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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Lauren Bell Moffitt entitled "Experiencing Sexually Objectifying Environments: A Case Study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

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Experiencing Sexually Objectifying Environments: A Case Study

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lauren Bell Moffitt
August 2010

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the amazing women in my family.
My mother, Kathy Moffitt, who is selfless and strong, and has
offered me unconditional love and support.
My grandmother, Francis Jennings, who is wise, loving, and open minded
My sisters, Kelly Moffitt Adkisson and Leigh Moffitt,
who have shared laugher, tears, and loving honesty.
These women have had a profound impact on the path I've taken in life.
They are each beautiful and intelligent in unique ways.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the courageous women in my therapy office
who have generously trusted me, taught me, and allowed me to be a part of their stories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Dawn Szymanski, my advisor throughout this journey, who has been endlessly encouraging and supportive. Dawn has opened my eyes to the fact that I can be inspired by research and may even have some degree of talent for it. Incredibly, she has made this process enjoyable.

I would also like to thank my family, friends, co-workers, and the ladies in my small group for their prayers, patience, and absolute support.

ABSTRACT

Research examining tenets of Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) has given little attention to increasing our understanding of specific environments and subcultures, such as beauty pageants, cheerleading, and cocktail waitressing that exist within our culture where sexual objectification of women is encouraged, promoted, and socially sanctioned. This qualitative case study of women's experiences in a sexually objectifying environment includes interviews with 11 women as well as observational data. Data classification via the constant comparative method resulted in nine themes: reasons for involvement, ambivalence, counterfeit intimacy, sexual objectification, resistance strategies, power, negative relationships with women, changes over time, and judgment. Corresponding subthemes are also described and interpretation is provided in light of relevant literature. Women's experiences in a sexually objectifying environment are further discussed in terms of the need for resources and power and the resulting conflicts that women experience in terms of relational dynamics and personal safety.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Objectification Theory (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997), a relatively new development in the rapidly expanding field of feminist psychology, proposes a framework for understanding the consequences of living in a culture that sexually objectifies women. The theory posits that in Western cultures objectification occurs when girls and women are visually sized up and appraised based on sexual attributes and physical attractiveness. Concurrently, this constant emphasis on appearance serves to separate the body from the individual as a person, allowing for the body to be treated as an object that exists for the pleasure of and use by others. Sexual objectification is one of the principle ways in which women are disempowered in a patriarchal society (Johnson, 2005). Cultural practices that encourage and advance sexual objectification of women include the way women are depicted as sex objects in the media, the manner of visually inspecting the female body by some men (male gaze), sexual comments about women's body parts, the approval and appreciation of cosmetic surgery (particularly breast augmentation), unwanted sexual advances, and sexual violence (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). In addition, specific environments and subcultures, such as beauty pageants, cheerleading, exotic dancing, cocktail waitressing, fraternity little sister organizations, and female brand promoters (i.e., "Miller Light Girls"), exist within our culture where sexual objectification of women is encouraged, promoted, and socially sanctioned.

Sexual objectification of women has been theorized to contribute to women's mental health problems both directly and indirectly through women's internalization of sexually objectifying experiences, also known as self-objectification. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) asserted that self-objectification occurs if/when women slowly and to varying degrees begin

viewing themselves from an outsider, or third party, perspective. Subsequently, women begin treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance. Supporting Objectification Theory, empirical research focusing on both specific instances of sexual objectification (i.e., trying on swimsuits, television exposure; Aubrey, 2006; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Morry & Staska, 2001; Quinn, Kallen, & Cathey, 2006) and general sexual objectification experiences (i.e., noticing someone staring at your breasts when you are talking to them; hearing a rude, sexual remark made about your body; experiencing unwanted sexual advances; experiencing sexual violence; Koss, Bailey, Yan, & Lichter, 2003; Kozee et al., 2007, Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005; Morry & Staska, 2001; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) are related to more self-objectification and adverse psychological outcomes, including disordered eating, depression, and post-traumatic stress.

In addition, a large body of empirical research has consistently supported the theorized links between self-objectification and poorer psychological health. Researchers have found that self-objectification is positively related to a number of (a) psychological consequences, including insensitivity to bodily cues, decreased flow states, increased body shame, and increased appearance anxiety (Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002; Szymanski & Henning, 2007; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001); (b) mental health risks, including anorexic symptoms, bulimic symptoms, dietary restriction, depression, and decreased sexual functioning (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Miner-Rubino, Twenge, & Frederickson, 2002; Moradi et al., 2005; Morry & Staska, 2001; Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Steer & Tiggeman, 2008; Szymanski & Henning, 2007; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001; Tylka & Hill, 2004), and (c) broader psychosocial constructs, including poorer self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, less relationship satisfaction, and lower

levels of global well-being (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008; Downs, James, & Cowan, 2006; Landry & Mercurio, 2008).

Research testing tenets of Objectification Theory has focused largely on examinations of sexually objectifying experiences and self-objectification and how they predict poorer psychosocial health among women. While quantitative studies have given us a broad understanding of external and internalized sexual objectification and their psychosocial correlates, they have failed to delve into more complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of sexual objectification. In addition, little attention has been paid to increasing our understanding of specific environments where sexual objectification of women and self-objectification are promoted and encouraged, and to understand women's experiences in these environments. Finally, previous research has neglected to explore contextual and intrapersonal variables that might exacerbate or buffer the negative effects of sexual objectification (Aubrey, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth, descriptive contextual understanding of the experiences of women who work in a sexually objectifying environment in order to add to the existing literature on the sexual objectification of women.

Criteria of a Sexually Objectifying Environment

Sexual objectification is proposed to be a phenomenon of Western culture, and therefore, all American women carry out their lives in an objectifying environment. However, not all individuals are equally affected, which can be explained in part by the varying situations and subcultures women are a part of that may intensify the experience of sexual objectification (Fredrickson, et. al., 1998). I propose a number of specific attributes of an environment that encourages and deepens sexual objectification, therefore constituting a *sexually objectifying environment*. Sexually objectifying environments are ones in which (a) traditional gender roles

exist, (b) a high degree of attention is drawn to sexual/physical attributes of women's bodies, (c) high probability of male contact exists (physically speaking, a male dominated environment), (d) women typically hold less power in that environment, and (e) there is the approval and acknowledgement of male gaze. In addition to these core criteria, many supplementary factors may contribute to the creation of a sexually objectifying environment, such as a casual atmosphere, the presence of alcohol, the regulated encouragement of sexualization (i.e., flirting, smiling), and/or the promotion of competition between women.

Traditional gender roles. Both historically and cross-culturally, men and women have taken on attitudes and behaviors stereotypically associated with their biological sex, a phenomenon known as a person's gender role. Defined in a traditional manner, men's gender roles are oriented towards competency, achievement, or agency (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Bakan, 1966); encompassing traits such as independence, aggression, competitiveness, rationality, problem-solving, and objectivity. Alternately, women's traditional gender roles tend to be relationally and expressively oriented. Characteristics associated with femaleness include nurturance, emotionality, intuition, dependence, submissiveness, and a focus on harmony (for a more in-depth description and analysis see Bem, 1993).

Men and women tend to act in accordance with these traditional gender roles in many (if not most) situations and environments in which they find themselves. Gutek (1985) coined the term *sex role spill-over* (the more accurate term of gender role spill-over is used in this article) to describe the carryover into the workplace of traditional gender roles that are inappropriate for a work environment. This phenomenon is more likely to occur when gender role is more salient than work role and/or gender ratios are highly skewed because under many circumstances, individuals use gender role stereotypes to guide behavior, especially in interactions with the

members of the opposite sex (Gutek, 1985; Gutek & Morasch, 1982). In particular, gender-role spillover occurs when women (more than men in similar occupational roles) are expected to project their sexuality through behavior, appearance, or dress (Gutek & Morasch 1982) and the effects may be magnified when women hold jobs where one aspect is reminiscent of a sex object (i.e., cocktail waitress). In this position, women are likely to be targets of unwanted sexual attention, but may (inaccurately) attribute the way they are treated to their job, rather than their gender (Unger, 2001). A dynamic is then set up where men are expected to take the role of sexual initiator. One potential outcome is a sexualized work environment, defined as "a work environment, in which sexual jokes, comments, innuendos, and sexual or seductive dress are tolerated, condoned, or encouraged, and in turn is likely to encourage people of both genders to make direct sexual overtures" (Gutek, Cohen, Konrad, 1990, p. 562).

Male-dominated environment. Also contributing to a sexually objectifying environment is a disproportionately greater number of men than women present. As previously mentioned, individuals tend to act in accordance with traditional gender roles and it has been shown that work environments where men predominate are more sexualized than predominantly female work environments (Gutek, 1985). Additional research supports this, showing that men are more likely than women to perceive the world in sexual terms and men are also more likely than women to mistake friendliness for seduction (Abbey, 1982).

Taking an organizational perspective, Gutek, Cohen, and Konrad (1990) proposed the Contact Hypothesis, which states that "People who have a lot of contact with people of the other gender at work will report more sexual harassment, more non-harassing sexual behavior, and a more sexualized work environment than people who have little contact with the other gender at work (p. 563)." Therefore, contact with men serves as a mediator between women and sexual

objectification: frequent contact with men creates a more sexualized environment, which in turn allows for more sexually objectifying experiences (i.e., sexual harassment or non-harassing sexual behavior). Support for the contact hypothesis has been found by several researchers (Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999; Gruber, 1998). For example, Gruber (1998) found that the extent of contact with men was a key predictor of incidence of harassment, number of different types of harassment, sexual comments, and sexual categorical remarks for women.

Attention to women's bodies. A third contextual element in sexually objectifying environments is women's bodies "on display." In their proposal of Objectification Theory, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) suggested that wearing baggy clothing may be a strategy used by women to avoid sexual objectification as it conceals their physique. Such loose fitting clothes obscure the body and assist women in "opting out of the objectification limelight," while wearing tight and revealing clothing that shows off the body serves to place women squarely within the "objectification limelight." Environments where women are required, often by specifications of a uniform, to reveal and emphasize their bodies are clearly sexually objectifying. Additionally, wearing tight or revealing clothing may facilitate self-monitoring, as women constantly review their appearance and the fit of their clothing in the surrounding mirrors. Therefore, dressing in a manner that enhances self-surveillance could be viewed as a behavioral manifestation of self-objectification (Prichard & Tiggeman, 2005; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

As an example, Prichard and Tiggeman (2005) point to the objectifying environment of fitness centers and the factors that highlight women's bodies such as full length mirrors and scanty, revealing exercise clothing. In their research, they found that women who wore tight and fitted exercise clothing (gym tops and gym pants) had increased self-objectification and self-

surveillance, while women who wore looser clothing (t-shirts and sweat pants) had lower levels of self-objectification and self-surveillance. Other research has also found that the attention focused on women's bodies in fitness centers leads women to self-objectify more than other general samples (Strelan, Mehaffey, & Tiggemann, 2003).

Women's lack of power. A pervasive lack of power among women is another criterion of sexually objectifying environments. While the term power encompasses a number of different definitions and is conceptualized as operating on different levels, for the purpose of this study, I will discuss power from a feminist perspective and on a broader societal and organizational level. Most traditional definitions of power include the ability or capacity to act towards a desired result despite resistance (Pfeffer, 1981), but feminist philosophies typically view power as "power over."

Cleveland and Kerst (1993) offer a detailed discussion of power as organized into three distinct levels of analysis: societal, organizational, and interpersonal or personal power. Feminist Theory most frequently employs the term patriarchy in reference to societal power. Narrowly defined, patriarchy is "father rule," but more conceptually and broadly examined, patriarchy means that our society (Western capitalist society) is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered (Johnson, 2005). Patriarchy has been conceptualized as a system, rather than a simple collection of individuals (i.e., men) and their actions. The conceptualization of patriarchy as a system implies that it is pervasive, ingrained, invisible, and all-encompassing, making it powerful in structuring our experiences and greatly resistant to change. This culture of patriarchy, an organizing theme to how we interact, is effortlessly sustained because it is the status-quo. As individuals attempt to effect some sort of change (i.e., by feminist action), others

react negatively, helping to maintain the system. Due to patriarchy, women clearly are in positions of less power at a societal level of analysis.

Power on the organizational level has previously been conceptualized as an extension of societal power into the workplace (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). The structure of occupations within an organization (from high status to low status), the relationships of influence between individuals (essentially, who fits where), and who has access to certain organizational resources are all significant factors. At this level of analysis, a sexually objectifying environment would be an environment where women occupy low status positions, have a relatively small amount of influence (in any number of spheres), and do not have access to certain organizational resources.

Power issues at the interpersonal or personal level of analysis include a number of more specific considerations (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). Power may be derived from factors such as the individual's perception of his/her own power as well as perception of others' power, individual behaviors (such as demanding or assertiveness versus praying or begging), or personal characteristics or traits (i.e., physical size, gender, level of anxiety, etc.). The degree of power a woman holds at this level of analysis should be individually determined.

Acknowledgement and approval of male gaze. The final core criterion for an environment to be sexually objectifying is the acknowledgement and approval of male gaze in that setting. As Frederickson and Roberts (1997) stated, where there is sexual gazing, there is always the potential for sexual objectification, especially as this factor is not under women's control and so cannot be avoided. Furthermore, according to Kaschak (1992), "The most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted—and arguably the most ubiquitous—is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body." Quinn's (2002) recent theoretical paper reframes sexual gaze as "girl watching," a specific, yet subtle, form of sexual harassment. Quinn refers to girl watching

as a “targeted tactic of power” where men use gaze to demonstrate their right to physically and sexually evaluate women. The activity serves as a form of playing, a game among men, however, the targeted woman is generally understood to be an object, rather than a player, in the game. In a patriarchal society where girl watching is commonly practiced, “this subjectivity may be inconceivable. From [a male] viewpoint, acts such as girl watching are simply games played with objects: women’s bodies” (Quinn, 2002, p. 398).

While it may appear that objectifying gaze would refer exclusively to the act of women being looked at by men in social encounters, there actually exist three distinct areas in which objectifying gaze may fall (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). The aforementioned interpersonal and social arena of objectifying gaze may be the most salient to women in daily encounters and includes: women being looked at more often than men (Hall, 1984), women feeling looked at in interpersonal encounters (Argyle & Williams, 1969), non-reciprocated gaze towards women in public places (Cary, 1978, Fromme & Beam, 1974, Henley, 1977), and the accompaniment of a sexually evaluative commentary that accompanies male gaze towards women (Allen, 1984). Other arenas of objectifying gaze are visual media showing interpersonal encounters (i.e., men looking at women in advertisements) and visual media depicting women’s bodies and body parts. Any single one or combination of these three arenas of objectifying gaze may exist in a given environment.

Additional criteria. There are likely a large number of additional factors that also contribute to a sexually objectifying environment. While it is not within the scope of this article to identify each of these criteria, the three that were previously mentioned, the presence/consumption of alcohol, regulated encouragement of sexualization (e.g., smiling, flirting), and competition between women, stood out from related literature. Alcohol has long

been linked to men's sexual objectification of women (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997) and has been suggested to be both a precipitant of and an excuse for sexually-aggressive behavior by men (Richardson & Hammock, 1991). In a summary of literature addressing the link between the consumption of alcohol and aggressive behaviors, Seto and Barbaree (1995) point out that alcohol appears to have a disinhibiting effect on perpetration of sexual aggression. Perpetrator alcohol consumption is strongly associated with increased sexual violence and physical aggression in the United States (Brecklin & Ullman, 2001; Brecklin & Ullman, 2002). Many perpetrators of sexual violence have consumed alcohol immediately prior to the incident and/or have drinking problems (Grubin & Gunn, 1990). There is also extensive research highlighting the interaction between alcohol and the role of male peer support in sexual assaults as drinking tends to be a shared activity (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

In addition to alcohol, the regulated encouragement of sexualization, such as smiling, flirting, or suggestive touching, may contribute to sexually objectifying environments. Flirting is often considered a code of conduct for social interactions. Yelvington (1996) proposed that flirting, which alternates between making promises and being elusive, is designed to indicate possible sexual interest in another person and also serves as a way of attracting interest to oneself. However, flirting leaves ample room for interpretation as individuals do not know the exact intentions of the person who is flirting, or even one's own intentions when engaged in flirting.

A final factor that may contribute to a sexually objectifying environment is competition between women. As previously discussed, self-objectification, a consequence of sexual objectification, involves the externalization of perspective and value regarding one's own body (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Similarly, as a result of competition, research has shown that

feelings of self-worth become increasingly dependent on external sources of evaluation (Kohn, 1987; Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 2006). Feminist Theory also highlights that women are taught to be competitors against other women for beauty (Wolf, 1991) and women are told to compete for things that are supposedly important to them, one of which is "men," (Lukas, 2008) or rather male attention, male resources, or, more broadly, association with male power.

Hooters Chain of Restaurants as an Example of a Sexually Objectifying Environment

There are a large number of settings that meet the previously outlined criteria for a sexually objectifying environment; however, in order to fully illustrate this phenomenon, the Hooters chain of restaurants has been selected to serve as a general example of the type of environment in which participants in this study are located. First, it is important to note that although waitressing has been generally considered to be a form of "doing gender" and often involves interactions that lead to objectification (LaPointe, 1992; Hall, 1993), all waitressing positions do not necessarily occur in objectifying environments and may involve little to no objectification depending on the context.

Hooters restaurants clearly uphold traditional gender roles as the restaurant's waitstaff are exclusively female, a right legally gained in a 1997 class action settlement (Hooters of America, Inc., 2008). Waitressing has long been considered to be a traditionally female role. Waitressing was found to be one of only six jobs that 70% of women held in 1995, others being secretary, bookkeeper, nurse, cashier, and elementary school teacher (Lips, 1997). Furthermore, in 2003, research revealed that 77% of servers were female (National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, 2003) and as recently as 2007, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics maintained that 74% of individuals with the occupational title of waiter/waitress were female. Restaurants often frame service work as "women's work" and most service jobs could be considered an

extension of their tasks at home (i.e., nurturing, cleaning, housekeeping, and waiting) or an expression of their femininity (Hall, 1993).

While the waitstaff at Hooters is exclusively female, the majority of customers, approximately 68%, are male (Hooters of America, Inc., 2008). Therefore, another criterion of an objectifying environment, a high probability of male contact is therefore also met. Due to the fact Hooters' waitresses are exclusively female, the third criterion of an objectifying environment, women's lack of power, is also met. Retail service work in general is often considered precarious due to high flexibility, poor pay, lack of benefits, and low levels of protection (Hughes & Tadic, 1998). From a broader perspective, the cult of the customer and quality customer service have become increasingly important in retail industries (a phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s). How the customer "feels" is of increasing interest and leads to increasing profitability (Du Gay & Salaman, 1992), thereby giving customers a great deal more power than those who wait on them--Hooters' girls, in this case.

Not only does this environment enforce traditional gender roles and provide women with less power, there is a heavy emphasis on women's physical appearance. LaPointe (1992) pointed out that dressing waitresses in uniforms to highlight their physical attributes is a common practice; however, Hooters provides an example of uniforms that can easily be argued to be more revealing than is "common" and strictly regulated. The Hooters Girls required uniforms, consisting of orange shorts, Hooters tanks or t-shirts, pantyhose, and white shoes and socks, clearly emphasize their bodies and, it could be argued, de-emphasize their human individuality. According to Hooters of America, Inc. (2006) "the element of female sex appeal is prevalent in the restaurants" and "sex appeal is legal and it sells." Hooters marketing strategies emphasize the Hooters Girl and her sex appeal, their business motto accurately capturing this: "You can sell the

sizzle, but you have to deliver the steak." In this unique environment, women's bodies are openly viewed as objects, tools of their trade, as the corporation asserts that, "Hooters Girls have the same right to use their natural female sex appeal to earn a living as do super models Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell."

Hooters also provides an excellent example of an environment that acknowledges and approves of male gaze. The most obvious form of male gaze is the direct interpersonal staring or looking at the waitresses, a practice heavily encouraged by the previously discussed combination of primarily male clientele and unevenly stacked power dynamics. Additionally, Hooters restaurants display numerous posters and photographs of the scantily clad Hooters Girls. A dangerous line may be crossed as men who stare at these images of women may be more inclined to feel as though the real women serving them are simply poster-girls coming to life rather than "real" women. Hooters creates a number of other products (i.e., magazines and calendars) and events (e.g., frequent swimsuit competitions between waitresses) in which the sole focus is to stare at and evaluate women.

Although I use Hooters restaurant to illustrate a sexually objectifying environment, this is only one example of a number of other restaurants that meet the criteria, such as Hustler Bar & Grille (owned and operated by Larry Flynt, who also runs Hustler Magazine), Cheerleader's, Knockers, Melons, Mugs 'n Jugs, Bleachers's, Zoomerz, and Fraternity House. The cheerleading environment also provides an example of a sexually objectifying environment that highlights traditional gender roles, focuses on the women's physical appearance, is demographically male dominated, provides cheerleaders with little, if any, power, and elicits male gaze. From an academic point of view, cheerleading has typically been presented as an activity that is demeaning and exploitive to females: "the function of the cheerleader is to encourage the

worship of men—the prettiest, nicest, and most lively are selected to show and encourage adoration" (Weis, 97, p. 83, as cited in Bettis & Adams, 2003). In describing the activity of cheerleading, Connell (1987) focused on the fact that femininity is performed principally for men. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, one of the standards in cheerleading, confirms this attitude: "It is a basic concept of the organization that each person in the stadium or in the audience has a mental picture of their ideal girl - and the squad offers someone for each of them to identify with" (Dallas Cowboys, 2007). The organization also states that there is a strict set of rules governing the women's appearance, performance, and moral character that is lengthy and explicit. Training and counseling are required in areas including personal grooming, makeup, physical fitness, etiquette, and interpersonal communications. Even advertisements and commercials appearing during sporting events frequently portray scantly-clad women (e.g., the Swedish Bikini Team ads; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004). Furthermore, sports fans and spectators are predominantly male (although, the number of female sports fans and spectators has steadily increased for the past few years), males are more interested and involved as fans than are females (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001), and fans (regardless of sex) tend to express a masculine gender identity (Wann, et. al., 2004).

Present Study

As previously noted, research has highlighted the potential for variable experiences of sexual objectification. While environment clearly is one cause for these differences in experience, Frederickson and Roberts (1997) also suggested that individual characteristics, both physical and personal, influence how or if women respond to sexual objectification. Furthermore, a small number of research studies confirm that women feel, understand, encounter, and respond to sexual objectification in different ways. Ronai and Ellis (1989) found

that some women who stripped enjoyed the feeling of "conquering and being in control" while others "felt degraded and out of control" (p. 282). Similarly, college cheerleaders expressed varying personal reactions to the traditionally feminine, youthful, and sexually available appearance requirements (Grindstaff & West, 2006), some mentioned discomfort with the feminine performative routines that detracted from the competitive, athletic aspect of cheerleading, while others felt that it was necessary and even enjoyable by stating, "I think it's fun…it's a girly, feminine thing and I think it's something that shouldn't be lost" (p. 509).

The purpose of this study is to more fully understand the experiences of women who work in a sexually objectifying environment and the case of a sexually objectifying environment. More specifically, I hope to identify factors that contribute to women's choosing a role in these types of environments, to describe these women's subsequent experiences of and responses to sexual objectification in their work environments, to identify and describe both harmful and protective strategies that women use in navigating these sexually objectifying work environments, and to identify and describe contextual factors in these environments that influence these women's experiences.

CHAPTER II – METHOD

Feminist Paradigm

My research method is a qualitative case study, guided by a feminist qualitative inquiry paradigm that serves as the foundation for my ontological beliefs, that the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, gender, and class, and my epistemological assumptions that all knowledge is both subjective and political (Hatch, 2002). My focus on the experience of sexually objectifying environments is consistent with the feminist approach that attempts to "center and make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations" (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). The underlying theoretical framework of sexual objectification and the anticipated findings of this study focus on ultimately bringing about social justice and improved life experiences for women. Furthermore, this domain highlights the limited power of women within a patriarchal society. Gender is clearly the organizing principle in the selected environments. A feminist perspective moves beyond the bounded system of a case study, however, and asserts that gender is the basic organizing and shaping principle of our lives.

The feminist qualitative research paradigm is considered by many to stand between academic and action research (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007) because of its ultimate transformative goals. It is hoped that the research will be used as a tool to bring about social change. From the analysis of my data, I ultimately seek to improve the lives of girls and women, not only through awareness, but also through more practical differences such as increased insight into the experience and impact of sexual objectification, sexual violence prevention programs (by identification of risk factors), interventions (by identification of protective factors) to develop or enhance skills and characteristics women can use to safeguard themselves, or other unforeseen benefits that may emerge.

Qualitative Case Study

To examine my research questions I have chosen a qualitative case study method, guided primarily by Stake (2000). According to Stake, case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. I will explore the case of a sexually objectifying environment and the women who chose to take a role in that environment, which is bounded by both organizational culture and physical space.

A qualitative approach was chosen for several reasons. First and foremost is the importance of context and the inability to separate what individuals say, how they feel, and how they behave, from the situation and setting they are a part of. A quantitative study is unable to tell us why people responded as they did, the context of their responses, and the more meaningful thoughts and behaviors underlying their responses (Creswell, 2007).

Although authors have offered a variety of definitions and characteristics, Merriam (1988) outlines four essential properties of all case studies that I have taken into consideration. First, a case study must be particularistic, focusing on a specific situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case is then able to reveal the situation and what it might represent. In this study, the specific situation is the experience of the woman as a part of a sexually objectifying environment. I expect that this will reveal a number of situations and representations, possibly expected, but most likely emergent from the data. A case study is also inherently descriptive, requiring a rich and detailed picture of the phenomenon being studied, while simultaneously considering culture, values, and attitudes in interpretation. The information will be analyzed in light of the researcher's reflexivity statement. Case studies should also be heuristic by either extending understanding, discovering new meaning, confirming what is already known, or broadening the reader's experience; all of which are hoped for outcomes of this examination of

the woman in the sexually objectifying environment. Finally, a case study should be inductive so that generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from the observed, contextualized data, rather than being a priori.

Of the three particular types of case studies identified by Stake (2000), I used a collective case study (multiple case study) framework. In a collective case study, one issue or concern is selected, but the researcher selects multiple cases to illustrate the issue. In this study, the multiple cases are 11 women who have chosen to work in a specific sexually objectifying environment. Cases were chosen with the anticipation that by understanding those selected cases, readers will be led to better understanding, or theorizing, about a larger collection of cases.

As a general rule, "qualitative researchers are reluctant to generalize from one case to another because the contexts of cases differ. To best generalize…the inquirer needs to select representative cases for inclusion in the qualitative study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). However, I believe that by including several different environments (i.e., various locations of the same restaurant) that meet the previously outlined criteria for sexually objectifying environments and by choosing representative cases, it will be possible to tentatively generalize the findings of this study to other environments where the sexual objectification is both sanctioned and central to the woman's role.

Participants

Eleven women participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 years, with a mean of 21.64 years (SD = 3.78). Nine women identified as white, one as Asian American/Pacific Islander, and one as multiracial. All women identified as heterosexual. Eight women had completed some degree of secondary education (including seven who were currently enrolled in classes at the time of participation and one who had completed a bachelor's degree).

Thirty percent of participants reported being a member of the upper middle social class, 50% of the middle class, and 20% from the working class. Four of the women had young children, two of which were married and the other was single. Time spent working in the sexually objectifying environment ranged from 1 month to 48 months, with an average of 17.23 months (*SD* = 16.04 months) and a median of 12 months. Ten of the women were currently working in the sexually objectifying environment and one was not currently working there but had done so within the past year.

Procedure

For the site of my inquiry I selected an environment that met the criteria of a sexually objectifying environment previously outlined and that closely resembles the restaurant example provided above. The criteria for participant eligibility was being a woman who was at least 18 years old and are either currently working at the selected environment or had worked in the environment for at least one month in the past year. Participants were recruited from undergraduate introductory psychology classes (in exchange for class research credits) as well as directly through the women working in the selected environment located in a medium sized southeastern city. Participants were recruited via the use of hard copy fliers, word of mouth or email requests, and snowball sampling in which participants then shared information about the study and researcher contact information with other women who would possibly be interested in participating. Participants were compensated a small amount of money for interviews that were, on average, 45 minutes long. Human subjects approval was obtained from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board.

Following selection of participants, initial information was provided to the women regarding the purpose of the study, location, necessity of audio taping, and compensation.

Participants then coordinated their own interview times according to their schedules. Interviews were conducted by myself in a private space and audio taped. Then the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. I also gathered observational data by being participant observer in the selected environment. I conducted five observation sessions at various times and in various locations, in order to assure reliability and validity of observations. Observation sessions occurred both prior to and following interviews with participants. Throughout this process preliminary analysis of the data was conducted in order to more appropriately focus subsequent observation sessions and interviews.

In order to clarify my observation and gain the participant's perspective, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviews began with general questions about choosing their role in the sexually objectifying environment and their subsequent experience, and then progressed towards more specific questions regarding perceived risk and protective factors and other more narrow subjects that emerged from the informants' interviews (see Appendix for the interview protocol.) Also included in the analysis were informal conversations with both staff and customers/spectators that occurred throughout my time in the field. Additional data used in analysis included information from the company website, training materials, and/or other relevant sources of data (i.e., materials from the restaurant).

Analytic method

The constant comparative method of data analysis was used, originally outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998; see also Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007, discussed as "circularity"). Although initially developed for use with grounded theory research, "the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research" (p. 159). Data collection and analysis occurred

alternatingly throughout the research process, in other words, analysis occurred during data collection rather than waiting until after all data was obtained.

I began the analytic process by reading through the first set of field notes from observations and the first interview transcript. I proceeded from there by re-reading through the data and writing notes, comments, observations, questions, and generally calling attention to information that was striking in some way. I looked back through these notes and attempted to group together the notations that fit together in some manner. This running list of initial categories was catalogued on a separate sheet of paper. I then began again with the next set of several interviews and field notes and proceeded in a similar fashion, reading through, writing notes, and creating new sets of initial categories as they emerged (while keeping in mind the previously created list). The lists of concrete categories, grounded in the data, were then compared, and categories merged or divided. As the process was repeated throughout the study and the list of categories became more refined, I was able to perceive more abstract themes emerging. My dissertation chair also read all the transcribed interviews and provided feedback on the development of the coding scheme throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Towards the end of this process, the literature was researched in order to compare previous findings to themes and then allowing for themes to be evaluated in light of the various theoretical underpinnings that lent direction to the study.

Standards of Quality

Despite the fluid and subjective nature of qualitative research, a more accurate reflection of reality can be insured through identifiable techniques. I followed the general guidelines and specific techniques suggested by Morrow (2005) in order to assure standards of quality and verification (referred to as *trustworthiness* and *credibility).* In order to establish trustworthiness,

researchers must attend to credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was primarily established by triangulating the information I gathered from various sources including numerous interviews, separate observation sessions, and documents. In triangulation, multiple and different sources of data (and/or methods, investigators, and theories) are used in order to provide corroborating evidence, verify facts, and overcome the inaccuracies of one source of data or method (Morrow, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Credibility was also established through the use of peer review, taking the most prominent role in analysis where independent coders identified their own codes and categories before seeking collaboration and agreement from others. Peer review generally provides an external check of the research process; it adds further critical thought to the study as it allows for individuals to ask difficult questions regarding methods, meaning, and interpretation (Morrow, 2005, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

Transferability was established by providing demographic information about participants, describing and providing a "thick description" of the context of the study, and providing direct quotations from participants so that the reader can determine the extent to which finding are generalizable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).To establish confirmability, I examined my own bias as a researcher via a reflexivity statement (see below), which serves to clarify researcher bias from the outset of the study so that readers understand my position and biases or assumptions that could impact the study (Merriam, 1988; Morrow, 2005, 2007). The reflexivity statement comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the study and the interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, I used two external auditors to determine whether the accuracy of the process and product of the research was consistent with the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The auditors were two female counseling psychology doctoral students, one White and the other African American, with training and

experience in qualitative methods. The auditors reviewed the interview schedule, four transcripts each (no overlap), and the results section including theme/frequency table. One of the auditors also reviewed the introduction and methods sections to more clearly determine whether or not the results answered the proposed research questions and general purpose of the study. The auditors each concluded that the process by which the researchers developed the themes from the data was logical and that the themes/subthemes were accurate, thorough, and seemed to come out of the transcripts. Finally, I supported all themes and subthemes with empirical data, using verbatim quotes from the participants and staying close to the actual words and data (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

Reflexivity Statement

I am a fourth year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology. Because of my feminist identification and theoretical orientation integrating feminist theory in therapy I would likely have important insights about the data as well as biased expectations about the nature of participants' experiences in a sexually objectifying environment. Being aware of literature regarding personal outcomes of sexual objectification, I expected to largely hear stories of negative experiences as well as confusion, ambivalence, and individually constructed explanations to help diminish the harmful emotional effects. However, in practicing therapy, I have also had the opportunity to witness the enormous variety and complexity of women's experiences, leading me to believe that some women may have more positive experiences or find ways to personally and/or emotionally benefit from their location in a sexually objectifying environment. In particular, I expected self-esteem and previous experiences with sexual objectification to have a significant impact on women's experiences. My own experiences in a

sexually objectifying environment as outlined in this study, while they have been limited, have been met with mixed personal and emotional reactions.

CHAPTER III - RESULTS

In this section, I first provide a thick description of the context of the study. Then I provide a discussion of themes that emerged in data analysis along with interpretation and comparison to the existing literature to contextualize the findings (Merriam, 1988).

Context of the Study

Walking in the door of the restaurant, a customer is immediately greeted by one of the restaurants renowned waitresses, who smiles broadly, saying "Welcome to [name of the restaurant]," with directions to sit wherever one would like. A map of the restaurant by the door provides information about which waitresses are responsible for each section so that the customer can even choose to sit with the woman that seems most appealing or who he likes the best. Regardless of where one sits, there is an open view of the restaurant, and subsequently the waitresses as well.

The greeter and the other women are wearing the required uniform of very short, tight shorts, a fitted white, low-cut tank top (imprinted with the restaurant logo on front and the chain's catch phrase on the back), tan, shiny hose, thick, white socks that were scrunched down, and white tennis shoes. Each of the women also wore a gold name-tag with their first name typed in large font. A look around reveals that the waitresses technically span the continuum of body types, but they all have longer hair worn down, show a significant degree of cleavage, and are likely at or below a size four.

As soon as one sits down, a waitress approaches, introduces herself and leans forward on the table to take the drink order (cheerfully, "What can I get ya'll to drink?"). She writes her name on our paper drink napkins and decorates it with little hearts. Other waitresses around the restaurant are also either leaning on the tables or have taken a seat on an empty stool in order to

take orders, chat with customers, or deliver the check. The atmosphere immediately promotes familiarity and it seemed as though the waitresses are all simply “hanging out” with the customers.

In looking around at the physical surroundings, the floor, walls, and tables/stools are all a light, tan wood (supposedly a “beach theme”). There are about 25 high tables with stools to sit on rather than chairs. Most of the tables are occupied and there are five men sitting on bar stools as well. The restaurant’s clientele are approximately 90% male. The ceilings are covered with what looks like grey tin roofing and circular tin lamps hang down over half of the tables. The music (louder than would be considered appropriate for most restaurants) seems to a mix of the top 40, mostly pop and hip-hop music. One of the waitresses is dancing to the music by the bar while she waits for her drink order.

The walls are covered with a variety of objects. At least 12 flat panel TV screens are mounted around the restaurant, each tuned to some version of ESPN except for one small TV by the bar tuned to CNN. The walls are covered with neon beer lights, sports paraphernalia. Also, the walls hold an endless array of photographs of women in the requisite uniform (or several in bathing suits) posing with various male patrons and celebrities. Other signs advertise upcoming promotional events (Bikini contest) or specials (all you can eat wing night), decorated with photos of the waitresses with enhanced breasts, uniform, smiling, long hair, and carrying big plates of food.

Looking around, one notices the variety of clientele in the restaurant (with the notable exception of gender). A wide variety of dress (and likely occupation) are represented with some men appearing to be dressed for either manual labor (construction, plumbing; wearing boots and work clothes), others in collared t-shirts and nicer shorts and still others dressed in business attire

(suit pants with button down shirts and ties). The men also span the age range from high school to elderly with the majority appearing to be are middle aged to older (mid 30's to upper 50's). Of the few women, they also seem to represent a variety of dress style, but are almost always sitting with male customers.

When the waitress comes back to bring food or drink refills, it's likely that she's already determined how she's going to treat you (whether based on age, gender, dress, or other clues that she's evaluated). For example, she may sit and talk, starting a conversation about golf if you're wearing a golf hat or asking about your favorite concert if you have on a t-shirt promoting a band. She might ask about where you work. In other situations it's often the table of customers who initiate the conversation, asking about the waitress, or teasing and flirting with her. If some customers are overly persistent or make her feel uncomfortable, it's likely that she'll give a half-smile as she walks away or pretend that she can't hear the comments or questions at all.

In waiting for food one looks around and notices just how many waitresses are actually in the restaurant, especially in comparison to the small number of male staff. The exposed kitchen reveals several male cooks, while two male managers, wearing collared shirts and black pants, spend almost all of their time standing by the wait station talking to each other or appraising the waitresses as they pass by to get drinks. Another look around the restaurant shows a table of three 16 year old boys asking to take pictures of their waitress on their camera phones, a man sitting at the bar getting up to leave and stopping several of the waitresses to say good-bye, a disinterested couple watching the TVs, and a group of college age men high fiving and laughing loudly with one of the waitresses. At any moment if things become too dull, one of the waitresses may start hula hooping, accentuating her body and the way it moves.

When the waitress brings back the checks she's circled the totals with hearts and written "Thanks!" with her name on the bottom of the check. On the way out one might notice that regardless of the time, the restaurant is still pretty crowded, people seem to be moving in and out regularly, the ratio of men to women hasn't really changed, and the waitresses are still cheerfully and energetically entertaining the guests.

Themes and Interpretation

The data analysis resulted in a classification scheme describing nine general themes: reasons for involvement, ambivalence, counterfeit intimacy, sexual objectification, resistance strategies, power, negative relationships with women, changes over time, and judgment. Additionally, several clear subthemes emerged within most domains and are discussed under the broader categories. Table A-1 illustrates the themes/subthemes which emerged from the data analysis, the number of cases which exemplified each theme/subtheme, and the classification. I used the classification criteria recommended by Hill et al. (2005) in that domains were classified as "general" if they were present in all the interviews or all but one of the interviews (i.e., 10 or 11 of the interviews), "typical" if they occurred in at least half the interviews (i.e., 5-9 of the interviews), and "variant" if they were found in at least two or three but less than half (i.e., 2-4 of the interviews).

Reasons for involvement

All of the interviews began by asking participants to describe how they first decided to begin working in the objectified environment. Three sub-themes emerged: financial reasons, flexibility, and past experiences of sexual objectification.

Financial reasons. Overwhelmingly the number one reason women selected that environment was for financial reasons. Every participant immediately mentioned needing a job

that paid more money than their previous position or other available jobs. The participants chose to work in the more objectified environment in order to "make more money." For example, one participant stated "I used to work at [name of a non-appearance focused restaurant] and it was okay, I made okay money, but working at [name of sexually objectifying restaurant] you walk out with like, I've walked out with hundreds of dollars in one shift." Another participant boasted that she was able to pay for four years of college by herself, in cash without student loans. Furthermore, women noted the ease of economic reward; feeling as though they were being well paid for minimal work that was not particularly demanding. One woman, whose mother is a registered nurse, stated: "My mom and all [the women in her family] had harder jobs and it wasn't fun, they hated going to work, you know, they felt like they weren't even getting paid for the amount they were doing. And I feel like I do even less work and get paid even more than what I should."

Flexibility. Frequently mentioned in conjunction with money, was the high degree of flexibility in their work schedule. The financial constraints facing these women frequently came with time constraints as well. For example, all of the women interviewed were either pursuing a college degree (n = 7) or had childcare responsibilities (n = 4), both requiring schedules that can be easily and quickly changed or reduced, often with little advance notice, and without the threat of job loss. Participants discussed easily picking up extra shifts if bills needed to be paid or giving up shifts at the last moment in order to focus on more pressing academic work. One participant, a 29 year old single mother illustrates this:

> I mean I've quit and tried to go other places and tried other restaurant jobs and tried to get real jobs as we call them and stuff like that, but honestly, the money that I make and the hours that I work like, I don't know what I'm gonna do when I'm too old to where I can't work there anymore, like I guess for me the reason why it's worked out so good is because like I had

> a daughter and she's disabled, she's got cerebral palsy so she's in a wheelchair so every week like we, um, every week you make your own schedule basically, you know, you put in a schedule request what days you can and can't work and, you know, I work 2 days a week and I make at least make $200 a week and usually it's about $300 a week and I work 8 hours a week and that's it, so really, I mean yeah, working that and then making my schedule with her then it's really hard for me to go anywhere else.

The desire or need for money, in addition to flexibility or control over one's work schedule, were central reasons for women choosing to work in the sexually objectifying environment. This finding is similar to that found among strippers where the desire or need for money is central to the choice to enter and remain in the industry (Barton, 2002; Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000).

Past experiences. While not as directly linked to the choice of the objectified environment as money and flexibility, six participants also discussed previous experiences of objectification that likely contributed to choosing a role in a sexually objectifying environment. The range of these experiences included (a) body and image focused activities such as cheerleading, gymnastics, baton, and beauty pageants, (b) experiences in highly similar but slightly less objectifying appearance focused restaurants, (c) childhood or adolescent experiences of objectification related to being generally attractive, and (d) racially prejudiced objectification. For example, one participant noted, "I've always been in pageants, or baton, or cheerleading or basketball or gymnastics or you know, kind of like, all of those, are kind of like putting a lot of attention on you, on yourself." Relatedly, another participant stated "but I do think that I always grew up feeling objectified, even, as crazy as it sounds, in first grade these little black boys used to sing Wild Thing to me and it made me feel so uncomfortable, and I don't know why, but I was a little kid, I don't remember what part of that made me uncomfortable, but I knew it was a

sexual song and that just made me feel weird, you know, and then I remember like around 4th grade this group of boys used to always tease me and say, 'Oh we're gonna pop your cherry'...."

These results are consistent with Sweet and Tewksbury (2000) finding that 75% of exotic dancers in their study had previous experience in athletics or entertainment. They suggested that the reasons for women's participation in other forms of objectification lie somewhere between a "natural" tendency and familiarity to using their bodies for achievement and a need for attention and acceptance. This sub-theme is consistent with a large number of studies that have suggested that sexual objectification experiences are precursors to self-objectification and their correlates (for a review see Moradi & Huang, 2008). In addition, the results of this study suggest that past experiences of sexual objectification can lead women to put themselves in additional objectifying situations, a potentially harmful Catch-22.

Ambivalence

In discussing their experiences of and reactions to working in a sexually objectifying environment, most of the participants expressed a high degree of ambivalence. Three subthemes emerged which captured their conflicting feelings and experiences: general ambivalence, double bind, and self-blame. In other words, women indicated a general sense of confusion and uncertainty, which often resulted in no-win situations and made them feel responsible for negative events and emotions.

General ambivalence. Most (*n = 9)* of the participants expressed a high degree of general ambivalence about their role in the objectified environment. Several participants clearly stated this ambivalence, "Yeah, it kind of blew my mind, I was like, "wow," well, I don't know, I haven't worked in a long time because I've been so busy and I'm not sure that I want to go back, I don't know that I like it" or, "I can't decide how I feel about it." Observational data also

revealed the women's ambivalence in their body language. For example, one woman leaned away from a customer with a seemingly strained smile as the man leaned towards her invading her personal space. Alternately, other participants immediately made indication of enjoying their job by stating things such as "It's actually a really fun job," "I love working there," or "It's not a bad environment and its fun," yet the overwhelming majority of material discussed in each interview involved negative aspects of the environment (e.g., uncomfortable experiences, negative emotions, challenging relationships). For example, one participant began her interview by stating that she felt like her job was fun and she enjoyed the people (they are "awesome"), yet within the same sentence she stated that on occasion there are people who "ruin" her day, she often feels self-conscious, and she chose the job as a "last resort."

Also, in their interviews the women would frequently mention that the majority of their experiences with customers were either neutral or positive, however, they would rarely describe those situations, and instead voluntarily spent a significant amount of time detailing very negative interactions with customers (see Sexual Objectification theme). The women's general ambivalence also extended to the seemingly positive attention they received: "I feel like more guys are attracted to me cause I work there cause like they're like, 'Oh, she's not afraid to like wear some skimpy little outfit' so they're kind of attracted to me in a bad way." Qualitative research conducted with feminist identified college women regarding body consciousness also found ambivalence in relation to objectification experiences, noting that the participants were ambivalent about rejecting culturally prescribed beauty norms despite feeling as though they should know better (Rubin, Nemeroff, Russo, 2004).

Double bind. Participants discussed the situations giving rise to such ambivalence, frequently experienced by the women as a double bind, or situations in which they received

powerful contradictory messages and felt unable to act on either. These no-win situations often involved attempts to smooth over tricky social interactions for fear of retaliation if the other party became angry. One woman discussed attempting to balance a situation:

> I just play it off like it's a joke, you know, and I've also told other girls that when I've trained them like if somebody, do you understand what I mean, just act like you don't take it seriously and if you act like you don't take it seriously then you're not just outright rejecting them and they don't get their feelings hurt.

Other participants also mentioned the dilemma between asserting themselves and facing a potentially negative response from the man involved, stating, "then the guy gets mad and it's just a mess you don't want to get in" as well as, "which probably wasn't the best thing, but you can't get mad, you don't want to make them mad because then they're not going to leave you any money and then like, I don't know." Similarly, observational data revealed that in one conversation, a table of men consistently joked with their waitress that she was not going to get a good tip because she wasn't paying enough attention to them.

Self-blame. For some participants, these no win-situations resulted in experiencing self-blame, feeling unable to get appropriately angry with others, and/or becoming obligated towards others. For example, one participant discussed the potential dangers that accompany these situations:

> Some guy stalked one of the girls and followed her home and it was just, it was insane so, but then you're giving them the wrong impression when you're in there leading them on and doing stuff like that so I can't blame this guy who's like maybe he was drunk, I don't know, and sitting there chatting away with this girl… you know you're giving these guys some impression when you're in the restaurant and then when you're outside the restaurant and you're vulnerable, then…I'm like I'm not a prostitute, but then again I guess that's what you think and I don't blame you.

In a sexually objectifying environment, flirting, feigning sexual availability, and generally flattering male customers sends a message of interest that is not genuinely felt by the women (see also Counterfeit Intimacy theme below); thereby, placing them in a situation where they are pursued against their true wishes. Women in similar environments (i.e., heterosexual college sorority women regarding their involvement with the fraternity social system) have also noted feelings of conflict about offending or embarrassing male pursuers and feeling confused or emotionally overwhelmed (Norris, Nurius, & Dimeff, 1996).

Counterfeit Intimacy

One aspect of working in a sexually objectifying environment is the creation of fantasy or ideal, but ultimately, false relationships with male customers. Simone de Beauvoir (1953) was perhaps the first to suggest that in interactions with men, women are always putting on a performance, both emotionally and physically. All the women discussed creating a seemingly ideal, yet superficial relationship with male customers. Foote (1954) coined the term "counterfeit intimacy," to describe how sex often becomes a symbol of the true intimacy that most people crave. This term has also been used to describe the superficial relationships created by strippers (Ronai & Ellis, 1989; Pasko, 2002; Wood, 2000), in which both parties benefit at the expense of the other (either for monetary or emotional/physical gain). This counterfeit intimacy was created by crafting the dream girl and reading and responding to customers. The women typically discussed this theme by talking about how they themselves are not real, their interest in the relationship and the other person is generally not real, and many of them go one step

further to read and interact with the other person in the ways that meet that person's needs.

Dream girl. The creation of fantasy relationships in this environment includes the illusion of a perfect, but realistically non-existent, woman. One participant illustrated this by saying, "They try to make you every guy's fantasy or like, they're like, 'we want the guys to walk in here and be an oasis for them,' and I didn't know that they would actually go to these extreme measures to do that." A carefully constructed appearance playing to cultural standards and men's sexual desires is further discussed under the Sexual Objectification theme. However, beyond flawless looks, these women are "not supposed to have a bad day" and "not supposed to complain," always confident and outgoing, "personal cheerleaders," that come with none of the emotional baggage or unattractive traits that exist in real women. Immediately upon entering the environment customers are greeted by women who are extremely cheerful, smiling broadly and laughing while they invite you to "sit wherever you want."

The fantasy relationship also incorporates women's subservience, as participants reported being required to pour beverages for the customers and even de-bone their chicken wings if asked. They also manage to fit the seemingly contradictory desires of men wanting women to be wholesome yet sexy, creating confusion for at least one participant, "It just kind of wierded me out cause they're like, 'We're going for this wholesome all-American girl image,' and then you throw us in these outfits?" The women in the restaurant all wear their hair down, have minimal jewelry (small stud earrings), cover up their tattoos, and wear make-up that is not overly dramatic. There are no physical appearance indicators that any of the women may have alternative beliefs or

lifestyles. In making others think that the women are ideal, they are circumventing a realistic relationship. One participant illustrated the insincerity, “I’m a really good bullshitter to be honest…you just bullshit people, and you, it’s hard to teach somebody or to tell somebody how to do that, all you do is make people think you’re the best person they’ve talked to all day.”

In addition to making themselves seem like “every guy’s fantasy” the women also discussed making the other person in the interaction feel as though they, too, are special and feigned interest in the other person. When these seemingly perfect women spend time and attention on male customers, men often presume flattery and genuine interest on the woman’s behalf. One participated stated:

> I don’t realize how flirty like I can get, or all the girls can get, like you, you know, you’ll be like, “Well, you didn’t come sit at my table, come sit at it next time,” and you’ll like wink at them and make them feel like, “Gosh, she wants me to come sit at her table,” whatever.

The women described a variety of ways in which they then create an ideal, but ultimately artificial or shallow, relationship. For example, many of the women spent a greater amount of time socializing with tables, asking questions, getting to know customers, remember details about their lives, talking to their interests, flattering, and even lying about their own attributes or accomplishments in order to impress. Another described her strategy as, “ask questions, see what the table is into kind of and relate to it.” Observational data also revealed that women were often leaning on tables, laughing with customers, and sitting for periods of time at some tables conversing with the customers. This process begins almost immediately for the women and one participant reported that during training she was told, “’You really just have to work it, like you have to flirt with

them, you have to pay attention to them, act like they're the only person there and you'll do really well.'" A number of the participants illustrated the insincerity of the counterfeit intimacy they create by comparing this process to a "game" or "acting."

Reading customers. These constructed relationships often go one step further as women "read" the customers to determine what kind of interaction they want. This was described by one participant as follows:

> Well, you just kind of have to treat different customers different ways, just because you, I mean obviously if like a guy and his wife came in you don't wanna be like, "Oh, hi!" (giggling and making motions in the air like rubbing someone's back). You kind of want to be like more, family oriented, kid friendly, like talk to the kids, stuff like that if you have families, you know, whereas if you have a table full of guys, obviously, you're going to flirt a little more, and be more outgoing and flirty, and I just never really picked up on that before I started working there.

Variable treatment was personally observed as the waitress in my section of the restaurant responded flirtatiously and sarcastically with a group of college-age men, was dismissive towards a group of three adolescent boys, and seemed more professional with a mixed gender group of business persons.

Ascertaining what kind of relationship customers desired seemed to not only allow girls to then play certain roles, it may likely have also served as a protective factor. Many of the girls talked about tables that would become angry or upset if they felt like other tables were getting more attention. Reading customers and interacting with them in ideal ways also extended to female customers. Several participants noted that they were especially nice to female customers and attempted to make them feel more comfortable if they thought they would potentially feel insecure in that environment.

Sexual Objectification

Not surprisingly, all the women described instances of interpersonal sexual objectification including regulated appearance, male gaze, and extreme forms of sexual objectification.

Regulated appearance. Strict appearance regulations promoted the sexual objectification of women in this work environment. One participant described this in saying, "Yeah, you have to keep the [name of restaurant] standards or look or whatever, they're all about image and it's not just whatever image you want, it's their image." Participants noted an endless number of physical requirements including maintaining the weight at which they were hired. One woman was told "basically, you're not allowed to get fat." Notably, all of the participants as well as the waitresses seen during observations sessions would be considered thin by cultural standards, likely wearing a size four or smaller with one exception. Other requirements included having their hair worn down, makeup done ("look like you're going to the hottest club"), tattoos covered, and accessories minimized, to name a few. This was deemed surprisingly excessive by a number of the women:

> Now, you have a full on like booklet, and it's like [the environment's] image and each page is dedicated to like nails, hair, makeup, brushing your teeth, wearing deodorant, like I mean, down to the freakin' T…promising that not only will you stay the same weight, height, you know, but you won't drastically change your hair, wear your makeup every day, you know what I mean?

Another woman indicated that "we are inspected [by the managers] before we clock in" and "they [the managers] will send you home if you don't look good."

Several participants stated that they were encouraged to be "camera ready" at all times.

Consistent with Objectification Theory (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997), the appearance criterion were based on mainstream White, heterosexual North American cultural standards. After all, according to one participant, "If you're the one adorable perfect all-American girl that's working there and everyone wants you or wants your table then I'm sure that would feel great - if you fit this little mold." One of the multiracial women pointed out that not fitting the North American standards for beauty was the most difficult thing for her, saying, "I mean that's the thing that bothers me the most, if I walk up to a table and the customer won't look at me or say anything because they're so pissed because I'm not white with blonde hair and blue eyes."

Male gaze. Many of the women (n = 8) noted that they were "on display" and constantly being gazed at. They described how men would "gawk," "stare," and "watch" them. For example, one participant stated "the guys are constantly watching you, no matter where you go, if you're doing nothing and just standing there, because that's what you're literally there for, they're always watching you and I've never seen anywhere where more individual guys come in, like, just guys by themselves, it's ridiculous." Another participant said, "Um, they basically just kind of see us as entertainment. I mean, they're constantly reminding us to always look our best - that the guys come in here to see us." Furthermore, several participants mentioned customers who would come in and sit for hours, ordering very little and watch the women. A number of other aspects of the environment were also designed to encourage gazing at the women such promotional events or activities (i.e., bikini contests, hula-hooping, and modeling for calendars), and the open floor plans in which the women can be seen from a variety of angles at all time.

The walls of the restaurant are literally covered with photographs of the women in their revealing uniform or skimpy bathing suits. Pictures of the women are the primary focus (rather than information) on posters advertising specials or promotional events and even the menus. Activities in the restaurant are designed to facilitate gaze as well, such as standing on a raised platform to "sling" orders to the kitchen, hula hooping both inside and outside of the restaurant, playing Twister during slow times, and standing in conspicuous spaces and positions to make announcements.

Extreme forms of sexual objectification. One of the most striking topics women discussed during their interviews was extreme forms of sexual objectification, experienced by nine of the women. However, it may be more appropriate to call these experiences blatant sexual harassment since the sexual objectification described by the participants was more unambiguous, intentional, and severe. Kozee, et. al., (2007) similarly suggested that interpersonal sexual objectification experiences includes not only body evaluation but also explicit unwanted sexual advances. Many participants had at least one, if not several, severe incidents. One participant who reported not having experienced anything overly uncomfortable had recently finished training and worked at the restaurant for approximately three weeks. However, she also expressed a much higher degree of anxiety about her job and upcoming shifts as well as nervous anticipation that she would have a very uncomfortable encounter. Another participant illustrated how the sexual objectification they experienced was different from other "everyday" objectifying experiences and clearly crossed a line:

> I've never really had a problem with guys like staring at me, I don't know or like flirting with me, that doesn't gross me out, but after a while I guess when you get these nasty redneck guys, I'm not trying to be mean, but like

> older guys with no teeth and when they get really, really drunk they start to get touchy feely with you.

The women also pointed out the high probability that one would experience some form of extreme sexual objectification because of the types of men that spent time in that environment, noting that "the majority of our regulars, there's something a little bit off about them," and stating, "I feel like a lot of our regulars are pervs, just big pervs." Experiences of extreme sexual objectification took the form of being grabbed, having pictures taken of sexual body parts without consent, being propositioned for sex or sexual favors, being followed outside of the objectified environment, and having extremely lewd comments made towards them or in their presence. The latter is illustrated by the following participant:

> This one guy, he comes in with his 16 year old son, it's his friend, they're Mexican and they're sitting at a high top table and he spreads his legs and like tries to pull me in towards him and was like, "Show me how hot you really are." And this other guy was sitting at a high top table and he came in with his son-in-law and his son maybe, I wanna say, I mean, they were all older, like the youngest was 30 something, they were really nice, um, I had talked to them originally at the bar and they just seemed like really nice people and ended up sitting in my section and then I had, uh, what was he doing? Oh yeah, he got out chapstick, lip balm, like chapstick or something and then he was like, "here" trying to put it on me, "here do you want some? Your lips look dry," and I was like, "no thank you, I have some in my pouch" [motioning down towards her waist] and he was like, "Oh are your lips down there dry, too?" yeah, yeah.

Another participant described the following:

> I mean, we, oh, another regular we have, oh my gosh, he's probably the biggest pervert I've ever talked to in my life. I , he sat at my table, he's a lawyer and he's like a really big lawyer in our area so he tips very well and he sat at my table and I was like "alright, this is gonna be great" and he was like talking about all the sex he's had and with some of the girls in the restaurant and he's like an older man, he's like 50, and he's like, "I get so many girls," and he's, like, so perverted and he's like, "Yeah, this girl really wants me really bad," he was like "look what she just sent me" and I

> thought it was just a text and then he showed me a picture of a naked girl, like, spreading herself.

Observation data was also consistent with women's self-reports. For example, one regular customer was observed frequently reaching out towards the women who walked by and attempting to have them engage in conversation despite their obvious disinterest. Another male customer attempted to inappropriately hug one of the women while she clearly expressed discomfort in turning away, making a face, and leaning backwards with her arms down by her sides.

Negative emotions. All of the participants indicated that the various types and degrees of sexual objectification experiences described above led to a wide variety of negative emotions, including feelings of disgust, degradation, guilt, insecurity, anger, sadness, and anxiety. In addition, the women talked about feeling "uncomfortable" in a general sense. They mentioned having a "bad vibe" or customers that were "creepy." For example, one participant stated, "It's just that it's like really uncomfortable to be around guys like that." Another participant described just how unsettling this was for her and others:

> I mean, it does make me feel uncomfortable and I can understand why they have a high turnover rate because I can imagine that would get so old after a while, just like, it would make me feel dirty or something. It just seems like I want to go home and take a shower or something.

Consistent with Objectification Theory (Frederickson & Roberts; 1997), several women expressed experiences of sadness and depressed mood. For example, it was not uncommon for the women to cry at work or to see other women cry at work, often attempting to conceal how upset they were by going to the bathroom. As one participant

stated: “Sometimes I want to go to the bathroom and cry because it makes you feel so disrespected, like you’re absolutely nothing and I don’t really think that’s fair.” Several women also indicated that their experiences of extreme sexual objectification overshadowed the more positive aspects of the working environment. For example in describing the worst part of her job, one participant stated “people being really nasty, but, I think that bugs me more. It happens enough that I don’t forget about it, but I wouldn’t say it’s every time I work or anything.”

Several women mentioned the combined stress of sexual objectification and job performance expectations as a source of anxiety. One participant talked about feeling nervous in trying to both converse with tables and manage orders, stating, “I’m kind of right now more worried about making sure that I get everything done that I’m supposed to do and don’t mess anything up.” It’s likely that performance anxiety is heightened in this environment. Other research has also found that self-objectification hinders task performance (Frederickson & Harrison, 2005; Quinn, Kallen, Twenge, & Frederickson, 2006; Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004), which may be a factor in creating anxiety in an objectifying environment that also requires some degree of actual work. For example, when called over to a table that was not hers, one woman described her reaction saying, “I was like, ‘Oh god,’ my heart started beating really fast, I was really nervous.”

Finally, many women also reported experiencing negative emotions related to the internalization of these experiences via self-objectification. For example, common feelings were frustration (“I mean, it sucks, a lot of those girls eat whatever they want and they’re still perfect and that’s frustrating all the time”) and self-consciousness (“Some of the girls are like, tiny, so then I’m like okay, geez now I feel uncomfortable and self-

conscious. I'm not fat so why do I feel like a cow?"). Thus, many of these women reported feeling bad about themselves as a result of not measuring up to cultural standards of beauty (e.g., "There's always somebody ready to take your place and usually the girls who aren't as pretty will be asked to leave if like prettier girls come in.").

Resistance Strategies

As described above, all the women reported experiences of sexual objectification. Subsequently, these women employed a number of strategies aimed at protecting themselves physically as well as serving to keep a positive sense of self intact.

Minimizing sexual objectification. The single most common strategy of resistance to uncomfortable comments or actions directed towards the women was minimizing the experience. Participants repeatedly mentioned creating a joke out of a negative situation, saying, "we just have to kind of joke around, laugh it off and, you know, just kind of put up with it actually." Many women in the restaurant can be seen laughing or heard making sarcastic remarks as they walk-away from a table (rather than laughing or bantering in actual conversation with the table). This is consistent with research indicating that women are more likely to respond passively rather than actively to stranger harassment (Magley, 2002). Not taking things so seriously rather than directly confronting the situation or becoming upset smoothes over the tricky social interaction as mentioned above in the kind of unresolvable dilemmas and no-win situations these women experience. Other minimizing strategies frequently employed by the participants include brushing it off, ignoring individuals or avoiding them, and simply normalizing the situation. For example, one customer was observed repeatedly attempting to engage one

of the women in a conversation while she consistently ignored him. One woman described how she handles it:

> I just don't pay any attention to them, just try to brush it off cause you have people like that, not everybody's like that, but I'm not gonna let one customer run me off. You know what I mean? So I just smile and bear it and then be like, "Ugh, hah, gross" when I walk away, like I can't believe that guy just said that.

Relatedly, another participant stated, "I mean, it's fun, it's just kind of like a joke to me, I mean, I don't, I don't really take it so seriously."

Several women mentioned the dangers associated with minimizing techniques, saying that "it's probably wrong" to laugh about the situation because then the men involved think that the kind of behavior they are displaying is okay. Fairchild and Rudman (2008) examined women's responses to unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public and found common strategies similar to those mentioned by participants here such as blaming themselves, blowing it off or ignoring it, or considering it to be complimentary or a joke.

Establishing boundaries. Another way of managing sexually objectifying interactions with customers was maintaining and communicating clear boundaries with men. Many of the women's ideas regarding establishing boundaries alluded to personal characteristics of strength, power, and control; specifically noting that women in the environment needed to be "independent," "not easily influenced," have a "backbone," and be able to "stand your ground." Amick and Calhoun (1987) discovered that women who successfully resisted verbal sexual aggression were usually more interpersonally dominant. Several of the women indicated this subtle quality to their dealings with others

that let them know certain kinds of inappropriate comments or behaviors would not be tolerated. As one participant described:

> I'm not the kind of person with my walls down for everyone to just you know, a girl that's more like, I mean, I know girls that I've worked with them before that just laugh stuff off or just smile and stuff, the guys gonna know that he can get away with a certain amount of stuff, he's gonna know he can grab onto her, you know what I mean, where as me, he's gonna know he'd better keep his hands to his dang self.

Other women discussed how they act in a less flirtatious manner with customers, use intelligent conversations to connect, or employ sarcasm, but they also acknowledged the thin line that constitutes this boundary as one woman indicated, "it's flirtatious, but it never really crosses the line, but it's right there at the line." Other women indicated that in a sexually objectifying environment there may be some question of what is and is not appropriate, leading others to test boundaries and more gradually increase the degree of unacceptable behavior yet also providing women with the opportunity to subtly communicate what is okay for them personally. One woman illustrated how she interacts in this manner:

> Normally like I think, unless it was something like super, super dramatic, you know, like say if I was to walk to a table and they might try and see how far they can go with you by saying something you know, then I might shoot a comment back to them real quick, you know what I'm saying? Let 'em know, "Hey I'm here to take your food order and make sure that you eat and that's about it," like, "We can talk, but we're not gonna talk about that."

Other methods of communicating boundaries included highlighting their non-single status in talking about boyfriends, husbands, or children and not interacting with male customers in other social situations (i.e., going out to bars, giving out their phone number, dating).

Psychological and physical distance. Yet another way women deal with sexually objectifying environments and work to keep their egos intact is to separate themselves cognitively and emotionally from the role they play in that environment**.** One way the women separated what they indicated as their "true" selves from their "persona" at work was by highlighting their roles outside of work. For example, participants would discuss future plans (i.e., "I don't want to make it my career by any means, I'm planning on going to nursing school and stuff like that.") or point out more important roles such as mother or provider. The women also emphasized separating themselves at work by emotionally detaching ("I don't get caught up in the job") or hiding their true emotions ("I'm not gonna give them the satisfaction of seeing that they're getting to me anyway, like if I let them know that they're hurting my feelings they're getting what they want."). "Acting" was also something that the women discussed as a means of separating their person from the persona at work (further discussed under the Counterfeit Intimacy theme). One participant said, "you put a totally different attitude on and you just go in there with a totally different outlook; it's not enough that like, she's a *totally* different person at work than outside of work, not to that extent, but."

Another way women engaged in psychological distance was to describe how they are different from the other women who work in the objectified environment. One participant stated, "I'm a lot different than most of the girls who work there" Another participant, who spent a very short amount of time in the objectified environment recognized this strategy in others as well as herself, stating: "Um, I don't know, I think no one there has a problem thinking that they don't fit the mold, everyone, even if you

don't think they're pretty they think so, I don't know, but I know I definitely did not fit the mold, that's for sure."

Another way participants frequently pointed out their status of being "different" from the other women was by having very few social relationships with the other women. Still others pointed out that this was a temporary situation because of financial constraints or that they had other plans for the future stating, "it's not my career, it's not the only thing I have going on," and discussed how their real selves existed outside of that environment. One participant noted "I have a life outside [of this environment]." In an informal conversation during an observation session, one woman (not a participant) discussed a distancing strategy created by the organization: physically separating the women's social selves from their working selves by not allowing them to drink alcohol in their primary job location, even when off work, while allowing it in other franchises.

Both physical and psychological distance has been noted as a resistance strategy in the stripping literature as well with women noting that they do not associate with co-workers outside of work and noting a number of statements indicating their separation from a persona that they are at work versus the "real" person they are outside of work (Murphy, 2003; Ronai & Cross, 1998). Still, the women noted that other people in the environment either did not care about or did not believe that the women had separate lives or were working towards more important accomplishments, making this a somewhat frustrating strategy to use because others often refused to validate the separation these women internally created.

Power

Each of the women also discussed the theme of power and powerlessness in their

interviews, generally on a more systemic level. Power dynamics were usually manifested in money and/or resources, culturally prescribed beauty, and the more exploitive authority of the males in charge (i.e., managers).

Money and resources. In discussing the power connected to money and resources, all of the women indicated that the wealth was held by men in their environment. One participant noted, "If you tip well, girls will put up with anything," while another discussed how women would frequently seek to date customers in hopes of finding someone who would then take care of them financially. The resources that were available to girls in this environment included not only offers to pay bills, but gym memberships, free tanning packages, free car leases, and even expensive international vacations. Frequently the participants noted that the money and resources did not come without the expectation of a more intimate relationship or sexual favors. One participant who is currently enrolled in college stated:

> We have guys that come in there and offer to like, pay our bills for us or like offer to like pay us to go out with them, like after we get off, it's just insane…I've heard, anything from offering to buy me a new car, offering to pay off my college tuition, offering I mean, like for me to go home with them.

Beauty equals power. Participants were clear that conventional beauty was a significant source of power in this environment. Physical attractiveness is often exchanged for social and financial success (Unger, 1979) and serves as a motivator for women to self-object (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Basically, looks matter and as one participant stated "all of the money is because of how you look." Even outside of sexually objectifying environments there exists a beauty premium with attractive people earning more money than unattractive people (Andreoni & Petrie, 2008; Hamermesh &

Biddle, 1994). The women who were more attractive received preferential treatment from managers, customers, and often other female co-workers as well as better work assignments putting them in the position to have access to more of the money and resources. One woman stated, “I think the girls that do the bikini contests are much more valuable to them so they let them by with a lot more; I know that for a fact.” Another participant discussed how the most attractive women received more lucrative job assignments (i.e., better sections, inclusion in promotional events), while those with excellent job performance or longevity were ignored. She stated that the only requirement for being chosen was to “look fine in a bikini and shorts.” Being beautiful is the primary way of gaining power according to women in a sexually objectifying environment.

Authority structure. The participants also discussed power in terms of the authority structure set up in their environment. The power dynamic is immediately observable as the women wear revealing and casual uniforms, while the managers, in stark contrast, are dressed more professionally in dark colors, slacks, and collared shirts. In particular the women pointed out the abuses of power from male managers. Having a relationship with a male manager was one way women discussed gaining power. One woman noted that “some of the girls hook up with the managers too to get the best tables,” again highlighting the use of beauty and sexuality through men in authority positions to obtain personal power. Other researchers have pointed out a similar dynamic between female exotic dancers and male managers, men’s inappropriate use of intimacy to reinforce patriarchal values and women’s use of sexuality to obtain that power (Murphy, 2003). Murphy also referred to male manager’s surveillance and control as “managerial gaze,” yet another manifestation of sexual objectification in this

environment. In observation, several managers would frequently stand near wait stations and simply survey the women rather than helping with tasks or checking on customer satisfaction. Managers also visually inspect the women prior to each shift to ensure that the women meet appearance requirements and then have the power to ask women to change aspects or their appearance or even leave the shift.

The participants' discussions of power dynamics also highlighted the related mistreatment of the women. One participant said, "the managers are horrible, they treat us like, they treat the girls like you're shit I think, like basically it's like I've got all these girls, you know what I'm saying, and they really do treat them horrible." One participant also described the women's personal sense of powerlessness in this situation by saying, "But, when the manager says something and you're uncomfortable with it, then it's a whole 'nother story." Still other women highlighted the clear double standard that alluded to male managers having a significant portion of the power. For example, the women noted that while they were required to cover up their own tattoos, managers could have extensive tattooing exposed, the women's appearance was carefully regulated, but managers could come to work looking sloppy or disheveled.

Negative Relationships with Women

Negative relationships with other women was a significant part of experiencing sexually objectifying environments for the participants, succinctly summed up by one participant who stated, "girls are brutal there." Competition and comparison were two factors underlying the negative relationships that the women discussed. The resulting negative relationships between the women were manifested in a variety of ways including: indirect aggression (i.e., gossiping), direct aggression, distancing and

disconnection from other women, and using traditionally patriarchal (i.e., stereotypical) criticisms of the other women.

Competition. Regarding competition, the women mentioned vying with one another for attention, praise, and money or resources. They frequently undermined each other in a number of ways in order to gain the advantage over other females in their environment. Participants most frequently gossiped about the other women (or, alternately assumed they were being gossiped about themselves) to customers, managers, and other girls. In examining competition between women, Campbell (2004) noted that women frequently compete by using indirect and relational aggression (i.e., stigmatize and exclude others, damage their reputation and social support) and, consistent with the present results, this primarily takes the form of gossip, a more sustained and low level form of harassment.

Several women mentioned how the level of competition led to constant vigilance from indirect aggression from other women. One woman illustrates this clearly:

> You have to watch yourself in that like the other girls are kind of like, they'll try to get you fired if you're making alot of money, they'll say things, they'll talk about you, so you have to be friends with everyone, you have to like watch what you look like every day, you know, you have to constantly check yourself in the bathroom mirror and everything and it's just, I don't know.

Consistent with these findings, other research indicates that women are more likely than men to use indirect forms of aggression (for a review see Bjorkqvist, 1994); however, several women also mentioned either witnessing or being personally involved in direct verbal or physical attacks between women.

Comparisons. The negative relationships between women in a sexually objectifying environment also stemmed from comparisons.

> I never get into drama and I never, I just stay out of it and so like I mean, I feel like I'm pretty well liked, I'm not the girl who makes the most tips, but I'm not the girl who makes the least tips by any means. I'm pretty up there, but I'm not the girl who everyone's like, "ah, I wonder how she got those tips" because we'll all gossip about it and you know…

Similarly, in a qualitative inquiry of women's body consciousness group members talked about the difficulty of establishing satisfying relationships with other women as a result of comparisons (Rubin, Nemeroff, Russo, 2004). Participants in the present study seemed to feel that they were placed in a situation where the only potential way to maintain positive relationships with the other women was to be "average;" if women were on top in some manner they became targets of others' jealousy, gossip, blame, or attempts to take over that position, and if the women were on the bottom, they were engaging in those behaviors. Interestingly other research has also found that direction of comparison (upwards vs. downwards) between women is irrelevant and that the comparison process in itself is threatening, particularly when compared to similar others (Heinberg & Thompson, 1992).

The participants also frequently discussed other women from a negative stereotypical perspective, imposing society's oppressive false standards on one another. As one participant described:

> There's of course, there's the, ah, like stereotypical girl behavior, like, the she said this and oh well she's a bitch, I don't like the way she's acting and you know, she's talking about me. And like you have the little cliques where like there's some girls they're all best friends and then other cliques where all those girls are best friends.

They frequently used negative clichéd terms such as "shallow" and "catty" for other women as well. One woman in an informal conversation during an observation session

shared the various negative and generalized reputations of women from each franchise in the area, stating that the women at one location were considered the "bitchy ones," while women at another location were considered the "fat ones." In fact, the list of damaging and disapproving terms used by the women was endless, including: bitchy, rude, immoral, conniving, gossipy, clique-y, trashy, mean, and insecure. Many of the participants used this in order to distance themselves psychologically from the other women (as mentioned under the Resistance Strategies theme). This extended beyond psychological barriers, usually with the exception of one woman with whom they had a relationship before entering the environment, many of the women pointed out that they intentionally distanced themselves from the other women by not making friends or socializing with other women from the environment. A small minority of the participants (n = 3) stated they felt like they had positive relationships with the other women working there, however, those women talked almost exclusively in negative terms about the other women.

Changes over Time

All of the participants described themselves as changed in some way as a result of spending time in the sexually objectifying work environment, regardless of amount of time spent there (ranging from three weeks to over five years). Several of the women seemed surprised to notice changes, including one woman who had only worked in the objectified environment for one month. She stated, "I think of it as kind of weird cause I didn't think it would change me that much, but it's changed me a little bit, not a drastic change, but something."

Increased self-objectification. The most noticeable change participants discussed was an increase in body surveillance, self-objectification, and comparisons to other girls. One woman pointed out the interaction between each of these behaviors:

> You're used to being critiqued and critiquing yourself because you have to have your make up done, you have to have your hair done every day, you have to, I mean, and it's kind of like you kind of unconsciously critique other people, like, "Oh well her hair looks bad today. She has on too much makeup," or, you know what I mean, just like little stuff like that and it's not a good quality to have, but I mean, it's just, you can't help it.

The participants more frequently checked their physical appearance, re-applied make-up, fixed their clothing, and monitored their weight (even refusing to eat before shifts because of anxiety that their stomach would be noticeably bloated). Other strategies were used to create the illusion of a perfect physique and included wearing elastic bands around the stomach to make it appear flat, wearing two bras, padding bras, or even having plastic surgery. Participants also frequently discussed evaluating their bodies or appearances in comparison to the other women. One woman, who had worked in the environment on and off for 13 years noticed that there were "phases" every so often in which one woman would have breast augmentation surgery and several other women would have surgery shortly afterwards. Other research has also noted women's tendency to change their bodies through weight loss or cosmetic surgery as a result of body shame or fears of becoming unattractive (Forbes, Jobe, & Revak, 2006; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). One participant shared her experience of comparing herself:

> Since I'm so competitive and they're competitive too, you know, I feel like I need to get more in shape so that I can look like that you know cause their waists are small…People are like, "You're crazy, you don't have a stomach," but I do, and I just want, I want to be pretty too, you know what I mean, I want people to look at me and be like, "Aw I wish I was like that."

Another woman pointed out the impact of the group dynamic by saying, “constantly it’s like, this is what’s wrong. As a group, the girls are like, ‘This is what’s wrong with me, this is fat, this is bad, my hair is bad today,’ and they talk about their boobs so much.”

Increased confidence. Another change that participants noticed as a result of being in a sexually objectifying environment was increased self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as becoming more outgoing. They noticed feeling better about themselves, being able to approach a wider variety of people with poise, and even talking louder and more often. In observation the women in the restaurant also appear confident, in their posture, eye contact, and speech. One participant talked about taking the job in part to “help open me up.” Much of the increase in sense of self-worth and assurance seemed to come from external sources of validation:

> Definitely guys when you go into work when guys like flirt with you or hit on you, you definitely just like, your self esteem goes so up and then girls that work at [name of restaurant] are always really happy, like the reason girls stay working there is because their self-esteem shoots up so they’re never really in a bad mood when they’re working and guys are flirting with them, hitting on them, whatever, and definitely when I work I feel like my self-esteem goes up…

Another participant discussed how she has always been self-conscious and did not think highly of herself, however, she felt a boost in self-esteem simply from being hired, saying, “I guess if I got the job I can’t look that bad,” indicating an even broader, more systemic, level of personal physical confirmation. However, it should be noted that this particular finding is in direct contrast to previous research which consistently relates body dissatisfaction to lower self-esteem (Lowery, Kurpius, Befort, Blanks, Sollenberger, Nicpon, & Huser, 2005; Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Eisenberg, 2006).

Other women talked about their boost in confidence more constructively and in terms of general acceptance from a wide variety of people, saying:

> [It] has made me more confident with just being who I am and not trying to be anybody different, you know… maybe that's how you figure out who you are, you know, just being able to just be who you are and like when other people accept that and you have all this positive feedback then you know, I think that makes you more confident because you aren't trying to hide who you are.

This kind of experience may suggest that in sexually objectifying environments, as long as you meet appearance requirements, other traits may be more likely to be accepted by others on another level.

Increased outside attention to appearance. Another clear change participants talked about was an increase in attention to looks and time spent getting ready beyond the borders of the sexually objectifying environment. Even others outside the environment noticed these changes, as one participant reported, "Yeah, it's definitely made me a lot more aware of how I look. I think I've definitely been accused of being more concentrated on how I look since I started working there." For many of the women this meant wearing more make-up in all settings, even when they normally would not, taking extra showers, fixing their hair, and wearing "sweats" and comfortable clothing less often. For a number of participants this change seemed unconscious and automatic. One participant described her experience as:

> Yeah, and I used to be one of those girls who would make fun of people for getting dressed up to go to class, but now it's just habit, before I even realize I'm putting on makeup I already have one of my eyes with mascara on them. It's like I don't even think about it a lot of times.

For one participant, spending more time and energy focused on appearance became so ingrained she had difficulty imagining how she had been before changing; it was

unthinkable to not care about superficial attractiveness. She stated, “it’s not that I really didn’t before, but it’s just like I never cared really and it might sound vain or selfish to like, care about how you look, but I don’t know, I just don’t know why you wouldn’t anymore, you know?” Costanzo (1992) pointed out that theories of socialization would predict that prolonged or repeated exposure to the pressure to improve appearance would lead women to believe their efforts were voluntarily chosen, or even natural.

Better health habits. Another change that women discussed was the tendency to take better care of themselves from a health standpoint. One participant described the process, “Well, it’s made me want to take care of myself a little bit better, it’s made me want to go exercise more because I don’t exercise like I should and it’s made me want to eat healthier.” Although engaging in healthy behaviors is clearly a good thing, it is important to note that the increase in exercise and healthy eating described by these participants may be a reflection of the desire to appear more physically attractive to others and achieve ideal standards of thinness. For example, Parson and Betz (2001) found that more body shame is related to increased physical activity, and Avalos and Tylka (2006) found that body acceptance by others was indirectly linked to intuitive eating, which includes choosing healthier foods.

Negative views of men. Many women pointed out that their perception of and interaction with men in general had changed negatively. This ranged from being less naive about men’s intentions, to cautious interactions with men, to downright repulsion. For example, one participant stated “I think I’m less naïve about thinking that guys really do just want to be friends with you, I used to believe that and I would argue with a guy like, “Oh whatever, girls can definitely be friends with guys and it be just friends,” but I

don't really think that anymore." Another participant said, "I don't know, like men, when I'm at work it seems like all the men that comes into work, like they just repulse me."

Research with strippers similarly found increasingly contemptuous and repulsive responses towards men (Barton, 2001). As a result, the women appeared to become more wary and cautious in male-female interpersonal interactions and also experienced a level of aversion as other men likely reminded them of unpleasant interactions in their sexually objectifying work environment. One participant illustrated this:

> Definitely more suspicious of guys, um, definitely kind of put it into perspective because even the guys that don't hit on me, like I'll just talk to guys and they'll be talking about girls or talking about hooks up, you know, just like, you know, like they want to brag their friends to me and I'm just like, wow, I just can't believe guys really do that or like, you know, I don't know, it's just really put it into perspective cause a lot of times you just don't want to believe guys are like that.

A number of the women indicated that they became more selective in dating and looking for partners, both at work by not dating customers, and outside of work in experiencing hesitation with and judgment towards men that they thought would enter into a similar environment.

Reaffirming or reprioritizing personal values. One variant theme, expressed by three of the women, reflected a change related to their personal values. For example, one participant who had already left the environment after only a short amount of time said:

> just made me realize what I want, I mean, what I don't want for sure, um, just the people I want to be around, I just I knew exactly that that wasn't right for me and it made me happy that I realized that's not who I am obviously, but, there's not much good that came out of it.

Another participant, who did not plan on returning to work, also viewed her experience as a personal learning opportunity and came to reject the cultural prescriptions of gender

roles for women saying, “Well, it was an experience and it showed me how I don’t want to be, I guess, I don’t want to be all cheerleader and all-American whatever.” Other women discussed a reprioritizing of personal values in relationships. For example a participant noted that she was more appreciative of her boyfriend, thus indicating what she does and does not want in an intimate relationship.

A number of other, more personally relevant changes were also noted by seven participants (i.e., becoming more demanding of a spouse’s attention, more concerned with a partner having financial stability); however, these more precisely defined changes were not endorsed by a sufficient number of participants to warrant a separate subtheme.

Judgment

All of the women discussed in depth the judgment they feel from others, both inside and outside of their work environment. Frequently judgment came as a result of others’ misperceptions of the women and their assumed behaviors or simply just negative opinions of the women. For example, several women told stories of being mistaken for strippers or prostitutes and many had been solicited for sexual favors or as “dates” for the evening. The women generally discussed being erroneously judged to be sexually loose and had been labeled “slut,” “whore,” and “immoral.” They were also judged to be one-dimensional, nothing beyond their looks, but rather “just big, dumb, stupid girls, [with] big boobs.” One participant described it this way:

> I feel like people, I mean, that’s probably the one thing I hate the most is that customers sometime act like I’m stupid, and I’m not, and that is probably the number one problem with customers that I see because they just judge too quickly I guess.

The women discussed negative judgment and misperception as coming from a variety of sources: close friends, family members, potential dating partners and the public in general. One of the women with a three year old daughter discussed hoping to be able to find another job by the time her daughter reached early elementary school, worrying that her daughter would get the wrong impression of her mother via other children's parents' judgment and gossip. Another participant also talked about concealing her work environment, saying, "I guess in a way I was kind of embarrassed… I've never told them that I work [there], still I don't want to tell outside people that I work there." Other than concealing their work location to circumvent judgment, there were a number of other consequences related to being negatively judged that the women discussed. They also highlighted negative emotions such as embarrassment, awkwardness, and frustration or anger. One woman talked about feeling disappointed:

> But it also made me disappointed because when I talked to tables like that it was like, "Oh hey, I'm a nice person but I also work here and you think nothing of the same things," so it was disappointing in a way….people are always going to have like, no matter what you tell them are going to be like, look at what you're where, at where you are.

CHAPTER IV - DISCUSSION

The results of the present study provide insight into women's involvement and experiences in immersed forms of sexual objectification. Participants' primary reasons for becoming involved in and remaining in the sexually objectifying work environment were financial need or desire and job flexibility. These finding are consistent with research indicating that women earn a lower average wage than men, continue to be clustered in low status, low salary, traditionally sex-typed occupations, face marginalization, restricted career development, and workplace gender discrimination, and shoulder greater responsibility for child care, elder care, family relationships, and household management than men (Fassinger, 2002; O'Neill, 2003). Connected to the need for increased income, participants noted that once part of the sexually objectifying environment, they became aware of the gendered power dynamics within the environment that fostered and reinforced the use of women's bodies and interpersonal skills to gain money, resources, preferential treatment, and personal power and that often put women in uncomfortable and potentially harmful situations via expectations for intimate relationships or sexual favors, discomforting sexual objectification, and sexual harassment. In addition, given that one of the primary motivations behind men's sexually harassing behaviors is the aim of protecting social status (Berdahl, 2007), it becomes imperative that women carefully manage the relationships with male customers. Perhaps this is why all but one woman reported minimizing sexual objectifying experiences as a way to cope.

Women working in sexually objectifying environments must deal with the ambiguous space between the formal rules and regulated interactions of business or organizations and the informal and unofficial directives of gender roles and social relationships. This ambiguity within structure often leaves women feeling confused, uncomfortable, and in potentially dangerous

situations. In the very act of obtaining the aforementioned resources, women must exchange their sexuality and allow (or obligate) themselves to be objectified. Furthermore, in order to maximize those resources, participants must encourage this interaction (i.e., by flirting, amplifying their sexuality, or minimizing their discomfort). Women may be gaining resources, but in order to do so they are losing power. It is likely that women would behave very differently in similar situations occurring in other environments; however, the structured appearance of a sexually objectifying environment (i.e., presence of management, exchange of money for service, formally organized and expected interactions) suggests security and likely makes women ignore the typical signs of discomfort or danger and lead to greater conformity to objectification. Thus, the patriarchal imbalance of resources contributes heavily to sexual objectification (and the creation of sexually objectifying environments) if women must use their bodies as a commodity to exchange for resources. These results highlight the importance of addressing external constraints that limit women's employment choices.

Consistent with the majority of studies indicating psychological consequences and poorer mental health outcomes associated with sexual objectification (see Moradi & Huang, 2008), our study revealed that sexual objectification experiences were linked to a variety of negative emotions, increased self-objectification/body surveillance both within and outside the work environment, and poor interpersonal work relationships. However, in contrast to this research base, our results also indicated a number of perceived benefits. Particularly striking was the finding that many women experienced boosts in confidence. Despite derogatory experiences of sexual objectification, these women were also receiving compliments and approval, which may overshadow feelings of shame. This has also been found by other researchers. For example, Fea and Brannon (2006) found that women who were more self-objectified and were given positive

compliments experienced less negative mood than those receiving neutral compliments, regardless of whether the compliment was in regard to their appearance or character.

Limitations and future research

Although there was considerable diversity in terms of age, time spent in the environment, and socioeconomic status, the majority of women were white, heterosexual females. Different themes may have emerged with a predominately racial/ethnic minority or sexual minority sample. For example, one of the racial/ethnic minority women in the current study indicated that the racism she experienced from some White male customers as a result of not fitting North American culture's appearance standards (i.e., not being White, blonde-haired, and blue-eyed) was more troublesome than her experiences of gender based sexual objectification. In addition, research examining women's experiences in fraternity little sister organizations found that African American women were more likely than White women to use collective rather than individual forms of resistance to sexual objectification (Stombler & Padavic, 1997). Thus, research examining the experiences of homogenous samples of women, such as racial/ethnic minority women and lesbians, is encouraged. Furthermore, the current study considered solely the perceptions of women working in a restaurant environment. Future research might examine women's prolonged experiences in other types of sexually objectifying environments.

It is also likely that participants may have underreported or minimized negative experiences as a result of cognitive dissonance (i.e., the uncomfortable feelings that arise from holding contradictory beliefs or behaviors that lead individuals to change the beliefs or behaviors in order to reduce the discord; Festinger, 1957). Clearly, the negative experiences and emotions that these women reported are contradictory to their participation in the environment. Alternatively, it may be that through the process of creating relationships (illustrated by the

Counterfeit Intimacy theme), the women infer more positive attitudes towards the customers and their experiences. This perspective is consistent with Bem's (1967) self-perception theory, which posits that we develop attitudes by inferring them from our behaviors. Interestingly, the participant who held the most negative attitude toward her experience no longer worked in the sexually objectifying environment.

Finally, this study is limited by the extent that it is based on one researcher's interpretations of one set of women's experiences in one type of sexually objectifying environment. Although I attempted to account for my biases in the context of data analysis, it is possible that my perceptions uniquely influenced aspects of the study, such as the formulation of the interview questions and data interpretation. Thus, it is important that future research replicate and extend my examination of women's experiences in immersed forms of sexual objectification.

Future research might compare women who work in sexually objectifying restaurants with women who work in restaurants that do not meet the criteria for a sexually objectifying environment to see if the two groups differ on self-reported measures of self-objectification, body shame, indices of psychological distress, self-esteem, self-confidence, satisfaction with work, and health habits. Additional research might examine if some women become more comfortable with these SOEs over time, and if so to determine if the increased degree of comfort is due to healthier, more empowered responding or more risky, unaware lack of responding. On one hand, women may employ more active strategies of resistance, such as boundary setting, that keep them out of uncomfortable situations. On the other hand, it may be that women become desensitized, have less awareness, or employ more minimizing strategies to ward off negative emotions.

Clinical Implications

The current research highlights the responsibility of counseling psychologists to take a position of advocacy towards women who have had experiences in sexually objectifying environments. We should be educating women about the intricacies and consequences of spending time in those environments as well as encouraging personal awareness of the behaviors they engage in, emotions they experience, or changes they undergo. For example, psychologists might have women consider the obligation they feel when reaping the rewards (either financial, social, or otherwise) of the environment and engage in a cost-benefit analysis of entering the environment. For women who may choose to remain in that environment, we might increase their awareness of the interpersonal processes at work and validate their feelings and responses to these experiences. For example, helping a client see how her ambivalent feelings are arising from situations that put her in a double bind and how her feelings of anger, disgust, and sadness are natural reactions to being treated in a disrespecting, degrading, and dehumanizing way. Relatedly, a counseling psychologist might help a client see how her experiences of sexual objectification are related to gender and power dynamics and larger socio-cultural factors; thus, connecting the personal with the political.

The current research also indicates the need for women in sexually objectifying environments to find ways to support each other, encourage one another, and work together to decrease negative relationships and help change competition into cooperation. For example, provide opportunities for women to address one another directly rather than through gossip or other indirect aggression. Furthermore, group support and/or professional activity could help educate women about their rights both personally and legally, provide discussion about healthy

strategies of resistance, and offer an advocacy mechanism whereby women could find resources (i.e., feminist therapists, eating disorder clinics).

In conclusion, becoming involved in a sexually objectifying environment typically is a result of financial need or desire, flexibility, and past experiences of sexual objectification. Once women become a part of that space, they typically discuss their experiences in terms of the ambivalence they feel, counterfeit intimacy they create, sexual objectification experienced, resistance strategies they use, dynamics of power, negative relationships with other women, personal changes that evolve over time, and the judgment they feel from others.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about how you decided to work at [name of restaurant].
2. What has your experience been like working here?
3. When you tell people that you work at [name of restaurant], how do they respond?
4. Tell me about your relationships on the job (i.e., with bosses, other waitresses, other workers, male customers, and female customers).
5. What have been the main challenges in your job here? How have you dealt with them?
6. Have you noticed any changes in yourself or your experiences since you began working here?
7. Is there anything else you feel that I didn't ask about that would help me understand your experiences as a [name of restaurant] waitress?

TABLE A- 1 ***Themes, number of cases, and classification of women's experiences in a sexually objectifying environment***

Theme/subtheme	*N* of cases	Classification
1. Reasons for involvement		
Financial Reasons	11	General
Flexibility	6	Typical
Past Experiences	6	Typical
2. Ambivalence		
General ambivalence	9	Typical
Double bind	8	Typical
Self-blame	5	Typical
3. Counterfeit Intimacy		
Dream girl	11	General
Reading customers	7	Typical
4. Sexual Objectification		
Regulated appearance	9	Typical
Male gaze	8	Typical
Extreme forms of sexual objectification	9	Typical
Negative emotions	11	General
5. Resistance Strategies		
Minimizing sexual objectification	10	General
Establishing boundaries	9	Typical
Psychological and physical distance	11	General
6. Power		
Money and resources	8	Typical
Beauty equals power	5	Typical
Authority structure	9	Typical
7. Negative relationships with women		
Competition	9	Typical
Comparisons	10	General
8. Changes over time		
Increased self-objectification	8	Typical
Increased confidence	8	Typical
Increased outside attention to appearance	5	Typical
Better health habits	4	Variant
Negative views of men	5	Typical
Reaffirming or reprioritizing personal values	3	Variant
9. Judgment	11	General

Note. Total sample included 11 participants; General = present in 10 or 11 cases, Typical = present in 5-9 cases; Variant – present in 2-4 cases

VITA

Lauren Bell Moffitt was born and raised in High Point, NC on August 4, 1981. She went to grade school at Johnson Street Elementary and middle school at Griffin Middle School. She graduated from the International Baccalaureate program at High Point Central High School in 2000. From there, she went to Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC and graduated with honors with a B.A. in psychology and Spanish in 2004. Lauren went on to work in neuropsychiatric assessment research at Duke University in Durham, NC. After traveling abroad she went on to enter her doctoral program in Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN in the fall of 2005. Lauren will complete her Ph.D. within this program following a pre-doctoral internship at Emory University in Atlanta, GA, and anticipates graduation in summer 2010.