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## You're Wearing the Orange Shorts? African American Hooters Girls and the All American Girl Next Door

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*Georgia State University*

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YOU'RE WEARING THE ORANGE SHORTS? AFRICAN AMERICAN HOOTERS GIRLS AND THE ALL AMERICAN  
GIRL NEXT DOOR

by

RACHEL COOK

Under the Direction of Dr. Layli Phillips Maparyan

ABSTRACT

Hooters restaurants are typically staffed by Caucasian women that resemble the company's idea of an "All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" image, promoted in employee training materials. However, my experience working for this company has been in a predominantly African American-staffed Hooters, atypical for the corporation. Through a mixed methods approach encompassing content analysis, participant observation, autoethnography, and interviews, this research seeks to understand the ideal Hooters Girl image promoted by the corporation, and the performance of that ideal in an atypical Hooters location.

INDEX WORDS: African American women, Race

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GIRL NEXT DOOR

by

RACHEL COOK

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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2011

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GIRL NEXT DOOR

by

RACHEL COOK

Committee Chair: Dr. Layli Phillips Maparyan

Committee: Dr. Susan Talburt

Dr. Amira Jarmakani

Dr. Jennifer Patico

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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For Mama Ruth

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## **PREFACE**

The views expressed in this paper are my own. They have not been reviewed or approved by Hooters.

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## Chapter 1

### Welcome to the 'Black Hooters'!

What is a Hooters Girl?

*Hooters Girl (noun) –*

*...the Hooters girls...those All American cheerleaders who are the cornerstone of the Hooters concept.*

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, p.3)

*Hooters offers its customers the look of the 'All-American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door'.*

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, p.6)

Hooters of America, Inc., which will from this point forward referred to as “Hooters,” is a restaurant concept that began in Clearwater, Florida, in 1983. Hooters has 455 locations and can be found in 44 states and 28 countries. I was employed with Hooters for five years, beginning while I was a junior in college. Prior to my employment with the company, I was a newlywed working in retail earning nine dollars an hour in need of more income. Because Hooters was known to be a place where attractive women can make good money, I set my sights on it. I applied to several Hooters locations, but was not hired immediately. Throughout the summer leading up to my junior year of college, I applied twice to the “Black Hooters” and once to a “regular” Hooters location.

I use the term “Black Hooters” to keep accurate with the terminology used in the research environment to describe this particular Hooters location. This terminology refers to the demographics of the Hooters Girl staff at this location being predominantly African American. This is not to be confused with the employee staff, as a whole at this particular Hooters location; management and cooks were of differing racial makeup. Not only do I use the term “Black Hooters,” but fellow co-workers and some customers also use this terminology. When I began working at this establishment, it was explained to me by

my co workers that the restaurant was called the “Black Hooters” because of the amount of African American Hooters Girls working at this particular location. My co workers explained that it was both Hooters Girls and some customers that referred to it in this manner because of the amount of African American Hooters Girls present.

One day while looking through the school newspaper, I came across a job advertisement for employment opportunities at Hooters. I took this as a sign that maybe I would finally gain employment at the “Black Hooters.” I had reservations about working for Hooters, but given my financial situation, I applied one last time and was hired. When I went in to ask for an application, I was seated at a table in the front of the establishment. I completed the application and one of the managers came over to ask a few informal interview questions. I was asked about my work availability and previous work experience. I had never been a server before, but the manager assured me that that would not hinder me from performing the role of the Hooters Girl. After the first interview, the manager emphasized that I come to the next interview, which would be conducted with the General Manager, “dressed to impress” with lipstick and a full face of makeup. Thus began my encounter with the standards for this “All-American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image.

When I came back to Hooters for the second interview, I was surprised to find that the General Manager was a female. Again, at the time of my gaining employment with Hooters I was a junior in college and not well versed in gender and racial issues. However, I could not help but notice the dynamics already taking place within this work environment. The majority of Hooters Girls working in this location were African American. The management, which I found, fluctuated over the years, generally consists of four managers; three lower level floor managers and a top-level General Manager. Throughout the time of my employment there have been many managers - African American, Caucasian and Latino. However, there was never an African American General Manager.

When I first began working for the corporation, my store consisted of a mostly African American Hooters Girl staff, Latino cooks, and a management team of both black and white managers, headed by a white female General Manager. The General Manager was a former Hooters Girl and qualified, as I will later argue, as the All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door.

During my first two years working with the corporation, I was a married college student, working the job out of necessity to run my household. During this time, I was considered a new girl. Hooters unlike many restaurants, has a considerably lower turnover rate than most restaurant concepts. For example, during my five years with the corporation I saw many Hooters Girls begin and complete their employment with the corporation, but the rate at which employees resign is slower than at other restaurants and retail establishments that I have been employed with.

I would accredit this to the working conditions of the corporation. For example, at Hooters, we were allowed to create a schedule request for each week. Every week we put in our request for the following week. While this is simply a request, it is usually honored, allowing Hooters Girls greater flexibility with regard to their personal lives than a typical restaurant or other service industry employee. Another working condition favorable for Hooters Girls involves the amount of “side work” allotted to the waitresses. “Side work” is a term used in the hospitality industry that refers to labor servers are required to do in addition to waiting on their tables. For instance, some side work may include folding napkins; rolling silverware; and mopping floors. At Hooters however, we were not required to do a lot of side work. Our side work included cleaning our tables and setting up the wait station. Compared to other restaurant concepts, our side work was not difficult.

### **Living Among The Borders**

I began graduate school three years after beginning employment at Hooters. At the time I had plans to write my thesis on domestic violence in adolescent populations. After realizing that this could be more emotionally taxing than I would like to invest, I began to ponder other options for a Women’s

Studies graduate thesis project. Late one night, I received a text message from my brother. The message read “‘Just Wingin’ It’ that should be the name of your thesis – a project about Hooters.” And thus it was born, the next day I began to think of ways I could discuss my experiences working at a predominantly African American staffed Hooters.

Working as a Hooters Girl during a Women’s Studies graduate program is an excellent example of border crossing (Anzaldua, 1997). I identified with both worlds, but at the same time not whole heartedly with either. I characterize this experience as both that of the *nepantlera* (Anzaldua, 1997) and the *outsider within* (Collins, 2000). As explained in *Entre Mundos/ Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*,

A nepantlera is a person skilled at living with contradiction, someone who can see from more than one point of view at a time and negotiate the in-between spaces that connect seemingly rigid either/or positions...Nepantleras’ double vision (second sight/insight) equips them to serve in roles requiring the ability to see issues from more than one (dominant) point of view.

(Keating, 2005, p.104)

Nepantlera describes my positioning as both a Hooters Girl and Women’s Studies student, but not fully a part of either world. Nepantleras have the ability to see both worlds in ways that those within them may not. For example, as a Hooters Girl studying Women’s Studies I was more aware of issues surrounding gender, race and the performance of both. For instance, most of my co workers agreed that the “Black Hooters” was different from typical Hooters locations based on the racial makeup of the wait staff. While they were aware that one’s hair style must be in accordance to company policies, many of them did not examine the social significance of this policy. They accepted the policy on hair without tying it to the society at large in which other companies, institutions, and the like have a preferred hair style for African American women that if obeyed, leads to success for that woman.

As an outsider within, I belonged to the world of orange shorts and to the world of Beauvoir. However, I did not feel like a complete member of either group. While explaining black domestic workers employed within white families, Collins’ (2000) explains the positionality of these women as being

*outsiders within*. These women worked in white households, but would never socially be a part of those families. At Hooters, I did not identify with many of my fellow coworkers because many of them aspired to become music video models and actresses. In my graduate program, many classmates wanted to study issues surrounding sexual identity or those heavy in theory. While I applaud my fellow classmates and respect the interest of my co workers, I never felt complete inclusion in either world. As an outsider within and nepantlera, I am able to be a part of both worlds, but understand my position along the border.

### **Crazy Stories**

During my brainstorming activities I began to also think of situations with co-workers, management and customers that could serve as anecdotes for discussion within the project. For example, I can recall my first experiences wearing the infamous Hooters uniform. This uniform consists of orange shorts, a white Hooters logo tank top, flesh toned panty hose, white slouch socks, and white sneakers. At first it was uncomfortable, but after a few weeks I began to get acclimated with the uniform. In regard to management and image standards, there were frequent problems surrounding hair styles of African American Hooters Girls at my particular location. For example, Hooters Girls are not allowed to wear their hair in braids, or up in hair ties. While this is not stated in print, it is the understanding that Hooters Girls are not allowed to wear their hair in any so-called “Afrocentric” hair styles, i.e. afros, braids, corn rows, etc. Issues such as these sparked my interest in exploring the world of Hooters, in particular, the “Black Hooters” as my store is so often coined.

A question often raised by customers is, “What does ‘Hooters’ mean?” We were instructed to say that “Hooters” is not a term for breasts, however, much of the merchandise and marketing materials of the company including our uniforms suggests otherwise. The Hooters website states the following on the matter,

The chain acknowledges that many consider ‘Hooters’ a slang term for a portion of the female anatomy. Hooters does have an owl logo and uses an owl theme sufficiently to allow debate to occur over

the meaning's intent. The chain enjoys and benefits from this debate. In the end, we hope Hooters means a great place to eat.

(Hooters Website <http://www.hooters.com/About.aspx>)

When I was asked the above question I often responded that “Hooters” is a description of the restaurant environment – fun and festive. However, this does not align completely with what I believe the term means. I will explore this concept more in later chapters.

Another anecdote from my experiences with customers involves a special edition of the Hooters uniform shirt worn by the staff for St. Patrick's Day. The back of the Hooters shirt read, “Get Lucky At Hooters.” While taking a food and beverage order I was asked, “How do I get lucky at Hooters”? I reacted to this statement by completing the food and beverage order and walking away. I was offended by this question and decided not to respond. The guests, two men, laughed as I walked away.

After recalling various incidents at Hooters that were intriguing in social, racial and gender-related terms, I realized I had a great piece of work ahead of me! I must state, however, that I have enjoyed many of my experiences working as a Hooters Girl. Nevertheless, my educational background, particularly in Women's Studies, has provided a more critical lens helpful in deconstructing numerous aspects of my work experience.

### **Are You A Woman or a Girl? The Use of Term “Girl”**

The term “girl” is used heavily throughout this research to refer to myself and other women employees of Hooters. While working at Hooters, management and employees refer to its female wait staff as “girls.” This term is used throughout Hooters, as an abbreviation of the term “Hooters Girl.” Why does the corporation uphold the name “Hooters *Girl*”? Perhaps, using the term “Hooters Girl” plays on the idea of female sexuality and innocence. Using the term “Hooters Women” does not send the same connotation of a playful, beach themed environment, staffed by young women, that which is promoted by the corporation. I use this nomenclature because it is organic to the research environment.

### **LeAngela Davis - The “Angela Davis” of Hooters**



Another instance that sparked my interest in the ways in which African American Hooters Girls navigate the image set forth by the corporation occurred when LeAngela Davis, an African American female employee of Hooters, won the crown as Miss Hooters International in July 2010. Hooters hosts the Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest every summer and this was the first time in the history of the contest that an African American won. Leading up to this event there are local swimsuit contests held in cities around the country, as well as those Hooters locations in other countries. The winners from local competitions go on to compete at the Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest. It is indeed ironic that the first black Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest winner's name is "LeAngela Davis" – which evokes the name of "Angela Davis", the legendary Black feminist and freedom fighter. Later chapters of this thesis will explore this topic further.

The aim of this project is to examine my experience working for an atypical Hooters location, one staffed by predominantly African American Hooters Girls, and the ways in these women navigate the All American Cheerleader Girl Next Door image.

The research questions guiding this research include:

How does Hooters operationalize their corporate vision of the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door"? How does the corporation use their media outlets and employee training materials to implement and impose this prototype on its female employees?

How do Hooters Girls respond to, conform to, and resist corporate pressure to embody the Hooters Girl idea? How does this process of negotiation vary from women who are markedly different from the Hooters ideal, particularly black women?

## Chapter 2

### Orange Pride and Camera Ready-ness: A Content Analysis of Marketing Outlets Utilized By Hooters

This chapter examines the marketing outlets utilized by Hooters to discuss the ways in which the corporation disseminates the “All-American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image mentioned in the *Hooters Restaurant Employee Handbook* to the Hooters Girl employee. I will examine these outlets utilized by Hooters restaurants to discuss how this image is translated throughout the corporation. Marketing outlets included in this discussion are the Hooters magazine, calendar, website, employee handbook and the corporation’s social media websites. As I argue below, the reality of the “All-American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image, while not explicitly stated, appears to be a Blonde or Brunette Caucasian woman, but preferably a Blonde woman with blue eyes. Throughout the marketing outlets provided below, this ideal Hooters Girl may appear with her Sister of Color, but it is clear that this sister is not the desired model.

Leavy (2007) describes content analysis as, “...the systematic study of texts and other cultural products or nonliving data forms” (p.227) and contends that content analysis can merge with feminist concerns and principles to address a range of issues regarding the social construction of gender and difference more broadly. Furthermore, Leavy (2007) argues that content analysis enables feminist researchers to answer research questions pertaining to the following:

- Whose point of view is represented in popular and commercial culture?
- How is difference represented in culture?
- How are messages distributed to people via popular culture?

- How are ideas about masculinity and femininity constructed, reconstructed, and contested within culture via texts produced within the culture?

(p.227)

This content analysis will describe each of the marketing outlets utilized by Hooters, including the physical store itself, and will discuss who the intended audience is for each outlet. This analysis will also discuss how the ideal Hooters Girl image falls correlates to ideas about femininity.

In addition to the questions provided by Leavy (2007) my research questions will guide this analysis:

How does Hooters operationalize their corporate vision of the “All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door”? How does the corporation use their media outlets and employee training materials to implement and impose this prototype on its female employees?

How do Hooters Girls respond to, conform to, and resist corporate pressure to embody the Hooters Girl idea? How does this process of negotiation vary from women who are markedly different from the Hooters ideal, particularly black women?

### **Beauty Bootcamp - Hooters Employee Handbook**

According to the *Hooters of America Restaurant Employee Handbook*, Hooters is,

...a casual, beach theme restaurant known for world famous chicken wings, fun times, and of course, the Hooters girls...those All-American cheerleaders who are the cornerstone of the Hooters concept.

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, p.3)

This statement is located in the first few pages of the handbook, which provides an overview of the corporation and the Hooters mission statement. Another statement describing Hooters and its famous Girl reads,

Hooters offers its customers the look of the ‘All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door.’ The essence of the Hooters Concept is entertainment based on female sex appeal, of which the LOOK is a

key part. When you are invited to join the Hooters team, you are hired with an image that personifies that All-American cheerleader look.

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, emphasis original, p.6)

The text uses “female sex appeal” as a way to naturalize the role of the Hooters Girl. As Butler (2004) contends,

“...if gender is the cultural significance that the sexed body assumes, and if that significance is codetermined through various acts and their cultural perception, then it would appear that from within the terms of culture is not possible to know sex as distinct from gender. The reproduction of the category of gender is enacted on a large political scale, as when women first enter a profession or gain certain rights...But the more mundane reproduction of gendered identity takes place through the various ways in which the bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence.”

(Bial, 2004, p.158)

The Hooters Girl role is codetermined through acts, such as serving and adhering to company image standards. It is assumed that “female sex appeal” is a term most are familiar with, and that this appeal really exists. While it may not be read by any customers, this statement is a directive to the Hooters Girl *and* the customer.

From the beginning of the employee handbook, it is implied and stated that the Hooters Girl is a *role*. Women hired for this role fit a certain image and are expected to adhere to this image throughout their employment with the corporation. What exactly is the “All-American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door”? How does the *Hooters of America, Inc. Restaurant Employee Handbook* define and explain the Hooters Girl role to its employees? The following deconstructs the ways in which the *Handbook* serves as a tool to disseminate the Hooters image.

As I will demonstrate and argue, the corporation uses the media outlets to send paradoxical messages to the consumer. One of the first paradoxes is found in the employee handbook in its description of the Hooters Girl being an “All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door.” Are all of those images the same? I contend that these are differing images, but align more with the marketing of the Hooters Girl. For example, in the Hooters Magazine, the Hooters Girl is featured in photographs reminiscent of a *Playboy* or *Hustler* magazine styles (All American Cheerleader image), while in the restaurant,

the Hooters Girl may be found soliciting in kind donations from customers for the *Kelly Jo Dowd Breast Cancer* Fund by selling cookies and cupcakes (Girl Next Door image). How do African American Hooters Girl align with the terms “All-American, Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” when these terms have not historically been associated with African American women? Can the African American Hooters Girl embody any of these terms? My experience and observations have led me to believe that the African American woman can embody those terms if and only if she alters her natural image. Her Caucasian counterpart must also alter her natural body, but for the African American, she must go further. Because of her race, the African American Hooters Girl must not only alter her breast, hair, and cosmetic application, she must settle with the fact that only a few women of color will be represented in the media outlets of the corporation.

### **Hooters’ Image and Grooming Standards -The “Look”**

The section entitled, “Hooters Girl On The Floor and Hooters Girl At The Bar”, of the *Handbook* discusses image guidelines that are to be adhered to by Hooters Girls. The section opens by stating,

*Part of being a Hooters Girl is maintaining the Hooters Girl image at all times. When you are in the Hooters Girl uniform, you are literally playing a role; having been cast for that role, you must comply with the Image and Grooming Standards that the role requires.*

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, emphasis original, p.6)

Hooters of America, Inc. through the use of the handbook, describes being a Hooters Girl is a *role*. By playing a role there are certain guidelines one must follow. The image section of the *Handbook* outlines standards of hair, cosmetic application, and uniform.

The text states the following on hair image, “Hair must be styled and worn down at all times with a glamorous appearance. No visible braiding, weaving, pony tails or similar styles will be allowed” (Hooters Handbook, 6, 2006). Working at a predominantly African American staffed Hooters, presented some challenges pertaining to hair standards. While there are no blatant statements in regards to natural or Afrocentric hair styles, it has been my experience that African American Hooters Girls must press

their natural curls, treat their hair with relaxers or wear hair extensions and wigs to create an acceptable Hooters Girl image.

The *Handbook* states the following concerning cosmetic application,

*Make-up must always be worn to best accentuate your features. **Makeup is not optional.** Hooters Girls must be camera-ready at all times. This is show business, just like the modeling industry. Make-up may not be too extreme, or too minimal. No body glitter or similar type of make-up is allowed.*

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, emphasis original, p.6)

The *Handbook* clearly states that wearing cosmetics is part of the Hooters Girl image. This is yet another paradox of the corporate ideal image. Does the Girl Next Door wear makeup? Does a Surfer Girl wear makeup while surfing? I contend that neither wear cosmetics in the way Hooters Girls are instructed.

During “Jumpstart”, daily meetings held before each shift with the scheduled staff, image standards are discussed. Hair and cosmetic application are popular topics during each Jumpstart. Management usually adheres to the following in regards to make-up application - “Eyes, Cheeks, Lips” – there must be make-up on each of these facial features.

The uniform is a key feature of the Hooters Girl. As suggested by the handbook,

Our LOOK is **wholesome, yet sexy**, and the uniform is athletic by design...

(Hooters Handbook, 2006, emphasis original, p.6)

Yet again, another paradox provided in the employee handbook. Can one be both wholesome and sexy? Through different During Jumpstart meetings, the uniform is critiqued extensively. The uniform must be clean, especially ones shoes and socks. Furthermore, another paradox rises in the employee handbook. Can one be both wholesome and sexy? Through different media outlets the Hooters Girl portrays varying levels of the two.

The *Handbook* serves as a performance guide for the role of the Hooters Girl. I argue that the employee handbook is directed at the employees *and* the customer. While many customers may never

read the employee handbook or other employee training materials, the audience of this material is not only the Hooters Girl, but those individuals experiencing the role of her, the customer.

As I dissect other marketing outlets utilized by the corporation including the *Hooters Magazine*, calendar and website, I will discuss the ways in which the criteria found in the handbook are played out. The interviews I conducted will show the ways African American Hooters Girls navigate this image set forth in the employee handbook and marketing outlets. In other words, they will lend some insight into what it is like for individual African American women conforming to this image.

While analyzing the marketing outlets utilized by Hooters, I found three general categories of Hooters Girls present in these outlets. They are outlined below:

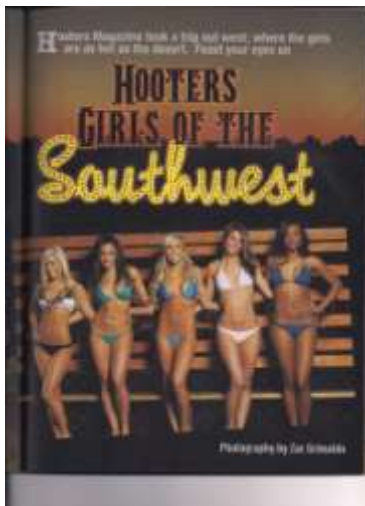
- A. *Blonde Bombshell* – These are the predominant Hooters Girls found in the media outlets. Like many of the Hooters Girls participating in promotional materials, they have augmented breasts, tan skin, acrylic nails and bleached blonde hair.
- B. *Brunette Babes* – These are Hooters Girls that are strategically placed in relation to their blonde counterparts, possibly to suggest that not every Hooters Girl has to be a blonde. They participate in the same aesthetic maintenance as their blonde sisters; augmented breasts, tan skin, etc.
- C. *Splash of Color Girls* – These are Hooters Girls of color; African American, Asian, Latina. They usually are placed randomly in the midst of many Caucasian Hooters Girls.

Working at the “Black Hooters” did not present the above groups in the same manner as a “typical” Hooters – one located in the suburbs and staffed primarily by Caucasian women. The “Splash of Color Girls” were found at my store, but in few quantities. For instance, there were a couple of Hooters Girls that worked at my store location that were featured in the Hooters marketing outlets such as the calendar, website or swimsuit contest. Out of five years of working for the corporation, less than five of my co-workers were featured in the marketing outlets.

## Hooters Magazine

*Hooters Magazine* is a bi-monthly publication. It features photo spreads of Hooters Girls and information on local event happenings at Hooters restaurants around the globe. There are also articles that discuss sports and automobiles. Below, I examine three editions of the *Hooters Magazine*, the February/March 2010, April/May 2010, and July 2010 editions. I chose these editions because they were available at time of data collection.

In the February/March 2010 edition of the *Hooters Magazine* are articles such as “Best Cars of 2010”, “Hooters Girls of the Southwest”, and “Let Freedom Wing” – an article discussing a military support initiative in which Hooters Girls visit Kuwait and Iraq for the holiday season. There are also “Side Items”, repeat columns found in the magazine that are entitled, “Hooters Across America”, “Gotta Have Gadgets” and “Screen Shots”, to name a few.



**Figure 2.1**

Within the February/March 2010 edition of the *Hooters Magazine*, the featured Hooters Girls come from the Southwestern United States. The photo spread is entitled “Hooters Girls of the Southwest” (see Figure 2.1). These women are featured wearing bikinis with cowboy boots and other Western



attire. While this photo spread has a Western theme, it still reinforces the theme of Caucasian blonde and brunette women, with an occasional woman of color placed in the photos.

Each issue of the magazine features a group of Hooters Girls from a particular store or region, and also features one or two other Hooters Girls. In order to become featured in these photo spreads, one must submit photographs to the Hooters of America, Inc. corporate office – similar to how one gains entrance into the calendar and other promotional items. The process of gaining exposure in the Hooters marketing outlets is political, but for those Hooters Girls featured in photo spreads alone or on billboards, for example, must especially exude the ideal image of the Hooters Girl as defined by the corporation.

### **A Splash of Color – Literally.**

Within both editions of the *Hooters Magazine*, women of color are depicted juxtaposed to their white counterparts strategically (see Figure 2.2). For example, The April/May 2010 edition of the *Hooters Magazine* is a special edition entitled, “The Hooters Dream Girl Issue.” The Hooters Dream Girl Contest is an online and televised program in which 16 select Hooters Girls that were featured in the Hooters calendar are selected as “Dream Girls.” Customers and fans may go online and vote for their favorite Hooters Girl. They may also watch the competition on television. In this issue of the magazine, the select Hooters Girls are featured, each with their own individual photos. Below each photo is a small paragraph detailing each Hooters Girls store of employment and random facts. There are 16 Hooters Girls, three of whom are African Americans, although two of these are of mixed ancestry. The remaining 13 are Caucasian (see Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

Through “The Hooters Dream Girl Contest”, one can understand some of the characteristics desirable of a “Dream Girl” – long, flowing hair; glamorous makeup; bikini clad bodies and the like. “The Hooters Dream Girl Contest” displays examples of the ideal Hooters Girl.



Figure 2.4



Figure 2.5

Also found in the April/May 2010 edition is photographs from the Hooters Super Pool Party event in Miami, Florida for the Superbowl. This section includes snap shots as well as staged photographs of Hooters Girls, athletes and celebrities that participated in the events. The Hooters Girls are shown doing promotional jobs for the corporation such as playing games, for example Twister as shown in Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5 with celebrities and guests. Hooters Girls are also shown posing with football Hall of Famer Joe Montana. The July 2010 edition of the magazine (Figure 2.6 and 2.7) the Miss Hooters International winner of 2009, Raechel Holtgrave, is highlighted. This issue discusses her year as Miss Hooters International and also displays some of the Hooters Girls that will be featured in the new Hooters Calendar for 2011.

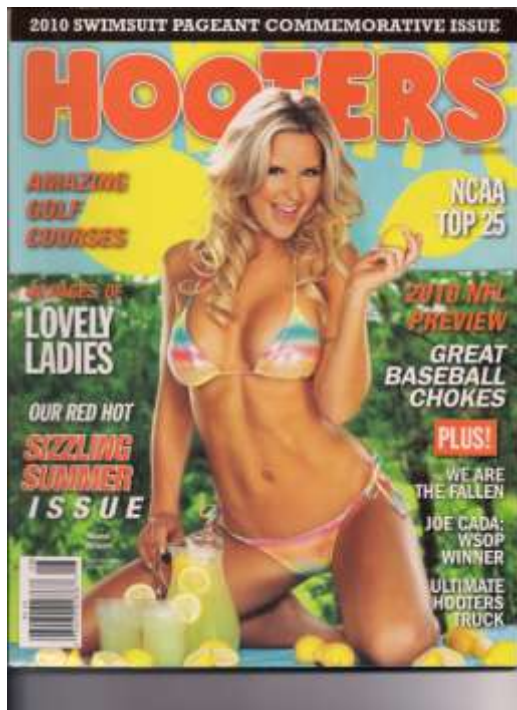
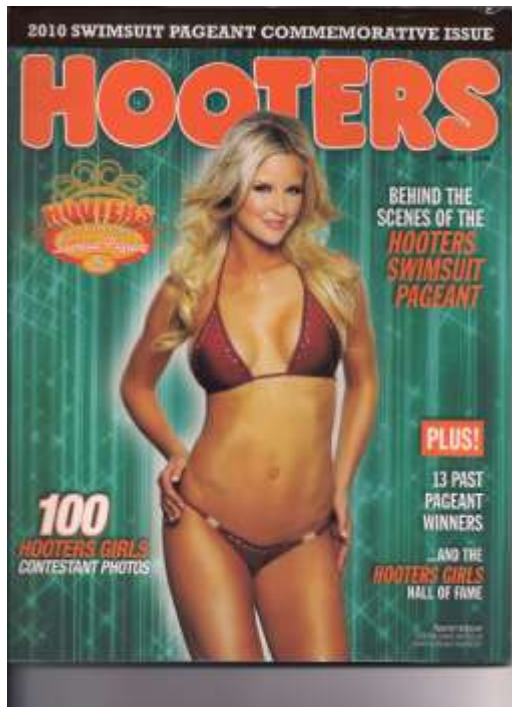


Figure 2.6



**Figure 2.7**

The *Hooters Magazine* also offers articles on sports and automobiles. Such articles are entitled, “A Changed Man: Vick Gets Second Chance On Field And In Life” an article about football player Michael Vick. While there are articles about other issues besides Hooters and its Girls, the main features of the magazine feature these scantily clad waitresses.

The intended audiences of the *Hooters Magazine* are male customers and the Hooters Girl. Male customers are provided with articles about sports, events taking place at different Hooters locations and of course, photographs of Hooters Girls. The Hooters Girl is also an audience member because it is here that she further learns the role and ideal image of the Hooters Girl. The All American Girl, Surfer Girl and Girl Next Door imagery are all found within the magazine. The All American Girl is present with the images of many Caucasian Hooters Girls alongside their co workers of color. The standard is set when she is alongside her sisters of color. The Surfer Girl is present in any of the swimwear photographs present in the magazine, such as the “Hooters Dream Girl Contest” and the Girl Next Door is present during the charity events featured in many of the magazine, such as the military initiative.

### **Hooters Calendar**

The *Hooters Calendar* is a swimsuit themed calendar featuring Hooters Girls from all restaurants both nationally and internationally. In order to have one's photo in the calendar, you must submit professional photographs to the Hooters of America, Inc. corporate office. Another way to gain entry into the calendar is by participating in local Hooters swimsuit contests. The politics that go into this process of becoming a "Calendar Girl", a term used at Hooters to describe Hooters Girls that are selected to participate in the Calendar and other promotional events, will be discussed a later chapter.

The calendar is formatted in a non traditional manner. The months are not ordered in ascending or descending order. For example in the 2010 calendar, the first couple of months of the calendar are October, June, November, and August. There are also center fold photographs that may be pulled out and used as posters. Each month of the calendar has the same format. There is a large picture of the main Hooters Girl for that particular month, surrounded by 10 smaller photographs of other Hooters Girls. The actual calendar dates are located in the bottom left hand corner of each month's page.

The Hooters Calendar displays a variety of Hooters Girls from all over the globe, however, there is not much variety in hair styles, skin textures or body figures. African American women present in the Hooters Calendar all have hair extensions and most have breast augmentation. Through this analysis the main alteration that African American women must make is with their hair. While not every African American woman has hair that would be deemed undesirable by the corporation, i.e. women with "good" hair, those that do not have "good" hair must straighten their tresses (Jones, 1994).

Like the *Hooters Magazine*, the *Hooters Calendar* provides some ideas as to what is the ideal Hooters Girl. For example, most of the Hooters Girls featured in the Calendar have long hair. To achieve this look, many of the models, of all races and ethnicities, wear hair extensions. Acceptable hair styles become a major theme of this project in regards to African American Hooters Girls (see Figure 2.10).



**Figure 2.10**

The entire *2010 Hooters Calendar* features 186 photographs of Hooters Girls. Out of all these photographs, there are 12 African American; 6 Latinas; and 3 Asian American Hooters Girls featured. My interviews and self reflection portions of this project will deconstruct these disparities in more depth.

The intended audience of the *Hooters Calendar* is similar to the *Hooters Magazine*, both the male customer, and the Hooters Girl. However, there is one exception. During the holiday season the calendar is promoted as a stocking stuffer item for husbands, boyfriends, teen boys, and male military personnel overseas. Thus, the intended customer becomes the female customer that may only frequent the restaurant at this time to purchase the calendar. The Hooters Girl is an intended audience because she should desire to be photographed for this publication.

### **Hooters Website**

There are many portions of the Hooters Website that are good indicators of the “All American, Girl Next Door” image. I will examine the following sections of the website and discuss its relation to the dissemination of this image.

#### **Want to Be a Hooters Girl?**

The main page of the Hooters website has links to different areas of the Hooters Website. Such links include, “Home”, “Menu”, “Fun Stuff”, “News”, and “Events.” The bottom half of the home page also has links entitled, “Hooters Online Ordering”, “Hooters Magazine”, “Hooters E-Club” and “Want to be a Hooters Girl” – a link for women aspiring to work for the corporation. I will discuss the other sections of the Hooters Website, but I will rely heavily on the “Want to be a Hooters Girl” section to help investigate the “All American Cheerleader, Girl Next Door” image.

### **Home Page**

The Home Page of the Hooters Website consists of information about menu items found in the restaurants and information on Hooters Girls. For example, the page discusses menu items such as the Buffalo Chicken Sandwich and Boneless Wings. Alongside the promotion of these menu items is are links and photographs of Hooters Girls, such as the winner of the Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest. There is also a photograph of Hooters Girls posing on the cover of the Hooters Magazine.

This juxtaposition of menu items and Hooters Girls is interesting in that the corporation must promote the two entities in conjunction with one another. Food and beverage, as well as the Hooters Girls image are the commodities of the corporation. Hunger and sexual arousal are used to attract customers (see Figure 2.8 and 2.9).





Figure 2.8



Figure 2.9

The bottom half of the Home Page includes information on a new promotion within Hooters, entitled, “Orange Pride.” A discussion of “Orange Pride” will occur further into this chapter, but the link reads, “We’re Orange With Pride to be Hooters Girls.” This link is located adjacent to the link for women aspiring to be Hooters Girls.

### **Orange Pride and The Undercover Boss**

Hooters recently partnered with CBS and filmed an episode of *Undercover Boss* a television show in which corporate CEO’s pose as employees going undercover to check out what the work environment is like within their respective corporations. The second episode of *Undercover Boss* featured Coby Brooks, President and CEO of Hooters of America, Inc. In the episode, Brooks worked undercover as a cook in three Hooters locations. Brooks wanted to get an idea of what occurs within the actual Hooters restaurants. After working undercover, Brooks noticed some things that he wanted to change about the corporation and the perception of the Hooters Girl.

For example, while working undercover, Brooks went on a promotional outing with two Hooters Girls. The promotional outing consisted of two Hooters Girls and Brooks standing outside of the Hooters restaurant passing out samples of chicken wings to attract customers. Brooks asked some women that were walking by what was their opinion of Hooters. The women responded that they thought the company exploited and degraded women, having cited the Hooters uniform as a major issue. Brooks was offended by this, but was understanding of the opinion of the women.

While working undercover, Brooks noticed other issues within Hooters restaurants such as the treatment of Hooters Girls from management, and the treatment of management from corporate employees. For example, Brooks observed Hooters Girls playing ridiculous games to “get cut” early from their shifts. “Getting cut” refers to servers being allowed to retire early from their shift if business is down. Brooks observed a manager deciding that “cuts” would be based on the Hooters Girls having a contest to see who could eat baked beans the fastest. Games like this are common within many Hooters

restaurants. While these games are amusing at times, and entertain the customers, they can be in many instances, degrading. Brooks was appalled by this type of activity occurring in Hooters stores.

In regard to management, Brooks noticed a manager that was a single mother working many shifts and unable to spend quality time with her children. Brooks was saddened by this, a fact that occurs with many managers I have known working at Hooters. He stated on the film that it was a priority for him to create better work-life balances for his employees. The show featured a Hooters manager taking her children on vacation and organizing her work hours in a more conducive manner for raising a family.

As a result of the show, in particular the promotional outing with the Hooters Girls, Brooks implemented a campaign entitled, *Orange Pride*. The motto reads, “We’re orange with pride to be Hooters Girls!” (<http://www.hooters.com/OrangePride/index.html>) A few months after the campaign was implemented, I viewed a training video at a Hooters staff meeting. The idea behind *Orange Pride* is to present Hooters Girls in a more positive light. There have been many instances where individuals have stated, “At least you’re not a stripper”, in response to my employment with the establishment. *Orange Pride* is a campaign exhibiting to Hooters Girls and the public that Hooters Girls go on to become working professionals and contributing members of society, in other words these women are more than just a pretty face. While I agree with these sentiments, I believe the image that Hooters promotes to the public and its employees contradicts itself at times. For example, there are many promotional materials that display Hooters Girls in sexually suggestive poses. I believe that women can be both successful, educated *and* participate in sexually suggestive careers. However, I contend that *Orange Pride* is a double edged sword of sorts – it is a tool for Hooters Girls to rely on in terms of developing and maintaining a positive self image as a Hooters Girl (i.e. “It’s acceptable to work at Hooters during my twenties, one day I will have a career in education/medicine, etc”); and it is a corporate responsibility tool utilized by Hooters to state to the public that it cares about the overall lives of Hooters Girls.

There are six tenants of *Orange Pride*. They include: *Openminded*, *Options*, *Opportunity*, *Optimistic*, *Opinions*, and *Optical*. The terms are detailed on the Orange Pride website,

*Openminded* - Hooters is...Openminded. Hooters does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their ethnic or social background and we certainly don't tolerate those that do. Hooters Girls have many different looks but their hearts are all made of gold.

*Options* - Hooters provides...Options. Hooters offers its employees flexible scheduling, tuition reimbursement, hourly and management positions, internships and continually strives to promote from within. Working at Hooters has been a spring board for hundreds of thousands of thousands of woman into careers both inside and outside of Hooters.

*Opportunity* - Hooters is...Opportunity. Hooters employs over 17,000 Hooters Girls worldwide with over 250,000 alumni who have donned the orange shorts. 75% of all Hooters employees are female and 37% of management and corporate staff are female. Hooters employs, not exploits women!

*Optimistic* - Hooters Girls are...Optimistic. There is no question that Hooters Girls serve their communities and make their part of the world a better place everyday whether that is by supporting our troops, helping those less fortunate or just brightening up someone's day with a smile.

*Opinions* - Hooters Girls change...Opinions. We understand not everybody likes Hooters at first but we think girls like you can change those opinions one person at a time.

*Optical* - Hooters is...Optical. Hooters Girls are beautiful and our guests do enjoy this visual delight but as you can see there is so much more to them than their beauty.

(<http://www.hooters.com/OrangePride/index.html>)

I commend Hooters for the *Orange Pride* campaign, and agree with parts of the above tenets. However, the campaign is not innocent combining elements of a public relations campaign and corporate responsibility as a result of *Undercover Boss*.

Overall, the Hooters website's intended audience varies. The website is aimed at male and female customers, Hooters Girls, potential Hooters Girls, and potential customers – both male and female. Current customers are informed of happenings companywide and nutrition information for menu items. Hooters Girls are featured on the website, further institutionalizing the ideal Hooters Girl image. Potential Hooters Girls can learn about the expectations of the role of the Hooters Girl and potential customers can also learn about what to expect out of their Hooters Girl.

### **Hooters Social Media Websites**

Hooters utilizes social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter to update customers and fans on happenings within the restaurant, food and drink specials, and any other store promotions. For example, the Hooters Facebook page states,

Is your stomach trying to tell you something? '5.99 Wingsday Platters at Hooters Today' – boneless wing platter with fries all day every Wednesday! Listen carefully...

([http://www.facebook.com/update\\_security\\_info.php?wizard=1#!/Hooters?v](http://www.facebook.com/update_security_info.php?wizard=1#!/Hooters?v))

The site also discusses community service ventures of Hooters. For example, in response to the oil spill in the Gulf Coast, Hooters is donating used pantyhose, worn by Hooters Girls as part of the uniform, to help clean up the disaster. There are also photographs and snap shots from Hooters Girls and customers from different Hooters restaurants. The Hooters Twitter page, [www.twitter.com/Hooters](http://www.twitter.com/Hooters), reads similarly detailing events taking place at Hooters such as “More than a Mouthful Monday’s” cheeseburger promotion.

The social media outlets of Hooters promote the “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image, but not as invasively as the above *Hooters Calendar*, website and handbook. These social media sites are utilized more as a marketing tool to provide information on food and drink specials and in-store promotions. These sites are utilized mainly to drive business and sales at Hooters restaurants. The target audience for the social media sites is young adult males between the ages of 18 and 35. While other demographics utilize the sites, the audience is geared at a certain age. Hooters Girls are also a part of the target audience, the sites serve as a promotional tool for waitresses exuding the ideal image. It also serves as a networking site for discussion between customers, Hooters Girls, and customers and Hooters Girls communicating with one another.

Throughout my five years working for the corporation, the Hooters brand has made attempts to diversify its marketing, promotional and media tools. However, there is still an overwhelming presence of Caucasian blonde and brunette beauties, perhaps the so-called “All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door.”

### **Hooters Promotional Events – Dreamy Girls in Bikinis**

Hooters restaurants host many promotional events at both the local and national level. For example, at the local level, Hooters restaurants host swimsuit contests, car washes to raise money for charities, motorcycle bike nights, and trivia nights to name a few. These events can be found at various Hooters restaurants throughout the corporation. While these events may be specific to a certain type of consumer, they all center on the Hooters Girl.

For example, Hooters restaurants that host “Bike Nights” cater to consumers that are interested in motorcycle culture. During “Bike Nights”, customers may park their motorcycles in front of the restaurant and are able to take photographs with Hooters Girls and their bicycles. Many Hooters locations also host car washes in their parking lots as a way to attract business and increase daily sales averages. During the car washes about five to ten Hooters Girls are standing outside the establishment in shorts and tank tops or bikini tops and wash cars that come into the parking lot for service. Many times, customers will come into the restaurant after having their car washed. Management supervises this activity, but allows Hooters Girls to conduct the car washing.

Another type of local store promotional event, and arguably the most popular, is the swimsuit contest. During the spring season, each Hooters location hosts a swimsuit contest. The winners from these contests continue onward to compete at the state level. The winners from the state level continue on to compete at the Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest, which has been held in popular destinations such as Las Vegas and Miami. Ironically, the Hooters that I was employed within did not host its own swimsuit contest. Management often explained to staff that the reason behind this was the unavailability of a parking lot. My Hooters location was serviced by several parking decks, making it unsuitable to host a swimsuit contest. Other Hooters locations hosted their swimsuit contest in their parking lots under a tent. Thus, Hooters Girls from my store were encouraged to attend swimsuit contests at the surrounding Hooters locations.

The above mentioned promotional events take place within individual Hooters locations. At the national level are the *Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest* and the *Hooters Dream Girl Contest*. Both contests build on the swimsuit contests held at the local level. The swimsuit contests held during the spring season at Hooters restaurants determine which Hooters Girls proceed to the state level swimsuit contests. The winners of the state level Hooters swimsuit contests proceeds to the *Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest*. There are usually about 100 contestants participating in the *Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest*. The top ten contestants of the *Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest*, with the possibility of other Hooters Girls that have been active in the marketing outlets, are featured in the *Hooters Dream Girl Contest*. The *Hooters Dream Girl Contest* is a viewer's choice contest sponsored by Hooters of America, Inc. and a major sports network.

### **Well Endowed - Giving Back**

Hooters of America, Inc. participates in many charity events at the corporate and local levels. For example, Hooters of America, Inc. has its own breast cancer research foundation, entitled, the *Kelly Jo Dowd Fund*. Kelly Jo Dowd was a former Hooters Girl that was prominent in many of the marketing outlets utilized by the corporation. In 1998 she was the cover girl of the Hooters calendar. Dowd passed from breast cancer and the corporation began the *Kelly Jo Dowd Fund* in her honor to raise money to go toward breast cancer research.

Hooters restaurants raise money for the fund in a variety of ways. For example, during my time with Hooters, we would solicit customers for donations during their dine-in service. We would also, host pink lemonade stands and bake sales in which Hooters Girls would bake or bring in items from bakeries and sell them, donating the proceeds to the *Kelly Jo Dowd Fund*. Working during the breast cancer research fundraising time was interesting. As I will note in my participant observation notes, management promoted certain types of selling techniques and behaviors during dine-in service. These same techniques also applied to charitable causes.

Hooters restaurants also participate in aiding global natural disasters such as the oil spill in the Gulf Coast during the summer of 2010 and the massive earthquake that occurred in Haiti. During the Gulf Coast oil spill, Hooters restaurants began a campaign to re-use portions of the Hooters Girl uniform, the panty hose, to help collect oil in the shores off the Gulf Coast. Following the earthquake in Haiti, Hooters restaurants donated all proceeds earned at each Hooters location during the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl.

### **The Hooters Restaurant**

The most important media outlet is the Hooters restaurant. Within one has access to all the aforementioned media outlets. The *Hooters Magazine* and *Hooters Calendar* are both sold at the establishment. Most Hooters restaurants have free wi-fi for customers providing them with access to the Hooters website and social media websites. In the restaurant, customers interact with the Hooters Girl and learn of any upcoming special events and promotions. The intended audience of the Hooters restaurant is widespread and includes both current and potential customers as well as current and potential Hooters Girls.

Ironically instead of seeing the ideal Hooters Girl such as those present in the magazine and calendar, one will see a varying levels of idealism amongst Hooters Girls. Women hired for the role, fit the ideal, but some Hooters Girls fit the ideal better than others. For example, the Hooters Girls working at the “Black Hooters” were hired by the corporation and are therefore acceptable, but those working in the busier sections of the restaurant are often those that personify the ideal Hooters Girl image the best. Those were often the women that had obtained breast augmentation and hair extensions.

### **Being Raced and Racy – A Discussion on Body Images Found in Hooters Marketing Outlets**

While working at Hooters, I noticed certain body types that are favored above others. For example, I noticed that women with breast implants were usually found in marketing and promotional ma-



terial used by the corporation. During my experiences waitressing, Hooters Girls that obtained breast augmentations during their employment period were often propelled into the promotional sector of the corporation. These women were provided the opportunity to be photographed for the Hooters Calendar, Hooters commercials and the like.

Working at the “Black Hooters” location presented interesting dynamics pertaining to body image. For example, my store was staffed by women with varying breast sizes. Regardless of the size, those with breast augmentation were often times provided opportunities to appear in promotional material. It has been my experience that it is not so much breast size that matters, but a “real” vs. “fake” dynamic – augmentation is praised. The buttocks are another body area discussed at Hooters. The Hooters employee handbook discusses how the uniform should fit in this body area: “Only approved Orange Hooters Girl shorts may be worn. They must be sized to fit, and should not be so tight that the buttocks show” (Hooters Handbook, 7, 2006).

African American Hooters Girls with large buttocks were especially encouraged to wear uniform shorts that fit them properly according to the Hooters uniform policy. I noticed that customers and some members of management, often those from the corporate office, responded in various ways to Hooters Girls with larger buttocks areas. While the term “Hooters” may or may not refer to a part of the female anatomy, I argue that Hooters is a corporation that celebrates the female anatomy, in particular, the breasts. Various body types could be found within my staff, however, because of the racial dynamic, there were different issues than may be found at a “regular” Hooters restaurant, where there are predominantly white Hooters Girls. For example, those black Hooters Girls with larger buttocks areas were not provided the same opportunity to appear in the corporation’s promotional materials.

My work experience lends me to believe that the desired body type of a Hooters Girl, particularly those that will appear in the Hooters marketing outlets, is one that has a slender build with aug-

mented breasts; wears an ample amount of cosmetics, hair extensions; and has a minimal waist and buttocks area.

### Chapter 3

#### Hooters Girls, Flight Attendants and Exotic Dancers: A Literature Review

The following review of literature helps situate my research amongst studies conducted on exotic dancers, hostess bars, and flight attendants, all participating in forms of emotional labor (Hochschild, 2003). Hochschild (2003) defines emotional labor as labor involving the management of feeling. The role of the Hooters Girl falls under emotional labor because of the relationships developed with customers. Hochschild (2003) contends,

The flight attendant does physical labor when she pushes heavy metal carts through the aisles, and she does mental work when she prepares for and actually organizes emergency landings and evacuations. But in the course of doing this physical and mental labor, she is also doing something more, something I define as *emotional labor*. This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others – in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place.

(p.7)

One of the company's slogans is, "Hooters Makes You Happy!" Hooters Girls are expected to smile and make guests feel like they are at home during their dine-in experience. Regardless of the emotional mood of the waitress, she is expected to entertain her guests and make them feel cared for in the restaurant.

#### At Least You're Not a Stripper – Exotic Dance Clubs vs. Hooters

Many liken Hooters to an exotic dance club. Often times when I told people my place of employment, they would say, "Well, at least you're not a stripper." There are similarities between Hooters restaurants and exotic dance clubs. I have patronized exotic dance clubs and find similar behavior on the parts of the dancers and the customers. At Hooters, we were encouraged to sit with our customers and entertain them through conversation or games, i.e. playing cards or board games. We were also encouraged to make some of our guests "Man of the Hour", an activity in which Hooters Girls randomly select a customer and bring him to the front of the restaurant where the girls sing a Hooters song or have a wing

eating contest. While these games are entertaining, they remind me of the same types of activities found in exotic night clubs. For example, some clubs do special performances for bachelors or men celebrating their birthdays.

Katherine Frank (2003) offers research from the participant observer perspective. Frank worked as an exotic dancer and conducted research on the environment. Frank (2003) discusses male strip club regulars stating, "...despite the fact that men experience some stigma as a result of being customers, this stigma is relatively small when compared with that experienced by the women who work in the clubs" (Frank, 2003, p.61). I feel this angst while employed with Hooters, I am challenged more so than the male customers that patronize the establishment. Also, as I explained earlier, Hooters Girls are expected to sit with their customers, Frank (2003) explains that dancers sit with their customers thus, conversation becomes a public service in and of itself (Frank, 2003, p. 62).

Phaye Poliakoff (1983), investigates the lives of two go-go dancers during the 1980's. Poliakoff is a participant observer while conducting this research, working at the Pebble Lounge while collecting data. Poliakoff (1983) interviews two go-go dancers, Peggy and Jamie, providing a platform for their voices. In the article the dancers provide detailed accounts of both the nightclub scene and their personal lives. In the introduction, Poliakoff discusses some of the reasons women become dancers. She states,

Economic necessity is the fundamental reason most women become dancers. The fact that women are economically powerless, coupled with the belief that women are sexual property, makes choosing to work in the sex industry a viable option for many women.

(Poliakoff, 1983, p.56)

Throughout this article, are phrases that are generalizations of those who are in the margins. Poliakoff states, "...women are economically powerless...", perhaps this speaks to the time period in which this research was conducted. I argue that today, reasons for working in an exotic dance club have expanded

beyond monetary benefit. Hip hop culture has glorified exotic dance clubs making it appealing and perhaps fun for women to work in such environments.

### **Hooters Girls In The Sky? Flight Attendants and Hooters Girls**

Hochschild (2003) discussion of flight attendants and emotional labor provides an excellent entry point for my discussion of Hooters Girls. Participants in emotional labor, labor involving the management of feelings, often rely upon a certain amount of “acting” (Hochschild, 2003). Hochschild (2003) argues that there are two types of acting that take place during emotional labor, “surface acting” and “deep acting.” Hochschild describes “surface acting”, as such that the actor, performer, or in this case, flight attendant; “...does not experience the world from an imperial viewpoint, but works at seeming to” (Hochschild, 2003,p.38). Hochschild (2003) describes “deep acting” in two ways, “one is by directly exhorting feeling, the other by making indirect use of the trained imagination” (Hochschild, 2003, p.38). Hochschild argues that both types of acting are used as methods of commodifying emotion.

Hochschild (2003) contends,

In surface acting, the expression on my face or the posture of my body feels ‘put on.’ It is not ‘part of me.’ In deep acting, my conscious mental work – the effort to imagine a tall surgeon looming over me, for example – keeps the feeling that I conjure up from being part of ‘myself.’ Thus in either method, an actor may separate what it takes to act from the idea of a central self.

(Hochschild, 2003, p.36)

Working at the “Black Hooters” presented this “surface acting” and “deep acting” in the following ways. “Surface acting” usually occurred during daily conversations with customers in which Hooters Girls sit down and talk with their guests. This type of behavior was not always comfortable for all Hooters Girls, but it was a common practice done in order to build a repeat customer base. On the other hand, “deep acting” occurred when Hooters Girls were instructed by management to follow a particular order of service with customers. Hooters Girls were required to follow certain steps with customers during the dine-in service such as offering specific appetizers and entrée items. Management monitored our frequency of conducting this “deep acting” by enlisting the help of outside companies that provide “secret shopper” services. Secret shoppers are sent into various restaurant and retail establishments to rate

the quality of service provided by workers. Hochschild's "surface acting" and "deep acting" certainly apply to the work experience at the "Black Hooters."

### **Hostess Bars and Hooters Girls**

Faier's (2009) discussion of Filipina women migrating to rural Japan to work in hostess bars helps situate this discussion of Hooters Girls. Faier (2009) examines Filipina migrant workers that come to rural Japan to work in hostess bars. Hostess bars are characterized as establishments that cater to male clientele, often traveling businessmen. Beverages are served and female workers provide conversation to customers. Filipina women working at these hostess bars often develop relations outside the establishment with their clients. As Faier (2009) exclaims, "Hostess bars are also ranked hierarchically according to the perceived quality of their services and the women who work there and, correspondingly, to their cost" (Faier, 2009, 43). This likens hostess bars to exotic dance clubs. One of Faier's (2009) main arguments throughout the text, is regardless of the type of hostess bar presented, there are multiple sites of encounters. Faier (2009) describes these encounters below

I use the expression *sites of encounter* to refer to the ways that these bars figured as nodes of social relationships where different histories, genealogies of meaning, and forms of desire coincided within unequal relations of power.

(p.41)

Similar to hostess bars and the Filipina migrant women employed within, Hooters Girls often negotiate and interact with multiple sites of encounter. There are customer relations that are strictly held within the restaurant; regular customers that frequent their favorite waitress providing a generous gratuity. There are other customer relations that take place both within the establishment and outside; regular customers that meet a particular Hooters Girl at the restaurant, and after leaving a generous amount, begin to spend time with the waitress outside of her work environment. There are also customers that the Hooters Girl may meet outside of the establishment, she befriends the customer and tells them of her workplace whereupon a new repeat customer develops. Interactions between Hooters Girls and customers can be deconstructed accurately using Faier's (2009) model.

## **Blonde Haired, Blue-Eyed Favorites – Representations of Black Women vis a vis the “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” Image**

In order to discuss representations of black women and other women of color in Hooters media outlets, I utilize Molly and Herzberger’s (1998), Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2001), and Collins (2000 and 2004).

Molly and Herzberger (1998) conduct a quantitative study investigating how women’s perceptions of themselves and their bodies vary by race/ethnicity and class. The researchers predicted that African American women would have better self-esteem than their Caucasian counterparts. This research relates to my own personal experience working at Hooters. Even though, Hooters promotes a blonde hair, blue eyed “Girl Next Door” image through its marketing tools, most of my African American co-workers along with myself, are not affected negatively. We do not appreciate the underrepresentation, but by the same token, we have positive self images. As explained by Molly and Herzberger (1998), much of the self-esteem of black women is connected to the preferences of black men – African American women may choose to not conform to the dominant culture’s definition of beauty, in part because of perceived and actual preferences of African-American men (Molly and Herzberger, 1998, p.640).

Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2001) discuss body image and the beauty ideal. The “All American Girl Next Door” image is disseminated through society through the use of Barbie, movies, advertisements, and the likes. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey suggest,

Movies, TV programs, posters, billboards, magazine articles, and ads all portray images of the ‘ideal’ woman. She is young and tall, with long legs, small breasts and hips, smooth skin, and well groomed-hair. Her body is trim, toned, and very lean. In some years, cleavage is the desired trait...

(Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2001, 101)

Hooters pulls from this description in promoting its “All American Girl Next Door” image. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2001) contend that this ideal image is associates youth with sexuality, especially for women. Their discussion also states that while white women are held to unreasonable standards of beauty, they

see it all around them unlike women of color whom rarely see themselves reflected in mainstream images of beauty (Kirk and Okazaway-Rey, 2001, 103).

Patricia Hill Collins provides classic work regarding African American women is self definitions and explanations of controlling images. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins outlines these stereotypes in “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images.” As Collins states, “maintaining images of U.S. Black women as the Other provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression” (Collins, 2000, p.70). I observe the “othering” of black women in the Hooters media outlets. Through my experience with the company, it seems to be that by somehow including an “Other,” the company is providing an opportunity for diverse clientele and thus, more revenue. In “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought”, Collins suggests that by self defining themselves, black women are actively rejecting stereotypes and negative imagery that is assigned to them. When African American women are labeled as “Sapphires” – assertive women, Collins proposes finding a new self-definition and valuation in these terms. Instead of becoming docile and more “feminine” – going away from the Sapphire image; one should own these identities and wear them proudly, “unfeminine” and all (Harding, 2004, p.107). Yet, how far can a woman go in rejecting certain stereotypes, image or identities when her employment depends on them? Hooters others black women, yet black women and other diverse women also other themselves to survive and essentially function at Hooters as “outsiders within.” Yet, a subset of women do not resist the corporations controlling images at all. These women play into the image uncritically.

Self-definitions are an important resistance to the “outsider within” status. Collins suggests, “The status of being the ‘other’ implies being ‘other than’ or different from the assumed norm of white male behavior” (Harding, 2004, p.108). By having self definitions, black women are able to resist the assigned imagery and oppression placed upon them by the “standard” – white men. However, white women fit into this dichotomy as well: “...seeing Black women as obstinate mules and viewing white



women as obedient dogs objectifies both groups, but in different ways” (Harding, 2004, p.108). Collins suggests that there are two main reasons that self-definitions are important. The first reason is that by using self-definitions one is resisting the dehumanizing effects of oppression (Harding, 2004, p.108). Secondly, using self-definitions allows one to reject internalized, psychological oppression (Harding, 2004, p.108). These are necessary for Black women’s survival. In an environment like Hooters, however, women must often keep their resistance undercover, or risk termination of their employment.

Hooks (1992) discusses the gaze/oppositional gaze. Working at the “Black Hooters” created issues around image for the African American women employed by the restaurant; a discussion of power structures and the gaze is appropriate. Referencing Michel Foucault, Hooks (1992) contends, “...I thought again about...the ways power as domination reproduces itself in different locations employing similar apparatuses, strategies, and mechanisms of control” (Hooks, 1992, p. 115). While management set the standards for the ideal Hooters Girl image, Hooters Girls at the “Black Hooters” often monitored one another, enforcing the standards. Waitresses appointed as “Corporate Trainers” were Hooters Girls responsible for training new employees and enforcing the standards set forth by management such as those regarding hair styles. This practice is not unique to the “Black Hooters”, it is practiced company-wide. However, my store, due the racial dynamic, extra monitoring occurred, especially surrounding hair styles. Management often asked Corporate Trainers to tell Hooters Girls not adhering to the image standards that they must align. Even when not asked by management, Corporate Trainers and Hooters Girls monitored each other.

## Chapter 4

### On the Job Training

This chapter discusses the details of working as a Hooters Girl, including, daily staff meetings, obtaining food and beverage orders; clientele; and the different types of social groups of Hooters Girls encountered during my experience. The following is a mixed methods approach to understanding my experiences of working as a Hooters Girl fusing elements of both the participant observation and ethnography/autoethnography methods. Lofland and Lofland (1995) describe participant observation as,

...the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association. This may not be the person's sole purpose for being present in the setting, but it is at least an important one. Intensive interviewing, also known as 'unstructured interviewing,' is a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee ... rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis.

(p. 18)

As an investigator examining the "Black Hooters" I developed many relationships with my co workers. The interviews I conducted that will be presented in the succeeding chapter, reflect those relationships as an unstructured interview style was used. Ethnography/autoethnography was another means for reflecting on my experiences working as a Hooters Girl. Reinharz (1992) describes ethnography as multi-method research involving observation, participation, archival analysis, and interviewing.

I utilize the above stated to discover the ways in which Hooters operationalize their corporate vision of the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door"? How does the corporation use their media outlets and employee training materials to implement and impose this prototype on its female employees? In particular to this chapter, how do Hooters Girls respond to, conform to, and resist corporate pressure to embody the Hooters Girl idea? How does this process of negotiation vary from women who are markedly different from the Hooters ideal, particularly black women?

#### **Jumpstart**

Each shift at Hooters begins with a staff meeting with the waitresses for that given shift. This staff meeting is called “Jumpstart.” During Jumpstart, management discusses in-store promotions and employee information, such as that regarding W-2 forms or alcohol serving certification. This is also the main area in which the ideal image of Hooters Girls is disseminated to the staff. Jumpstart meetings begin with managers having Hooters Girls stand in a line and employee uniforms are inspected for cleanliness and appropriateness. The uniform inspection is usually followed by a discussion of in-store promotions and events. The last portion of the Jumpstart meetings usually covers employee rules and regulations as well as upcoming training sessions. This discussion of Jumpstart begins with the uniform inspection.

**I.P.A. – Image. Performance. Attitude.**

I experienced many different management styles and codes of conduct during my five years of employment with Hooters. However, there were many regulations that remained the same. “I.P.A.”, Image, Performance, and Attitude, is one such rule. Under I.P.A., one must adhere to certain standards in order to receive certain privileges. For example, those Hooters Girls that were punctual for their shifts and wore a clean uniform free of food stains, were often rewarded “Cut Cards” – cards that Hooters Girls may use to go home early for the day. Furthermore, Hooters Girls that adhered to the desired image, not only wearing a clean uniform and being punctual, but those that wore the desired “Hooters” styled cosmetics, hair, and body – one enhanced by breast augmentations – were often rewarded for their efforts with Cut Cards, their desired table sections and often the opportunity to appear in many of the Hooters media outlets.

I found that those women adhering to I.P.A. standards were often those that already fit the Hooters Girl desired image. The Hooters Girls that were often praised, already fit the I.P.A. model when they were hired. I argue that there were women that were hired who already fit the desired I.P.A. model, and those that were hired that did not exactly fit the I.P.A. model, but with adjustments (i.e. breast

augmentation, hair extensions) would fit the desired I.P.A. model. For those in the first group that already fit the model, privileges were often given such as prime table sections in the busier areas of the restaurants and possible appearances in the Hooters media outlets. For Hooters Girls in the latter group, one needed to work to maintain the minimum requirements of I.P.A. or one could enhance herself with breast augmentations or hair extensions to become more acceptable. I fell into this latter group. I wore cosmetics to work daily and pressed my hair each week to maintain the desired image; however, I did not obtain a breast augmentation and I seldom wore hair extensions.

### **“You Need To Buy New Shoes” – The Uniform Inspection**

During Jumpstart meetings, managers are required to inspect the Hooters Girl uniform, including hair and cosmetic application. The Hooters Girl uniform is inspected by looking for stains or holes in the uniform. The shoes worn by Hooters Girls are white, and should be clean for each shift. Hooters Girls are required to purchase a new uniform if it is not up to standards. Hair and cosmetic application are assessed in interesting ways. Hooters managers often state that the minimum application of make-up includes, “Something on the eyes, cheeks and lips.” However, Hooters Girls are encouraged to go above and beyond this minimum and wear extensive makeup, which includes eye shadow, foundation, blush, mascara, false eyelashes, eyeliner and lip stick. As managers would often state, “Make-up is a part of the uniform.”

During the uniform inspection, Hooters Girls’ undergarments are also inspected. Undergarments are not supposed to be visible through the uniform. For example, Hooters Girls must wear beige bras under their white uniforms and black bras under their black uniforms. Managers must inspect each Hooters Girl to insure that they are wearing the appropriate undergarments. During Jumpstart meetings, managers ask Hooters Girls to pull out their bra straps to show that it is the appropriate color – either beige for the white uniform; or black for the black uniform. Hooters Girls are also asked to turn around during the Jumpstart meeting so that the uniform shorts and undergarments may be inspected. Shorts

should fit properly, not showing too much of the buttocks. The Hooters Girl's undergarments are inspected to ensure that waitress is wearing a thong, instead of full coverage underwear. This is done by the manager looking for the appearance of panty lines. Full coverage underwear are discouraged because of the appearance of panty lines through the uniform shorts.

My experiences with the uniform inspection were usually pleasant, however I had occasional issues with passing the uniform inspection. This occurred because during my menstruation times, I would wear full coverage underwear under my uniform instead of thongs. Menstruating while working at Hooters proved to be a challenge for women like myself that did not wear tampons and thongs during that experience. I was often reprimanded by management for this behavior, but it never became a major issue.

I noticed that the uniform inspection was difficult for some male managers to perform out of fear of a sexual harassment case. Throughout my five years working for the corporation, there were never any issues surrounding male managers being inappropriate with Hooters Girls during the uniform inspection. This process was done in front of all the Hooters Girls for that given shift, making it more comfortable for both the manager and the Hooters Girl. This particular part of Jumpstart was better handled by female managers because many of the female managers I worked with were former Hooters Girls. They understood the company's uniform expectations. For those female managers that had not previously been Hooters Girls, they were more comfortable inspecting the uniform and the supporting undergarments. I credit this to them being female and comfortable with the female body. Overall, I found that Hooters Girls were also more comfortable with female managers performing the uniform inspection.

The ideal Hooters Girl uniform consisted of a clean, "appropriate" fitting uniform. The uniform should conform to the body, but the shorts should not show too much of the buttocks. From time to time, customers and peers would ask if one has to have a certain breast size to work at Hooters. The

name of the company suggests emphasis on certain female body parts, but from my experience, breast size is not a requirement, but is appreciated. Customers often ask, “What does ‘Hooters’ mean?”. As Hooters Girls we were instructed by management to never state that “Hooters” equates to breasts or any part of the female body. Instead, management suggested that “Hooters” was more a description of the restaurant environment – fun and festive. The following is stated on the Hooters website in regards to the term,

The chain acknowledges that many consider ‘Hooters’ a slang term for a portion of the female anatomy. Hooters does have an owl inside its logo and uses an owl theme sufficiently to allow debate to occur over the meaning’s intent. The Chain enjoys and benefits from this debate.

(Hooters Website, <http://www.hooters.com/About.aspx>)

What is meant by the corporation stating, “The Chain enjoys and benefits from this debate”?

Perhaps, this is another paradoxical message sent on behalf of the corporation. The term has different meanings depending on the context. In the restaurant the term is used to name the establishment and perhaps to describe the festive environment. The term is also used in conjunction with certain menu items, such as the “Hooterstizers”, the appetizers. In the media outlets, particularly the calendar and magazine, the term is used to reference the female anatomy, or at least, sex appeal.

The Hooters uniform inspection speaks to the overall image of the “All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image in the following ways. First, the ideal Hooters Girl has a proper fitting uniform, according to corporate standards. An appropriate Hooters uniform consists of clean, white Sketchers sneakers; *flesh tone* pantyhose with no tears in them; clean, orange uniform shorts that hug the body, but does not show an excessive amount of the buttocks; and clean, white uniform shirt that fits the torso. I highlight “flesh tone” pantyhose because while panty hose are a part of the uniform, and skin color of women of color became an issue. Pantyhose were sold in the restaurant for Hooters Girls to purchase, along with the rest of the uniform. Flesh toned panty hose were those that went well with fair skin. I wore the “flesh toned” panty hose, but some of my counterparts chose to wear the darker colored panty hose

that went better with their skin tone. These panty hose were called “coffee” panty hose and were also sold in the restaurant.

The body fitting inside of this uniform is more noteworthy for discussion. Second, the ideal Hooters Girl body type, I argue, is one with large *augmented* breast; fair skin- but tanned if one is Caucasian; shoulder length or longer hair – which can be aided with hair extensions, even if she is white; and have a small buttocks. How does this align with the “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image?

I emphasize the augmented breasts and small buttocks in this discussion because I noticed that women with their natural breasts did not have a large presence in the Hooters media outlets. Also, on countless occasions I saw women begin working with their natural breasts and after getting an augmentation, they were given more opportunities to be seen by management. When I imagine the “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” I do not envision her with large augmented breast, heavy cosmetic application, and hair extensions. The image description presents an image of a Caucasian woman that has natural features and wearing little cosmetics.

This could happen in a variety of ways including better table sections during their given shifts, or the opportunity to shoot for the Hooters Calendar or other promotional materials. At the “Black Hooters”, I noticed that many of the waitresses had curvaceous bodies, such that the buttocks became an issue for management. There were some African American Hooters Girls that had large buttocks. Management would often state that these particular Hooters Girls needed to wear larger uniform shorts to cover their buttocks. I found that large, *augmented*, breasts were favored, tolerated, by management, over a large buttocks.

In regards to hair and cosmetics, hair should be “styled” a term that I will deconstruct below; and makeup should be worn to compliment one’s features. As I explain, hair became an issue for management and Hooters Girls at this particular establishment.

### Is your hair good enough?

During my years working at the “Black Hooters”, hair standards were always an issue. For example, the *Hooters Employee Handbook* states the following in regards to hair standards,

Hair must be styled and worn down at all times, with a glamorous appearance. No visible braiding, weaving, pony tails or similar styles will be allowed. No bizarre haircuts, styles, or colors are acceptable. No hats or headbands may be worn. No large hair clips or scrunchies, butterfly clips, or unacceptable hair accessories may be worn.

(Hooters Employee Handbook, 6, 2006)

Working for a Hooters location that was predominantly African American staffed presented new challenges to management surrounding hair image. During many Jumpstart meetings, hair style and image were consistent themes. Management, including managers that were African American, had difficulties with Hooters Girls and their hairstyles. For example, many Hooters Girls desired to wear their hair in its natural state, for many of the African American Hooters Girls this consisted of a curly hair style. Management created creative ways of deciding if hair styles were appropriate. For black women, these creative ways were based on hair texture. During Jumpstart, managers would state, “Hairstyles must be *glamorous and styled*” (emphasis added).

Hair became such an issue, that staff from the Hooters headquarters came into the store to have a special meeting on the Hooters hair image. The person facilitating the meeting was ironically, an African American woman. She played a key role in the Hooters corporate office dealing with issues of Hooters Girls image and representation. My co workers and I had many questions during this meeting. When asked, ‘What is a “glamorous and styled” hair style appropriate for work?’; she responded that hair styles worn at Hooters should be the type of hair styles one would wear to their wedding or prom. The understanding by the end of the meeting was such that natural, African American/African Centered styles cannot be worn by Hooters Girls, and thus, are not “glamorous” or “styled”.

Arguably, most African American Hooters Girls working at the “Black Hooters” understand that hair is a major aspect of the *African American* Hooters Girl image that is dealt with subjectively. Do Caucasian Hooters Girls deal with as many issues surrounding hair image as African American Hooters Girls?



I argue that they do not. While many of them will encounter issues surrounding hair color or length, they will not encounter issues over hair texture. The issues surrounding African American Hooters Girls hair always dealt with issues of texture. If one's hair was not acceptable, then she needed to alter it either through heat, chemicals or hair extensions.

A discussion of "good" hair is appropriate. "Good" hair speaks to African Americans or persons of African descent with a certain texture of hair. This texture is usually fine and straight. This particular type of hair also is more similar to hair grades found in Caucasian populations. If one's hair is "good" enough, they may wear it in its natural state. For African American women with hair that is not "good" they must press it out and/or wear hair weaves and extensions. As Jones (1995) contends,

Hair is the be-all and end-all. Everything I know about American history I learned from looking at black people's hair. It's the perfect metaphor for the African experiment here: the price of the ticket (for a journey no one elected to take), the toll of slavery, and the costs of remaining. It's all in the hair.

(p.5)

As Jones (1995) explains, hair has been assigned significant meaning in the African American community. Hair texture is an important cite of resistance amongst African American women historically and at the "Black Hooters." Resistance was often sought through pushing the envelope on hair styles. Many co workers would arrive for their shift with their hair in its natural state to see if the manager would approve.

What does this discussion of appropriate and non appropriate hair styles suggest about the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" image promoted by Hooters? My work experiences lead to the following opinions about African American women and hair. Hooters Girls are required to wear their hair in styles that are straight or loose curls. Hair should fall into either blonde, red, brown or black color shades; or a variety of the above. For African American Hooters Girls, this translates into women having either to press the natural texture of their hair; put relaxers in their hair; wear hair extensions; and/or dye their hair to lighter shades such as blonde or light brown. African American women doing the minimum, such as only pressing their hair or only put a relaxer in their hair, were not necessarily frowned

upon. However, those that went above the requirement of straight hair and put extensions and color in their hair were often praised and provided opportunities to appear in the media outlets of the corporation.

### **“I don’t want to work upstairs” – Selecting Table Sections**

The “Black Hooters” store is designed with upstairs and downstairs dining areas. This store plan is conducive to the demographics of the area – an urban, tourist driven area. However, this floor plan presented challenges within the social dynamics of the Hooters Girl staff. There were politics that went into who got which table sections. Inquiries guiding this research question what is the “ideal” Hooters Girl, what does it mean to be the “All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door”? Answers to these questions were presented during each shift while sections were distributed to Hooters Girls. For example, management often stated that a Hooters Girl table section was based on a corporate concept, mentioned previously, entitled, “I.P.A.” – Image, Performance and Attitude.” However, the image component heavily affected the I.P.A. model.

Many Hooters locations allow Hooters Girls to pick their own table section. This is done through either seniority or playing games such as “Ball Toss” in which pieces of paper are numbered with table section numbers and the pieces are thrown onto a table. Hooters Girls then pick up the balls, and whichever number they receive is their table section. Throughout my years working for the corporation, this method was rarely used at the “Black Hooters.” Instead, management selected our table sections. The upstairs area of the restaurant required more physical movement to operate. Hooters Girls had to walk up and down the staircase several times a shift carrying plates of food. Thus, many waitresses did not prefer to work upstairs. Deciding who would work upstairs and who would work downstairs was often a political process. Those Hooters Girls that were looked at as ideal, were often placed downstairs in the prime area of the restaurant, nicknamed “The Fishbowl.”

Discussion about the “ideal” Hooters Girls often appeared indirectly while table sections were distributed. As previously stated, management would often state that one’s table section depended on a Hooters Girl’s performance of a corporate concept entitled, “I.P.A. – Image, Performance, and Attitude.” Over the course of my five year employment with the corporation, I began to notice trends in those that excelled with “I.P.A.” The concept of “I.P.A.” sounds simple, Hooters Girls must come to work in the proper image – hair and makeup up to Hooters standards; Hooters Girls must perform – selling the promotional items; and Hooters Girls must maintain a positive attitude. I argue that those Hooters Girls that were given the best table sections, for example, the “Fishbowl”, were often able to perform well in terms of promotional item sales because their table sections were in high traffic areas of the restaurant.

#### **“Who wants to go home early?” – Getting Cut Early**

During slow business days at the restaurant, management would often “cut the floor.” This entailed asking the Hooters Girls on that given shift if they wanted to go home early for that days shift. There were often politics that went into this process. For example, waitresses with the highest quantities of contest sales were the first rewarded with the opportunity to end their shift early. However, those waitresses with the highest contest sale items often had the prime areas of the restaurant, such as “The Fishbowl.” Prime areas of the restaurant such as The Fishbowl were areas in which many customers would sit when they came into the restaurant. This was a high traffic area in the establishment in which many people would like to sit because of the view of the restaurant and the city. Those Hooters Girls working in The Fishbowl regularly excelled in I. P. A. and thus were considered the “ideal” Hooters Girl. Furthermore, these women were either the “ideal” African American Hooters Girl or were the ideal Hooters Girl – Caucasian.

#### **In-Store Promotions and Charity**

Another aspect of Jumpstart meetings was the discussion of promotional items that were to be announced to customers. Each business quarter there are select beverage and menu items promoted

within the company nationwide. For example for the third quarter, Sam Adams beer and cheese sticks are promotional beverage and menu items. During Jumpstart, Hooters Girls that sell large quantities of the promotional items are praised. Another aspect of the ideal Hooters Girl then, is one with high sales in promotional items.

As mentioned before, Hooters of America, Inc. participates in charitable causes. The Hooters *Kelly Jo Dowd Fund* is one such example. During my experiences working on days where we were raising money for such charities, management would discuss methods by which to raise money for the cause. For example, the *Kelly Jo Dowd Fund* fundraising usually takes place during the month of October. Management encouraged Hooters Girls to raise money for the fund by soliciting to customers. This happened in a variety of ways. For example, Hooters Girls were expected suggest a donation to the *Kelly Jo Dowd Fund* while serving each guest. Usually this suggestion was made at the end of the dining experience when customers were making payment on their dining bill. Management also thought of creative ways to raise money for the fund by suggesting that we organize a bake sale. The bake sale we organized consisted of pastries and pink lemonade. This bake sale was conducted in the entry way to the store where both customers and individuals passing by the store could donate to the cause. The selling of pastries for charity is a combined example of the Girl Next Door and All American Girl.

### **Employee Rules and Regulations/Training Opportunities**

During Jumpstart, management reviews rules and regulations are with Hooters Girl. For example, there is a rule that employees may not take their breaks in the dining room in front of guests. Instead, Hooters Girls must eat in the break room. Other rules discussed during Jumpstart include proper store closing procedures and rules regarding attendance and tardiness. Rules were reviewed and added often during my employment. More interesting to my research was the employee training programs. For example, every Hooters Girl is required to go through a series of trainings at the beginning of their employment. The first three to five days of any Hooters Girl work experience consists of a "Classroom"

training day in which the employee handbook is reviewed in addition to other employee training materials including text and video guides. Following this classroom training is on-the-floor training in which a Hooters Girl follows a Corporate Trainer Hooters Girl throughout her shift. Corporate Trainer Hooters Girls will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Upon successful completion of the classroom and on-the-floor training days, a Hooters Girl is released on her own onto the dining room floor. This experience can be daunting for many waitresses because one must adapt to the uniform, the racial dynamic taking place in the restaurant and the fears that accompany many on their first days of a new job.

### **The Cool Girls: Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls**

Within Hooters restaurants company-wide, there are different levels of Hooters Girls. For example, there are Hooters Girls and “Corporate Trainer” Hooters Girls. Another level, or subset of Hooters Girls, are the “Camera Ready Girls”, a term that I coin later in this discussion. Corporate Trainers are Hooters Girls that have been working for the company at least 90 days and have been certified to train new Hooters Girls. In order to become a Corporate Trainer, one must first be asked by management to begin training. After completing the training associated with becoming a Corporate Trainer, a Hooters Girl is certified to train incoming Hooters Girls and conduct Beauty Boot Camp and other training opportunities.

Camera Ready Girls are Hooters Girls that have been featured in the annual Hooters Calendar and/or other media outlets of the corporation. The Calendar features Hooters Girls from throughout the entire corporation. There are a variety of ways one can get photographed for the calendar. Hooters Girls may participate in the local swimsuit contest and if placed within the top five at the state level, she will probably be photographed for the calendar. Hooters Girls are also encouraged to submit photographs for the calendar each year. Please note, one may be both a Corporate Trainer *and* a Camera Ready Girl. However, there are Hooters Girls that are only Corporate Trainers and those that are only Camera Ready

Girls. Management does encourage those that are Camera Ready Girls to become certified as Corporate Trainers so that they may conduct training courses with incoming Hooters Girls. I argue that this is a strategy on behalf of the corporation to have those that are presented in the media outlets lead the company in image.

A discussion of the intra-restaurant politics surrounding the treatment of both Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls is essential to understanding the dynamics taking place within this “Black Hooters.” Theoretically and often times in reality, both Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls are esteemed as the epitome of what a Hooters Girl *should* be. I suggest this in theory and in reality because those that are chosen to be Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls at the “Black Hooters” are not always the ideal Hooters Girl for the company as a whole. Those chosen at my Hooters were beautiful women, even by Hooters standards, but did not quite match up to the ideal Hooters Girl. This ideal Hooters Girl I argue is Caucasian with blonde or brown hair. Those chosen from my Hooters were black women that conformed to Caucasian notions of beauty. For example, the women chosen to be Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls often wore hair extensions and some had breast augmentation. Skin color varied as some were dark skinned and some were light skinned. A discussion of Caucasian Hooters Girls working at this Black Hooters will be detailed later in this chapter.

Management privileged Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls because they excelled at executing the role of the Hooters Girl. An example of a way in which these particular Hooters Girls were privileged would often come when it was time for managers to pick table sections for each shift. Corporate Trainers, and specifically Camera Ready Girls, would often get the prime sections of the restaurant such as The Fishbowl. I should note Camera Ready Girls regardless of whether or not they were Corporate Trainers – in most cases they were – were viewed as the highest level of Hooters Girls. Women that were Corporate Trainers were revered but not in the same manner as their Camera Ready Girl counterparts. Therefore, management would often privilege the Camera Ready Girls first, followed by the Cor-

porate Trainers. The Hooters Girls that would follow the first two groups in the ranking were those that had tenure at Hooters. After many years working for the corporation, I found myself amongst this group.

Corporate Trainers and Camera Ready Girls were the example that management would often refer to emulate the ideal Hooters Girl image. Often times when a manager had a problem with a Hooters Girls hairstyle or cosmetic application, they would go to one of the two esteemed groups and suggest that they reprimand the Hooters Girl in offense and correct the image issue.

I was asked to be a Corporate Trainer, but I did not want to join because of the responsibilities associated with the role. I did not desire to train new employees or teach classroom training sessions and the like. While I was not a Corporate Trainer, I did train new employees when those that were Corporate Trainers were unavailable. I did not mind doing this for management on occasion. On the other hand, I was not a Camera Ready Girl. I did participate in a few swimsuit contests throughout the years, but never placed in the top five nor did I submit photographs for the swimsuit calendar.

While I understood that the Corporate Trainer and Camera Ready Girls were the “role models” for staff, I did not aspire to this role. I had good work ethic, but I did not desire to be the ideal Hooters Girl. Prior to my work on this project, I had the same sentiments. From my earliest days at the “Black Hooters”, I knew that I did not want to become inundated with the Hooters image, but I did not articulate it in the ways in which I am able to today.

The “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image, that is promoted by the corporation was always interesting to me. I often wondered, how does the image promoted by the corporation align with the reality taking place within the “Black Hooters”? During my early years with the corporation, I realized that the reality and the ideal does not align, but instead a mixture or hybrid of activity happens within this particular Hooters. For example, like most Hooters restaurants, there are those ideal beauties, those that are held on a pedestal by management, those that are the model waitress. Due to the lack of Caucasian waitresses, this ideal Hooters Girl was African American with many Caucasian-like fea-

tures such as hair extensions and breast augmentation, the latter an activity that I argue, is practiced by more Caucasian women than African American women. African American women do not align with the terms “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door,” but she can if she alters her body. Caucasian women are already considered the above nomenclature, but in order to become an ideal Hooters Girl, regardless of the waitress’s race, one generally must augment their breasts, add hair extensions, and apply their cosmetics accordingly, especially if she is a woman of color. My findings have shown that for African American women, breast augmentation and hair extensions always trump one’s skin tone.

### **Attention! Beauty Boot Camp**

There are other required training programs offered after the initial training. These include “Beauty Bootcamp”, an image class offered to new Hooters Girls, and Serve Safe Class, a class for alcohol serving certification. The Hooters Girl image is disseminated through the Beauty Bootcamp in the following ways. Employees are taught the proper cosmetic application and are also taught about acceptable hair styles for work as a Hooters Girl.

Corporate Trainers taught the training programs and would dress in full hair and makeup for such events. The ideal image of the Hooters Girls was presented for employees to see at training events as a way of inspiring and setting a standard for Hooters Girls to aspire to. Training sessions were used as opportunities for the corporation to disseminate their image of the ideal Hooters Girl to new employees.

### **The Queen Bee – Female Managers**

Throughout my years working for the corporation, I experienced one female General Manager and a few female assistant managers. During my first two years, the Black Hooters was lead by a white, female, General Manager that was a former Hooters Girl. She appeared in the Hooters Calendar during her days as a Hooters Girl and exemplified the “All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” image outlined by the *Hooters Employee Handbook*. This female General Manager had blonde hair and a petite build. She was attractive and had a wonderful personality. I enjoyed working under her manage-



ment, however I did notice trends in hiring while she under her direction. As I will deconstruct further from a comment made from one of the research participants, this General Manager had a tendency to hire waitresses that were very thin. After her employment, I noticed that the male General Managers were less strict with body weight, but instead focused more on an applicant's facial features when they applied for a position as a Hooters Girl. Male managers were still strict about image and body size, but not as strict as the female General Manager.

Working under a female General Manager was interesting. I enjoyed the experience mainly because she was a former Hooters Girl and I thought she could relate to our experiences. However, due to the race dynamic, I felt that there were some disconnects between having a predominantly African American wait staff lead by a Caucasian General Manager. While I believe she thought the staff was attractive, she wanted us to conform to Caucasian notions of beauty through hair styles and cosmetic application. For example, this General Manager praised me when I tried hair extensions for the first time.

### **365 Days of Orange – Working During Holiday Season**

Most Hooters of America, Inc. restaurants operate 365 days a year. Our location was no different and we were open for business every day of the year. This became a problem for staff particularly during the holiday season during the months of November and December. Management required Hooters Girls to pick two holidays to sign up to work. The holidays included Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Years Eve and New Years Day. Hooters Girls were required to work at least two of the mentioned holidays. Once Hooters Girls stated their preference in holidays, management would make the schedule. If there were any discrepancies with the schedule, Hooters Girls would have to speak with management about the matter. One would be fired if they did not show up for their assigned holiday shifts. Management would also base the holiday schedule off of I.P.A.

I disliked working during the holidays. But, I noticed that there were some politics that went into who would get to work which holidays. For instance, many Hooters Girls did not want to work Christmas

or New Years Eve. Even though Hooters Girls were required to state their preference for the holiday season, I found that management ultimately based the holiday schedule on I.P.A., seniority, Corporate Trainers, and Camera Ready Girls.

### **Breaded or Naked? Taking Food and Beverage Orders**

A large portion of the work of Hooters Girls involves obtaining food and beverage orders for guests. As I will illustrate, issues surrounding image, including sexuality, arise a lot during this portion of the Hooters Girl work experience. During the food and beverage service, Hooters Girls must present the menu and guide customers through the selection assisting with any questions guests may have. Hooters Girls are also instructed to suggest certain menu items, i.e. promotional menu items.

It is during this process that questions about Hooters Girls' image come into play. During my experience working as a Hooters Girl in a predominantly African American staffed restaurant, customers would often verbalize or provide physical cues as to their understanding of this "atypical" Hooters location. For example, I have had countless amounts of customers visit this Hooters restaurant and state, "I've never been to a 'Black' Hooters"; or "It's so many Black Hooters Girls here." Other customers, perhaps those dissatisfied with the experience of a predominantly black staffed Hooters; walk into the restaurant and walk back out. Others say, "I've never seen so many beautiful African American women." What does the above say about the overall image of Hooters? Is the ideal Hooters Girl an African American woman?

During the food and beverage ordering process, Hooters Girls must also allude to the menu, which has some menu items that are sexually suggestive. For example, chicken wings are a popular menu item. Customers may order their wings in a variety of ways. First one must decide on the quantity of wings. Next, one must decide whether to order the wings "naked" or "breaded." "Naked" refers to a style of wings that does not have flour breading on it. "Breaded" refers to wings with flour. Many times while working, I would suggest these types of wings as "breaded" and "un breaded" because saying

“naked” around customers, especially female patrons, changes the dynamic of the food service experience.

Another example of sexually suggestive menu items includes the beer size and names. Beers come in two sizes, the “Pint” or the “Big Daddy.” The “Pint” is a mug that contain about 16 ounces, while the “Big Daddy” is a mug that contain about 30 ounces of beer. Hooters Girls are encouraged to suggest the larger size beer container, the “Big Daddy.” My experience has been that stating the term “Big Daddy” in front of guests creates another change in social climate for guests, similar to the “breaded” or “naked” question. For example, I have experienced perverse attitudes from some male clients when I ask them if they would like a “Pint” or “Big Daddy.”

What does the food and beverage menu names suggest about Hooters Girls? Are Hooters Girls conduits or representatives of sexuality? According to the menu and the service required of Hooters Girls, I would argue that the waitresses are very much so representatives and conduits of sexuality within this restaurant.

### **Hands Off Food Service**

While working for Hooters there was a concept of providing “Hands Off Food Service” to our guests. Hooters Girls were expected to bring food to guest and open any condiments that accompanied menu items such as, ranch, blue cheese, ketchup, or mayonnaise. I found that this approach set us apart from many other restaurant concepts because many customers would state that they frequent Hooters for that reason. Utilizing the hands off food service method was something I did not do consistently. The reason for this being, some customers did not appreciate it, such as women. After years of waitressing, it became easy for me to “read” my tables and know which customers would appreciate the hands off service approach. Usually, male customers preferred it more so than women.

Management encouraged us to perform hands off service as it was a part of the steps of service Hooters Girls are required to perform with every customer. The steps of service included greeting guests

as they come in the door, taking them to your table section, getting drink and appetizer orders, food orders, providing flatware, serving the food, offering dessert and finally, suggesting merchandise for guests to take home with them such as a shirt or calendar.

I selectively performed hands off service to those guests that I felt would appreciate it and not find it offensive. For example, I did not perform hands off service to women or children, especially those children that were with women. There were men that I did not perform hands off service for as well. For those that I felt were new to dining at Hooters and appeared apprehensive, and also those male customers that I felt were acting in a perverse manner, I would not provide hands off service.

### **You're a Celebrity – Taking Photos and Signing Stuff**

As mentioned above, management encouraged us to sell the Hooters merchandise to customers such as Hooters shirts, calendar, key chains, and other memorabilia. We were also encouraged to sign these items with permanent markers and personalize the items for guests. For the most part, this was a fun experience of being a Hooters Girl. We were also encouraged to take photographs with guest. The *Hooters Employee Handbook* and management stated that Hooters Girls must always be “camera ready” for activities such as these. Managers would often state, “... customers can eat anywhere they choose, but they choose to come to Hooters for the Hooters Girls.”

### **Hula Hoops, Skip Its and Twister – Playing Games With Hooters Girls**

Another aspect of working at Hooters, regardless of location, is management wanting Hooters Girls to entertain their guests. Entertaining guests may come in a variety ways. We were encouraged to sit down and talk with our guests and when supplies were available, we were encouraged to play card games and board games with our guests. Management would purchase card games, jump ropes, hula hoops and the *Twister* game to play with guests. Toys such as jump ropes, hula hoops, and the *Twister* game – a game where a mat with colors is laid on the floor and game players must twist and bend to

reach the color they are supposed to touch - were often meant to be used *by* the Hooters Girls *for* the customer's enjoyment.

During my data collection, I often asked myself, how do these activities explain or define the "All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" image promoted by the corporation? By participating in these activities, I gather that the ideal Hooters Girl is the "All American Cheerleader, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" by engaging in these activities. To embody this image is to be personable, playful and flirty according to Hooters' standards.

### **Sugar Daddies and Sugar Babies – Regular Customers**

Throughout my five years working for the corporation, I developed a steady base of customers that would frequent the establishment to visit me on a regular basis. We call these customers "Regulars." This "Black Hooters" restaurant was a bit different than the other Hooters locations because while we had regular customers, the quantity of them was much lower than at a suburban Hooters location. I would credit this to the geographic location of my Hooters location being in a metropolitan, convention area; the business was driven by tourists and people that worked in the buildings adjacent to the restaurant.

Many of my co workers and I developed a steady base of regulars. Many of these customers were men, both married and single. They would come into the restaurant for conversation and fun. I developed many friendships with many of my customers, as did many of my fellow Hooters Girls. Having regulars is a characteristic found at most Hooters locations. Working at the Black Hooters, presented a different type of regular clientele base. I would not attribute this difference to the racial makeup of our staff, but instead I would credit this to the geographic location of the store. Since we were not located in a suburban neighborhood, it was hard to develop a big regular customer base. Our customer base was mainly tourist and business people in town for meetings. I developed regular customers that lived in the area as well as those that frequented the city from out of town several times of the year. One of my

regular customers lived in Florida, and would often come to the Black Hooters to visit me whenever he was in town on business. This customer was my regular throughout my five years of employment with Hooters. Customers such as these made the work experience enjoyable.

### **Is He Old Enough To Come In? Serving Children**

Hooters restaurants service people of all ages, including children. On many occasions parents would inquire at the doorway, “Is he/she old enough to come in?” Waiting on families was always an interesting experience. There were families that dined in the restaurant that were comfortable with the environment. These customers were friendly with the Hooters Girls and allowed their children to interact with us. For example, I would often make a smiley face out of ketchup for my children customers and bring balloons for them.

Working at Hooters I noticed that we often had customers that would frequent the restaurant, apparently for the food only, but were not interested in the Hooters environment or the Hooters Girls. I saw this many times with families. In these cases, I argue, families would be in the area and see Hooters as the most affordable option for dining. They would come in to eat and would not want to interact with the Hooters Girls or the environment. In these cases, I would serve the families and not bring balloons or smiley faces made from ketchup to the children. I would simply take food and beverage orders, and serve the items.

I noticed that during these types of experiences, the idea of what does Hooters and the Hooters Girl represent would surface. These customers that did not want to patronize Hooters, but did out of convenience of the location, were often confused about the restaurant concept in general. Was Hooters a restaurant or an exotic dance club? Were Hooters Girls waitresses or more like go-go dancers? Many customers walked away with these same questions, but some would return to the establishment if they were comfortable with their initial experience. I contend that Hooters Girls are in between waitresses and go-go dancers. The establishment allows for both experiences. For example, on days where there

are a lot of families and women visiting the establishment, we were to operate as a neighborhood bar, friendly and providing great service. On days where there is mostly a male clientele, which happened more frequently, we were expected to provide excellent *hands off* service, but flirt with our guests. Just as the term “Hooters” can have a variety of meanings, the role of the Hooters Girl can and did fluctuate depending on the demographic of customers present.

### **What Type of Hooters Girl Are You?**

During my experience working for Hooters I categorized different types of Hooters Girls within my work environment. I have provided a typology of them below. While this list is not exhaustive or conclusive, it provides some insight into the social landscape of the work environment.

- A. *College Girls* – Hooters Girls that attend college and work at Hooters to help finance their education. Often times, these girls live at home with their parents, in student housing or have their own apartments. These Hooters Girls often have the support from their family, therefore they do not have to work as many shifts as some of the other Hooters Girls. I classify myself as a *College Girl*.
- B. *Model Chicks* – Hooters Girls that pursue modeling on a full time basis. Often times, these girls begin their careers at Hooters as a *College Girl* and become comfortable with the Hooters image and environment ; wearing scantily clad outfits. They use this as a spring board for gaining access into modeling. There are many professional photographers that frequent Hooters using it as a gold mine for fresh faces. You will find many of these girls in music videos and magazines. A few have appeared on television shows as well.
- C. *Camera Ready Girls* – Hooters Girls that are featured in the calendar, promotional/marketing materials, commercials, website, etc. Upon being hired by Hooters, employees are informed on these so called “opportunities”, however, not everyone is encouraged to apply. These girls are usually given privileges not extended to the “regular” Hooters Girl. For example, *Camera Ready Girls* are given the best table section during their shifts and also get to work as many or as little shifts as they choose. These girls usually do not work as much as the rest of the staff, and usually earn money from promotions outside of the store.
- D. *Lipstick Girls* – Hooters Girls that have a lesbian or bisexual identity. This is a relatively new group of girls. From lay conversations in the past, I find that they navigate the Hooters landscape differently than those girls with a heterosexual identity. For example, these girls often times say that male customers can “sense” that they are “different”, and do not “try” them the way that straight Hooters Girls get “tried”. Many of these girls are friends outside of work and

attend LGBTQ events together. To my surprise, management takes little note of their sexual preference.

- E. *Girls Next Door*- Hooters Girls that exemplify the Hooters “Girl Next Door” image, promoted through our employee training manual. These girls are white and like the calendar girls, receive special attention from management. Often times, these girls are hired at other Hooters locations and transfer to our store. These girls usually work the day shift, which is significant because day shifts are often characterized by *Calendar Girls*, *Girls Next Door* and a few *College Girls*.
- F. *Corporate Girls* – These are Hooters Girls that train new employees. There is a special training that accompanies this position. There are Hooters Girls represented by each category I have described present in this group. These girls are responsible for maintaining the Hooters image, although not all are “ideal” Hooters Girls. These individuals are probably tolerated because it benefits management to have more Hooters Girls on staff that can train new employees.
- G. *Grand Opening Girls* – This is a special sub-set of *Corporate Girls*, that are responsible for maintaining the image and usually have roles that go beyond the restaurant. For instance, these girls have the opportunity to travel all around the world to open new Hooters locations. They also are responsible for training the *Corporate Girls* and have much contact with Hooters corporate employees.
- H. *The Mommy’s Club* – Hooters Girls that have children, some are single mothers and others are in relationships. This group will also include pregnant Hooters Girls.

While working at Hooters, the above were the social groups I encountered. How do the above groups align with the image promoted by the corporation, that is, the “All American Girl Next Door”?

The above are social categories of Hooters Girls I encountered at my particular Hooters location. The above categories could be found at other Hooters locations and are not unique to the Black Hooters. What is unique about the Black Hooters is the racial makeup of each category. For example, with the exception of the *Girls Next Door* category, the others are made up of African American women, whereas at a typical Hooters restaurant, the *Grand Opening Girls* would be predominantly made up of Caucasian Hooters Girls.

**That’s Our Waitress? The Caucasian Hooters Girl at the “Black Hooters”**



While the “Black Hooters” was staffed by primarily African American women, there were some Caucasian women that worked there throughout my years of employment. At any given moment there were no more than about 10 Caucasian Hooters Girls working out of a staff of about 50 Hooters Girls. Throughout my employment, white women worked at the Black Hooters. I argue that it took a specific disposition in order for these particular women to be able to handle the racial dynamics within the restaurant. For whatever reason, many of the white waitresses did not remain employed very long at the Black Hooters. I would attribute this directly to the racial makeup of the wait staff. Those few white waitresses that did remain employed for long periods of times had many things in common. For example, many of them were single mothers and needed the income. Others were tolerant of difference and got along well with the wait staff.

It was interesting working with white Hooters Girls at the “Black Hooters” because I thought of them as the ideal Hooters Girl, even if in the grand scheme of the company some of them may not have been the ideal. But because they were white women working at the Black Hooters, they were, by default, the ideal. I enjoyed diversity on our staff, but it was always interesting to note how and if they were treated differently by management, in particular, the Hooters corporate office entities that would make occasional store visits.

### **“Why Does She Have on *That* Uniform?” – The Pregnant Hooters Girl**

During my work experience at Hooters, I encountered a handful of co workers that became pregnant during their time at Hooters. This was always an interesting experience for the Hooters Girl that was pregnant, management and customers. Once these women become visibly pregnant, they are required to wear an alternative uniform. This uniform consists of a loose fitting Hooters logo t-shirt, the same one that is sold to the public, and a pair of black shorts that the Hooters Girl may select herself.

Many of my co workers that became pregnant while working at Hooters decided to resign. I noticed different opinions on the part of customers regarding visibly pregnant Hooters Girls. Some customers did not mind having a pregnant waitress and would tip these particular women extra because of it. Other customers would complain to non pregnant Hooters Girls about having a pregnant Hooters Girl wait on them. Some of these customers that did not want a pregnant waitress would not say anything to staff or management, but would instead ask rude questions to the Hooters Girl such as, “Why do you have on *that* uniform?” On these occasions, I saw pregnant Hooters Girls become upset with the situation. If customers were too rude to the waitress, according to the Hooters Girl opinion, she could request for someone else to wait on them or have them escorted out of the restaurant. However, this rarely happened.

For the most part I observed two main behaviors on the parts of customers in regards to pregnant Hooters Girls. On one hand, customers were accepting of her, they would treat her as they would any other Hooters Girl. On the other hand, there were those customers that did not want a pregnant waitress serving them and either asked management or another Hooters Girl for a different waitress, or they would act rude towards the pregnant Hooters Girl. Throughout my years working for the corporation, the pregnant Hooters Girl’s presence never created a major problem for either management or wait staff.

### **Qualifications for Publication – Black Hooters Girls and Promotional Materials**

During my years working at Hooters, I began to notice the types of African American women that would qualify for appearance in promotional items and promotional appearances. Those were the Hooters Girls that obtained breast augmentations; wore the Hooters preferred cosmetic style; and kept their hair “styled” according to Hooters standards. What does this say about the ideal Hooters Girl? Furthermore, what does this say about the ideal African American Hooters Girl?

I argue that the ideal Hooters Girl is Caucasian and either blonde or brunette, but preferably blonde. As far as women of color are concerned, the ideal Hooters Girl of color exudes many characteristics of her Caucasian counterpart. This may be demonstrated via a vis hair style, cosmetic application, breast augmentation, or skin tone. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, LeAngela Davis, the first African American Miss Hooters International, exudes qualities that are similar to her Caucasian Hooters Girl counterparts, however, she is a dark skinned African American woman.

Does Davis' crowning as Miss Hooters International suggest that Hooters of America, Inc. is becoming more open to different standards of beauty in regard to women of color? Or does Davis' crowning represent a tolerant behavior and attitude toward such issues on behalf of the corporation?

### **Clocking Out: Concluding Remarks on My Participant Observation**

My observations have led me to some assumptions about how the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" image is disseminated and implemented at the Black Hooters. From the training process to the serving process, Hooters Girls are constantly reminded of the role they play. Being "camera ready" is a mandate, and management constantly reminds us of this. Training programs and Jumpstart is where most of the dissemination of the Hooters Girl image takes place. During the actual work shifts, food and beverage service, is where the image is implemented and negotiated amongst Hooters Girls. During work shifts, Hooters Girls are confronted with customers that may or may not challenge the image that has been constructed by the corporation. That is, during interactions with customers, African American Hooters Girls are challenged often times by customers that are not used to the racial makeup of this particular location. Customers often would state, "I've never been to a 'Black' Hooters before" or "I've never seen so many beautiful black women before."

I will deconstruct my participant observation further in addition to the interviews conducted in the final chapter of this research.

## Chapter 5

### Regulars: The Customers That Keep Coming Back

As explained during the participant observation, there were many interactions with customers at the “Black Hooters.” Hooters of America, Inc. encourages waitresses to entertain their guests through conversation, games, and flirting. For example, I developed many relationships with my customers through conversations had during the dining experience, playing cards with guests, and using pet names, such as “doll”, to speak with my customers. Discretion was used in regard to these types of behaviors, as most of my regular clientele was male. I had a few female regulars throughout the course of my employment, but these women usually worked in the area and frequented the establishment during their lunch breaks.

I would like to highlight particular customer interactions that were had during my tenure at the “Black Hooters.” In particular, I would like to explore the repeat customers that frequented the establishment often. At Hooters we referred to these customers as “regulars.” There were different types of regulars that varied depending on their frequency of patronizing the restaurant. For example, there was a group of men that sat at the bar, many of them frequented the “Black Hooters” on a daily basis. Other regulars, were those frequenting weekly during their lunch breaks. There were also those regulars who came in weekly or a few times a month. Being that the “Black Hooters” was situated in an area frequented by tourists, there were often individuals attending conferences that became regulars for the days that they were in town. These regulars often became my favorites, as their gratuities were generous due to them using their business accounts to pay for meals.

What differed at the “Black Hooters” from a typical Hooters location is many of the regular customers did not have *one* particular Hooters Girl they preferred, regulars usually had several waitresses

that they enjoyed dining with. At typical Hooters restaurants regulars usually dine with one particular Hooters Girl. This often causes feuds between Hooters Girls at these mainstream locations.

I will discuss the interactions between these types of customers by breaking them into categories. The categories are the following: bar regulars; weekly and monthly regulars; traveling businessmen; sports fans; and female regulars. I would like to emphasize that most of the regulars frequenting the “Black Hooters” were male. However, throughout my years employment I did notice a few female regulars that I will discuss.

### **Bar Regulars**

At the “Black Hooters” there were a group of men that sat at the bar. At mainstream Hooters, most regulars sit with the waitress of their choice at a table. This is significant as many Hooters Girls that transferred to the “Black Hooters” or worked there on occasion often noticed the difference in the type of regulars that frequented our location. What is also significant about the bar regulars are that many of them did not leave the amount of gratuity that we Hooters Girls deemed appropriate. For example, many waitresses complained that the bar regulars did not tip enough. This was based on their frequency of visiting the establishment and the attention many bar regulars requested from Hooters Girls. Many waitresses agreed that the bar regulars *should* tip more because they frequent the establishment often and enjoy conversations with the Hooters Girls. The bar regulars were tended to by the bartender. On any given shift there was at least one bartender working the bar area and making drinks for Hooters Girls’ guests. The bartender had the most contact with the bar regulars, however, these customers also knew many of the Hooters Girls that did not work the bar.

I worked very few bar shifts during the beginning years of employment at the “Black Hooters.” I found that it was difficult to entertain any guest, including the bar regulars, due to the duties required of Hooters Girls working the bar area. The bar regulars were staples to this “Black Hooters” because their business was usually guaranteed. Overall, I enjoyed the company of the bar regulars, I got to know many

of them on a personal level. Many of the regulars in this group knew me throughout my entire employment period at the “Black Hooters” and became similar to family for me. However, if I were to rank the bar regulars on a Regulars Hierarchy, this group would be at the bottom of the pyramid due to the amount of gratuity received by Hooters Girls from this group. Hooters Girls did enjoy the company of the bar regulars, but preferred the business of more of the following groups of regulars.

### **Weekly and Monthly Regulars**

The weekly and monthly regulars were common at the “Black Hooters” and often one of the favorite type of regulars among the Hooters Girls. This group of regulars consisted of businessmen that worked in the area, men that lived in the area, and often times individuals that frequented the establishment regardless of if it was in proximity to their home or work. The weekly and monthly regulars were often single men or *unhappily* married men that frequented the establishment, generally during the evenings, and enjoyed the company of Hooters Girls. As I will discuss in this section, one’s relationship status was often a factor in the frequency of a regular.

Weekly and monthly regulars often came to the establishment to enjoy the atmosphere and the Hooters Girls of their liking. These regulars did not usually have one set Hooters Girl that they preferred. Instead, they usually had several Hooters Girls that they enjoyed. Waitresses interacted with these customers in a variety of ways. The key factor determining how Hooters Girls treat their regular customers depended on the amount of the gratuity. I believe that it was understood by regular patrons that this is how the environment operated. Male customers leaving a generous gratuity were favored among Hooters Girls. However, there were occasional regulars that did not leave generous gratuity, but had nice personalities. Hooters Girls would still often sit and entertain these customers even though the tip was not up to their standards.

The interactions between Hooters Girls and their weekly and monthly regulars was complex. Some Hooters Girls only interacted with these customers only within the “Black Hooters” establishment,

while others would interact with their regulars outside of the work environment, i.e. going to dinner or basketball games with these individuals. Over the years of my employment, I developed friendships with some of my regular customers and I interacted with some of them outside of the work environment. During a time when I did not have health insurance, my physician regular allowed me to visit his practice free of charge.

There were many exchanges that took place between Hooters Girls and their regulars. This practice and frequency of regulars visiting the establishment is not specific to the “Black Hooters.” Fostering relationships with one’s regulars is a common practice at mainstream Hooters locations. Management encourages waitresses to “entertain” their guests. Generally, this means sitting with guests and talking with them. This practice happened frequently at the “Black Hooters”, but due to the volume of business, this was not always possible. There were many shifts in which many of my regulars visited me and I was unable to provide the attention that they desired. Sometimes this affected the amount of gratuity that I received, but those regulars that I had longer relationships with were more understanding of the flow of business at the “Black Hooters.”

What is interesting about the weekly and monthly regulars, as well as the bar regulars, is their opinion of the ideal Hooters Girl promoted by the corporation and the reality of the waitresses within the “Black Hooters.” These two groups of regulars appreciated the amount of African American women working at the establishment and often stated that they exclusively patronized our restaurant for the women of color. Many of these regulars would not dine at another Hooters because of the amount of Caucasian waitresses present at mainstream Hooters locations.

### **Traveling Businessmen and Sports Fans**

This group of regulars has interesting characteristics. Often times the traveling businessmen and sports fans would be in town for a few days and were often the most surprised by the racial dynamics occurring in the “Black Hooters.” It was with these customers that I so often heard the phrase, “I’ve

never been to an all black Hooters before” or “I’ve never seen so many beautiful black women before.” While these comments were supposed to be compliments, myself and other Hooters Girls often took offense to such statements.

What was consistent and a positive aspect among these customers is the generous amount of gratuity that was given by these regulars. Hooters Girls enjoyed conventions that brought in businessmen because they often used their business expense accounts to pay for meals, and often were playful with the Hooters Girls. While this group of regulars were in town for only a few days, they are classified as regulars because of their frequency of dining the establishment during their stay. I recall a man that was in town for a construction convention that frequented Hooters every day of his trip. Each visit he sat with me and the gratuity grew each shift. This was a common practice of this particular group of regulars.

Since many of these regulars were surprised by the racial makeup of the wait staff at the “Black Hooters”, notions of the “All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” were challenged. These customers often struggled to make sense of the corporate ideal that they were accustomed to, and the reality taking place within the “Black Hooters.” More times than not though, these customers enjoyed the “Black Hooters” and walked away with a different understanding of the Hooters brand. At times however, I did notice individuals, usually white males, walking into the establishment and immediately leaving the establishment when they realized there were so many African American waitresses.

### **Lunching Ladies – Female Regulars**

During my tenure as a Hooters Girl, I did notice a few women that frequented the establishment on a regular basis. These women often sat at the bar, or came in with their co-workers on their lunch breaks. These women did not interact with the Hooters Girls in the same manner as the male patrons, but instead frequented the establishment for the food and beverage items. These women often did not interact with the Hooters Girls beyond small conversation. I noticed that when the female regulars be-



gan coming to the establishment, they are usually appear somewhat uncomfortable with the environment, but after dining and enjoying the menu items, they tend to become more comfortable with the environment. Important to this process is the waitresses tending to these customers. Women that have a negative experience with their Hooters Girls would often not return to the establishment. A negative experience could be characterized as a misunderstanding between female customer and Hooters Girl, as in one party having a negative attitude toward the other. Female regulars frequented the establishment for the food and beverage items and were of various races.

### **Is Becky Working? White Male Regulars**

While many of the regulars frequented the “Black Hooters” for the plethora of African American waitresses, there were those that frequented the establishment for the few Caucasian waitresses that were on the staff. These customers were usually businessmen that dined at the “Black Hooters” out of convenience during their lunch break. Some of these regulars would only dine in the restaurant if a Caucasian waitress served them, while others preferred a Caucasian Hooters Girls, but would still dine in if they were served by a black waitress. These white male regulars agreed with the ideal image of the Hooters Girl provided by the corporation, and performed this through their selection of waitresses that could serve them.

Interestingly, those white males that allowed African American Hooters Girls to serve them often chose to dine with those African American waitresses that looked like “authentic” African American women. By “authentic” I am suggesting that those Hooters Girls that were brown skinned with traditional African American features were preferred by these white males. I, being a fair skinned African American woman, did not meet these standards and thus, did not interact with these types of customers.

To conclude my thoughts on the types of regulars frequenting the “Black Hooters” I will start by stating that the image of the ideal Hooters Girl was challenge the most during these types of encoun-

ters. For white male patrons visiting the “Black Hooters” there were those that were surprised by the racial makeup of the wait staff and there were those that were surprised by the racial makeup of the wait staff, but decided to search for the “All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” within this colored environment. For the first group, white males accepting the “Black Hooters” and its Girls, the interactions were varied. Some men respected the wait staff and made it an enjoyable experience for the Hooters Girl, often providing a generous gratuity. On the other hand, members from this first group were also found making statements such as, “I’ve never seen so many beautiful black women before”, creating an uncomfortable dynamic for the African American Hooters Girl. While this group often tipped generously like their counterparts, Hooters Girls had to compromise their integrity in order to receive the funds. In other words, I found myself and other Hooters Girls tolerating racist behavior at times in lieu of financial gain.

For African American men frequenting the “Black Hooters” the experience for both the patron and the Hooters Girl was more uplifting. The black male regular would glorify the Hooters Girl and often only patronize the “Black Hooters.” These customers would often state, “Why are you not in the Hooters Calendar or promotional material? You should be, you’re beautiful.” Statements such as these were often said to me from my African American clientele. These customers rejected the corporate image of the ideal Hooters Girls and celebrated what they found in the “Black Hooters.”

## Chapter 6

### What's it Like Wearing The Orange Shorts? Conversations with Hooters Girls

"....it's like a sorority..."

Rebecca, 24

#### What's the 411? Interviewing Hooters Girls

I conducted interviews with fellow co workers, both current and former employees. Lofland and Lofland (1995) contends that the "getting in" phase of intensive interviewing consists of providing information to participants on the topics to be covered, length of time required, promises of confidentiality if appropriate, etc (p.84). Prior to conducting the following interviews, I briefed participants on the research topic and provided an overview of interview topics. These topics included discussions on the customer relations; employee-management relations; and general anecdotes about their work experiences with Hooters of America, Inc. Interviews took place outside of the restaurant, allowing Hooters Girls the opportunity to reflect and discuss their work experiences more openly. African American, Caucasian and Latina Hooters Girls were interviewed. The interview process helped illuminate that while Hooters Girls were affected by the racial dynamics present within this so called "Black Hooters," each of them have unique experiences within this work environment. For example, when beginning food service with white, male customers, one Hooters Girl interviewed reported that during her work experience, such patrons would say they wanted "Chocolate Milk" to drink. During my five years working for the corporation we never sold chocolate milk. This particular Hooters Girl has a brown skin complexion, thus the statement was directed at her phenotype. Anecdotes such as these lead to further questions about race relations within this "Black Hooters."

I include the narratives of Hooters Girls interviewed by dividing responses based on discussion topics. The interviews conducted were semi-structured guided by questions interview topics. I asked questions relating to all aspects of the lived body experience of the Hooters Girl, from inquiries surrounding Jumpstart, to inquiries about employee relations with one another. These questions and topics were raised to aide in answering my research questions:

How does Hooters operationalize their corporate vision of the “All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door”? How does the corporation use their media outlets and employee training materials to implement and impose this prototype on its female employees?

How do Hooters Girls respond to, conform to, and resist corporate pressure to embody the Hooters Girl idea? How does this process of negotiation vary from women who are markedly different from the Hooters ideal, particularly black women?

### **So What’s The Word Girls – The Interview Protocol**

I interviewed five Hooters Girls. The demographic of the women are as follows

*Rebecca, 24, African American, employed for 4 years*

I met Rebecca during my first year of employment with the “Black Hooters.” She originally worked at a mainstream Hooters and transferred to the “Black Hooters.” Rebecca and I worked many shifts together throughout our tenure at Hooters. Like myself, Rebecca was a college student during her employment with Hooters. While she did not appear in any of the promotional materials or media outlets of the corporation, she did undergo a breast augmentation during her employment at the “Black Hooters” which presented her with praise from management in various ways that are highlighted below. However, prior to her augmentation, she was esteemed as the example of an ideal African American Hooters Girl, both at the typical Hooters and the “Black Hooters.” This interview was conducted face to face, where I took notes on the discussion.

*Jenny, 25, African American, employed for 1 year*

The majority of Jenny's employment was conducted at a typical Hooters near the "Black Hooters." However, on two occasions she was asked to assist at the "Black Hooters" due to a shortage of waitresses. Jenny's account of her experience working at the "Black Hooters" juxtaposed against her experience working at the typical Hooters provides insight and balance to my discussion of the ideal Hooters Girl image promoted by the corporation. I attended college with Jenny and knew her throughout her employment with Hooters of America, Inc. Jenny worked at a typical Hooters restaurant, one with a predominantly Caucasian staff however, she filled in at the "Black Hooters" on two occasions. I include her narrative to balance out the illustration of the African American Hooters Girl. Her narrative will explain the experience of African American Hooters Girls working in a typical Hooters restaurant. Her work experience at the "Black Hooters" was paralleled by one of her fellow co-workers, a Caucasian woman who accompanied her to the "Black Hooters." Jenny illustrates the similarities and differences of their experiences at the "Black Hooters."

*Bethany, 24, Caucasian, employee of 5 years*

I met Bethany during my employment at the "Black Hooters." She began working there shortly after I began. Bethany was one of the Caucasian Hooters Girls that remained at the "Black Hooters" longer than most Caucasian women. Most white women working at the "Black Hooters" do not stay employed for long periods of times like their African American counterparts. I postulate that this could be based on one of two main reasons. First, I would blame the racial makeup of the wait staff, and second, I would credit the volume of business at the "Black Hooters." My Hooters location was the largest grossing in the region, many women working at the "Black Hooters" simply could not keep up with the amount of customers we served per shift. "Sink or swim" was often the motto. None the less, Bethany shared many experiences with me at the "Black Hooters" and provided the insight of a Caucasian women working within this unique Hooters restaurant.

*Nina, 22, Mixed ethnicity - African American, Cuban and Mexican, employee of 4 years*

I met Nina after working for Hooters for a few years. We worked well together and have remained in contact after my employment with the corporation. While not mentioned explicitly during the interview, Nina's sexual preference played a role in her response to customers. Nina self identifies as being a lesbian. I categorize her as part of the "Lipstick Girls" group I identified during my participant observations. As I will mention below, her experiences with customers lend to a different experience than that had by most Hooters Girls. Our interview was conducted over the phone and some follow up questions were asked during an in-person interview.

*Grace, 27, Mixed ethnicity – African American and Caucasian, employee of 4 years*

Grace started working for Hooters shortly after the start of my employment. Out of all my participants, I argue that Grace is the most like minded to me in that she has some background in Women's Studies and the Liberal Arts. Grace's responses provided some interesting insight and raised some concepts that I had not previously considered. Our interview took place over the phone and was an hour long discussion.

### **Jumpstart**

Jumpstart was a popular topic during the interviews. Below, participants discussed different aspects of the daily meeting, from employee rules to sales contests.

#### Rebecca

At other Hooters you can pick your sections, but at Downtown, you can't. Downtown Hooters is controlled differently, we don't get to pick sections. We are prisoners we can't leave jail, we have to do ridiculous things to go home early, like hide your phone in your boobs.

(Rebecca, 24)

Please note that many participants referred to the "Black Hooters" as the "Downtown Hooters" due to its geographic location. I will continue to refer to it as the "Black Hooters."

#### Jenny

Managers would say you have to open the sauces at the table and If you see a hair on the food just say, 'Oh I'm sorry baby let me get that for you.' Managers would say I have an 'exotic' look and that I should be in the swimsuit contest. They would say I'm the best looking black girl they have ever seen.

(Jenny, 25)

Bethany

Management was a building process because we changed managers so often...Jumpstart was a bit productive, but redundant, for example, 'Celtics play at 7pm.' It was an unnecessarily long bitch session. Managers would say, 'Your makeup looks bad.' We got picked on...With checkout procedures we closed at 1am and are still there at 3am, customers should leave by 1:30 am  
Sometimes contest sales are unfair. We are pushed and punished for not selling. You get punished for the girls that never sell it. You can only suggest items, you can't make them buy it. Certain things are punished that shouldn't be punished...There are certain favorites when it comes to cutting and going home early. Some girls leave early every shift. I had two doubles back to back, and then had a head wait shift, but they jacked my head wait shift.

(Bethany, 24)

Nina

Marketing for Margins is mainly for management, it does not benefit the employees.

(Nina, 22)

Grace

I don't feel one way or the other about Marketing for Margins. Every sales job has specific goals to make a company feel as though they are achieving something. It has never been explained how the sale of one appetizer over another drives sales I did not like being removed from the bar or floor schedule at whimsy for seemingly no good reason, or being spoken to like children daily. In times of hunger, there was no allowance to eat. Being told my hair was too ethnic/ not colored properly. Being told that I need more make-up. That because of the lack of make-up I must have been out all night, hungover, high, etc.

(Grace, 27)

From participants' responses, Jumpstart was a place to get information about upcoming store promotions, sales contests (i.e. "Marketing for Margins"), and information on how to improve upon waitressing skills. However, much criticism and critiquing of one's image occurred in Jumpstart. As Bethany exclaimed, management would often criticize Hooters Girls' cosmetic application. From discussing Jumpstart with participants, I gather that while one learned of upcoming events and customer service expectations during Jumpstart, it was a place where one's image was critiqued; those that conformed were rewarded, while those that did not were not rewarded. As Grace commented, rules and regulations were reviewed during Jumpstart. There were some rules and regulations that were ridiculous to Grace, such as the minimal discount given to Hooters Girls on menu items and the limited time

one was allotted to eat a meal during their shift. As I experienced, it was not cost effective to always eat a meal on one's shift, nor were Hooters Girls given the chance to eat their meals they purchased during their shifts. In summary, Jumpstart was a place where the behavior and image standards were placed.

**“All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” Imagery Promoted by Hooters of America, Inc.**

While discussing Jumpstart, issues surrounding favoritism and employee rules became a constant theme. For example, these Hooters Girls noted their favorite and least favorite aspects of working for the corporation. Many of them cited instances of favoritism shown to certain Hooters Girls on the basis of their appearance.

Rebecca

When we filmed ‘College Hill’ the floorplan was already done. For example, white girls can come to work once a month and still get the Fishbowl, why? ... Nancy was blonde haired, but had to dye her hair black so she can look more black. I also witnessed a black girl getting ready for a swimsuit contest and white girls from other stores did not like her because she was trying to be too white/dress to white with her hair, etc.

(Rebecca, 24)

While discussing the ideal image of Hooters Girls promoted by the corporation, Rebecca alludes to an experience she had at the “Black Hooters” in which a film crew came to the restaurant to shoot a scene for a reality show. One of our fellow co-workers was featured in this reality show. I was also working during this shift and shared some of the same experiences. During the filming for the reality show, Hooters Girls were placed strategically in certain table sections of the establishment. Rebecca explains that Hooters Girls that rarely worked were given prime working areas in the restaurant on that particular shift. Rebecca also mentions Nancy, an African American Hooters Girl that was featured in many of the promotional materials for the corporation that worked at the “Black Hooters.” Rebecca explains that Nancy had to re-dye her hair from blonde to black, to look more “ethnic.” Rebecca and I discussed that while African American women are encouraged to enhance their features in a Eurocentric manner, there are some boundaries to the amount of enhancements that can occur. Perhaps since Nancy was featured in many of the promotional items of Hooters, the corporate entities decided that she should preserve



some of her ethnic qualities. Is there a limit to how much an African American woman can perform the ideal Hooters Girl image?

### Jenny

That image is a thin, white, blonde hair, blue eyes girl. I don't think they are talking about a black girl or a minority. You can tell by the handbook, for example, they say you need to wear a white bra. If I wear a white bra you can see it under my shirt because I have dark skin. The way the handbook is outlined, it seems like how it is written does not apply to black girls. At my Hooters, they would make exceptions for me for to the white bra thing. Or how they say the shorts should not show the butt cheeks. Stacy has a big butt and you could see her butt cheeks.

(Jenny, 25)

Jenny's narrative about the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" image promoted by the corporation provides a glance at the experience of the African American Hooters Girl surrounded by ideal Hooters Girls. Jenny's experience with the uniform and undergarments demonstrates a small, but significant aspect of being an African American Hooters Girl, thus further illustrating that this "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" is probably not a woman of color.

Amanda was not exactly the ideal Hooters Girl. She was a little too fake for Hooters. I think she was not the "All American Girl Next Door" look. She was the girl that you may have a fetish for, she was a bit too fake looking.

(Jenny, 25)

Jenny's account of Amanda, the white Hooters Girl that accompanied her to the "Black Hooters" for a shift to aid the store due to inadequate staffing, displays that even as a Caucasian Hooters Girls there are varying "levels" of being a Hooters Girl. That is, just because one is Caucasian, does not necessarily mean they fit the mold of being the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door."

### Bethany

They're (Hooters corporate) scared to venture out... I think they should give more opportunities and be open minded. You can see favoritism in the Calendar.

(Bethany, 24)

Bethany's account of the ideal Hooters Girl image includes discussing the promotional materials of the corporation, such as the Hooters Calendar. Bethany exclaimed that Hooters as a corporation does

not venture outside of its ideal Hooters Girl image, resulting in a lack of diversity in Hooters promotional materials.

### Grace

At this point in my tenure at Hooters I could care less about the All American Girl image. In my younger years it was easier to wear wigs or add weave extensions to my hair so that it would look 'glamorously styled' at all times... the smell of chicken and grease stays in your hair so constant washing is not an option for most African-American girls. When they wrote the handbook, I'm sure it was not with more 'ethnic' girls in mind as the rule stands now you probably won't be hired if you don't have some form of hair style that is straight or straight and then curled. Your natural hair or face is not the Hooters Girl image. Fabricated and unnatural, painted, coiffed, - these are the standards of Hooters beauty. The girls at Downtown Hooters are all affected by the image standards. Rarely does any girl remain how they came through the door. Extensions, lashes, false nails, pressed hair, back-lined eyes - day or night - double stuffed bras; all become regular staples for the average Hooters Girl. I feel as though I am susceptible at any moment to critical scrutiny...75% is image based performance and technique goes unnoticed.

(Grace, 27)

Grace's commentary on the "All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door" image provides interesting insight into the everyday lived body experience of a Hooters Girl. For example, Grace mentions the hair upkeep that many African American Hooters Girls experience. As Simone de Beauvoir (1989) argued, "One is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman"; one is not born, but, *becomes* a Hooters Girl as Grace contends. Through hair styles, cosmetic application, and the like, one transforms from the day of hire into a Hooters Girl.

### **Training Sessions**

The ideal Hooters Girl image was disseminated the most at Jumpstart meetings and training sessions. Training opportunities with the company were regulated by management. As previously mentioned, when one is initially hired, there are series of trainings new employees must attend before being allowed to work on the floor. After those sessions are complete, there are training sessions that are mandated by management to some Hooters Girls. For example, there is a training entitled, "Beauty Bootcamp." While it has always been unclear to me whether this training is required for all Hooters Girls, the implementation of it at the "Black Hooters" was always subjective; certain Hooters Girls were

required to attend the training. Those required to attend the Beauty Bootcamp were often those that were furthest from the ideal Hooters Girl image.

Rebecca

They would tell us, 'Treat this like it's your business.'

(Rebecca, 24)

Jenny

Mary told me to wear my makeup the way I did on my interview. She told me that she would call her regulars pet names. She told me about my nails that they don't have to be fake but they still need to be kept nice. They used to say stuff like don't wear any crazy colors in your hair or any up-dos. I felt like they were basically talking about black hair styles. They said don't wear cornrows, no pony tails or anything. The managers never talked to me about hair, just makeup and nails. I remember a lot of emphasis on my nails.

(Jenny, 25)

Rebecca and Jenny provided commentary on training opportunities. While working at the "Black Hooters", Rebecca was told often to treat her individual tables as her own business, and was encouraged to bring in candy and other treats for her customers to build a repeat customer base. I can attest to this experience as well, as I was in many training sessions with Rebecca. Jenny was one of two African American Hooters Girls on her staff at a typical Hooters restaurant and was told how to style her hair and makeup. The consensus was such that Jenny felt the trainers were tailoring this information because she was African American (i.e. "no cornrows").

**Promotional Items and Appearances**

I discussed promotional materials and appearances with my participants to understand who gets to participate in such activities. Discussing this highlighted standards of the corporation regarding the ideal image. Note, promotional appearances are referred to as "promos" in the narratives.

Rebecca

For some, being asked to do a promo is like a privilege...must have a sprinkle of black girls at a promo.

(Rebecca, 24)

Jenny

I remember walking out to the patio with all those beers with in my tities, with a bottle of Miller Lite in my tities. Carwashes made Friday afternoons really busy. They had a lot of girls work those days. I did not want to work the carwash because I knew it was a lot of money to be made on the patio. And we used to have to advertise outside. They used to send girls outside after Jumpstart with signs in their hands to advertise the Car Wash. Once the customers come in the girls that would wash cars would strip down into their bikinis and wash the cars. The girls outside would wet us up as we walk to the tables with beer. It was degrading but you were making bank on those days. The guys would not even care if food was late or messed up because they were watching the car wash. It was a lot of fun working the patio on those days.

(Jenny, 25)

### Bethany

Promos and getting into the calendar are very political. Calendar is not open to everyone...They won't pick certain people. You can see favoritism in the calendar.

(Bethany, 24)

### Grace

I don't participate. I have no desire to be a career Hooters Girl and about 4 years ago I did try for the calendar and did not make it...I also did not expect to, it was more for fun...Lately these contests hold no importance for me at all.

(Grace, 27)

For Rebecca, Bethany and Grace, promotional materials and appearances are political and depend on one's ranking within the corporation. While working at a typical Hooters, Jenny was presented with another type of promo that did not occur at the "Black Hooters" due to the physical layout of the establishment. That is, Jenny's Hooters location hosted car washes weekly that were considered promotional events. Jenny did not feel comfortable washing cars in a bikini and instead chose to work the outdoor patio area where many customers would sit to watch the activities. All participants agreed that gaining entrance into promotional materials and events was a political process and depended heavily on one's looks as they aligned with the ideal Hooters Girl image.

### **Customer Interaction**

Interactions with customers were a consistent theme during the interviews. I realized that many of us share similar experiences, but also very different experiences.

### Rebecca

Some customers have said, 'What are you doing tonight? I'll pay you \$200 to come over.' I think people think we are prostitutes or something. One night some wrestlers came in and were white and said, 'Where's the white girls at?' The manager on duty was newly hired and white. He allowed the customers to say this and did not do anything about it.

(Rebecca, 24)

### Jenny

I was the token black girl. If black guest came in, the other Hooters Girls would say, 'Oh I bet they want Jenny' or ask me if I want that table. Sometimes black guys would ask for me instead of having their white waitress. We rarely had black customers, old or young white men only. I can count the number of times we have had black customers come in. There was one white regular that would come into the restaurant and he would always sit with one of the other girls. He said, 'You're the most beautiful colored girl I have ever seen.' He was old so I did not act offended in front of him.

(Jenny, 25)

### Bethany

The worst customers are the ones that think Hooters is a dating service or escort service. Some cuss me out for not giving them my number. The best are those that come in eat, tip and have conversation. I had two or three sets of customers that came every week.

(Bethany, 24)

### Nina

My favorite type of customers are families, they seem easier to serve rather than a group of men that try to show off in front of each other....I have never had a regular in my years of employment at Hooters.

(Nina, 22)

As previously mentioned, I believe that the "Lipstick Girls" interact with customers differently due to their sexual preference. For example, Nina has never had a regular customer, this is not a common practice at the "Black Hooters" or any typical Hooters. Serving groups, such as families, is more comfortable for Nina.

### Grace

We have a few regulars but they are all raggedy and do not at all significantly contribute to my income or well being. Only when I have worked bar have I appreciated any regulars, bar regulars money is more consistent. Convention customers are the more preferred. Certain conventions like "For Sisters Only" or "Bronner Brothers Hair Show" are conventions when no one wants to work. Unfortunately, both conventions are primarily geared towards African Americans. Most women customers are fine, some are jealous and give us minor issues...I don't know why they come there to eat though. My favorite customers tip 20% and above do not require special flirtations or coddling. They are happy with their experience and respectful. They do not beg me for my number or for me to go out with them at the end of the night or accompany them to their hotel rooms. They do remotely attempt to solicit sexual favors.

(Grace, 27)

My participants' experiences with customers varied. The consensus amongst my participants and my other co-workers is that the best customer experience is with those that come to the restaurant to have fun and are respectful toward the Hooters Girls. Customers that patronize the establishment and harass the waitresses provided uncomfortable experiences for Hooters Girls.

### **Best Experiences as a Hooters Girl**

#### Rebecca

It's like a sorority.

(Rebecca, 24)

#### Jenny

It was a fun place to work.

(Jenny, 25)

#### Bethany

Meet a lot of good people...Talking to co-workers about dating...Getting in trouble for sitting at table 60...Made a lot of money at Downtown Hooters...There was also low turnover because of - day and night shift, you can pay your way through college, money also keeps you there, scheduling , fun environment... I'm a sports fanatic and could always watch the games.

(Bethany, 24)

#### Nina

Met some of my closest friends.

(Nina, 22)

#### Grace

My best memories happened with friends from Hooters, but all experiences take place at outside locations.

(Grace, 27)

My participants all had positive things to say about the sense of community they gained from working at Hooters amongst their co-workers. As Rebecca stated, "It's like a sorority", this is an accurate explanation of the social dynamics taking place amongst staff members. I can agree, some of my closest friends I gained from working at this establishment. All the participants agreed that while there were

disagreements amongst Hooters Girls, i.e. arguments among Hooters Girls, the social dynamics taking place between staff members was a warm and family-like environment. I would attribute the low turnover rate, mentioned by Bethany, to the sense of community Hooters Girls felt with fellow staff members.

### **Working At Another Hooters Location**

I found that most of my participants had worked at other Hooters locations, and this experience contributed to their overall experience of being a Hooters Girl.

#### Rebecca

I was introduced to weaves at the Savannah Hooters. At the Savannah store I was introduced to 'by the book' Hooters. Black girls don't get to do promos. But, I was picked to do a promo. They started to blow my pictures up and put them on the wall. I started to understand how bikinis *should* look at the swimsuit contests. White guys would tip me crazy!

(Rebecca, 24)

Over the course of her employment with the corporation, Rebecca worked at four different Hooters locations. The "Savannah Hooters" she refers to was the first location she worked in, followed by the "Black Hooters" and two other Hooters locations.

Memphis is country, there are two Hooters the suburban Hooters, the 'White Hooters', and the Downtown Hooters, the 'Black Hooters'. At the 'White Hooters' there were regulars; girls were not cute; just white girls; dirty uniforms. At the 'Downtown Hooters' I was comfortable because it was similar to the 'Black Hooters.' I was hired on the spot; and they treated me like I was the best; girls were country; some were jealous of me. White girls in Memphis think it's *wrong* if black girls make money. Memphis (Hooters) did not take image seriously.

(Rebecca, 24)

While working in Memphis, Rebecca noticed two types of Hooters. One that was similar to the "Black Hooters" which is called the "Downtown Hooters" similar to the other nickname of the "Black Hooters"; and a typical Hooters, coined the "White Hooters." While not completely like the "Black Hooters" of this project, the "Downtown Hooters" that Rebecca works within the two are similar due to the amount of black waitresses that work at the location. What Rebecca made clear during the interview though, was that the difference between the "Black Hooters" of this research project and the "Downtown Hooters" in Memphis was the amount of models, actresses and reality stars that have surfaced from the "Black Hooters." Rebecca exclaimed that the women of the "Black Hooters" were more attractive than any other Hooters that she has been employed with.

Jenny

I had a better experience in Snellville than I did at Norcross. I had better clientele in Snellville because it was white guys that would come from golfing. In Norcross the blacks and Mexicans were not tipping the way the white guys would.

(Jenny, 25)

Nina

I worked at the San Francisco location. It was a more diverse crowd, we actually got paid \$10 an hour plus tips, and the restaurant atmosphere was much more laid back.

(Nina, 22)

Grace

I have worked at a Gwinnett Location one night on the bar, and I have worked at the Cumberland location one night. Both sets of customers tip better and more consistently but there is a decrease in volume...I made a comparable amount of money at both locations.

(Grace, 27)

Rebecca and Jenny both commented on the racial dynamics taking place within the store, however Jenny, Nina and Grace commented on the racial dynamics and their significance to the amount of income made at different Hooters locations. Does working at the “Black Hooters” subject oneself to making a certain amount of income, or a certain schedule of income? Are there different customers and income potentials that occur at the “Black Hooters” that are different than those at typical Hooters locations? From conducting these interviews and my own participant observations I argue that the while working at the “Black Hooters” one encounters certain clientele and income patterns. There are regular customers that frequent the establishment, and there are many tourists that frequent the establishment. At typical Hooters, the clientele base is more predictable, creating more regular customers. The racial dynamic must also be mentioned in this discussion. Overall, do African American women experience different encounters with customers and the management structure at Hooters? I argue that they do; the experience of an African American woman as a Hooters Girl is different than that of a Caucasian Hooters Girl, regardless of whether she works at the “Black Hooters” or a typical Hooters.



## Chapter 7

### Progression or PR?

#### The Case of the First African American Miss Hooters International

During the summer of 2010, Hooters of America, Inc. crowned its first African American Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest winner. Each year, contestants from all over the corporation are selected to compete at the international contest which is held each summer in locations such as Miami or Las Vegas. Contestants that make it to the international contest have succeeded in their local swimsuit contest at the city and state levels. Much preparation goes into the swimsuit contest season which begins each year in April and continues until July; culminating with the Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest. Does crowning an African American woman dispel my argument that the ideal Hooters Girl, the “All American, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” as defined by employee training materials is a Caucasian woman, specifically a blonde haired, blue eyed, Caucasian woman? Using Roland Barthes (1957) semiology model I contend that this crowning does not negate my argument. As I will argue, this crowning reaffirms the long standing model utilized by Hooters of America, Inc.



Figure 7.1

I rely on Roland Barthes' "Myth Today" to deconstruct the photograph of LeAngela Davis (Figure 7.1), the first African American Miss Hooters International. Similar to the match box photograph used in Barthes (1957) discussion, this photograph represents many paradoxes. Roland Barthes' (1957) describes his dissection of televisual signs in terms of semiology, "which is a science of forms, since it studies signification apart from their content" (Barthes, 1957, 111).

Barthes (1957) contends that "...any semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified. This relation concerns objects which belong to different categories, and this is why it is not one of equality but one of equivalence" (Barthes, 1957, 112). The photograph above is of LeAngela Davis, the first African American Miss Hooters International. She is surrounded by Caucasian contestants from the pageant. The semiology of this photograph consists of two different categories – African Americans and Hooters Girls. The majority of Hooters Girls are Caucasian and this photograph displays the winner of the Miss Hooters International competition, an African American woman surrounded by Caucasian women. The winner of this contest can arguably be seen as the *ideal* Hooters Girl. Based on the demographics found in Hooters marketing materials and the reality taking place in most restaurants, African American women and Miss Hooters International belong to different categories.

Barthes (1957) discusses myth as a "...peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it *is a second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign...in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second" (Barthes, 1957, 114). The myth in regard to this photograph, regardless of if one has background information on the corporation, is that being an African American woman and a Miss Hooters International are not synonymous. The background information or *metalanguage* of this photograph is that most Hooters Girls are Caucasian, and at minimal, most women in this particular pageant are Caucasian.

Barthes (1957) states, "the signifier of myth presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other" (Barthes, 1957, 117). The Afri-

can American Miss Hooters International posed with Caucasian women brings with it background information that suggests that most participants in this contest are white and the winner is black; going further, many that are familiar with Hooters note that this is the first African American winner. Now that Davis has been crowned Miss Hooters International, she has been turned into an empty vessel and now represents excellence as a Hooters Girl. On one side, African American women have low representation at the Hooters Swimsuit Contest. On the other side, the winner of this contest, an African American, is Miss Hooters International, arguably the *ideal* Hooters Girl.

### Barthes' and Bikinis



**Figure 7.2**

I will Barthes' (1957) model (Figure 7.2) to examine the photograph of LeAngela Davis. The *1.Signifier* is the photograph itself; *2.Signified* is the African American Hooters Girl; and *3.Signification* is the photograph of an African American Hooters Girl. *I.SIGNIFIER* represents the African American Hooters Girl as the Miss Hooters International; *II.SIGNIFIED* represents notions of what majority of Hooters Girls embody, their whiteness, juxtaposed with LeAngela's image as a African American Hooters Girl; and *III.SIGNIFICATION* is that Hooters is a post-race corporation that employs Hooters Girls of all ethnicities.

This photograph of the Hooters swimsuit contestants is similar to Barthes' use of the *Paris-Match* cover of the Algerian Francophone boy saluting the French flag. As Barthes suggests,

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well

what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors... there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally there is the presence of the signified through the signifier.

(Barthes, 1957, 116)

Hooters is an organization primarily staffed by Caucasian Hooters Girls. The previous winners of the Miss Hooters International Swimsuit Contest have all been representative of this demographic. This photograph *signifies* that Hooters is a post-race corporation that employs Hooters Girls of all ethnicities and backgrounds. This photograph further goes on to signify that not only are women of color present within Hooters restaurants, but, they are chosen as icons represent the corporation, such as the Miss Hooters International. The signifier in this case is the African American Miss Hooters International, the signified is that Davis is both an African American and a Miss Hooters International and the signified through the signifier shows that one can be *both* African American and a Miss Hooters International.

What does this photograph represent? The photograph from *Paris-Match* represented many things from French imperialism, to ideas surrounding Blackness. This photograph of LeAngela Davis, the first African American Miss Hooters International, means that Hooters is a post-race corporation, one that does not discriminate and represents individuals of all backgrounds. The *Paris-Match* cover meant that France is made up of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, but all of them are French pledging their allegiance to the French flag. Like the *Paris-Match* cover, the photograph above means that Hooters Girls, in particular, Miss Hooters International Winners, come in all ethnicities. The *Paris-Match* cover also alludes to French imperialism and the mentality that forms in marginalized groups. The young boy saluting the French flag conformed to many European traditions that were probably not indigenous to his cultural background. The photograph above suggests that Hooters has many standards of beauty, but is this really the case? Does one have to conform to a certain image in order to be Miss Hooters International? My experience leads me to believe that you do have to conform to a particular image in order to become Miss Hooters International or the ideal Hooters Girl in your store. If you are an Afri-

can American woman, you are already starting off as not the ideal because of your race. In order to gain acceptance, if possible, you will have to alter your breast, hair, and cosmetic application.



**Figure 7.1**



**Figure 7.3**

Can an African American woman really be both a Hooters Girl and an African American? After examining all that one must modify in order to become this ideal Hooters Girl, I think not. An examination of Figures 7.1 and 7.3 exhibits two aspects of Davis' physical features that changed, enabling her to win the crown. In Figure 7.3, Davis' hair is in a natural hair style, free of hair extensions and is not straightened. In Figure 7.1, Davis' hair is straightened and hair extensions have been added. Also, in Figure 7.3, Davis is without a breast augmentation, in Figure 7.1, there are clear signs of breast implants. Would Davis be crowned without these additions? Based on my observations, experience, interviews,

and content analysis of Hooters promotional materials, Davis would not have been afforded the crown without enhancements.

## Chapter 8

### Can I Get You Guys Dessert?

#### Conclusion

Inquiries leading this research sought to explore how African American women negotiate the image, definition or explanation of the Hooters Girl provided by Hooters of America, Inc. of the “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” while working within an atypical Hooters restaurant, that is, one staffed primarily by African American women. I first reviewed the media outlets utilized by the corporation such as the company website, swimsuit calendar, social media websites, and promotional events. While analyzing these outlets, I sought to understand who is this “All America Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” and how does one perform this identity. Next was my participant observation and ethnography, a personal narrative explaining my experience wearing those infamous orange shorts. I then conducted interviews to speak with Hooters Girls working at this “Black Hooters” to gain an understanding of their experience working in this atypical Hooters restaurant. After conducting this multi method research, I then analyzed a current happening within Hooters of America, Inc. – the crowning of the first African American Miss Hooters International during the summer of 2010.

My research points to some peculiar findings. Through my research methods, I found that the ideal Hooters Girl image, the “All American Girl, Surfer Girl, Girl Next Door” term used to describe the Hooters Girl is a Caucasian woman. However, not just any Caucasian woman, one with blonde hair, blue eyes, tanned skin and a breast augmentation. This is not to say that other women will not be found working at Hooters or in its promotional materials, but the ideal image is this blonde beauty. For women not fitting this mold there are a few options. For Caucasian women, one may have a different shade of hair, but crucial to gaining entrance into the promotional materials – which for me defines if one has achieved the ideal image of Hooters beauty – is obtaining a breast augmentation. Hooters uses its media

outlets and employee training materials to implement the ideal Hooters Girls image in the following ways. First, Hooters Girls are provided ideal images of the Hooters Girls through the media outlets and Hooters Girl trainers. A new employee presented with these images then decides whether or not, or to which degree they will adhere or not, to the ideal image. The media outlets and training materials/trainers are used as the standard. Employees that follow the direction of those materials are rewarded.

For African American women, the process is more detailed, generally, one must straighten their hair, adding hair extensions; and obtain a breast augmentation. What is also important for African American women is also maintaining a small waist line. African American culture historically has celebrated curves, but at Hooters, the only curves permitted are those on the top half of a woman's physique. For women of color, a breast augmentation trumps skin color. An African American Hooters Girl can move up the ranks within the company if she obtains this procedure regardless of her skin complexion. Hooters Girls working at the "Black Hooters" conformed to the image by adding hair extensions to their tresses, applying heavy makeup, and most importantly, augmenting their breasts. Breast augmentation proved to be critical to gaining entrance into the media outlets and training opportunities of the corporation. Hooters Girls rebelling or resisting the image often did so through their hair styles (i.e. wearing their hair natural). African American women working at the "Black Hooters" navigated this image in various ways. Some waitresses decided to conform to the image just enough to maintain employment with the corporation, while others went above the minimal requirements and obtained breast augmentations and hair extensions. The latter were praised and often provided with opportunities to be featured in the corporations promotional materials and events. I found myself in the first group, conforming just enough to maintain employment with Hooters. Hooters has an ideal image of what the Hooters Girl should embody. As stated in the employee handbook, Hooters Girls are hired because they *fit* the image. However, working at the "Black Hooters", one finds alternate performances of this ideal



image. For example, Hooters Girls altering their image through breast augmentation, hair extensions, heavy cosmetic application are often praised. Those adhering to the minimum standards are not punished, but are also not rewarded with opportunities to be present in the media outlets of the corporation. These women are also not offered the opportunity to become trainers for the staff, because they do not fit the ideal image of a Hooters Girl.

I enjoyed my time working for the corporation, in spite of many of the racists and sexists views of the entity. It provided me with the opportunity to capitalize on my appearance while in college gaining a better education. Most importantly, while not my initial reason for working at Hooters, it provided me the opportunity to shed light on African American women that work at this infamous institution.

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