influence can aid in determining the level of devotion an employee may have to fulfill aesthetic requirements. Essentially, both studies conclude that aesthetic labour is vital to the restaurant industry. Managers actively use these techniques and expect them in employees. The customer-employer-manager relationship is a mediator in the restaurant industry that may differ from other occupations. It is vital to understand how this operates in the context of the U.S. and Canada. Due to the pressure from both managers and employers to appease customers, aesthetic labour is emphasized in the restaurant (Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue 2015; Genc and Kozak 2020). It can be assumed that similar patterns happen in the U.S. and Canada, although the labour market is undoubtedly different from that in Taiwan and Turkey.

While other countries have different systems for determining gratuity, in the U.S. and Canada, emphasis is placed on the individual consumer. Customers are given the ability to determine the “worth” of their dining experience by the amount of tip they give their servers. This falls along the lines of what Korczynski (2008) has termed the “customer-oriented bureaucracy.” In order to maintain profits, companies organize themselves along the customer-oriented bureaucracy, in which customer needs are at the forefront. As Korczynski (2008) describes, “… the essential element of customer-orientation involves orientation to the non-rational aspects of customers, towards customers’ sense of emotions, individuality, and power” (78). Within this bureaucracy, managers and employers structure the workplace and job
requirements around the need to cater to the “formally irrational nature of the customer” (81), thereby increasing the use of aesthetic labour. This is witnessed repeatedly throughout this study, where participants report molding themselves according to what customers want or expect. Both managers and customers play a role in how aesthetic labour is deployed in restaurants.

Although Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue (2015) and Genc and Kozak (2020) provide insight into how aesthetic labour is utilized and perceived by both customers and managers in the restaurant industry, there is no consideration of how it is perceived and deployed by workers. A recent study by Basnyat, Che, and Ip (2021) looks at the perspectives of female servers on their own gender roles and the commodification of physical attractiveness during service encounters in restaurants. Noting that previous studies have been mostly consumer-focused, this study focuses on the servers’ experiences. The study used semi-structured interviews with twenty women servers in Macao, China. In the servers’ responses to the commodification of their physical attractiveness, many of them naturalized the reasons why women are more often seen in service roles, believing it to be because of the “caring” and “thoughtful” nature of women, “that they are more suitable than men to serve guests, and are preferred by restaurant management” (454). Many participants also believed they were emotionally stronger than men and able to withstand negative or unwanted circumstances.

The authors state that these gender stereotypes eventually became what the female servers saw as gender roles they needed to perform during service encounters. Additionally, all the participants attested that restaurants pay extra attention to the physical appearance of their employees. The study found that overall, the commodification of female servers’ beauty and physical attractiveness was done in several ways in the restaurants, including by stationing servers who were considered beautiful at the door, reception, and seating areas to welcome
guests and placing emphasis on smiling and maintaining a positive attitude. The findings of the study suggest that the servers were aware that they were being stereotyped but had no objection to such practices. The authors suggest that alternatively, it is possible that some of them may have been using the stereotyping to their advantage in the hope of gaining tips. Investigating the role of tipping was beyond the scope of that particular study. However, in my research, it is clear that tipping plays a role in the commodification of physical attractiveness. Additionally, the cultural norms in China differ from that of the US or Canada; the Western beauty standard is a significant determinant in shaping what employers or customers deem attractive. Although Basnyat, Che, and Ip (2021) provide insight into how servers may perceive the commodification of their physical attributes, race was not mentioned. Race is vital to understanding how Canadian employers utilize aesthetic labour through hiring practices and job requirements.

The way that restaurants utilize aesthetic labour to brand their employees rests on the historical gendered and racialized divisions of the restaurant industry, whether or not managers and owners are aware of it. This upholds what Sarah Dempsey (2021) has deemed the “ideal server”: the identity of whom is organized along a gender, race, and class hierarchy. This echoes what Walters (2018) found of retail workers, where “race, gender, class and body size appraisals intersect in the process of hiring employees as extensions of the marketing” (133). Dempsey (2021) points out that employers are not neutral actors but active agents whose hiring preferences and choices “maintain a racialized and gendered system of privileges and disadvantages” (Branch 2011, as cited by Dempsey 2021, 2). By emphasizing the importance of “soft skills” (Warhurst and Nickson 2007), and other intangible characteristics that employees must have in service encounters, the socio-spatial segregation of the restaurant is allowed to continue.
Therefore, attention must be paid to the intersections of gender, race, and class in restaurants’ organizational layout and hiring practices.

3.4 The Role of Tipping in Furthering the Gendered and Racial Order of Restaurant Work

The role of the restaurant server is positioned uniquely because of their reliance on tips. The vast majority of tipped workers live off of their tips, relying on consumer subjectivity to determine when, where, and how much they will get tipped (Jayaraman 2020). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2020), it is federally mandated that employers may pay their tipped workers USD 2.13 an hour if they make at least $30 in tips a month (emphasis added). In Canada, a tip differential existed until very recently in provinces such as British Columbia and Ontario, where employers could pay servers less than minimum wage if labeled liquor servers (Matulewicz 2016; Vosko 2019). In Quebec, a tip differential still exists (Matulewicz 2016). Even in restaurants where servers are paid the provincial minimum wage, it is not necessarily a livable wage, and they still rely on tips to supplement their income. As the majority of food service workers in Canada are women, as Matulewicz (2016) argues, “The wage-tip, therefore, is a gendered economic practice validated by labour law” (141).

Extensive research exists on the connections between gender and tipping (Jacob et al. 2009; Lynn 2009; Guégen & Jacob 2012). Studies have shown that numerous factors can affect how much a consumer might tip; these include waitresses’ perceived attractiveness (Lynn 2009), how big a waitress smiles (Tidd and Lockard 1978), how much makeup a waitress is wearing (Jacob et al. 2009), and if a waitress is wearing red lipstick or not (Guégen and Jacob 2012), and the implicit bias of consumers (Brewster and Lynn 2014). These studies emphasize the role of the consumer’s subjectivity in determining when, if, and how much a server might be tipped. Due to the customer’s responsibility for partially funding the server’s wage, customers are
positioned in roles of authority that interfere with management control over mandating job requirements (Paules 1991; Korczynski 2008). Therefore, tipping not only plays a role in maintaining the gendered order of work but in determining how servers decide to go about their duties. The participants of this study described changes to their appearance and personality based on whom they were serving, reinforcing the idea that the customers play a role in the performance of aesthetic labour (Korczynski 2008).

Because tipping has been noted to be affected by both conscious and unconscious processes (Lynn 2008), implicit gender and racial biases may play a role in tipping amounts (Brewster and Lynn 2014). In particular, the women who primarily constitute the service industry workforce are subject to bias based on gender stereotypes. This relationship between tipping and personal impressions makes work in the service industry especially precarious, and as such, the livelihoods of many women are dependent on an inconsistent wage (Jayaraman 2020).

Tipping is an unreliable wage; it creates a power imbalance between worker and consumer (Dobson 2014; Hall 1993). Because servers rely on tips for most of their income (Jayaraman 2020), they may feel as though they need to smile, defer, or flirt with customers (Hall 1993) to earn tips. The labour divisions in restaurants are highly gendered; by hiring gendered workers and reinforcing gender divisions, restaurants frame service work as women’s work (Hall 1993). Scholars (Matulewicz 2016; Hall 1993) have argued that full-service restaurant work is structured so that uncomfortable experiences with customers become part of the work.

The standard view in the restaurant industry and many other front-facing service sectors of the customer as always being right complicates what servers feel should be part of their jobs.
Through qualitative interviews with hospitality and service sector workers, Good and Cooper (2016) argue that the nature of service work makes it “difficult for employees to define the boundary between the attributes expected of customer service work and their personal feelings about what constitutes unwanted sexual attention from customers” (451). Because of the framing of the “customer is always right” attitude and the power dynamic it creates, customers may feel they are superior due to their financial power. This is compounded in the food service industry, where customers are directly part of the work relationship with their willingness to tip (Good and Cooper 2016, 452).

The mechanism of tipping upholds gendered and racialized divisions in the restaurant industry. Because tipping is based upon consumer subjectivity, how much a server gets tipped can vary greatly depending on implicit gender and racial bias (Brewster and Lynn 2014). Tipping affects job requirements as servers may attempt to alter themselves or the way they go about their job duties in order to get tipped. Additionally, it creates a power dynamic between customer and server, since the customer is partially responsible for funding the server’s wage.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion
This chapter outlines the historical context of gendered and racialized divisions in the food service industry to reflect on how job requirements may embody these divisions. The socio-spatial analogy of the front and back of house calls attention to the gendered and racialized segregation that persists in this industry and the way that affects who is sorted into what occupations. The usage of aesthetic labour to analyze these divisions is discussed, as most studies using aesthetic labour have taken place in the retail and hospitality sectors rather than focusing on restaurants. Those focusing on restaurants have primarily been based on employer or consumer perceptions rather than servers’. Aesthetic labour helps analyze how the intersections of gender and race, in commodifying embodied traits, are used as bases to justify occupational
segregation. Finally, the role of tipping in upholding the gendered and racial order of work is discussed, revealing that tipping itself creates complexity for how servers view and deploy their assigned job requirements.
4 Chapter: Job Requirements and their Interpretations

4.1 Introduction
An important theme of this research is the job requirements given to servers, either explicitly or implicitly. Question 7 in my interview guide asked about the sorts of duties servers took on outside of customer service. Questions 11 and 12 asked about the sort of job requirements that were explained to the servers and their interpretation of those requirements. Investigating job requirements is essential to exploring how restaurants brand their employees through stringent requirements, manuals, and training (Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Scholars have noted that enforcing certain forms of femininity is fundamental to gendering work in the retail and hospitality sectors and is directed at enhancing sales (Pettinger 2005).

Additionally, job requirements that are implied rather than explicitly stated may contribute to discriminatory hiring practices and upholding gendered and racialized divisions (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United 2015). The way job requirements are delegated may contribute to the precarious nature of restaurant work. Managers often push more job requirements onto servers once they start working; servers must take on added responsibility rather than hiring more people to perform the work (Lewchuk and Dassinger 2016). This chapter looks at the variety of job requirements assigned to servers, both explicit and implicit, how tipping may affect those job requirements, and the ways that servers either embraced or resisted their given job requirements.

4.2 Variety of Job Requirements

Explicit Job Requirements
When asked about the job requirements stated, either before or after being hired, many participants did not have a concrete answer; their responses were varied. This could be because many of the participants were not hired through typical channels such as job ads or online
postings. Instead, they were hired through word-of-mouth or having connections with people already in the restaurant industry\textsuperscript{14}. By being hired through informal channels, they had no exposure to a job posting that would have listed expected qualifications and job duties. Those who did describe explicit job requirements reported that the requirements ranged from attitude and demeanour, level of experience or skills, and appearance or personality. This reinforces what scholars of aesthetic labour have found about attributes such as appearance and personality becoming configured as skills by employers (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Though scholars such as Warhurst and Nickson (2007) and Williams and Connell (2010) have observed the way that this has occurred through hiring processes and training, the participants in my study expressed a level of awareness about how their attributes were being commodified for consumer expectation. Managers would encourage or imply subtle changes to appearance or presentation, presumably to appease customers and bolster the restaurant brand.

The answers of stated job requirements also varied widely; some were specific, while others were based on individual perceptions. Some common ones were “ability to work in a fast-paced environment” (Fiona and Marilyn), familiarity with the menu and being able to memorize menu items, having prior experience in the restaurant industry, “ability to handle stress” (Fiona), serving groups of people and taking orders, and having flexible hours. These requirements cover a range of things typical to serving. That there is such a range in perceived job requirements is common; studies of servers show the variety of tasks they may be asked to perform (Erickson 2004; Lerum 2004). As Greta Paules (1991) observed, “the waitress is called upon to answer the phones, tend the register, process credit cards, seat customers, bus, wipe, and set her tables, scarping all plates and separating glasses and utensils into the appropriate bins” (8). Perhaps this

\textsuperscript{14} This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.
is why the “ability to multitask” (Fiona and Marilyn) came up repeatedly as well; it is difficult to pinpoint exact job requirements when they can change frequently and depend on what is happening in the restaurant.

There were also job requirements that seemed to be based on personality and appearance. For example, Vivian stated:

I feel like a big [job requirement] is to just look presentable. I did have, like, when I got hired- the uniform requirements were insane. Like, we all had to go buy a new wardrobe basically because they would line us up in a row in front of everybody and go down and be like, ‘No, this is wrong. This is wrong. You can’t wear those shoes. Like, you can’t wear cotton. Your hair can’t be like that. Your jewelry is too big.’ Or like, ‘You need to wear more jewelry.’ So, like, appearance was a big thing and a lot of places [were like that].

Vivian described the stringent uniform requirements at one of the restaurants she worked at. Similar to the experience I described at the beginning of this thesis, Vivian and the other servers would have to line up for the managers to pinpoint what needed to be changed. Vivian also noted that they “all had to go buy a new wardrobe” because the clothes they already owned were not up to the restaurant’s standard. This places another expectation onto the server, which is that they will need to spend their own money in order to meet the aesthetic expectations of the restaurant.

Hannah also attested to uniform requirements, stating that during the interview, the hiring manager “talked about the dress code and the way that they wanted hair and makeup done in the interview, like they said, ‘We do this, and we wear this.’” Both Vivian and Hannah’s descriptions reinforce the idea that employers rely on techniques such as uniform requirements to mold servers into the type of employee they wish to have (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Employers use uniforms as a way to maintain a corporate image while at the same time appealing to customers’ visual senses (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). This idea was further witnessed through Christina’s testimony.
Christina worked for the same restaurant over the course of nine years. Her experience is unique in that many of the other servers had experiences working at a multitude of different restaurants, bouncing around from one to the other. Christina was able to see the restaurant change over the course of those years, watching management and staff come and go. One thing that stood out to Christina was the emphasis the restaurant placed on its branding. In addition to memorizing drinks and menu items, Christina was also trained to have an order in which things were served at the table. Christina noted that “they were pretty particular about everything.” When I probed further and asked Christina if they mentioned anything about attitude or demeanour, she replied, “Oh. Hm… I don’t know if they said anything about that, they mostly just wanted- they called it [name of restaurant]ifying things, like- Saying things in a particular way, or like, making a joke.” The company enforced its brand through the script that servers were given to talk to tables. This was not a literal script, but, as Christina attested, “Something I would like, pick up on, or I would hear [another server] say… Like, just stupid- that kind of stuff, right, like- it was kind of this added expectation that you have this, like, whole personality while you’re serving.” Further, Christina said there were specific phrases servers were not allowed to say, such as, “No problem”, because of the insinuation the phrase gives of there being a problem in the first place. This reiterates the findings of aesthetic labour scholars in similar industries; the branding of employees does not only take place before their hiring but throughout their hiring process and the length of their employment (Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Williams and Connell 2010).

Overall, it was clear that the stated job requirements relied heavily on assumptions; even those told to servers were often unclear, whereas other things were picked up on over time. The responses given by the participants on stated job requirements were not uniform but varied.
according to restaurant style and organizational structure. For example, Christina discussed how the restaurant she worked at, which was part of a chain of restaurants in Ontario, explicitly instructed her to use certain words or phrases to reiterate the importance of their brand. Others, such as Hannah, who had worked for smaller businesses, described varying requirements based on who was the manager. Vivian, too, noted that the uniform criteria were more or less strict depending on which restaurant she was discussing. The participants’ experiences suggest that emphasizing a corporate image or brand is a goal of many restaurants and is carried out in various ways.

**Implicit Job Requirements**

For this section, I refer to “implicit” job requirements as those that were not stated before or during the hiring process. I include duties such as “side work” for this section because they are usually added duties that are not stated; instead, they are learned as servers go and vary according to what work needs to get done around the restaurant. “Side work” is a colloquial term for these duties, as they are often added on top of customer service duties. It is unclear where the term comes from, but it is used widely in the restaurant industry. According to a 2010 blog, “Sidework is restaurant jargon for the tasks that are required to prepare the place for public enjoyment. Think of it as… detailing” (King 2010). Comparing it to detailing may be an apt analogy, as similar to detailing, the duties of side work can change daily based on what needs to be done. As King (2010) attests, side work can also encompass “replacing light bulbs, sanitizing highchairs, or scraping chewing gum from the bottom of tables; The sorts of tasks that the phrase ‘additional duties as assigned’ was invented to include.” But even so, side work is not something that any of the participants mentioned when I asked about job requirements that they were informed of during the hiring process. By using an umbrella term, managers can subjectively assign duties to workers. This is reflected in the participants’ discussions, as they had different
side work depending on factors such as restaurant volume, number of staff members present, and management.

The kind of side work that servers performed varied widely; common side duties included cleaning, rolling silverware into napkins, and polishing silverware and/or wine glasses. Several participants mentioned dishwashing as one of the side duties they had to perform. Fiona stated that when the restaurant was short-staffed, the servers would need to wash their own dishes. Cleaning was the most common response; the level of cleaning could be quite comprehensive. Some of the participants mentioned cleaning the restrooms, while several listed vacuuming, sweeping, and mopping among their side duties. Although sometimes cleaning responsibilities were shared among other front-of-house workers such as hosts, from the participants’ experiences, most of the cleaning associated with the restaurant fell on their shoulders. This exemplifies Hall’s (1993) assertion that restaurants create gender divisions by gendering the type of work performed. Hall (1993) and Lapointe (1992) have documented the way that job tasks themselves, and not just the workers performing them, have themselves become “loaded with gender meanings” (Hall 1993, 454). This is also a unique observation of enacting certain forms of femininity in the restaurant industry, as Pettinger (2005) has similarly observed in the retail and fashion industry. By prescribing duties associated with femininity, managers and employers are gendering the role of the server.

In addition to cleaning and other responsibilities associated with setting tables, much of the side work differed according to the level of need by the restaurant and management. For example, Vivian recounted that she once had to clean the basement, “which was like a dungeon”, and even at one restaurant, was entrusted to “take care of the wasp problem” by setting wasp traps. Christina discussed how at the restaurant she worked at, there would be differing daily
duties. This could be something like the side work for Monday was cleaning the freezer, Tuesday was emptying the salt and pepper shakers and refilling them, and so forth. Christina also mentioned that they had to scrub the tables and clean the lights. Again, these sorts of job requirements were not explicitly mentioned to the servers during the hiring process but rather, things that were expected of them or came to be a part of their duties over time.

Some participants had trouble distinguishing what was side work or additional work on top of customer service duties, as the level of work they performed was so extensive. Ophelia worked at a restaurant with a small staff, and each staff member had to know how to bartend, serve, and cook the food. In this way, if someone called in sick or missed their shift, the others knew how to perform the work of the absent staff member. Ophelia also described how she had to be “on-call” for this restaurant in case someone called out of work and had to let her manager know if she planned to leave the city. Marilyn, too, spoke to this phenomenon, stating:

Yeah, at my first restaurant job… it was just like everything was kind of side work at that point. ‘Cause it was kind of, it was more of a situation of a hotel that’s going down, like, it’s definitely not in its prime anymore, so there were a lot of issues, so it was a lot of putting out fires for everyone all the time.

Paige also attested to this, saying, “We did basically everything at that place, everything that includes anything to work in a banquet hall.” Paige described doing many jobs in the banquet hall, everything from setting up for weddings and events, serving food to tables, washing dishes, cleaning the banquet hall, carrying tables and folding and unfolding chairs, and being at work, on her feet, for hours on end. This is not unique to Paige; servers do not only take food orders and run the food to tables. They also listen to customers, laugh and talk at appropriate times, clean up spills and messes, carry trays, plates, and drinks, sweep and clean, polish silverware, roll up napkins, prepare silverware, and more, depending on what the organization expects of the server.
The type of labour performed in the restaurant is not only physically and emotionally exhausting (Paules 1991), it is specific according to the goals of the restaurant.

This is embodied through Hannah’s discussion of what her employers expected. Hannah talked about the way she felt used by management to garner new customers or appeal to the clientele. As she stated:

When you’re serving, it’s like management needs you to look good. Let people flirt with you, bring in all the tables, bring in, like- they would put me on the patio so that people walking by would see me and come in- like they used me as an advertisement, which I realized was happening later- because I was the youngest.

Hannah pinpointed what she felt her employers’ true intentions were: utilizing her young, feminine features to appeal to a particular demographic. Hannah detailed this further, explaining:

The cocktail patio where I worked, it was that classic, summer-trendy, Instagram [thing]…. It was like, how are we going to set everything up so that people come and want to take photos? So, it was largely marketed towards women because we were relying on the advertising of social media. So, we were relying on making it cute and having young women come and take pictures of it.

By using Hannah as a physical advertisement, it signaled what “type” of customer, and further, employee, the restaurant was looking for (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). In this case, it was young, white, conventionally attractive women.

These implicit job requirements, whether side duties or the expectation of altering their appearance or personality to meet the restaurant’s needs, affected how the servers viewed their roles. Many of the implicit job requirements were gendered, whether through the sort of tasks performed or pressure for servers to present themselves in a certain way. The implicit job requirements contribute to organizational goals of appealing to the senses of customers and upholding employee corporeality (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Implicit job requirements were primarily shaped by servers’ perceptions of what their job requirements meant; many of them were not given explicit instructions but were expected to know what was going on through
previous experience in the restaurant industry. Not defining clear expectations may be beneficial to management, as they can flexibly change what is required depending on the goings on of the restaurant and who is managing at the time\textsuperscript{15}.

4.3 Tipping in Shaping Job Requirements

The mechanism of tipping plays a role in perceived job requirements. Tipping adds another dimension to the deployment of aesthetic labour; though aesthetic labour concentrates on front-facing customer service roles, most of the research that explores the retail industry focuses on workers who are paid an hourly wage. In the restaurant industry, where servers rely on tips to supplement their income, the customer plays an even more influential role in determining a server’s wage. Not only can management influence this by encouraging servers to flirt with customers or wear more makeup in the hopes of bringing in more tips (Hall 1993; Erickson 2004), but servers themselves may use certain techniques to attempt to gain more tips. This could mean they may either embrace or resist their job requirements, which will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

Researchers have concluded that “workers who receive gratuities exercise little control over the material outcome of tipping and less over its symbolic implications” (Paules 1991, 23). That the mechanism of the tip exists creates a complication for the server, as they may change certain aspects of their appearance or personality in order to get tipped. However, research suggests that tipping practices can be inconsistent, and “it has been assumed that the emotional hazards of tipping are an evil the server is helpless to combat” (25). Because the amount of the tip is based on consumer subjectivity, in the end, the worker does not have much control over the outcome of the tip.

\textsuperscript{15} Management influence on job requirements is discussed further in Chapter 5.
Ophelia described this dilemma of limited control and the frustration of having customers’ feelings as the basis for tipping:

Like, I’m responsible for this whole experience for the customer. They’re going to tip me nothing if they don’t like the boss, their seating, the restaurant, the food. And they could think I’m great, but if they don’t like anything and they don’t want to tip or they can’t afford to tip and they don’t want to, whatever. It comes on me.

Hannah, too, attested to this: “Like when I was serving, it was like this very desperate- like, you could spend three hours serving a table and if you said something that rubbed them the wrong way, they wouldn’t tip you.” Ophelia and Hannah discussed how servers often bear the brunt of customer frustrations, as they are the ones who are with the customer throughout their restaurant experience. Hannah pinpoints this feeling of “desperation”, as ultimately, the server cannot control if the customer does or does not tip.

Even so, some tactics are used by servers to try and increase their tips. Because the framework of the food service industry posits the customers as always right, managers may pressure servers to present themselves in specific ways to please the customers (Hall 1993; Erickson 2004). And because servers rely on tips to supplement their income, they may also feel the need to adopt certain tactics, such as wearing more makeup, dressing proactively, or flirting with customers in hopes of increasing tips (Matulewicz 2016). Hannah described this process, stating that:

[There is] a very sexualized nature of getting tips. If I dress nicely- and the owners of both places were men- and they would ask us to dress more nicely, like on Canada Day, for example, so that we brought in more tips and more customers, and if you came without wearing makeup, they’d be like, ‘What are you doing? You [need] to get on that.

Hannah refers to the process of management encouraging certain types of changes to appearance or uniform in order to appease customers. These changes are not described in the hiring process or job postings; instead, they are catered to the whims of customers who may visit the restaurant
that day. Hannah discussed the enhanced pressure on holidays such as Canada Day, where restaurants are generally busier and experience a higher volume of customers.

Outside of management pressure, servers may determine techniques that they find conducive to getting more tips. Marilyn considered her approach, stating, “Yeah, when I enter the workspace, I really feed into the sort of, ‘I’m a ditzy blonde and I know you like that about me’ kind of thing. Because honestly, it makes me more money… If men think I’m stupid, and I’m just some blonde, blue-eyed woman, I’ll make more money.” Marilyn’s statement encapsulates how servers may attempt to change their appearance or personality depending on customer wants. This is especially fascinating considering that Marilyn was a brunette at the time of the interview. Even so, she found that the persona of a “blonde, blue-eyed” woman may appeal to customers. This has gendered and racialized implications, as Marilyn specifically talks about serving men, consciously feminizing herself, and emphasizing her appearance as a white woman to gain more tips. This gendered dynamic of attempting to feminize oneself to appeal to male customers has been well-documented in the restaurant industry (Hall 1993; Matulewicz 2016; Jayaraman 2020). Marilyn’s experience also speaks to the feminine ideal that customers may be seeking: a white, blonde, blue-eyed woman. This is a beauty standard that managers recognize, too, as they look to hire employees that embody those traits (Walters 2018). That Marilyn recognized this and used it to her advantage is a unique finding, as workers may display varying levels of awareness of how their embodied traits are actively commodified.

Tipping is a powerful tool that can influence how servers carry out their job requirements. They may decide to embrace job requirements if they believe the requirements will aid them in getting tipped or resist them if not. They may choose to ignore them entirely and instead fashion their own technique for how to negotiate their role in the service interaction.
Tipping complicates the ability of management to enforce job requirements, as the mechanism of the tip gives customers a feeling of sovereignty through a sense of relational superiority to the server (Korczynski 2008). The customer’s position in the service relationship as someone the manager aims to please and someone the server desires to be tipped by impacts the fulfillment of job requirements.

4.4 Embracing vs. Resisting Job Requirements

Paules (1991) suggests that despite the ways in which servers may be monitored by management, there are multiple ways in which servers display their autonomy. Building on Paules’s research, I describe this as embracing versus resisting given job requirements. Servers may embrace their job requirements through a commitment to their work and an overall positive view of their role as a server and the work they perform. More commonly, servers can be seen resisting their job requirements. Resistance may occur through measures such as refusing to listen to management’s instructions, openly breaking the rules, or even quitting. The ways that servers exhibited resistance were typically through non-traditional routes, as the restaurant industry is characterized by precarious work, including low unionization rates and wages and little worker control (Vosko 2019). Assessing individualistic strategies may translate into broader collective action (Lewchuk and Dassinger 2016) and allows for an assessment of the participants that sees them as active agents in their workplace. Each way of perceiving job requirements displays servers’ agency in negotiating the tasks associated with their assigned roles.

Embracing Job Requirements

First, the various forms in which servers can be viewed embracing their job requirements will be discussed. The primary way that I interpreted servers embracing their job requirements was through the mindsets they held when going into their job, or the way they viewed their roles. When they positively viewed their roles, they were more likely to embrace their job
requirements. Paige described embracing the requirements of her job by viewing the work not so much as work, but as “hanging out with friends.” Although the job was “physically draining”, Paige worked with other people her age, “So we had, you know, we had the energy… We were all like one big group of friends. So, we were like, oh, we’re going to go hang out with our friends and make some money.” By viewing the job as an opportunity to hang out with her friends, Paige was able to enjoy more aspects of the work she was performing. Several of the participants noted that one of the perks of their job was making friends at work. Participants like Christina described remaining friends with people they worked with at restaurants for years. While this may have been a way for the participants to find the positive in their work, it also benefitted management. If the workers were more likely to show up because they were seeing their coworkers, they might have been less likely to understand when management was taking advantage of young people who were not fully aware of the rights they were owed (Good and Cooper 2016). Paige also mentioned that her friends disliked many parts of the jobs, but in a way, they accepted it together.

Hannah, too, discussed her initial positive view of serving and its requirements. As she stated:

At my first job [serving], I liked it at first because I hadn’t really experienced that before. I felt safe… I liked the job at first because I was young, and I felt like I was just kind of figuring out my identity and who I wanted to be out in the world… When I was younger, it was fun because I was getting all this attention [from customers] and I felt like, you know, like I was flirty and desirable and all that.

By viewing serving as an empowering experience, Hannah was able to enjoy her job. Hannah describes the duality many workers in the service industry feel; customers can be both a source of pleasure and pain (Korczynski 2003). In Loe’s participatory observation of a restaurant similar
to that of Hooters\textsuperscript{16}, she observed that “what may be fun and games to one woman may be sexual harassment of another” (Loe 1996, 417). Since many women servers go into the job understanding that there is a level of sexualized behaviour they must “tolerate” (Loe 1996; Jayaraman 2013), it is often on the individual to decide what crosses the line into harassment. Feeling empowered by one’s sexuality could be a perk of the job for some; when management is enforcing that sexuality on behalf of the customer, it can develop into exploitation.

Other forms of embracing job requirements were witnessed in interviews with Christina and Ophelia. Christina mentioned enjoying the experience overall, stating, “I had so much fun. There were some negative interactions, but it didn’t outweigh the positive experience it was overall.” Some aspects of serving that may make it difficult can also make it pleasant; it is a fast-paced environment where things constantly evolve. Many in the service industry enjoy interactions with customers (Korczynski 2003). Ophelia discussed enjoying the work more at one of the restaurants where tips were split evenly among all the servers: “I worked at two places that were shared tips and I totally loved it. It definitely helps, it makes you work as a team… it’s not that cutthroat, like, girl-on-girl get the best table. [We were all] just working together. It helps.” Splitting the tips reduced the competitive nature of serving and bolstered teamwork. Both Ophelia and Christina could embrace their job requirements directly because of the positive atmosphere brought about by working with other servers.

Out of all of the participants, Marilyn seemed to be the one who embraced her job requirements the most. Marilyn talked about her extensive experience in the restaurant industry, having held roles in supervising or management positions in all of the places she worked since she was 16. Marilyn explained, “So, I’ve had great experience… and I was able to carry good

\textsuperscript{16} Hooters is a restaurant chain with worldwide locations; the name is a double entendre referring to the North American slang term for women’s breasts as well as the logo, which is an owl.
conversations and I was fast... so I got the priority shifts and stuff like that.” Marilyn’s perception of her ability to serve bolstered a positive experience for her. She liked serving because she was good at it: “In my personal opinion, I really earned that respect and to have those [perks] and stuff like that, because, yeah, I could serve circles around some of the other girls, and that was just a fact.” Marilyn’s perspective differs from some of the other participants as she had more experience in management positions. She got to see the restaurant from a different point of view, and in her opinion, she deserved to be in a leadership position. Marilyn’s pride in her work was one of the ways she embraced her job requirements and encouraged those requirements throughout the restaurant.

The participants displayed several different methods of embracing their job requirements. The level to which the participants discussed embracing their job requirements largely depended on their mindset; those who viewed their job positively were more likely to fulfill their job requirements. However, this places responsibility on servers individually, rather than being something management is in charge of. The participants who worked in restaurants where teamwork was valued and encouraged also described embracing their job requirements; this shows that the environment and organization of the restaurant have a bearing on whether servers will embrace or resist their assigned job requirements.

**Resisting Job Requirements**

Participants showcased an assortment of ways of resisting their job requirements. This section uses Paules’s (1991) contributions in analyzing ways women servers may display autonomy and individuality in their workplace. One of the ways Paules (1991) sees individuality and negotiation of job requirements is through a rejection of the role of the servant “in favor of images of self in which she is an active and controlling force in the service encounter” (132). Paules’s analysis provides a valuable framework for seeing how servers negotiate their work
habits in the face of pressure from management and customers. Branching off of Paules’s work, I observed several ways in which participants showed agency through resisting job requirements and negotiating the terms of their employment.

Some of the ways that the participants discussed resisting their job requirements were through subtle methods such as not listening to management or ignoring rules and regulations, attempting to change their mindsets or view their requirements differently, refusing to serve customers who may be rude, and finally, quitting. All of these tactics subvert the requirements that have been placed on servers and are forms of displaying their agency. This shows that servers are not passive victims to the restraints placed on them by management and customers (Paules 1991), but active agents in how they negotiate their job requirements. Even in precarious jobs, workers still have a degree of power (Lewchuk and Dassinger 2016), which they display in numerous and creative ways.

One of the subtler ways discussed of resisting job requirements was through, as Paules (1991) stated, developing individualized work habits or changing them in direct opposition to management instruction. For example, Christina would resist the requirement of explicitly suggesting drinks for customers by refusing to do so, as she didn’t find it necessary: “[Suggesting] drinks was a rule that I tried, like, so hard to pick up on, and I eventually just gave up… It always just felt very, like, forceful to me… I didn’t like it.” Christina initially attempted to abide by this requirement, but because of the restraints it placed on her service, she “gave up.” Giving up may be seen as a way to set limits on how hard servers will work and “the degree to which they will self-exploit” (Lewchuk and Dassinger 2016, 144). Christina recognized a dislike for something she was told to do and willingly decided not to do it.
Vivian, too, resisted strict uniform requirements. She knew the uniform requirements were “really intense” and that management wanted nice hair and makeup done, but as she stated, “I’ve never been one to do that.” Instead, she made sure she looked “presentable. But I’m not going to start wearing makeup because they wanted me to. And they hired me as is, so I was like, oh, this is- you know, they accept me like this.” Here we see Vivian, like Marilyn, use the knowledge of her appearance as a tool in the face of management restrictions. This also suggests that management did not accept other workers “as is,” reinforcing the idea that the beauty standard- a slender white woman- was a consideration when hiring Vivian. Both Christina and Vivian gave up on the job requirements laid out for them, as they did not find them necessary and felt better off without them.

Hannah displayed resistance by attempting to change her mentality in order to endure the pressure she began to feel from serving. She explained trying to “beat the system” through viewing the customers who degraded her as only funding her wages: “I’ll suck it up- because I tried to go with the mentality of like, well, these people think that they’re getting to me, but they’re actually just paying my student loans.” Hannah found resistance by turning around the degradation she experienced from customers. They were not really affecting her; the joke was on them. Even though this was ultimately unsuccessful, Hannah was able to exhibit agency through altering the narrative about the job she was doing.

Ophelia, Marilyn, and Christina all described times when they refused to serve customers who were being rude or unruly. Marilyn discussed a time when a man wanted to get into the restaurant, and she replied, “No sir, I will not be serving you.” Marilyn may have been in more of a position of authority due to her connection to management, but both Ophelia and Christina described times when they felt uncomfortable and did not want to serve customers. In each
scenario, someone from management or another coworker stepped in to serve the customers instead. The relationship with the customer is vital to job requirements and integral to the role of serving; by refusing to partake in serving the customer, the participants attempted to draw boundaries in their workplace. As Marilyn pondered, “Yeah, it’s kind of like, where do you draw the line on like, what sort of level of disrespect you’ll take from someone?”

Resistance could also be viewed in ending the relationship with management and the job requirements through quitting. Paige remembered being fed up with her treatment at the banquet hall, including the long hours with low pay. She had trouble coming up with a reason as to why she stayed for so long in the first place, stating “…it doesn’t make sense why we put up with it for the longest time, but we all did until 90 percent of the staff decided to quit at the same time, so within a month we were all gone. We screwed them over in the end.” Because Paige and the other servers quit simultaneously, the company was forced to hire a team of caterers, who would need to be paid much higher wages. This was one way that the servers could organize and resist their job requirements, as well as display solidarity. Quitting is one way that workers may be able to display their autonomy, as they can leave management in a position where they are forced to find replacements on short notice. As scholars have noted that precarious employment has forced workers to acquiesce to employer demands and has undermined traditional forms of resistance (Lewchuk and Dassinger 2016), quitting may be one way to display worker autonomy. Though the restaurant industry is well-known for its high turnover rates (Jayaraman 2020), quitting has the potential to send a message to management about their expectations for servers.

Vivian, too, described quitting as a form of agency. She stated, “So, if I ever didn’t like somebody [or] the way things worked or what was going on, I would just quit at a certain point. I had enough experience that I knew I could just kind of find a better job. So, I would just leave,
because, yeah, it was easier than trying to fight, in that way.” Out of approximately 14 restaurants that Vivian had worked at, she said that she quit most of them because “I just couldn’t deal with the manager or the conditions and it was easier to quit than to try to make it better.” Although Vivian spoke of quitting as seemingly the easy way out, the fact that she was able to quit and maintain awareness of her value as an employee is exemplary of her agency. She realized she did not have to “deal” with poor management and conditions if she did not want to, so she left. Sadly, it appears that this experience is typical since it repeatedly happened at a range of different restaurants. Paige and Vivian show that one of the ultimate ways a server can resist their job requirements is by refusing to continue performing them.

The participants were creative in the ways that they resisted their job requirements. Their methods varied from refusing to listen to management or adhere to rules and regulations, attempting to modify their mindsets around their roles, denying service to unruly customers, and quitting when they no longer felt like they could deal with the requirements of the job. Though a multitude of factors constrained the participants, they were able to display agency through the choices they made. By utilizing feminist political economy to examine the experiences of the participants, my data contributes to challenging the traditional view of “women as passive and powerless [in research] on women and work” (Paules 1991, 15). Although power dynamics existed in both the relationships with managers and customers, the participants were still able to assert their boundaries through the level to which they either embraced or resisted their job requirements.

4.5 Chapter Conclusion
This chapter has discussed the variety of job requirements servers described being assigned. Those job requirements fell into two broad categories, either explicit or implicit. Even when job requirements were explicit, they were not well-explained. The participants described
the way that management utilized both implicit and explicit job requirements to negotiate the way that servers presented themselves; managers encouraged employees to be a certain “type” of server to appeal to customer wants and boost a corporate image (Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Tipping is a mechanism that influences how job requirements are carried out, as customers are placed in a position of authority with both management and servers. And finally, various methods of embracing versus resisting given job requirements were outlined.
Chapter: Management Enforcement of Job Requirements and Conflict Resolution

5.1 Introduction

In a 2004 study, author Cathy Enz pinpointed the most prominent issue plaguing restaurant managers at the time: human resources. According to the study, managers reported difficulties with employees walking out, not understanding service, and not having the “needed skills” (318). Referring to these employees as “unskilled and unmotivated”, the report noted that managers overwhelmingly agreed that hiring and retaining employees was an issue. The managers also agreed that there needed to be a better image of the restaurant industry in general and that employees need higher pay and more benefits. Though this study indicates the desire of managers to provide better working conditions for their employees, it remains to be seen whether or not that desire translates into tangible changes. Managers have some decision-making power when it comes to hiring and training but are also often constrained by rules and regulations of the organization itself, themselves used as tools of enforcement on the employer’s behalf.

The manager's role is important when considering the job requirements of the food service industry. The manager often acts as a “middle-man” who negotiates the employer's expectations, aids in hiring and training, and is intended to support the staff throughout their shifts (Paules 1991). However, most of the participants in this study indicated that there was little to no support or conflict resolution from managers. When there was support, it varied depending on which manager was there. Question 7 was intended to start a discussion about management’s role in the restaurant. In looking at “preferential treatment”, I wanted to explore if managers were explicitly discriminating against staff, if their preferential treatment could affect who they hired, and the job requirements assigned to employees. In addition to discussing preferential treatment, the discussions also centered on management expectations and personal experiences the participants had with unethical managers.
This chapter looks at support from management and whether or not management could be counted on to resolve conflicts. It also explores participant perceptions of preferential treatment and the unethical ways management enforced job requirements through methods such as dress codes and uniforms.

5.2 Management approach to conflict resolution: “Figure your shit out on your own”

In working in a high-stress environment such as a restaurant, it is crucial to have proper support and guidance from managers. Managers also enforce the expectations of the organization through methods such as assigning side work, communicating dress code requirements, and issuing write-ups if employees break the rules. In looking at the role of management in negotiating job requirements, it is often more indicative of the organization’s values. Although managers are in higher administrative roles and may have more leeway when it comes to hiring decisions, they are also constrained by the regulations of the company. Paules (1991) refers to this concept as the manager as a “fill-in man”; the person who is expected to compensate for absent employees with their own time and labour. The manager is posited in a position of authority, and at the same time, may need to perform a myriad of roles in the restaurant. Paules (1991) states that this results in “disparity between images of management as superordinate, responsible in the positive sense, and managerial responsibility as perceived by employees, is embodied in the common spectacle of the manager in a suit, with a tie, pulling bus pans, emptying garbage, sorting silverware” (62).

Because managers are expected to fill so many roles, this may constrain their ability to provide proper support and conflict resolution. Even though managers are meant to resolve conflict and provide a healthy workplace environment for employees, this is not always witnessed in the restaurant industry.
Most of the participants did not have positive experiences with management, and several reported specific negative interactions with managers. This added to the dissatisfaction they felt in their roles. Additionally, some of the participants described tailoring their behaviour based on which manager was on duty and knowing that there were some managers they could rely on more than others. The participants described a range of conflicts with customers and coworkers that did not have a satisfactory resolution.

Christina discussed an experience with a table of customers who were making “kissing noises” at her and generally making her feel uncomfortable. She said that the customers were “obnoxious and unpleasant”, so she asked her male coworker to take the table instead. After the coworker took the table, he returned to Christina and said, “Oh my god, these guys keep asking me if I’ve had sex with you yet, and if I did, what it was like.” Christina continued:

And I was like, ‘What did you say?’ And he was like, ‘Oh, I said I didn’t. And then I was like, ‘Okay…’ and then he like went, like immediately went back up to the table and was like talking to them and like laughing, and like, you know when you know? Like, they just kept looking over at me and I was uncomfortable. So, I like, went up to my manager… and just like explained things, and my manager was like, he was like, ‘What do you want me to do with that… do you want me to talk to him and accuse him of something… I can’t do anything about that.’ And I was like, ‘What the heck?’ ‘You can’t do anything? You can’t even sit him down and be like, ‘Hey, we respect our coworkers here.’ So, I ended up just calling out [my coworker] and being like, ‘Hey, I don’t know what you were talking about with those guys, but I feel like it was me. Not trying to like, be egocentric or anything, but like, it made me really uncomfortable, and I don’t appreciate it, so like, if you could just refrain from doing that again…’ And he was like, he just denied it, and like laughed it off, like, just kind of like typical jerk style.

Christina’s story provides insight into a common theme of the food service industry, where employees largely have to deal with conflicts themselves (Good and Cooper 2016). When Christina was presented with a table she felt uncomfortable serving, she took it upon herself to ask a coworker instead of going straight to her manager. This coworker then took part in the sexually harassing behaviour with the table. When Christina brought this up to her manager, he
said that he could not “accuse” the coworker of anything, even though the coworker had already made an explicit sexual statement toward Christina. The manager and coworker may have seen this as normal, as they were both men and positioned in the restaurant space, where sexual innuendoes and joking among coworkers are commonplace (Erickson 2004). Christina was able to speak up when she felt uncomfortable, and no resolution was provided; in fact, her complaint was not even taken seriously. This pattern is common, and other participants noted it as well.

When I asked Paige about her experience with conflict resolution, she said:

There is a lot of conflicts that would happen, and it was never really dealt with. Any of the managers… So, there was conflict between the staff and like, I’ve gotten in a fight with one of the ladies that I was working with because she was racist, but we were yelling at each other in front of our manager. And then our manager was just like, you know, like, stop, stop. And like, you know, trying to calm the situation. But that was it when we separated ways, and I went this way, and that lady went that way. That was the end of the conversation. There were no, like, no follow-up. There was no [resolution], none of that. It was you. Either you figure your shit out on your own, or, you know, it’s about it. And I saw that happen in every other conflict that happened.

I asked Paige if people ever mentioned anything to managers. She said that she did see people mention things to the manager, but that there was never “much of a follow-up or much of them getting involved to resolving any of the issues. It was honestly mostly just you figure it out on your own and it was kind of… it was generally dealt with the staff themselves.” Similar to Christina, Paige alludes to not getting management involved unless it was seen as necessary. Many of the conflicts, particularly internal conflicts, were on the staff to sort out themselves.

Both Fiona and Christina said that the level of support depended on which manager they went to. Hannah had multiple negative experiences with management, and she stated that in one situation:

I got grabbed at one point by a customer and dumped a beer on them out of panic and they took me off the floor for two hours as like a punishment, like, you don’t get any tables for two hours, you just have to tidy in the back and do the tasks and stuff. And what always blew my mind is that the managers were all women. I was like, are you not
seeing what’s happening here, like do we have no solidarity or anything, like you don’t care at all? And I expected more understanding from that, that I was like… it’s just the reality. It’s just like… it comes with the job. And I was like, well, I don’t want the job then.

Here, Hannah notes her frustration that even though the managers were women, they still sided with the customers over Hannah. When a customer grabbed Hannah and caused her to spill a beer, management punished Hannah instead of mentioning anything to the customer about their behaviour. Certainly, there is a gendered dynamic here, as most managers of restaurants are male (Jayaraman 2013). Hannah continued, stating that:

> It’s all very toxic and very yeah, very corrupt. It’s not ethical at all, and it’s so complicated, and I totally forgot about that whole thing about like who’s in the good graces [of management] and who’s not. And such a huge part of that was like if you let the kitchen staff hit on you or like if you- I caused an issue because I wanted them to kick somebody out because this customer was harassing me, and they were like, no, he’s a regular. We can’t, like, you’re going to have to suck it up…. He brings a lot of money in.

Again, in this statement, Hannah describes how her managers, and the organization, prioritized the repeat business of customers rather than providing her with a safe work environment. Hannah’s experiences show that management is inconsistent with their tactics for dealing with conflicts, if they demonstrate any tactics to begin with.

Vivian also described little support from management and no resolution to any conflict. She said that the managers were only supportive “when it was busy”, and when they weren’t busy, “They would just be in the office… but a lot of times they would just stand around and yell at you if you weren’t doing [work].” Vivian, too, experienced conflict in the restaurant, and direct conflict with her manager. When asked if she felt there was any resolution to the conflict she experienced, Vivian said no, because the manager was friends with the owner, “so the owner didn’t care, and we actually- a few of us who work there wrote to the head office and they did not care at all. They were just like, it’s the owner’s problem. We don’t deal with that kind of
stuff, yeah… Which is crazy, but I feel like that’s how most restaurant jobs work. Because there’s not really anybody to complain to. So, you just kind of [deal with it].” Like Paige and Hannah, Vivian describes dealing with the conflicts herself. Even when Vivian and her coworkers banded together to write to the head office, they saw no resolution. The pattern of these statements, such as “Figure your shit out on your own” (Paige), “Suck it up” (Hannah), and “deal[ing] with it” (Vivian), indicates that for many restaurants, there is no formal system or method for dealing with conflicts. Conflicts affect how employees perceive their job requirements and their overall satisfaction in their roles (Han, Kim, and Kang 2017).

The one participant who did feel as though there was enough resolution to conflicts was Marilyn. It is important to note that Marilyn had worked as a manager before and was in the process of transitioning to the manager of a restaurant at the time of our interview. Therefore, it is possible she had a different perspective with experience from the management vantage point. Marilyn said:

I would say in the things I can think of that there has been enough resolution. There have been a few instances with customer to server where it’s just like, they’ve been pissed as hell about it. I’ve had a lady threaten to sue me because I cut her off. I think it’s hard to like- I’m thinking about all those sort of like conflicts I’ve personally had in where I worked, and uh, it’s mostly just in situations where I’ve refused people service.

Even so, Marilyn did not provide any specific instances of times when management stepped in to resolve a conflict. She mainly described her own reaction to conflicts, not going into detail about management response to conflict.

Overall, the participants described little to no support from managers. When conflicts arose between coworkers or customers, servers were expected to deal with it themselves, with no actual structure for reporting complaints or grievances. When servers like Vivian organized with other employees to report something, nothing came of it. Higher levels of conflict can lead to
employee dissatisfaction and less worker motivation (Han, Kim and Kang 2017), negatively affecting how servers perceive their roles.

5.3 Preferential treatment and unethical management: An “occupational hazard”

Managers also played a role in the expectations of job requirements and the position's assigned duties. Managers tended to “play favorites” by allowing certain behaviours from some servers while punishing others. In addition to this, employers also communicated the expectations of the organization through job requirements by enforcing dress codes and uniforms, and often encouraging participants to dress provocatively or wear makeup. This translated into the sexualization of some of the participants, and even sexual harassment.

Through preferential treatment and favoritism, managers not only actively discriminated against employees, but communicated how well they thought servers were doing in their roles. Six out of the seven participants said that they felt their managers had displayed preferential treatment. Analyzing this further, there were specific reasons why some managers favored certain employees over others.

Christina said that she had “definitely” witnessed preferential treatment from “most” of her managers, but that

I can’t really say much because I was probably one of the favorites, but they would, they would base it off a few things, like they base it off of, like, how well you worked in the team, like, how your work ethic is, if you’re actually doing stuff while you’re there, and then they would- we had, like, server stats that came out every week… so they would base it off that, too.

These “server stats” were determined by surveys given to customers at the end of meals. If the customer rated the server highly, they would have a better score. Of course, this does not account for any personal bias the customer might have, or anger about something out of the server’s control. These server stats and reviews could have negative consequences for the servers. For example, Christina stated that a female server was written up after one negative review. Another
coworker, a male server, “had the record for, like, server with the most amount of bad reviews… he never lost shifts… or got [written up].” Both of these instances occurred during a time period with the same manager. The manager, who was male, punished the female server more harshly than her male counterpart. Christina could not determine a reason for why that was.

Marilyn, too, noted that there was “absolutely” preferential treatment, but similarly to Christina, she was one of the people on the receiving end of this treatment. Christina and Marilyn both justified this, stating that the preferential treatment towards them was based on their own merit. Even so, Marilyn also stated that “the owner of the restaurant liked me right off the bat, and honest to God, I do think it’s because I’m from [this town] and he’s a rich white man and he associates me with being in the same sort of class as him.” Although Marilyn felt that she earned the treatment based on how good of a server she was, she could still see that the manager also liked her based on racialized and classed aspects.

Other participants such as Fiona and Ophelia noticed preferential treatment but were not on the receiving end of it. Out of all of the participants, Hannah went into the most detail about her perception of this treatment and how it translated into sexualization and overall dissatisfaction with her position. Hannah said that “every single one” of her managers showed favoritism towards certain employees and that “the kitchen manager that was bug- that was giving me a hard time, he would do it with the girls who agreed to sleep with him.”

At both of the restaurants Hannah worked at, she experienced sexualization from management and pressure to let customers and coworkers flirt with and even harass her. Hannah said that “…the kitchen manager fully [harassed] underage girls and the owner, literally, like on my first shift there, the owner said, ‘Oh, that’s so and so, you’re going to have to watch out for him, he’s really going to like you,’ Like, everybody knew about it. It was a joke. It was like this
hilarious thing.” From the outset, Hannah was primed by management and the owner to accept sexual joking and flirting even if she did not consent to it. Hannah agreed that the environment of the restaurant “is already very sexualized. And I’ve even noticed, even with the- even with my coworkers, when I was working in a restaurant, they would be making sexual jokes all the time. And that kind of thing was very common.” This reiterates what scholarship has stated about the restaurant environment as one where servers are subject to sexualization (Jayaraman 2013) through sexual joking and innuendoes both among coworkers and from customers (Erickson 2004; Matulewicz 2016). Hannah’s experience provides insight into the role that management, and the owners of restaurants, play in upholding this sexualization and going so far as to encourage it openly.

Dress codes and uniforms were also a method through which sexualization occurred, as Hannah stated:

I was objectified the entire time, right, like they didn’t care that I was in school and that I had a life outside of there, they just cared if I wore something that they didn’t like or if I wasn’t letting a customer flirt with me. They didn’t take sexual harassment or even assault seriously at all. It was like, oh, well, you have to get tips. Yeah, it was all just about like looking nice and making my money for the business, that was it.

Hannah felt that management's priority was making money and ensuring that Hannah looked “nice.” Along with dressing a certain way, one of the required duties of the job was letting customers flirt with her. Hannah also stated she felt objectified the entire time and was aware of what she felt was management’s goal to use her as a tool to earn money.

Hannah also detailed her experience of being sexually harassed by the kitchen manager. Hannah said:

I was harassed by the kitchen manager. He was ten years older than me and it was like a very well-known thing that he, like, tried to sleep with all the servers and he had a checklist and that if you were really young and had a boyfriend, which I did, that you were like more of a challenge for him. And yeah, he would like follow the hostesses or
me to my car… And I quit. Well, I tried to talk to the owner and say, like, this needs to be sorted out. And he said, like, ‘What? We’re not going to do anything about it.’ Like, everybody knew it was just like a thing.

The sexualization that Hannah experienced in the restaurant translated into her being directly sexually harassed by one of the kitchen managers. When she tried to tell the owner about it, he offered her no resolution. Hannah stated that “everybody knew it was a thing”, suggesting that being sexualized, and even harassed, were merely part of the expectations of management.

Vivian also witnessed unethical management tactics, both through favoritism and unethical expectations. Vivian said that one of her managers

…always picked favorites and he openly said and told these people that they were, like, his A-Team. And he would, like, talk shit about the other employees to his favorites… and he would, like, put other people down… But shocker, all of his, like A-Team, were like the most attractive, like, outgoing girls, you know. And then the B-Team was always like, I don’t know, he would say some crazy stuff, he’d be like ‘that girl’s fat’, ‘his breath stinks’, blah blah blah, like all this stuff. And it was not cool.

The manager would give those on his “A-Team” priority shifts, letting things slide more easily, while demanding more from those on his so-called “B-Team.” Vivian’s manager also made disparaging comments about the people on the B-Team, including calling one of the girls “fat.” This suggests that body size is another component by which managers judge employees.

Vivian also discussed another manager who encouraged the servers to take shots of alcohol, and if they didn’t do it “he would suddenly treat you like shit.” The manager claimed that “We’re making this shot, our restaurant, our bar shot, and we want you guys, to like, show people and like, you know, be excited about it and do it. So, like, it wasn’t a strict requirement, but it was definitely implied that, like, I’m offering you the shot, you’re going to do it.” At the same restaurant, Vivian said that management wanted them to “wear, like, short skirts and tight clothes, you know.” This has gendered implications, as the managers in both of these scenarios were men, with most of the servers being women. Most of the time, the dress codes were aimed
at women, with specific requirements about hair and makeup. Once, Vivian was chided by her manager for having “pilgrim hair”, with the manager claiming that Vivian never “did anything with it, it’s just always there.” I asked Vivian if anything was specified about the men’s hair, and she said no, but also stated that there were only two guy servers to begin with. The managers were aware that customers were looking for young, attractive women to serve them and used the servers’ aesthetic appearances as part of the product being sold at the restaurant.

Sexual harassment is common in the food service industry (Jayaraman 2013). Although it was not the focus of this study, the topic came up on its own through discussions of favoritism and management practices. The preferential treatment of employees by managers was often gendered; both Vivian and Hannah noticed that servers who had agreed to have sex with managers were treated differently, while Christina noticed a female server being punished for something that a male server was not. Usually, managers and owners were men, while servers were predominantly women.

Vivian and Hannah’s experiences show that sexual harassment is often tolerated in the restaurant industry to gain tips (Jayaraman 2013; Matulewicz 2016), with management encouraging the sexualization of servers for customer satisfaction. Favoritism and gendered discrimination by management and job requirements such as strict uniforms and dress codes tailored to women may exacerbate these circumstances. Hannah described it best, stating that the unfair treatment is “just, like, an occupational hazard; just the way that it goes. And I don’t miss it.”

5.4 Conclusion
This chapter has discussed the manager’s role in enforcing job requirements and how participants perceived their relationships with managers. The relationship with management can affect how servers view their roles and the duties, rules, and regulations they are expected to
follow. Most participants reported witnessing preferential treatment from management, with some describing outright discrimination. Preferences were often determined based on appearance, with managers encouraging servers to dress or act in certain ways for customer benefit. Managers uphold gendered and racialized divisions through their interactions with servers.
Chapter: Workplace Organization and Hiring Processes

6.1 Introduction

The gendered and racialized divisions present in the food service industry influence what sort of job requirements servers will be assigned and whether they will be chosen for the job at all. The workplace organization of the restaurant (i.e., who is in what job position) is indicative of hiring practices, as workers in the restaurant are often sorted based on social location, taking up separate spaces in the workplace (Sachs et al. 2013). Hiring processes are integral to determining what will be expected of workers. Question 6 asked the respondents about the organization of the restaurant in order to gain a sense of the gender/racial composition of their workplaces. Question 10 asked the respondents if they felt that gender or race were considerations in the hiring processes of the restaurants they worked for. These questions were intended to provide a sense of sever’s perceptions of their workplaces and hiring processes. The servers’ perceptions overwhelmingly indicated what has already been noted by American scholars of socio-spatial segregation in the restaurant industry, where workers into jobs based on “natural” or assumed attributes (Cobble 1991; Hall 1993; Sachs et al. 2013). For Canada, this study indicates similar patterns.

Further, while aesthetic labour has provided research on the commodification of “embodied dispositions” in the retail sectors (Witz et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Williams and Connell 2010), there are gaps in the literature on the restaurant industry. Looking at servers in Ontario provides a unique lens through which to view the deployment of certain attributes in servers and their job requirements. These attributes tend to favour white, cisgender, non-disabled women for those jobs which are front-facing and interactive. It must be noted that these discussions were had with participants who were mostly white or white-passing. White participants still have the ability to make observations about race, but they do not have the same
experiences as racialized workers in the food service industry. Scholars such as Walters (2018) have noted the necessity to include a diverse pool of participants in order to collect meaningful data about racial hierarchies present in the retail and service industries. Therefore, because the majority of the participants in this study were white or white-passing, there are limitations to the observations they are able to make about these racial hierarchies.

The level to which gender and race were present in the participants’ descriptions varied, and the participants’ observations of race in the restaurant provide valuable insight into employer priorities in hiring and staffing. The conversations with the participants about the gendered and racialized dynamics of the workplace provided insight into patterns noted in restaurants, where workspaces are separated according to gender and race (Sachs et al. 2013; Jayaraman 2013).

6.2 Workplace Organization

Gender ratios of servers

From the shift in the early twentieth century that led to women pursuing employment outside of the home, the feminization of the restaurant industry has persisted (Cobble 1991; Jayaraman 2020). Today, 71.3% of food and beverage servers in Canada are women (Statistics Canada 2019); in the U.S., 70.5% of servers are women (Data USA 2019). The trends are clear, but understanding how women servers perceive these divisions can provide insight into why this gender segregation continues.

All of the participants except for Paige replied that there were more women than men employed as servers at their workplace. Paige is somewhat of an outlier because she worked at a banquet hall that required more strenuous work; she described the uniforms they wore as a white shirt with a bowtie, reminiscent of something seen more often in fine dining and more associated with masculinity (Cobble 1991). She did say that her manager was a woman, but the banquet hall
itself was owned by a church, which a man headed. This aligns with restaurant trends, where managers and owners tend to be men (Jayaraman 2013).

Christina’s experience was different from other participants in that she started in the back of house; though it is common for workers to move up the restaurant chain and work in various positions, it is not common to see women working in back-of-house positions, especially those such as bussers or dishwashers (Jayaraman 2013; Restaurant Opportunities Centers United 2015). As Christina stated:

“I started there as a dishwasher… and there was only one other female in the back of the house. So, it was probably like a 1 to 10 ratio back there… the whole time I worked there. And then in terms of the front, it was a bit more of a mix. They liked having male servers because it was a family restaurant. So, it was like, they had a certain vibe they wanted from their servers.”

Christina affirms that the back of house was made up of a majority of men, while the front of house was a bit more diverse because of the “vibe” the restaurant wanted from their servers. The usage of this word is interesting, as it implies an awareness that the restaurant was seeking out a certain type of worker to represent its corporate image (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). It was unclear precisely what Christina meant by this statement, but I would assume that the restaurant preferred a mix of servers rather than only women. Christina stated that the restaurant “liked having male servers because it was a family restaurant.” This suggests that the restaurant is aware of typical heteronormative understandings of a “family” unit, one which is composed of both a man and a woman. Christina’s observation of this suggests that the restaurant was actively utilizing aesthetic labour and anticipating consumer desires when choosing who would be a server.

Fiona echoed similar comments to Christina, stating at first that “I think there was an equal amount of female to male servers,” but then after a moment, correcting herself and saying,
“No, there were a majority female but there was like, 1 to 3, like one male server for every three female servers.” Fiona recalled at least one male server always working during her shifts.

Alternatively, Vivian, Ophelia, Hannah, and Marilyn, expressed much more certainty about the ratio of male-to-female servers. Vivian described the organization of the restaurant she worked for the longest, where she worked for three years. As Vivian stated, “Yeah, it was basically all women servers. There was one guy server and then there’s two guys out of like fifteen [servers] and then the floor manager was a guy, the manager was a guy, and the regional manager- they were all guys. And everybody in the kitchen was guys of course.” She went on to say that she “never saw one manager come in there or like anybody from the head office that was a woman. All the servers were women, and all the hosts were women, too.” Vivian attested that this was a pattern she noticed at other restaurants, with “predominantly men in the kitchen and women in front of house.”

Marilyn also noticed this pattern, stating that the front of house “is definitely much more woman dominated; there were definitely a few men, but I would say it’s like maybe 20% men in the front of house to 80% women. Whereas, in the back of house, it’s the complete opposite [of the front] where it’s like 90% men and 10% women.” Hannah, too, stated that at the first restaurant she worked at, “the hostesses, managers, servers, and bartenders were all women. There was one [male] host, he was like 15, and everyone else was women. And everyone in the back of the house, like dishwashers and maintenance and kitchen, were men, and the owner was a man. And the other one, it was the same… Yeah, it was very much a gendered thing. One hundred percent.”

Perhaps the most bluntly observed experience of this division was from Ophelia, who stated that the managers of one restaurant she worked at told her that she could not be a bartender
because “no women are bartenders here.” Ophelia said that they had no problem admitting it; “all of the servers were women, and all of the bartenders were men.”

Ophelia went on to describe her frustration with this experience and her attempt to voice her concerns to management:

And when I had finally been like, I’m done with talking to these fucking people and going to their tables and them treating me like shit, like I want to start serving drinks, they were like ‘Nope, only men behind the bar.’” … “[The bartenders] made way more money. They would leave with like double what we left with. And they didn’t mind telling us that. I mean, while we’re running around the fucking building, and they’re just standing behind this bar pouring a pint.

Ophelia said that this pattern occurred at every restaurant she worked at, where the “women were the servers, and the guys were the bartenders.” Likewise, Ophelia described the pattern of a majority of women being employed in the front of house, while men were the ones working in the back of house.

Women being employed as servers most of the time was reflected in almost all of the participants’ answers. This is important because, as Hall (1993) has argued, restaurants are not only creating gender divisions through who is hired for what position, the work of the server itself is gendered. Typical serving duties include “smiling, flirting, and deferring” (Hall 1993), along with cleaning, sweeping, and mopping. The job responsibilities themselves become gendered through the reinforcement of gendered divisions.

**“Feminine” Servers vs. “Masculine” Cooks**

The participants did not have trouble coming up with answers to Question 6, indicating that although this might not have been something that they were consciously thinking about, it was easy for them to recall an estimate of how many men versus how many women were working in different areas of the restaurant. Notably, there seemed to be a distinct division in many of the participants’ minds about the gender dynamics between front-of-house female
servers and back-of-house male cooks. This reinforces the patterns noted by scholars that see women occupied in administrative or service positions. In contrast, men occupy maintenance-oriented positions (Campos-Soria et al. 2010, as cited by Sachs et al. 2013). This is especially evident in the restaurant industry; in qualitative interviews of restaurant workers, Sachs et al. (2013) found that front-of-house workers were typically white or light-skinned women, while workers in the back of house were men. This was also witnessed in the experiences of the participants of this study.

The gendered dynamic of the kitchen has been documented by restaurant advocates, particularly by activist and attorney Saru Jayaraman. In her book *Behind the Kitchen Door*, Jayaraman explores the experiences of American women restaurant workers, collecting their testimonies about the goings-on of the restaurant. The workers’ experiences range from having aggressive executive chefs throw plates and dishes at them to encouraging fights among coworkers. As Jayaraman attests, “Since most of the men executive chefs ran hostile, testosterone-driven kitchens, women in the kitchen were constantly being ghettoized, pushed into pastry positions where they earned less money and had no opportunity for advancement in the restaurant. Few women could survive in ‘a man’s kitchen’” (Jayaraman 2013, 131).

This statement rang true in the experiences of the participants of this study. Although I did not set out to explore the specific gendered dynamic between servers and kitchen workers, it came up on its own in most of the interviews. Having such a stark contrast between what happens in the back of house and what is expected in the front of house influences the overall organization of the restaurant. Employers uphold gendered hierarchies by gendering workspaces and hiring gendered workers to fill them (Hall 1993).
Even if the participants did not explicitly say that there were mainly men in the kitchen, they used phrases such as “kitchen guys” (Marilyn), “the guys in the kitchen” (Christina), and “everybody in the kitchen was guys, of course” (Vivian). It appeared as though it was customary for men to be the ones in the kitchen, given the language by which the kitchen staff was discussed, even if they were only briefly brought up in passing.

Both Christina and Hannah had specific negative experiences with male kitchen workers. Christina discussed her experience as a “Manager on Duty” (MOD). This title effectively made her supervisor when no other managers were on shift. Christina said, “There were some negative interactions… specifically when I was an MOD, there were some harder times, because there were certain guys in the kitchen that had either been there longer or just had some sort of like a-I don’t know, superiority complex, I’m not sure.” She went on to describe an instance where a cook “created a barrier to the dishwasher” because he was unhappy with Christina’s decision to allow a table to come in 15 minutes before the restaurant closed. Christina and that cook also “had a few other instances where things didn’t go well because I was MOD… where he would just, like, be slamming things or like swearing to himself in the kitchen, and customers could hear him, and I would have to say, ‘Can you not?’ And then he would get even more mad.”

Christina attested that it was all men in the kitchen except one female prep cook, who Christina said “wasn’t even really part of the kitchen dynamic” because she was only there in the mornings to prep the food. I asked Christina if the men in the kitchen would listen to other managers, and she said “…they would definitely listen to the other managers. There was one woman manager that they didn’t listen to, but she didn’t really ask that much of them.” This suggests that gender was the deciding factor of whether the kitchen workers would respect the person managing them, as Christina stated that they listened to the male manager with no problem.
Hannah echoed similar experiences to Christina. She said that all the kitchen staff were men, except one woman “who would come in to do sweets for a couple of weeks.” Again, this reinforces the pattern of women not being represented in kitchen staff, unless in lower ranks such as prep cooks or pastry chefs (Jayaraman 2013). Hannah was open about the “harassment and the dynamic of the back of house” and her own experience of being sexually harassed by a kitchen manager. Hannah said he would follow her to her car and “was very inappropriate.” Hannah attested to the “gendered dynamic of the kitchen staff, with the back of house being predominantly male” and feeling uncomfortable and degraded by the advances made on her.

There has been a clear distinction between cooking as “masculine” in the professional, public sphere versus “feminine” in the private, domestic sphere (Chen et al. 2020). Cooking at home has historically been seen as “women’s work”, and labour that women traditionally performed in the domestic sphere (Whitaker 2005; Sachs et al. 2013). Even so, the majority of chefs in the U.S. are male (Jayaraman 2013). It could lie in the professional aspect of the occupation; at home, women’s work has historically gone unpaid, and this translates to devaluation in the labour market. Further, media representations of male chefs have focused on clinical, professional depictions, while women the ‘natural’ attributes seen of women have relegated them to the private sphere, where cooking should be something that is a “delight”, rather than legitimate labour (Chen et al. 2020). Women are often looked down upon in the kitchen by their male counterparts, as witnessed through the participants' experiences. Fernand Point, considered the “father of French cuisine,” once noted that “Only men have the technique, discipline, and passion that makes cooking consistently an art” (Spring 2021). By correlating masculine and feminine traits with job requirements, employers segregate their workspaces according to race and gender. This can be further witnessed through hiring practices.
6.3 Gendered and Racialized Divisions through Hiring Practices

Hiring practices act as an opportunity for management to negotiate their expectations (Warhurst and Nickson 2007), while at the same time acting as a predictor of what the job might entail. Job interviews are primarily for the employer to determine if the candidate will be a good fit. Many tips about job interviews explain them as an opportunity for both parties to see if they will be a match, though this assumes that the person looking for the job is in the position to deny the offer if they do not feel it is a good fit. The reality for workers in the service industry is that they are part of a precarious workforce (Vosko 2019); they often do not have the luxury of rejecting a job offer if an interview goes awry. And even then, many of the interviews in the food service industry are informal, acting less as a questioning of skills and requirements and more as screening for employers to see if the candidate has the right aesthetic attributes and capacities (Warhurst and Nickson 2007).

In looking at the experiences of hiring processes of the participants in this study, I aimed to gather more information about the tactics employers use that may subtly contribute to the utilization of aesthetic labour. In other words, managers often tout that they care about diversity within their hiring, but how they recruit workers is often discriminatory and exclusionary. Employers maintain the gendered and racialized divisions that characterize the food service industry by looking for a certain “type” of worker, relying on word-of-mouth recruitment, and offering employees little formality during the interview process.

**Interview Processes**

Six out of the seven participants described getting their serving jobs through mutual friends or established connections. Those that had worked at several different restaurants said that many of them were restaurants where their friends worked, which led to them getting hired. Most of the participants had informal interviews or were hired on the spot. Several of the
participants noted that their interviews were informal, focusing on their interests or personal attributes rather than their prior work experience.

Out of all the participants, Marilyn summed up this process to reflect what many restaurants practice. Marilyn detailed her hiring process, stating:

The first place I worked, the lady who was running the restaurant, I actually had worked for her since I was 15 years old, she knew I was a really good worker, she might be- I grew up in a very small town, so, it was kind of more like a word-of-mouth thing, anywhere I worked when I lived in Muskoka. It was more like, ‘Oh, Marilyn’s looking for a job, we’ll hire her, we know she can work hard.’ Like, ‘We’ve heard about her, we know her Dad’, all those types of things. And then for all the jobs I’ve had in Ottawa, I’ve sort of- honestly, I’ve never had what I would call an actual interview. My interview for the place I currently work was literally me talking about Muskoka, and jet skis and restaurants and stuff like that down there, because, uh, I’ve come to learn that people- especially white- like white men, will like me more when I tell them I’m from Muskoka, because it makes them think that I’m rich, and therefore, associated with the rich.

Not only did Marilyn not have a formal interview, but she was already acutely aware of what people who tend to own or manage restaurants- white men (Jayaraman 2013) are looking for in their workers. As early as the interview, Marilyn knew that the manager would not be as interested in her work experience as he was in her ability to have a conversation and to talk about herself and her interests. Marilyn also described the word-of-mouth communications that allowed her to have many of her jobs in her hometown. Since people knew who she was, they already knew she “was a good worker.” The connections she had in her family and hometown aided her in getting a job, thus reducing the need for a formal interview. However, this is not unique to small towns, but representative of the hiring practices of restaurants overall (ROC United 2015).

Marilyn was not the only participant who described managers’ reliance on word-of-mouth recruitment and informal interviews. Vivian said she usually looked for jobs online but got a few of her jobs “from knowing somebody who works there and if they’re in good standing
with the manager then usually, I, they kind of say come in for an interview.” In these instances, the manager relies on the employee to vouch for their friend, trusting that they will be a good candidate. Often this is the only thing they need; as Vivian explained, “I got hired on the spot a few of those times just because they [knew] one of my friends. So, you kind of have an in… And then the interviews, it’s usually just talking, like conversational. They don’t really ask questions. I got hired once and we found out later that they were purely hiring on looks and the owner said, like, they have to be seven and a half or higher to get through.”

From Vivian’s testimony, a few things can be observed. Firstly, several of the managers in Vivian’s experience needed no prior knowledge or screening of her outside of the recommendation from a current employee. Secondly, the interviews were “conversational” in nature, again reinforcing Warhurst and Nickson’s (2007) theory that employers utilizing aesthetic labour predominantly use interviews as screening processes to see if employees have the right aesthetic attributes, such as appearance and personality. And finally, this employment of aesthetic labour is witnessed in Vivian’s frank description of her manager “rating” potential servers based on looks. When I probed further into Vivian’s response and asked if this “rating” was apparent during the interview, she replied, “No, not at all in the interview. Like most of my interviews for serving, it’s just been like getting to know who you are as a person. Like, they don’t really care if you have this many years of experience, mostly just like, can you hold a conversation, are you normal?” Here, I repeated Vivian’s last statement, asking ‘Are you normal?’, as I was curious to know what that meant to her. She stated, “Well, yeah, right. Kind of like can you make people feel comfortable when you’re talking to them, and you’re not like awkward, and you kind of- because I think that’s kind of one of the important parts of serving, is just like conversation, and being comfortable with people.” Clearly, what is defined as “normal”
rests entirely on employer subjectivity. From Vivian’s point of view, being a “normal” server requires someone to be able to carry out a conversation without being “awkward.” Vivian implies that her definition of “normal”, and what her managers viewed as normal, is one that values being neurotypical. For those who are neurodivergent or disabled, making people “feel comfortable” may not come as easily. She also states that the manager in one of her interviews was concerned with looks. These observations indicate that the basis of normality rests on conventional standards of beauty and ability.

Hannah noticed this pressure to look good for her interview. Hannah stated, “I definitely felt like I was being looked over [during the interview], and that was a big part of it. And they talked about the dress code and the way that they wanted hair and makeup during the interview… I dressed really professionally, not in a way that was sexualized or anything.” Hannah indicated her attempt to appear professional for the interview, having no desire to appear “sexualized.” Even so, she felt as though she was being “looked over.” This would prove to predict how she would be treated at that job, where they were consistently pressuring her to dress provocatively. The emphasis on appearance was something she was aware of. She said that it felt empowering at first, but over time became something she was uncomfortable with. Hannah’s experience points to the way in which employers commodify servers’ embodied traits in the pursuit of corporate gain (Witz et al. 2003), even at the expense of workers’ autonomy.

Paige and Fiona also attested to getting their jobs through connections; Paige had mutual friends employed at the banquet hall, while Fiona’s older brother already worked at the restaurant she applied to. Luna, too, got some of her serving jobs through knowing people. Christina was the only one who described going to apply to her job:

When I used to apply to jobs as a teenager, I would bring my resume to places. Like, I remember walking around the mall and like, giving my resume to different people. And
then there were a few restaurants near where I lived, so I dropped off my resume there. So that was just one of the places that I went and knocked on their door, and handed the manager at the time my resume, and then I got an interview.

Although Christina was not hired through word-of-mouth, hiring through informal meetings such as dropping off a resume is a method witnessed in the service sector (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Warhurst and Nickson (2007) theorize this is because employers in industries that prioritize aesthetic labour like to get an initial “screening” of their potential employees. This screening is typically based on appearance and allows employers to weed out potential employees who might not fit the company “brand” or appeal to consumer expectations. This negatively impacts racialized communities, immigrants, and those with visible disabilities. Additionally, Christina described the interview she had as “casual.” She was initially hired as a dishwasher as that was the only position they needed at the time and asked in the interview if it would be possible to work up front. The manager replied, “Yeah, for sure, if you show your work ethic and you do a good job, when a spot opens up, you would be the first that we would think of since you are already here, and it’s easy to find another dishwasher.” Christina ended up being a dishwasher for only about two months, where she was then promoted to a hostess, and later, a server.

One reason restaurants may rely more on word-of-mouth hiring and in-person application processes is their extremely high turnover rate (Jayaraman 2020). Many people who work in the food service industry are part-time or temporary workers (Vosko 2019). Additionally, the workforce comprises young workers; the restaurant industry is one of the most common first-time jobs for young Canadians (Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association 2010). In this way, restaurant staff is constantly shifting, leaving, and moving to other roles. It may be
beneficial on an organizational level to seek new hires through informal routes, but it only proves to maintain stratification along gender and racial lines.

**Gender and Race in Hiring Considerations**

Hiring based on gender or race is not legal; the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on race, nationality, ethnic origin, or gender identity or expression (Government of Canada 2022). However, when employers utilize aesthetic labour and place emphasis on embodied dispositions, traits, or personality types, they may be practicing de facto discrimination. In their analyses of intersectionality in the service sector, Macdonald and Merrill (2008) argue that managers attempt to match the “type” of service provider with their assumptions concerning the customer’s expectation, which aligns the service performance “more or less with the gender and ethnic identity of the worker” (115-116). When viewing this from the lens of the restaurant industry, where there is a heightened pressure to appease the customer, employers may take “customers’ stereotypes into account and then hire a person who will fit these stereotypes or fulfill their corporate ‘brand’” (122). This can be reinforced in Christina’s earlier comment about her managers looking for a certain “vibe” and can be witnessed again through the experiences of the other participants.

Both race and gender were witnessed as considerations for hiring processes, though they varied in the participant responses. Some noted that race was a consideration, though gender was not, while some were adamant that gender was a consideration, but race was something they had not considered.

As noted earlier, Hannah said that she never considered race, “…but in a small town everybody was of the same race, and I’ve never really experienced being treated differently because of my race. But in both [restaurants], people were predominantly white. So, I can assume it was a consideration, and gender, not as much as my appearance. I definitely felt like I
was being looked over, and that was a big part of it.” Even though Hannah said she felt gender was less of a consideration than her appearance, she detailed her experiences of being sexualized by the restaurant managers through their encouragement to dress provocatively to appeal to customers and gain more tips. Gender and appearance are intertwined; Hannah also attested that most front-of-house workers were women. It is not a coincidence that the same workers who are the first people to greet customers are mainly women. In this way, Hannah’s statement about appearance suggests that gender was a consideration, but it was witnessed through attention to appearance and a conventional beauty standard.

Fiona, too, answered that gender was not a consideration, but attested that race was.

Fiona stated:

…to put it bluntly, despite being in a quite diverse area of Ottawa, like, our restaurant [staff] was very white. And then the clientele was white, but we had diversity in the clientele [too]. So then, when I was leaving, they were doing more of- more diverse hiring, but while I was working there, it was mostly white workers. In terms of gender, if that played a role- no. Like, not so much. It did not really- if you wanted- if you were a male and you wanted to be a server, like, you were considered as a server, not like, kitchen. And if you were a female wanting to come in and work kitchen, like, that was available to you and not just a server, you know what I mean?

Here Fiona details the discrepancy between the restaurant being located in a diverse area of Ottawa, and having diverse clientele, but its staff not being representative of that diversity. Fiona did not feel gender was a consideration in hiring but attested that there were more women servers than there were men. Interestingly, the main workspaces that Fiona pointed out were serving in the front of house and working in the kitchen in the back of house. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these spaces are highly gendered, and this dynamic was pinpointed repeatedly throughout the interviews. It appears that gender may have played a role in workplace dynamics, even if Fiona believed it was not a consideration during hiring.
Marilyn’s observations reflected the possibility of gender and race being considerations, but attested that race and gender weren’t “bad things.” Marilyn said that in the small town she was from, “there [were] literally no people of colour there… it’s a big rarity.” When discussing the restaurant she most recently worked at, Marilyn said that

…when a restaurant first opens, they over hire, and then they have to make cuts, and it did seem to be that a lot of the cuts were being made to people of colour. I don’t think it was necessarily a gender issue- [we had] a female sous chef, and the head chef felt like she wasn’t commanding enough, or like unable to get the boys’ attention or get them to listen to her and stuff like that. That’s the only thing I could think of being gender-based. Um, and I don’t know the exact reasons why certain people were let go. I feel like some of them were reasonable things to let people go- like, it’s your first week of work, why are you no-showing? Um, or it’s like, you’ve been here two weeks, you should not be getting slammed at the bar like that, so, there is some correlation- I don’t want to say that they were fired because of the colour of their skin or anything like that, um, because in my opinion, there are some reasonable, um, reasoning as to why there were let go, in the examples I can think of. But, you can’t, like- it’s too coincidental, you know?

Marilyn discussed specific examples she observed that may have reflected when gender or race were considerations. Regarding race, Marilyn noticed that the workers being let go were racialized rather than their white counterparts. She also felt that letting go of these workers was justified. However, this is based on Marilyn’s own perceptions of what being a “good worker” is, something she considers herself to be. She said herself that the choice of who was let go was “too coincidental”, suggesting that she felt that there could be racial bias present in management.

With gender, Marilyn referred to a situation where a female sous chef was let go because she was not “commanding” enough. As discussed, the restaurant kitchen is a space where masculinity is considered a job requirement (Sachs et al. 2013).

Additionally, employers often justify their hiring choices by claiming that there are not enough applicants without examining how they uphold workplaces that prioritize certain characteristics over others. They may also feel they are not discriminating if they have one diverse employee among a homogenous team. For example, Marilyn also detailed how the
racialized workers working in the front of house were “more palatable”, meaning that they were “mixed race” or white-passing. Marilyn continued,

I remember [someone] brought it up to one of my past managers, and she was saying how we don’t really have any people of colour in the front of house. And, um, not trying to argue against this woman being Native, but when you look at her- she doesn’t look like a visible minority. She looks like a white woman, so she’s white passing. And [the manager’s] excuse [for this] was ‘Well, [name of worker] is one-third Native’ or something like that, and it’s just like, okay, we have one person whose got- who’s not just considerably white, that’s not enough, you know?”

Marilyn’s manager actively justified his hiring choices by pointing out that they had an employee who was “one-third Native.” This exemplifies the implicit discrimination managers in the restaurant industry partake in (ROC United 2015) and their unwillingness to change their hiring practices to become more equitable.

Vivian attested that gender was a “huge” consideration in restaurant hiring processes. For race, she said,

…race is a hard one because I don’t know. I don’t know if I could say yes because I think there’s a lot less people of colour who go in to [apply]. So, there’s just less applying… I helped my manager once with applications and interviews. And, like, I remember being like, I wanted to hire a person of colour because or entire staff was white… everybody was white, except the dishwasher… But there was one person of colour who applied to be a server and they didn’t have any experience… I don’t know. Some of my managers were probably racist. Who knows?

Vivian refers to a concept that has been previously mentioned, and that is using the lack of applications from diverse candidates as an excuse for why the staff is homogenous. This is why Vivian hesitated to say that race was a factor; even so, Vivian also said her manager was hiring based on looks. If most of the servers were white, and the manager claimed that they had to be a “seven and a half or higher” to be hired, one would assume that the manager’s standard of beauty was Eurocentric. Why would racialized candidates apply if they were not the “type” of worker management was looking for? And further, when employers rely on word-of-mouth hiring, how
would they be considered in the hiring pool if they were not already part of the circles that the servers worked in? Vivian states that some of her managers “were probably racist”, but follows it with the question, “Who knows?” As Vivian is white, she would not be the one on the receiving end of this racism; potential racialized employees and workers of colour would be.

Vivian went on to discuss why there might not be as many racialized candidates applying to work in restaurants. Most of the restaurants she worked in had white servers. Vivian said that I’m sure a lot of [people of colour] have just felt like, oh, it’s not our vibe. I had a manger say those words to me once, like because there was like a group of black people hanging out and they wanted us to change the music. And I don’t know, they got into a big fight with the manager because he apparently said something racist, but- I wasn’t there, but like, I was just overhearing a story about them yelling and calling him racist, because he was like- he told him that they weren’t ‘our scene’ or whatever.

Interestingly, Vivian uses the same word Christina used earlier- “vibe.” Here, Vivian uses it to rationalize why people of colour might not decide to apply to restaurants. She follows it up with a story she heard about a manager getting into a fight with a group of black people. The story implies that the manager did not want black people at the restaurant because that was not the image the restaurant wanted to portray. When restaurant owners and managers set out to present a certain “vibe”, this can have gendered and racialized implications. Further, it can be reflected in their hiring practices, the makeup of their staff, and where people are located in positions in the restaurant.

Both gender and race were seen as hiring considerations at varying levels; the conversations about gender played a heavier role when discussing the male-to-female ratio of servers, as well as the back of house and front of house dynamic. Discussions of race in hiring considerations were reinforced patterns that see racialized workers as excluded from social circles that allow for word-of-mouth connections, as well as mainly white front-of-house staff, with workers of colour being relegated to back of house positions (ROC United 2015).
6.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed participants’ perceptions of workplace organization in restaurants. In looking at the gendered dynamics between servers, although it was hypothesized that there would be a more prominent power dynamic between male managers and servers, the dynamic between servers and male cooks came up more often. The work associated with being a cook is overly masculinized (Jayaraman 2013), while the work associated with being a server is feminized (Cobble 1991; Hall 1993). In the participants’ experiences, the contrast between these roles often caused conflict. In looking at hiring processes, the tactics management used to recruit employees was found to be informal and often through word-of-mouth or established connections. This is a barrier to racialized candidates, as they may not be part of the same social circles. Further, both race and gender were observed as hiring considerations at varying levels. This fortifies the theory that managers look for certain “types” of workers (Macdonald and Merrill 2008) to fill roles in the restaurant.
7 Chapter: Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis has sought to explore how certain traits and attributes are commodified by management to appeal to consumer expectations and bolster corporate gain. The main questions I asked were (1) How does management commodify “typical” feminine traits in order to meet consumer expectations? (2) How does this commodification contribute to the precarity, racialization, and gendering of service work? (3) What sort of job requirements are expected, and how does relying on consumer expectation (i.e., “the customer is always right”) further the gendered and racialized divisions in this industry? (4) How do servers challenge, embrace, or assign meaning to the gendered aspects of their labor?

Throughout the research, the participants revealed that management commodified their traits in a number of ways. Management and employers prioritized a beauty standard that upheld the dominance of whiteness (Walters 2018) and was fractured along the lines of class, race, and gender. The participants shared their experiences with mostly homogenous staff and the pressure from management to look or act a certain way. This reinforces what Williams and Connell (2010) have deemed “looking good and sounding right.” Aesthetic labour was deployed through hiring, training, and uniform requirements (Witz et al. 2003), and participants often had informal interviews or were hired on the spot. In addition to the role of the server as being gendered, the job requirements that servers were assigned were gendered, with women often being given custodial tasks such as mopping, sweeping, and cleaning. The participants described both embracing and challenging their given job requirements, with more descriptions given about their resistance. Unlike other studies on work that look at workers in precarious jobs (especially women) as passive victims, I followed Paules (1991) in seeing the participants as active agents in negotiating the terms of
their employment. This does not take away from the exploitation they experienced but provides a glimpse into how other workers may organize in similar industries.

This thesis provides a unique lens into the Canadian context of previously witnessed gendered and racialized divisions in the U.S. restaurant industry (Cobble 1991; Jayaraman 2013). Although Canada is often praised for higher levels of equality, there is still a legacy of racism (Rashid 2021), the labour market is unequal for men and women (Vosko 2019), and Canada’s economy has been heavily influenced by that of the US. Even though Canada has higher unionization rates and higher levels of worker control (Stanford 2013), this does not translate to the food service industry, which has some of the lowest unionization rates among all industries (Vosko 2019). The food service industry in Canada is under-researched, even though prior to the pandemic, 54% of Canadians went out to eat at least once a week (Statistics Canada 2019). Since visiting a restaurant is such a common occurrence, the complexity and avenues for research may be overlooked in this industry.

Utilizing semi-structured qualitative interviews proved to be useful to the goals of this project. I was able to get firsthand accounts of experiences from the perspective of workers. Flexibility in the interview guide allowed for topics to occur naturally, and the data reflects what topics were important to participants. There are limitations to this study, as I was only able to interview seven participants from Ontario, which is a relatively small sample size given the number of restaurants in the province. Though the participants contributed valuable observations about the roles of gender and race in hiring considerations, it must be noted that the participants were mostly white or white-passing. As Walters (2018) has suggested, more studies must be performed which center racialized workers and their experiences of these divisions.
Additionally, although Ontario is the most populous province in Ontario, labour regulations differ between provinces. Nevertheless, I believe the data collected from this study was fruitful and provides a glimpse into the way aesthetic labour is commodified in Canadian restaurants and how this upholds gendered and racialized divisions.

Moving forward, there are avenues for more research to be conducted on the restaurant industry in Canada. Although gender and race were the main aspects covered in this study, hiring discrimination and job segregation in the service sector happen on a multitude of levels, including ethnicity (Walters 2018), accent (Timming 2017), and body size (Walters 2018). These likely occur in the restaurant industry specifically, in addition to other components such as age, ability, education level, and immigration status.

The restaurant industry could benefit from better labour laws, as there are exemptions in employment standards for those who work in food service (Vosko 2019), and due to the considerable variation in size and organization of restaurants, an industry in which unionization has been historically difficult. Though this thesis touched briefly on worker solidarity, it would be compelling to explore the ways employees may organize in the face of industry with so many issues.

This thesis provided a meaningful look at Ontario servers’ experiences with aesthetic labour, job requirements, and gendered and racialized divisions. There is ample opportunity for similar research to be conducted with more workers in the restaurant industry in Canada. I focused on servers due to their reliance on tips, but the organization of the restaurant is a hierarchal one that sorts all workers into different positions based on identity markers such as race, class, and gender. It is clear that employers rely on aesthetic labour to sell the product of a restaurant experience, and in that experience, servers become part of the product being
sold. This thesis has illuminated some of the ways servers grapple with that, hoping to shed light on something many have experienced but may not have had the words to describe. In contributing to the literature on the Canadian restaurant industry, I hope to encourage other scholars to explore the intricacies that exist in this sector.
Appendices

Appendix A

Participate in a study about Serving Consumer Expectations: Women Servers' Interpretations of Job Requirements in the Food Service Industry

Have you recently been employed as a server at a restaurant in Ottawa? Would you like to share your story so that others can understand what your job is like?

To participate in this study, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Identify as a woman
- Have been working in the Ottawa food service industry as a server for at least 6 months
- Be comfortable using and being recorded over the platform Zoom

Participants will be compensated for their time with $10 Visa gift cards

Please contact the researcher, Taylor Maudlin, at TaylorMaudlin@email.carleton.ca for more details.

This study has been cleared by the Carleton University Ethics Board A. Clearance #115630
Appendix B

Interview Questions/Guide

1. How long have you worked in the food service industry?
2. How many restaurants have you been employed for?
3. Describe the type of restaurant(s) you have been employed for? (i.e., casual/family-style, sports bar, fine dining, pub style, etc.)
4. Were you ever employed full-time?
   If yes: a) Did you receive any benefits?
   b) How long were you employed in this full-time position?
5. To your knowledge, were you ever paid less than the Ontario minimum wage because you worked as a liquor server?
6. To the best of your ability, describe the organization of the restaurants (i.e., who worked in managerial positions, who worked in service positions, who worked in back-of-house positions, etc.) you worked at; do you recall the ratio of men/male-identified to women/female-identified working in service positions?
7. Outside of customer service and the duties that go along with serving, were there any other duties you were asked to perform? (i.e., cleaning restrooms, folding napkins, polishing silverware, etc.)
8. Did you ever feel that your manager(s) showed preferential treatment for any employees? If so, why?
9. Describe the hiring processes for the restaurant(s) you have worked for.
10. Do you believe that gender or race were considerations in the hiring processes of any of the restaurants you worked for? If you worked for more than one type of establishment, did this vary? How so?
11. What sort of job requirements were explained to you, either before or after being hired? - dress code
12. How did you interpret these job requirements? How did your interpretation shape your perception about how to perform your work tasks?
13. Was there anything you did to challenge, or conversely, embrace your job requirements and/or duties?
14. How did you interpret your role as a server? What sort of things characterized this role?
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Name and Contact Information of Researchers:

Taylor Maudlin, Carleton University, Pauline Jewett Institute of Women’s and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Tel.: 613-220-6417
Email: TaylorMaudlin@e-mail.carleton.ca

Supervisor and Contact Information: Dr. Megan Rivers-Moore, Carleton University, Pauline Jewett Institute of Women’s and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
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Project Title

Serving Consumer Expectations: Women Servers’ Interpretations of Job Requirements in the Food Service Industry

Carleton University Project Clearance

Clearance #: 115630  Date of Clearance: June 30th, 2021

Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research project because you have recently been employed as a server identifying as a woman who is over the age of 18 and who has worked in the Ottawa food service industry for at least six months. The information in this form is intended to help you understand what is being asked of you so that you can decide whether you agree to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and a decision not to participate will not be used against you in any way. As you read this form, and decide whether to participate, please ask all the questions you might have, take whatever time you need, and consult with others as you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

The food service industry is one that has been characterized by scholars as having gendered and racialized divisions. The purpose of this study is to gather information from women who have worked in the food service industry about their experiences with job requirements, duties, and hiring processes in order to get an idea of servers’ interpretations of these divisions.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in the study, we will ask you to:

Participate in an individual interview that will last approximately one hour about some of the experiences you have had while working the food service industry. The nature of these questions will pertain to the number of restaurants you may have worked at, the staff organization of those restaurants, the job requirements you have been told or have observed, and how you have interpreted your role as a server.
The interview will take place over Zoom and the audio will be recorded. You may withdraw your consent at any time during the course of the interview.

**Risks and Inconveniences**
Since you are being asked questions about your personal experiences, you may recall negative memories from your time working in this position. However, this risk would be no higher than recalling similar experiences in other workplaces.

**Possible Benefits**
You may not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may allow researchers to better understand the dynamics and working conditions of the food service industry for woman-identified servers.

**Compensation/Incentives**
You will be given a $10 Amazon e-gift card for your participation in this study.

**No waiver of your rights**
By signing this form, you are not waiving any rights or releasing the researchers from any liability.

**Withdrawing from the study**
If you withdraw your consent during the course of the study, all information collected from you before your withdrawal will be discarded.

After the study, you may request that your data be removed from the study and deleted by notice given to the Principal Investigator (named above) within two weeks after your interview has taken place or before August 1st, 2021.

**Confidentiality**
We will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. Research records may be accessed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board in order to ensure continuing ethics compliance.

The results of this study may be published or presented at an academic conference or meeting, but the data will be presented so that it will not be possible to identify any participants unless you give your express consent.

As soon as the interview is complete, you will be assigned a pseudonym so that your identity will not be directly associated with the data you have provided. All data, including coded information, will be kept in a password-protected, encrypted file on a secure computer.

"In-session” data, such as the audio and chat transcript from the interview, will be stored locally on the researcher’s computer. Operation data, such as meeting and performance data, will be stored and protected by Zoom on servers located in Toronto, but may be disclosed via a court order or data breach.
We will encrypt any research data that we store or transfer.

Data Retention
After the study is completed, your de-identified data will be retained for future research use but will be destroyed five years after the research is complete.

Audio recordings of Zoom interviews will be kept temporarily for transcription purposes but will be destroyed upon transcription completion.

In the case that participants would like to see the findings of the research, they may contact the researcher once the project is complete.

New information during the study
In the event that any changes could affect your decision to continue participating in this study, you will be promptly informed.

Ethics review
This project was reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board A. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Carleton University Research Ethics Board by email at ethics@carleton.ca.

Statement of consent – print and sign name. All participants will be emailed a copy of this consent form. If participants are unable to sign this document electronically or send a signed scanned copy, verbal consent may be given over Zoom. The researcher will read aloud the following statements and the participant will verbally answer yes or no. This will be documented in the Zoom recording.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.  __Yes  __No

I agree to be (audio recorded).  __Yes  __No

Consent for audio recording must be given in order to participate in this study.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of participant                          Date

Research team member who interacted with the participant
I have explained the study to the participant and answered any and all of their questions. The participant appeared to understand and agree. I provided a copy of the consent form to the participant for their reference.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of researcher                          Date
Bibliography


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