

*Sarah Gormady wrote the following piece for Professor Linda Blum's Women, Work, and Policy class. Sarah intends to graduate in 2010 from the College of Liberal Arts and is majoring in Russian, International Affairs, and Political Science.*

### **Waiting in the Panopticon**



With this paper I intend to explain how the shift management policies created gender discrimination at the Deck restaurant. The methods I have used in my study of the Deck are; observation of the current working environment, reflection on the past working environment, and interviews of former and current employees. I observed the current working environment by visiting the Deck once a week over the course of four weeks. To establish a ubiquitous understanding of the work environment I observed the Deck on two different weekdays; Wednesday's day shift and Thursday's night shift. I visited the Deck during the night shift on Saturday and during the day shift on Sunday. During my visits I interviewed the wait staff and management. My reflection of the past working environment was established from my own working experience, current long term employee interviews, and interviews with former employees.

There was a time, ten or so years ago, when every management position at the Deck was staffed by women. When I was hired at the Deck the front of the house staff was a balance between men and women. The Deck management was egalitarian, and every one shared the same amount of work for the comparatively the same amount of earnings. However, the Deck today, four years after I was hired, is a very different place of employment.

The Deck's turn over rate, the rate at which a single position is filled over the course of a year, is so low it is immeasurable. The national average is over one hundred percent, Beta (2006). Employees of the Deck average seven years employment with the restaurant (management estimate).

David\* is new to the Deck, by Deck standards. He started his employment when his then fiancée, Kate, called him to fill in for a missing host one Saturday two summers ago. David

became a Deck employee that day. He was a full-time navy seaman during the beginnings of his career at the Deck, so he worked when he was needed filling in shifts as a host or a service bartender. He had had no previous service experience.

David's predecessor, Jenny\*, was general manager of the Deck for seven years. Jenny had worked in the kitchen, behind the bar, and waiting tables full time for three years at the Deck before her promotion to general manager. Jenny's experience of working through the ranks was how management staff was hired. David was hired into management without having to work his way up the front of the house hierarchy.

When I interviewed David about his promotion from hourly part-time worker to a salaried full-time general manager, he was nonplussed by his rapid and unconventional promotion. "When Jenny told the staff that she was leaving, I told her I wanted her job," he says in response to my questions about how he became the general manager. He just wanted the job. The new Deck allows for employees who 'want' promotions to get them.

David is not the first employee of the Deck to be hired into a well paying position without working his way through the ranks. The first promotion opportunity was when the former bar manager Kristin\* left the Deck to open her own bar. The position of bar manager was filled by Robert\*, another bartender who had worked his way up the front of the house hierarchy. When Kristin left, and Robert was promoted, there were bartending shifts available that needed to be filled. Jenny was the general manager then, and she decided to hire Richie, a person with extensive bartending experience, but not with the Deck.

A few employees were upset by this decision. Other bartenders who had waited tables in the past to get their positions expressed dissatisfaction with Richie's hiring. Jared reminisced,

“When he came to work here I was like, ‘Who the fuck is this guy? Who does he think he is,’ but it’s all worked out . . . he’s a good bartender.”

Rachel and Lily had both been working for the Deck for three years, waiting tables, and service bartending when Richie was hired. Both had applied as bartenders, as well as wait staff, when they were hired. When I asked Rachel how she felt about Richie’s hiring she responded with a description of Richie as a great bar tender and a good hire, “. . . but I still feel passed over. It was so rude, just rude.” Shelia recently left the Deck with a scholarship to a graduate degree program. Lily no longer works at the Deck either. Others believe that her decision to leave was based on being passed over for the bartending position.

Jenny was not available for questioning about her decision to hire a new employee to fill the bartending position. However, the Deck still does not have any women bartenders. I asked David why there were still no women behind the bar. His response was filled with gender stereotypes.

“Honestly, I don’t think women want to work behind the bar. They are better at multitasking, and the responsibilities are less demanding on the floor. Bartenders are the manager on duty. And, no women have applied to the position lately except for one, and she was a rock. She just couldn’t cut it. She was the only application from a woman that came in this year that applied for bartender. Most women’s applications, when they apply for bartender, apply as wait staff first and bartender second.”

This was confusing to me. I asked David if he would consider hiring someone to work as a bartender and a waitperson. He looked at me strangely and said, “I don’t see how that relates.” David was confused because he assumed that the women applying for wait staff positions were pursuing full time waiting positions and an would fill in for an occasional bartending shift. I was

confused because I figured, as probably most of the women applicants did, that you could not just walk in off the street and be hired as a bartender.

Matt has been an employee of the Deck for 24 years on and off. At one time he was the general manager of the Deck. I asked him the same questions about the Deck's past employment history. According to Matt, not many women had been bartenders in the past. When I asked his thoughts on why this was, he replied similarly to David, "Women don't want to work behind the bar." I asked Matt if he thought the Deck was gender biased and he responded immediately with, "No, everyone works and does the same work, men and women."

"Except for bartending," I replied.

"Yes except for bartending, but that is a choice."

There again was the idea that it was a choice of the women employees not to bartend. I spoke with Mellissa after speaking with the men. Mellissa has been working for the Deck for eleven years. Two years ago she was promoted to front of the house manager. Firstly, I asked Mellissa if she would consider bartending. Her negative response fit some gender stereotypes of women in the workplace that her male co-workers had expressed.

"No way! I am too anxious to handle the stress of the manager on duty. You know they take all the heat is anything goes wrong. Besides I don't want to work behind the bar. I don't like making drinks. The work is kind of boring. The customers aren't as interesting, and they don't really want a waitress in bugging them. I don't even like working bar wait."

Bar wait is a sort of assistant to the bartender. The bar waitperson sets up the tables in the bar while the bartender opens the bar in the morning. Then, during the busy periods of the day the bar wait would wait on tables in the bar until the bartender 'cuts' them, ending their shift when the flow of customers became manageable for just the bartender.

I asked Melissa why she thought that there were no women bartenders. Her answer was not the same as the other manager's answers.

“You know, I think it's like this, women expect to have to work their way up, even if they have experience elsewhere. Men, on the other hand, come into a restaurant with the same credentials as anyone else but they expect to be hired in the position they were working at some other restaurant.”

The Deck's turnover rate is so low, that it seems there is no opportunity for job creation in the restaurant. However, the amount of management positions has increased from; a general manager, a bar manager, and a kitchen manager to; a general manager, a bar manager, a front of the house manager, a kitchen manager, a kitchen manager's assistant, a pantry manager, and two trainers. The new management positions are filled by men with the exception of Melissa, the front of the house manager. Jenny, the former general manager, built the new system of management to delegate some of her management responsibility so she could focus on opening and managing a new restaurant.

The opening the new restaurant was one of the catalysts for the corporatization of the Deck. The new management system was just a symptom of an entirely new management style. The management transition started when a few long-term year-round employees left the Deck about four years ago. Many of the former employees left the Deck after finishing their undergraduate and graduate work at local colleges. Jenny wanted to continue hiring upwardly mobile intelligent employees, so the applications for employment with Deck were redesigned to include a cover letter and two essay questions. All the new hires, including myself, were former employees of corporate restaurants. Jenny had not yet been exposed to the selling power of corporately trained wait staff because of the Deck's low turnover rate and consistent re-hiring of

summer employees. The average guest check, the average amount of money spent per customer at the Deck, of the new hires was considerably higher than that of the other employees. Jenny saw the potential to increase the revenue of the restaurant.

When Candice acquired the Deck it had already been in operation for fifteen years. Candice had never started a restaurant from the ground up, so when she purchased the new restaurant she and Jenny set out to build ‘their’ restaurant. Jenny started reading start-up business plans and listening to books on tape about successful management styles. The affects of Jenny and Candice’s ambition to build a better more success full restaurant were seen at the Deck.

Employees had always had the choice of wearing a uniform. Most of the wait staff wore their own clothes to work during the winter, and in the summer wore the t-shirts offered by management because the work was sweatier and messier. However, management announced that uniforms would be worn all year to help customers identify wait staff and promote the restaurant. There was dissention among the wait staff. The same employees who had filled out the application with two essay questions were revolting against the idea that the Deck management was using their bodies for advertisement, and making them pay for the uniforms.

The first incarnation of the Deck uniform was the apron with the Deck logo on the front. A local artist drew a fish in a frying pan for the menus years before, and it had become the Deck’s logo. The fish was placed directly in the center of the apron. Rachel described her reaction to the apron as revulsion.

“I saw them, and immediately was absolutely pissed. I was like, ‘are you kidding me right now . . . it’s a fish right over my crotch.’ I mean how sexist is that?”

The uniform situation did not improve much for the women employees. The summer following the introduction of the fishy crotch aprons, Jenny ordered colorful t-shirts for the women staff. The shirts were bright pink, orange, and a muted green. The shirts were too short. Even the large and extra large sizes would not cover the women's midriff. The larger sizes got wider not longer. The length was not the only issue, the logo was placed front center on the t-shirts. The Deck's fish was no longer placed over a waitpersons crotch, but it was between her breasts. Andrea, a previous employee reflected, "I am so happy I spent the last four years getting my B.A. in Women's Studies. Now I can wear this t-shirt." Andrea quit the following year. Most of the other women employees agreed with Andrea. "I applied there so I wouldn't have to deal with that kind of crap," said Lisa, another former employee. "I didn't want my body used that way."

The men's t-shirt differed greatly in sizing, coloring, and logo placement. The material of the men's shirt reached below the hip line, the colors were not as bright, and the logo was placed off center. Jenny took the complaints of the women and ordered different t-shirts the following summer. There was an improvement on the length of the shirts, and long sleeves were now offered as an option, however the logo was still dead center. The women once again complained, this year new shirt designs have not been ordered. I asked Mellissa how she felt about the uniforms.

"I don't mind them so much because I don't like to get my own clothes stained and stinky. But, I am not comfortable. I am not eighteen anymore, and I don't want people staring at my chest trying to figure out what the writing under the picture is, you know. I wish they would just put the art on the back and the name of the restaurant on the sleeve. I mean come on . . ."

Melissa sighted he Jakeefit of the uniform is everyone, including the management, is to wear the t-shirts while working. The bartenders tend to put a shirt on over the t-shirt, but for the most part everyone complies with the rule. The managers blend in with the wait staff. Wait staff at the Deck have always been given a lot of autonomy. The wait staff can do most of their own voids, deletion of food items, which would not be allowed in other restaurants because of employee theft. The blending in of the management however creates an environment of self-observation. Employees of the Deck must always be on good behavior because the boss is always watching.

This is true in more instances than just matching management uniforms. Cameras were placed throughout the restaurant after a burglary. Jenny told the staff that the cameras were to insure that if there were to be another robbery the culprits would be caught. However, she also relayed to the staff a story told to her by the security company installing the cameras, "So they had a client that was being sued by an employee for workman's compensation, and when they reviewed the tapes the woman had been doing cartwheels when she was injured."

The message to the staff that they were being watched was affirmed when employees in the kitchen were reprimanded instantaneously for giving the wait staff high cost food for meals provided during their shifts. Candice was coming down three flights of stairs from her office, where the monitors for the cameras were placed, two and three times a shift to correct indiscretions.

The layout of the building is another aspect that lends to the employees sense of constant observation. Jenny, and now David, and the owner Candice share an office on the third floor of the building. The window from the office overlooks the decks. Candice or David can see every section of the restaurant, inside with the cameras and outside through the window, from their

office. The manager on duty, the bartender behind the bar, is on the second floor of the restaurant. He too has a window overlooking the decks.

There is another “boss” overlooking the actions of the wait staff at the Deck. Customers have control over the earnings of wait staff. The wage of a Deck waitperson is \$2.38 per hour. All a waitperson's earnings come from the gratuity left by the patrons of a restaurant. The set up of the Deck's dining areas allows for the patron to observe all the actions of a waitperson. The indoor family dining is an open room. More than half of the customer seating is elevated to overlook the waitperson's work stations. The outdoor family dining is set up in a lateral manner so that the waitperson must walk down the middle of two rows of tables. The tables are set up so that a patron is able to see their waitperson as they wait on other tables and order food at the computer. Both dining areas have an entrance that is a few steps above the dining area. When a patron enters the dining room, or steps out to the deck, they are three feet above the host or waitperson greeting them.

This set up is not true of the bars, where only men work. The upstairs bar is elevated so that a bar patron is two feet lower than the bartender. The arrangement of the bar and customer seating allows for the bartender to be the observer. On the deck bar, the bartender not only overlooks his own patrons, but also the wait staff. The bar is set perpendicular to the aisle that the wait staff uses to wait on deck patrons.

The bartenders are not just observers of the wait staff, and their shift manager, they also make a higher wage and comparatively more tips than wait staff. David broke down the pay scale during our interview. “The wait staff is paid \$2.38 an hour, service bartenders are paid \$5.50 an hour, and bartenders start at \$7.00 an hour.” I was curious about his use of language. Wait staff and service bartenders are paid a lower wage than a bartender because, according to

David, “. . . they are the manager on duty.” I asked David who was the highest paid hourly employee, and Bill turned out to be the answer. Bill had been working at the Deck for twenty-five years, and it seems reasonable that he would be paid more for his years of service.

However, when I asked Matt, who was hired the year after Bill, what he made hourly he replied, “Two dollars and thirty-eight cents, just like everyone else.” Matt has been working every winter at the Deck for the past ten years, without interruption, and he has never received a raise as wait staff.

The most money is made during the summer. The highest earners are the deck bartenders. A good night will bring in two to three hundred dollars in tips for a bartender out on the deck. No waitperson ever in the history of the Deck has earned two hundred dollars waiting tables in one shift. It is a mythical goal that the wait staff talks about often. Laurie and Kate come to the table that I am speaking with Mellissa at to visit. I ask them about the two hundred dollar goal.

“I have come so close, within like thirteen dollars,” says Kate.

“Well that’s because you are young and have huge boobs,” Laurie laughs as she pats Kate on the back.

The problem of equalizing all of the employees’ earnings is the set up of the restaurant. Two years ago, the Deck went smoke-free. The upstairs bar would no longer be a smoking section. The all male bartending staff took this opportunity to appeal to management to make the entire bar 21+. Previously, the outside deck and the barstools at the upstairs bar were the only 21+ seats in the restaurant. Smoking parents could sit with their children in the upstairs bar and eat dinner. Once smoking was banned, there was no need to provide seating for patrons under

twenty-one. The kid's menu was removed from the upstairs bar, and the dining areas were re-named family dining areas.

David explains, "It's better now for everyone. Children and families don't have to listen to bawdy bar conversations, and bar patrons can enjoy their drinks and good times without worrying about censoring themselves in front of somebody else's kids."

The result of the change in policy is the rearrangement of the work schedule. Before the Deck was non-smoking, wait staff rotated working the bar wait shift. Bar wait was notoriously poor for earnings because of the limited amount of tables and the density of the second hand smoke would decrease patron volume. However, when smoking was banned, and the cheaper kid's menus when downstairs the bar wait shift become a money maker. The guest check average increased and the table turnover increased as well. Suddenly bartenders wanted bar wait shifts. During the three weeks I visited the Deck only one woman worked a bar wait shift. Every Saturday night for the last five years Dawn has worked bar wait, and she is the only woman regularly scheduled to work bar wait.

When I asked both men and women employees about women's stagnant positions as waitpersons, the replies of the Deck employees were consistent. According to Christine Williams (2004) ". . . women's lesser achievements in the workplace [are attributed] to the gender characteristics that women bring with them to work." In the case of the Deck women are not working in the higher earning areas of the restaurant because the clientele is different.

"Bar patrons expect a different kind of service; they don't want to be mommy-ed as much as the family dining customers," says Laurie, a part-time waitperson who works full-time in the restaurant she owns with her partner. "It's my experience that customers expect a man to serve them drinks from the bar and a woman to bring them their food."

Elaine J. Hall (1993) points out that wait staff adopt gender identity roles to fulfill the expectation of patrons. The history of segregated work, men working in upscale restaurants and women working in family restaurants, creates expectations of service that should be received from male and female wait staff.”

In the same article Hall (1993) asserts the gender integration of restaurant workers has encouraged employers to seek out more egalitarian management styles to avoid gender discrimination. “[By] scheduling all servers to one hour of side work per meal, rotating servers through a weekly sequence of stations, and allocating side work by serving stations . . .” employers have been able to distribute work equally among male and female staff. However, the Deck being a prime example, even with the best management there is still room for gender discrimination.

“It was the first time I waited tables in six years, and Alex kept calling me Mellissa.” Kyle tells this too me during one of my visits to the Deck. Kyle has worked for the Deck since he was eighteen, and he is now an associate professor. Kyle is a bartender; he works on the weekend service bartending and will pick up an occasional bartending or bar wait shift during the week. Kyle is upset because Alex, the only heterosexual male waitperson, was emasculating him because he was working a waiting shift. A few minutes later Kyle explains, “You know I paid my dues, and I was doing him a favor, next time he can work the shift by himself. I am not a waitress.”

The other bartenders hold the same perceptions of themselves as bartenders, not wait staff, even though they wait tables in the bar during their shifts. The only other bartender to work waiting tables is Jake, and he is gay. When I asked Kyle about why he thinks women are not working behind the bar at the Deck, he replied. “We have a girl bartender . . . Jake is the

token 'girl.' He waits tables more than he bartends." The man who just moments before was complaining about being emasculated for waiting tables, emasculated his co-worker for waiting tables and being homosexual.

Jake is often the brunt of emasculating jokes, and sometimes will join in after a few shift drinks. When I asked Jake what he thought about Kyle's comment, he shrugged. Jake is the last representative of the old Deck crew. Five years ago the staff was eclectic, with wildly styled and dyed hair, tattoos, and piercing. Matt describes the old Deck best, "It used to be a place where all the gays, heroin addicts, and freaks hung out . . . and it still is." Matt winked at the end of the sentence. Even Jake, wearing a women's long sleeve black t-shirt has tamed down his look. He wears his hair in a geometric bob and dyes it dark brown. He doesn't wear eyeliner anymore and he took out his lip ring. Jake has modified himself to fit into the 'normalized' Deck.

According to Hall (1993), ". . . restaurants use job titles and uniforms to reaffirm the gendered service style that workers are expected to perform and the way servers use them to negotiate the gender meanings of their jobs." The Deck's management has unintentionally gendered the jobs in the restaurant using not only job titles, and uniforms, but also manipulating the space that the employees work. Michael Foucault's criticism of modern society includes situations like the Deck. Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as a model of modern disciplinary power. According to Garry Gutting, "The principle of the Panopticon can be applied not only to prisons but to any system of disciplinary power . . . its principle has come to pervade every aspect of modern society." Foucault theorized that there are three methods of controlling people; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination (2003). The women employees have been placed into the prisoner's position of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.

The Deck of the past seemed like an unlikely place for the pervasiveness of patriarchal power because the owner and management were women. However, when the women managers of the Deck decided to become more competitive with other restaurants they had to conform to the standards of the other restaurants. They also had to adapt to another management style in order to accommodate for the extra responsibility of opening another restaurant. They unintentionally bought into the patriarchal system and, as a result, set up the gendering of jobs and eventual gender discrimination of their employees. The women employees contributed to this discrimination by gender identifying themselves within the new patriarchal structure. Many women employees expressed the same feelings as Mellissa when she described her lack of ambition to become a bartender, even with the advantages of an increase in income. The men employees expressed the same sort of gender identity issues as the women, however their gender identities allowed them more economic opportunities.

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