



Take Us Off the Menu

**The Impact of Sexual Harassment
in the Restaurant Industry**

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BY

The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United



Executive Summary

There are six million tipped workers across the nation, two thirds of whom are women and forty four percent workers of color.¹ Under federal law these workers can be paid as little as \$2.13 an hour, with the remainder of their income derived solely from tips. Dependence on tips as a base wage has led to a power imbalance with significant negative ramifications. Women in the leisure and hospitality industries, where the majority of tipped workers are concentrated, account for 14 percent of all sexual harassment claims, the most of any industry, and double the rate of the general workforce.² Sexual harassment is endemic to the restaurant

industry with the vast majority of workers reporting sexual harassment. However, tipped workers who earn a guaranteed wage report half the rate of sexual harassment as tipped workers in states that follow the \$2.13 subminimum wage.³



One out of three Americans enters the workforce through the restaurant industry, and one out of two works in the industry at some point in their life.⁴ This means that between one third and one half of all Americans learn acceptable workplace behavior in the restaurant industry. To understand the effect this has on workers lived experiences, we examined the surveys of 233 former restaurant workers collected with Forward Together for the Glass Floor data set and combined

these results with over a dozen interviews of former and current restaurant worker to deepen our understanding of the impact these early experiences have on individuals as they progress through their careers.

The key findings are that, regardless of work or situation, the majority of women hadn't considered their early work experiences as sexual harassment until asked to reflect on those experiences. This perspective has serious implications for women in real life. Women are discouraged from recognizing these formative experiences as harassment, and women internalize this norm thereby creating a high bar for what they consider to be sexual harassment, and unacceptable workplace behavior.

- **According to our survey data, women who had previously worked as tipped workers were 1.6 times as likely to live with inappropriate behaviors in the workplace as women who were currently employed as tipped workers.**
- **According to our interviews, most women didn't recognize their experiences as sexual harassment until they were asked to reflect on their experiences.**

"I never thought about it as sexual harassment until now," was an almost universal statement.

- **The fact that these early experiences were not recognized as harassment led to tolerance for harassment later in life, both for workers who continued their career in the industry and workers who continued their careers elsewhere.**

A common refrain, "It's part of the job, take it or leave it."

- **Along with increased tolerance for harassment, several women said it impacted them in their life outside the workplace, whether making them uncomfortable in personal experiences with men, or, as noted above, leading them to tolerate sexual assault associated with accepted workplace behavior.**

One respondent, after years of harassment, noted she was prone to flinching whenever a potential romantic partner put an arm around her shoulder.

One particularly dramatic story involved a worker whose supervisor told her it was no big deal and insisted on scheduling her with a co-worker who had attempted to sexually assault her, leading this worker to diminish the severity of the encounter in her mind.

- **Experiences of harassment had an economic impact, as many workers felt forced to leave jobs, or left them with limited choices and few options, stuck in an abusive workplace or relationship.**

One worker, a life-long fine dining server, could no longer do the work she loved due to the trauma she experienced.

Other workers described how they or co-workers were unable to escape difficult work situations because of dependents or lack of economic security.

- **Finally, the majority of respondents associated the harassment they experienced to dependence on tips.**

From guests, who would not leave a tip if restaurant workers evaded their advances.

From supervisors, who had the power to schedule and could make a wage disappear in an instant.

And from co-workers, who could sabotage service and the associated tip by ruining a meal if a tipped worker did not comply with their demands.

Seven states have adopted equal treatment for tipped workers ensuring all workers one fair wage, independent of tips. In those seven states sexual harassment is lower than in the subminimum wage states that maintain an unequal treatment regime. Tipped women workers who earn a guaranteed wage report half the rate of sexual harassment as women in states with a \$2.13 minimum wage since they do not have to accept inappropriate behavior from customers to guarantee an income. In addition, tipped women workers in \$2.13 states report that they are three times more likely to be told by management to alter their appearance and to wear 'sexier,' more revealing clothing than women in equal treatment states.⁵

Women carry the experience of sexual harassment with them even after they leave work in the



restaurant industry; at times it is what forces them to leave the industry in the first place. Our Glass Floor survey research found that over a third of women (34%) who were formerly tipped workers quit their jobs as a result of encountering unwanted sexual behavior in the restaurant workplace. Sexual harassment featured clearly in the recollections of former restaurant employees, even if they had moved on to other jobs outside the restaurant industry. These early experiences have the potential to affect women as they continue in their careers. The restaurant industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries, and is the entry-point into the workforce for a third to a half of all young women, providing both their first employment experiences and one of their first experiences with institutionalized sexual harassment.⁶

By introducing many women to working life, the industry establishes cultural norms around sexual behavior that can shape perceptions of what's acceptable behavior in the workplace that workers carry with them long after they've left the restaurant industry. Current and former women who worked as tipped restaurant workers report similar rates of sexual harassment. However, nearly three-fourths of women who previously worked as tipped workers (74%) stated that they tolerated inappropriate behaviors that made them nervous or uncomfortable in their restaurant or workplace, compared to less than half (46%) of women currently employed as tipped workers. Women who had previously worked as tipped workers were 1.6 times as likely to tolerate inappropriate behaviors in the workplace as women currently employed as tipped workers. Women who encounter sexual harassment in the restaurant industry are more likely to tolerate sexual harassment in future environments; the large number of men and women who begin their work lives in the restaurant industry are more likely to reproduce learned norms of culturally accepted behavior they in their future workplaces.

TO EXAMINE THESE ISSUES we interviewed over a dozen current and former restaurant workers who are profiled below, buttressing and giving context to the reality faced by women in the restaurant industry to this day.

¹ American Community Survey (ACS), 2016. Calculations by the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United) based on Ruggles et al., Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2017.
² Frye, J. (2017, November 20). Not Just the Rich and Famous. Center for American Progress
³ Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, Forward Together, (Oct. 2014). The Glass Floor: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry. New York: New York.
⁴ National Restaurant Industry. 2017 Restaurant Industry Pocket Factbook.
⁵ See note 3.
⁶ See note 3 and 4.

Profiles



Laurie Terrell⁷ has worked in the restaurant industry for over 22 years. A self-proclaimed Air Force brat who grew up, “all over the world,” Laurie started waiting tables when she was 15, and then “waited tables pretty much the whole time up until December of last year,” when she turned 37.

Born on an Air Force base outside Riverside, CA, Laurie beams with pride about how her father was a decorated pilot who won the Curtis LeMay award for his service. Laurie was a precocious and headstrong child; home-schooled by her Mother, she successfully graduated from high school when she was only 15 after her exasperated Mother dared her to take her final exams to reply to her constant refrain of, “I already know this. Why am I doing this?” Graduating with all As, her Mom responded, “Now you can get a job.” While scooping ice cream at Baskin Robbins she was promoted to cake decorator after she decided to take on a rush job when she was alone one day. “My dad thought it would be prudent, back when I was 12 to learn how to decorate cakes,” to add to her set of skills. At McDonald’s, at age 16, her boss handed her the health code manual and said, “your job for the next few days is to make sure we are up to code. I trust you, go do it.” That’s how she became an expert in the health code.

Even though she got a couple of degrees and learned to sing Opera, she fell in love with hospitality. “Oh my god! My favorite sight in the whole world is a restaurant full of people laughing and eating with their friends and family. Just the sound of happy people, the happy cacophony;... it is so great when you have customers who trust you.”

“Literally, almost every shift I have worked someone has touched me inappropriately, usually a customer.”

Laurie, a self-described “epicurean hedonist” loves to “train” her guests. “I’ll [say], here is your nebbiolo and here is your pasta with truffle cream sauce, so take a bite of your pasta, and then take a sip of your wine, and then see what happens in your mouth. And to watch people learn how pleasurable an eating experience can be, and to teach them these things... I would always end up getting repeat clients [who] would say, ‘Ok, what kind of wine are we having tonight?’”

Unfortunately, the industry is also the source of her greatest grief. “Literally, almost every shift I have worked someone has touched me inappropriately, usually a customer.” She learned to accept this at an early age.

⁷ The name, locations, and a few details have been changed to protect the identity of the interview respondent.

"I've been bit, I've been grabbed, I've been licked. You name it... I haven't had that much harassment from management but a lot from customers. And you just learn to let it go. Then when you get older, when you start dating... you have a hard time distinguishing between good touches and bad touches in your subconscious. It's very, very damaging, especially when you learn how to wait tables before you've had any sexual experiences, and you have people manhandling you before you've ever even kissed a boy."

Her second job waiting tables was at 16, outside Denver, Colorado at a Village Inn, a chain of casual family style restaurants concentrated in the Rockies and the Midwest. There, as Laurie describes it, the older waitresses "groomed" her so she knew how to behave and make a living. One of the women training her told her, "Listen, you are young, you need to know, we're basically one step up above prostitutes. We serve a basic need, and we need to be friendly and look cute while we do it... so, go and get some acrylic nails and put make-up on." And she learned that putting up with harassment had its rewards, and trying to avoid it had pitfalls. She was told, "so-and-so over there, if you stand close enough for him to pat your butt after he orders, he'll tip you 100 percent. If you don't, he won't tip you at all." Laurie recalls forty-year-old men pulling her into the booth, hugging her. "I would just let them because I was extremely naive at the time. I thought, if I am friendly to them they will tip me. But they knew I was 16. How gross is that?"

"It was months of me trying to adjust to the fact that men that I didn't know were touching me." The older waitresses would tell her, "this is the job. Take it or leave it. This is the job."

At first she would get upset by these experiences. "It was months of me trying to adjust to the fact that men that I didn't know were touching me." The older waitresses would tell her, "this is the job. Take it or leave it. This is the job." Laurie would get upset, and they would mentor her: "It's ok, honey, he does that with everyone. He does it with me. It's going to be all right. But this is the job."

Laurie thinks a lot of the negative treatment is due to the way media portrays servers as loose and sexually available, but she knows that strong management and a cohesive staff is one of the strongest defenses against sexual harassment. "The best job I have ever had," was at a Ruth's Chris Steakhouse outside Los Angeles. "I never got harassed at all. That was the white unicorn of jobs... You have to go through four interviews... a minimum of two years fine dining, you have to take a wine test... But after the four interviews, the managers and the waiters have to be unanimous that they want you. And so the crew is a crew of people who are knowledgeable, who are passionate, who... help each other." Unfortunately the seasonal nature of the job meant she had to look for work elsewhere.

Five years ago, Laurie was a server working at a popular diner in Chelsea, New York. "We had a bouncer, we had a line down the block... Literally, everyone came there. But the thing was, my manager had a zero tolerance policy... He protected us... I told a guy that something he wanted was unavailable, and he called me a fat dyke. My manager looked at him and said, 'That's it. Get the f*** out... You are never coming back.'" Working the overnight shift severs had recourse to the

bouncer for unruly guests, "so, we had a lot of protection... we would get sexually harassed, but... a lot of times it was drunken guys trying to be funny. So it wasn't deliberate sleaziness... But when they would touch me... I was allowed to say, 'Bro, you just touched me, and I did not appreciate that. If you want to keep eating here you better apologize real fast.'"

This is a stark contrast to most other places she has worked, where management has policed her attire. "Oh yeah, I have been told many times, wear make up, wear contact lenses, if you wear red lipstick, you'll make more money. The truth is, if you were contacts and red lipstick you do make more money. But, you know, it isn't management's place to tell me to wear makeup. It's not in the manual. It doesn't say women servers have to wear makeup. Yeah, I had my appearance commented on a lot." She was previously the Maitre'D at a Zagat rated restaurant in Manhattan Beach where the owner decided that she was too fat and he "told the kitchen that they were only allowed to serve me grilled chicken and vegetables... And only twice a day. And I was there for 14 hours a day... I wasn't overweight at all... but he liked people to be model skinny," and he would bring over clothes to dress her and told her how to do her hair and makeup.

The "straw that broke the camel's back," as Laurie puts it, the reason she is retiring from the industry, is a high-end fine dining restaurant in Beverly Hills, frequented by A-list celebrities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone. There the cocktail waitresses get the worst of it. A lot of the clientele, "feel like they're the kings of the world. They feel like they just own everything and can do whatever... they want... In Beverly Hills, the management not only didn't protect me, but they forced me to wait on people that I had told them were touching me and saying things to me. They would always comment on my appearance, try to touch my head when I would shave the back of it. Scream at me for not being a good waitress, all kinds of stuff."

It gets to a place where you are so dehumanized that you start having nightmares about it. And when you are trying to date someone, and they put their arm around you, and you flinch.

After several months of this, someone told her, "I think, you jump whenever you hear loud noises, you are crying... I think it is related to [the restaurant.]" So she stopped working, "it's a long process of getting over some of the trauma of people who are supposed to protect you pushing you into situations where they know you are going to get abused. And if you push back, they... just scream at me and humiliate me. They would take parties away from me. It was literally the worst place I have ever worked in 22 years."

Laurie didn't always describe these experiences as sexual harassment. "Yeah, looking back, when I was in my teens, I didn't know what it was. I really didn't. I was so naïve... When I started, I hadn't even kissed a boy, and I thought it was very confusing. And looking back, kind of traumatizing because people were touching me without my permission and I was supposed to just smile and nod and be okay with it. And it built up over the years, and I finally got to [this restaurant] where the management were harassing us, dehumanizing us, dressing [us] down in front of the line-up ..."

Laurie explains, “it gets to a place where you are so dehumanized that you start having nightmares about it. And when you are trying to date someone, and they put their arm around you, and you flinch... That’s when this sort of thing starts affecting your actual life. Or you just feel like you have to be super compliant for people to love you.”

Laurie thinks all restaurants should have a sign denoting a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment and touching of any kind, and anyone that violates it should get kicked out, their food put in a to-go bag, and be charged a 20% gratuity. “I am glad that people are finally asking [about this]. The media [portrays us] as dumb, and slutty, and most waiters I know have advanced degrees.”



Jennifer Williamson was born on a berry farm in Northwestern Oregon, the same farm her father grew up on, and she traces her family’s origins back to the Oregon Trail. The farm is still in operation, where her family now grows nursery stock.

Prior to being elected to represent the people of House District 36 in the Oregon legislature, Rep. Williamson was a litigator at a big firm in Portland.

“I wanted to be a public defender, but couldn’t afford it,” she notes. She then

worked in public affairs with Portland State University and the Oregon Department of Education. At the time, “Oregon had been on a prison building spree and we had been at the capitol begging for money just for maintenance on our university buildings. And, so I actually ran on a criminal justice reform platform.” Rep. Williamson has long been interested in public service and prior to Law School worked on Higher Education Policy in the US Senate for Mark Hatfield, Oregon’s senior senator at the time. She was elected House Majority Leader in 2015.

Rep. Williamson’s first job was in the kitchen of a nursing home when she was a freshman in high school. After that she worked the counter at a little café, and then as a server in a big Italian restaurant. To get herself through Law School, she tended bar at a golf club.

Recalling her work at the café, “it’s funny because my staff always brings up... my interview with the Cafe. The guy who owned it told me he shouldn’t [hire] me because my nail polish was chipped, that it was just incredibly unprofessional, but that he was going to hire me anyways. Then he gave me an Oregon Right to Life pin that I had to wear. It was just crazy from the beginning... But it still sticks in my mind... He wasn’t going to hire me based on my nail polish. It’s so vivid to me, I was just horrified.”

Rep. Williamson has fond memories of the regulars of the Italian restaurant in Beaverton where she worked next. “We had a stream of regulars and they were just incredibly kind. They would come for family celebrations. And those were really fun customers, because they became part of the family. We had a lot of servers there. These two women, in particular, who had been there for twenty years... they were twins... in their early sixties. They were kind of the matriarchs of the whole place, so they watched out for me.”

She still had to put up with her share of misbehavior, recalling, “at the restaurant [people] would slap you on the butt.” Even though she was in her teens, the kitchen staff would always pressure

her to drink and take drugs. "I stayed away from all of it, because I was much younger than them... I was super uncomfortable at the time... everyone was older than me, so I considered them all essentially supervisors." Rep. Williamson notes that the environment was "vulgar... lots of dirty jokes... lots of drinking and doing drugs... I think I have always been much more cautious... in work environments later on, and... I guess that's probably why."

She didn't consider it sexual harassment because she was "young, and because I hadn't worked anywhere before. Because I saw these older women put up with a bunch of s***. Looking back on it, I had never stopped and reflected on it. But, what I do remember is that all of those women were single moms, and they put up with a lot... from customers, from management. They were pretty protective of me, so I think... I never put it in that context."

Her memories of working at the golf course are less than fond. "Pouring drinks for people who had been on the golf course all day. Guys, men, older men, mostly, and you had to be a member, and

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they would just be totally obnoxious, totally wasted, inappropriate. And the women on the course, because they were all women who drove the little beer carts around just got horribly harassed. And then they'd come in and sit at my bar. You know, it was the climate of the whole thing. It was pervasive, as far as the ability to tell dirty jokes, and tell comments about your outfit, and people asking you out. It was just the culture of the place."

Asked if she considered this experience sexual harassment, Rep. Williamson noted, "You know, it's funny, because I never thought about it in those terms really until this... It was just... drunk rich guys who you had to make sure were happy."

Oregon is a One Fair Wage state, which means that there isn't a separate subminimum wage for workers who receive tips. Rep. Williamson remembers that she didn't have to be afraid to lose her tips if she didn't put up with bad behavior. "In Oregon we don't have a tipped wage. We always have minimum wage. So that was good. So I think that probably relieved some of the pressure that I think people... experience in other states... It was more of the, "if you don't put up with this, you aren't going to get scheduled." Rep. Williamson worked the Sunday morning and lunch shift, "which was the regular guys who went out on Sunday morning and golfed and, it could be a lucrative shift ... If you didn't put up with it, because they were club members, then you were going to get put on a different shift that was less lucrative."

Rep. Williamson's experiences working in the industry have made her, "a bigger advocate for issues around working families and minimum wage... because the policies that I pursue as a legislator come partially out of that experience." In particular, working with single Moms inspired her to push to pass a bill requiring notice on work schedules, "so that you can't do day before, same day, or

stand-by scheduling... People would be told they needed to come in, or they would get half-way through their shift and then get sent home. There was no way to plan for anything with your kids, or to be at a doctor's appointment, or do whatever... If the punishment is losing your shift because you had to do something with your children, it was just unacceptable."

She has been disheartened that the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association has arranged for her to meet restaurant owners "to pitch rolling back the fact that we have a minimum wage for restaurant workers," since she knows how single Moms and other workers struggle to get by.



“ just stumbled upon it.” Annie James,⁷ 35, accidentally joined the restaurant workforce 13 years ago after accepting an offer to be the barista at her friend's father's bakery. Annie was born in Seattle and grew up in Olympia, Washington. She's spent much of her life on the West Coast, before recently moving to Chicago. She has been in the industry for over a decade, in part because it allows her the flexibility to simultaneously pursue her music career. Annie is also a musician and appreciates that working in the industry allows her to take time off to go on tour.

Annie's first job was at Hot Topic. She started her work life in retail. She then transitioned and in her early 20s began to work as a barista. Shortly after her time as a barista she got her first full-service restaurant job in Portland Oregon. It was a small business with a small staff. “I was just sitting there one day and they [said], ‘do you want to work here?’, and I did.” After working in Portland for a while Annie moved to California where she was able to secure a job at a Bay Area deli. She fondly recalls that at the deli, she was able to work with her best friend. They got to “have fun being 21 years old together.”

Annie shared that “there was constant sexual harassment at the deli. It was relentless, every day.”

Though her job at the deli provided her with financial security, it was also where she experienced some of the most profound sexual harassment she would ever experience while working in the industry. Annie shared that “there was constant sexual harassment at the deli. It was relentless, every day.” When Annie attempted to tell her manager, he said, “it's you, you're bringing it on yourself.” At this same workplace Annie's manager offered her a ride home, and she accepted. On the ride home, “he stopped and pulled his pants down, and he said, ‘go down on me, right now.’ Annie didn't know what to do. “In traumatic situations, you're under their control. You can agree to certain things but just because you're agreeing doesn't make it all the way consensual. You're agreeing just because it makes things easier.” Annie acknowledges that it wasn't until much later that she was able to realize that her manager should not have put her in that position to begin with. Shortly after she left the deli and made her way back to Washington, though her experiences with sexual harassment did not stop.

⁷ The name, locations, and a few details have been changed to protect the identity of the interview respondent.

When she returned and worked at a restaurant in Washington, there were several instances where customers had too much to drink and would “flirt with their energy and their eyes.” She recalls once offering a customer dessert, he responded by just staring at her, not answering her, just staring. In any other circumstance, one where she wasn’t dependent on a tip and didn’t “need the money,” she would’ve addressed the behavior. She also shared that as a server she had once waited on two men and the entire time that she waited on them they were “just laughing, and side-eyeing me, and refused to order things.” The men were “just joking with each other and thought they were so smart.” When the time did come to pay for the little they had ordered, they didn’t leave a tip. Instead they left the hotel key to their room nestled in the billfold. Annie was startled, “Wow, nice, thanks, I thought. It was a good thing I was getting paid an actual wage in Washington otherwise I would’ve made almost zero dollars off of that stupid interaction. Having to serve these men who were just obviously harassing me without doing it overtly, that was one of the worst experiences I’ve ever had.” Reflecting on her career she shares, “the whole idea of tipping is just so annoying, because people should just get paid a wage, you’re assuming that everyone is going to make a lot of tips and not everyone works in a cushy job.”

When recounting her experiences Annie stresses that she did not always know in the moment that she was being harassed, and even when she did realize she had been harassed she would question herself and her own behavior, and not the violator. “When something traumatic is happening to you, you kind of have an out-of-body experience in a certain way... I felt out of my body a little bit, not able to make decisions really clearly, foggy, like a ‘what’s going on’ kind of feeling, but also my heart beat faster.” Even after her manager propositioned her she recalls just crying, questioning what happened, and very much blaming herself. “I did that for a long time... and I would say... well, next time I’ll make better decisions.” Annie clearly expressed disdain for “relying on bad behavior for your tips. Having to smile at people that are sexually harassing you, having to normalize it in your brain, and say that’s just the restaurant industry.” Experiencing instances of harassment, repeatedly, over the course of 13 years is “actually traumatic and causes a lot of damage to your brain.” She shares that at her current workplace is where she has experienced the “least amount of sexual harassment,” sharing that she feels “very grateful for that.” However, she again proclaims that tipped workers should just have a fair wage and laughs after she shares that she feels grateful, “like feeling grateful for not being sexually harassed is... laughs, yeah, ok.”



Marlea Willis grew up in Upstate New York, and studied Psychology and Engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology. “Music is numbers,” Marlea states, explaining the connection. She won multiple music competitions and moved to New York City to audition for the opera. “Thousands of people try, but I wanted to give it a shot.” Even though the opera ultimately didn’t pan out, Marlea is a trained lyric soprano and has performed in the US, Austria, and Germany. Marlea has built

a twenty-year career in the entertainment industry as a publicist. “After years of working for other companies, it got to the point where I wanted to have more control over the projects that I work on,” Marlea notes, so she started Marlea Willis Communications. “What I love about it is that I am a professional cheerleader. When I see something that I really like, or I see someone working really

hard on a project, I want to make sure the word gets out about it." She takes particular pride on the great documentaries she has worked on, but specializes in all areas of television, film festival, and arts non-profit publicity.

Marlea got her big break working at a restaurant in SoHo. The best part of working in a restaurant was how, "The customers really befriended you. I learned a lot from them... I used to always talk about the arts, and music, and literature... and how I was auditioning. One of the guests... actually worked at A&E Television Network, in the marketing department... and they needed someone to fill in... At that time A&E was more about arts than about reality shows... and that is actually how I became a publicist."

Marlea first worked in the restaurant industry during her freshman year in college in Rochester and continued after she moved to New York City to audition for the opera. "I started out as a host in a couple of places in the Greenwich Village area... I was young. It seemed like a fun thing to do. But, what was interesting, was that all of the management was always men, and they literally told you how they wanted you to dress." She continued working as a bartender and server, "And the bartending, of course, took it to a whole other level."

As a host she was told, "you had to wear something that was preferably tighter fitting. You had to wear heels, uncomfortable heels, because there was a certain look that they wanted."

As a host she was told, "you had to wear something that was preferably tighter fitting. You had to wear heels, uncomfortable heels, because there was a certain look that they wanted. And what was interesting is if you did not conform to that, or even if you gained a couple of pounds, say, if it was that time of the month, they really were mean about it. And it made me realize, I guess I have to maintain a certain look to be in this business." As a server, it continued, "this top has to be tighter. They gave you uniforms that were literally a size too small." When she started bartending, Marlea learned she had to wear the right bra, otherwise she was made to feel that she was never good enough. Once she tried a new pink lipstick, and immediately was asked, "where's the red?... To be honest, at that point it didn't even faze me because there is a certain way that you have to look if you are working in the restaurant industry in New York." Marlea never considered this harassment until recently, when she attended a Time's Up event. In her mind she would say, 'okay, this is what you signed up for.'

"I have to say bartending was really demoralizing. I literally felt that I was chattel that they were sending out every day... it wasn't healthy for me to work in that environment... One time I came in and I had the right top on, but I had on pants. They were great looking pants, well fitted, and they matched my shape. But I was told, if I did not go and get a skirt I would be out of a job. That was awful, and uncalled for."

After, when she started working in the entertainment industry, she found, "you still had to maintain a certain look, because even though you may not be the celebrity you have to have a look that allows people to think that you are one of them... I know a lot of publicists who live on protein shakes, and

that's it, so they can stay a certain size." Marlea has found that if a woman isn't dressed a certain way at a meeting, men in the room will dismiss them. "You should own your femininity and be comfortable with it. But, what I find so surprising is how that can be turned against you, and that is what I find upsetting." This attitude towards a particular physical standard "has just followed me throughout my career," but it was her earliest experiences in the restaurant industry that normalized these experiences later in her career.

Marlea now feels a special kinship with the Time's Up movement in the restaurant industry. "I feel that everyone should demand a certain amount of respect... Even when I just look at the way the chefs will talk to the line cooks or the managers... It's a bad behavior business... I can't just even imagine what it is like if you are a single parent and this is your job, and you have to endure this day in and day out just to put food on the table. It needs to stop."



Abby Keller⁷ has been in the restaurant industry for two years. She got her first restaurant job when she was 17, and re-entered the sector when she was 21. Abby is 22.

Abby grew up in New York's upper west side. Abby beams with pride when she talks about New York, clearly in love with the city. When she was 16 she got her first job working in a clothing store in Chinatown, a role that allowed her to meet many from all over the world stopping through New York. While she loves New York, Abby moved to Louisiana to attend college, where she studied political science. It was during her time in Louisiana that she entered the restaurant workforce. She was looking for a job that would allow her to focus on her studies, and serving gave her the flexibility and instant cash she needed. When she returned to New York she re-entered the industry. Abby was really excited about getting hired. She wouldn't be just any cocktail server, she was going to serve at a speakeasy bar within the restaurant, where she'd also get to work with her best friend. She clearly enjoys being a part of a collective, and connecting with her peers. When she talks about the industry Abby brightens when she talks about her co-workers. One of her favorite parts of working in the restaurant industry is the teamwork. She shares that the instances of teamwork, "those are good moments, where we all helped each other." When she reflects on the teamwork she shares, "it felt good to know at the end of the night that we did a good job."

Abby recalls that the owner "only hired attractive females. There were no men as servers... The owner was blatantly sexist. There was a blatant attitude of women being inferior."

While Abby fondly recalls moments of camaraderie, she also reflects on stark abuses of power. At first she was a server in Louisiana, making \$2.15 an hour. Her introduction to the industry proved to be low paying and abusive. Abby recalls that the owner "only hired attractive females. There were no men as servers... The owner was blatantly sexist. There was a blatant attitude of women being inferior." Even though it's been five years since she worked there, she vividly recalls the abuse.

⁷ The name, locations, and a few details have been changed to protect the identity of the interview respondent.

"I remember the owner flipping us off and always swearing, always yelling 'f*** you' at us." The women were always "cursed out for doing things wrong." When they made mistakes, "everything would be docked from our pay. If we got an order wrong, the staff meal would be deducted from our check." Their hourly wage was only \$2.15 an hour, and after these punishment deductions, "we'd essentially be making nothing. We'd [say] 'oh, if we make this much money at this table then we'll be making minimum wage.'" Abby was away from home, in a new state she was not familiar with, and since this was her first job she, "just figured that's what most jobs would be like in that town... [That] job was a really bad introduction to the restaurant industry."

Abby later returned to New York and when she did she was presented with another opportunity to work as a server. Her experience in Louisiana stayed with her, "I was very hesitant to go back into it." Because her first experience was so toxic, Abby admits "I wasn't super surprised when this [sexual harassment at the speakeasy] happened to me."

Her job at the speakeasy had all the promise of being a great way for her to connect with people, make money, and be a part of a cutting-edge concept. She shares, "the potential was there." The job proved to be at a place that left her experiencing harassment, "every time I was there, at least once a day." She recalls the work environment, "only women worked in the speakeasy, it was in the basement, secluded. It's kind of dangerous to be in that environment. It's known for having a back door and for being really secretive, and you could get away with anything down there." At the bar she recalls guests would "say something and it's meant to be sexy but it's actually disgusting, or they'll do things like try and kiss your hand, it's always the same thing."

*Abby recalls the first instance a boundary was personally crossed, "the manager touched my stomach and told me I was so f***ing cute. And we were the only ones down there [in the speakeasy]." After that, the incidents escalated.*

While Abby experienced instances of harassment from guests, the worst perpetrator was a high-level manager. The high-level manager was nearly 30 years her senior and was also in a long-term relationship. He constantly made crude remarks saying things like, "oh she's cute, she'll get tips." Abby recalls the first instance a boundary was personally crossed, "the manager touched my stomach and told me I was so f***ing cute. And we were the only ones down there [in the speakeasy]." After that, the incidents escalated. "There were a couple of times when he'd poke my butt and then tell me he poked my butt." She shares that he also attempted to manipulate her, "he used to try and make me feel like he was the only person I had. He would do things to try and 'help' me." He shared that he had been sued before for harassment, he then "creepily" told her that "he knew I'd never do that to him because I was too nice." She couldn't engage management about the instances of harassment, because the high-level manager was the rampant harasser. There was one night where the instances of harassment just escalated. On a busy Saturday night, when the restaurant was short staffed and while Abby attempted to deal with a guest that had been over-served, the manager propositioned Abby. The manager asked her if she wanted to do drugs and "asked to have

sex in the bathroom." When Abby refused, he sent her home. "He told the other manager to tell me to leave. There wasn't even a barback that night. They needed my help. They ended up having to bring someone from upstairs to help." Even after Abby was propositioned, refused, and was essentially fired, her concern was for the well-being of her co-workers, and for the team needing her help that night.

When Abby reflects on her experience at the restaurant, her love of people, teamwork, and her genuine care for her co-workers shines through. She is concerned for the women that remain in that workplace, and for all the women that will encounter that manager and others like him. "I can imagine that because I'm gone he'll move on to someone else, because he did it to someone else before me, and I don't think anybody else should experience that." Abby is passionate about addressing issues of sexual harassment in the workplace, because she wants those around her to not feel what she felt. "People go out to eat and.... expect that pretty waitress you can harass." Working in retail Abby feels that she wasn't sexualized the way she was in restaurants. To address the issues of injustice that women face Abby states, "the social structure has to change."



Gina, 34, is currently a nurse living with her 15-year-old son in the Bay Area. She began her nursing career as a traveling nurse, and when she was sent to California she fell in love with the state. When she talks about why she moved to California she states that the quality of living and the access to fresh produce were contributing factors. Gina has been a nurse for nine years, though much of her working life was spent working in restaurants in Texas.

When you talk to Gina you see that she is really easy-going, caring, charismatic, and willing to share and connect with new people, it's no surprise that she has spent much of her career working in what she calls "people-centered industries." Gina grew up in Texas and got her first job when she was in high school. She was 16 and began to work with Allstate Insurance. In the mid-90s she was making calls, connecting with people to provide them with insurance quotes over the phone. After her stint with Allstate, she took a break from working, it wasn't until she went to college that she got her second job and began a six-year career in the restaurant industry.

As she reflected on her experience in the industry, she noted that while working in the industry was character building, she also experienced instances of sexual harassment nearly every day.

Gina's friend was working at a cocktail bar, and Gina saw that her friend was making a lot of money in tips as Texas pays tipped workers a subminimum wage of \$2.13 an hour. A job in her friend's bar felt like just what Gina needed, a job that provided a steady flow of income and was flexible enough to allow her to attend college for a science of nursing major. Thus, when she was 19 she began working in restaurants. She attributes her experience in the restaurant industry for helping make her who she is today, "it helped get me where I'm at, this made me stronger, it made me more

personable, this made me a better nurse, it made me a better mother, it made me a better guest."

Gina began her career working with her friend in the cocktail bar. She then moved on to become a hostess at Applebee's. As a hostess she was tipped out a percentage of the server's sales, but "everybody knew if you wanted to make more money you had to be a server." She eventually landed a job as a server at IHOP, where she stayed for a little over a year. IHOP was a breakfast house, and the morning breakfast industry she states had a low check total. Again Gina knew she had to progress in the industry, "as a server you want to go and work where they sell alcohol because customers are going to be racking up a huge bill." After IHOP, in 2005, Gina got hired at Hooters. As she reflected on her experience in the industry, she noted that while working in the industry was character building, she also experienced instances of sexual harassment nearly every day. It was when she shared that she worked at Hooters that she began to recount some of the more alarming 'norms' of the industry.

While Hooters is known for selling sex, her first encounter with workplace sexual harassment was when she was 16 and doing calls with Allstate. She would get callers that would say things like, "hey you have a cute voice" and they'd ask "what do you look like in real life." Several years later at IHOP there was a manager that got fired because he would massage the shoulders of all the women. The issue was brought to the company's attention because one of the servers filed a complaint. Gina recounts that at IHOP only one of the women reported the harassment, nobody else did, "I didn't." Instead, Gina questioned herself. "They were long days. I thought, well, maybe I looked stressed out. Maybe I look like I need somebody to grab my shoulders. I put it back on myself, like somehow I was inviting that." She stressed that you have to define "where are your own personal boundaries and limitations."

At Hooters it was understood that you have to look a certain way, behave a certain way, do your hair and makeup a certain way, be attractive and be flirtatious. This was even in their handbook.

At Hooters Gina's boundaries were also stretched and tested. At Hooters it was understood that you have to look a certain way, behave a certain way, do your hair and makeup a certain way, be attractive and be flirtatious. This was even in their handbook. "They gave us a book on pretty much what to look like, and what our calorie intake should be." The uniform she recalls was also skimpy. "[You] always had to wear a Hooters shirt. You could only wear a long sleeve shirt if it was approved by management, but the shorts stayed. You had to wear the shorts." The Hooters tights were even meant to prevent varicose veins. The issue of appearance "kept that [the sexualized] atmosphere alive." The sexualization encouraged tipping.

Tipping also emboldened guests. Guests would frequently look, gawk, whistle, and say things like 'hey baby.' Gina though, "you need to get that money, and when you get that tip at the end of the day you know it's no big deal, and that's just the way it goes." It was also a common occurrence that guests would attempt to cross a boundary. "It never failed that somebody thought someone

was attractive and would say, 'hey... I was wondering if I could get your number,' or... 'could I get to know you outside of work?' That happened all the time." Customers were even so bold as to complain when there were pregnant women on the floor. "At one point in Hooters we had two or three pregnant women, and the customers were so upset. I remember this one shift I was working and a table complained." The table proceeded to ask to speak to a manager and say, "there's nothing but pregnant chicks here." They complained that they came to the establishment to look at the obvious, and there were two or three pregnant ladies." After they complained, "one of them then looked at me and [said] well, at least you're looking good," Gina says.

Gina notes that when she was working in the industry, "I didn't know I was being harassed. I didn't know you could say stuff like don't talk to me like that. I'm here professionally to serve you." She laments, "you think you're going to get a bigger tip because you participate in some of this nonsense [flirtation], and it's not necessary. It never was." She then stresses that the flirtation cycle for a tip "kind of opens the door. The customer might come back and expect that to be the norm. We set up the standard for each other." Gina stresses that the sexualization of women in tipped roles has become a generational problem. It happened to her, it happened before her, and when she talks to her boyfriend's little sister she hears that it still happens now, but it shouldn't. "It's still a business at the end of the day." Gina stresses that "sexual harassment should not be required to have an income in the US, you don't need harassment to serve chicken wings."



As a kid Laura Esposito⁷, 26, always felt that "there was something cool about being a waitress." Laura has been in and out of the restaurant industry in Philadelphia for twelve years. Laura is a local, having been born and raised right outside of Philadelphia. She's the youngest of two children and was raised by her mother and grandparents. She attended Tulane University where she studied anthropology and political science, Laura then entered politics and eventually went on to attain her Master's degree. Her work in restaurants was her financial anchor while she navigated her studies, though she always felt that there was "something fierce about being a waitress that could handle a fast paced dynamic environment."

As a tipped worker Laura earned a subminimum wage that was usually less than \$3 an hour, her income was reliant on tips.

Laura was 14 when she got her first restaurant job, she entered the world of work as an ice cream scooper. Since then she has been in and out of the restaurant industry for the last 12 years progressing from an ice cream scooper, to a barista, to hostess, then as a delivery driver and she's even worked as a server. Laura loves working in the restaurant industry, she loves the idea of customer service, she likes meeting people and talking to people. She regards herself as a pretty friendly person, so the restaurant industry plays to her strong suits. Laura also shares that because she

⁷ The name, locations, and a few details have been changed to protect the identity of the interview respondent.

has a passion for food, she enjoys that through her work in the restaurant industry she is a part of feeding guests and making them happy.

The restaurant industry was not only a source of making connections with new people, but it also was her source of income while she was in school and during transitional periods in her life. As a tipped worker Laura earned a subminimum wage that was usually less than \$3 an hour, her income was reliant on tips. Though she did receive tips she recognizes that tips presented the semblance of “making a lot of money,” the immediacy of the payout is what made her feel like she was earning a stable income. When Laura recounts her time in the industry she shares that because wages could be so low, that “getting discounted or free food, and not having to worry about spending money on groceries, was something that become financially important, and was a reason I chose to stay in the industry.”

Though the industry has enabled Laura to earn a living while in school and has been source of social connections for her, it has also left her dealing with instances of sexual harassment in the workplace. When she was 16, a minor, she worked as a barista at a very large national coffee chain. While she was a barista, though she earned more than the state subminimum wage, her income was comprised of mainly tips. Laura recalled that there was a day where tips were down and her manager, a woman, suggested that she show more cleavage to boost tips and encouraged her to wear mini skirts in the future. Her manager was almost 15 years Laura's senior, she later went on to say that she only hired people with “good skin and good teeth.” Young workers were sexualized as a way to boost tipping rates. Laura was only 16 when she was a barista, she shares that because she was so young hearing what her manager said “was shocking,” and she even when she was that young she didn't feel like she should have to “whore herself out for tips.” Her experience at the coffee shop was her very first experience with sexual harassment in the workplace.

“many of the guests were dismissive, they made racist remarks about restaurant staff, and were disrespectful and made us feel like the help.”

As her restaurant career progressed she began to work as a server at a fine dining members only establishment. She recounts this as one of the worst experiences she had in the industry, as “many of the guests were dismissive, they made racist remarks about restaurant staff, and were disrespectful and made us feel like the help.” She was concurrently working as a hostess at another restaurant where she was also dealing with issues of harassment. At the second restaurant Laura recalls a moment when she was walking by the kitchen and there were people gathered watching a “really graphic porn video in the background, that was really disturbing.” At first Laura tried to justify it, chalking it up to the culture of the kitchen, but reflecting on it she shares that she thought it was “pretty inappropriate.”

She then took a break from the industry and returned to it in 2017. In 2017, she became a pizza delivery driver, she meant to work in the job only briefly but the dependency on tips left her living paycheck to paycheck, with no room to save, she “couldn't afford to lose her job.” Laura shared that she also didn't like what the environment brought out in her, in order to ‘fit in’ she had to adhere to

the norms. Since delivery work is also tip based, drivers would wait for deliveries and during the wait, what was a very masculine workforce, would make lots of sexualized and harassing jokes. In order for her to “keep up,” she “started to also say inappropriate things.” Laura reflects on “just going along with it” she tried to not let it bother her, she resigned to accepting “that’s just how it is, and... thought well if you can’t beat them, join them.” In addition she was also dealing with a manager that was trying to date her. She shares that her manager consistently flirted with her. She began to notice that when she flirted back he was a lot nicer to her at work, and easier to work with. When she rejected him and told him she wasn’t interested he made it a “hostile work environment” which jeopardized her income. Laura then felt that she had to keep “flirting with him, but just enough to be on his good side.” Laura eventually “gave up on calling things out that were inappropriate, because that’s just the way the owner and management were.”

Through the industry Laura was introduced to sexual harassment at a young age. It gave her “more of a tolerance” for sexual harassment. She states that her early experiences made her feel like that was the norm in restaurants, and that it was also the norm to have to be provocative to earn tips. She describes a complacency that came over her. In other experiences inside and outside the restaurant industry, she feels that perhaps she would have more consistently and forcefully addressed uncomfortable behaviors had she been introduced to the world of work through a job that did not promote accepting or imparting uncomfortable behaviors as a means to boost wages. Laura shares that she thinks workers should not be dependant on tips, “they’re an illusion,” she recalls the rush of a great tip but states that she has mostly lived in a state of instability while she’s been in the industry, living paycheck to paycheck. Laura wants to see the end of the subminimum wage.



Natalia Venegas,⁷ 25, parents immigrated from Mexico and settled in Chicago’s McKinley Park. Natalia is the oldest of three daughters and has a very close-knit family. Her family loves to joke, tell stories, and they often do this around a meal. It’s the moments created by laughing and joking that sparked Natalia’s love of both restaurants and performance. She has been in the restaurant industry for over five years, in part because it enables her to work with theater companies and pursue performing.

She also shares that equally as shocking was that the culture of drinking, combined with the practice of tipping, blurred the lines of professionalism.

While Natalia has a longstanding career in theater and restaurants, her first job was at a grocery store when she was sixteen. After she graduated high school she needed to secure a job that would pay more than the grocery store and work around her school schedule. Her first restaurant industry job was at a cafe as a barista. She then went on to work at a bar. She recalls, “I was trying to travel a little bit more and move out on my own, so I wanted a job that would give me a little bit more money while I was going to school, and wouldn’t take up all my time. I decided to go to bars

⁷ The name, locations, and a few details have been changed to protect the identity of the interview respondent.

and try to apply, and I got in." She was 21 when she began to work in bars, since then she has remained in tipped roles, primarily as a bartender, though she currently works as a server in a sports grill. Natalia thrives in fast-paced environments and loves that while in restaurants she gets to meet new people. Though she notes that at times the new people she meets often are the cause of emotional distress and part of the reason why since she was 21, during every shift she works she's experienced a behavior on the spectrum of sexual harassment.

When Natalia was 21 she got her first job at a small bar, she was legally able to serve alcohol and was excited to move out of the cafe and make more money. She recalls that at that time she didn't really drink, and those moments of drinking are both her best and worst memory of her time at that bar. "My memories involve drinking, both in a fun and in a strange way where it's like, in the bar industry you can drink while you work, so this weird world of like 'everyone is drunk and it's ok' and you step outside of that and it's like man that's not really ok." She shares that when she was 21 she didn't really drink much, she recalls one night where "everyone was just giving me shots because they thought it was cute and funny that I didn't drink, and I was a lightweight. That was kind of like a big shock for me." She also shares that equally as shocking was that the culture of drinking, combined with the practice of tipping, blurred the lines of professionalism. "In that setting, men are bolder, they have the excuse of alcohol, they think they're allowed to do whatever they

"In that setting, men are bolder, they have the excuse of alcohol, they think they're allowed to do whatever they want because they're just hanging out, but I'm not there to hang out I'm there to work."

want because they're just hanging out, but I'm not there to hang out I'm there to work." Because drinking is allowed, and even encouraged, she engages, she shares that drinking with a guest will boost tips. Though she does stress that many people also think "oh you're drinking with us, well you might want to sleep with us." Many men treat women tipped workers like "just a woman they met at a bar." In one instance there was a guest that would come in every Friday and drink in her section, and every time he would tip her \$100 at the end of the night, no matter how much he spent. Eventually, he came in one night and asked, "we're going to go out dancing right?" Natalia replied, "no I'm not going out with you, you're a customer." He was then upset and proclaimed, "oh wow I wasted all this money on you, whatever bye," and he never came back in. When she reflects on how that made her feel you can hear the change in her tone, "that was disrespectful and completely misogynistic, you thought I was being nice to you because I liked you, I'd be nice regardless but it's also my job." That interaction, she felt, resembled a proposition for sex work. Tips and drinks blurred "the line of professionalism" and men treated Natalia "like just someone else you're flirting with."

As Natalia's career in the industry progressed, so did the severity of the sexual harassment she experienced. After college Natalia remained in the restaurant industry to financially supplement her theater work. During the day she led story writing and performance workshops at local public schools, and at night she worked at as a bartender at a sports bar in one of Chicago's trendiest

neighborhoods. At the bar, she had to wear a tank top that was very small and very low cut. The uniform meant a lot of guests stared at her chest, “we were there to be sexualized.” She recalls being at the bar one busy weekend night, wearing the tank top and a mini skirt, and having a man ooggle her. He had been “roaming around the bar drunk,” his staring eventually progressed. Natalia was at the server station putting in drink orders when he approached her. She continued to input orders when he suddenly shoved his fingers up her skirt. Natalia yelled ‘get off of me’ as she shoved him off. His reply to her forcibly removing him was, “Oh sorry babe, I thought you'd like it.” Enraged Natalia was left to handle and process this incident alone. She approached security and shared that she had just been sexually assaulted, she requested that the perpetrator be removed from the bar. Upon hearing what happened security replied, “wow that sucks, but he seems like he's fine so we can't take him out.” They told Natalia that if it happened again she should let them know, Natalia was stunned, “it's like if he assaults me again you want me to let you know, what?!” That incident was traumatic, though Natalia notes, that behavior is the norm, she shares that “managers that I've worked with, have rapped girls, taken advantage of them when they're drunk and taken them home.” Grave instances of assault often go unreported or unaddressed, she shares, “unfortunately I think we're very conditioned to just brush it off.”

Natalia feels the tiered wage system fosters an “attitude of superiority.” Tips create a power dynamic that leaves some guests thinking, as Natalia states, “oh I have money so I can have you do whatever I want you to do. It's almost like people feel like they're doing you the favor, waving a tip around as if to say- I don't have to tip you.” When tipped workers are encountered with this attitude and its subsequent demands, they grapple with the “constant worrying of, do I want to tell this man that he's being a pig, or do I want this \$20. Sometimes it's not worth the \$20, and sometimes I need the money, so I think I can't argue right now, let's go.” Since starting in the industry Natalia has been able to save money to travel, this summer she visited several cities in Europe, including Amsterdam and Paris. When she thinks aloud about how the work can change, she reflects on her experiences in Europe. “I think making it more like Europe, if you feel like I went out of my way or I gave you good service then you can go ahead and give me that extra tip. I think that having a standard livable wage would be excellent.”

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