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The Qualitative Investigation of the Social Construction of Female Sexuality Within a Sexualized Work Environment

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THE QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF
FEMALE SEXUALITY WITHIN A SEXUALIZED WORK ENVIRONMENT

by

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Christi L. Young

THE QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE SEXUALITY IN A SEXUALIZED WORK ENVIRONMENT

Christi L. Young, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2003

This qualitative investigation seeks to identify the sociocultural determinants and psychoemotional ramifications of essentialist gender role socialization on female employees in a sexualized work environment (SWE). Sexualized work environments incorporate work and sexuality and exist on a continuum according to the frequency and intensity of the sexual economic exchange that takes place within them. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten female employees at a comedy club to explore the social construction of female sexuality in such an environment. Subjects commented on the various advantages and disadvantages of working in a SWE as well as on general issues related to gender and self-definitions of sexuality. All of the waitresses reported employing various stereotypically female sexualized actions to increase their monetary rewards. However, they also mentioned other factors, such as, self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and resiliency as affecting and being affected by their employment in a SWE.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General Theoretical Background

In the past centuries, both Christianity and medicine have viewed sex as a basic human drive that needed to be somehow diminished through self-control and environmental purity. There has been a trickling down effect of sexual mores and practices from the middle classes, doctors, social workers, school teachers, and other professionals to the so-called ignorant masses, mainly those consisting of rural populations and various other urbanites. After the WWII, a new kind of sexological thinking predominated sex research based on the premise that: (a) sex was a natural force in opposition to civilization, culture, or society; (b) the all powerful sex drive was deeply embedded in the individual thus it was individual conduct that was paramount to sex research; (c) there are fundamental differences between the sexuality of men and women; (d) sex theorizing ought to revolve around notions of male heterosexuality; (d) the initiative for the scientific study of sexuality constituted an excellent avenue to reduce sexual ignorance and promote human betterment; and (e) the positivistic scientific view of sexual knowledge considered sexual imperatives as trans-cultural and trans-historical (no variations across times or places).

The social constructionist view of human sexuality opposes the positivistic essentialist approach that views sexuality as biological destiny based on internal drives, viewing it instead as socially, culturally, and historically determined; hence, the increased importance on the cultural, interpersonal, and psychoemotional aspects of human

sexuality start to gain importance. For social constructionist sex researchers, human sexual desire is not an inherent biologically or psychologically determined given, but is elicited, organized, and interpreted as a social activity that is produced and consumed in advanced, industrial commodity-oriented societies whereby desiring material goods and services becomes equated to desiring sexual experiences.

In the modern historical era, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the physical aspect of human sexuality as evidenced by our almost incessant obsession with number of sexual partners, sexual frequencies, orgasms, size of sexual organs, as well as erectile duration and hardness. Stakeholders in our sexuality come in many packages, from large-scale social institutions to close friends and relatives; they all seek to influence what we do when we are alone with our sexual partners and who these partners may be. It is indeed erroneous to think of sexuality as a purely natural phenomenon outside the boundaries of society and culture.

Historical, Social, and Cultural Determinants of Masculinity/Male Sexuality

Adopting a social constructionist viewpoint requires considering the construction of masculine and feminine gender from a historical, social, and cultural perspective. Masculinity and femininity come to be defined as entities whose principles are socially constructed by the cultural milieu, communicated by the media, and instilled in social actors through a variety of socialization practices. Social actors, in turn, come to reformulate and custom-tailor the sociocultural masculine and feminine perspectives accordingly depending on their unique interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences (Collier, 1995; Di Leonardo, 1991). Indeed, such historical, social, and cultural masculine perspectives act as powerful overarching determinants or macro-level blueprints that

determine a person's sexual scripting and ultimately help shape the mental, emotional, and interpersonal aspects, or micro-level constituencies, of his or her sexuality (Gagnon & Parker, 1995; Rosen & Leiblum, 1988). Sexual scripting refers to the macro-societal, meso-cultural, and micro-interpersonal processes involved in instilling the individual with the socio-culturally approved and widely accepted sexual norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs popular at a specific historical time. In addition, it refers to the modeling of appropriate sexual behaviors that could be easily and readily emulated by the person.

<div align="center">Private and Public Domains of Gender</div>

The sweeping economic changes brought about by the industrial revolution initially relegated women to the undervalued domestic, private domain and men to the considerably more valued paid occupational, public domain (Coontz, 1992; Lipman-Blumen, 1984). As the economic organization of production shifted from barter exchange (pre-industrial era) to earning wages (industrial era), the privileged bread-winning male role—a cherished ideal for young men to aspire to—evolved through considerable political struggle. In their initial attempts to improve their bargaining power with employers and their leverage over women, male wage-workers colluded with their employers to help create occupational sex segregation. At the same time, women who could afford to stay home preferred to do so in light of the poor working conditions that characterized the public workplace, as well as the considerable difficulty they faced trying to balance home- and child-care needs with those of paid work (Gerson, 1993).

The private-public bifurcation of female and male gender has led to the accordance of sexual and economic privileges to males using heterosexuality as the major vehicle (Burr, 1995; Sprey, 1999). For this reason, restricted, or missionary style

heterosexuality constituted the norm and advocated as the one and only sexual style (Katz, 1995). Such style was elevated to the status of an absolute, divine, and transcendental law of nature at the expense of other sexual practices and orientations (Lancaster, 1995). Therefore, the origin and perpetuation of core societal institutions—such as economic, work, and familial—rests upon the exercise of patriarchy-driven gender-power differentials enacted for the sake of male elitism. Such elitism has as its main focus the unequal distribution of goods and services and, subsequently, the benefiting of the few and under benefiting of the many (Kellner, 1989; Poster, 1989). Under these circumstances, restricted male heterosexual behavior came to provide a viable avenue for the domination, subordination, and oppression of women, their marginalization in the work place, and the construction of sexualized work environments (Zalduondo & Bernard, 1995).

Human Sexuality: Essentialist and Postmodernist Paradigms

Contemporary men and women seem to be ambivalent, confused, and anxious when it comes to thinking about, discussing, or practicing their sexuality in the context of an intimate relationship. They seem to be walking a thin line between essentialism and postmodernism (Harvey, 1989; Zilbergeld, 1992). While essentialism presupposes a clear-cut division of gender roles and identities and advocates the assuming of masculine and feminine identities, in males and females respectively, at an early age as an absolute must, postmodernism stresses the importance of androgyny in gender development (Flax, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Seidman & Wagner, 1992). In fact, postmodernist ideology moves away from differentially calibrating gender and extricates itself from essentialist notions of differentiated and preferred male vs. female ways of being and acting, advocating,

instead, an androgynous way of raising males and females (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; White, 1996a).

At the core of essentialist ideology lays the notion that what is socially created is inextricably linked to the natural order of things and consequently immutable (Klein & Jurich, 1993; Thomas & Wilcox, 1987; White, 1996b). From an essentialist perspective, male-female heterosexual sexual relations are accorded considerable importance and considered as inherently natural, biologically determined, and heavenly ordained; male-female biology is sexual destiny (Filsinger, 1988; Troost & Filsinger, 1993). However, elevating male sexuality to the highest echelons of the social hierarchy at the expense of female sexuality lays the foundations for the generation of a host of misperceptions concerning male-female sexual relations. On the contrary, postmodern social constructionist notions (Harvey, 1989) tend to move away from modernist assumptions of male-female essentialist sexual ideology and advocate for placing male-female sexuality within the historical, social, and cultural complexity and contextual totality of the human sexual experience as it is exemplified in the personal sexual narrative (Di Leonardo, 1991; McLaren, 1993; Weeks, 1995). Evaluating, understanding, and respecting everyone's personological storying (Heron, 1971/1992) of his/her sexual life constitutes the first step in unraveling the mystery, complexity, and contextual totality of his/her sexual experiences (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992).

The social constructionist perspective, as applied to human sexuality, breaks down the gendered construction of sexual behaviors, orientations, and identities into the basic constituent elements found in the ever-present historical, social, and cultural contexts (Di Leonardo, 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

As a theoretical paradigm, it constitutes a more humanistic way of approaching issues related to sexuality and gender in the sense that it considers the sexual actions of specific bodies within the greater historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they occur (Gagnon & Parker, 1995). These forces create particular kinds of environments, such as sexualized work environments (SWEs), which, in turn, socially condition and direct individuals to certain kinds of sexual, ethical, moral, political, and economic actions.

The Essentialist Construction of Gender

The historical, social, and cultural perspective may be viewed as an overarching umbrella encompassing economic, employment, and power issues, such as inequality and alienation, as well as issues relating to gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, race, and social stratification (Gagnon & Parker, 1995; Weeks, 1995). According to essentialist traditional ideologies, the construction of male-female gender requires one's molding into a masculine and feminine role respectively. The essentialist masculine role presupposes autonomy, competition, and aggressiveness while the feminine role gives preference to the expression of the innate human needs for connectedness, intimacy, and self-disclosure; at the same time devaluing feminine traits as weak and inconsequential (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; White, 1993; White, 1996b). Alternatively, postmodern ideologies (Huyssen, 1990; Rosenau, 1992) call for the deconstruction of traditional notions of male-female sexuality and the reconstruction of a balanced androgynous ideology emphasizing the historical, social, and cultural determinants of sexuality and equally cherishing masculine and feminine traits (Cantor, 1988; Connor, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988,1990; Harvey, 1989; Reinisch,

Rosenblum, & Sanders, 1987). The reconstruction process—a major premise of postmodernism and social constructionist—is primarily achieved by re-narrating one's dysfunctional and oppressive lifelong sexual narrative (Kleinman, 1988) that helped keep the person sexually, emotionally, and psychologically suppressed; a chained prisoner of dysfunctional and limiting age-old prescriptions and proscriptions.

In general, functionalist essentialist notions allow for false dichotomies by advocating the distribution of different functions and statuses to different people, such as male vs. female, heterosexual vs. homosexual, adult vs. child, rich vs. poor, black vs. white, national vs. foreign, (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993; Smith, 1996). Under the rubric of functionalist and traditionalist notions of sexuality, sexual relations, just like economic relations, become socially constructed, patterned, and entrenched in the structural pillars of social institutions in such a way that they fuse with society and become indistinguishable from it. This structuring of sexual relations causes the predominant and accepted forms of sexuality (heterosexual male dominance and female submission) to assume the status of absolute truths (White, 1993). According to Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1988, 1990) and Smith (1996), gender structuring tends to exacerbate sexual differences between males and females (alpha bias) and amplifies sexual power imbalances to such an extent that female sexual agency is downplayed and, most of all, unwanted. For this reason, modern sexologists, advocating the functionalist perspective (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993) consider the existence of biological and anatomical differences between males and females as being of paramount importance and ultimately responsible for their different sexual behaviors and experiences (Robinson, 1976). As a result, they have utilized these conceptions to conduct sexual research and theorizing

based on the white male heterosexual experience the standard against which all other sexual experiences are to be judged (Gagnon & Parker, 1995; White, 1993).

Alpha bias characterizes women as having inherently different natures and predispositions based on their so-called essentially different social, psychological, and biological constitution (Hare-Mustin, 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Smith, 1996). Alpha bias falls in accord with the limiting traditionalist and essentialist arguments of gender role ideology. On the contrary, beta bias refers to the tendency or inclination to downplay or overlook male and female differences. Of the two, alpha bias is particularly problematic since it tends to relegate women to the status of secondary human beings, based on their alleged inferior physical and psychological make-up (Baber & Allen, 1992). Over the decades, alpha bias has led to the social construction of SWEs whereby women exchange their physical, psychological, and emotional attributes for monetary rewards and favors.

At the same time, alpha bias places men at a superior economic and occupational status, by virtue of their gender, and views them as possessing naturally superior qualities, especially the ones that lead to success in the workplace, such as independence, autonomy, competition, and aggressiveness (Lipman-Blumen, 1984; Smith, 1996). Alpha bias tends to also predispose men to developing all kinds of socioemotional and psychosexual problems. The polarization of gender differences that is celebrated by such a bias tends to leave men incapable of adequately developing vital personality and character traits, namely connectedness, bondedness, intimacy, and self-disclosure (Sattel, 1992). Such traits could be employed, and may prove invaluable tools, for those men attempting to counteract feelings of existential loneliness, anxiety, depression, and

antisocial behavior; feelings that usually ravage the psychological and emotional tranquillity of most men (Real, 1997).

Although beta bias minimizes gender differences and apparently treats women and men as gender neutral human beings, it, too, is problematic in the sense that some differences between women and men do exist and they do make a difference in everyday life. Eliminating such differences tends to ignore the special needs of women as a less powerful and relatively oppressed group—in terms of covert and overt access to equal opportunities and equal reward for equal or comparative work—living under the premises of an exploitative, capitalistic, patriarchal system. Similarly, abiding by the premises set forth by beta bias tends to obscure the special needs of men for bondedness, connectedness, self-disclosure and, above all, intimacy (Baber & Allen, 1992).

Gender Deconstruction: Postmodern Feminist Ideology

An alternative approach to alpha and beta bias is to eliminate the categorization of male and female altogether (Kipnis, 1988; Lather, 1991). This could be achieved by first deconstructing gender (Derrida, 1976; Scott, 1991). The latter refers to the dismantling of the prevailing gender category with its attendant male and female differences. The purpose of doing this is to unmask the hidden meanings that give rise to the power dynamics of interest embedded in the specific historical, social, and cultural contexts that came to socially construct gender in the first place (Baber & Allen, 1992; Bruner, 1990; Lorber & Farrell, 1991).

Deconstructing gender (Cantor, 1988; Spretnak, 1992) to its bare constituents is consistent with postmodernist gender-role ideology (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Harvey, 1989; Scott, 1990). According to such an ideology, within-gender differences are

considered to be equally valid, if not more so, than between-gender differences, which come to constitute the essentialist binary oppositions between males and females. Even though essentialist gender-role ideology, at its extreme, relegates men to the status of unemotional, inexpressive, competitors and workaholics, a great deal of men are considerably sensitive and quite vulnerable to the emotional trappings of their surrounding social environment (Real, 1997). Most men spend a great deal of their emotional and psychological energy putting up fronts and fervently maintaining acts of strength, bravery, and competitiveness necessitated by their socially constructed and constricted male gender role (Thompson & Pleck, 1995).

From a historical, social, and cultural perspective, the evolution of complex relations between language, meaning, and power gave rise to the constitution of the male sexual experience as dominating and aggressive, which became solidified within predominant masculine contexts (Gagnon & Parker, 1995). Such masculine meaning contexts are exemplified directly through our choice of words in everyday language and, indirectly, through sexual metaphors. As Murphy (2001) contends, sexual metaphors have emerged from power differentials among competing groups, primarily between male and female, as an attempt by the former to use their power to dominate the latter through the construction and maintenance of an institutionalized status quo of hierarchical gender relations. Sexual metaphors and innuendoes are especially powerful in creating and maintaining value meanings and ideologies that extol male attributes, characteristics, and, in general, elevate the masculine role while denigrating the feminine experience (Levant & Pollack, 1995).

The Present Study

Sexuality is an all-encompassing powerful determinant in the lives of men and women; it plays an important role in shaping an individual's development across the life span, in terms of his/her self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. It is an ever-present force that affects interpersonal interactions and relationships at various levels. Sexuality also extends beyond the individual to encompass work, familial, and close relationships such as casual encounters and friendships (Blonna & Levitan, 2000).

Biological sex and gender identity constitute the earliest individual classification and identification systems upon which one's sexual identity is formed (Daniluk, 1998; Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Travis & White 2000). An individual comes to define his or her sexuality based upon his or her location on a continuum of the maleness and femaleness gender scripts. The prevailing sexual scripts come to set up different masculine or feminine standards, which are in turn internalized by the person through various socialization processes. The construction of one's sexual identity involves the individual's attempt to match personal experiences to the dominant sexual scripts (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). However, the development of sexuality is not a natural given (as postulated by essentialism) like biological sex but is continuously constructed and reconstructed through the passage of time in various societies and cultures.

According to social construction theory, sexual identity is in a constant flux influenced by daily experiences and interactions. The social construction of sexuality is molded and modified by the surrounding sociocultural environment through social contact and interactions (Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Gagnon & Parker, 1995). Some women willingly seek out employment in sexualized work settings that incorporate work

and sexuality, mainly because of financial reasons (Loe, 1996). There exists a reciprocal dynamic interaction between the structure of a SWE and an individual's perception of his/her sexuality. This research seeks to provide a better understanding on the sexual imperatives of a SWE, specifically, on how women working in such environments come to conceptualize their sexuality and utilize their sexual selves for personal gain.

Although as an invisible force, sexuality has always played a major role in workplace relationships and interactions (Gutek, 1985; Civil, 1998; Florence 2001). With over fifty percent of all adult women in the work force (Hecker, Pikulinski, & Saunders, 2001), there exists a considerable demand for investigating the impact of women's sexuality on employee and customer relations. As more women enter the workplace, the influence of their sexuality becomes increasingly important especially in positions of relatively low status and power (Gutek, 1985; Florence 2001; Civil 1998). While statistics celebrate women's massive entrance in the workplace and their accomplishments therein, the effect of gender stereotypes becomes more and more evident and inadvertently strains efforts to promote gender equality (Kim, 2000). Unfortunately, as most women are still responsible for most of the homecare and childcare, and face gender discrimination in a traditionally male oriented economy (Kim, 2000), they tend to gravitate towards entry-level positions; that afford greater job flexibility but lower wages and benefits (Florence, 2001). Certain entry-level, low-skill positions provide greater financial gains for their female employees—such as sexualized work environments—within the context of an exploitative female sexuality.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor women tend to hold more service-oriented positions than men (e.g., food service, retail eating and drinking places). Radical

feminists argue that this is the result of patriarchal gender stereotyping that robs women of an equal opportunity to accessing the whole spectrum of the workplace (Jackson & Scott, 1996; Whelean 1995). For example, women are often paid low-wages, which average about $.67 to every dollar earned by men (Kim, 2000; Florence, 2001). These low wages are correlated with education level and marital status, but not with race. Liberal feminists argue that, women working in the service-related industry of waitressing, are paid about 94% of men's wages, rather than the average of 67% (Florence, 2001). Therefore, the need for financial viability and stability often pushes women to accept employment in SWEs and influences their behavior by urging them to make the most of their sexuality to maximize their personal rewards (i.e., bigger tips) (Loe, 1996; Wood, 2000). Thus, different workplaces may be sexualized to varying degrees accordingly depending on the nature of the environment and the female employees' financial needs.

Sexualized work environments are becoming increasingly important in providing viable employment opportunities for women in traditionally entry-level, underpaid, low-skill professions (Gutek, 1985). SWEs are going to continue to grow in numbers as long as society supports the unequal male dominated patriarchal employment structure. Some women today opt for accepting employment in SWEs as an affirmation of their power and their ability to choose and use the work environment to their advantage (Laws & Schwartz, 1996; Wood, 2000). Previous studies have shown that women working in sexualized environments attempt to control the power structure in their environment by utilizing their sexual power (Loe, 1996; Wood, 2000). The basic premise of this study is that sexuality is a core construct in human relations and the understanding of oneself,

and, a SWE framework represents a readily available location to address it (Gutek, 1985; Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Loe, 1996; & Wood, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, female sexuality has been exploited and marketed to the male consumer in sexualized work environments, such as comedy clubs, bars, nightclubs, places of female exotic entertainment, cabarets, and brothels (Louise, 2001). SWEs combine work and sexuality and are categorized by the degree of sexual economic exchange that takes place within them (Gutek, 1985). The non-traditional female positions fall under the far end of the continuum where sexuality is not a determining factor for the female employees' upward mobility. Examples include business or supervisory positions whereby women have similar salaries and benefits as men. Traditional female positions, such as waiting tables or secretarial work, fall closer to the middle of the continuum and tend to focus more on traditional female gender attributes— such as, physical attractiveness, pleasantness, submissiveness, and kindness—as part of the hiring criteria and as a crucial factor for the female employees' financial gain. On the other end of the continuum are SWEs that exclusively capitalize or even exploit female sexuality, such as places of female exotic entertainment, escort service agencies, cabarets, and brothels.

This account explores the various links between the traditional, patriarchal, and oppressive gender milieu with the process of becoming a female employee in a SWE (Aboud, 1987). In particular, it focuses on the daily work and personal interactions of waitresses with male clients and management at Gary's comedy club. In this study, we utilize personal interviews with the female employees at Gary's to unearth the oppressive

gender and sexual narratives that were structured in the prevailing patriarchal social and occupational arrangements, internalized by most of the employees, and acted out in predetermined gendered scripts during their work and casual interactions (Kleinman, 1988). The emerging themes are gender discrimination and sexual oppression due to the widespread entrenchment of patriarchy (Lipman-Blumen, 1984; O'Donovan, 1993; Yllo & Straus, 1990). Finally, various recommendations are given as to how sexual emancipation can be attained through the reconstruction process by re-narrating the female employees' lifelong subjugated sexual scripts. Ultimately, this study addresses the following research question: "How is female sexuality socioculturally constructed and psychoemotionally experienced by female employees in SWEs and what contributes to the internalization of limiting gendered sexual scripts?"

Sexuality is a central factor in educating students and lay people alike about human relations and gender identity development. As such, this investigation can serve to increase public awareness for the special needs of women working in SWEs by providing educators, theorists, and the general public with valuable information concerning their life circumstances and working conditions. By accepting employment in SWEs, the female employees are making a personal statement regarding the use of their sexuality for personal rewards; reaffirming their agency by exerting their personal power or going along with the patriarchal traditions of society.

Nowadays, SWEs are quite common due to the considerable permutations and combinations of the utility and manifestations of female sexuality. Some sexualized behaviors include sexual jokes, comments, whistles, innuendoes, as well as long stares or "accidental" touching and bumping (Gutek, 1985). The misuse of female sexuality can

also be inferred from the use of graphic sexual depictions of posters or pinups in the workplace. Even voluntary disclosures of intimate information can contribute to the sexualization of a work place. In addition, another important characteristic of a SWE includes the extent to which sex becomes the topic of conversation amongst employees as well as the tolerance of male and female employee flirting. The basic premise of a SWE lies in the use of traditional and feminine gender stereotypes emphasizing and differentiating the roles of male and female employees. Although the gendering of work relations and performance (maleness or femaleness) ought not to factor in promotional and hiring criteria, it continues to do so to a greater or lesser extent. The preferential hiring of males over females for key power positions in work hierarchies is a greater reflection of the entrenchment of gender stereotypes in the workplace.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how women working in a sexualized work environment come to personally and socially construct and conceptualize their sexuality as well as how they employ it for personal rewards. The proposed project provides an excellent opportunity for the deconstruction of the sexual, gender, economic, and power differentials and dynamics, which lay hidden under the camouflage of customer and management interactions in SWEs. Beneath the obvious façade of sexual and economic exchange that takes place in such environments are ordinary women and men, actors and sometimes victims of the feminized and masculinized status quo (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995; Philaretou & Allen, 2001; Reinisch, Rosenblum, & Sanders, 1987; Zalduondo & Bernard, 1995).

Ultimately, this research is going to: (a) explore and understand the dynamics of the various sexual-economic exchange processes associated with female employment in a mid-range SWE, such as a comedy club, (b) investigate issues of traditional gender socialization and gender scripting, and (c) identify the impact of a female's employment in a SWE to both their personal and familial lives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender, sexuality, and power are interrelated in the workplace, especially in sexualized work environments. In her in-depth examination of female exotic dancers, Wood (2000) found that society continues to hold negative beliefs and attaches powerless connotations to women who work in places that utilize sexuality as their primary economic tool, such as the adult entertainment industry. However, the adult industry constitutes an extreme example of the variety of female sexual oppression and exploitation that takes place in everyday social interactions. In the service industry— where monetary rewards are directly influenced by the quality of service provided and employee-customer perceptions—the use of female sexuality for personal benefit is more indirect and subtle. At one end of the continuum are service work environments that do not acknowledge or support the overt sexualization of the work setting by their female employees while at the other end, are those that capitalize it. Restaurants and bars fall somewhere in between along such an imaginary continuum of SWEs. In both settings, employees have the option of individually tailoring the utilization of their sexuality to their financial advantage as they see fit and to the extent that they feel comfortable. In this study, I focus on a bar/comedy club, where employees have this option.

Loe (1996) conducted an ethnographic investigation of a restaurant, euphemistically renamed "Bazooms," whereby the waitresses overtly utilized their sexuality to increase their tips. Oftentimes, however, the waitresses expressed considerable discomfort concerning customers who crossed the line by taking advantage of their sexual openness for their own gratification. Furthermore, the author went on to

explain that a typical SWE continuum ranged from sexualized gestures, innuendoes, and comments to improper touching. Even though they rated higher financial reward as the primary reason for their sexualized actions, the waitresses in Loe's study admitted that, most of the times, they enjoyed the attention they elicited from male customers.

Places of female exotic entertainment, cabarets, and brothels involve overt sexualized actions, visual representations, and, overall, the direct manifestation of sexual-economic exchange. They fall at the extreme end of the SWE continuum and their mode of operation revolves around the exchange of sexual favors or sexual entertainment for financial gain. The power relationship between female entertainer and customer is similar to that of a sales relationship. The former has the power to offer the product (her sexuality) for sale and the male customer has the buying power to purchase it. Wood (2000) interviewed 12 female exotic dancers working at two different strip clubs. The dancers reported using similar sexualized strategies as those in Loe's study. For example, in their attempts to elicit positive responses from their male clients and increase their tips, the dancers gave customers considerable attention and made them feel special, desired, and wanted. Dancers also utilized "impression management" techniques (Goffman, 1959) in their attempt to project a favorable sexual persona to male customers and increase demand for their "sexual product." For this reason, dancers and management employed sexy costumes, makeup, body adornment, music, and facial expressions to fortify their sexual personas. Level of self-disclosure and body language were yet other important facets of the sexual interaction between female dancers and male clients (Wood, 2000).

An extensive review of the current literature revealed three major themes related to the proposed study: sexual power, male and female interactions and perceptions, and

sexual harassment. These themes not only evolve as recurring patterns in current literature but also constitute important factors in the social construction of female sexuality (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). For this reason, they have been chosen to be the primary focus of the present study, and, in particular, for constructing the interview questionnaire.

Sexual Power

Sexual power is socially constructed and constitutes a byproduct of sociocultural conditions and expectations. In the workplace, power can be overtly or covertly manifested and comes to affect the interpersonal interactions between female employees and male clientele. Oftentimes, men hold formal positions of power, signified by higher ranks, salaries, and benefits. However, informally, they may also dominate and subjugate women by sexualizing various entry-level female oriented work environments (Gutek, 1985, Jackson & Scott, 2001). Although women have been traditionally viewed and exploited as sexual objects in such environments, they can informally utilize their sexuality to gain power by capitalizing and exploiting their sexual interactions with males.

Perceptions of sexual power constitute yet another factor in the social construction of female sexuality. Kane and Schippers (1996) studied the gender and sexual perceptions of men and women. They surveyed 453 randomly selected adults in the United States asking questions regarding the sexual drives and sexual power of men and women, as well as their perceptions concerning compulsory heterosexuality in general. They found that both males and females reported the other gender as having more sexual power. Wood (2000) conducted an ethnographic investigation in which she

interviewed 12 women employed as dancers in 2 different strip clubs. Overall, she reported that the female dancers employed various techniques that capitalize on their femininity and sexuality in an attempt to gain control of their interactions with men. Impression management strategies included various non-verbal techniques, such as eye contact, facial expressions, and proximity.

The results of these studies suggest that women may resort to utilizing their femininity and sexuality to gain control and power during their interactions with men (Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Wood, 2000). This may be a necessary tool for many women to combat the socially constructed patriarchal views of male superiority and female passivity. Kane and Schippers (1996) noted that the popular perception of women's sexual power may be due to the "hard-to-get" role that many women are socialized to play during the enactment of any sexual act. However, the results of their study pointed to the differing male and female perceptions as to who has greater power in the unfolding and commencement of sexual acts. In particular, female participants labeled men as having more sexual power based predominately on the superiority accorded to them by the traditional masculine ethos. Male physical prowess was reported as making it easier for them to obtain sex. Additionally, female participants viewed societal double standards as common-like in that they typically allowed men to take pride in being sexually free and promiscuous while stigmatizing women for the exact same thing. At the same time though, male participants attributed greater sexual power to women based on the latter's ability to withhold or deny sex (Kane & Schippers, 1996).

Male/Female Interactions and Perceptions

Traditionally, men have been the initiators of dating relationships and sexual activities. An optimistic, friendly, and outgoing demeanor may lead men to misperceive female friendliness as sexual interest (Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, 1990). This is because men have been socialized by their significant others and the mass media to pay considerable attention to women's physical attractiveness and be vigilant for possible signals of their sexual availability (Harnish, Abbey, & DeBono, 1990; Kalof, 1993). The social construction and internalization of such sexual schema often times leads to male sexualized cognitions and actions that further exacerbate the confusion and misinterpretation of female gestures of kindness (Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, 1990). Such misinterpretation may be utilized to her financial gain or as a self-esteem booster. This sexual schema also portrays the differences in male and female perception regarding the stereotypical characteristics of an attractive woman.

Saal, Johnson, and Weber (1989) conducted a set of three studies investigating male and female perceptions of gender interaction. The first study introduced 110 females to 97 males in groups of four to six. After some brief group interaction, the participants completed questionnaires consisting of thirteen questions that were answered with a 1-7 likert-type scale format. The second and third studies had the participants (75 males, 88 females and 98 males, 102 females, respectively) view a video of a males and females interacting in different situations. After watching the videos, the participants were asked to rate the behaviors of the individuals on a 7-point scale in areas including but not limited to descriptions, such as cheerful, friendly, attractive, flirtatious, and seductive. From the participants' responses, the researchers concluded that men tend to

accord more sexual meaning to heterosexual male/female interactions, and as a result, have the tendency to misperceive women's friendly or out-going behavior as promiscuous, seductive, and sexual in nature (Saal, Johnson, & Weber, 1989). Women who portrayed a warm, friendly, and outgoing behavior were often labeled by men as romantically or sexually "interested." However, women were more likely to label other women's behavior as merely friendly because they were more aware of women's general tendency to be socially outgoing and friendly as well as the wide range of social emotions they often display (Kalof, 1993).

Kalof (1993) conducted a study that examined the social construction of sexual imagery. In this study, 80 participants, ages 13-22 viewed the Michael Jackson video "The Way You Make Me Feel". After viewing the video, the participants were asked three open-ended questions regarding the images portrayed by the male and female actors, how they would characterize their maleness and femaleness, and whether they found any situations in the video resembling their personal lives. In this video, Michael Jackson is portrayed as being infatuated with a physically attractive woman and pursues her relentlessly. He continues to do so, until she finally succumbs to his pursuit but only when she is in a dangerous situation. The researcher chose this video because it conforms to the status quo patriarchal gender arrangements whereby female sexual attractiveness is being utilized to elicit the attention of men; while men are often portrayed as the sexual pursuers/pushers, women resort to the passive role of physical, sexual, and emotional distancing (the role of hard to get). In addition, Kalof (1993) noted that after men and women viewed the video, the latter were more likely to describe the single, attractive female as powerful, in control, and independent. These descriptions were largely based

on the actress's physical attractiveness and sensuality. As the author points out, there is also a tendency for females to associate feminine physical attractiveness with power and control. Typical descriptions given by the female participants of the female actress portrayed in the video included: "attractive, in control, excited, and playful, provocative, energetic, streetwise, and independent, and sought after, needed, untouchable, and beautiful" (1993, p. 644). On the other hand, males tended to characterize the female actress in the video as "teasing and hard to get or indecisive and submissive" focusing on the end result as opposed to the full account (Kalof, 1993, p. 644).

With the differences in male and female perceptions acknowledged and explored, one can proceed further to consider the viability of women utilizing sexuality in their interactions with male customers. Considering most men tend to read more sexually into women's friendly or outgoing behavior, it is reasonable to assume that waitresses could capitalize on such perceptions for their financial benefit. Since waitresses are financially rewarded for good customer service, they tend to emphasize pleasantries and an overall friendly/outgoing demeanor (Lerum, 2000). However, as previously mentioned, the misperception and misreading of actual intent often leads to a lucrative financial situation for many female employees as well as undesired attention or harassment. Examining the typical female waitress/male customer interaction, one typically finds an attractive and pleasant waitress casually interacting with a customer, who may, in turn, misperceive her friendliness as a display of personal interest towards him and take social/sexual liberties with her. Overall, both the male clients and the female employees of a sexualized work environment may attempt to maximize their monetary appeal and physical attractiveness,

respectively, in the context of an exchange-based environment (Gutek, 1985). This can prove a significant factor in the construction of their sexuality.

Both men and women objectify each other based on established societal gender and sexual role expectations (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). Flirting is a typical objectifying behavior designed to show possible sexual interest in another, while also gauging any reciprocated interest originating from the other (Yelvington, 1996). Flirting is also a method of attracting attention. Men typically flirt in a confrontational verbal style, while women tend to employ sexy looks and suggestive body language (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). Moreover, flirting toys with sexual attraction and is utilized as a tool for negotiating power within male/female interactions (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). Even though most women are aware when they are being flirted with, they may not correctly ascertain its actual intentions (Yelvington, 1996). Thus, the act of flirting, in conjunction with the frequent disparities between male and female gender and sexual perceptions, can lead to either positive or negative consequences. While it can boost the female's sexual self-esteem, it may also lead to the internalization of negative feelings concerning her sexual/self worth.

Sexual Harassment

Pro-sex feminists argue that women should be allowed the freedom of sexual expression in the workplace, while radical feminists state that heterosexual sexual expression is oppressive and offensive to women since most workplaces are controlled by men who are all too eager to utilize their power, income, and status to gain sexual favors from women (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999).

In order to be classified as sexual harassment, an interaction must cause an individual to lose an opportunity or benefit because of his/her sex and gender. The issue of consent is not as important as the question whether the sexual behavior resulted in discriminating practices based on the individual's gender (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). Waitresses come in contact with and serve customers as a major job requirement. For this reason, they tend to have a higher tolerance of otherwise objectionable sexual behaviors, such as leering, touching, and sexual comments, as they may feel it is part of their job and they may be less likely to voice a complaint (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). In various studies, Williams, Guiffre, and Dellinger (1999) noted that sexual interactions at work are neither completely fulfilling and liberating nor harassing and harmful. Most employees rank a range of sexual interactions on a continuum from pleasurable, to tolerable, to harassing. These interactions can vary from flirting, to consuming pornography, to sexual intercourse. Williams, Guiffre, and Dellinger (1999) listed several variables as affecting how one perceives sexual interactions (whether harassing or not), such as race, class, and sexual orientation. However, the researchers found that regardless of the presence of any intervening variables, sexual innuendos, flirting, jokes, or compliments tend to negatively affect how a woman views herself.

Feminism: Radical vs. Liberal

Feminism's main objective revolves around women's liberation from male oppression and gender equality. The feminist movement has been fueled by the women's rights movement and liberation and arose in Europe in the late 18th century. Ever since, its thrust has spread to varying degrees throughout the world. The feminist movement has

brought about considerable legal, political, economic, and social gains although there is still much to be done to demolish the gender barrier and bring about gender equity. Of top priority in the feminist agenda is women's suffrage, equal opportunities in education and employment, property and inheritance rights, and sexual emancipation/liberation. Feminists not only seek political and economic freedom, but biological and emotional emancipation as well. Feminism and feminist theory is divided into many paradigms or schools of thought sharing numerous similarities but differences as well. Similarities amongst feminist viewpoints include seeking to protect, emancipate, and provide equal opportunities to women, and differences have to do with the processual part of bringing about gender/sexual emancipation and liberation (Stacey, 1993). Feminist theory can be viewed on a continuum with many diverse levels of thought. As such, few feminists identify with either far end of the continuum. Instead most feminists identify somewhere within the continuum adopting various aspects of the different schools of thought.

There exist three classic feminist positions mainly those of radical feminism, Marxist feminism and liberal feminism. Radical feminism focuses on male violence against women and men's control of women's sexuality and reproduction. It tends to view men as a group responsible for women's oppression. In contrast, Marxist feminism ties women's oppression to various forms of capitalist labor exploitation. Thus, women's paid and unpaid work is analyzed in relation to its function within the capitalist economy. Finally liberal feminism pays increased attention to individual rights and choices, which have been traditionally denied to women by the patriarchal masculine ethos. Liberal feminism seeks ways to utilize existing legal and educational practices and reformations to rectify gender injustices.

Many feminists are dissatisfied with the broad and rigid categorization of feminism, which excludes much of the nuances of feminist thinking and limits feminist thinkers and writers in their work, disregarding the plethora of complexities and contradictions concerning this categorization. Such rigid classification can also lead to unnecessary and misleading stereotyping concerning many feminist ideas and ideals. However, the difficulty with attempting to break down feminism into different classifications is that even within the same feminist ideological school of thought or paradigm, women tend to make their own subjective interpretations of the feminist objectives they support, oppose, or are indifferent to. Such subjectivity is due to the different historical, social, and cultural factors that come to affect the lives of women.

The existence of various feminist ideologies provides a clearer understanding of the diversity of the holistic concept of feminism. Sexuality plays an important determinant in differentiating the feminist ideologies and it is utilized to provide different understandings of women's oppression. Most feminists would argue that men's power over women, both socially and economically, also affects heterosexual relationships in that women tend to have less control in sexual encounters and in the unfolding of the sexual act compared to their male partners. While radical feminists feel sexuality is at the heart of women's oppression and constitutes the primary means for men to dominate women in society, other feminist ideologies do not necessarily view sexuality as fundamental to the oppression of women. For example, Marxist feminists de-emphasize sexuality and put more emphasis on areas such as economic inequality, exploitation, and the allocation of domestic labor as sources of women's oppression. Radical feminists, however, capitalize on heterosexual relations as the major source of women's oppression,

which is viewed as perpetrated by sexual oppression brought about by the negative influence of women's sexualized clothing, cognitions, demeanors, and actions. In this way, radical feminists argue, sexual oppression comes to negatively affect the status of women in their relationships with men and other women as well. For example, women's sexuality devalues their status in the workplace by being used as the major determinant of job placement and promotion as well as by constituting the primary reason for sexual harassment and violence.

Historically, feminists have suggested that the female body had been used as a tool for male domination and pleasure. Radical feminists view women as victims of male sexual lust legitimized through socially coercive means to comply with the standards of a male dominated society (Mantilla, 1997). Such feminist views are congruent with women's struggle against patriarchal control and are considered to be radical. Radical feminism emerged in the 1970's and historically views women as an oppressed class seeking empowerment from patriarchal society. Radical feminists hold that at the core of male-domination is men's incessant desire to use and exploit the female body for the sheer acquirement of power and for financial gain. The unfolding of heterosexual intercourse, from the beginning to its end and what goes on in between, requires a woman to constantly submit to a man's sexual advances. For this reason, radical feminists view sex as a personal tool that could be utilized by women to either reinforce or destabilize male power (Mantilla, 1997). Thus, according to this viewpoint, women who abstain from having sex with their husbands or boyfriends are theoretically empowering themselves. The ultimate goal of radical feminist ideology is the creation of women's consciousness as an underclass and their eventual revolution from the oppression of men.

Although radial feminists suggest that the female body had been incessantly exploited for male domination and pleasure, liberal (pro-sex) feminists attempt to reverse the patriarchal male power imperatives by empowering women to take control of their own sexuality and receive sexual pleasure when, if, and with whom they choose (Loe, 1999). While radical and liberal feminist ideologies share similar goals in regard to the importance of female empowerment, they differ in the actual carrying out and processual dynamics of such empowerment. Radical feminist theory celebrates the sexual empowerment of women as a way to prevent the commercialization and objectification of their sexuality and the detrimental personal consequences of such (Loe, 1999). Liberal feminism, however, supports a woman's desire to utilize and enjoy her sexuality for personal advancement and pleasure. Moreover, it fervently supports the principle that: "a woman's body, a woman's right" and that any decision a woman makes regarding her own body must be legally protected and respected.

Extrapolating the principles of liberal feminist theory to female employment in SWEs leads us to conclude that a woman's voluntary decision to work in such an environment, and utilize her sexuality for financial gain, should be accepted and respected. However, positive and negative consequences may arise, which may have both micro social psychological (in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal development) and macro social constructionist ramifications (in terms of sociocultural perceptions of female sexuality in general).

For the present study, I have chosen to focus on radical and liberal (pro-sex) feminist ideologies as they pertain to female agency and individual choice regarding traditional employment views of patriarchy and masculinity. This decision has been

largely based on my initial conceptualizations and insider knowledge of sexualized work environments. In my investigation, I will be discussing both the radical and liberal (pro-sex) feminist viewpoints in regard to the social construction of sexuality. While radical feminists argue that women's sexual power is constrained by men, and inadvertently seek freedom of women from discrimination, liberal feminists hold that women should be able to enjoy sexual freedom. Liberal feminism was inspired by the sexual revolution and the premise set forth by women's sexual liberation (Loe, 1999).

Views of Sexuality

To better understand the differences between radical and liberal feminist ideology, it is necessary to examine the views each holds about sexuality. While both ideologies view sexuality as a socially constructed phenomenon, they differ in their perceptions of the etiology and consequences of the socially accepted and expected heterosexual actions. Radical feminists hold that the act of heterosexual intercourse is merely an extension of male dominating practices. For men, they argue, sex is desperately sought after as something to "have," while women are objectified as what is to be "had." Women's sexuality tends to be viewed as a sexual commodity to be exchanged in the everyday field of social actions. Radical feminists even go on to say that through marriage, a woman is essentially selling herself, prostituting herself, as it were, by exchanging her sexuality for emotional and financial support (Mantilla, 1997). Radical feminists also extend the definition of sexuality beyond the physical act of intercourse. They purport that sexuality is more than just anatomy and biology, arguing instead, that it is also a socially constructed phenomenon negotiated by dominant individuals and groups

(men) as a result of their superior position in the social hierarchy (Travis & White, 2000; Jackson & Scott, 1996; Daniluk, 1998). Overall, radical feminists hold that sexuality, as a socially constructed phenomenon, relegates men to the dominant and active sexual role, while placing women in the subordinate and passive role (Mantilla, 1997). This differential and preferential treatment of men and sexual objectification of women creates and supports a power imbalance. Radical feminists also hold the premise that physical attractiveness is a key factor in the definition of female sexuality and that the definitions of beauty are socially constructed to be very narrow, unrealistic, demanding, and competitive; with thinness, big chest, and an athletic figure constituting to what comes to be defined as the acceptable beauty standard (Travis & White, 2000). In this way, female beauty and sexuality become the primary mechanisms by which individual men and the patriarchal system in general gain and maintain control over women. Thus, radical feminists' quest for the origins of the social construction of female sexuality leads them to men's incessant preoccupation for a physically attractive and sexy female body.

Although liberal feminists agree that female sexuality is socially constructed and deeply entrenched in the social structure, they also believe that it can be deconstructed and reconstructed to a more empowering variety for women. Their ultimate aim is to deconstruct the andocentric view of heterosexual intercourse and move away from the oppressive dichotomy of male domination and female subordination, which radical feminists come to view as ever present and unchanging. Libertarians also hold that sexual choices are strictly individually-based and that only the individual has the final say in deciding whether to initiate a particular sexual action (Mantilla, 1997). Liberal feminists embrace ideas like women owning their sexuality and deciding how, when, where, and

with whom to engage in sexual activities (Sutler-Cohen, 1999). Thus, the liberal feminist perspective gives women permission to engage in sexual activities that are solely based on their personal liking.

The liberal feminist viewpoint is often seen as pro-sex or the positive, pro-sex view of feminism. The pro-sex movement originated from sex-workers entering the political debates and seeking individual rights. Its founders supported the notion that women working in SWEs are empowered as they personally struggle with definitions of eroticism and express their creativity in their work environment (Mantilla, 1997). The pro-sex movement supports women's rights in the everyday sexual arena including, but not limited to, the right to initiate and refuse sex, the right to use birth control, as well as women's right to choose their sexual orientation (Mantilla, 1997). Pro-sex feminism is characterized by the belief that sex is a positive human capacity that allows for connection and intimacy and that sexual expression is the window to personal and relational satisfaction (Scharch, 1991). Pro-sex feminism is becoming associated with a "tough bad ass feminism," (p. 13) in which ideas such as "girl-power" are emphasized (Ruttenberg, 1998). In general, the pro-sex view equates sexual power to feminine power. For example, in sex-work environments, such as brothels, strip clubs, and cabarets, men exchange money for sexual favors, which according to pro-sex feminist ideology constitutes an act of self-determination and agency.

View of Employment Opportunities

Both radical and liberal feminists acknowledge the limited opportunities available to women in the everyday workforce. Such limited opportunities have directly or indirectly led women to accept employment in SWEs. While radical feminists view

working in SWEs as a product of social coercion, liberal feminists consider it as a conscious choice and not as something women were forced into by the greater patriarchal system. In addition, radical and liberal feminists offer different conceptualizations concerning the etiology and dynamics of sex-work and sexuality. While the former sees women as being constantly degraded as sexual objects, the latter views them as powerful and agentic sexual beings. Radical feminists also hold that any occupation whereby women must depend on men for economic support should be regarded as a form of prostitution. Viewing female work in sexual-economic exchange environments as a form of prostitution tends to victimize women by rendering them in dire need of rescuing and rehabilitating, a goal of utmost importance to the radical feminist (Mantilla, 1997). Overall, for the radical feminists, women working in SWEs become victimized, objectified, and abused as a result of their being lured, or even forced, into an exploitative environment.

Liberal feminists see women entering SWEs as making a personal choice to go against the patriarchal sexual status quo. They consider SWEs as an excellent opportunity for women to obtain financially lucrative and flexible employment in an otherwise low wage female segregated job market. For example, Lemire (1998) describes Playboy Clubs as establishments of ultimate male and female sexual fantasy. These clubs present a glamorous, fun, well-paid job opportunity for women with minimal training and no career commitment in mind. Similarly, the 'bunnies' are formally protected by the "look but don't touch" policy and by the "no dating the customers" rule (Lemire, 1998). SWEs, are typically dominated by a female workforce which holds more informal power and earns higher incomes than its male counterpart (Lemire, 2000.) In addition, SWEs

provide for a flexible work schedule allowing their female employees to attend to both their educational and child care endeavors effectively and efficiently. SWEs also allow for the exercise of personal agency, a privilege not readily available in other work environments and protect their employees from potentially negative situations involving customers.

Social Construction and Pro-Sex Feminism

According to social construction theory, individuals come to develop their attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and interactions from the aggregate of their socialization experiences in a historical, social, and cultural milieu (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). Social constructionism, loosely defined, refers to any social influence on an individual's experience (De Lamater & Hyde, 1998). Using the social constructionism perspective, we can make inferences about the individual meanings—of the permutations and combinations of the sociocultural background surrounding the person—that are ultimately manifested in his/her storying of his/her socially constructed experiences. Sexuality, then, results from the accumulation of socially constructed sexual interactions and experiences that give rise to master personal sexual statuses (Arthur, 1998; Dunn, 1998). In examining the developmental aspect of female sexuality, Laws & Schwartz (1977) emphasized the various physical developmental stages as well as the social-cultural expectations regarding gender roles and gender identity. Their work proved invaluable to others who sought to better understand the social construction of female sexuality.

As this study seeks to examine the social construction of female sexuality, verbal/non-verbal communication practices and behavioral actions are to be utilized to

provide a better understanding in the development and formation of female sexual identity. Laws & Schwartz (1977) and Dunn (1998) both emphasize women's agency regarding the creation of their sexual perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, which ultimately come to construct their sexual identities. Sexual identity is also affected by many outside forces, such as socializing practices, media, and peer group influences. Therefore, when looking at the social construction of sexuality, both macro and micro factors need to be considered.

In general, the issue of human sexuality is fraught with ambivalence, contradictions, and controversy as health educators and political leaders struggle to advocate for safe sexual practices and abstinence amidst media bombardments of provocative sexual imagery. From billboards to magazines to pin-up calendars and other soft-core pornography, the prevailing sexualized theme elevates the importance of a sexualized feminine persona—exemplified through scant clothing, longing looks, and various other sexual depictions and innuendoes—to the highest echelons of a woman's hierarchy. Outside social-cultural forces and conditions become vital to an individual's definition of the situation, which ultimately come to influence his/her sexual behavior and identity (Dunn, 1998).

As postulated by social constructionists, sexuality is an ever-changing social-cultural force and can be conceptualized as the culmination of myriad interactions between males and females negotiating for power in the everyday competitive arena of social exchange. Traditional feminist views of heterosexuality view it as a result of female submission to a male dominated patriarchal social-cultural system; an authoritarian, compulsory, and exploitative system (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, &

Thomson, 1994; Kalof, 1993; Thorne, Warner, Geller & Friedan, 1994). In particular, radical feminists view heterosexuality as a male dominated state as women tend to play out submissive roles during the enactment of sexual acts. Radical feminist theory concludes that if a heterosexual woman consents to sexual intercourse, she is in essence submitting to the desires of a male dominated society. Pro-sex feminists, however, take an opposing stance by emphasizing women's role as gatekeepers in the initiation of sexual intercourse; women are afforded considerable sexual power by being able to allow or decline men's sexual advances (Kalof, 1993; Kane & Schippers, 1996).

Pro-sex feminist ideology purports that women ought to be free to express and enjoy their sexuality, including heterosexual contact, when, where, and with whom they please (Loe, 1999). For this reason, pro-sex feminists urge women to explore and enjoy the whole spectrum of their femininity, sexuality, and sensuality and find ways to enhance it. As Laws & Schwartz (1977) point out, women come to develop their sexual identity by internalizing the images that are reflected back to them from both their significant others and the surrounding social-cultural environment. This constitutes a life-long developmental process whereby women continue to compare their self-defined female sexual identity with internalized experiences and interactions. Women make everyday conscious choices whether to conform or deviate from the social-cultural sexual scripts and gender expectations. Therefore, both macro environmental and micro developmental sequences lead to the development of widely accepted sexual scripts, which, together with a woman's biological constitution, give rise to the totality of her personal sexual experiences. However, gender roles and sexual identity are not static and

unchanged entities but are significantly affected by changing social-cultural contexts and the passage of time.

In today's social-cultural context, female sexuality is almost solely measured in terms of femininity or the femaleness of a woman (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). An example of the real-life application of femininity is the utilization of female paraphernalia, such as make-up, clothing, and personal adornments to accentuate female attractiveness. Femininity is also constructed contextually through the social organization of interactions among women and between men and women (Arthur, 1998). It is through the additive effect of such everyday social interactions that an individual's sense of self and sexual identity emerges. Outside social forces, customs, and practices come to play a pivotal role in shaping femininity and lead to negotiated social actions, which are in turn internalized by the individual (Arthur, 1998). At the same time though, men and women construct different personal meanings even when subjected to similar social-cultural images (Kalof, 1993). However, most individuals view sexuality as a product of their immediate social-cultural environment whereby certain behaviors and relationships are deemed as sexual at the exclusion of others (De Lamater & Hyde, 1998). Unique to women is the conceptualization of their sexuality as a commodity, which can be negotiated, bought, sold and used in the everyday arenas of social exchange regulated by male power and privilege (Kalof, 1993). Loe (1996) conducted a qualitative investigation of the dynamics of power, gender and sexuality in a restaurant euphemistically named "Bazooms," in which she reported the relationship between the sexualized culture and the gender power dynamics involved. In her study, she went on to explain how the sexualized culture of the restaurant came to negatively affect the female employees and concluded that the

customers consistently viewed the female employees as manipulated by the power of male management.

Cultural values, rules, norms, attitudes, and beliefs are continually developed, maintained and altered throughout human civilization to form what we know as dominant sexual/gender roles. Dominant gender role socialization requires that young men become dominant, goal-oriented and aggressive, while girls are socialized to be submissive, emotionally expressive, and to put the needs of their husbands, boyfriends, and families before their own (Philaretou & Allen, 2001). Female employees in SWEs find themselves in the midst of conflicting essentialist/postmodernist perceptions of sexuality (Dunn, 1998). Upon close examination of a sexualized work environment, a multitude of societal and cultural sexual/gender role expectations surface. Ultimately, what emerges is the constant struggle between the female employees and the surrounding andocentric environment of patrons and management. The female employees are caught in the battle between traditional androcentric views of sexuality—supporting a virgin/whore labeling dichotomy stigmatizing women on either end of the continuum—and pro-sex feminist revolutionary perspectives.

The proposed study constitutes an exploratory, ethnographic investigation on how female workers come to construct, co-construct, and reconstruct their sexual perceptions and how they come to perceive the surrounding SWE as affecting their sexuality. The social constructionist and pro-sex feminist perspectives are to be used to examine how a female employee's sexuality is socially constructed and privately experienced within a SWE. Ethnography constitutes an important social research technique, within the social constructionist framework, that relies heavily on in-depth and participant observation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods raise two general issues of concern regarding validity: reactivity and researcher bias (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The amount of reactivity or effect of research on the environment or individuals is related to the level of intrusion the researcher creates. Reactivity may also lead to socially desirable responding, in which respondents provide answers that are socially desirable or culturally expected (Meston, Heiman, & Trapnell, 1998). In this study, participant observation was utilized, thus allowing the researcher to assume the least intrusive position in the working environment under investigation. A single researcher, who is involved in participant observation, tends to be less intrusive than a team of researchers and assimilating with the participants ensured little, if any, disruption in their personal and work lives. This is especially important when conducting sexuality research due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. For this reason, researchers need to be especially aware of the various biases in the reporting of certain sexual variables (Meston, Heiman, & Trapnell, 1998). Additionally, the issue of researcher bias can influence or limit the findings of the investigation. As a co-worker and peer of the women interviewed, relationships formed and experience within the environment could affect how the reports are analyzed or interpreted.

The Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography provides ample opportunities to explore the process of social construction (Caceres & Cortinas, 1996). Ethnographically exploring the social settings in which sexualized behaviors occur helps provide an in-depth understanding of the

cultural context of sexuality (Caceres & Cortina, 1996). In ethnography, the researcher enters the field with a research question but with as few apriori impositions as possible. In essence, the researcher is letting himself/herself be guided by the data. This technique requires the researcher to continually develop and analyze field notes and descriptions—to mature through his/her data—thereby gradually developing a logical and systematic approach to decipher data.

While social construction theory considers environmental circumstances as the most important factors in the construction of personal identity, ethnography provides the means to interpret such factors. Although limited, interviewing help strengthen ethnographic studies by cross-referencing the researcher's interpretations of the environment with actual data from actors in the field. Successful interviewing requires the painstaking development of rapport and trust, especially when discussing sensitive issues such as sexuality. Participant-observation also allows the researcher to develop enough rapport with some of the participants so as to be able to gain their trust for further interviewing. As typical with ethnographic research, complete objectivity is impossible. However, ethnography allows the researcher considerable maneuverability in methodological choices, thereby increasing objectivity. In her dissertation, Lerum (2000) suggests that researchers should employ multiple methods to interpret data. Therefore, in this study, I have attempted to increase objectivity by utilizing a variety of methods, such as participant observation, interviews, and engaging in casual interactions/discussions with some of the participants.

Ethnographic studies entail long-term immersion into a given culture or situation with purposive observations of the actors in their natural environment. Researchers

conduct ethnographies when there is little known information about a given phenomenon or to see how a social organization defines itself through researcher involvement in the natural setting of activity (Adler & Clark, 1999). Becoming involved in the setting allows a researcher to gain sympathetic understanding and develop a similar perspective of the situation as the subjects under study. This qualitative investigation utilizes participant-observation as a way to allow me, the primary researcher, to derive valuable knowledge of the personal and professional lives of the participants by becoming a well-known and accepted peer in their work environment.

The Present Ethnography

As is commonly the case with most ethnographic studies, like the present one, it is difficult to narrow down the focus of the study, as many themes and by-themes emerge from the general topic. Therefore, my ultimate goal is to develop a detailed account of all the factors that come to influence the development of female sexual identity in a SWE. According to social construction theory, the environment is essential to understanding human behavior (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). Participant observation techniques, which allow a researcher to experience the situation from the participants' point of view, constitute invaluable tools for the generation of social knowledge. In reviewing various ethnographic sexuality studies, I have come across several that are especially applicable to the current investigation. Such studies include Wood's (2000) ethnography of the social construction of power in strip clubs, Berkowitz's and Padavic's (1999) ethnographic comparison of white and black sorority women's perceptions regarding "getting a man or getting ahead," and Caceres' and Cotinas' (1996) ethnographic account of gender roles in a Latino gay bar. Ethnographies are often conducted when not

sufficient knowledge and considerable stigma exist concerning a social specific phenomenon within a culture/subculture (Kinson, 1996).

Some recent ethnographic studies have focused on stigmatized populations that fall prey to negative societal perceptions and judgments, such as sorority members, gay men, and exotic dancers (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1999; Caceres & Cortinas, 1996; Wood, 2000). Wood's (2000) ethnographic design included 110 hours of participant observation in two strip clubs. In addition to observing the behavior of the dancers, she also employed open-ended interviews with 12 dancers. The participant observation techniques she employed included, mimicking the behavior of customers, as well as interacting, conversing with, and tipping the dancers. Caceres' and Cortinas' (1996) ethnographic methodology employed participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the review of historical data. The participant-observation part consisted of the researchers visiting the bar, on a weekly basis, and conversing with patrons and employees. The in-depth interviews were conducted with four key informants who provided valuable information regarding the history of the bar, its clientele, and the role of the consumption of alcohol in its premises. The bar owners provided the researchers with information regarding the bar's history. Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) examined sorority members at two Southeast state universities utilizing ethnographic methods. The researchers conducted 26 open-ended interviews with equal numbers of white and black sorority sisters regarding reasons for joining the sorority, social and academic activities, and career goals in relation to sorority membership.

Ethnography allows the development of insider perspective after prolonged and meaningful contact with the research population. An ethnographer not only makes

important observations of his or her research population, but also experiences it through his/her extensive personal contact (Lerum, 2000). Such experiencing of the research population can prove invaluable as it often leads the researcher to arrive at important assumptions and truths that could not have otherwise been inferred. In the present study, I chose to focus on female waitresses, a population that is often labeled as powerless due to the gender-stereotyped nature of their job (Gutek, 1985). After carefully reviewing the current literature, various explanations emerged concerning the participants' motives for working in SWEs. I consider the ethnographic method well suited to provide in-depth understanding as to the etiology of the waitresses' exploitation as well as to what degree they are influenced by the SWE.

In designing this study, I have attempted to develop a detailed account of the various factors that come to influence the development of female sexuality and identity in a SWE; a comedy club called "Gary's." Since ethnographic studies trade generalizability for detail (Lerum, 2000), I have attempted to gain a more in-depth and detailed understanding of how sexuality is socially constructed and privately experienced by the female employees of Gary's comedy club, by being an active participant observer. My previous work experience and interactions in the field of waitressing, helped provide invaluable knowledge, ground assumptions, and strengthen validity/reliability, all of which would have failed to have significantly contributed had a more mainstream research method been employed. In addition, my rationale for the chosen methodology includes cost, relevance, convenience, and efficacy of rapport building.

Researcher's Background/Self as Instrument

I believe that my extensive personal background in the field of waitressing renders me well-suited for investigating this topic. I completed my undergraduate degree in psychology and organizational communication at Western Michigan University, in 1997. Thus, my interests lie primarily in behavioral psychology and organizational structure of work settings. My specific interest in human sexuality issues stems from several roles that I have held in the past, such as Sexual Health Peer Educator, Human Sexuality instructor, and Family Life Educator. In addition, my previous work experience has significantly influenced my choice of topic. As a college student, I held jobs that met my needs for a flexible schedule, few hours, and good pay. Such jobs often fell into the general category of a SWE, much like the one investigated in the present study.

I personally find the ethnographic approach very useful, as it is compatible with my personal theoretical interests as well as with my general beliefs and methodologies. Ethnography allows a researcher to see and participate first hand in what the participants do in the setting, as opposed to making detached and impersonal judgments based on answers to an impersonal instrument. In addition to ethnographic observations, unstructured interviews tend to allow each participant to defend or refute any unfounded interpretations based on the researcher's observations and preconceived notions.

Unique to ethnography is the use of self as an instrument to collect data. Being immersed in a culture or a given situation allows the researcher to experience the situation as the participants do, thus being able to access information sources that could have not otherwise been collected. However, using the self as instrument should be sensitive to such issues as: his/her background, personal biases, selective observations,

and interpretations. Ethical considerations also require researchers to make their ideological/theoretical positions clear to self, readers, and subjects.

Data Collection

Qualitative ethnographic research usually relies on participant observation and in-depth interviews to collect, analyze, and interpret data. Participant observation entails the systematic description of events, behaviors, and interactions in the research setting. Marshall and Rossman (1989) state that data collection through observational techniques requires researchers to classify their involvement level, "revealedness," intensiveness, and overall focus of the study along various continua. Throughout this study, my main goal has been to build strong relationships with the participants while collecting diverse information from them through observations prior to interviewing.

Data for this study has been primarily collected through semi-structured interviews, which have been completed after an initial three-month period of intense observations of the SWE under investigation (Gary's comedy club). During this period, the participants were asked questions informally and additional observational data was obtained through my capacity as a waitress. Supplemental observational data was collected two to three times a week during my shifts, each of which lasted approximately 4 to 8 hours. After each shift, I proceeded with recording both my casual observations and my purposive ones. The latter observations targeted interactions with both clientele and management and looked for signs of distress, gossip, or complaints about the SWE. I have tried not to exclude any relevant observations as any environmental factor could contribute to the social construction of sexuality. It was also deemed imperative not to let

personal misconceptions exclude relevant observations as this would have limited the results of the study by eliminating pertinent information. All of my observations were manually recorded by taking notes immediately following the end of each shift. Employee demographic information was also gathered. The remainder of the personal interviews was open-ended, which allowed the participants to freely express their opinions on any issues they deemed pertinent.

Sampling

The staff at "Gary's" consists of a male general manager/owner, one male manager, 4-5 doormen/"bouncers", 4 male cooks, 3 male bartenders, and 13 female servers. The personnel hierarchy of this establishment closely resembles the prevailing patriarchal gender role hierarchy. For example, most of the male employees are relegated to roles of power and supervision with the exception of a single female manager.

For the present study, the primary research question revolves around the social construction of female sexuality within a SWE. Therefore, my research focus had to do mostly with noting, recording, and analyzing the various interaction patterns that took place between the waitresses and other customers and employees in the work setting. The population from which the sample was drawn consisted of 13 women between the ages of 18 and 28. All of the participants were of similar socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and physical attractiveness. Selection criteria included the following: length of employment of at least three months, willingness to be interviewed for two hours, and a general willingness to disclose information pertinent to the investigative goal. To maximize the quality of the information collected, I chose only those participants who felt comfortable with the project and were willing to give thoughtful answers. Due to the small population

of the establishment, it was deemed necessary to interview all female employees who met the selection criteria, all of which were comfortable with the investigation's goal.

Interviews

In constructing the interview questionnaires, leading questions were avoided as much as possible. Instead, open-ended interview questions were utilized that allowed for considerable flexibility and freedom of thought. This was done in an attempt to lessen the probability of receiving socially desirable answers, thereby increasing the chance of receiving accurate/relevant personal information. For this reason, I have purposefully constructed the interview questions to be phrased as "how" questions as opposed to "why" questions. This was also done n attempt to reduce the subjects' reactivity and defensiveness. A simple act, such as changing the wording of a question, can considerably impact the answer a researcher receives.

The formal interview process consisted of seven structured questions designed to assess the participants' demographic information. The structured questions included the following demographic information: age, ethnicity, education level, marital status, and number of dependents. Following the gathering of demographic information, unstructured interviews followed, in the form of open-ended questions, designed to determine the overall effect of the SWE on the female employee's construction of their sexuality (See Appendix A for a list of interview questions). The interview schedule included several questions similar to those that were utilized in a quantitative study of sex in the workplace conducted by Barbara Gutek (1985). Gutek's study was designed to assess the occurrence of sex in the workplace.

Data Analysis

Qualitative studies oftentimes lead to the collection of substantial amounts of data. As data is gathered, noted, and recorded, it is important to strike a delicate balance between getting as much information as possible, without getting overwhelmed, and censoring/screening information without compromising the study. Once the data collection stage was completed, all data was then transcribed. Once transcribed, data was read several times to ensure familiarity. Data was then coded for reoccurring themes, ideas, and concepts. My coding process is similar to that employed by Miles and Huberton (1994), which consists of thoroughly reading the field notes, transcriptions, and other data sources several times, assigning meaningful codes to them, and grouping similar themes, behaviors, and concepts. Upon coding the data, the codes were subsequently used to retrieve and organize the data into relevant research by-themes and themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon analyzing the data collected from the in-depth interviews at Gary's comedy club (the SWE under investigation), several themes emerged. These include props (descriptive information about the SWE), gender (scripting, socialization, roles, and identity), appearance (physical characteristics, demeanor, and attitudes), actions (sexualized feeling, thinking, and behavioral patterns), employment rewards & general drawbacks (concerning the SWE).

Props

The term props is used to refer to generalized descriptive information as to what sexualizes the particular work environment as well as more detailed description of the environment itself including job duties, ritualized activities, uniforms, design layout, etc. The waitresses described a typical day on the job in terms of shift responsibilities, such as setting up the room, stocking, checking people in, looking over their section, and doing side work. They also reported taking orders promptly and accurately, delivering food and drink, and keeping patrons happy.

Overall, the waitresses reported that the working environment was "fun" and "laid back," but changed somewhat depending upon the daily prevalent theme. For example, they noted that Monday nights are "Bike Nights" since all the customers tend to be bikers who usually hang out on the outdoor deck. For the waitresses, the bike night uniform includes shorts and a motorcycle brand t-shirt or tank top. Tuesday nights are "wing nights" (25-cent wing special) and is the busiest night of the week. On Tuesday nights,

logo t-shirts and jeans or shorts are worn by the waitresses. Wednesday nights are college nights with a typically young, adult college student crowd. The waitresses wear jeans and logo t-shirts. Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays are comedy show nights with typically one or two comedy shows running each night. The uniform consists of black logo t-shirts worn with black/khaki pants or shorts.

This particular SWE (Gary's) was described by one of the waitresses as "somewhere in the middle between a bank and a strip club." Her conclusion was largely based on the various props and actions that came to socially and sexually construct Gary's comedy club. Other waitresses have noted such sexualized props as beer and liquor signs and various souvenirs sold by the performing comedians (such as, bras, "Pussy-Eating-Bibs", "blow up dolls", etc) as significantly contributing to the sexualization of the work environment. These props, although an indispensable part of the environment, seem to also set a special atmosphere (ambiance) for the performing comedians. However, even though the reality of the sexualized props at Gary's is socially constructed for all its employees, it tends to be privately interpreted and differentially experienced by the waitresses, and, therefore, comes to affect them in unique ways. As an example, consider the dress code during a typical comedy night (t-shirt with khaki or black pants/shorts). Some of the girls modify their uniform by tying up their shirt and wearing short shorts ("hot shorts"). Even though this mode of dressing is not required by management on comedy nights, some of the waitresses choose to dress like that as a private reflection of their sexuality.

Gender

The gender theme evolved from all interviews. All of the waitresses that were interviewed commented on the rigidity of the gender roles embedded within the employment structure of Gary's comedy club. They went on further to explain that along with the positive aspects of being a female waitress, such as Gary being easier on the girls, there were some negative aspects as well, such as grouping all waitresses together as if they are all identical in their personalities and life situations or, worse, treating all waitresses as if they have a "dumb blonde" mentality. The gendered work structure, as perceived by most waitresses, was also limiting in terms of their upward mobility. With women employed as servers/waitresses and men as bartenders, cooks, or managers, they commented that it was almost impossible for them to become bartenders (a higher paid position in the echelons of the comedy club business). However, one waitress felt that the gendering of work positions at Gary's worked to her advantage. As she noted: "people tip us more because we are female, there are no male servers." She further went on to elaborate that as the crowd is mostly male, it made better sense to have female servers. At the same time though, another waitress felt that the gendered work structure was unfair to the female waitresses. In fact, she had successfully overturned the gendered structure by bartending on Mondays and Tuesdays. One waitress nicely summed up the gender role situation by saying that, "we all have our roles here, ours is to be cute and make Gary money."

The micro-gendering of employment positions is often a product of macro-societal patriarchal gender arrangements. Such stereotypical employment gendering patterns are reflected in the waitresses' responses. For example, one waitress commented

that she: "always gives the bill to the male patron." Moreover, another waitress said that females are better at waiting tables because, as she so eloquently put it: "by virtue of our natural feminine inclinations for social interconnectedness and overall pleasantness, we are more attentive to our customer's needs."

Most of the waitresses also commented that the various interactions between males and females in the comedy club seemed to be governed by some sort of an unspoken gender arrangement system. They also went on to explain how they themselves tended to differentially approach and treat customers based on their gender. For example, if waiting on a male-female couple it was described as best practice to: "treat them as a couple, no harm, no foul." As one waitress put it: "when waiting on males alone, you can be more "flirty" or "friendly" and they (male patrons), in turn, will repay you with bigger tips." Sometimes, female patrons were described as being intimidated by the waitresses' innocent flirtations because they were thought of as competing with them for their boyfriend's attention. Some female patrons, however, tipped better because they either were waitresses too or had worked as waitresses at some point in their lives.

Appearance

Almost all of the waitresses that were interviewed commented that their work environment was considerably driven by their physical appearance and feminized demeanor. Many of them also implied that there are certain physical appearance prerequisites for working at Gary's comedy club that originated from customers, employees, and management. Such prerequisites or expectations include, as many waitresses put it: "being of certain age and having a certain look" and most of all "being very pretty." The considerable focus placed on physical attractiveness was rationalized

by both the waitresses and management as due to the much higher tips earned by stereotypically physically attractive female waitresses.

The increased importance placed on appearance, due to its direct effect on monetary rewards, seemed to have considerably influenced the behavior of most waitresses. In fact, one of the waitresses admitted to: "trying different looks" to manipulate the amount of tips she received. Many of the waitresses reported that they routinely "do their hair and makeup a certain way" or "use glitter and get their nails professionally done." Although, at first glance, the physical appearance bias may be seen as discriminatory and burdensome, many of the waitresses considered the pressure to look a certain way as also motivating. As several waitresses put it, such pressure: "helps us keep in shape and feel good about ourselves." It should also be pointed out that the physical appearance pressure does not completely deprive the waitresses of their agency. While some of them opted to wear less and tighter clothing (and revealing more skin) others chose not to do so because they were uncomfortable. Several waitresses explained how working at Gary's has affected them positively by improving their self-confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness. As one waitress put it, working at Gary's "improved my self-confidence to voice my opinions," and as another waitress further noted "it made me realize for the first time in my life that I was pretty."

Actions

Sexualized and feminized actions were initiated, supported, or encouraged by the waitresses themselves as well as by the customers, other employees, and the performing comedians. The primary motivation behind most of the waitresses' actions was the attainment of monetary rewards. However, such actions were also perpetrated for the

attainment of intangible personal rewards in terms of boosting the waitresses' self-esteem as well as their self-confidence. Some of the reported actions that the waitresses employed included smiling, joking, and complimenting the customers through names, such as "hun" or "honey". Another action reported by most waitresses as an important technique for getting bigger tips was trying to "read the customers" and react appropriately to them. For example, as some waitresses put it: "respectfully treating a couple as a unit, regardless if they are together or not, or exhibiting a fun oriented attitude in a happy, fun-going group" helps tune in to the customers state of being and, ultimately, increases rewards.

All of the waitresses reported the frequency and nature of their interactions with customers as an indispensable part of their work environment. The waitresses-customer interactions were reported as both positive and negative in nature accordingly depending on the waitresses' personalities, perceptions, and overall state of being. They all reported an array of customer comments ranging from innocent flirtations to sexual innuendos and even sexually explicit behaviors. However, most of the waitresses perceived customer comments and expressions as harmless in nature. For example, one waitress said that: "getting hit on goes in one ear and out the other," while another viewed compliments positively because as she so interestingly put it: "the compliments do nothing for the guy that gives them, but make me feel good inside, which rewards my husband at home, meaning if I feel good about myself, I will treat him better." Overall, the positives (bigger tips, compliments, pressure to maintain one's physical attractiveness) outweighed the negatives (sexual advances and innuendos).

Another important interaction pattern took place between the waitresses and their co-workers. These interactions were generally characterized as fun, relaxed, and comfortable even though, at times, sexualized too—in terms of sexual jokes, innuendoes, flirtations, and stories. As one waitress commented: "this place (Gary's comedy club) is all about sex and while 80% are OK with it and have fun, the remainder 20% (usually male customers and management) ruin it for everybody." It should be noted that most of the times the sexualized interactions are staged by the employees for the amusement of customers. For example, the male bartenders often make sexual references whenever a female waitress puts beer bottles under the sink, such as "while you are down there…" Overall, the waitresses felt that their job was fun, de-stressing, and presented a great opportunity to make new friends.

Several waitresses also mentioned job efficiency and proficiency as additional sources of job success and satisfaction, besides tangible (monetary) and intangible (customer compliments) rewards. Most waitresses agreed that providing good service is important as it constituted an important prerequisite to bigger tips and more customer compliments.

Rewards

As surprising as it may seem, most waitresses reported that the intangible rewards far outweighed the tangible ones. The main tangible reward reported by all waitresses was money followed by job flexibility, and light work duties, which allowed the majority of them to attend college and/or tend to their family needs. Other intangible rewards follow from the aforementioned, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, independence, and autonomy.

The intangible rewards frequently cited by the waitresses as important pull factors for working in a SWE included customer compliments, coworker friendships, invaluable social relationships, and fun times. In particular, one waitress explained that in adolescence, she never perceived herself as very attractive and that: "beauty may have just come to me, but I think working here has helped me realize it." Another waitress stated that she valued all the relationships she had made in her workplace and that she never felt unwelcome working at Gary's.

Occupational Drawbacks

Most of the occupational drawbacks reported by the waitresses seem to fall into two major categories: those that are job specific (revolving mainly around customer interactions) and those that are related to their significant others. The former, are inherent in the job itself and can be alleviated but not eradicated. For example, many of the waitresses described how customers get on their nerves by being too demanding and impatient, arrogant, or overly flirtatious and sexually pushy. Concerning flirtations and sexual aggression, most of the waitresses opted for more of an emotion focused (rather than a problem focused) coping strategy, which although does nothing to solve the initial problem, tends, nonetheless, to temporarily alleviate it. Another important occupational drawback is alcohol. As most of the waitresses reported, alcohol tends to bring out the negative in some people, which could be both physically dangerous—although rarely so as most of the male employees are always vigilant for alcohol related abhorrent or violent behavior—and psychologically/emotionally uncomfortable. The joint effect of alcohol and the sexually degrading nature of comedy acts oftentimes got out of hand and fell out

of the immediate control of the waitresses, thereby risking the amount of tangible monetary rewards and even harassment and embarrassment.

Occupational drawbacks that have to do with the waitresses' significant others are more complicated because they are influenced by far more than what goes on inside the work environment itself. Personal relationships often come to negatively affect the waitresses' perceptions of the SWE and vice versa. In addition, the male partners of the female employees of any given SWE oftentimes resort to jealous outbursts or put downs as a way to exercise their power and "keep their women under control." However, this problem was seldom addressed by the waitresses as it tends to be more of a private matter.

Discussion

There are limited opportunities available to women with low skills and education in the everyday workforce. This has, in turn, induced a considerable number of women to work in sexualized work environments. This study examined women working as waitresses at a midwestern bar/comedy club. The waitresses were found to consciously/unconsciously weigh the pros and cons of their work environment—especially when it came to the construction of their sexuality—and utilized their feminine and sexual personas to gain power. They also enjoyed the benefits of shorter shifts and a flexible work schedule that allowed them to attend to their educational needs and, inadvertently, to their future financial independence. However, these waitresses also endured the potential negative consequences of undesired attention and possible sexual harassment.

The reported benefits and occupational drawbacks are specific to the women working within SWE's. However, there are additional negatives when you generalize the results to the general population of women. It would be a sound assumption that the benefits described by the women working in this SWE are specific to a narrow population. While the women working at this SWE didn't voice concerns regarding conforming to the "hiring prerequisites" of a SWE, not all women measure up to the demographics (i.e. age, physical attributes, etc.) of the women in this study. Thus, not all women would benefit from this working environment. In fact, hiring according to these criteria would be discriminatory to women who do not meet the criteria. Additionally, assessing a value to women based on their appearance results in further negativity. Longevity and upward mobility are additional factors in determining how the benefits of working within a SWE generalize to the population. An entry-level position without the possibility to gain status or benefits would be unsatisfactory to any employee. Additionally, a woman who does not fall within a specific age range may not benefit from working in a SWE.

Preliminary results revealed that working in a SWE tend to impact the female employees' sexuality and self-perceptions. Such employees oftentimes utilize their sexual personas for the attainment of monetary rewards. As female waitresses come in close contact with male customers—being a requirement of their job—they tend to also become more tolerant of unwanted sexual comments, innuendoes, and behaviors (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). The pressure to "make customers happy," although an indispensable part of their job, tends to backfire on the female waitresses as is oftentimes misinterpreted by the male customers for romantic or sexual interest on

behalf of the waitresses (Saal, Johnson, & Weber, 1989). On the contrary, female customers are more likely to interpret the waitresses' behavior and demeanor as merely friendly because they are more aware of women's tendency to be socially outgoing and friendly and the wide spectrum of social feminine emotions (Kalof, 1993). Therefore, macro-patriarchal social constructions of sexuality and gender are "alive and well" and reflected in the meso-employment environments in the everyday field of social exchange.

Gender issues were commented on by the subjects and mostly revolved around the employment structure and interactions in the SWE; those between coworkers and clientele. Most of the waitresses reported that the gendered employment structure actually worked to their monetary advantage even though their interactions with the predominantly male clientele were at times quite negative. However, these same interactions oftentimes yielded informal power to the female employees. While male customers seemed to have more formal power over the waitresses—based on their ability to complain and get the waitress in trouble—they also informally exercised their dominance by sexually subjugating the waitresses' work environment (Gutek, 1985, Jackson & Scott, 2001). Male patrons tended to yield to the traditional view of women as sexual objects. The waitresses, however, informally utilized their sexuality to gain power by capitalizing on male exploited sexual interactions and turning them around to their monetary advantage. To this end, the waitresses' reported utilizing various non-verbal techniques including eye contact, facial expressions, and proximity to increase their monetary rewards. They also explained how they employed elaborate impression management techniques by displaying different personas accordingly depending on the situation at hand.

Considering men tend to read more positively into women's friendly or outgoing behavior, the waitresses of this study often capitalized on such perceptions for their financial gain. Since waitresses are financially rewarded for good customer service, they tend to emphasize pleasantries and an overall friendly/outgoing demeanor (Lerum, 2000). Pleasantries, however, often occur simultaneously with flirting. Flirting patterns typically vary by gender with men flirting in a confrontational verbal manner, while women employ sexy looks and suggestive body language (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999). Although flirting constituted an important tactic used by the waitresses to increase their monetary gains—by eliciting attention from the male patrons—it was often misperceived as a display of sexual interest (Yelvington, 1996). The female employees' flirting, in conjunction with their projected sexual appeal, came to constitute a viable tool for negotiating power and monetary rewards within the bounds of the male customer/female waitress pattern of interactions (Williams, Guiffre, & Dellinger, 1999).

Traditionally, men tend to be the initiators of dating relationships and sexual activity. Therefore, a friendly, enthusiastic, and outgoing female demeanor may often be misinterpreted by men as sexual interest (Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, 1990). As female employees in low skill entry level SWE jobs tend to get hired based on their physical attractiveness and pleasant personalities, ample invitation for misinterpretation exists (Gutek, 1985). However, such expectations and misinterpretations may be turned around by the female employees for both their financial gain and to boost their self-esteem.

Men are socialized by mass media to focus on women's physical attractiveness and sexual availability (Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, 1990; Kalof, 1993). Over time, this comes to constitute a well-learned gender role/sexual schema, which acts as a generalized

expectation, resulting in the misreading of women's friendly/kind gestures (Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, 1990). This sexual schema also exemplifies the different intentions behind the differential male and female perceptions of female physical attractiveness. While women tend to utilize physical attractiveness as a method to gain power, men tend to view it as a tool to exercise their power and as women submitting to greater patriarchal social expectations (Kalof, 1993).

Femininity is a major component in the construction of female sexuality. Sexuality is often measured in terms of femininity or the femaleness of a woman (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). An example of the real-life application of femininity is the utilization of female paraphernalia, such as make-up, clothing, and personal adornments to accentuate female attractiveness, all of which, the female employees reported as constituting viable means to their financial gain. All in all, femininity is constructed contextually through the use of socioculturally generated and widely accepted feminine items (such as female paraphernalia) as well as the social organization of gendered interactions among women and between men and women (Arthur, 1998).

The social construction of feminized gender role and sexual actions within Gary's SWE are consistent with those reported in other studies. Williams, Guiffre, and Dellinger (1999) noted that gender role and sexual interactions in the majority of SWEs are neither completely fulfilling and liberating nor harassing and harmful. Female employees in such environments tend to rank the prevailing sexual interactions on a continuum from pleasurable (interactions with co-workers), to tolerable (interactions with customers), to harassing (some interactions with intoxicated/obnoxious male customers and/or circumstantial incidences with male management).

Conclusion

Investigating a sexualized work environment, such as Gary's comedy club, offered me, Christi Young, the opportunity to see first-hand how women working within such an environment become increasingly agentic in their efforts to overcome the gendered employment structure, and, in the process, utilize their sexuality to derive tangible and intangible rewards. Upon analyzing the study's results, several conclusions emerged. First, all the women interviewed utilized their agency to gain various advantages (rewards) and offset the disadvantages associated with working in a SWE. Second, a number of rewards were reported by the female participants, which were both tangible (monetary) and intangible (self-esteem, confidence, motivation to maintain their physical appearance, and improved relationships with their significant others) in nature. Third, from the general comments of the female participants, it is logical to assume that working in a SWE enabled them to define their sexual personas accordingly depending on the their perceptions of the gendered interactions within the environment.

Radical feminists purport that women are indirectly coerced into working in SWEs due to the limited opportunities that are available to them for climbing up the occupational ladder. Liberal feminists, although not disputing the limited occupational opportunities available to women, nonetheless, view SWEs as constituting opportunity structures for women to exert agency and derive tangible/intangible rewards thereby overcoming the limitations imposed by traditional patriarchal work environments. Radical feminists' objection to SWEs tend to be based on the objectifying nature of the gendered employment structure present within such environments, as well as on the

overall degradation of female sexuality and the feminine persona. I find this argument, however, extreme because it assumes that males knowingly exert their power over women, keep them oppressed, and pressure them (even coerce them) into working in SWEs; it assumes that female employees of SWEs have no choice or agency in their lives. Interestingly, results from the study enabled us to conclude that although SWEs were characterized by a male gendered employment structure, they presented their female employees with ample opportunities to employ their agency and utilize their sexuality to their advantage. However, the tangible/intangible benefits of working in SWEs do not come without costs, such as limitations to upward mobility and the main drawback of dealing with the public in a subservient capacity and putting up with "light-core" sexual harassment from intoxicated male clientele.

Female sexuality is an extremely complex entity and tends to engulf the totality of the female persona. SWEs offer a unique opportunity to investigate the social construction of female sexuality. An environment that incorporates both sexuality and work enables those who are employed within it to examine their own sexuality on a daily basis. The women interviewed often spoke of their sexuality—a somewhat taboo topic even amidst today's sexually free sociocultural environment—without much reservation or shame.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Preliminary selection criteria questions:

1. How long have you been employed at "Gary's?"

2. Are you comfortable and willing to talk about your experiences working here and sexual issues?

The structured portion will include seven demographic questions:

1. In what year were you born?

2. To help us classify answers, we'd like to know your racial and ethnic background. Are you Caucasian (white), Black, Asian, Hispanic, or a member of some other group?

3. What is the highest grade of school or college you completed?

4. If you attended or are attending college, what is your major course of study?

5. What is your marital status? Are you married and living with your spouse/partner, widowed, divorced, separated, never married, dating or living together with someone?

6. Do you have any children?

7. If so, how many?

The unstructured portion constitutes an attempt to investigate such themes as: sexual power, male and female interaction, and effects of working in a SWE. For the purpose of the interview, "sexuality" will be defined as broad encompassing term that "refers to all aspects of being sexual" (Blonna & Levitan, 2000). Thus, the definition should not limit thoughts to sexual behavior (i.e. what people do, with who, how often and so on). Sexual behavior is only a small segment of the definition of human sexuality. Sexuality also involves genetic inheritance, anatomy and physiology. It further encompasses feelings about our bodies and what it means to be a man or woman. Sexuality also involves

personal ethics, values and cultural norms we develop through interaction with our family, ethnic groups, and religious affiliations. Sexuality also extends, being effected by relationships with friends, significant others and sexual partners. Finally, sexuality does not exist in a vacuum; it is influenced by and influences our environment.

The interview will consist of the following questions with additional follow-up questions based on participant response:

1. A SWE is defined as a workplace where sexuality and work mix. How is your work environment sexualized?

2. What is a typical day like for you at work?

3. How does working in a SWE make you feel?

4. What are the benefits of working in this environment?

5. What are the negative aspects of working in this environment?

6. Describe the interactions that you have with male vs. female clientele.

7. What are the advantages/disadvantages of being female working in a SWE?

8. How do you measure your success as a waitress?

9. Describe how you attempt to increase tips.

10. How do you feel sexuality is related to tips or your job?

11. How does working here effect how you feel about your sexuality?

12. How does the relationship between sexuality and tips effect your actions?

13. Can you share any stories of interactions with others (clientele, management, co-workers) that have affected how you feel about your sexuality?

14. How did you feel about completing this interview?

Appendix B:

Approved HSIRB Consent Form

College of Education
Family and Consumer Sciences

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

HSIRB/Chair

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "A Qualitative Investigation of the Social Construction of Female Sexuality in a Sexualized Work Environment." This research is intended to study the social construction of female sexuality while working in a sexualized work environment. This project is Christi Mattheis' thesis project.

You will be asked to attend one two-hour private session with Christi Mattheis. If you consent, you will then be asked to meet with Christi Mattheis for the interview at a mutually agreed upon location. The session will involve an interview during which you will be asked questions regarding your employment, such as length of employment, interactions with co-workers and clientele, your sexuality and how working in a sexualized work environment affects your sexuality. You will also be asked to provide general information about yourself, such as age, marital status, number of children, level of education and course of study.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participants. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to the participant, unless otherwise noted in this consent form. There is also a minimal risk associated with the publication of the data collected in the interview due to the small work environment, which will be minimized by the removal of identifying information and demographics reported in summary/aggregate form. Additionally, the reports will only include psuedonymical names for both the participants and location.

The interviews may bring a range of reactions. In this activity you will have the chance to talk about your experiences and sexuality, which may gain a greater understanding of your place in work environment. This experience may also allow you to become more comfortable with your employment in a sexualized work environment.

All of your personal information is to remain confidential. That means that your name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will be coded, and Christi Mattheis will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigators' office.

You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Christi Mattheis at 979-8337 or Andy Philaretou at 387-3714. You may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 387-8293 or the vice president for research at 387-8298 with any concerns that I have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not have a stamped date and signature. You may withdraw from the study at anytime without prejudice or penalty and if you choose not to participate it will not affect your employment.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of this study and that you agree to participate.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix C:

Approved HSIRB Proposal

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Centennial
1903-2003 Celebration

Date: 6 August 2002

To: Andreas Philaretou, Principal Investigator
        Christi Mattheis, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair   *May Lagey*

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 02-04-19

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "A Qualitative Investigation of the Social Construction of Female Sexuality in a Sexualized Work Environment" has been **approved** under the **full** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 19 June 2003