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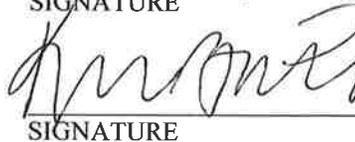
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Playing the Game:  
Work Experiences of Women Card Dealers in a  
California Casino

Thesis

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Good Times!

## GLOSSARY

- Action - Referring to how much money is being placed as bets, as well as when the dealer has bets out for them.
- Audition – The process of getting a job at the casino. Potential dealers have to simulate a game or be placed on a live game. Managers evaluate the dealer’s performance.
- Banker (Third Party Provider of Proposition Player Services, “The Corporation” – A TPPPS is a business that provides services in and to a gambling establishment under any written, oral, or implied agreement with the gambling establishment, which services include play as a participant in any controlled game that has a rotating player-dealer position.
- Bust – The term that describes the action when a dealer goes over 21 on blackjack.
- Chip Runner – An employee who gets chips for card players as well as dealers.
- Dead Spread – When there are no players on the table.
- House – The term used to describe the casino.
- Johnny – Lousy tipper.
- Juicy or George – Big tipper.
- Live Game – When a dealer has cards out in front of the bets.
- Pit Boss – Also known as floor man, floor person, and floor woman. The supervisor position that watches the floor, arranges the rotation of the dealers, has chips to give to dealers, and make final decisions on games.
- Push – The term used when dealers are changing shifts on a table. The usually shift on a table is thirty minutes and a new dealer comes in to deal.

- Rotation – The roundabout way in which dealers know where their position is during their shift. They are either in the pai gow rotation or blackjack rotation.
- Swing Shift – Working from mid-afternoon to mid-night.
- Table Games – The term table game is used to distinguish games such as blackjack, pai gow, three card poker, and baccarat that are played on a table and operated by a dealer. They are also called carnival games because at times these games are not considered for the serious player.
  - Baccarat – A game where there are two sides; banker and player. The customer chooses one side and bets. The cards are dealt on both sides, whatever three cards total bigger, wins the bet. Heads or tails with cards.
  - Three Card Poker – Player receives three cards, the dealer receives three cards and it is played against the dealer. Poker with three cards instead of five.
  - Pai Gow – Popular table game that was originally played with Chinese dominoes when first created. Now at the casino it is played with cards. It is essentially seven card poker and a player sets two hands. High and low, bottom hand has to be better than top hand. The cards are set by five on the bottom (best hand) and two cards on the top (second best).
  - Blackjack – Common table game. Players try to get cards with a face value as close to 21 without going over.
  - Ultimate Texas Hold ‘em – Poker, where players get two cards and dealer gets two cards and they try to make a five card poker hand with the five cards that are on the table called the river.
- Washing Hands – Each time an employee touches chips, they clear their hands.

## ABSTRACT

This research focused on how women card dealers made meaning of their work in a California card room casino. Ethnography and 10 qualitative open-ended, semi-structured interviews were utilized to understand the gendered and sexualized nature of work in the card room. The card room in this study was a male dominated space where traditional gender norms are fully emphasized. The female card dealers emphasized their beauty and other hetero-normative interactions with card players to generate tips. However, this gendered game had challenges for the participants, such as when the management did not protect their safety or personal space with overly aggressive customers. This study found that emotion work is a large part of how the women gain, keep, and negotiate power within this industry. The research is a micro-analysis of the larger societal problems that are related to our society from inequality of the work place, patriarchy, gender stereotypes, women as objects, and violence against women.

Keywords: Sexuality, feminization of labor, sexism, service work, emotional labor, emotion work, gambling, casino, gender, gendered work, card dealing

## INTRODUCTION

*She looks at him with a sly glance.*

*He places all his chips in the circle, “All in!”*

*“Ok, baby.”*

*She deals the cards. The dealer busts her hand! The player sighs with relief and says, “Thank God you busted!”*

*The dealer replies, “Well baby, if you hadn’t played your hand right I wouldn’t have busted and then I would have had to spank you!”*

*The player and the dealer have a good laugh together.*

The above scene is played out for hundreds of players day and night at the Cowboy Cocktail Casino, a card room in California where I worked as a banker. Many of the card dealers that work there are women and most of the players that come to play cards are men. One of the main reasons I was interested in studying this group of women in the casino environment was because I observed this setting perpetuating stereotypical gender roles that are observed in the larger society — even at times, enhancing these roles. As a female employee, I became extra keen in understanding the treatment many women, myself included, experienced at the casino. I wondered on how the women card dealers made meaning of their work in a male dominated space. I used ethnography and interviews to understand the ways the women negotiate their gender at work.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

“Cowboy Cocktail Casino” is a California card room. Unlike “traditional” casinos, such as the ones in Las Vegas and Tribal land, they do not contain slot machines. In the state of California, it is illegal to gamble against “the house” unless it is a Native American casino. That is where the job as a banker becomes important in the casino industry. Banking corporations were created so that card rooms would be able to have table games that are usually played against the house. When I worked at Cowboy Cocktail Casino as a banker, I was considered the middle person. The players who come to the casino are playing against me, and I was in charge of the chips the banking corporation granted me. As a banker, I would sit at the table, usually on spot number one, with chips in front of me to disperse to the dealer who would then make the payouts to the players. Since I was considered a player by law, I had to take a place at the table and claim a hand. The banking corporation and the casino work closely together because they both need each other. The casino needs bankers in order to have games like blackjack, pai gow, and three card poker. The banking corporation needs the casino because they provide the customers and the building. There is also oversight by the Department of Justice to ensure that all the games are played correctly, payouts are accurate, players pay taxes on their winnings, and the casino employees pay taxes on their tips.

I worked in the casino business for over two years. I became accustomed to the language, norms, and routines of the casino life. I found it fascinating observing how people interacted in this complex social world. When I first began my job as a banker, I was not only shocked with the large sums of money people were losing, but I was curious about the way the women card dealers behaved toward their male customers. I noticed their conversations would be full of sexual suggestions as well as stereotypical comments about women and men. At times,

it felt as if I was sitting at a table listening to soft porn. The main clientele in the casino were men. I became fascinated in observing how the women card dealers interacted with them.

I introduce these details about the card room setting because it sets the stage for the three main social issues related to gender and inequality at work that are experienced, in general, by women in low-paying service industry jobs. The three main issues that I will be discussing which related to this casino are: 1) Minimum Wage and Tips, 2) Lack of Professional Growth, and 3) Working in a sexually charged work place.

### Minimum Wage and Tips

Reflecting on the history of minimum wage in California, especially regarding women, we can look at the Industrial Welfare Commission (IWC) that was founded in 1913 in San Francisco. The organization's goal was for women to earn a minimum wage for their work (Mead 1998). The women's struggle at that time was to receive a livable wage and to have a work day that was shorter (Mead 1998). Minimum wage measures were signed into law on May 1913 and the IWC was in charge of finding out the cost of living, wages, and hours of work required to make sure there was basic living needs for women (Mead 1998). They also established minimum wage in different industries that reflected the work women did.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, the California minimum wage was raised from eight dollars an hour to nine dollars an hour (State of California Department of Industrial Relations 2014). The Federal minimum wage is \$7.25<sup>1</sup> an hour (United States Department of Labor 2013). There are two different wages that are present; however, the employer has to follow the minimum wage that has stricter guidelines and is more beneficial to the employee (State of California Department of

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<sup>1</sup> This has been effective since 2009. Minimum wage changes from state to state. If an employee is working in a tipped position the employer can legally pay them \$5.25 an hour.

Industrial Relations 2014). Acs and Nichols (2007), in a study for Urban Institute regarding low-income work, reported that one in four workers aged 18-61 earned less than \$7.73 an hour in 2003. The bare minimum wage of \$7.73 — that the government has decided is a livable wage — does not take into consideration the children or elderly parents of which the low-income provider takes care of. In addition the hours of low-income workers have to be investigated. Most do not work full-time. The combination of low hourly wage and part-time work places this population in the working poor (Acs and Nichols 2007).

Before 2008 the card dealers at Cowboy Cocktail Casino worked regular shifts. This varied from dealer to dealer and shifts were easy to pick up. However, because of the great recession, the card dealers' schedules were rearranged to accommodate the economic turn. All dealers in the casino were cut hours and picking up shifts became harder to do. Nobody was allowed to work overtime. Blackjack dealers were allowed to work a max of six hours a day, five days a week. Pai gow dealers worked a max of eight hours a day five days a week. They worked for minimum wage and with their paycheck they paid for health insurance and 401K that had been set up by the casino. The amount that the dealers received from their check ranged from ten dollars to one hundred dollars biweekly. The tips they made was their complete income. Without tips, the card dealers would all be below the poverty line. Kaufman and Williams (2013) find that when economically hard times hit the country, it is usually women who receive the brunt of the worsening economic conditions.

Card dealers in essence are “front-line production workers” (Enarson 1993: 221) who are getting paid minimum wage. Their emphasis on the job is to make tips. Three-quarters of the dealer's earnings is made up of tips (Enarson 1993). In the 1980's the IRS ruled that dealers' tips would be taxable, which resulted in many dealers incomes dropping significantly (Enarson

1993). Tip earning is unstable and it depends on the economy (Enarson 1993). Sallaz (2002) found that for casinos to allow the tipping system creates a relief for them in their management of labor costs. Monetary payment then is shifted towards the card playing customers (Sallaz 2002).

### Lack of Professional Growth

In 2013, 72.7 million people were in the labor force (United States Department of Labor 2013). Women of working age make up 57% of that, part-time and full-time. Of the 57%, 74% of the women worked full-time and 24% worked part-time. Women are more likely to have lower wages than men and they find it a harder journey to make it into upper-middle or upper class (Lovell, Hartman, and Williams 2007). Women are more likely to choose jobs that have greater benefits than bigger salaries. Enarson (1993) explained that card dealers experience very low job security, minimal benefits, constant repetitive body motions, changing shifts, and constant surveillance by management. Schaap, Stedham, and Yamamura (2007) looked into the managerial staff of casinos and noticed that many were lacking women. They argued that casinos are very prominent in perpetuating typical gender stereotypes and funnel women into certain jobs like waitressing, hostesses, housekeepers, and cooks (Schaap et. al. 2007). Since the traditional gender roles are emphasized within the casino industry it is hard for women to climb up the ladder to senior management positions (Schaap et. al. 2007). At the time of Schaaps et. al's. (2007) study, 51.3 percent of the casino workforce were women, but they were completely underrepresented in the highest levels of business management.

Britton (2000) found that the image of a top corporate manager relies heavily on the masculine ethic. In turn "traditional femininity" (Britton 2000:420) is believed to be powerless and is not an asset to managerial work. The lack of professional growth for women is not that

there are no jobs available; it is more of a socially acceptable position and gatekeeping ploy. Family obligations are placed more heavily on women workers than their male counterparts. Duffy (2007) refers to this as reproductive labor and socially it is placed upon women to take charge. There are still barriers placed upon women who cannot access jobs that are male dominated (Reskin 1993). Men have a stake in holding on to their sex-based privileges and because of this sex discrimination will likely continue (Reskin 1993).

Labor markets hold on to sex segregation, meaning the higher the job is on the ladder, the more segregated the sexes are (Reskin 1993). The United States Department of Labor (2013) listed many occupations women were more likely and not likely to be hired in. I present a short list of what was found. It can be noted that occupations that have more people interaction or are customer service based have a large percent of women working in the industry. Women have access to these jobs because they cater to what society has considered acceptable female work. The occupations women are less likely to be present at are jobs that require delegating orders, lack of emotion work, and less customer service interactions.

Table 1 Occupations women are most likely to be hired in.

Occupation	Percentage of Women
Preschool & Kindergarten Teachers	97.2%
Dental Hygienist	97.1%
Nurse Practitioner	91.5%
Maids & Housekeepers	88.6%
Human Resource	87.6%
Host & Hostesses	85.2%
Social Workers	81.9%
Court Clerks	77.4%
Flight Attendants	75.8%
Physician Assistant	74.5%

Source: United States Department of Labor 2013

Table 2 Occupations women are least likely to be hired in.

Occupation	Percentage of Women
Cement Masons, concrete	0.0%
Highway Maintenance	1.5%
Construction Laborers	2.5%
Firefighters	5.7%
Engineers	11.7%
Taxi Drivers & Chauffeurs	12.7%
Civil Engineers	16.5%
Aerospace Engineers	15%
Clergy	18.6%
Architects	23.3%

Source: United States Department of Labor 2013

### *The Sexually Charged Workplace*

While sexually charged workplace is commonly thought of as strip clubs, Hooters, sex shops, and bars, anywhere a woman is at work among males it is a sexually charged workplace. Filby (1992) gives an example of English betting shops, which is created into a highly sexualized working place because most of the women who work there are cashiers and they interact with customers daily. They represent the betting shop as a gateway to female interaction, which is catering to the male ego. Talking is the main way sexuality is exhibited in a working place (Filby 1992). Tyler (2012) discusses the significance of space and location with its ties to sexuality in connecting how work performance is understood through emotion, appearance, and sexuality. Sexuality then, becomes an aesthetic that management will use to sell their company (Tyler 2012). The female body is commodified to fit into the needs of the heterosexual man (Baum 2013).

This was true in the case of Darlene Jespersen, who fought Harrah's Casino in court regarding what is considered an appropriate look for a women. (Chandler and Jones 2011) Jespersen was a bartender for twenty years at Harrah's. She never wore make-up. Harrah's started a personal best campaign where "professionals" would come and give advice to the employees on how to dress and wear make-up (if you were a woman). Jespersen refused to wear make-up and was fired because of it. Her case went to court, and it was struck down against Jespersen because she did not provide enough evidence to support that putting on make-up was a burden for her. This demonstrates how the image of a woman becomes a commodity the casino wants to use.

The experiences of cocktail waitresses are also included whose bodies sell the casino image (Jones and Chandler 2007). "In their tiny tailored uniforms and high heels, 'libidinous

beauties' excite the gamblers and deliver the drinks that water the action" (Chandler and Jones, 2011: 32). The waitresses wear outfits that emphasize their body and they are to be a distraction for the male players who are playing at the casino. They are also heavily regulated by their management because they are expected to look a certain way and that their bodies are constantly under surveillance and scrutiny. Dellinger (2002) found that the way women dressed at work had a lot to do with how they worked in a sexually charged workplace. It is referred to as organizational sexuality (Dellinger 2002).

With all these different obstacles and issues facing women in the workplace my research then aims to find the answer to the question at my setting: how do women card dealers make meaning of their work in a male dominated work place? And how do they negotiate their gender and sexuality?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research demonstrates there are still significant inequalities facing women, especially in the workplace. Women are steered into certain jobs, they are excluded from certain jobs, and they are required to act a specific way in all jobs. I will present three themes related to my former place of work and how it is portrayed in the general social world; the service industry, feminization of work places, and emotion work. The casino card room is a service industry, where women have taken up most of the dealing jobs and since women are the majority workers they are expected to present the emotional work.

### Service Industry

The service industry is a major part of the United States' economy. We are a society that lives on having people cater to us and make small talk when we are out shopping or dining

around. Some of the members of the service industry include servers, food workers, shopping clerks, and hospitality front desk workers. The United States job industry now, is more of a service industry than a producing industry as it was during WWII. Many of these jobs are catered toward women workers since they are paid a lower wage. Service jobs are usually part-time and many times they segregate women (Baum 2013) into positions that they are not able to advance from. The service industry can be classified as a job that has a non-standard working schedule. Workers in the non-standard working schedule provide a vital role in our society's economy (Enchautegui 2013). However, most non-standard working schedules are geared toward lower-income families which means that the workers have less flexible schedules and “usually work in industries like, retail, leisure, or hospitality that require direct services and customer contact” (Enchautegui 2013:4-5).

Macdonald and Merrill (2009) and Schaap et. al. (2007) dig deeper with their research regarding intersectionality for hiring in the service sector. When women are hired for certain service sector jobs, the management will assess her to see if she matches what a customer expects to see, “employers take customer preference into account when hiring” (Macdonald & Merrill 2009:114) and if the employee is able to sell the organization (Schaap et. al. 2007). They name this process “logic.” It varies from region to region and place to place but the outcome will be along the line that the woman will be someone the customer expects to see in this position and expects to have certain emotional qualities that cater to them. “[E]thnicity and gender shape hiring decisions because they shape service interactions” (Macdonald and Merrill 2009:115).

An example would be bank tellers, as they are considered service workers now. Ulla Forseth (2005) finds that women now occupy the front-line positions (Enarson 1993) of the

banking service industry. The banking industry used to be a traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical organization (Forseth 2005) but it has turned into a seller job. Smiling and caring are presentations of servitude (Forseth 2005). Not only are the service workers required to be attentive to their customers they have to have competitive skills to go along with it and these are skills valued by the company. Using MacDonald and Merrill's (2009) process of logic, women are hired into these positions because the customers expect to see a young woman bank teller. Personal gender qualities are what are associated with the nature of work.

Elizabeth DiNenno (2003) explains that sexuality is part of the job no matter what occupation a woman is holding down. Sexuality for women is inevitable in a service job. However, DiNenno (2003) argues that she does not see that sexuality is only a site of oppression in service jobs, it can also be a site of power. Women are able to use the norms that are used against them to improve their position in work (DiNenno 2003). Women know that most men will respond to forms of power that make the women seem like they are being sexual or infantile. In performing their gender the women are able to gain access to receiving a raise, getting hired, or being promoted (DiNenno 2003). In a sense, service work encompasses three main things: sexuality, capitalism, and inequality.

The card dealers are what Enarson (1993) calls service workers and the front-line workers. The mannerisms and attitude of the card dealers are important because they are representing the casino. The interactions with customers will show if players return or not, and the dealers are making money for the casino. The literature mirrors what the card dealers have to deal with daily. They are not selling a product, but they are selling their personality. The dealers have been groomed to work in the service industry to please people.

Relating back to Jesperson's case, because she was a bartender she was a service worker. Because of this Harrah's wanted to take the commodity Jesperson had as a service worker (Chandler and Jones 2011) and like Macdonald and Merrill (2009) previously stated to create a service worker that the customers would want. The case is significant because the industry was deciding what a professional look was for women. Even though Jesperson had always groomed for work without make-up and was a favorite bartender, her image as a woman did not fit in with the casino standards.

The service work of women goes even further in the discussion of trying to represent the companies. In Las Vegas, McGinley (2012) explains that women have to commodify not only their personas as human beings as workers for the casino. They are marketing the casino on their bodies. This leads to men believing that they are allowed to touch the merchandise as well as having the managers treat the women like objects. Masculinity and femininity are emphasized and the atmosphere is catered toward the heterosexual man (McGinley 2012).

### *Feminization of Work Places*

Occupations for women can be labeled into two categories according to the United States Department of Labor; traditional and nontraditional occupations<sup>2</sup>. Even though there are men present at these jobs, the women outnumber them. This happened gradually as men occupied these positions first. Wages in these sectors begin to drop, men flee these jobs because of the decrease in wages and the status of the job decreases. What is interesting to note is that once a job is considered feminized it is coded as "women's work" (Macdonald and Merrill 2009:114), and it begins to lack prestige, employment security, and promotional prospects, which in turn

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<sup>2</sup> Traditional – Female dominated occupations. Nontraditional – Male dominated occupations.

makes men begin re-thinking their career path (Lincoln, 2009; Macdonald and Merrill 2009). Thompson's (1998) study found that in a casino in France when a women dealer was placed on a roulette game as a dealer, the men dealers went on strike. It was a male space and it was considered prestigious. It presents how men want to preserve their status above women. As women have gained momentous access to new jobs and careers in the past forty years there are still areas where women are barely represented (Lincoln 2009).

Lincoln (2009) discusses the core issue of feminization of work places, gender inequality, and occupational sex segregation. She analyzes the supply and demand in the workforce. The supply is the workers' characteristics and the demand is the characteristics of the employers' workplace and jobs (Enarson 1993; Lincoln 2009; MacDonald and Merrill 2009) An example would be Enarson's (1993) study where she found that most women who dealt cards, dealt blackjack. It was considered a "skirt job" (Enarson 1993). Since it was a "less glamorized job" (Enarson 1993: 223) than it was before women began working, men would not seek to be employed in that game. The added regulations and rules that are placed on the games steer men away from the job. The job then becomes feminized because women are considered more complacent (Enarson 1993). The demand is to have women as blackjack dealers and the supply is women.

Lincoln (2009) also examined the feminization of veterinary school and future veterinarians. The profession has become more sex segregated, which did not start in the job field but in college. There had been a gradual change in how many men and women decide to go to veterinary school. As the number of women who were studying to become veterinarians increased, the enrollment of men began to slowly decline (Lincoln 2009). One can assume that male students began to change career paths because they felt that it was becoming more

regulated. Macdonald and Merrill (2009) regarded that occupations can shift in their make-up regarding ethnic and gender compositions, especially when women move into jobs that are considered male – dominated areas.

Zoe Ho (2013) found that many women are entering the hospitality industry; however, most senior management positions are held by men. She noted this discrepancy due to many hospitality classrooms that are filled with women and the usual guest speakers of the industry that come to present are men. She asks: What is keeping many of the women from reaching senior management positions? Her preliminary findings are that many women enter this field and do not have problems in the beginning stages of their career lives. It changes when women advance in their career and they begin to have families. Ho (2013) suggests that it is not the classic gender glass ceiling phenomenon <sup>3</sup> (Ho 2013) but a “choice” that women make in their professional lives to balance life and work. This in turn creates a smaller pool of candidates to advance to senior management positions. I argue that Ho has an individualistic perspective and does not apply a sociological analysis to understand the structural context, institutional culture, and organizational decision making that might dissuade women from reaching management positions.

To also counter this assumption, Schaap et. al. (2007) noted that “women’s advancement in the hospitality industry has been slow because of the interest of the good old-boy network” (Schaap et. al. 2007: 88). It is a clique that men create of other men who they trust and they not only socialize within their work but they also socialize outside of work. These good old-boy networks exclude women and without having access to these networks women cannot penetrate the glass ceiling. This is despite the skills or abilities women have that would enhance their

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<sup>3</sup> Unofficial policy that prevents women from advancing within a company or organization due to sexism.

position in to senior-level management (Schaap et. al. 2008). The lack of social networks leads to unequal access to jobs and careers that women are being denied at the upper management levels of the hospitality industry.

Ho (2013) described these women's lives as revolving around their work and their family life has to accommodate to the work schedule. The women in this study are still considered the main caregivers, however, if they have support (i.e. their own parents, or their spouses) they are able to get away with not being the main caregiver. Different standards are placed upon male workers. Ho (2013) mentions that stereotypical gender roles do play a part in why women do not advance to the top tiers of the hospitality industry, she believed this shaped women's decisions on what is more important, family or career. There is an emphasis that the choice is individualistic, even among the participants in the research – nobody questions how the industry is patriarchal and that reflects the larger society's values. The women are abundant in positions of less power but as they advance pressure is placed upon them to either choose a life of family or a life of a career. They cannot have both. Unless one is a man, which then it is expected that you choose a career because you have a wife to take care of your family at home. Lincoln (2009) critiques this idea by Ho (2013), explaining that there is a self-perception placed upon women culturally when their gendered position is taken into context.

Schaap et. al. (2007) follows this analysis with a Catalyst<sup>4</sup> survey of male CEO's and female senior-level executives. Both were asked what they saw as the difficulty with women reaching high-level management positions; the males simply stated that there was a shortage of women, however the women reaffirmed the fact that there are negative stereotypes placed upon

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<sup>4</sup> Measuring work conditions.

women and there are secluded networks that women are not a part of that keep them from these high-level jobs (Schaap et. al. 2007). What was interesting, though, was that both groups believed that women had to adapt to the masculine culture of the corporate world to succeed (Schaap et. al. 2007). There was no questioning of the culture itself. As Britton (2000) previously stated that the corporate image is of masculine work ethic.

Austrin and West (2005) surveyed two of the largest casinos in New Zealand to analyze their employees. It was found that on the gaming floor sixty percent were women and they were mostly minorities. The employees are constantly monitored with their presentation as well as how well they are able to keep the game flowing and not make any mistakes (Austrin and West 2005). Austrin and West (2005) explain an interesting change also noted by Sallaz (2002) when the casinos changed from only serving elite clientele to serving mass clientele for leisure and fun, the dealers changed from being men to women. The emphasis now is on customer relations towards the card players because when casinos were considered exclusive, the card dealers had to be very serious and non-emotional toward the players, which is why they hired men in this atmosphere.

The casino industry is an interesting place to study when we look at the work that is done there. The industry used to be exclusively a boys club, meaning the gamblers were males as well as the dealers. That aspect of the business has shifted. Gabriel Vogliotti in the 1970's was a journalist turned gaming expert in the rising gaming economy in Nevada (Chandler and Jones 2011). He ended up linking sexual fantasy to gambling and presenting the idea that women needed to be all around for the pleasures of the men to be seen. Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel in the early 1940's was the first in the industry to begin using women in the gambling arena. He

believed what was needed was the access to women at all times. Sex is part of the business of gambling, but it was not to offend middle class America.

Relating the research of the feminization of work places to my place of study, we can see that many of the issues discussed in the literature are relevant to the casino card room. All managers, supervisors, and pit bosses in the casino are men. The women are in the front lines as card dealers presenting the card room as a more feminized work place but a masculine atmosphere for the male players to come to relax. Continuing with hospitality, research finds the lower tiers of the industry are feminized jobs. Control and surveillance are placed upon the employees and there is more interaction with the public. There is not much threat for the male dominated power structure in the upper tiers because they are making women choose in the lower sectors either family or work and the system is in place that women will more likely choose family. The structure of the hospitality industry assumes it is gender neutral, but it is not. It favors men. Even with Ho (2013) having an upbeat prediction of women advancing to the higher ranks in the hospitality industry, there is still the underlying notion of power structure and how the American culture of individualism plays a part in creating an illusion of upward mobility.

### *Emotion Work*

Arlie Hochschild (1979) described emotion work and emotional labor as “the process of managing and presenting emotions in the private sphere of our lives” (Brook 2009:533) and the organization of a state of mind created for the public that are visible by facial and body display (Brook 2009). The idea is that employees are expected to express certain emotions to perform their jobs properly (Handel 2013). Hochschild (1979) explains two presentations of self through performance: surface acting and deep acting. As individuals, we are always managing our

impressions to fit into the situation that we are in. Hochschild's (1979) example is of an actor who is playing King Lear and the ways that he can go about enacting this part; he can follow the English school of acting that focuses on the outer demeanor of the actor. Or, he can choose the Stanislavsky/American school of acting where the actor guides his memories or feelings that then gives the actor the emotions needed for the part. Related to work, when an individual's emotions align with their job – which is deep acting – the individual will be less stressed at work (Handel 2013) However, when the emotions are faked – which is surface acting – this leads to more stress at work and emotional exhaustion (Handel 2013). This concept gives the idea that society has an effect on both the outer performance as well as the inner performance of an individual within their lives.

Commodifying emotions is a concept Hochschild (1979) refers to when analyzing how workers are alienated from their work. Enarson (1993) points out that service workers have to commodify their friendliness for their own economic interest. Hochschild uses Marx's alienation theory to make her point through the idea that the public-self, of the service workers, belongs to the managers (Brook 2009). Their personas belong to the organization and not to themselves. She continues on with Marx's theorization of wage – labor and what the worker is able to commodify for the organization; just because organizations seem to only commodify worker's physical and mental labor powers they are also able to commodify their emotional feeling labor (Brook 2009). The very act of the worker is the presentation of the company or organization. The company does not expect the workers to actually internalize these performances, however, they are a representations of the company or organization (Brook 2009). Emotions and emotional activities are managed in the marketplace by employers.

Other researchers have expanded on Hochschild's idea. Women are more likely than men to be in a position that requires emotional service work. Macdonald and Merrill (2009) call these women emotional proletarian. Emotional proletarians are teachers, service workers, maids, nannies, and anything that is catered to someone else's needs to be catered to. Emotional proletariats comprise 29 percent of women laborers. This, of course, will continue to grow. What is interesting in what they found was that not everyone has a chance of becoming an emotional proletariat and it is sorted out by ethnicity, class, and gender (Macdonald & Merrill 2008). Women work as emotional proletarians in twice the numbers as men do (Macdonald & Merrill 2009). White women will be in emotional proletarian jobs in their early life – most likely during school working part time – and in their later years when their children have gone off to school. However, with Latina women and black women their numbers stay the same and there is no dip in their presence as an emotional proletariat (Macdonald & Merrill 2009). Interactive service requires deep or surface acting to appease the customer, which means these women are taking a little part of themselves out to present themselves in a certain manner (Macdonald & Merrill 2009).

Filby (1992) demonstrated that cashiers at betting shops were sexualized and they perform emotional labor; from making the customer feel like he was at home or “acting out plays with the customer” (Filby 1992:38). An example would be in how the cashiers would ask how the customer's day was; that cashier would be attentive to his needs while he would talk to her, receiving emotional support, as if she was his girlfriend or wife. The experiences the women would fall back on would be their experiences as women (Filby 1992). Tyler (2012) in her research of sex shop workers brought up that these workers had to manage their emotions as they were performing sexualized labor; whichever it was either giving advice on their products or

giving advice to customers. Their emotions were being commodified (Tyler 2012). Their appearance had nothing to do with sexualization, but their sexual subjectivities were and are commodified. In Tyler's (2012) study regarding Soho sex shops there was a strong tendency to make sure that the workers that worked there dressed more conservatively and that their appearance was not the main focus for the clients. Their focus was their emotional sexualized understanding of who the customers were and how they presented themselves as experts in the field of sexuality. It is what Tyler (2012) called repertoire because there was comfort for the customers to be around people that were not judging them.

Linking all three themes together my place of research incorporates all of it. I expand upon the literature to how the women understand their work environment. I examine whether the women feel they are in a place of power or in a place of oppression. Emotion work as a dealer is a large part of the job, even though it is not on the job description. The literature on emotion work relates to the casino world because there is constant soothing for the customers because the majority of the time they are losing money. The casino dealers are bribed with tips to perform emotional labor. The sexualized environment and tipping system allows for the management and customers to control the dealing behavior.

## THEORY

For this research I used Feminist Standpoint Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory.

### *Feminist Standpoint Theory*

Feminist standpoint theory originates from a Marxist theoretical perspective which focused on the oppression of women (Hekman 1997). Women have their own understanding of how they view the world and how they view making sense of their experiences. Feminist

standpoint theory is a “woman’s unique standpoint in society that provides the justification for the truth claims of feminism while also providing it with a method with which to analyze reality” (Hekman 1997: 341). Women and men have different realities according to the experiences that they have had. According to those who are the ruling group – in this case, the men – their perspective on life is considered reality while women’s experiences are not considered real (Hekman 1997).

What is important to remember regarding this theory is that it is particular rather than universal (Hekman 1997). Which means women create their social world according to who is around them. It also focuses intersectionality because women from different classes, races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds experience being a woman differently. The feminist standpoint theory allows us to connect and analyze women’s everyday lives within our social institutions (Hekman 1997). It also makes us evaluate what knowledge is gained, where the knowledge is situated, and what standpoint is this knowledge coming from (Hekman 1997). With this understanding, feminist standpoint theory is achieved rather than given, as women may not realize they are being oppressed (Hekman 1997). But women who do realize their own oppression are able to then voice their concerns from their viewpoint as a woman.

The participants in my study who are women casino card dealers, are in a very unique position as workers and women. Feminist standpoint theory allows me to analyze their reality within this socially constructed setting of the casino. Their knowledge is based upon their lives, their understanding of their position as women, and where they are as workers in the casino. As stated earlier, some of the women card dealers may not think they are being oppressed while some may think they are. The women dealers’ take on their life, is what reality is available to them in the casino world and in the outside world.

## Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction is how people act toward things based on the meanings of those things. Meanings are derived from the social interactions and interpretations. Behavior then is reflective, a socially understood meaning.

Gender is an achieved status and “is constructed through socially, psychologically, and cultural means” (West and Zimmerman 1991: 13). “Doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1991), is guided by social cues that people can understand and they use Goffman’s idea that refers to it as a gender display where femininity and masculinity are the standards of being male and female. Gender then, is culturally defined. Gender display is then what society deems as feminine or masculine (West and Zimmerman 1991). In a sense it is like a patriarchal bargain – “set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated” (Kandiyoti 1991 :104). These influences shape women’s subjectivity within a patriarchal structure.

Gender and gender inequality are socially constructed. They create political and power struggles for those who want to define them concretely. The sexualization and eroticization of male dominance and female submission creates symbolic violence where patriarchal forms of sexuality are imprinted deep into our bodies, thoughts, and identities as individuals (Chambers 2005). As socially constructed gendered beings we act accordingly to our surroundings (Chambers 2005). Our interactions with people creates our surroundings or as Chambers (2005) citing Bourdieu calls it, our habitus. We come to understand the norms around us and we obey them without a second thought. It is not the act that we continually are doing, but because of the act we become certain types of people (Chambers 2005).

A key theoretical idea that I believe shapes the experiences of the casino women in this study is emotion work. Emotion work, either encourages or inhibits emotions to make them appropriate for a social situation (Hochschild 1979). Again, we are social individuals and are socialized to act a certain way (Hochschild 1979). Hochschild (1979) refers to Goffman regarding “social patterns in emotive experiences” (Hochschild 1979:555). As individuals, we are continually conveying how we are to act in different situations. It is a “gesture in social exchange” (Hochschild 1979:568). The social exchange takes place in two scenarios, surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting is when an individual does not feel what those around him/her think she/he should feel. Deep acting is when an individual internalizes feelings others around him/her are feeling.

For my research symbolic interaction with emotion work allowed me to analyze the women dealers and understand what their place is as an emotion worker. The theory helped me examine how women comprehend their status as being an object for the casino as well as the majority male card player. Using Symbolic Interaction and Feminist Standpoint Theory together allowed me to understand how women view themselves in the casino, patriarchy is all encompassing in the casino and how women use their gender display to perform their gender. Symbolic Interaction and Feminist Standpoint Theory go around in a constant circle to create experiences for the women dealers. Their outer display presents what the casino wants them to portray – customer service - while their thought process as a woman dictates how they will present themselves. The interaction that the women card dealers present depends on the interactions earlier in their lifetime.

## METHODS

For my research, I used in-depth interviews and ethnography. Interviews are vital because they can capture “people’s witness accounts of their social world” (Sprague 2005:119). The participants shared their knowledge of their social world. Understanding the work dynamics from the women’s perspective, ultimately contradicted the bias I had regarding the women who dealt cards. By conducting interviews, I was able to listen to different ways language was used to describe the women dealers working conditions and I grasped a better understanding of their position within the casino hierarchy.

Being I worked with the interview participants prior to beginning the interview process, we established a positive co-worker relationship. I also had co-workers who became friends. This personal relationship with the participants influenced the way I self-disclosed information. The goal was not to influence the responses of the participants (Sprague 2005). I wanted to reduce or eliminate the Hawthorne effect, where participants change their mode of behavior — or in my case the extension of the dealer performance — because they were aware of being observed (Wickström and Bendix 2000). Even with these particular precautions in place, some participants during the interview process would ask if their responses were correct. In response, I assured the participants that their statements were valid.

The use of ethnography allowed me to observe group practices and beliefs (Sprague 2005) that were present in the casino environment. The data that I collected on my ethnography permitted me entry into the social setting (Sprague 2005). Originally ethnography was created to study groups of people who were considered distant from our own comfort zone (Esterberg 2002). These were groups and people with different cultures outside of United States. However, ethnography can also be used to study people and cultures much closer to home. Ethnographies

can range from observing a farmers market's vendor and worker population, to observing a college campus and watching students congregate or pass by. As for my research site in the casino, I observed mundane routines, exciting events, people's facial expressions, the sounds that are in the casino, and where people are placed within this environment. As a banker who sits quietly and attentively at the card table, I was placed in a job that allowed me to observe as my main job description. In this thesis ethnographic data supplemented my 10 interviews.

### *Recruitment*

Before I quit my job at the casino, I asked my co-workers if they would be willing to participate in my research project. I told them that I was doing research to understand the working culture of the casino industry and if they had time to contribute their point of view. If they decided they were interested in the project, I gave them my telephone number and asked for theirs so I would be able to set up an interview. I asked a total of twenty women if they wanted to participate. Thirteen women agree to do the interview, but due to time constraints as well as scheduling issues I interviewed a total of ten women. Within in three weeks, the interviews were complete.

### *Sample*

I interviewed ten participants. My sample was female card dealers. Four were Vietnamese, one was Cambodian, three were white, one was Mexican, and one who was mix heritage of white and Mexican. The women ranged from ages in their early thirties to their early fifties. Most had been in the industry for almost twenty years. All had started working in the casino in their early twenties. Seven of the women were mothers with children aging from one to their mid-20's. Only one of my participants was married. Three of the women were

homeowners, while the others were renters. English was the second language for five of my participants.

The path to becoming a dealer among my participants ranged from having family or friends in the business or getting recruited to the job. Eight of the women had worked in several different types of casinos varying from cruise ships, Tribal casinos, big corporate casinos, and casinos outside the United States. All had been at Cowboy Cocktail Casino for at least two years. My sample consisted of women dealers who were earning a *minimum* of 2000 dollars a month on tips. The women’s yearly earnings could range from \$50,000 a year to \$100,000 dollars a year. It fluctuated according to the economy. For example, my participant Reyna in one night, made \$11,000 dollars. According to my participants Cowboy Cocktail Casino was a “hidden gold mine” for dealers.

Table 3 List of Participants.

Participants	Years in Industry	Age when Started	Ethnicity/Race
Telma	24	18	Mexican/White
Angelica	24	18	White
Tommie	14	21	Cambodian
Miranda	18	22	Vietnamese
Alexis	11	25	White
Sandra	24	21	Vietnamese
Ashlee	20	21	Vietnamese
Reyna	17	18	Mexican
Abigail	29	21	White
Hannah	20+	21	Vietnamese

## *Interviews*

I asked my interview participants to suggest places for the interview. I wanted to make sure that they were comfortable at all times. I did not want to interview any of my participants inside the casino, since it could jeopardize their job security. Some of my interviews, were conducted at Starbucks and we shared a coffee together. Others I met at restaurant and had lunch or dinner with them. Other places where I met my participants were at parks, bookstores, parking lots, and their home. The interviews lasted from 15 minutes to 90 minutes; most were 60 minutes. The shorter interviews were with participants who answered quickly and without too much elaboration. Even when prompted with follow up questions. When we would first meet up we would talk about life in general, getting to know what was going on with each other's lives since I had quit. At times I had to interrupt my participants just for a moment to have them to sign the consent form!

All except one participant agreed to be audio recorded. The women did not seem worried about any risk. They were all happy to help me with my research and to be able to tell their stories. My one participant who did not want to be recorded was very intrigued by the whole process. She did not understand why I would even want to interview her. Throughout the interview she would ask questions like, "Why are you not interviewing doctors or people who do 'good' work?" Even after the interview was completed she wanted to see all the notes I had taken, which I showed her. Her interpretation of what was considered "good work" to research, was influenced by the "ruling groups' [p]erspective" (Hekman 1997) of what is considered legitimate and important.

The type of questions I asked were open ended because I wanted my participants to be able to expand on their experiences. I used questions as guides and for each interview the

conversations would go many different ways (Appendix A). Some of my participants spoke a lot about working conditions in various casinos they had worked at, some spoke about what it meant to be a tip earner, and some would go into personal details with their own experiences as being gamblers and how that had affected their lives.

### *Ethical Concerns and Conditional Concerns*

My main ethical concern was to make sure that my participants in this study knew that their information would be confidential. I did not want to put their livelihood at jeopardy for my research. Because of this, I tried to make sure my participants felt secure with me, that any information they divulged to me would be kept confidential, and that all of their names would be changed. I also made sure that I did not expose the identification of the casino. Another issue that arose was that I was already an established member of the casino card room. Since I had been working there for over two years, people had already formed various relationships with me. I had shared personal stories with some, and many who spoke to me regularly knew that I was a student. I did not want my participants to feel that I had only gotten to know them for my research. Once it was time to begin the interviews, I quit working at the casino because I did not want my participants to feel any discomfort in what they had shared with me during the interview process and make them feel uncomfortable at work.

I had preconceived notions of the women dealers with whom I observed each day and night for two years (Esterberg 2002). I had assumed that most of my dealer co-workers were partiers, gamblers; at times I guessed some just “settled” for this type of job. However, I had to put these thoughts aside because I was studying the women dealers in the casino and truly listen to their experiences and perspectives. Esterberg (2002) suggests that it might be not the smartest choice to study a place that you are too familiar with because you might not see anything new.

This might indeed be true, but as a sociologist and researcher I felt it was important to make meaning of these interactions.

*Ethnography: Setting and Fieldnotes*

Gambling in the United States has had a very long history; during the frontier era – coinciding with the gold rush – historical accounts emphasized the proud all male, masculinized gambling atmosphere (Enarson 1993). Initially, in the United States, gambling was a male dominated activity, “[w]omen played a largely ornamental role” (Enarson 1993:220) in the context of gambling. The women would be there to show support as well as being the servers of the alcohol. They were not allowed to gamble, nor were they allowed to deal (Enarson 1993). It was not until the 1930’s that women were finally allowed to work in the casinos as dealers, thanks to Raymond “Pappy” Smith (Enarson 1993). His idea was that having women dealers created a more “cordial atmosphere” (Enarson 1993:220). This was also reinforced with the labor shortages during World War II when most males were heading to the war. The casino industry followed in suit like others and hired many women.

As previously mentioned, I worked at Cowboy Cocktail Casino as a banker for over two years. The demographic of the dealers I viewed during my time there, were that a majority of the dealers were females. There were two sections within the casino; the poker section and the table games section. The poker section, was by my observations a mostly male dominated area, both by players and dealers; I did not work in that section. The players that came to play poker were considered “serious” players and for many of them it was their occupation. For the table games section, where I worked, there were more female card dealers than male card dealers. The day shifts were dominated by women, while the swing and graveyard shift was more diverse in the gender aspect.

The table games section was split into two areas: blackjack and pai gow. The blackjack section housed players that were looking for quick cash. There were regular players but the blackjack sections was more likely to see new players who were not familiar with the casino culture. The blackjack section dealers were slightly more diverse racially and ethnically than the pai gow section. For the pai gow section it was usually the same players day in and day out. The two main groups that deal in that section were Vietnamese and white.

In my role as a former banker, I would sit at the card table with players and a dealer. We were the first two people a player would be in contact with when he or she would sit down on a table. Above us in the hierarchy of the casino were “the suits.” They were the ones directly supervising the dealers – also known as the pit boss, floor woman, floor man, and floor person. Above the pit boss was the human resource boss, then the casino manager, and then the casino owner. For the bankers their supervisor were the most visible. In the room that I worked in housed fourteen card tables. There were six blackjack tables, three pai gow tables, two baccarat tables, two three card poker tables, and two ultimate Texas hold ‘em tables. Twelve of the tables were in two rows of six going down the room and the other three tables were on the side of the room where an exit is located. It was an L shaped room. Not all tables were open all the time, but there was always one pai gow and one blackjack table open. At each table, there would be a banker in a brown shirt with at least \$10,000 worth of chips, all neatly stacked, ready to be dispersed to the dealer when needed. All tables would have a dealer who was in a blue shirt. They carry a tray of \$3000 with them to change money.

At the two corners of the room there were two podiums: one for the bankers and one for the dealers. This was where all paperwork was located and also where the bank supervisors and pit bosses stand. There were cameras in every corner of the room, on top of the ceiling, right on

top of the podiums, in the break room, the locker room, and on top of every card table. The card room color tones were neutral. The walls were beige with crown molding on the top. The carpet was also a neutral color of light brown. The only color that was vibrant in the room was the pai gow section where it housed a happy Buddha and all the fruits that was around it to show prosperity. The players were never to go behind the table where the dealer was standing. There were also signs on top of each table to show the customers what game was played on a certain table.

My field notes consisted of the last two years of writing notes on toilet paper, recording my voice, and writing diary entries about my day had been. I made sense of the world by writing down ideas and thoughts that occurred to me during certain events (Esterberg 2002). I had kept a field note diary close to the day when I began working at the casino. Since I was so new to the casino industry most of my questions that I had were focused on the language and performance the dealers presented in the casino. I had to learn the language of the casino to start making sense of what was going on around me. I would jot down events that would happen at work and at home I would review my notes and relate it to concepts I was learning in my classes. I used a computer application called EVERNOTE where I jotted down ideas, as well as recorded my voice when I had a lot to say on a subject. I did not do formal field notes as Esterberg (2002) suggests. It was my job as a researcher to try to understand the cultural meanings of my surroundings.

Then, for one week I conducted systematic fieldnotes to capture the daily experiences of the card dealers and added to my already existing notes. With over two years of observations, I added this ethnography data as a supplement to the ten interviews. For my focused ethnography, I observed in only one place and that was my place of employment. I was able to sit at all the

tables during my observation week since it was the week right after Christmas and the casino was slightly slower at that time. Typically during holidays the regular players do not come in as often because they were with their families. The normal routine was slightly different in the casino. It did not take away from the essence of the casino atmosphere. I jotted down notes on the different interactions among the tables because the crowds at each table varied.

I began my observations on my first day of a fresh workweek. I observed for a minimum of an hour at the table that I was at. I not only observed at my table, but if my table was a dead spread I would look at what was happening on the other tables. I would see who was playing, who the dealers were, who the bankers were, who the floor persons and banker supervisors were and what time of day it was. I also observed situations while I was in the break room as well as from the podium. Each point of view gave a different angle to what was going on within the big picture of the casino setting. Being at the table with the players and a dealer allowed me more personal contact and interaction with both parties. The break room allowed me to see how dealers act while off the table and I was able to talk to them about their lives other than the casino. The side door of the casino was where all the smokers went and chatted. It was a hangout place for everyone when they need a couple of minutes of de-stressing. The podium that was located in one of the corners of the card room overlooked the room and I was able to observe the whole room. Noting different groups at each table and observing the mannerisms of the crowd. Things that caught my eye I made a mental note of and during my breaks I wrote down words and phrases on my phone. After work I would write down as well as use my voice recorder to document the daily events of the casino world.

## FINDINGS

I approached the research study wondering how women card dealers made sense of their working environment that I viewed as a hyper masculine domain. What I found was women who were empowered, used their femininity as a tool for money making, and the appreciation of the job they had because it gave them financial freedom. Yet, the very sexism that shapes the casino was what inhibited their safety and even their upward mobility at the casino.

### **Sexism and the Casino Industry**

All my participants were aware that the industry they worked in was a very sexist environment. Some thought it had changed over time, some thought it was the same, and some just said it was still there. They were highly aware that they were not twenty year old girls anymore - but rather grown women. They had been “around the block and knew what was around the corner.” The sexism the women encountered was the men – either players, co-workers, or bosses – reestablishing male dominance which is sexual (MacKinnon 1989) They had all learned different coping mechanisms to work with the sexism within the industry; varying from taking it as a joke, having a comeback, or just letting it go all together.

Angelica had the unfortunate way of losing her job by finding a boyfriend. “Me and another girl got fired from that job because she got married and I got a boyfriend. You have to deal with a lot of sexism in the industry.” Tommie followed Angelica’s analysis by describing her own experience. When she began working graveyard she worked with mostly male dealers and male pit bosses. She recounted the times when she had voiced her opinion on things that she thought were unfair and she was silenced by her male co-workers. She described it as a boys club and she was not allowed in.

I work the shift where there are three dealers coming in, two males, and myself, and a floor person that is male. And it is so bad when you don't get along with any of these fuckers. At times I feel like they team up. To...just work against you. I am not one to conform. I am not one to stay too quiet about things...I feel...I have spoken out about things...and now...I have been ostracized...so I basically do my own thing. Finding out that when I speak my mind...and it affects me adversely, I realize that I should just keep my mouth shut and do my job. For fear of retaliation. However, if I was a guy, they would not be picking on me. That's where the being a woman and working with a male group...if I was a guy they would not pick on me as much.

There were frequent scenarios when pit bosses and male dealers would present their sexist viewpoints. On one occasion I was on a dead spread with Lance, and Jackson, the pit boss, came by. We were watching the television where two women anchors were talking about football. Jackson then smirked and said, "Yeah, this is what I want to watch, two women discussing football." Lance concurred with him stating that, "It does not make sense for women to talk about football. Soccer and basketball okay, but not football." He also mentioned that the sports network probably was not able to afford a retired NFL player to be an anchor. Jackson then went on to discuss how he had overheard a woman card player talk about how she enjoyed staying home on Sundays, watching the game, and drinking beer. Jackson sarcastically commented, "I'm sure she gets a lot dates." For them, gender was finite. Women and men were supposed to stick to their roles.

While the women acutely felt the sexism, at times female dealers would enact the sexist viewpoints against each other, especially women pit bosses. The few instances when there was a female boss around, it was assumed that she was "a bitch," while her male co-worker was perceived as assertive. For example, one afternoon Phailin and I were on a dead spread. She looked up towards the podium where the floor woman was standing. She then retorted, "Men are better bosses than women." I asked her to explain. She replied because there are some jobs women and men are designed to have, and being a boss for a woman just was not. I had also had

a similar conversation with Hannah regarding bosses before I had asked her to interview for me.

Once again I was on a dead spread and one of the floor men came by to chat and then left.

Hannah stated that she was way happier having him as her floor man than having the women.

They make things run smoothly and there is no drama. I am closer to my male co-workers than to my female co-workers. It is easier to talk to them. I get along better with males. They respect you on how you are. You see all the female floor...they all got kicked out because they had favorites and they make bad decisions. Or they are jealous of each other. I am so comfortable to work with the two floor men. I rather work with floor men than floor ladies. They don't pay attention to little things. The women pay attention to little things. Like, with men, I can wear open toe shoes. With women I cannot. Everywhere, not only here. I like to work with floor men than floor ladies.

Telma had been a pit boss in her younger years. Her advice for women when they became bosses was to not lead with emotions. She believed that emotions were a quality in women that made nightmare managers. "If you are leading by emotion, you are not leading anyone. This could be a lack of education, or the people they are choosing to put in those positions." Telma then recounted stories of her time as a pit boss at Century Casino.

When I was a boss at Century, I remember working there and always hearing people talk about me. It was in a grander scale. Then, there were some girls that I thought were my friends...I was in the bathroom and they didn't know I was in there, they were talking by the mirror, talking shit about me. I was in the stall. And I remember them saying, 'oh, she thinks she's this, she thinks she's that', just tearing me down to the ground! And I remember opening the stall and just looking at them. I just smiled and washed my hands and walked away. I never treated them any different...I treated them professionally, I was not friends with them anymore. But when I am on the job I do not treat people differently! That is what you have to do. Personal problems...they are gone...that is to be dealt with on personal time. When you are on the job...treat everyone the same. Then you won't have problems. That is why most of them failed and got kicked out. It's a lack of education. That is why they failed.

Telma also had many issues with male dealers who did not feel that they needed to listen to her as a young female pit boss.

The men did not respect me! When I became a floor...you have to remember...I am 44 now...at the time I was in my late 20's and including I was put in a position of power over a lot of men. And they did not like it! They would not, even when I would come to the table to make a

decision in these big games, they wouldn't accept my decision. They would call for the casino manager...So, it came down to where I had to call him...and he would make the same exact decision I made...but they would accept it. Because it was coming from him...And then I would have coworkers as well, especially the men. There was a lot of jealousy and they always assumed I had been sleeping with someone to get the job.

Ashlee was blunt about the fact that the gaming industry had a lot of sexism and sexual harassment involved in it. She stated that it just comes with the territory. When sexual harassment or sexism occurred it was brushed aside, but there were times that it needed to be looked upon, acknowledged, and penalized. She acknowledged that as a floor person, she was the only one wearing a skirt. "It is still a male dominated industry. Big bosses, still male. You see females, but not as much. They are the bottom managers, but not like general managers or like head of director. You don't see that. It is very rare. Mostly you see all males on the top of the chain. And then you have floor like me, on the bottom."

Abigail, who had been a floor in many different casinos and had been in the casino industry longer than anyone else, spoke about being a pit boss and being in the industry as a woman like this:

It is still a male club. I said I wanted to learn to golf because all the business was still done on the golf course. I felt that because I didn't play golf I would never be part of the club. I still feel like that now. All the male floor men had an outing. They went to go see a hockey game...but it was the whole male club thing. It is alive and kicking. Ashlee just became relief floor. She is the only person in a skirt. At one point, it was only me and Eva, now there is no full time female floor. Is that just a coincidence?

Reyna also had spent time being a floor person at other casinos. She did not enjoy being the floor and would only do it if her bosses asked her. She remembered that she had a hard time with male dealers who were originally from Las Vegas casinos. They questioned her authority.

When dealers would come in and I genuinely felt that I made more than some people because I had built a clientele I grew up in this place. There would be guys that came in from Las Vegas with slick back hair, super edgy guys, they thought I was the biggest bitch. They would come

and be like, 'you think you are all that,' and I was like 'no. I just know what I am working with. I don't care that you are from Vegas, I don't care that you can deal craps. I can out deal you in the games that I do know. And I am working the customers the way I know how because I know them and you don't.' So, there was that battle. Dealer, to dealer.

Integrity was an aspect that all of the dealers expressed being on the job. They did not want to have a bad reputation. They shared stories of dealers who had cheated on games and they did not want to be part of that club. Integrity meant everything to them. Even though the women worked in a sexist environment they all had this sense of being women with power. They did not look at themselves as victims or sad about the reason they were working in a casino. The casino was their livelihood and most enjoyed what they were doing. The job allowed them to do many things in life and they were very appreciative of the opportunities granted to them. "I think women in power is great! I am happy to see that. If the women are educated and understand their position and are not leading by emotion...they are great leaders. We can be great leaders...if we can separate our personal feelings from work."

The dimensions of work for the women card dealers was complex. Their work experience according to Hekman (1997) allowed for connection to "everyday life with the analysis of the social institutions that shape that life" (343). They come into an industry that was heavily male dominated, required them to emphasize their femininity, and work for minimum wage. The work brings them independence, power as a money maker, and an easy job to work, which has a flexible schedule for them to do other things in life. It places these women in middle-class status which makes them different than regular service workers. Even though they are not presented in higher management and it was a hard road to travel the women did not dwell on that.

## Playing the Game

Once the women were officially dealers, it then became their task to create a persona that fit into the casino world. They all agreed this did not happen overnight. Knowing the mechanics of the game was not enough. Being a dealer meant more than just distributing cards and money to the players. It was expected that they put on a show. It was about the interaction the dealer and the player had while this transaction was happening. Lam (2011) referred to this as the process of informally learning the rules of the industry. Learning what it meant to be a woman, how to interact with players, and learning to hustle, all linked to the women card dealer's ability to make money.

### Understanding One's Status as a Woman

*Being a female is a lot more powerful than most people think.*

Sandra.

Most of my participants felt that there were distinct advantages - for generating tips - to women. Being an attractive woman was an asset and as the women grew up in the industry, they learned that protecting their integrity was also important. Ashlee was very frank that looks get women in the door to becoming a dealer as well as being the highest tip earners within the casino industry. However, she reinforced it by stating that the women who were the best looking had to have some kind of personality to go with their looks because if they did not, things would go downhill quite quickly:

For the females of the industry, you are pretty and you got some kind of noodles working in there you can get away with a lot of stuff! I mean a lot! If he [the customer] sits down and she [the dealer] has no personality, he is going to be like, 'What am I doing?' Looks gets you in. You have to be pretty! I don't care what all these people say, pretty do get you pretty far!

Angelica followed this sentiment when she explained how she was able to get her second dealing job, “I got the job because I was a cute, pretty female. And you know, you do want an attractive young woman at the table.” As I interviewed the participants I detected no anger or resentment in acknowledging that the industry they worked in favored beautiful people. They were very open in sharing that they were aware they were attractive women and that was why the players come to play with them. Reyna who was an attractive blond woman, commented that the casino allowed women to meet “industry people,” and because of the disposable income, they spent it on themselves which creates a setting of “keeping up with the Joneses’.”

Sandra, a Vietnamese woman, was one of the most stunning looking dealers. She was petite, long light brown hair, always had her make-up done perfectly, and the most intricate nails that she had done every two weeks. Her casino persona was a mix of being a sexy mother who said things to grown men that would make them blush, as well as putting them right back in their place. She was adamant that being a woman was a powerful role in the casino. Sandra, as well as the other dealers understood they worked in a hyper-masculine space and being “feminine” balanced this. “There is that charisma of a woman appreciating being a woman,” which resonated to their power as dealers and money makers in the business. It also presented how women conduct themselves within this industry since it is heavily gender stereotyped. “Be smart about it. Don’t sleep your way to the top because that is how you lose it. [laughing]...God creates you for being a woman for a reason. Use it to your most ultimate potential.”

Reyna who was college educated, reflected on the ways the casino life can have a dramatic change on a woman’s understanding of who she is because of the pressure to conform to a hyper-masculine setting. Reyna was very close to her parents who kept a close eye on her when she first started in the casino industry. Her father was her role model of what kind of

respect a man should give a woman and that was what she based her interactions with male players. She did not allow them to forget that she was someone's daughter, sister, and wife.

The business is really cut throat. [I]t is a deep rooted thing, cut throat and wickedness...and it is all this lore for a fast life. And being a chick, you are pulled in a million directions. It's like, 'You are a good dealer. You should come by where my buddy hosts this underground game. We guarantee you make 3000, plus tips.' I never bit that bait. Not that it wasn't tempting...Like my girlfriends in the business who did that...did a lot of drugs...and I was never into that. While I am not innocent by any means...drugs was just not my thing. So, I remember linking it...that if I do that...I will do drugs...and I don't know what is happening with these girls. All I know is bad things happen! It was just wicked! It is a bad industry... And if I didn't have my parents presence like...monitoring me. Like, 'What is happening? Who are you taking this trip with?' Anything could of happened! I was super young and vulnerable.

All of the women had learned socially how to be and act as women outside of the casino; that was their base, "managing and presenting emotions" (Brook 2009:533). As they progressed in their time as dealers they learned to emphasize certain characteristics of a "stereotypical woman" to increase their income. Some of the women understood their own oppression within the casino and were very vocal about it during the interview. The women voiced that they held power by emphasizing their femininity for financial gain. However, as women within the casino, they had little say on the overall politics.

### *The Art of being a Dealer - A Gendered Performance*

*My job is to deal a beautiful game, make you laugh,  
lose your money, and tip me on top of all that.  
When I do that successfully, it is like art work.*

*Angelica*

Being a card dealer centered on a working relationship with players. All of the card dealers at Cowboy Cocktail Casino had their set of clients. There were players that enjoyed playing with certain dealers and the dealers liked dealing to them because there was certainty for tips. Tip giving was in the form of players placing bets for the dealers along with their own bet or

handing a dealer a tip if they won. Money did not play on the table, it always had to be chips. Many dealers preferred playing along with the customer because it allowed them to double their money.

The interactions were vital for the dealers because they were able to create bonds with players that would become their repeat customers. Ashlee referred to her regular players as clients and players who would show up sporadically were customers. The dealers strived to have clients. Almost all the interactions were gendered interactions that most of the time catered toward the males. Women dealers were rewarded when going along with gendered stereotypes of nurturing, mothering, and flirty girl, but punished when they were being direct and assertive. The only way to correct that was for men to engage in gendered harassment or violence. The interactions created the emotion work that was informally required of the dealers.

All of the dealers agree that being a dealer was more than just dealing cards and paying the players. It was about giving the players a performance that they enjoyed so that they will return. What was also prevalent, was that gender and hyper-heterosexuality is taken into consideration with all the performances. The women dealers assessed their players. Especially if they were male players, to work on an angle that would allow them to make tips. During my observations I saw most of the women dealers conform to stereotypical gender performances of being a woman, as in being a listener, displaying sad faces when players would lose, tilting their head to one side when asking a question, having a higher pitched voice at times, twirling their hair on their finger, and being caring. Women dealers emphasized their sexuality, playfulness, and flirtation skills when the player expected more. The women dealers would inhibit or induce feelings to make the situation appropriate (Hochschild 1979: 551).

Ashlee made a clear distinction of this with an example of how she performed her gender on the job. When she was on the table she would always try to make the table have a good time. She would constantly be making jokes to run the game smoothly. She presented herself as a tough woman, who could “get a little freaky”, but had boundaries and if a player crossed it they would be reprimanded by her. She explains the distinction:

Let’s say I have known Joe for ten years and we always talk about how’s your family, how’s your business, whatever and we make crazy comments but we always...but there is a relationship that, we know. And then one day he says something like, ‘oh you have a cute butt, I like seeing you from behind.’ And you will be like, ‘oh whatever Joe.’ Something you can brush aside because there is no harm because you have that kind of relationship with that person. Let’s say, David comes in, first day you met him and he shoots that comment to you. He’s not even nice, just being obnoxious, or you don’t know if he is nice...he just finds you attractive. For me, I would take it personally, because I don’t know you. Who are you to comment on my butt? It’s like...for your thrill you are going to comment on my ass? No! That would be different!

Sandra, out of all the dealers that I had worked with, went over and beyond to make her players feel good. Her style of interaction for regular clientele was of caring, compassion, and making sure they were okay, even if they never tipped her. During the interview, she explained that being attentive made her feel good. She had been in the industry so long, she realized that sometimes all someone needed was someone who cared for them. Sandra was known for paying attention to gamblers that had been gambling for long periods of time. If she saw a player sitting at a table for more than two hours and they had forgotten to get themselves a drink, she would drop a bottle of water right next to them. Usually the player would pick it up and drink it all. If she noticed that a player was at a table when she clocked in and the person was still there after she was going to clock out, she would get them food to eat. Just to make sure they got some nourishment. “It is my way of showing, ‘Hey, when you take care of me, this is

how I take care of you.’” She had built up her clientele based on making sure her players were taken care of by her.

I know all my customers. What they like to drink, eat, and smoke...Everybody wants to be recognized. Genuine recognition not the ass kissing one. So, I mean, I invest a little money in it. But in return, I will get it back. That is what I mean in the long term. Even with my cook. Like...Who am I?...I get filet mignon at 5:30 in the morning. I don't get it because I am Sandra. I don't get it because I have big tits. I get it because I take care of them. You want to ask for something you better take care of them. Everybody has a price. Either in money or whatever...You gotta figure out what it is. If you are going to take something from someone you better be able to put it back...to replace it. If you can't do that...then don't bitch and whine, how come I didn't get what she got.

Sandra had no issues of getting control of her table if necessary. She had learned throughout the years that managing the table and having the players respect her and understand the rules of the table while she was on there was mandatory. She wanted to get to know her players, but all of the players needed to understand her boundaries during the thirty minutes she would be dealing on the table. For example, the casino had a 'no cursing' rule and Sandra would always enforce it.

That is another reason I run my game. I've noticed a lot of dealers just dumb down and deal their game. Won't say anything when people cuss or swear and be verbally abusive. I nip that in the butt! I always try to put it in a way without offending them first. Like [if they say] 'Well I didn't know.' I say, 'It's ok baby, you didn't know. I am just telling you so now you know.' Like, being a mother. Instead of coming like...Being a bitch to them...It's like kids, you have to explain to them why they cannot do it...Or, if the guy is an older guy, with a lot of money, so, you have to be careful on how you address them. Like, instead of going, 'Sir you cannot cuss in here.' I go, 'Baby, come on! Enough is enough! Baby I am only 95 pounds! Fuck, once is ok, fuck, twice is ok, FUCK THREE TIMES that's a little bit too much! Can we just tone down the fuck a little bit because I am going to have to call the police and consider this a rape!' And he just busted out laughing. So, right after that, I tell him, 'Ok baby, just cool down with that word because other people can get offended.'

Similar to Sandra, Alexis enjoyed making her customers happy. She liked coming to the table when it was a good positive crowd and she was happy to pay them, because that meant more tips. She had less banter with the players because when she would be on the table dealing

she focused on making sure the cards were dealt correctly. Her conversations with players were about family and pets. “There are some that I know their life story. But usually when I am dealing it’s pretty much just dealing because I can’t do so many things at once. (laughing). I can’t talk and chew gum.”

Tommie had worked in the casino industry for a long time but was new to being a dealer. When asked about how she viewed her relationship with the players she stated, “I don’t want to say friends...but more than just an acquaintance. So, you develop friendly feelings towards them.” She did not think she had developed a bond with customers yet. She felt that her directness sometimes hindered her from achieving a following like many of the other dealers. “[I] am not always well liked. They will come and play with me if I am there, and they will tip me and everything! But I don’t have the personality that draws people.” She had been attempting to become more personable. She related stories in where she had to learn the kinks of each player, especially if they were regulars. She had to learn how to read her players to know what was expected of her. Tommie talked about a regular who liked it when “the more of an ass you are to him, the bigger tips he gives you!” She also mentioned the whole experience of role playing. “These guys want you to act a certain way...I am not just talking about guys in general, girls too. It’s role playing. You tell them what they want to hear. You laugh at their jokes. You fake the funk pretty much to make the money.”

While Sandra embodied the persona of the most caring, Hannah was a much respected dealer at Cowboy Cocktail Casino not only for her card dealing skills but being a respected woman within the Vietnamese community. She was the fastest card dealer in the casino. She had a large following of people who would want to come to play on her tables. Even if they did not play, they wanted to have a conversation with her. She explained her philosophy, “[I] just try

to be nice to customers. When they lose, I try to keep myself quiet. When they win, I celebrate with them.”

Hannah and Miranda who were attractive Vietnamese dealers that I observed used their culture within the Vietnamese community as their platform for dealing. Since there was a fairly large Vietnamese population that gambled and were dealers, the cultural norms were incorporated into the casino setting. Hannah as one of the most respected dealers, her conversations were always polite, quiet, and very respectful. Her demeanor would always be to smile and nod if someone complimented her. Especially within the Vietnamese community she represented herself as a typical Vietnamese woman. Miranda, was a wild card and she always had funny come backs to all her players. She had one of the loudest laughs in the casino and if you knew her laugh, you could always distinguish it. With her players her performance was of her annoying them, they hating it, but then still tipping her because they actually really liked her.

There is a variety of people that I deal to. Fifty percent Asian that includes Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Pilipino and then fifty percent others, white and Mexican and everybody else. My job is like...a combination of that. Recreation, addiction, some just stop by who come in for a restroom break. You have a different variety of people who come and visit. My game is different than everybody else. They need to come in and relieve their stress. People come in and share their knowledge and share their stories with me. Sometimes there are crazy days and people.

Angelica was a proud, intelligent, woman, who enjoyed her job and did it to the best of her ability. Her interactions with players – as was mentioned by other dealers - was the most important part for her. The game was more than just dealing cards; the players that came to Angelica’s table wanted to be listened to. Interacting with the players gave her joy.

Because I gotta tell ya, there is no better feeling than getting off the table and people are cracking up, ‘You were great, Angelica! I had a great time! Thank you so much! I lost my ass, but here’s 20 bucks! Cuz I had such a good time.’ There is no better feeling than that! These guys are completely aware that they are losing their asses, but I did a well enough service that they still gave me money.

Similar to Angelica, Telma conceptualized herself as a listener, similar to a bartender. Telma explained that being a dealer was a very easy job and one was able to make a living “if you just talk to people. [I] try to make them feel a connection with me.” Listening was an important aspect of being a dealer. The job as a dealer was to be that one person that had no biases in hearing the stories that the players expressed. She conveyed this sentiment when she talked about her fellow card dealers who she believed did not understand what their position as a dealer meant.

The dealers that don't make money, like Karina...she complains that she only makes 30-60 dollars a day. That is because she talks too much. People want to be listened to. You wanna increase your income? Just take a breath! Just sit back and listen. If I am talking through you, you, and you, it's like total chaos! And no one can get a word in. And really these people just want attention. Let's say we are on a dead spread, and I continue to talk to you (the banker). This person here will start doing things to demand my attention. So, I have to take my focus off you and focus on them. The other bankers might not understand that the person that is sitting in front of me...my bread and butter. That is my goal. We have to give these people our attention. I compare it to little children. Because they want their mom's attention! Just give me attention! If you give them the right attention you can make really great money.

For Ashlee, she perceived the clients as business partners. Her part of the deal was to entertain the players, building a repertoire that included listening to them, making jokes, having discussions of world events, talking about family, and most importantly, discussing what was going on the current game. The player's part was to tip her when he won. It was a place for the customers to come play, hang out and enjoy the company.

It is their way of getting away from everything and this is how they come and relax and not worry. For everybody, it's like a stress relief. Now I think about it, it's almost like going to a strip club. But the dealer doesn't take off their clothes. Men go to strip bars to have a drink just to look and to forget. These men come in to play just to have a drink and to take their mind off a things. And if they win that is fabulous. If they lose that is ok. They have their little life budget.

Ashlee had built a clientele that came to see her on a regular basis. She did not expect them to come every day. When they did come, they played on her game consistently. It took years to build up clientele. Ashlee had worked the swing shift for many years before becoming a day shift person. When she started the day shift about seven years ago, she hardly knew any of the players. She went from making minimum of 200 dollars a shift to 50 dollars a shift. "I went from swing to day and it took me 2-3 months to just to get to know the players. You get the same players. In time you get to know them and I had to build a whole new clientele. So, it's a big difference!"

Reyna's interaction with her players was always about respect. She was "there to deal a game to you and make you have a good time," but she would not put up with nonsense. She had a bubbly personality and was a beautiful woman. All the regular players knew who she was and respected her boundaries. When new players would come to play on her table - and this was usually men - they seemed to view her as only a beautiful blond woman and assumed that she was not smart. They had no clue that she was college educated working her graduate degree. They found out quickly if they disrespected her. She always attempted to diffuse situations before they got out of hand, as in one example:

Like yesterday, I got into with this guy...Like I was trying to diffuse things. I tried to make it as smooth as possible and it was super dead and he is dropping the F bomb because he is losing. So then two other customers come and he keeps on cussing, so I tell him, 'Hey honey you gotta stop dropping the F bomb.' Then he says, 'Well I am not saying it to you, you would know if I was cussing you out.' 'I know that you are not saying it to me, that is why you said it for 20 minutes. I am just saying you have other people here.' And then he's like, 'You are right, my bad.' So, it could of gone either way. I could of just come from the top and attacked him and he would of just been like, 'Fuck you!' So, I try to navigate ...I do pretty good with that.

As a dealer her objective was to come on the table and create a good time with her players. When customers became agitated or complained she would assess how she could

smooth things over, so as not to have a situation that was out of hand. She felt that she had developed this skill well. She expressed that at times, like all people, she had bad days at work.

I mean you have to know what to let go and what not to take personal. And sometimes that is hard. Like everyone else, we have bad days and I am just not in the mood to put up with your shit. Like some day's I will just let it slide. [O]r I have enough awareness not to take it personally...Like, I could have had the worst week of my life, and someone on my table might of just spilt their coffee and they say, 'Shit!' And I will be like, 'Really?! That is what you wanna do, cuss me out?' [laughing] Like it's 'Wow, you are a hot mess!' You are having a bad day. It is important to stay balanced.

Throughout the interviews the interactions with the players was one of the most important parts of the job. The women were guided by social cues of the male players in how to react. As Kandiyoti (1991) stated it was like the patriarchal bargain, where rules and scripts regulated the gender interaction. Also, through the interviews as Chambers (2005) commented there was a form of sexualization of male dominance and female submission, however, the women dealers combated this by being dominant motherly figures.

### Hustling for Tips

At Cowboy Cocktail Casino all dealers received minimum wage but for tax purposes, the casino and IRS had made a deal that the dealers would claim they were making 21-22 dollars an hour. None of the dealers relied on their paychecks because the casino was considered a cash industry. Hustling was something most dealers did to get their tips. Angelica explained it beautifully.

There is a word called the hustle. There is soft hustle and hard hustle. A hard hustle would be me going, 'Dude you gonna tip me?' A soft hustle would be...Cuz we use to wear bow ties...I am going to use this as an example...'How about giving a hurray for the girls and boys in the bow ties!' 'How am I doing?' That is a soft hustle. 'Tip me.' Hard hustle. You hustle, you have to! I mean, you would like not to, especially if someone gets it. But if someone is making hundreds of dollars and they are not tipping, you have to do what is called the soft hustle. Let them remember that you are there for a reason. Maybe I will talk about something I want to purchase. Maybe I will talk about, 'how I am doing.' That is my favorite. 'How am I doing?

Are you enjoying yourself? How's your service today?' Things that make them think about it, but I am not being rude. It's a show, it's a performance, it's art. Without insulting you, it's art.

Ashlee was big on the hustle and demonstrated it proudly. In her interview she spoke about how she would compliment and butter her players up so that they would tip her.

That is how you hustle! You compliment them, you butter them up. You talk with them. You socialize with them that is how you hustle. The guys that don't tip you, you think... 'Why are you wasting your time on someone who doesn't really care?' Even if he doesn't tip you but he is not giving you a hard time, you still don't mind giving him the higher energy. But if you have a guy who doesn't tip you, and then on top of that is being an asshole and grumpier than shit, why would you even try? You wanna save that energy for someone else. You shouldn't but, you are. You don't need that!

Ashlee was fun to watch with her regular players: She grabbed chips from her client's pile very sneakily and placed a bet up for herself next to her players bet. This usually happened with dealers that had a good repertoire with their customers. I never witnessed a male dealer attempt this. I had asked another dealer Sadira – who also used this technique – if she could do that just with anyone. She stated that it took time to become that comfortable with players and it was only if they were tipping and having a good time.

Abigail's approach to generating tips focused on being attentive, courteous, and appreciative towards her players. She would not hard hustle because she deemed it inappropriate.

There are people who are very blatant in the way they hustle. I don't like that. It leaves a bad taste. Personally the only way you should hustle tips is to be friendly, to be courteous...I don't like hearing, kind of sleazy hustles. I don't like hearing, 'oh you know I always want to be on top.' I don't think you need to bring sexual undertones into any business.

Sandra wanted to feel good about the money she made as a dealer, so she worked the soft hustle. She would never outright tell a player how to tip her. If the customer asked how much they should tip her, her answer was, "How much did you like my service?" Sandra believed that

it allowed the customer to make their own decision and she is able to teach them how to tip. “I do hustle, but I keep it on the classy side.” She mentioned that she would hard hustle if the customer was obnoxious and gave her a hard time on the table:

If you are going to waste my time and be talking shit and make me torment myself mentally you know, you better take care of me! Cuz if not, I will let you have a taste of what you are dishing out to me. Or, I want you off my game. Because I don't want that negative energy for my other nice customers who have to sit there and listen to you verbally.

Sandra discussed that her regular customers were her “bread and butter.” Those were the ones that she wanted to keep close because she was a long term dealer. Her goal was that the player won money, tipped her, and then came back another day to win money again. She spoke about a man who would come and play on her table just because he liked watching her interact with the other customers. He had recently retired, divorced, and it took him six months before he started to have conversations with Sandra. The customer relationship turned into a friendlier one where they would go out and have their kids hang out. The relationship did not go further than friendship. He was her “money maker” so she made sure she would not jeopardize her income.

Tommie echoed the similar sentiment that women had a distinct advantage in making money as dealers. Since she was a new dealer, she was developing her casino persona. Her insights of the casino was of a newbie. Even though she had been in the industry for over ten years this was a new avenue for her. She was crafting it to fit the gender norms in the casino. She would take notice of how high tip earners performed their part and realized that dealing is a lot more than just knowing the mechanics of the game.

[Y]ou can use your charm, your body, your looks to get more money. [I]f you are cute, with a nice body, and you have a personality to got with it...makes a difference in your income! We have predominantly male customers. Most guys like to impress women, they like to indulge women, and they would generally tip the women more than men. That is a huge advantage!

Even though receiving tips was important for the dealers, there were instances when receiving a tip was not worth dealing with a bad customer. Both Sandra and Reyna were displeased with floor people when they based their decision<sup>5</sup> on how much the player was tipping the dealer. The money for the floor would many times trump whatever bad interactions were going on at the table. The floor person's goals were for the dealers to make money, the casino to make money, which in turn meant the floor would make money. Sandra recalled:

I don't care how much money he tip me. You can't base your decision on how much he's tipping me! I am willing to give up that loss, but not every dealer is willing to do that. I hate it when Matt [the pitboss] makes the comment, 'Oh...the guy is a duchebug but he is so juicy. I can't kick him out.' And I am like, 'Why do you base your decision on that?' You shouldn't! If you put your foot down...They don't like it, but they go home they have a chance to go think about it and then they come back and apologize and they become a better player. They are just like kids! You allow them to be a brat, they are going to see how far you allow them to take it. Now they are sitting there talking shit about you, the customer has no respect for you because you allow them to talk shit to you.

Reyna echoed the same sentiment that she was not willing to be disrespected for money. She would not allow her co-workers either to be disrespected by players. There was an incident that upset her when a customer was making fun of the way Miranda spoke. Miranda was a Vietnamese woman with an accent.

[The player was] playing baccarat and he was pretentious but he was hooking me up with money. I got off the table and Miranda came in after me. And this dude was making fun of the way Miranda speaks English. So, I turned around and told him to 'Stop doing that.' [H]e told me 'To just turn around and think of him when I was spending all the money he had just given me.' And I just said 'That I will give you all this money back, do not make fun of Miranda.' And then the floor came by rubbing my shoulders and just telling me that 'It was ok.' And I just said, 'No, it is not ok. It is not fine to make fun of someone because of the language that they speak, I don't need his money and I can give this all back. It is not ok.' I really want people to just have a good time...But if you are a piece of shit, and you think that you are better than people and you can talk down to them, it takes me to a place that is unreal.

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<sup>5</sup> A decision a floor person would make ranged from asking a player to quiet down, not to cuss at the dealer, asking the player to be respectful to the dealer, cutting the player off from alcohol if intoxicated, and most importantly determining what happens on a live table if the game has been compromised.

As alluded to in the discussion of interactions, tips are the primary way the participants made their money. Since the women were making minimum wage as their base pay, all their energy went into making tips. At Cowboy Cocktail Casino, I observed that money making was a significant source of power for the women. Women outranked their male counterpart dealers on tip money which translated to having a little say on what was going on within the casino. When it came to changes related to the game rotation high tip earners had an impact on it.

The casino has two rotations: blackjack and pai gow. Most of the time dealers do not cross sides unless there is a shortage of staff or it is the graveyard shift where there is only one rotation. There are also dealers who deal both games, however most dealers only deal on the blackjack side or only deal on the pai gow side. The pai gow side has more Vietnamese dealers since many of the players on that table are Vietnamese compared to the blackjack side that has a more diverse crowd. Telma explained that before the recession pai gow was a very hot game and there was a lot of action. However, after the recession, things began to cool down on the pai gow side and the dealers were making less on their tips. This caused a significant hardship to many since this was the money they were living off of. Many dealers at this time were losing their homes because they were not able to make mortgage payments.

The pai gow dealers asked the management to deal in the blackjack section and to introduce one rotation throughout all the games so that everyone would have a chance at earning better tips. The management implemented a one rotation pit but blackjack dealers did not like it. They became upset because now pai gow dealers were going to take their action in the blackjack side and to them that was not fair. It is also related to the customer relationship because the dealers had to build up a clientele within the new section. A group of blackjack dealers went to management and stated their grievances. The system returned to “normal.” As Telma recalled,

there was some tension between the two camps after that, but explained that the blackjack dealers were protecting their earnings. In my observations, the tensions continued. When the pai gow dealer rotation was lacking in dealers, the floor person asked a blackjack dealer to deal on the pai gow side. Blackjack dealers would comment, “I am a blackjack dealer, not a pai gow dealer.” “Why aren’t there enough pai gow dealers?” or “I don’t know how to deal pai gow.” Dealing pai gow for blackjack dealers meant that they were not getting that income from their regulars which they depended on.

Most of the women I interviewed were adamant that hustling was part of the game of dealing and they enjoyed doing it. They all performed it differently and would change it as time went on. It was the representation of power the women had within the industry. They were able “to construct and enforce their definition of reality” (Fishman 1978: 397) due to the hustle. They also learned to manage their emotions to create the correct environment for their players (Lam, 2011). As females, they would assess their table crowd and act accordingly. The dealers would observe the gestures, body language, and facial displays (Lam, 2011) to create the persona that would fit in with the table. Gender performance was essential for the job and learning to be a typical “gendered” woman meant that it balanced what the men wanted.

### **The Shadow Side – A Woman’s Place**

My participants explained that overall the casino industry had treated them well. However, the casino represents a microcosm of the larger society of United States and its treatment of women. “Power relations between men and women are the outcomes of the social organization of their activities in the home and in the economy” (Fishman 1978:397). Even though my participants at times, were probably making more money than the male player she was dealing to, she would play on the submissive role. The violence and objectification of

women in the casino was a representation of what the overall placement of a woman was outside the casino.

Telma shared stories of when attention and interactions with players took on a darker side. During her career as a dealer, she had many instances where players had taken her niceness to another level and she did not reciprocate. At the time of our interview, she was experiencing a problem with one of the players who was infatuated with her. He would always appear when she was at work but now he appeared when she was driving around in the city and would “accidentally” bump into her. She did not have any feelings towards this player, but he desperately wanted to date her. There was an instance a couple years back when he had followed her after work to her car in the parking lot and he screamed demanding to know why she did not want to date him. She now had security walk her to her car to make sure she made it in. During the interview she stated that the player scared her.

[Y]ou have to be careful...you are running a fine line...because I have had so many stalkers over the years...even female ones. There was one chick that started writing me notes...and I don't know. I listened to her problems, I felt like I was personable with her...but I wasn't trying to...I don't know where she took that. You run a fine line with people. Not everyone in there is...balanced...People can take it the wrong way.

Telma's worst experience with a customer was when a man losing thousands of dollars stated that he wanted to kill her. She had tried to keep the situation as cool as she could, but the player was losing 2000 dollars a hand on blackjack. Then on one clean sweep she took 12,000 dollars from him. This was when the player got agitated and then began to threaten Telma's life. He was escorted out and banned from the casino, but then he began to call the casino and threaten her life again. That was when the casino decided to call the police and report it. The District Attorney then banned the player from all casinos in the county.

I still look over my shoulder. Cuz...this guy has a lot of money! I mean...he stopped in the foyer and straight up yelled, I AM GOING TO FUCKING KILL YOU! And then he called afterwards and called the poker room and threatened me through them. He would say he was going to kill me, and then that is when the casino called the police and that is when the district attorney got that in his hands. Yes, there is freedom of speech, but when you are making threats...you cannot follow through with actions. He has been barred from the county.

Ashlee agreed, like the other dealers that being a woman in the casino was powerful in the income department. However, she realized there were times when her integrity as a woman was cast aside by male pit bosses if large sums of money were on the table. She recalled an incident when a player called her “a cunt.” She was appalled by it and asked her boss to come to the table. However, instead of asking the player to leave the casino to cool down, Ashlee was switched to another table to deal. She was furious because the pit boss had not taken her side to support her.

I was like really, ten minutes later and you haven't kicked this guy out for calling me a C? And then you come to me, and you ask him if he called you that! My ears were so red! I was just like...that was my most memorable day! In 20 years I had never had anybody call me that. That just completely threw me off. Fifteen minutes later he is still playing there, I was like, are you serious? So, now he pulled me out of my game to deal at another table. Why do I have to be removed? I was so upset that day.

One night while Tommie and I were on a table, she was dealing to a table full of men. Some regulars as well as some who were new to the game. One of the players – who was considered a regular - began to call out “LESBOS” every time he received two queen cards. At first, I was not quite sure what was going on at the table and I noted the behavior. As the game progressed, he continued with calling out lesbos and then he began making comments about the how the queens were “scissoring.” It started to become awkward. Tommie kept on dealing the cards, and I observed the other players looking uncomfortable. Eventually Tommie said, “Now boys, let's keep it clean.” Another player casually jumped in and said, “Don't talk in front of the

ladies like that because it is making the dealer feel uncomfortable.” The player making the comments assumed it was a joke and continued with his comments.

Another time I was present on the table I observed a white male who was playing a high limit game. I noted the interactions between him and Clementine – who was a biracial woman. She came on the table with all smiles and asking how the player was doing. There was little conversation first and then the player began to compliment Clementine on how beautiful she was. She smiled and thanked him. He then began to talk about how Clementine looked like a woman that he used to date. He proceeded to talk about how gorgeous his ex-girlfriend’s naked body was. As he was describing his ex-girlfriend he commented how beautiful Clementine’s body would be naked covered in oil. During this time Clementine just smiled and did not say too much. It was interesting to see how he spoke to her in this way even though she had a very large wedding ring.

“To be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used” (MacKinnon 1989: 329). The darker side of the casino business was that it enforced the rules and norms of the larger society; I would even state that it was more regulated. These were instances where the power as a money maker lost its stand because of the larger society’s placement of women.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Sexism in this industry is prevalent. Most of my participants articulated the dynamics and feelings of sexism. The sexism they experienced came from upper management, the players, and their co-workers. The chances of moving up in the casino hierarchy was very limited since there were male gatekeepers preventing it. Ho (2013) suggested that there was no glass ceiling

phenomenon in women to move up in the hospitality industry, however, Schaap et. al. (2008) and my participants testimonies proved that women's lack of advancement in the industry was due to the good old-boy network.

The women who I interviewed had created personalities to fit into the work environment. Therefore they created a deep performance that resulted in emotion work. Their card dealer personality was their money maker. I relate this to Lam's (2011) research findings of the casino where women informally learn the rules of the industry by their co-workers. Their co-workers guide them on how to act with the customers. Using his analysis the three major elements of being a woman dealer are: 1) Understanding one's status as a woman, 2) Being a dealer was an artistic gendered performance, and 3) Hustling was a power play women had in the industry. Women in this position had to understand who they were relative to the clients they worked with. Their knowledge was gained from their unique point of view related to their race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Goffman (1956) relating to a woman dealer's "stage" requires that the women meet that it is a real situation and define the situation. Hustling, using Dinunno's (2003) concept, was that their sexuality is not only their oppression but also their power.

Yet the shadow side of being a dealer demonstrates the pervasiveness of sexism and the way the woman portray themselves within the industry. Violence and harassment towards women was relatively common, and my participants presented their stories that showed that it was an ongoing. This is a reflection of the larger society related to violence against women.

Yet among this complex dynamics, women in my study were able to create middle-class lifestyles that they might have not been able to do if they had worked in other positions. It allowed them to have a house, travel, and be completely independent even with children. Lovell

et. al. (2008) and Kaufman and Williams (2013) both mentioned that women have a harder time making it into middle-class. The participants showed that they were able to create a middle class lifestyle through emotion work of hustling and the tip industry of casino.

Currently, there is no qualitative research on California card rooms. This is the first research that has been conducted in casino card rooms. The research that has been done in the past focuses in the epicenter: Las Vegas. In California, card rooms are very spread out and there are no large corporations that have a hold of multiple casinos. Being a dealer in California means you have to commute long distances to work and dealers really have not that many casinos to choose from that are close by.

I want to follow in Chandler and Jones' footsteps in presenting the every day lived experiences of women working in the casino industry. I believe this research counters popular notions of casinos and women card dealers. My research focuses on the frontline workers who are visible to the public: usually women. There is additional research to be done: casinos are important to gender studies, critical criminology, and micro-economics. I learned that card rooms are sites where massive amounts of money is exchange through the house and clients as well as informal channels.

## CONCLUSION

There are no simple solutions or recommendations to improve the working lives of women casino dealers. First, they themselves enjoy their high earnings and negotiate power from what I consider a relatively powerless place due to the management surveillance, threats, and rigid gender norms. The casino represents the real life issues women are currently facing in the larger society. The casino works under the umbrella of patriarchy. The power dynamics will not

begin to change unless society changes. My initial observations were that women were “held down” by the job and they were not allowed to grow from it, but what I found out was that the women who worked in the casino used it as a platform to become independent and make money by enacting exaggerated performances of being women. It allowed them to do other things in life, like, travel, buy their own home, have short workdays, and manage their own work schedule to fit their needs. Yet, while I honor their conviction of overall living a good life, the recession, long term retirement, and the wear and tear on their bodies from maintaining beauty regimens could ultimately leave them in a less desirable place.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*Introduction...I am doing a study to understand the day to day work experiences of female card dealers. I am really interested in learning more about how you do your job.*

- 1) Tell me about how you decided to become a card dealer?
  - a. How long have you been in the industry?
  - b. Were there other jobs you occupied within the casino industry before becoming a dealer?
- 2) Tell me about when you first started working here... *Prompt...Did you receive any training? What was that like?*
  - a. Can you describe how it was different than your previous jobs?
- 3) What is a typical day for you “on the job” as a card dealer?
- 4) What kinds of card games do you usually deal? Tell me about the customers at these various table games?
- 5) What is your favorite game to deal?
- 6) Do you have regular customers? Tell me about them...
- 7) What are some of your most memorable days at work? Memorable customers? Fellow co-workers?
- 8) Can you describe a stressful time you’ve had at work?
- 9) Tell me about working for tips...

*Prompt...is it easy? Do you have to learn to be a tip earner? How does it compare to other jobs that you have held that or not tip generating.*

*So, we are just about done here....*

10) What advice would you give a new card dealer?

11) How do you see your life in ten years?

12) Do you have anything else to add about the topic of women and work?

## APPENDIX B - INFORMED CONSENT

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

I am a graduate student at California State University San Marcos that is conducting a study on women's work experiences in the casino industry.

I invite you to participate in this study because you are a woman and are currently working in a casino industry and are 18 years old and older.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research project explores the working life of women in the casino industry.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

If you agree to participate in this study, I will schedule an appointment (at your convenience) for a one hour interview. The questions will be fairly open ended and will focus on your working life. The interview will be tape recorded.

Once I have transcribed your interview, I will offer you the opportunity to have a paper copy of your interview. If you wish, you can tell me if you would like to modify any of the information or if there is anything you would not want to be included in my study. If you want your interview transcription, please tell me how you would like it; either as a paper copy or sent my e-mail.

### RISKS AND SAFEGUARDS

There are risks involved in participating in this study; however, I will explain the safeguards – the way we will try to protect you and the data from the risk.

1. You may feel upset or stressed about answering some of the questions that will ask about your working experiences. I will remind you that you can stop the interview at any time and you can skip any questions that you find upsetting.
2. You may have limited time because you have to work and have other obligations. The time and date of the interview will be established by you. You will also know upfront that the interview is expected to take about an hour. However, you will be reminded before and throughout the interview that you can stop or delay the interview at any time.
3. Protecting your identity is priority!
  - a. I will only be using a number to identify you. The number is assigned by the order of which the interview took place.
  - b. I will know who you are but I will not write down any identifiers.
  - c. Interview digital recordings will be kept in an audio file password protected on the university computer server.
  - d. Interview transcripts will be located on a password protected file that only I am allowed to view. They will only have numbers to identify you and not your name.
  - e. Once I begin writing up the analysis for my thesis, I will change or remove any identifiers that could be linked back to you.

BENEFITS

You may not have direct benefits from sharing your working history. However, in terms of research, your story will help me learn more about the experiences of women workers in the casino industry.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your digital voice recorder interview will be stored in a password protected file on the university system. The only person that will listen to the voice interviews will be me. Your name will not appear on any of the transcriptions or voice recordings.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You can also end the interview at any time. You can withdraw your interview from my study at any time.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study you can call me at 760-XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at [serna003@cougars.csusm.edu](mailto:serna003@cougars.csusm.edu). You can also contact my thesis chair Dr. Marisol Clark-Ibáñez by telephone at work 760-750-4631 or by e-mail [mibanez@csusm.edu](mailto:mibanez@csusm.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as an interview participant, you may contact our Institutional Review Board at 760-750-4029. The IRB is a committee that reviews research studies to make sure that the rights of the participants are protected and minimize risks, which may include auditing of the research study and data.

AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE

By arranging an interview session, you are signifying that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study and agreeing to be audiotaped. (Remember you can always withdraw from the study at any time.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewer

Bettina Serna

California State University San Marcos

Graduate Program

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