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“SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS MY JOB”: THE IMPACT OF DISPLAY WORK ON BIKINI
BARISTA INTERACTIONS

By

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Bachelor of Arts, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington, 2018

Thesis

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“Sexual Harassment is My Job”: The Impact of Display Work on Bikini Barista Interactions

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This study compares the experiences of women working in “bikini” coffee stands with women working in “family-friendly” coffee stands. These stands are similar in that customers drive up and purchase coffee through a window. However, bikini coffee stands differ from their family friendly counterparts because they are staffed by scantily-clad women. This study contributes to the existing literature by comparing the experiences of service workers in sexualized and non-sexualized environments. Additionally, this study examines the understudied service job of bikini coffee. Using semi-structured interviews to examine the baristas’ thoughts and experiences surrounding their work, I find that both types of baristas engage in emotionally in-depth relationships, which I refer to as ‘quasi-friendships.’ The presence of display work complicates the quasi-friendships that bikini baristas have with their customers: it simultaneously intensifies aspects of these relationships that are reminiscent of friendships as well as transactional relationships, ultimately dependent upon tips from customers.

Keywords: Display Work, Sex Work, Service Work, Bikini Barista

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INTRODUCTION

Women who work as bikini baristas make their money by serving coffee in revealing outfits. They are usually required to wear (only) bikinis or lingerie, and sometimes they even go topless with pasties. Bikini barista stands have become so popular in the Pacific Northwest that other coffee stands have marketed themselves as "family-friendly" due to a decline in business (Spokesman Review 2017). However, despite their ubiquity, previous research on these jobs is sparse. Given the amount of research conducted on other sexualized service occupations, such as waitresses at Hooters (Loe 1996; Newton-Francis and Young 2015; Rasmusson 2011) or cocktail waitresses who wear revealing outfits (Murray 2014), this lack of attention seems to be an oversight. Furthermore, ethnographies and other qualitative workplace studies have rarely examined service workers in the coffee industry, suggesting little about workplace experiences within one of the largest service occupations.

This study contributes to existing knowledge on feminized service work by comparing the experiences of baristas who work in sexualized and non-sexualized drive-through coffee stands. The jobs have many similarities; both types of baristas provide customer service and make coffee. However, they differ significantly, as bikini baristas are paid to display their bodies for customers to see as part of their job. Aside from an undergraduate thesis (Grubb 2018), there is a lack of research examining the impact of this "display work" on bikini baristas. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative studies that examine a sexualized service job with a similar non-sexualized one.

In addition to examining the impact of display work, this comparison reveals more about gender within sexualized service work. Numerous studies examine the role of gender within sexualized service work; however, most focus on a single setting (Cook 2011; DiNenno 2004;

Hearn and Stoll 1975; Loe 1996; Murray 2014; Newton-Francis and Young 2015; Rasmusson 2011). The comparison across sexualized and non-sexualized jobs shows how baristas handle customer interactions. Specifically, the comparison of semi-structured interviews demonstrates how baristas perceive and navigate these interactions. The use of semi-structured interviews also demonstrates the influence a sexualized environment has on experiences with providing customer service. However, before outlining the design of this study, we must briefly examine the existing research on gender, service work, and sexualized service work. Additionally, this literature review provides an overview of research that has exposed the impacts of emotional labor, aesthetic labor, and display work on women's work lives in the service industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Doing Gender at Work

Research has consistently shown that women in service occupations are expected to perform a variety of feminine traits. In other words, the interactions that women have while at work are similar to performing femininity. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is not an attribute that someone possesses. Instead, gender is a performance that is sustained through our actions. More specifically, gender is the enactment of "socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities. These activities come to be viewed as "expressions of masculine and feminine natures" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). Traditionally, women have been relegated to reproductive labor done around the home, such as feeding and caring for children (Federici 2004). This division of labor has created the association of women with caring for others. Thus, this act can be construed as one of the micropolitical activities that express femininity. Specifically, when women tend to the needs of others, they are performing femininity. Since service work involves serving food and meeting the emotional desires of

customers, service occupations often offer considerable opportunities to perform femininity at work, whether or not it is an expression of the worker's authentic self.

Capitalism has historically benefitted from women's reproductive labor, and it continues to do this even as women become more represented in the paid workforce than before (Creighton 1982; Federici 2004). The US has shifted towards a service economy, thereby increasing the number of jobs where the product of the worker's labor is interactions with customers and clients (Cohen 2013). A significant portion of these jobs involves tasks that resemble reproductive labor that women do at home, such as serving food and beverages (Thistle 2006). The prevalence of women taking on these feminized service jobs happens partially because they have a more challenging time than men accessing higher-status occupations (Acker 1990). Thus, customer service and food service jobs tend to be female-dominated (BLS 2020). Women enter these jobs at higher rates due to both gender norms and their marginalization in the workplace.

Research in female-dominated service work influenced by gender norms has shown consistent patterns of behavior. Women who work in these jobs frequently act nurturing, deferent, or sexually available (Creighton 1982; Dowling 2012; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Tyler 1998; Tibbals 2007). Dowling's (2012:111) work exemplifies the multifaceted performance of gender in service work. When describing her experience as a waitress, she states: "I am the sexualized, eroticized server; I am mother and mistress and everything in between. Sex and gender are put to work here, but this is a complex terrain of resonance." This re-creation of femininity in food service work is comprehensive, as women act feminine in various ways. Below, I showcase three of the most common performances of femininity identified within service work: nurturance, deference, and sexuality.

Nurturance. One manifestation of doing gender at work is women nurturing customers. Women working in the service industry often view nurturing as part of their job because they are required to take care of customers' emotional and physical needs (Creighton 1982; Dowling 2012; Elder and Rolens 1985; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Tyler 1998; Tibbals 2007). Dowling (2012) states that the nature of waitressing put her in a position that felt maternal because customers were utterly dependent on her to meet their needs. She says, "I influence what you eat, what you drink, when you get it, and how you experience it. You are dependent on me for the satisfaction of your bodily needs and for your enjoyment" (Dowling 2012:111). Taking care of others' needs is integral to service work. Thus, these jobs often pressure the women who work them into taking on maternal roles.

The similarity between service work and reproductive labor activities is so substantial that management often expects female employees to act motherly towards customers (Creighton 1982; Taylor and Tyler 1998). Taylor and Tyler (1998) interviewed managers at an airline and found that their participants expected their female employees to provide service through acting patient, caring, and attentive. The management believed that flight attending was "women's work" because women were naturally equipped to care for people (Taylor and Tyler 1998:166). The performance of femininity was so ingrained in this service role that management often expected women to excel at interacting with customers.

While acting nurturing is in line with expectations from management, women might also act nurturing at work because of socialization. Creighton (1982) argues that women working in the service industry enter their jobs already socialized to take care of customers. She says that "for women to refuse to take care of others' needs can feel like rudeness" (Creighton 1982:61). This statement suggests that women are socialized to act nurturing towards customers regardless

of their explicit job requirements. This socialization helps them suppress their feelings of anger or annoyance to take care of customers' needs. Women feel compelled to act nurturing due to socialization, which is reinforced by management expectations.

Deference. Another manifestation of doing femininity in service work is when women act deferent. Women in the service industry act deferent to customers, meaning that they treat the customer as if they are of a higher status. Although service workers in general are already subject to mistreatment from customers, women have to accept mistreatment more often than men do (Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Foff Paules 1991; Korczynski 2013). Hall (1993) noticed this phenomenon in her study on wait staff. She argues that this mistreatment was due to the subordinate position that the women held. She also argues that the female wait staff tolerated this treatment because they wanted to provide the best service.

Not only do women working in the service industry accept mistreatment, but they also continue to care for the emotional needs of the customers who abuse them. In her ethnography, Dowling (2012) pointed out that customers berate waitresses and then come in on a separate occasion to celebrate a promotion at their jobs. The waitresses they had previously disrespected would still congratulate them on their successes. Dowling's (2012) findings indicate that even when mistreated, women are still compelled to care for customers' emotional needs because this dynamic aligns with their job requirements. The mistreatment of women in these service roles is commonplace, and these women often act deferent in response to this treatment.

Sexuality. Women in the service industry also do femininity at work by acting and presenting themselves in a sexualized manner. Past research reveals that when interacting with customers, women in the service industry dress seductively and act flirtatious (Dowling 2012; Filby 1992; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Murray 2014; Tibbals 2007). Frequently, women

engage in sexualized behavior because they view it as an intrinsic part of their job. Filby (1992) conducted an ethnography of a betting shop that hired attractive women with lively personalities. These women ended up sexualizing themselves on the job to entertain customers. They would make suggestive jokes and play into the sexual comments made by customers. The women working in the job were under the impression that management wanted them to engage in this behavior because they were hired for their appearance and ability to entertain customers. Many women in the service industry view enacting a sexualized persona as an intrinsic part of the job.

In addition to viewing sexuality as an implicit part of the job, women in the service industry sometimes use sexuality to excel at work. Tibbals (2007) recalls a time during her participant observation as a waitress where she used sexuality to make up for poor service. One of her male customers made a joke insinuating she was a sex worker while he was visibly annoyed with her. To diffuse the situation, Tibbals (2007) responded by making a joke back at her customer. For some women in the service industry, playing into their sexualization during customer interactions helps them ensure that the customer is enjoying themselves. Employers do not always ask their staff to look and act sexy. However, women still have sexualized interactions with customers. This phenomenon raises the question: How do service workers act when they are asked to dress sexy? To understand women's interactions in their service jobs, it is essential to look at the different forms of labor required. The performances of femininity that I mention above, occur when women conform to workplace standards of affect, emotion, and appearance. These standards require workers to engage in emotional labor, aesthetic labor, and sometimes display work to appeal to customers. By outlining the theories of these different forms of labor, I highlight how women end up conforming to gender norms when they conform to workplace standards.

Emotional Labor

One form of labor that service workers are expected to engage in is emotional labor. Hochschild (1983:3) defines emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.” Hochschild (1983) builds on Goffman’s (1953) work surrounding interpersonal interactions. Goffman (1953) argues that within everyday life, there is a front-stage and a back-stage. He states that while people are front-stage, they act in specific ways to give off desired impressions of themselves. For instance, he argues that servers will “deceive” their customers “because they show a heartfelt demand for it” (Goffman 1953:11). In contrast, people who are back-stage can act like their authentic selves. Hochschild (1983) uses this framework to describe how people manage their emotions while at work.

In order to understand the role of gender within emotional labor, Hochschild (1983) focuses on the male-dominated occupation of debt collecting and the female-dominated occupation of flight attending. She argues that predominantly male debt collectors are trained to act angry with customers to intimidate debtors. On the other hand, predominantly female flight attendants are trained to make customers feel at ease. In both cases, the workers have to perform a heightened emotion, or suppress a natural reaction, to accomplish the tasks assigned to them by their employer.

The execution of emotional labor is a salient example of the performance of gender in service work. Hochschild (1983) argues that the flight attendants in her study alter their emotions to align with cultural expectations of femininity. For instance, flight attendants are trained to act pleasant towards rude customers by thinking of them as guests at their homes. They are trained to care for customers' emotional states by acting as homemakers. These emotions that flight attendants project align with employer expectations and gender norms.

Subsequent research applies the concept of emotional labor to sex work. Sex workers and exotic dancers engage in emotional labor to make customers feel desired (Enck and Preston 1988; Kay Hoang 2010). For instance, according to Deshotels and Forsyth (2006:223), exotic dancers engage in emotional labor through "strategic flirting." The authors use this term to describe how exotic dancers flirt so their customers feel inclined to tip them. Furthermore, dancers also figure out what their customers' fantasies are and then embody these fantasies for them.

Both service and sex workers engage in emotional labor to make customers feel special or important. Workers in both types of occupations also hint at their sexual availability in order to make more money (Enck and Preston 1988; Deshotels and Forsyth 2006; Dowling 2012; Filby 1992; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Kay Hoang 2010; Murray 2014; Tibbals 2007). The emotional labor that sex workers engage in has some overlap with the sexualized performance of service workers.

Aesthetic Labor and Display Work

Aesthetic labor is another form of labor that characterizes women's experiences within service jobs. Aesthetic labor was coined by Warhurst and colleagues (2000) to describe the requirement of workers to embody an appearance that is appealing to customers. This form of labor is gendered as women, in general, are typically held to stricter appearance standards than men (Mears and Connell 2016). Thus, they also usually put a greater amount of effort into their appearance than men (Jackson 1992). For instance, Tyler and Abbot (1998) argued that airline companies use female flight attendants' bodies to maintain an appealing image for customers. These flight attendants are subject to strict weight regulations and are sometimes fired if they do not maintain a slender figure.

In addition to aesthetic labor, display work impacts women's experiences within service jobs. The term "display work" falls under the broader category of aesthetic labor and describes any occupation that requires showing one's body for money (Mears and Connell 2016). Display work has significant overlap with aesthetic labor; however, with display work, the "visual consumption of the body is the primary service being rendered" (Mears and Connell 2016:335). In contrast, aesthetic labor is used to project an appealing image to customers so that they may purchase another product (Tyler and Abbot 1998; Williams and Connell 2010). While aesthetic labor requirements are relatively standard within the service industry, occasionally, service occupations take these demands further and explicitly require female workers to engage in display work. These occupations offer the display of the female workers' bodies as the primary service and the serving of food and beverages as the secondary service.

The presence of this requirement means that the employer is explicitly sanctioning the sexualization of the worker. While masculine display work is usually done by athletes and is viewed as strong, powerful, and nonsexual (Mears and Connell 2016), feminine display work has strong associations with sexuality; even seemingly nonsexual occupations such as ballet and fashion modeling have historically been associated with sex work (Brown 2012 as cited in Mears and Connell 2016). Therefore, it is no surprise that when service jobs require display work from their female employees, they capitalize on their sexuality.

Sexualized service work. For this study, I refer to occupations that explicitly require workers to engage in display work while selling another commodity as "sexualized service occupations" (see Figure 2). I argue that the people employed in these jobs are technically service workers and not sex workers. I make this argument because the workers in these jobs are technically hired to sell food and drink (or any other commodity) but are required by their

employer to exhibit their bodies. The most recognizable feature of these occupations is the revealing uniforms or outfits workers must wear (Grubb 2018; Loe 1996; Murray 2014; Newton-Francis and Young 2015). Sexualized service occupations include jobs at "Breastaurants," which are restaurants that employ waitresses to sell food and beverages in revealing clothing (Avery 2016:171). Sexualized service occupations also include cocktail waitressing, waitressing topless in exotic dance clubs, and, as relevant to the current study, working in bikini barista stands. Sexualized service work differs from other forms of service work in several ways, including appearance standards, customer base, and compensation. Workers in sexualized service jobs typically make significantly more money than their non-sexualized counterparts and cater to a customer base primarily made up of men (Loe 1996; Murray 2014; Rasmusson 2011). In addition, since the sexualization of the worker in these occupations is an explicit expectation of the employer, these positions are more likely to require the worker to adhere to conventional beauty standards than other service jobs. These standards include having a slim physique, wearing makeup, and having specific hairstyles (Cook 2011; Loe 1996; Newton-Francis and Young 2015). For example, Cook (2011:48) highlights that waitresses at Hooters must embody an "All American, Cheerleader, Surfer, Girl Next Door" image. She describes how African-American women who worked at the Hooters she observed were pressured into straightening their hair, because management gave them lucrative restaurant sections when they conformed to white beauty standards (Cook 2011). It is essential for sexualized service workers to maintain their appearance in order to attract customers.

Although sexualized service workers are not sex workers, their jobs still have many similarities with sex work. The differences between sexualized service work and sex work are nuanced, given that the workers in these jobs both sell sexualized behavior such as the displaying

of the body. Furthermore, the boundary between sex work and sexualized service work is obscured because sexualized service workers offer their sexuality as the primary commodity (Avery 2016). In other words, patrons of sexualized service workers are most likely interested in the display work being offered and not the food and beverages. On the other hand, forms of sex work, such as exotic dancing or phone sex work, typically *only* involve selling a sexualized behavior. However, even this distinction is not always reliable as sometimes exotic dancers are pressured to sell drinks for the club they work in (Enck and Preston 1988). In short, the offering of display work blurs the boundaries between sex work and service work. Thus, the presence of display work might mean that sexualized service workers might have customer interactions that have many similarities to the interactions that sex workers have.

Since sexualized service workers sell a sexualized behavior, bikini barista customer interactions may also have similarities with other forms of sex work. Bikini baristas may have a solid incentive to foster feelings of intimacy between themselves and their customers. For instance, Grubb (2018) found that bikini baristas attempted to build rapport with customers. This finding seems to align with past research on sex work; for example, some sex workers build rapport with customers and even treat them as if they are close friends (Van-Meyl 2014). Thus, bikini baristas may intentionally create an atmosphere of intimacy between themselves and customers. Bikini baristas might engage in this behavior in addition to acting in line with gendered standards of affect and emotion that have been identified in service work.

Impact of Display Work on Interactions

Sexualized service workers who are required to engage in display work may have a higher likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment since they must show their bodies. For instance, Murray (2014) points out that sexualized servers will tolerate sexual harassment from

customers who tip them generously. She also argues that the customers at the establishment she observed felt empowered to objectify the servers due to the sexualized environment. Therefore, the presence of display work could mean that sexualized service workers experience sexual harassment more frequently than non-sexualized service workers.

Although some of the effects of display work are harmful, some scholars argue that it could positively affect sexualized service workers. For instance, these workers might be protected from the caustic effects of emotional labor. DiNenno (2004) argues that some waitresses at Hooters emphasize the importance of their sex appeal on the job more than others. They posit that these waitresses are less likely to place importance on making their personality appealing to customers and management. Therefore, they experience less emotional drain compared to their coworkers. Instead of merely intensifying challenging aspects of service work, such as sexualization, display work could protect workers from the effects of emotional labor. Additionally, sexualized service workers may not be as negatively impacted by sexual harassment as non-sexualized service workers. Service workers are already sexualized without display work (Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Tibbals 2007). However, these workers may not expect this sexualization or sexual harassment because they are not required to engage in display work. Thus, they may not be mentally prepared to deal with customers sexualizing them. On the other hand, sexualized service workers might not be as impacted by their sexualization because they view it as an integral part of their job (DiNenno 2004). This phenomenon questions whether the difference in sexualized and non-sexualized service workers' experiences is even significant.

The differences between service work and sexualized service work are nuanced. For instance, some studies suggest that displaying the body exacerbates the effects of emotional and aesthetic labor on workers in sexualized service jobs (Loe 1996; Murray 2014; Newton-Francis

and Young 2015). Furthermore, service work is already potentially degrading and alienating even when it is not explicitly sexualized (Albrecht and Zemke 1985; Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Hochschild 1983; Tsaor and Hsieh 2020). Thus, we do not see how these are distinct features of sexualized service work. Sociologists have examined the experiences of women with sexualized and non-sexualized service work. However, research that compares the two occupations is lacking.

The setting of the coffee stand could also shape the impact of display work on interactions between bikini baristas and customers in unique ways. Moreover, this setting could have some positive influences on the work-life of the baristas. Workers in sexualized environments often feel disempowered when customers attempt to touch them. DeVolvo (2003) gives the example of a waitress who quit her job out of embarrassment after falling when a customer pulled her hair to get her attention. Similarly, Wesely (2003) argues that exotic dancers have trouble drawing and maintaining physical boundaries with customers. Her interviewees informed her that it is hard to avoid inappropriate touching from customers because they know it will benefit them financially. Women working in drive-through coffee stands do not have to navigate drawing physical boundaries the way other service and display workers do. Coffee stands provide a barrier between baristas and customers.

A comparative approach. The lack of comparison between sexualized and non-sexualized service work in previous research does not provide a clear answer to how display work influences service workers. It is difficult to discern precisely how the experiences of women working in the service industry in general differs from women working in sexualized service occupations. Despite the extensive literature on service work, there is not a single study that could be located that compares the experiences of sexualized service workers to workers

employed at a job that would be considered the non-sexualized equivalent. For example, there is not a study comparing the experiences of cocktail waitresses who wear revealing outfits to cocktail waitresses that do not. There are also no comparative studies examining waitresses at Hooters to waitresses at a well-known non-sexualized restaurant chain. Without a comparative element, these studies do not illustrate the differences between the jobs. Sexism or sexual harassment that waitresses at Hooters may face may or may not be different from the sexism that a waitress at an Olive Garden, for example, might face.

Also, unlike restaurants and bars, coffee stands are usually small and do not have an area where baristas can step away from customers, which could influence interactions. An example of how physical space influences performances are illustrated in a previous study on sexualized labor. Wosick-Correa and Joseph (2008) argue that female patrons hold a view of exotic dancers that differs from male patrons. The researchers build on Goffman's (1953) work by using a dramaturgical analysis to describe interactions within the club they observed. They argue that female patrons are less likely to view their interactions with exotic dancers as sincere because they see them while they are "back stage." More specifically, these patrons run into dancers in the women's restroom. During these encounters, they see the dancers acting differently from how they typically act around customers. Although working in a small space may not be the same as sharing a bathroom with customers, the layout of coffee stands could undoubtedly influence how baristas perform customer service for patrons. Baristas are also more likely to work on their own because of the size of coffee stands, meaning that they will not have a community to cope with when dealing with problematic customers (Korcynski 2003).

This study also attempts to demarcate the boundary between selling a service and selling sexuality by examining the similarities and differences of experiences between the baristas.

There is a fine line between the sexualization of the worker that the employer explicitly and implicitly sanctions. Service occupations have the potential to end up on different parts of this spectrum; some service occupations may hire workers based on their sex appeal even if workers are not explicitly required to show off their bodies (Filby 1992). On the other hand, some service occupations do not even hire based on sex appeal, and yet workers are still highly sexualized by customers and management (Hall 1993; Polychronis 2008; Tibbals 2007). This spectrum of sexualization has not been examined in barista jobs the way it has in restaurants (Hall 1993; Huebner 2008; Foff Paules 1991; Tibbals 2007), flight attending (Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Tyler 1996), retail (Hughes and Tadic 1998), bars (Polychronis 2008), and even betting shops (Filby 1992).

The current study. The current study is a comparative analysis of baristas working in bikini and "family-friendly" stands. There has been research on customer service workers in the coffee industry (Brickner and Dalton 2019; Collom 2020; Szabo 2012; Tilbrook 2020). However, researchers have not examined gendered performances by baristas, even though it has been heavily explored in other service occupations (Creighton 1982; Dowling 2012; Elder and Rolens 1985; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Tibbals 2007; Taylor and Tyler 1998). This gap in the literature has also occurred even though baristas are subject to emotional and aesthetic labor standards (Szabo 2012). This study fills this gap in the literature by examining aesthetic labor, emotional labor, and display work in a new context: baristas.

The only study that compares bikini baristas to conventional baristas is an unpublished undergraduate thesis by Grubb (2018). The author conducted a comparative ethnographic analysis of family-friendly and bikini baristas to examine whether the sexualized work environment of bikini barista stands was harmful to its workers. She also examined display

work's impact on the baristas' interpersonal and customer service communication styles. Grubb (2018) observed interactions at the stands and conducted a handful of interviews which included workers and management. However, because the bulk of Grubb's (2018) data seemed to come from ethnographic analysis, her study mainly focused on surface-level interactions. She mostly observed the exchanges between baristas and customers; therefore, her study does not give an in-depth analysis of the meaning that baristas might assign to their work. Due to Grubb's (2018) choice in methodology, little could be gleaned about the internal experiences of baristas. Focusing primarily on interviews and obtaining a larger sample can reveal even more information regarding baristas' thoughts and emotions.

The spectrum of sexualization within service work raises several questions regarding family-friendly baristas and bikini baristas. This spectrum begs the questions, "Do bikini baristas enjoy interacting with their customers even though they are there to sexualize them?" and "How do these experiences compare to family-friendly baristas' interactions with customers?" Perhaps sexualized and non-sexualized service workers have similar feelings towards their jobs. The overarching research question driving this study is "What role does display work play in the baristas' interactions with customers?"

DATA AND METHODS

In order to answer my research questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with bikini and family-friendly baristas. The goal of this study was to compare the impact of display work across these seemingly similar jobs, so I used the same interview questions for both groups. Whenever possible, I conducted my interviews in person. However, I had to conduct several interviews over Zoom towards the end of my data collection process. Additionally, my audio recorder stopped recording halfway through one of my in-person interviews. In order to salvage

this interview, I wrote down everything I could remember as soon as I realized what had happened. I used these notes in my analysis alongside my transcription of the first half of the interview. All interviews occurred between August 13 and September 12, 2021.

I conducted interviews because I wanted to know how baristas perceived and navigated their interactions. Interviews allowed me to directly ask baristas what their workplace experiences were like for them (Tracy 2020). More specifically, I used semi-structured interviews because they “cede control of the discussion to the interviewee” (Tracy 2020:158). In other words, semi-structured interviews provided baristas the opportunity to talk about what they felt was important. These interviews also provided me the opportunity to ask clarifying questions (Brinkman and Kvale 2020). This opportunity was necessary given that little is known about bikini baristas. For instance, several bikini baristas informed me of the prevalence of requests for “shows.” They used this term to describe giving short performances that involved sexualized acts. Shows involved acts such as exposing themselves to customers or dancing. The option of doing shows became a significant part of bikini baristas’ interactions with customers. The phenomenon of shows emerged because bikini baristas initially brought them up. Thus, this finding illustrated the importance of semi-structured interviews.

Other methods such as ethnography or content analysis would not have been conducive towards answering my research question. Conducting ethnographic observation at coffee stands would not have uncovered data about how baristas perceive their work experiences because it would not have revealed baristas' thoughts and perceptions surrounding their interactions with customers. Furthermore, ethnographic data had already been collected about drive-through baristas. Grubb's (2018) analysis revealed that both groups of baristas engage in “communication probing” techniques. In other words, Grubb (2018) found that drive-through baristas ask

customers questions about their lives in order to sustain a conversation. While Grubb's (2018) analysis revealed *how* baristas build rapport with customers, her analysis did not reveal the meaning that the baristas assign to rapport.

Content analysis also would not have generated information about baristas' thoughts and experiences that my interviews did. I could have conducted a content analysis of social media pages by the coffee stands and/or bikini baristas.¹ The information from content analysis could have revealed how the stands and/or workers chose to present themselves to customers. Although content analysis could have been a viable strategy to examine this element of bikini coffee, I chose semi-structured interviews because they enabled me to learn about the internal experiences of bikini and family-friendly baristas, which was my initial motivation for this project. Furthermore, after examining social media sites associated with bikini and family-friendly coffee stands, I determined that the amount of text on these sites was relatively sparse, which would have made it hard to conduct an in-depth analysis.

My interview questions (see Appendix A and Table 1) focused mainly on customer interactions. They probed how the baristas felt during these interactions and throughout the workday. My interviews also offered baristas the opportunity to share their thoughts and emotions while they were not at work. I felt that it was essential to interview baristas away from work because they would not be distracted during our interviews. I also anticipated that baristas would express thoughts and opinions they might not feel comfortable expressing at work (Tracy 2020). For instance, several baristas I spoke with expressed frustrations regarding customers, management, and coworkers.

¹ It is common for bikini baristas to advertise themselves on social media. Bikini baristas use social media to build a following of regulars; this is important given that most of their income comes from tips.

Data Collection

I collected data in the Pacific Northwest because this area has one of the largest concentrations of bikini barista coffee stands in the United States. I identified 16 bikini barista stands in Seattle and Tacoma alone and even more throughout western Washington. Since bikini barista stands are sparse outside the Pacific Northwest, I felt that recruiting in this area would give me the best chance of interviewing women who worked at different stands (See Figure 3). I recruited both groups of baristas by handing out flyers at drive-through stands in the Seattle area, including Tacoma. The flyers contained information about my study along with my contact information.

I paid each of the interviewees \$20 to compensate them for their time. Additionally, I also did my best not to recruit at stands when they were busy; I did not want to impact the baristas' income by taking up time that could have been spent with customers. If I saw a line at a bikini or family-friendly stand, I would typically go to a different stand and come back later to recruit. If I had a car behind me while talking to a barista, I would explain my research to the barista as fast as possible and then drive off. In contrast, if I did not have a car behind me, I would attempt to build rapport with the barista to earn their trust.

I got an enthusiastic response from baristas; around 80% of baristas at bikini and family-friendly stands that I talked with while recruiting expressed enthusiasm about the prospect of being interviewed. Family-friendly baristas were excited and surprised that somebody was interested in their work. Bikini baristas also expressed excitement about participating in my study, and, in addition, several of them were excited to tell me about some of their extreme experiences. For instance, one of the bikini baristas I spoke to during recruitment informed me that she would be a good candidate to interview because she already had three men expose

themselves to her that day. Despite the enthusiasm of all the baristas interested in participating, only a little over a third contacted me to set up an interview. Furthermore, about half of the baristas who contacted me did not follow through with our interview. A little less than half of my sample was women whom I spoke to directly while recruiting interviewees; the other half were women who saw my flyers either hanging up at a stand or posted on another barista's social media account.

I attempted to avoid snowball sampling; however, I did end up partially relying on this method. I was hesitant to rely on snowball sampling because I did not want to recruit baristas that were all from the same friend group or workplace (Tracy 2020). I wanted a variety of different experiences in my study. If I had gotten all of my interviews from one friend group, there would have been a high possibility that my interviewees would have had similar thoughts and opinions (Tracy 2020). Thus, my sample would not have been as representative of baristas' experiences in the Pacific Northwest.

Establishing rapport with bikini baristas was vital because I could answer any questions that they had about myself or my study. This rapport was necessary because some baristas mistrusted me until I was able to answer these questions. For instance, one of the bikini baristas that I met while recruiting asked me, "how do you feel about bikini baristas?" I told her that I saw the job's appeal but had not done it myself because I did not want to deal with men sexualizing me. She laughed and then divulged, "Oh honey, I got into dominatrix work to deal with anger towards my ex-husband." This woman then agreed to participate in my study and proceeded to tell her coworkers about me. I was unable to interview her due to scheduling conflicts; however, I ended up interviewing one of her coworkers.

I prioritized the recruitment of bikini baristas first due to logistical reasons. First, I thought they would be challenging to recruit because sexualized service workers are often dubious of researchers (Rasmusson 2011). Second, I had limited time to collect data in Washington before heading back to the University of Montana for the fall semester. Since bikini barista stands are not very common outside of the Pacific Northwest, I felt that it was essential to prioritize recruitment of this population in Washington State. After I had conducted around five interviews with bikini baristas, I began recruiting both groups of baristas at the same time. Eight of the interviewees were people whom I spoke with directly while recruiting. One of the interviewees saw my flyers posted in an exotic dance club. The rest of the interviewees learned about my study from a barista that I had previously spoken with and had contacted me.

I followed the University of Montana's Covid-19 safety guidelines while collecting my data. I wore a mask during recruitment and screened all of my participants for Covid-19 symptoms prior to each in-person interview. In addition, I sat six feet away from participants during in-person interviews.

Challenges with data collection. Although I had an enthusiastic response from baristas, I confronted several challenges during data collection. For instance, several baristas I interviewed (both family-friendly and bikini) were afraid I would accidentally expose their identity to their bosses. These women feared that such exposure would put their livelihoods at stake. For instance, one of the family-friendly baristas I interviewed informed me that she was worried about her boss finding out that she participated in the study because she needed her job to get through college. She shared this concern approximately 20 minutes into our interview. I then stopped the recording and reassured her that her identity was completely confidential and that we could end the interview at any time. After pausing, we continued with the rest of our interview.

I also had to deal with stand owners who were mistrustful of me. For instance, I had a bikini stand owner explicitly ask me to stay away from her workers after one of her employees agreed to participate in my study. After this employee and I had spoken twice, she reached out to inform me that she could not participate in my study until I spoke with the stand owner where she worked. I reached out to the owner over Instagram with a brief description of my study, and she responded with a request to see my questions before the interview. She informed me that she would not allow any of her employees to participate unless she could look at my interview schedule first. I decided not to show her my questions because I did not want her to brief potential interviewees on what they could say. In response, this stand owner refused to let me talk to any of her workers.

In the end, my sample consisted of ten bikini baristas and eight family-friendly baristas. One of the interviewees, Christine, a 25-year-old bisexual, Mexican woman talked about her experiences with both forms of barista work, so I counted her in the bikini and family-friendly portions of my sample. Thus, I had 17 interviewees in total. All of the baristas in my sample were between the ages of 19 and 26, and the majority were white. Throughout this paper, I have described participants using the demographic terms they used to describe themselves (see Table 3). Eight of the baristas identified as either bisexual or pansexual; six of whom were bikini baristas. Almost all family-friendly baristas worked at local coffee chains; however, two worked for the same large corporation. From what I could gather from my interviews, bikini stand owners typically owned at least a handful of stands. However, these chains are typically regional and do not extend outside the Pacific Northwest. For instance, I found that one of the largest bikini coffee chains, Lady Bug Espresso, exists exclusively in the Pacific Northwest and has 14 locations (Peterson 2014).

Data Analysis

After collecting my data, I started my data analysis process by reading through my interview transcripts, writing down themes that I noticed, and creating a coding schema of these initial themes. I then used NVIVO to code my interviews using this coding schema. I used Charmaz's (2014) constant comparative method; as I coded my data, I modified my initial coding categories and combined/divided them to describe my data. For instance, I initially coded some of my data as “friendship,” however, I noticed that baristas sometimes had emotionally in-depth interactions with customers they had never met. Thus, I changed this category to “baristas supporting customers.”

During my first coding round; I sorted my data into broad themes: “empowerment” and “emotional support.” After this initial coding round, I proceeded to break these categories down into specific codes. For instance, I changed “emotional support” to “baristas supporting customers” and “customers supporting baristas.” During my second round of coding, I broke these categories down into specific types of support, such as “listening to customers” and “giving advice.”

I then engaged in a third round of coding, looking at how the themes I initially identified were related. At this stage of the data analysis process, I also began to connect the emerging themes in my data back to theories that I explored in my literature review. For instance, I examined the relationship between the theme of emotional support in my data and Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labor. I then wrote an analytic outline to guide the rest of my analysis and writing process (See Table 2).

RESULTS

Prior to conducting my interviews, I conceptualized sexualized service work as a form of service work that offered display work. However, my interviews revealed that there is a continuum between sex work and service work (See Figure 1). The presence of display work put bikini baristas somewhere on this continuum. My interviews also revealed that display work positions bikini baristas closer to sex work than service work. At the same time, my interviews also highlighted the similarities between sex work and service work. Similar to other forms of sex work, bikini baristas reported that they experienced frequent sexual harassment at the workplace, including sexual comments and a near-universal experience of men exposing themselves in the drive-through. Additionally, they fulfilled customers' emotional needs under the pretense of sexuality (Lucas 2005). However, as evident in my interviews, “family-friendly baristas also fulfilled the emotional needs of their customers. I argue that drive-through barista relationships extended beyond workplace emotional labor and often veered into emotionally in-depth quasi-friendships. I also argued that these relationships obscured the line between sex work and service work.

Doing Gender

Baristas performed nurturance through engaging in emotionally in-depth interactions with customers, which I refer to as “quasi-friendships.” Within these quasi-friendships, baristas supported customers through challenges occurring in their lives. These challenges included loved ones dying, workplace issues, childhood trauma, and relationship issues. Baristas listening to customers was the most common characteristic of these nurturing interactions. One of the bikini baristas I interviewed in the North Seattle area, a 23-year-old, white, heterosexual woman named Siobhan referred to her work as a bikini barista as being a “coffee girlfriend.” I asked her to tell me more about this term, and she stated that her customers just wanted someone to talk to. A

good example of this type of situation was Siobhan's interaction with an older man who had recently lost his wife:

There are actually these relationships that you build with people. I had this customer come by recently, this guy whose wife passed away during Covid, and so over this coming weekend that I saw him, he was saying that this weekend they were finally going to do a memorial for her because they could not during Covid...and just having customers open up to you like that makes you feel that you are helping these people in some way.

This interaction was just one example of how baristas emotionally supported customers by listening to them. Siobhan's account exemplified how baristas do femininity on the job; they perform nurturance through emotionally supporting customers. However, her use of the term “coffee girlfriend” implied a sexual undertone to the care that she provides. Siobhan could have stated something along the lines of “coffee friend” or “coffee therapist,” however, instead, she compared her interactions with customers to a romantic relationship.

In the case of bikini baristas, the performance of nurturance was completely intertwined with the display work they offered. Bikini baristas mentioned that they flirted with customers in addition to having emotionally in-depth interactions with them. Jackie, a white, straight, 22-year-old bikini barista in the north Seattle area, stated that her customer interactions were “pretty much like any normal interaction, except I am extra flirty and I am bending over and shaking my ass.” Similarly, Rosie an indigenous and white, bisexual, 20-year-old described her behavior as “customer service plus” because she was “extra flirty.” Furthermore, Rosie engaged in this behavior with customers whom she also emotionally supported. Additionally, Leila a bisexual, white, 24-year-old, bikini barista made a statement that summed the fusion of sexualized and nurturing performances. She stated:

Sometimes guys come, and they want to buy your underwear or your bra because they want to feel like a pretty girl, and men are very vulnerable. Bikini baristas are like the best counselors for men because that is where they go.

Leila's and the other baristas' experiences highlighted how there were elements of the sexualized and nurturing performance within bikini barista customer interactions. The coexistence of these performances was striking, given that men are presumably coming to the stand to sexualize the barista. Furthermore, the coalescence of these performances indicated that the emotional care that bikini baristas give to customers is an integral component of the services they offer.

For one of the interviewees, Christine, who had worked both jobs, the emotional support she provided at her bikini stand was nearly identical to the emotional support she provided at her family-friendly stand. Christine had worked in bikini coffee in the past but was working at a family-friendly stand at the time of our interview. Throughout our interview, she compared her experiences at the different stands and even highlighted that she engaged in meaningful work through emotionally supporting customers in both settings. She informed me that one of her favorite customers recently had her mother pass away. Christine appreciated that she felt comfortable enough to come to her and “genuinely let it all out.” Christine later expressed that she enjoyed “being that person” whom her customers could talk to in times of need. Baristas from both kinds of stands gained a sense of satisfaction from these interactions. I then asked Christine how her interactions at the bikini stand compared. She informed me that men came to her stand to complain about being parents or problems with their relationships. She followed this information with “and then they come here they tip their money, see what they want to see, and go back.” Christine's experiences exemplified some key similarities and differences between bikini and family-friendly coffee. She occupied an understanding, supportive role for her customers in both jobs. Her customers came to her and opened up about important issues in their lives. For Christine, this behavior transferred over to the bikini stand. However, the customers were also able to “see what they want to see” in addition to this nurturance and care.

Emotional Labor

In some ways, the baristas' performance of nurturance was in line with the emotional labor standards present in service jobs. However, these performances also depart from what employers typically expect from workers. This departure was due to emotional depth, which made these relationships reminiscent of close friendships. Hochschild (1983) differentiated between workplace and private displays of emotions. She argued that close, intimate relationships such as friendships often require extensive emotion work. I refer to the baristas' interactions as quasi-friendships because they are characterized by a level of emotional involvement reminiscent of close private relationships. Baristas' interactions resembled private relationships because baristas did not provide emotional labor by simply ensuring that customers had a good experience at the stand; they got to know customers and supported them through significant life events. However, despite this intimacy, baristas also told stories that undermined their claims of friendship. These stories suggested that these interactions were merely a result of baristas acting in accordance with their role as service workers. Thus, my interviews revealed that the emotional labor embedded in these interactions resembled transactional relationships *and* friendships that would occur outside the context of the stand.

Baristas described interactions with customers reminiscent of friendships because they got to know customers and supported them. One of the family-friendly baristas, Maude, a straight, 19-year-old Latinx woman told me that “people come and they just dump everything on you, and you are just like 'oh my gosh, yeah, cool.' You build these relationships with people.” Maude's statement summarized how these relationships began to resemble personal ones. Several other baristas described customers driving up to the stand and almost immediately opening up to them. Her statement exemplified how these interactions are often characterized by an immediate

sense of familiarity and depth. This emotional labor extended beyond Maude ensuring that they had a pleasant experience at the stand; she got to know her customers and support them through the ups and downs occurring in their lives.

As I have stated in the previous section, baristas provide emotional support to customers by listening to them process parts of their personal lives, including work, relationships, deaths in their family, and addiction. The emotional labor that baristas engaged in led to the establishment of quasi-friendships with their customers. Baristas specifically referred to customers as friends; nine of the baristas in my sample described at least one customer as “a friend.” Lena, a straight, white, 24-year-old bikini barista described an older man who came to her stand every week and insisted they were “actually friends.” Additionally, Rosie informed me that “your customers almost become your friends.” Rosie and Lena's language surrounding the word “friend” showcases how these interactions did not completely resemble personal relationships. For instance, Lena's use of the word “actually” implied the unlikeliness of her developing a friendship with this customer. Furthermore, Rosie's use of the word “almost” implied that these relationships were unable to reach a level of depth characteristic of friendships.

My interviews also revealed that these relationships were transactional because baristas never saw their customers outside of work. Sienna, a white, queer 19-year-old who worked as a family-friendly barista, was one of my most enthusiastic interviewees when describing “friends” she had made at the stand. Thus, I was surprised to hear her express detachment from these relationships. She stated:

There gets to a point with customers where you feel like you start to know them and are close to them, but it is also weird because when you are not at work, they do not exist in your life. So, it is kind of like having this weird balance between your barista life with your barista friends and your barista acquaintances and your home life and your home friends and your home acquaintances.

Sienna alluded to the paradoxical nature of barista and customer interactions; baristas got to know customers quickly and intimately; however, they also viewed these relationships as a completely separate part of their lives. Sienna's experience exemplified how these relationships were bound by time and space; no matter how deep Sienna's relationships got, the relationships did not leave the context of the stand where she was acting in accordance with her workplaces' emotional labor standards.

Another piece of evidence that suggested that baristas were not close friends with their customers was the fact that several baristas claimed that they consistently lied to customers. Specifically, some baristas explained that they routinely told customers what they wanted to hear rather than the truth. Christine mentioned that when interacting with men at the bikini stand, she would “feed them bullshit.” Similarly, Eva, a 22-year-old bisexual Mexican woman who worked in bikini coffee, mentioned that she would lie to her customers. She told me this information when I asked her how her behavior at work compared to her behavior outside of work. Eva stated:

The guy I was talking about earlier was asking me for advice on girls. He wanted to know how to approach them at a bar and stuff, and he asked me, “oh, if I were to approach you at a bar, would you talk to me? Or like date me?” and I was like, “oh yeah, of course!”

She followed this story up with, “I guess that is the main difference is. I will not lie to my friends.” Eva had just recently quit her bikini barista job when I interviewed her. She started the interview by referring to her customers as friends; however, when I asked her to compare her behavior in and outside of work, she concluded that she lied to her customers all the time. Eva's contradictory answers showed that the term “friend” did not adequately describe the relationships between baristas and customers. These relationships were also transactional because they still

resembled customer service interactions. As much as baristas asserted that they cared for their customers, these interactions were still embedded in a service centered relationship.

Although family-friendly baristas had developed relationships with customers and “cared” for customers, for the most part, they did not talk about the financial impact these relationships had on their lives. Joan, a white, gay, 19-year-old, was the only family-friendly barista who mentioned the importance of cultivating positive relationships with customers for tips. She informed me that “you have to put on a performance to earn those tips.” Her use of the word “performance” implied that she was not acting like her authentic self. Here, Joan implied that she had a financial incentive to “perform.” Although Joan was a family-friendly barista, her comment was akin to the bikini baristas' financial incentives to build a following of loyal customers.

Several bikini baristas revealed a clear financial incentive to maintaining these relationships. This incentive was not just one-time tips, but it was the ability to build a following of regulars who would tip them on a daily or weekly basis. One of the bikini baristas, Siobhan, informed me that she sometimes did not want to talk to people. However, she forced herself to make conversation, especially if the person was a regular; she stated, “you do not want to be a jerk, but you also do not want to get rid of your regulars.... Because that is what baristas thrive on... our regulars, and so your job is keeping your regulars happy.” Siobhan then went on to say:

It is more like relationships. I think from my perspective of it, the customers are just there to have an excellent start to their mornings and like have a pretty girl smile at them and talk to them. It was a lot more customer service than it was being sexy, just being able to listen and smile and listen to the customer's problems.

Siobhan was one of several bikini baristas who revealed that overall, forming these relationships was based in part on a desire to keep customers who tip well coming back to the coffee stand. To maintain a following, the bikini baristas I interviewed intentionally created a feeling of intimacy

and familiarity between themselves and the customers. For instance, bikini baristas informed me that they purposefully shared information about themselves with customers to get them to open up. This information ranged from what baristas liked to do in their free time to sharing stories on formative childhood experiences. Gabbi, a bisexual, mixed race, 22-year-old bikini barista mentioned that she shared pictures of herself online in the nursing program she was in at the time to give her customers a glimpse into her current life. She stated: “I showcase my real life on my Instagram so that my customers feel close to me. They see me in my scrubs, and they see me getting ready for work, school, and studying.” Baristas allowed customers to get to know them; however, they did this intending to build a following.

Impact of Display Work on Interactions

Bikini baristas' interactions with their customers had a stronger resemblance to friendships than family-friendly interactions. This difference is due to customers of the bikini stands reciprocating emotional labor, whereas customers of family-friendly stands did not. On the other hand, bikini baristas' interactions with customers also resembled transactional relationships because they depended financially on them. Due to these contradictory impacts of display work, bikini baristas had more complicated interactions than family-friendly baristas. In other words, this added element of display work contributed to the stronger resemblance of friendships *and* transactional relationships in these interactions.

Due to mutual support, bikini barista relationships had a stronger resemblance to friendships. For instance, several bikini baristas described having customers who would listen to them complain about other customers. I asked Lena to describe how she felt after dealing with demanding customers, and she told me:

I am not going to let it get to me. If it did, I will definitely tell one of my regulars about it. I will be like, “this mother fucker!” and they (her customers) will be like, “Oh shit, really?” and I will be like, “yeah! They did! They said that!” Then I am over it.

Lena was not the only bikini barista who received emotional support from customers; Eva also informed me that she would complain about other customers to some of her regulars, saying, "so you know you tell them about something that happened like it is funny. They are kind of like protective in a way." Likewise, Leila told me that she would vent to her customers, saying, "if my day is shitty and I am mad, I get to use the boys as counseling too. It is like a two-way street—it goes both ways."

In addition to returning the bikini baristas' emotional labor, customers also engaged in thoughtful acts of service for them. Similar to what friends might do for each other, bikini baristas' customers also went out of their way to do favors for them. For instance, Lena told me that one of her regulars brought her a fan at the stand during a heatwave. She also told me that one of her customers drove to the stand, brought her an outfit, and mended it because one of the straps was broken. Additionally, several baristas mentioned that customers would order food for them if they were hungry. The level of involvement and care these customers provided was unique to bikini barista work compared to family-friendly baristas. On the surface, customers exchanged money for coffee and display work; however, my findings suggest that these interactions were more than mere exchanges.

These interactions extended beyond the transaction of a customer service relationship because customers engaged in these acts of service even when it was inconvenient. Similar to friendships, my interviews indicated that baristas could sometimes rely on customers to take care of them. One memorable example from my data was a story that Gabbi told me about one of her favorite regulars. One night in the middle of winter, she was experiencing debilitating sciatic

nerve pain. The cold weather exacerbated Gabbi's physical pain as it was freezing, and this stand did not have any heating. Her manager refused to let her take the night off even though she was in such severe pain. She informed me that one of her regulars came to the stand, and she told me:

Usually, I take my robe off, but he goes, "Put your robe back on. Clearly, it is cold." He sticks his hand into the stand to see how cold it was, and it was cold... it was really cold. He was like, "what is going on? Why is your heater not working?" I was like, "I keep texting my manager to tell him what is going on, and he is not responding." He asks me, "is your back, ok?"

They were close enough that the customer was aware enough of Gabbi's health issues that he knew to ask about her back. In addition, although this story is one of the more extreme examples from my interviews, it illustrates how customers reciprocate the care that bikini baristas provide them. After this interaction, the customer called out of work to stay with her at the stand for the rest of the evening to ensure she was ok because of the cold. The customer had been coming to Gabbi's stand for over a year, and they had developed a close relationship during that time. This care that Gabbi's customer showed for her exemplified how these relationships extended beyond the quick transactions at the stands. In contrast, family-friendly baristas did not receive the same level of care in return from customers. This absence of reciprocity within the family-friendly baristas had some interesting implications. This absence implied that bikini baristas received this reciprocity because of the display work they provide.

Both bikini and family-friendly baristas provided similar forms of emotional labor; however, they did not get the same amount of support in return. The motives behind this care were questionable due to the sexualized nature of the bikini baristas' job. Moreover, bikini baristas likely received care because they were sexualized. The contradictory responses of bikini baristas alluded to the presence of cognitive dissonance or inconsistency between their beliefs and actions (Festinger 1962). Bikini baristas referred to customers as friends even when these

customers solicited them for sexual acts, often called "shows." The bikini baristas I spoke with offered varying definitions of a show, ranging from dancing or "twerking," taking off clothing, and other sexualized acts. Bikini baristas wanted to maintain a positive view of customers despite the sexualization they endured from them.

Since bikini baristas received care and support from customers, they also minimized the sexual nature of their interactions. This minimization implied that these friendly interactions were not as meaningful as bikini baristas reported. One example of this minimization was Lena's story about one of her friends at the stand. This friend of hers was a regular named Mitchell, who solicited her for a show on one occasion. Lena was hesitant to give Mitchell a show because he reminded her of her grandfather. Lena initially denied this request; however, she went on to say:

I was like, "I will show you my tits, but it will not be like oooooohhhh" [shimmies and makes a face at me]. He does not want to pay for shows either, so I am like, "I am not giving you free shows, my dude. That is wiggidy-wack."

Lena did not appreciate that Mitchell solicited her for shows without the intention of compensating her for it. Thus, this interaction showcased how bikini baristas overlooked the ways in which customers sexualized them. This situation raised the question of how truthful baristas were regarding the nature of these interactions.

Another example of baristas downplaying the sexualization they experienced was when Violet, a 21-year-old white, queer woman, stated, "sexual harassment is my job." However, earlier in the interview, she insisted that "the men that come through there do not make me feel dirty like, they do appreciate me." This statement suggested that sexual harassment was a normal, routine part of her work. This contradiction indicated that bikini baristas may downplay harassment or sexualization from customers.

Violet also told me a story that completely encapsulated her insistence to maintain a positive view of customers despite experiencing harassment from them. She described an interaction with a customer whom she suspected was masturbating in the drive-through. She did not know if he was engaging in this behavior; she deliberately did not look at his lap because she "did not know how to handle it." When I asked her how she felt about it afterward, she stated:

To be honest, I did not really care...he tipped me well, he was a nice guy, and I did not know if he was or was not so...if he was super vulgar or said something that would have had like a negative connotation.... but to be completely honest with you he was not a bad guy. He just may or may not have had his hands on his dick.

Violet's hesitancy to view this customer as anything but a "nice guy" illustrated the complicated views that bikini baristas have of their customers. For some baristas, their views of their regular relationships were inherently contradictory. They got to know and care for their customers, and yet they knew that their customers were there to sexualize them. For instance, Rosie stated, "I feel like if you respect your customers and do not look at them as the creeps that they are, it will work out for you." Violet's and Rosie's statements illustrated how bikini baristas may have had a desire to view their interactions with customers positively. The emotional depth that defined bikini baristas' customer interactions may have resulted from baristas overlooking how their customers viewed them. Therefore, the bikini baristas' description of customers as friends may not have accurately represented what their relationships were like.

Violet's contradictory statements may also have been influenced by the frequency of sexual harassment that she had experienced. Violet was not the only bikini barista who had witnessed customers expose themselves. Almost every bikini barista in my sample mentioned customers engaging in this behavior in the drive-through. In addition, several of the bikini baristas I spoke to while soliciting participants complained about this behavior to me. Although most of the bikini baristas who experienced this type of harassment did not attempt to view these

customers as friends, I did notice that some of the bikini baristas downplayed the harassment they experienced. For instance, when I asked Eva a clarifying question on sexual harassment, she experienced she framed it as "just comments like all the time." She then went on to say, "it has been mostly comments for me. I have never really had physical stuff happen." Although these bikini baristas all experienced sexual harassment frequently on the job, they maintained positive views of their customers. This ability to view customers positively could partially be due to bikini baristas minimizing their sexualization.

Bikini baristas may also be inclined to minimize sexual harassment from customers who otherwise act friendly towards them because of the vulnerable position their work puts them in. More specifically, the presence of display work contributes to a lack of safety alongside the stand's layout. These stands are small, detached buildings where bikini baristas typically work by themselves or with one other coworker. When dealing with sexual harassment, baristas frequently have to take matters into their own hands as they do not have a manager on shift whom they can go to for support when this happens. Camille described a customer who would regularly come to the stand to expose himself. I asked her what the stand owner's response was, and she informed me that he told her to throw hot coffee on him the next time he did it. Furthermore, Christine mentioned that a customer had pulled a gun on her while working at the stand. She also stated that bikini barista work had become even more dangerous over the years. Christine told me, "the police out here do not really do much for us anymore." Similarly, Jackie mentioned that there was a man who tried to sneak into her stand before she started working there. She stated, "There was a guy on the roof that would hang out and watch all the girls who worked night shift. At one point, he was trying to get in through the door, and he was hiding." Display work also contributes to the work environment being unsafe; bikini baristas are

put in a precarious position when they are required to display their bodies in small, isolated coffee stands. However, bikini baristas are not just in danger of being assaulted by customers; they are also at risk of being harmed by their bosses.

Bikini baristas are also at risk of being exploited by bosses due to their work's lack of regulation. Christine informed me that some stand owners pressure bikini baristas to give shows to customers. She also told me that these same stand owners would pressure women into having sex with them before hiring them. Furthermore, a couple of the baristas mentioned that not all stands pay their baristas an hourly wage, making them even more reliant on tips. Other baristas mentioned the pressure to “make deposit” at the night’s end; if they did not sell enough coffee, they would get taken off the schedule. One bikini barista, Jackie, even informed me that the owner tried to pressure her into putting her own money in the till. Although this stand owner was unsuccessful, this situation highlighted the importance of tips.

Bikini baristas reported that they needed their regulars to show up and tip them continuously. For bikini baristas, it paid off to become friends with customers, or as Rosie put it, “if you do not look at them as the creeps that they are, this job will work out for you.” For bikini baristas, the insincerity of their interactions is amplified by the financial incentives of the job. My interviews with bikini baristas suggested that these interactions may not have been genuine because they were financially dependent on their regulars. Although both baristas earned tips, bikini baristas earned most of their income from loyal customers tipping them. Therefore, a bikini barista’s income was directly related to her ability to build and maintain a following. Due to this financial arrangement, the requirement of display work complicates bikini baristas’ relationships with customers.

DISCUSSION

My comparative analysis of bikini and family-friendly baristas reveals the impact of display work on customer service interactions. My interviews with 17 drive-through baristas showcase how baristas do gender and emotional labor while at work. My findings are that sex and service work overlap significantly, as both capitalize on women performing femininity through emotionally supporting customers. I refer to these emotionally in-depth interactions as "quasi-friendships." The quasi-friendships that baristas engage in are emotionally intimate and therefore reminiscent of close friendships. I use the term "quasi" to highlight that these relationships are not precisely friendships. Even though these relationships involve emotional intimacy, these relationships typically do not leave the context of the stand. These relationships also resemble the emotional labor that sex workers and service workers provide. Service workers and sex workers engage in emotional labor to ensure that customers and clients have a satisfactory experience (Deshotels and Forsyth 1988; Hochschild 1983; Kay Hoang 2010). Thus, these interactions remain superficial because baristas are acting in line with their job requirements. I found that display work complicates baristas' quasi-friendships with customers; it simultaneously enhances the emotional intimacy and the transactional nature of these interactions.

The presence of quasi-friendships indicates that both forms of work commodify the baristas' performances of femininity. More specifically, drive-through baristas do nurturance through emotionally supporting customers. West and Zimmerman (1987:126) argue that gender is constructed through "micropolitical activities" because it is a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment." The emotional care present within drive-through baristas' quasi-friendships with customers is a stark example of these micropolitical activities. These quasi-friendships resemble the nurturance that service workers provide (Creighton 1982; Dowling

2012; Elder and Rolens 1985; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Tyler 1998; Tibbals 2007). These baristas take on the task of supporting customers even though it is not part of their job description. By taking extensive care of customers' emotional needs, both types of baristas emulate the reproductive labor that women have traditionally done.

Drive-through baristas act similar to other service workers who nurture customers. However, they differ because their nurturance involves taking extensive emotional care of customers and learning intimate details about their lives. Thus, quasi-friendships can be mistaken for actual friendships because of the baristas' emotional labor. Service workers are expected to provide warmth and care but not necessarily *intimacy* (Creighton 1982; Dowling 2012; Elder and Rolens 1985; Hall 1993; Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Tyler 1998; Tibbals 2007). In other words, there is a difference between internally working up compassion for an irate customer, which most service workers do, and helping them process hardships in their lives, which many of these baristas do (Hochschild 1983). These relationships are reminiscent of personal, non-work-related relationships that baristas might form with people outside of the stand. For instance, Hochschild (1983:68) states:

The deeper the bond, the more emotion work and the more unconscious we are of it. In the most personal bonds, emotion work is likely to be the strongest. At the other extreme, it is a wonder that we find emotion work at all-and not simple pretending.

Although past research has shown that service workers are obligated to provide emotional warmth to customers without experiencing anything in return (Hochschild 1983), the emotional depth of drive-through baristas' quasi-friendships with customers departs from past service work literature. Drive-through baristas engage in emotion work that is reminiscent of relationships with deeper bonds.

My findings also depart from Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labor because my interviews with bikini baristas revealed instances where the line between friendship and service interactions was blurred. This boundary was blurred partially because this care was not one-sided, unlike other service worker relationships. Hochschild (1983) argues that people constantly engage in emotional exchanges with each other. She argued that these exchanges are typically equal in personal relationships. In contrast, she stated that these exchanges were uneven within the context of service work interactions. She says that this uneven exchange occurs because, within service interactions, management expects workers to care for the customer's emotions without expecting anything in return. My findings show how display work intersects with emotional labor; the presence of display fosters an equal exchange of emotional labor between bikini baristas and customers. Therefore, the presence of display work blurs the boundaries between social roles; bikini baristas inhabit social roles that are neither just friends nor just service or sex workers.

Service workers typically alter their feelings to induce positive emotions in customers. Oftentimes, employees work up positive emotions towards irate customers (Hochschild 1983). However, drive-through baristas depart from these past findings because their care and intimacy within their interactions with customers resemble friendships. Greco, Holmes, and McKenzie (2015) provide a sociological description of friendships reminiscent of the emotional depth of quasi-friendships. Greco and colleagues (2015:26) state that:

Emotional intimacy develops between friends thanks to the disclosure and free expression of emotions such as joy and happiness and sadness, sorrow, and depression. These emotions are related to the experiences and memories that are narrated *to* the friend who is actively involved in listening to his/her friend or experiences these emotions with the friend.

Drive-through baristas engage in relationships with customers characterized by emotional support and vulnerability. Customers come through the drive-through and process emotions such as grief or frustration. In turn, baristas hold space for these customers going through difficult life events. Aside from providing coffee and (sometimes) display work, drive-through baristas provide quasi-friendships.

The quasi-friendships identified in this study depart from what past literature service work has identified. The closest research has come to identifying a phenomenon akin to quasi-friendships has been work on bartenders. Anderson, Maile, and Fisher (2010) highlight that bartenders have close relationships with customers and frequently listen to customers' problems. However, this study is a survey and does not provide in-depth information on how these workers might view customers. Therefore, bartenders (or other service workers) might engage in quasi-friendships; however, it is unclear.

Although drive-through baristas engage in extensive emotional labor that is not required, their relationships with customers remain within a commodity exchange and therefore are “quasi.” The paradoxical nature of quasi-friendships is comparable to sex workers' relationships with clients. Bernstein (2007:474) uses "bounded authenticity" to describe the relationships between sex workers and clients. She defines this connection as an "authentic, yet bounded, interpersonal connection." According to Bernstein (2007), these connections are authentic because clients of sex workers sought out experiences that felt emotionally intimate. However, these intimate encounters are still situated within a monetary transaction.

The presence of display work further complicates drive-through baristas' quasi-friendships with customers. Bikini baristas endure frequent sexual harassment from customers who support them financially. This phenomenon is reminiscent of Murray's (2014) finding that

sexualized service workers will allow sexual harassment from customers that tip them well.

Murray (2014) argues that the servers in her study felt an immense amount of shame surrounding their work. Similarly, bikini baristas referred to customers who solicited them for shows as friends. However, compared to other sexualized service workers, I argue that bikini baristas work a job that is much closer to sex work.

Bikini barista work is closer to sex work than other sexualized service jobs. Compared to other forms of sexualized service work, sexuality plays a more prominent role in bikini barista jobs. Thus, bikini barista work likely has significant similarities with sex work. More specifically, bikini barista work resembles sex work more than other sexualized service jobs such as waitresses in revealing outfits. These waitresses experience frequent comments and groping from customers; however, the harassment of bikini baristas surpasses this in frequency (Loe 1997; Murray 2014). For instance, every one of the bikini baristas I spoke with told me a customer had exposed themselves to them. Furthermore, unlike many other sexualized service workers, bikini baristas also had the option of engaging in sexualized acts such as giving "shows" to customers.

Further research should aim to uncover more information on bikini baristas and the spectrum of sexualized service work. In order to achieve this endeavor, further research should compare the experiences of bikini baristas to other sex workers. For instance, one area of future study could be comparing the experiences of exotic dancers to bikini baristas. This comparison could reveal more information about how display work impacts quasi-friendships with customers. For instance, if baristas' quasi-friendships differed significantly from those between exotic dancers and their customers, this would suggest that the setting of a coffee stand impacts bikini baristas' interactions with customers significantly. Moreover, this setting could foster

higher rates of emotional intimacy. When recruiting at bikini barista stands, I noticed that most stands had only one window, with one barista working at a time. Bikini baristas are more likely to interact with customers while nobody else is around. Therefore, bikini baristas might have relationships with more emotional depth than exotic dancers.

CONCLUSION

This study compares bikini and family-friendly barista work using the theoretical lenses of gender performance, emotional labor, and display work. I use these frameworks to answer the research question, "How does display work impact baristas' customer interactions?" My study reveals that bikini and family-friendly baristas both engage in emotionally intimate interactions with customers but that the presence of display work complicates these interactions for bikini baristas. Although display work complicates these interactions, the emotional support that both baristas offer their customers is similar in content and intensity. This similarity in emotional support indicates that both sex and service work commodify care and demand emotional labor from women.

Quasi-friendships are performances of femininity. They exist in bikini and family-friendly work, and they are an integral component of both. My findings complicate the discourse surrounding display and sex work; my interviews reveal that display work is neither downright caustic nor completely empowering. Bikini baristas have positive experiences with providing display work. They make more money than family-friendly baristas, but they also develop closer relationships with their customers. At the same time, the seeming sincerity of the relationships between bikini baristas and customers does not exist in a vacuum. Bikini baristas are financially dependent on these relationships. Therefore in some ways, even the positive aspects of display work are eclipsed by the transactional nature of bikini barista interactions. The impacts of

display work are nuanced; however, the potential harm of display work outweighs the benefits. Nevertheless, in order to understand how display workers experience this form of labor, it is crucial to listen to them.

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TABLES

Table 1: Research Questions Related to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>1. What role does display work have in the barista's interactions?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Aesthetic Labor Emotional Labor Display Work</p> <p>2. Demographic Questions</p> <p>3. Barista's Relationship with Work</p>	<p>5,7,8, 15,16 5,6,9, 10,11 12, 13,14 7, 8, 15, 16</p> <p>19,20,21,22</p> <p>1,2,3,4,5,17,18</p>

Table 2: Codes Used for Data Analysis

Three Iterations of Analysis		
Research Question: How does display work impact the interactions that bikini baristas have with customers?		
First Iteration (Selected Codes)	Second Iteration	Third Iteration
Boundaries Sense of Purpose Pride in Work Empowerment Pressure to do/show more Intimacy Illegitimate Workplace Rapport with Regulars Hiding Authentic Self Lack of Rules Vulnerability Showing Authentic Self Safety Advice Emotional Labor Playing a Role Holding Space Friendship Exploitation Customers as Friends	Baristas Caring for Customers Customers Caring for Baristas Building a Following Sexual Harassment	Drive-through baristas form quasi-friendships with customers. These quasi-friendships are emotionally in-depth and are reminiscent of friendships. Display work complicates the quasi-friendships that bikini baristas engage in. These interactions have a stronger resemble friendships and personal relationships in comparison to family-friendly baristas.

Table 3: Demographic Information

Name	Barista Type	Length of Experience	Stand Location	Age	Sexual Orientation	Race	Gender Identity
Mia	Family-Friendly	Five Months	Ocean Shores	19	Straight	White	Female
Anya	Family-Friendly	Four Years (on and off)	North Seattle Area	26	Straight	White	Female
Maude	Family-Friendly	Three Years	North Seattle Area	20	Straight	Latina	Female
Sienna	Family-Friendly	Three Months	South of Olympia	19	Pansexual	White	Female
Judith	Family-Friendly	Five Years	North Seattle Area	23	Straight	Native American	Female
Chelsea	Family-Friendly	Three Years	Tacoma	26	Straight	White	Female
Joan	Family-Friendly	One Year	Olympia	22	Gay	White	Female
Christine	Both	One Year	North Seattle	25	Bisexual	Mexican	Female
Camille	Bikini	14 Months	South of Olympia	20	Straight	Native American and Jamaican	Female
Rosie	Bikini	Nine Months	Tacoma	20	Bisexual	Indigenous and White	Female
Leila	Bikini	Two Years	North Seattle	24	Bisexual	White	Female
Jackie	Bikini	Nine Months	North Seattle	23	Straight	White	Female
Siobhan	Bikini	Two and a half years	North Seattle	23	Straight	White	Female
Gabbi	Bikini	Two Years	North Seattle	22	Bisexual	Mixed Race	Female
Lena	Bikini	Three and a Half Months	North Seattle	24	Straight	White	Female

Violet	Bikini	Three Weeks	North Seattle	21	Bisexual	White	Female
Eva	Bikini	Three Months	Tacoma	22	Pansexual	Mexican and White	Female

FIGURES

Figure 1: Different Forms of Labor in Service Work.

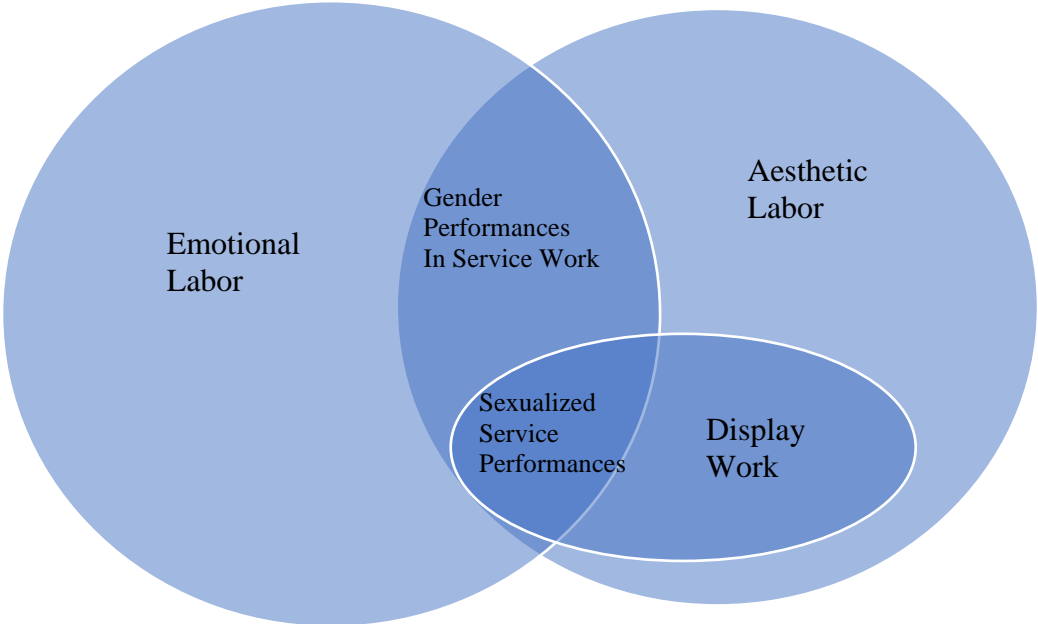


Figure 2: Sexualized Service Work

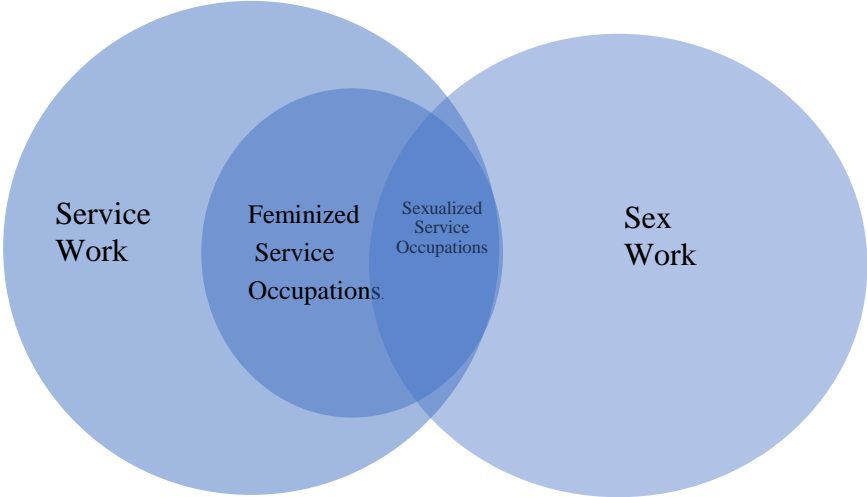
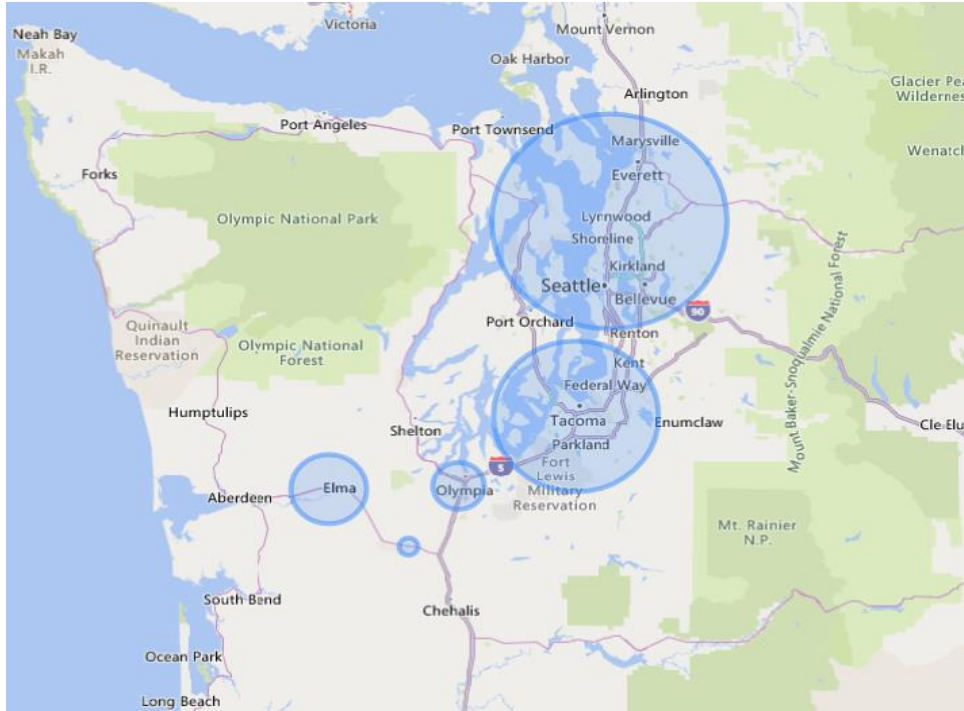


Figure 3: Areas Where Interviewees Worked



APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been working at your job?
2. How did you end up working in your job?
3. What is your favorite part of the job?
4. What is your least favorite part of the job?
5. Describe to me who your typical customer is.
6. Describe to me a typical customer interaction that you have.
7. Can you describe to me how your employer expects you to dress for work?
8. How do you feel when dressing this way?
9. How is the way that you act at work similar to or different from the way you act outside of work? Can you give me some examples?
10. Can you tell me about a time where you had to hide how you felt at work?
11. Can you tell me about a time where you had a positive interaction with a customer?
12. How did you feel afterward?
13. Can you tell me about a time where you had a negative interaction with a customer?
14. How did you feel afterward?
15. Have you ever dealt with sexual harassment on the job?
16. What was that like for you?
17. What advice would you give someone starting in this line of work?
18. Is there anything else about your job that we didn't cover that you would like to talk about?

Thank you for answering these questions. I am going to ask you a few demographic questions now before we finish the interview.

19. How old are you?

20. What is your race?

21. What is your sexual orientation?

22. What is your gender identity?