

The American Diner Waitress

An autoethnographic study of the icon

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Acknowledgements

First, thank you to all the waitresses and restaurant co-workers I have had the pleasure to work with over the years, in particular my co-workers at Cherry Hill and Crystal Lake. I want to thank my supervisors, Rebecca Coleman and Sue Clayton, for taking me under their respective wings and reminding me why I embarked on this journey. It has been through their enthusiasm for my work that this PhD was able to come together, after a very long journey. Thank you to Emma Dowling, Tony Dowmunt and the AVPhD Group, Les Back, and Luciana Parisi for their academic support. Thank you to the various jobs that kept me going financially while studying, particularly Barbie Clarke for mentoring my academic and professional life, and my Qual team at KP for their patience in my final throws. Thank you to Erin Taylor Kennedy and Jordan Barbour for their support in making *Diner Wars*. Thank you to the 1752 Group and Centre for Feminist Research, especially to Anna Bull, Sara Ahmed and Natalie Fenton, for being feminist killjoys and helping to name the problem.

In my PhD, I write about the deep friendships that women form from childhood into adulthood. I would not be where I am today without them. First, the Donnelly sisters provide me with a quiet confidence that I always have a best friend and sister out there. None of this would be possible without Tiffany Page's leadership, gossip TV and pink wine or Alice Corble and Chryssa Sdrolia's lioness roars. Chyrssa and Leila Whitley put their academic and linguistic prowess into editing my chapters. Leila and Rachel Palmer, my mates, my buddies, I couldn't think of better people to go on an academic journey with. To my mummy group, Nora Hungershoefer, Vanessa Wingerath, Lise Marker, Melissa Bubnic, Jessica Townsend and Katya Nasim – being inspired by all of you is an understatement. Thank you, all you wonderful power animals.

My family has grown since I started on this journey. The list of reasons to thank my partner, Matthew Gunton, is far too long and soppy for this space. Let's just say, I think we make a hell of a team. Francis cannot read this yet, but one day I hope he will. I hope I make him proud to call me his mother. He is the best emotional labour I ever embarked on. To my Poor Hazel hound, for the walkins in the parkins when I needed to clear my head and for keeping my feet warm. Thank you to the Gunton clan, particularly Uncle Rob, for your support and love. To my very large American family, particularly Ethan and Seth, since I am the emotional one I'll say – I love you.

My confidence comes from the unconditional love of my parents and I would not be who I am without them. To my mom, Leeanne Hasbrouck, who jumps on a plane at the drop of a hat to support me – whether it be surgery, a newborn baby, or the final throws of my PhD. During my fieldwork my mom provided me with food, shelter, and a car. Through my entire life, my mom has provided unconditional emotional labour - our nearly daily phone calls keep me grounded: thank you. Lastly, to my father, Bruce Hasbrouck, whom I lost during this PhD: his legal mind, faith in me and love of a good fight encouraged me call out injustices as I saw them. This included everything from holding a sit-in during gym class at 9 years old me to writing my first wage complaint to a restaurant. I still hear his perfect mix of sound advice, emotional vulnerability, and silly dad jokes in my head and it carries me through the day. I know he would be proud of me for completing this journey.

I dedicate this PhD to my dad's memory.

Abstract

This practice-based thesis explores the relationship between the iconography of the American diner waitress and the labour of diner waitresses. My research is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork, whereby I worked as a diner waitress and conducted in-depth interviews with my co-workers in New Jersey. I use autoethnography and experimental documentary filmmaking as methodological tools to (re)produce both the iconography and the labour of the American diner waitress. Through this I reveal the feedback loop that exists between the iconography and narrative associated with the affective labour of waitressing. As a feminist artist, activist and cultural theorist, I affect the icon through exposing its power to find potential points of intervention that could improve waitresses' labour conditions.

I ground my ethnographic fieldwork and practice in a historiography of American waitressing and feminine labour. I analyse the extraction of the icon and what the image is, to understand the relationship between the icon and waitresses' labour. To do this I draw from feminist theory including: feminist Marxism, affect theory, cultural theory, and feminist historiography. I also utilize semiotic analysis as a tool for further unpacking the image and narrative. My methodology chapter provides the context of my practice and how it intersects and informs my theoretical output. I look to autoethnography, affective immersion, and documentary film practice to do this. All of this sets the context for my film, *Diner Wars*, and the final two chapters, where I present my autoethnographic experiences as a diner waitress. I ask: how do the material conditions I experienced in my fieldwork, such as tipping and managerial control, relate to the iconography of diner waitressing? How do waitresses engender ideas of femininity such as sacrifice and 'cattiness' and how does this play out in our performance as waitresses and our (re)production of the icon?

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1 Introduction

1.1 A waitress' labour explained



Figure 1: Still frame from Diner Wars. Lois serving.

Just a waitress ... it's tiring, it's nerve-racking. We don't ever sit down. We're on stage and the bosses are watching. If you get the wrong shoes and you get the wrong stitch in that shoe, that does bother you. Your feet hurt, your body aches. If you come out in anger at things that were done to you, it would only make you feel cheapened. Really I've been keeping it to myself. But of late, I'm beginning to spew it out. It's almost as though I sensed my body and soul had quite enough.

It builds and build and builds in your guts. Near crying. I can think about it ... (She cries softly.) 'Cause you're tired. When the night is done, you're tired. You've had so much, there's so much going ... You had to get it done. You hope everyone is satisfied. The night's done, you've done your act. The curtains close.

(Career waitress, Dolores Dante in Terkel, 1974, p. 253)



Figure 2: Still frame from Diner Wars. Lois with a regular.

Sometimes you get some angry people that come in, and maybe they carry an attitude from outside, and bringing it inside with them. And its like 'ok, I'm not gonna be angry with you I'm just gonna make you happy and make you feel really good and your gonna give me a good tip when you're on your way out.' Cuz that's what waitressing is all about: is making money, taking care of the people you have to take care of; and after awhile you get close to them people too.

(Lois in Diner Wars, 35:42 – 36:09)

A waitress' job is first and foremost to serve food and drink to customers, but equally important is our duty to create an atmosphere. How does a waitress sell food, drinks and an atmosphere? First, there are our physical abilities to scurry, lift heavy trays, carry multiple plates at once, balance a martini glass and work long hours on our feet. There are then our mental capabilities like memorizing orders, learning the kitchen/restaurant language, remembering tables, thinking quickly on our feet and using basic maths skills. Lastly there is our affective feminine labour that includes our ability to smile in the face of angry customers, to negotiate the emotions of clients, management and a stressed kitchen; our ability to read body language and moods, to coddle the needs of others, to support, pamper, and seduce; our ability to 'shoot the shit', bring wit and charm, and control our own emotions in order to play to others.

Waitresses do not produce a material product: we are only the courier of material products (i.e. food and drink). An American waitress sells an experience to her patrons.¹ The expectations associated with this experience are allied to the iconographic image of the American Diner Waitress. In this way the waitress embodies the face of the diner and without that face the diner would not exist as it does today. The icon is a commodity and a tool and it is used both by waitresses in order to exploit, and to exploit waitresses.

As will be explained in the subsequent sections of this chapter, the aim of this thesis, and the accompanying film *Diner Wars*, is to unpack this icon and the labour of American diner waitresses. With this, I ask: is it possible to gain control of the image that is used to exploit waitresses' labour? Through recreating, reworking and exposing the complex relationship waitresses have with our affective labour, do we produce new possibilities for waitresses' labour conditions?

1.2 Grounding my research in cultural studies and digital media practice

As a feminist artist, activist and cultural theorist, my work explores the relationship between the iconography of the American diner waitress and the labour of diner waitresses. Grounding my research in the field of cultural studies, I work at the intersection of various scholarly fields including: feminist labour studies, semiotics, feminist historiography, and cultural and Marxist theory. I use digital filmmaking to further explore and test my ideas around the American diner waitress today. More specifically, I (re)produce the American Diner waitress, her iconography and her labour, through autoethnography and experimental documentary practice. Through this methodology, I seek to understand how the feminine labour of American diner waitresses relates to the iconography of the American diner waitress. In so doing I aim to expose possible points of intervention to change the material conditions of waitresses for the better. The research questions that guide this project are:

¹ The customer is not simply a guest in an establishment, but a 'patron' to the waitress. I believe the common use of patron in diners and restaurants in the USA is connected to the wage structure for servers. As waitresses are at the whim of tips for the majority of their wage the customer is no longer a customer but a saintly figure willing to expel their money by the goodness of their heart to the devoted servant. A waitress is at the unpredictable whim of her patron for her wage.

- How might my reading of feminist theories of work – particularly theories of feminine labour, emotional labour, and affective labour – enhance my understanding of the labour of American waitresses?
- How was the iconography of the American diner waitress formed? What insights into the material conditions of the diner waitress can be garnered from understanding this process of formation?
- Methodologically speaking, through an activist lens, how can I utilize semiotics, experimental documentary practice, and autoethnography to unpack, interrogate, and potentially affect the relationship between the iconography and labour of American diner waitresses?
- What are the material and immaterial conditions of diner waitresses that I experienced in my fieldwork?
- How do my co-workers and myself produce and (re)produce the diner waitress icon, both in our labour and in our performance in my film autoethnography?

Sometimes referred to as an anti-discipline (Nelson, 1997, pp. 273-274), cultural studies provides the freedom to utilize different materials, from across academic disciplines and outside of academia, often with a political aim to interrogate our unequal culture.² As renowned cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1997), describes it:

[T]he work that cultural studies has to do is to mobilize everything that it can find in terms of intellectual resources in order to understand what keeps making the lives we live, and the societies we live in, profoundly and deeply antihumane in their capacity to live with difference. (Hall, 1997, p. 343).

In other words, Hall argues, the interrogation of why our societies are ‘profoundly and deeply antihumane’ cannot be answered through one discipline. To understand structures and inequality, I utilize materials from various disciplines with an aim to view ideas and theories with cross-disciplinary eyes. This cross-disciplinary methodology creates the potential for new insights and new ideas by decentralizing

² For a lively discussion on cultural studies as a discipline (or anti-discipline) John Storey’s *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader* (1997) is a collection of essays that delves into its development and rejection of a canon.

texts through, for example, historical and cultural contextualizing. To do this I use historical texts, films, popular culture images, ethnography (including autoethnography) and feminist and cultural theory to interrogate the iconography of the American diner waitress. The academics I cite throughout this thesis sit in multiple disciplines including media and communications, sociology, business and management studies, English literature, anthropology, cultural studies, women's studies and history. My strategy has been to explore the link between the image and the labour of the diner waitress in different fields in different ways, in a framework which allows the theory to inform my practice and vice versa. When considering these texts I have appropriated their insights as have been relevant to my practice work, and do not claim to have drawn from all these fields comprehensively. This sometimes results in working with materials that are often seen, in other contexts, as at odds with one another. For example, I utilize both Marxist feminists (Fortunati, Dalla Costa) and affect theory (Clough, Ellis, Orr) but do not engage with current academic critiques between the two.

1.3 Timeline for research, fieldwork and output

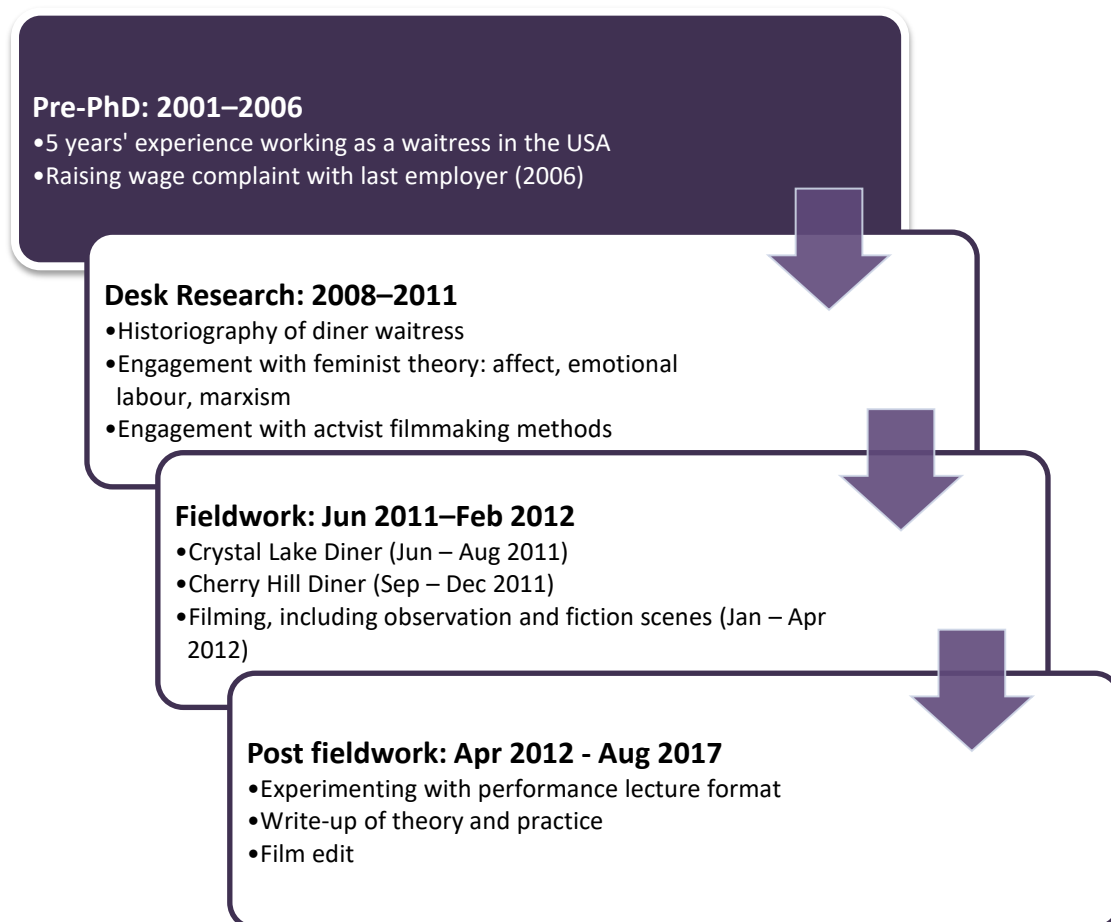


Figure 3: timeline of PhD

My primary research is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork, whereby I worked as a diner waitress and conducted in-depth interviews with my co-workers in my home state of New Jersey over a period of eight months between 2011 and 2012. As will be described in more detail in my methods chapter (chapter 4), I had previous experience working as a waitress in the US. I went back to work at two restaurants during my fieldwork period, Crystal Lake Diner and Cherry Hill Diner, and conducted, and filmed, in-depth interviews with my co-workers during their night shift at the latter. When I returned to the UK post-fieldwork, I filmed further footage of myself reflecting and (re)producing the theory and autoethnographic stories that weave through my PhD. I have edited together these re-enactments with my documentary footage to produce a film intended to run alongside my theoretical analysis of my fieldwork found primarily in chapters 5 and 6.

My fieldwork is presented both within the writing in the PhD and in the form of practice work. While the main output has been a film entitled *Diner Wars*, which is enclosed with this thesis as a DVD, I have taken the insights from this work further, and engaged in what I term 'performance lectures'. These performance lectures are works in progress, and have helped develop a reflexive critique of my academic and practice work on the (re)producing of the American diner waitress icon. Along with describing these in chapter 4, I have also enclosed a separate DVD of a performance lecture as an example of this work.

1.4 Autoethnographic writing style as a mode of interrogation

When the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration: indeed when the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist. (Butler, 2005, p. 8–9).

As a practitioner and storyteller, I also attempt to turn my written PhD into forms of creative writing through placing myself into the write-up of my ethnographic fieldwork as a diner waitress in New Jersey. As I unpack in chapter 4, this form of radical empiricism is presented in the form of autoethnographic writing. Autoethnographic writing complicates conventional empiricism that is expressed in third person observation by placing the researcher at the centre of the ethnographic story. My attempt at autoethnographic writing responds to my creative, practice-based approach to research through weaving storytelling into my theoretical and analytical writing. These stories leak into my analysis and into my film further blurring the line between practice and theory. Autoethnographic writing is also a feminist methodology because the form recognises the prejudices and positions we come from and therefore the lens through which we interrogate the world.

Through attempting to understand the context of my own experiences I, as Butler considers in the quote that introduces this section, become a social theorist. By beginning with my own physical, mental and emotional experiences in regard to waitressing I become tied into the affective understanding of my labour and the affective, precarious labour of waitresses. It is through both self-reflection and critique of my own experiences as a waitress, ethnographer, filmmaker, and activist I aim to

gain insight into the relationship between my labour and the image produced from my labour and ultimately how these feed back into each other. With a feminist materialist perspective, I look outward and attempt to understand how my subjective experiences are interrelated to my co-workers' experiences, and what potentialities these relationships and experiences have for solidarity.

In practical terms, I delineate my autoethnographic writing from theory and analysis by placing it in italics. Furthermore, I experiment with semiotic 'riffs' where I effuse about a concept that circles my theory and my experience. The aim of these riffs is to further unpack the images and words that produce the American diner waitress icon, and link back to the way these terms culturally reproduce the icon. Throughout my writing when speaking about waitressing, I flip between the third person and the first person. This purposeful choice is a reflection of my experience and identity as a waitress, filmmaker and academic while writing this PhD. As will be explained in more detail in chapter 6, I distinguish myself when I feel my position as a white, privileged academic, waitressing for a fixed time, separates me from my co-workers. As I refer to it in chapter 4, it is my schismatic split in identities as a waitress/academic/artist that is at the heart of my autoethnography. *I am not really a waitress, but sometimes, I am.*

1.5 Chapter breakdown

My thesis considers the history of diner waitressing in the US and the labour conditions associated with this profession. I also investigate how the image of the diner waitress has been constructed in parallel to the development of the profession, and how it has affected and been affected by the job. The first two chapters (2 and 3) of my thesis provide a context in the form of a historiography, which includes a literature review and analysis of the main themes of my research. In chapter 2 I provide a focused history of the development of the waitress profession in the United States including: the rise and fall of waitress unions; ideas of femininity; and how this intersects with feminist ideas circulating during the first half of the 20th century. This historiography acts as a literature review of the American waitress (Cobble, 1992; Donovan, 1920; Foff Paules, 1991; Owings, 2004; Taylor, C. 2009; Taylor, F. 1911), and feminist theory in relation to femininity and labour (Banta, 1993; Berlant, 2008; Hochschild, 2003; Rowbotham, 1997; Skeggs, 1997). Through a historical analysis of

women entering the casual dining sector and a review of 18th and 19th century ideas of femininity, I examine what feminine, and particularly emotional, labour is. I argue that in the early years of the waitressing profession waitresses purposefully utilized these socialized skills to carve out a career. Furthermore, I argue their decision has future consequences with regard to the devaluing of their feminine labour.

While chapter 2 presents a historical narrative of what has led to the current material conditions of American diner waitresses in the US, chapter 3 provides an analysis and framework on the iconography that feeds into this labour. In chapter 3 I unpack the extraction of the iconography of the American diner waitress and produce a semiotic analysis. To first reveal the extraction of the icon and the fetishization of waitresses' labour, I utilize Marxist and feminist theory on feminine labour including: theories on invisible labour, emotions and affect (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2008; Fortunati, 1995; Lazzarato, 1996; Marx, 1982; Mies, 1986; Rowbotham, 1997). In order to understand what the iconography is, I pull from multiple disciplines of thought including: cultural theory (Banta, 1993; Hall, 1993; van Leeuwen, 2001), and religious theory of the icon (Mitchell, 1986) in relation to Neoplatonic thought, and structuralism (Althusser, 2008; Barthes, 2000, 2002). Through introducing Barthian semiotics, I am able to further utilize the method throughout the subsequent chapters as a way of analysing my fieldwork experience, and my (re)production of the image of diner waitressing in my experimental documentary film. This chapter ends with a semiotic analysis of multiple popular culture images of the diner waitress I found in a Google image search.

While I have included an analysis of various media portrayals of the American diner waitress at the end of chapter 3, it is important to note that a full review or cinematic analysis of the American diner waitress in cinema and TV is out of scope of this thesis. There is a long history of representations of waitresses in cinema and TV, (particularly in relation to working class identity and the American dream) that is not present in this thesis.³ With this said, I have chosen to include some images and

³ Films like *Her Wild Oats* (McCormick & Neilan, 1927) show that the history of representation of diner waitresses spans nearly the length of the job itself. The silent comedy tells the story of a young waitress that runs a tiny lunch wagon (early diner) and is saved from her poverty by a man pretending to be poor that she employs. This story trope of being saved by a male customer/co-worker would be rehashed in countless films throughout the next century.

representations of diner waitresses because they relate to my own experience of producing and reproducing this image. I also recognise that through producing my own documentary, I am adding to that body of images and film representation. The analyses or references to films I do have within my thesis are another tool within my mixed-method, multi-disciplinary methodology to unpack the relationship between the image and experience of diner waitresses in America. Where relevant, I have noted within the text or in footnotes film and TV references of the portrayal of diner waitresses. These references are not exhaustive but a representation of the media portrayals I have consumed throughout my life and further sought out in my research.

In chapter 4, I lay out my methodology for both my ethnographic approach and my practice, which are intertwined. Theory and practice inform each other and are often hard to untangle; throughout this project the feminist, labour and cultural theory I read informed my practice and my practice changed this theory. For example, through reading affect theory and autoethnography I experimented with performance lectures: these performance lectures then informed how I engaged with affect theory. Through this dialectical process a narrative was produced and (re)produced that is revealed in my writing style and my film. Where my first two chapters set a historical and theoretical context for the topic, this chapter provides an understanding of my practice. While my primary practice has traditionally been documentary film, through allowing the theoretical ideas presented here to infiltrate, my documentary film became more experimental in nature. This included experimenting with performance lectures to reflect and untangle my relationship to the (re)production of the image of the diner waitress, and autoethnographic fictionalized scenes inserted into my documentary film. I contextualize the development of my practice in the fields of documentary filmmaking practice (Arthur, 2007; Citron, 1999; Daniels, 2013; McLaughlin, 2009; Renov, 2007) and visual methods (Davies, 1992; Ellis, 2004, 2009, 2012; Pink, 2007; Vannini, 2015). As is explained further in chapter 4, my earlier discussion of affect theory (e.g. Orr, Clough, Davies and Spencer, Ellis, Shuman) infiltrates my writing and practice in the form of affective immersion, which produces autoethnographic pieces woven through the chapters. These stories aim to bring insight into my experiences, including my emotional journey of waitressing and the role I play in my own fieldwork.

Chapters 5 and 6 put my methods and theory into action through presenting a feminist analysis of my ethnographic fieldwork. These chapters are intended to be read in parallel to my film. I have separated them to encompass the two themes in my findings, which are: material working conditions and affective labour. In chapter 5, I relate our waitress' identity to our material conditions, including our relationship to management, tips, regulars, and the precariousness of our position. This is achieved through autoethnographic stories of my experience of being hired and subsequently fired at the first diner where I conducted my fieldwork, Crystal Lake Diner. In this chapter I argue it was through my experience of getting my uniform wrong, agitating over bad tips, and being fired that I recognized what a diner waitress embodies and what she does not. That is, while the image of the American diner waitress is one that is down and out or unfairly treated, she is not one that will confront this through demanding changes to her working conditions.

In chapter 6, I explore the gendered roles waitresses reproduce that ultimately emphasize both maternal and sexual female roles. I also look at phenomena such as notions of reproductive and emotional labour, and perceived 'catty' and competitive tropes in waitress behaviour and culture. More specifically, I utilize the feminist theory introduced in earlier chapters (e.g. Fortunati, Dalla Costa, Skeggs) to analyse the use-value of sacrifice and the sexism I experienced whilst working in the diners and shooting my film. All of this analysis is based on autoethnographic stories from both restaurants I worked in, along with scenes and stories presented in my film. Lastly, I analyse cattiness through a semiotic riff and reveal the meaning of the title to my film, *Diner Wars*, through placing it in the context of American reality TV that was popular at the time of my fieldwork. In this chapter I reveal our complex relationship to our workspace, our patrons and our management and how these material conditions are wrapped up in the manipulation and exploitation of socialized gender roles.

As detailed above, throughout this research I produced experimental scripts for performance lectures that I presented alongside my film. These were continually developed and changed over the course of this research to reflect new ideas emerging from the research and the performances themselves. Some of these were incorporated into my autoethnographic writing found in this thesis. This movement between ideas, writing and performances has culminated into an experimental

documentary film and autoethnographic writing where I aim to reveal the feedback loop that I consider exists between the iconography and narrative associated with the affective labour of waitressing and waitress' identity formation. I will relate, play, recreate, critique and hopefully affect you, the viewer, and your understanding of the icon and our labour. I will attempt to affect the narrative of the icon with new sticky ideas, reveal its power, and find ways of re-appropriating its power back into these hands of the workers.

1.6 My PhD is a feminist act

Writing this PhD has taken a lot longer than originally anticipated. Life got in the way. The bulk of this was distinctly female: care work. This has been everything from birthing and raising a child, running a household while working full time, my parents separating, my father's illness and subsequent death, supporting a best friend with breast cancer during fieldwork, fighting sexual harassment and sexism that my friends, colleagues and I experienced as students – and all while in and out of debt and full-time work. It has been hard to distinguish between the theorizing of my waitressing co-workers and my personal life. In the end I decided it was in fact fruitless to try, and allowed them to inform each other. When I began this PhD I was in my mid-20s, my parents were married, my family and friends were healthy, I was employed: I was sexy and young. I write the conclusion of my PhD with grey streaks in my hair, warrior's scars that tear through what was once bikini abs, crow's feet giving away the story of my sleepless nights. I am in that transition from sexiness to maternal (a different kind of sexy). Completing a PhD is punctuating a period in my life of massive transitions. In this period I lost the safety my white, upper-middle-class nuclear family upbringing afforded me and have gained incredible knowledge, insight and relationships that I didn't think possible. These include the relationships I built with the waitresses I worked with and the feminist scholars from which I gained inspiration. The skills in multi-tasking I accumulated as a waitress are integral to my work/life balance as a mother, carer, partner, full-time researcher and activist scholar. The emotional resilience I was taught as a girl and woman has been foundational to how I have read the multitude of theory I have encountered in this research. This journey of producing a PhD that is

grounded in feminist theory provided me a toolkit to take on the hardships I faced outside my academic work.

I am not glorifying this harsh journey and claiming it was worth it. The illness and death has not been worth it. The loss of talented, intelligent women from academia has not been worth it. I call the experiences of these losses and struggles a distinctly female one because I was never afforded the luxury of compartmentalizing it. Letting someone else deal with it. I was never taught how to ignore feelings, how to not internalize other's emotions, how to not fix it. It is the burden placed on women to care. I watched male colleagues and friends get on with it and complete. They had struggles and they had babies and they had crap supervisors but they got to complete. Instead I was brought up to multi-task, to juggle everyone's needs, and in return take a bit longer on my own work.

Like most feminists, the first time I heard the slogan 'the personal is political' was a moment for me. It encompassed a lifetime of unarticulated feelings. It allowed me to own my experience as valid and has been a charging force in the development of my PhD along with my political development. It allowed me to let go of trying to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools and terms like rational, objective and neutral were able to become laughable, silly and passé. As these years have passed this empowering phrase has more scarring implications. I have been confronted with my politics in such a personal manner the slogan emboldens and enrages me. I have had so many moments where I wished I had the luxury of separating the two. Having two heads and no responsibility to emotionally lift up the world around me. The slogan has simultaneously empowered me to own my experiences but also has been a stark reminder that my experiences are not my own. This is apparent in my PhD. My personal life sneaks into the chapters and seeps into sentences. While sometimes it is explicit other times the reader will not know. It is not always clear when tears fell on the keyboard with the creation of a thought, with the assertion of a position. How hard it was to read theory that hit so close to home. How hard it was to write about a sexist workplace from an institution that perpetrated the same misconduct.

I write this first autoethnographic piece both as an acknowledgement to everything and everyone that got me to this point and as a lens on how to read my PhD. A PhD is purported to be a solo adventure and therefore a distinctly masculine one

but as this personal statement explains, my PhD was one piece of a much larger intertwined life that involved a lot of people and experiences. It feels stronger because of this.

I have included this autoethnographic piece to segue to the historiography chapter because a feminist history is a living history that builds on stories in many cases obscured from dominant narratives. A feminist history is also one that challenges a neutral voice and attempts to bring in the multiple voices of history that remain on the margins. By revealing my own subjective position throughout this research, I hope to provide a more nuanced analysis that is grounded in a distinct female-subject perspective.

2 A historiography of American diner waitressing

Both the image of the American diner waitress and the labour American diner waitresses' experience today are entangled in a history of the job. Before I unpack how the image of the American diner waitress relates to waitress' labour, I will present the diner waitress narrative in the context of feminist and labour movements in the US through the 20th and 21st centuries. In this chapter I will first provide a brief history of the rise of restaurants and waitresses in the US through a review of Dorothy Sue Cobble's (1992) extensive historiography of American waitresses in *Dishing it Out*. Next, I will contextualize this history in light of the tensions of feminist movements in the US during the rise of the profession. I will then explain how these feminist movements and feminist ideologies, in relation to concepts of feminine labour-power, run in parallel and directly affect the rise and fall of waitress unions through the 20th century. This chapter aims to ground both diner waitresses' labour conditions today and the iconography of their labour, which will be explained in detail in the following chapter, in a history of feminist movements. Furthermore this chapter introduces feminist thought in relation to femininity and working-class female labour, which acts as a foundation to my academic work and practice. My practice works to interrupt the narrative and image formed from the history of the American diner waitress. In order to do this it is equally important to understand both the material conditions that created the profession and the process of extraction of that profession into a simplified image. This chapter will provide the history of these material conditions while the following chapter will unmask what the actual image is through an analysis of the extraction of the image from women's labour.

2.1 The development of cheap restaurants and 'waitresses' in the USA

This historiography is specifically about waitressing and not their male counterparts. While the history of professional male servers dates back to a much earlier period, the history of waitresses is a more modern one connected to industrialization and the move to cities in the late 19th/early 20th centuries. There are two reasons why waitresses were able to penetrate the male dominated restaurant service job market in the early 20th century. First, they were a cheap, unorganized

labour-force compared to their male counterparts and second, because the restaurant industry was becoming a more casual space and moving away from traditional European dining styles. During the turn of the 20th century there was a cultural development emerging in the US of eating outside of the home. Previous to this period, restaurants were limited to hotels to provide luxury dining for wealthy travelling patrons. Modern working conditions meant there became a need for lower-end restaurants for the numerous travelling, single workers staying in boarding houses. The luxury dining experience was accustomed to having professional male servers, trained in European cuisine. As dining moved outside the home, so did the house servants. Many early waitresses were white, northern European decent and began as maids to wealthy families but found working in restaurants was both more social and had better working conditions because they were not on call to their employer 24 hours a day. The development of lower-end restaurants in the early 20th century also called for a workforce that was cheap and could cater to the predominately middle and working-class male clientele.

Women were able to market their feminine jobs skills and their feminine qualities, such as beauty, attractive smiling, 'chattiness', and a personable, sometimes maternal, experience for the customers. Dorothy Sue Cobble argues "the move toward inexpensive, simple dining added to the demand for women" (1992, p.21). In other words, the cost-effectiveness of hiring female servers and their feminine traits were central to their success in penetrating the emerging market. Cobble explains further:

The cheaper labor of women was necessary where employer profits were lower. The quick yet personable service needed in informal eateries also clashed with the leisurely, aloof style of the male waiter, traditional in full service, formal restaurants and upper-class homes. The presence of a friendly, attractive female server suited owners perfectly. (Cobble, 1992, p. 21).

Waitresses were able to provide an experience based on their physical appearance and their socialized feminine skills that male waiters could not compete with. They could flirt, smile, and emotionally cater to their customers. Furthermore, the space provided an opportunity for men to gaze at a female body in an otherwise socially conservative society. In fact, the opportunity for open conversation between single male and female strangers in public was so rare during this period waitresses were often compared to prostitutes (Donovan, 1920; Cobble, 1992). These labour-powers, Cobble argues, with

which the male waiters could not compete, provided waitresses with an opportunity to secure the labour market. “With employers emphasizing beauty, sex appeal, and a pleasing personality, waiters found it difficult to compete” (1992, 21–22). Employers recognized that the presence of, for example, the young, beautiful farm girl that had just moved into the big city was a clever and competitive way of bringing in travelling male clientele. Throughout my research I explore these distinctly feminine forms of labour that reproduce both the sexual (the girlfriend/wife/mistress) and the maternal role.

From the earliest days of the profession waitresses have been in restaurants to serve an ‘experience’ to customers not just food. The job of the waitress has not only been to take orders and carry trays of food but also to present her beauty, smile, and emotional labour. Older waitresses could present the maternal role through the labour of feeding customers while providing emotional support and maternal advice. The promotion of the waitress as an experience has solidified the profession as a predominately female occupation, but has also made the job morally contentious throughout the various women’s movements of the 20th century. I argue the American diner waitress iconography is born out of the relationship between American diner waitresses’ emotional and feminine labour to provide a dining experience and tensions around the concept of femininity within feminist movements. I further argue this tension led to both the rise and fall of unions and the subsequent precarious, deskilling of the job. Most importantly, through placing these affective, feminine labour skills on the market waitresses created the very icon that we must adhere to today. As I will explain in chapter 4, it is this iconography that produces and (re)produces both the identity of the workers and the material conditions that exploit the workers. Likewise, it is also this iconography as a commodity that can be turned on its head and become the tool for potential change through solidarity and future organization.

2.2 Femininity and feminism: intersections throughout 20th century America

The feminist movement developing in the early 20th century was divided by a fundamental ideological difference. On one side of the divide were feminists like Alice Paul who believed men and women were fundamentally equal, spearheading the Equal Rights Amendment campaign. On the other side was a strand of feminists that

wanted to highlight the differences between the sexes. Feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham argues it was this latter strand of feminism that emphasized femininity as a positive force that could be used for social reform: “the idea of women’s special role was thus connected to a wider movement of ‘progressive’ social reform” (1997, p. 43). This perspective, that positioned women as ‘special’ and able to provide a unique contribution to society, was grounded in a particularly white, middle-class feminism. While perhaps good intentioned, this movement was ultimately grounded in classism. Feminist sociologist Beverley Skeggs reviews the history of femininity in her seminal ethnographic study *Formation of Class and Gender* (1997). She explains that ideas of femininity formed in the 18th and 19th centuries linked appearance to respectability, placing middle-class white women as the feminine standard while “working class women were coded as the sexual and deviant other against which femininity was defined” (1997, p. 99). The cultural capital entailed in exuding femininity was inherently linked to a middle-class lifestyle (frailty, passivity, etc.), but, as Skeggs points out, one aspect of femininity that a woman not raised in a middle-class lifestyle could invest in was her appearance. Women could attempt to buy beauty through investing in fashion. Skeggs’ point highlights the early development of female class divides and the capitalist exploitation of these divides through selling beauty products related to femininity to working-class communities. In the name of liberal social reform, this feminist movement was actually further oppressing its working-class sisters through reinforcing ideas of femininity that place pressures on women to emphasize their appearance as their primary asset and their nurturing maternal qualities as their other. Furthermore, with a feminist movement touting ideas of femininity as a feminine power, working-class women could never join the movement. Instead, working-class women would become one of the social causes the middle-class feminist movement could use their feminine powers to nobly inspire.

Working-class women invested in their beauty and their maternal personality in order to gain occupations that would ultimately divest their cultural capital. By waitresses, using their feminine qualities to gain access to work often compared to prostitution, they were further lowering their social standing, moving further away from femininity. To be feminine was to not work, to remain clean, soft, passive and fragile. To waitress was, and still is, a job that requires hard physical labour and an

assertive personality. In other words, by performing femininity in their work, waitresses were unable to achieve feminine ideals. For working-class women, it was a lose–lose game. As Skeggs explains, “the conversion of feminine duty into occupational caring did not yield a high investment but it did offer potentially greater rewards than unemployment” (1997, p. 102). Ultimately working-class women were not afforded the luxury of being feminine, but rather had to attempt to *appear* as feminine and use this appearance to gain employment in a male dominated workforce. By separating themselves from male servers by using feminine qualities, women could position themselves as unique in the job market, and remove the competition of men all together. Ultimately feminism that emphasized a particular kind of femininity helped waitresses secure their niche and create solidarity in the early 20th century through the rise of the waitress unions, but it also led to the degradation of the position to unskilled, low-paid labour in the post-war era. The next two sections of this chapter delve into the history of waitress unions and how both the rise and fall of them can be viewed as directly linked to feminist movements’ views on femininity and feminine labour.

2.3 The rise of unions

Waitress unions peaked during the first half of the 20th century and after World War II dramatically declined. Through linking Dorothy Sue Cobble's thorough investigation of the rise and fall of waitress unions in the 20th century to Rowbotham's and Skeggs’ analyses of the connection between femininity and early 20th century feminism, I argue that the waves of waitress unions have been directly related to cultural perceptions of femininity, the changes in women’s movements along with the changes in laws regarding unions as a whole. Furthermore, a repercussion of the arguments surrounding women's roles and women's rights often left female dominated working-class jobs like waitressing in a precarious position due to their feminine skill-based nature. Cobble connects the fall of the unions to changes in the workforce and generational differences. While this is true, I argue that it was the emphasis on waitressing as a distinctly feminine role that helped it develop as an organized workforce, but consequently led to its demise as equal rights-based feminism gained popularity and the industrialization of the restaurant industry

developed. With the waitress profession able to flourish under a distinct gendered skillset, many early waitresses demanded unions have same sex segregation. These unions had large periods of growth during the first and second world wars, but after the Second World War, economic and social changes demanded a reformation of the unions that ultimately led to their fall.

With the suffragette movement happening, the 1910s were a period of radical thought and belief in social change. The movement proved powerful when the Nineteenth Amendment, that gave women the right to vote, passed in 1919. At the same time the theories in Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) began to flourish, something that would dramatically affect the service industry after the war. Aptly called 'Taylorism' the theory emphasized workplace efficiency through giving workers simple, clear tasks, outlined through manuals and creating a more uniformed industrial line that could be translated to any level of work. Rowbotham argues that through this simplification of job techniques and roles came the feminization of labour:

Though job techniques were made simpler, the work was not made easier. For instance, when the tasks of telephone operators were reduced to a manual of appropriate responses, the work force was feminized – by 1917 it was 99 percent female – but the pace intensified, leaving the women nervous and on edge. (1997, p. 103).

Taylor's aims to simplify work to menial tasks worked to deskill jobs but did not relieve workers of the stress of production. With the deskilling came pressure to work faster and created an environment where efficiency trumped craftsmanship. Martha Banta highlights an interesting element to the formation of Taylorism and scientific management. Women were seen as the "uncontrollable energy surge subsumed under the all-purpose term 'the human element'" (1993, p. 12). In other words, the 'mystery' of femininity and forms of feminine labour-power, such as emotional labour, lay outside the spectrum that Taylorism attempted to control. Subsequently, the research and study of this human element of labour (i.e. feminine labour) became a moral crusade instead of a focus on efficiency, cost and profit (p. 140). While Banta is unimpressed by the replacing of "true scientific accounting" (p. 140) with moralistic narratives, I would not as quickly dismiss this 'pseudo' science and instead conclude that, to Taylorist social scientists, women's work was not quantifiable but was instead

a value qualified by the moralistic need of women in the home versus capitalism's need for women in the factories. It was quantifiable in that Taylorists were attempting to compare the cost value of women's reproductive work over the value of their labour in the marketplace. The value of these narratives is the production and reproduction of the image of women workers as uniquely different from their male counterparts. Women's labour and the need for their labour was tied into the cultural need for feminine fragility to be maintained in the cruel, masculine realities of capitalism. What Taylorists feared was both how to place order and structure on women whom they saw as uncontrollable, emotional beings *and* how to ensure that very fragility was maintained. In all of this, a liberal narrative is formed where patriarchy is producing and reproducing the narrative and subsequent images of women. As Laura Mulvey explains it best in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', woman is tied to "her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 15).

Waitressing was not feminized due to the official methods of deskilling and industrialization of the job promoted by Taylor. It was feminized through, amongst other things, the need for informality within an eating space. As I explained previously, waitresses were hired because of their ability to 'chat' to customers freely, and their creative skills in emotionally supporting their clientele. In this way, waitressing was able to avoid the deskilling and devaluing process that many other female dominated jobs incurred for the first half of the 20th century. The strength of early waitress unions can be seen in Francis Donovan's praise of them in her 1919 waitressing fieldwork in Chicago called *The Woman Who Waits* (1920). As will be explained further in the next section, it was after World War II with the growth of the industrialization of the restaurant industry and changes in feminist attitudes towards feminine labour skills that waitressing became a deskilled, undervalued job.

Moving into the 1920s, waitresses became even more prominent, with restaurants catching up to the retail industry by becoming theme based and stylized. It was this boom period for restaurants that saw novelty sales techniques being used in the new consumption based market. Cobble notes that waitresses became part of the décor as ornamental objects and hired based on anything from hair colour to size and shape. While one restaurant might go for a tropical theme and hire sexy, young

waitresses in costume another family-themed restaurant might want a 'mother' type and hire the older, nurturing women. It was during the 1920s that waitresses were solidified as a fundamental part of the 'dining experience'. During this period the socioeconomic character of the waitress was still predominantly white, northern European and working-class. Many had moved from small farm towns in the Midwest to large cities for work. It was only after the war that white middle-class women began entering the profession as well.⁴

It was also during this period that waitresses overtook waiters, claiming 59% of service jobs in the US (Cobble, 1992, p. 23). This growth of waitresses in the service industry skyrocketed during the 1930s and 40s with the war raising the amount of job opportunities for women. It continued through the 1950s with the post-war boom that occurred in the US leading to the growth of the teenage consumer and the explosion of the service industry. Rowbotham attributes this growth of working-class female jobs to the success of the social programs of the 'New Deal' in keeping up demands for services (1997, p. 204).⁵ Unions were also able to flourish during this period with the implementation of the National Labor Relations Act of 1936 that secured the right to unionize. Both Rowbotham and Cobble emphasize this period as a golden era for trade unionism, both for men and women. Unions became perceived as a second family for low wage and industrial workers.

Acclaimed historian Jacqueline Jones places World War II as a seeding period for ideas and development of the future Civil and Women's liberation movements in her book *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (1985). She attributes this to academic places and traditionally white male occupations being opened up to women. The amount of women pursuing professional qualifications doubled during this period, and while the 1950s saw a recession in women's rights, Jones argues frustrations and tensions were brewing underneath the surface. The control over femininity was central to the

⁴ There is a great deal of historical analysis around racial discrimination in the service industry, particularly to black Americans, leaving black women with often the lowest of waitressing jobs, most often cocktail waitresses and barmaids. To this day, the vast majority of waitresses continue to be white, while people of other minority ethnicities are left with the lowest scale restaurants or are bussers and dishwashers. For further reading on this refer to Cobble's *Dishing it Out*, chapter 3.

⁵ The New Deal was a series of programmes created under President Franklin D Roosevelt between 1933 and 1938 that most famously included Social Security.

development of the job. In order to control the skillset and the exchange value of their commodity, waitresses organized into a separate, sex segregated union outside the already established male server union (Jones, 1985). Waitresses in the 1910s had struggled to hold a place in the male dominated unions, and as early as 1919 female led unions began gaining strength.

The development of separate women's organizations was not without wider political and ideological contexts. Organized women's separation from the male workers was linked to dissatisfaction with the male unions and the move towards a more conservative feminism and women's rights movement. Rowbotham attributes women's choice to utilize feminine skills to the conservative prohibition and anti-communist campaigns growing in the 1920s. Organizations like the Women's Trade Union League were labelled communist and denounced by right-wing commentators "for trying to Bolshevize the United States by destroying family" (1997, p. 152). It was during this time that radical ideas of changing the whole state system to allow for equality were suppressed and movements started working within new social confines. As Rowbotham argues, "the idea that changing women's circumstances involved shifting the wider structures of society was forced into retreat" (1997, p. 154). Rowbotham combines this political retreat with the developing 'maternalist argument' of perceiving women as a special case rather than equal. "The maternalist arguments about women's gender difference merged with a pragmatic recognition that, given the lack of trade union organization among women, protective legislation constituted a last-ditch defence" (p. 157). Building on Rowbotham's argument, I argue that while other white-collar female jobs were taken away from women during the Great Depression, waitresses were more secure, in part, due to their choice to market the feminization of their position.

While the role of the waitress has been both maternal and sexual since the development of the profession in the early 20th century, I argue it was the 1950s that saw the consolidation of the iconic image and role we know today. The cultural conservatism permeating the McCarthy era put emphasis on the simplified roles women were to play. Rowbotham observes that movies during the 1950s portrayed women as ultra-feminine and male obsessed but in control. For example, Rowbotham describes Doris Day as a fixed icon of the decade, "the girl every guy should marry ...

true blue, understanding, direct, honest, and even a little sexy” (p. 310). Ultimately, as she explains, “the message was that while sex and love could be dangerous, women could exert power by channelling allure and keeping it within contained limits” (p. 309). The emotional labour of women was supposed to be a perfect mix of the sweet, wholesome Doris Day and the more sexual, untamed Marilyn Monroe. It was during this period that women’s roles were contained both sexually and physically. Women were supposed to reflect the Fordist industrialization of the nation: a mass-marketed, cookie cutter version of the ideal housewife. These simplified images of women revolved around their abilities to use their sexuality and maternal instincts to nurture and support patriarchal structures.

While the position and perceptions of women changed dramatically over the following two decades, waitresses’ roles have seen little change. Perhaps the waitress is a living relic of this period that is often looked at nostalgically as a cleaner, simpler and glossier period of time. Lauren Berlant makes the political argument in her persuasive book, *The Female Complaint: On the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (2008), that women’s roles have continually been simplified to fit into a specific sentimental political role that prevents them from changing the overall exploitative capitalist system:

‘Women’s culture’ survives as a recognizable thing in the United States ... because its central fantasy ... is the constantly emplotted desire of a complex person to rework the detail of her history to become a vague or simpler version of herself, usually in the vicinity of a love plot. If she cannot achieve this condition of generality through the standard marital and reproductive modes of building reciprocity with the world or having ‘a life’ that adds up to something, she does it through gestures, episodes, and other forms of fantasy improvisation, perhaps with less conventional objects, so long as she can feel in a general sense that she has known the feeling of love and carries the memory of having been affectively recognized and emotionally important. (Berlant L., 2008, p. 7)

For Berlant, recognition and love are central to women’s culture in America. Berlant argues women perform this simplified sentimental ‘love plot’ both through traditional roles of motherhood and marriage but also through other ‘improvised’ ways as well. In this light, waitressing could be seen as one of these improvised fantasies where gestures of femininity and womanhood are performed. It can be argued that this performance harps back to the white American 1950s archetypal woman outlined by

Rowbotham that can be seen as the simplified feminine woman Berlant paints. In other words, Berlant argues 'women's culture' is to work to become a simplified archetypal version of oneself in order to be validated and recognized in a patriarchal society. The waitress has also fulfilled the love plot within capitalist society by presenting a culturally needed commodity: the feminized, simplified woman whose priorities and sense of self are wrapped up in serving others. Later, in chapter 6, I will further explore how this love plot plays out in the lives of mine and my co-workers' identities as waitresses. More specifically, how one of my co-workers, Ellen, performs towards the sacrificial mother in her role as a waitress.

2.4 The fall of unions

The waitress stereotypes I fulfilled during my fieldwork – the collegiate waitress and the singer-actress-model-artist waitress – have historically played a large role in the history of waitresses. Cobble claims the development of the teenager and the part-time worker in the 1950s is one of the primary reasons waitress unions began to fail. This post-war period saw the rise of the service industry in exponential numbers along with the fall of the craft and skilled worker:

In the postwar era, the retail food industry became the primary employer of the part-timer – teenagers, college students, married mothers, and multiple job-holders or 'moonlighters' flooded into the new part-time job openings ... By 1980, the Department of Labor estimated that only one-fifth of food service workers were employed year-round and full-time, the lowest of any occupational category except private household. (Cobble, 1992, p. 195)

This drastic change was not something for which the waitress unions were prepared. The clashes that began between the 'professional' and 'part-time' waitresses were both ideological and class oriented. The part-timers coming into the industry were predominately middle class, white, college educated, and saw waitressing as a stopping point in their movement onward and upward. Furthermore, their ideologies of unionization and the feminist movement differed greatly from their seniors. Cobble maintains that a lot of the younger generation were supporters of industrial unionization and felt the current unions were not addressing sex discrimination and job segregation. Until this point, waitress unions were predominately occupational unions.

Occupational unions worked with employers to hire women only from the union halls, and when and if fired, the waitress would come back to the union hall to get in line for the next opening available. The union did not protect women in retaining their job at a particular restaurant, but instead worked to ensure all the union members had a job. The union worked non-hierarchically – if there was a job shortage all union members would take a cut in hours to ensure everyone still had a job. There was no seniority to longer members or ‘better’ waitresses. The union also covered health care, sick leave, and maternity costs. The employer was guaranteed a flow of waitresses and had more freedom in disciplinary action with their employees than in industrial unions. As Cobble makes clear:

Because occupational unionists placed less emphasis on the protection of individual members and more on the mutual interests of the overall industry and the occupation, disputes were less frequent and common ground more easily found than in worker representation systems in which the union was reacting continually to employer discipline and in which its identity and appeal were based largely on a day-to-day adversarial stance. (1992, p. 147)

These unions slowly shaped into the more popular post-war style of unionization where the worker’s right to retain a specific job became more important than sustaining the profession as a whole. Cobble argues that this, along with more employer paid health care, diminished solidarity amongst waitresses. Cobble’s preference for occupational unionism represents a nostalgia for a period that I argue would inevitably have to change if the equal rights movement were to progress. While occupational unions were instrumental in retaining the waitressing profession as a skill based, female run occupation, they also promoted job segregation. The unions ran on fear of having no job at all for women, so when women started to demand more opportunities these occupational unions were seen as holding back women instead of uplifting them. As the women in the occupational unions aged, their job opportunities became restricted and a new generation of working women with new ideas about feminism and the waitressing profession, forced a rethink on union methods in retaining jobs (Cobble, 1992, pp. 147–148).

The ageing unions found it hard to reach out to the young women entering the service industry, particularly because many did not see waitressing as a profession.

This permeated through to even the full time waitresses taking on the profession, as Cobble indicates:

Many had attended college and believed they would soon leave the “blue-collar” restaurant world far behind. Few saw their primary commitment as being to the culinary workplace; their identity and interests resided elsewhere. They considered themselves actresses or students or some other label – but not food servers. Waiting, said one, “is like the way station of life. You can’t have your dream now, so you work in the restaurant”. (1992, p. 196).

It was during this post-war era that the stereotypes of the cultural icon we know today were forged. While previously waitresses were predominately one class of women from similar working-class backgrounds, after the war the socioeconomic climate of the US drastically changed and different classes and backgrounds began to permeate an industry moving too fast for the workers to organize or restructure themselves. Most notably, middle-class teenagers began to enter the workforce as part-time, casual workers. These workers were not entering the profession as a career or as a primary source of income, but rather an additional source of income for school or ‘spending money’. As Cobble explains, women did not see the profession as a ‘profession’ but rather a means to an end or stopping ground until other career prospects became available.

It is during this period that the stereotypes of waitresses that help shape our iconography were formed. These stereotypes are presented in Alison Owings’ chronicle of diner waitresses across the US in *Hey! Waitress: The USA from the Other Side of the Tray* (2004). Owings claims there are three types of waitresses: 1. The career waitress with a life of experience in her aged eyes and her smeared mascara. 2. The waitress-slash-actress-slash-singer-slash-model-slash-artist. 3. The seasonal collegiate waitress turning tables to make quick money and move onto higher job prospects (2004, p. 3). While these represent most waitresses, I will add a fourth type: 4. The young single-mother that never intended this to be a long-term prospect but is slowly growing into a career waitress (see number 1). These stereotypes solidified in the post-war era and reflect the growing changes in American culture both in regard to the feminist movement and the capitalist structure.

The development of these stereotypes helped to create a culture of competition and distract waitresses from creating solidarity and a better working

environment. This culture of competition relates both to the view of the profession as a stepping stone or career choice and the role the waitress fulfils for her customers as the mother and/or mistress. Cobble explains the tensions between young and old waitress in the 1970s: “to many younger activists, the older, working-class generation’s concern with sexual differences appeared rigid, inhibiting, and acquiescent to male privilege” (1992, p. 12). These feelings were in reaction to the stance of the waitress unions during the period. With the growth of the middle-class feminist movement in the 1960s that included the support of the ‘Equal Rights Amendment’, waitress unions were seen as old fashioned and out of touch with the movement for directly opposing these changes and developments. For senior waitresses, the changes threatened their sex-based unions and the distinction of their craft as a female one that had kept the threat of male competition out of the field for decades. “They also defended their sex-based locals against legal assault and pushed for the upgrading and revaluing of women’s jobs. Rather than end the sex-labelling of jobs and move women into work traditionally done by men, they sought to preserve and extend the female sphere” (Cobble, 1992, p. 11). Older professional waitresses saw the feminist movement as threatening to the profession that they worked to solidify through the previous decades.

Ultimately, I argue, this tension between the new flux of middle-class, predominately part-time waitresses and the craft-based senior waitress changed the profession to a degrading level that neither had aimed for. For the senior skilled waitresses that took pride in their profession, the majority of their unions collapsed and the status of their profession sunk to be seen as an unskilled, disrespected job. By the 1980s the memory of waitressing as a career that used feminine labour as a recognized form of skilled labour was a distant memory. Even in the ground-breaking sociological study on emotional labour *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983), Arlie Hochschild categorizes waitressing as an unskilled profession: “thus because passengers see them [flight attendants] – and are encouraged by company advertising to see them – as no more than glamorous waitresses, flight attendants usually resented the *appearance* of working at a low level of skills and had to cope with this resentment” (p. 121). Flight attendants resent ‘appearing’ as a ‘glamorous waitress’, as that appearance is of a socially recognized

unskilled profession. While arguing for the recognition of emotional labour in relation to flight attendants, Hochschild falls into this trap of not recognizing the same for waitresses. Like the career waitresses Candacy A. Taylor (2009) interviews in her coffee table book of diner waitresses, complaining about the chain and corporate restaurants censuring them through protocol on appropriate interactions with customers, flight attendants faced the same dilemma with evaluations on the sincerity of their smile. There is a paradox at play with the measuring of 'genuineness': through the corporate takeover of emotional labour, there becomes a loss of authenticity that the corporate guidelines are trying to define and guarantee. This Taylorist approach to quantifying emotional labour further devalued the emotional labour of waitresses. In other words, this growing corporate takeover of the service industry demanded cheaper, faster labour and less value was placed on the skilled emotional labour of the waitress. The unions struggled to hold their space in the competitive market because of the fast growth of cheap, part-time workers in the service industry.

For the rising part-time middle-class waitresses, they were entering the profession with different social and cultural ideas that were developing in line with women's growing opportunities to have a profession. The second wave feminist movement during the post-war era reinvigorated the feminist movement left behind in the 1920s. Women were demanding more, and perhaps by accident, in an act of naïve defiance these middle-class feminists degraded the station of their sisters working in the service sector. Arguably, in the process of demanding more equality and rights to male dominated jobs they devalued many women dominated jobs and the skills that held them to these jobs. This debasing of the job helped to undo the skilled-labour title the unions had fought for and break up the female only unions that had grown in the first half of the century. By the 1970s a new generation of future women workers was being raised. One catalyst to this change was Title IX, a clause to the Federal Education Amendments, passed in 1972. The amendment stated: "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance".⁶ While it mostly affected sports funding in the US by

⁶ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/597287/Title-IX>

increasing the number of female athletes and organizations, it also affected the opportunities of women working in federally funded companies, schools, and organizations. Most importantly it changed the perspective women and new mothers had on the opportunities their daughters could have in the future.

A new generation of American women were raised in an era of 'post-feminism' with the neo-liberal idea that sexism and discrimination were stories of the past. Growing up in the 1980s as a white middle-class girl, I never felt my options were limited to waitress, secretary, teacher, nurse or therapist. In fact, there was pressure for me to reject these career trajectories and be something 'bigger' or 'better'. Waitressing, particularly, is seen as the most transitory and least supported career option. One elementary school teacher I had even used the career as a threat to female students that were not working hard in school. To become a waitress was seen as a regression or a rejection of my formal education to instead rely on my socialized feminine skills. This supports Hochschild's theory that, while my generation may have been presented with freedom of career-choice, we were still being socialized with specific social and emotional skills deeply embedded in our identity as women. With waitressing becoming a stopping ground for the new career-orientated woman, the job became lowered to the status of deskilled labour so women felt it was an easy job to take on for a short amount of time. For part-time workers it was flexible, easy to obtain a job, and proved to be fast money. As I will further explain, the push towards tips becoming the prominent source of income for waitresses also helped garner an atmosphere of competition and short-term gains.

During this period a form of white, middle-class feminism focused on a 'glass ceiling' approach that aimed to be accepted into male professions. The result of this was a devaluing of skills that were identified as distinctly feminine, particularly ones that are socialized into women from childhood. This subsequently devalued the jobs associated with these feminine-labour based skills such as emotional labour. Hochschild argues that emotional labour is directly related to emotional experience, something socialized to be more important for women than men. She concludes that the subordination of women has four major consequences:

1. Lacking in other resources, women make a resource out of feeling and offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack.

2. Due to childhood socialization women are more likely to be presented with the task of mastering anger and aggression in the service of 'being nice'. To men, the socially assigned task of aggressing against those that break rules of various sorts create the private task of mastering fear with vulnerability.
3. The general subordination of women leaves every individual women with a weaker 'status shield' against the displaced feelings of others.
4. Women use sex, charm and relational skills as defence mechanisms. For them, it is these capacities that become most vulnerable to commercial exploitation, and so it is these capacities that they are most likely to become estranged from (1983, pp. 163–164).

These consequences directly relate to the women in service-orientated jobs that involve high levels of emotional labour. Women lacking in other resources and options make use of the resources based on nurturing socialized in them from childhood. When women's skills expand beyond that which is socialized in them and the opportunity for advancement in other fields is offered, Hochschild implies women would naturally move away from emotional labour. At first glance this argument explains the resistance towards waitressing as a career prospect by the younger generation and the view of the job as a stepping-stone or a side track to another future. What Hochschild does not consider is the growing forms of white-collar feminized labour. Since Hochschild wrote about emotional labour in the early 1980s the labour market has had a dramatic shift in relation to necessary skills in the white-collar market. Today, when resources open up for advancement out of devalued jobs such as waitressing, the same labour skills are required but just re-branded as 'communication', 'teamwork', and 'multi-tasking'. While women's skills related to emotions, sexuality and feelings are often debased as innate feminine qualities and therefore not skilled labour, they are paradoxically found in most white-collar job descriptions. Unfortunately, this shift towards a feminine-labour workforce has not resulted in an increase in wages for waitresses.⁷

⁷ There is a large body of literature and critique on the effects of the feminization of labour over the past 50 years. This includes making connections between stagnant wages and the increase of women in the workforce. Furthermore, there is a larger discussion to be had in regard to stagnant wages being directly related to the lack of recognition of feminine forms of labour as skilled labour. (Fawcett

At the same time a new type of service was developing that would vastly change American culture: the rise of fast-food restaurants. With it the entrepreneurial, independent, self-serving goals of the profession took over and tips became the principle payment for servers. Cobble rightly highlights how introducing tipping successfully supported dismantling workers solidarity:

Although tipping permitted a certain amount of autonomy in service work, it also fostered individual entrepreneurship, competitive behaviour, and dampened the ardor for collective effort. With its “remnants of use value,” tipping lay outside the commercial exchange system, this intimate transaction created a more ambiguous kind of worker consciousness than the classical adversarial “us versus them” attitude. (1992, p. 43).

Under the guise of American cultural ideology of autonomy and free enterprise the tipping wage flourished more rapidly in Cold War America. Tipping was able to replace fair wages by focusing on the server–customer relationship as the central wage relation and the employer a facilitator or mediator. But it is also this ambiguity of employer–server customer relations that facilitates a neglect of workers and their grievances by the restaurants that would be considered unacceptable if not illegal in most other industries. By transferring the wage relation to server–customer the server has no fixed manager or boss to make grievances to; grievances have instead been shifted towards the customer. As Cobble further explains:

Tipping also weakened the potential alliance between customer and worker. At times, workers perceived the customer rather than the employer as responsible for their feeble income. And to a large degree, employers convinced the public that low wage rates were justified because servers received tips. (1992, p. 43).

In chapter 5, I delve deeper into the history of tipping and the effects of it on the material conditions of diner waitressing while I worked as a waitress in New Jersey. This deflection by the employer that Cobble points towards not only lowered the minimum wage for servers, it has made the waitress feel inclined to push against the patron rather than the system that makes these substandard wages possible.

The break up of the waitressing unions encapsulates the socioeconomic climate of 1950s America. The sisterhood once revered in the profession became more and more tainted with what Cobble calls an “air of competition” (p. 196). As will be seen in

my ethnographic fieldwork presented in chapters 5 and 6 along with my film, this new air of competition deeply resonates today. Previously organized waitresses had spaces to provide emotional support and solidarity from their emotionally and physically draining careers. Frances Donovan recounts the support she received from the Waitress Alliance in her fieldwork on waitresses in the Chicago area in 1919. "The Alliance is an employment agency but it has another equally important function, it provides a common meeting place for the exchange of ideas" (1920, p. 189). She further emphasizes the importance of the Alliance and the Union in Chicago by concluding, "I worked with Alliance girls, Union girls, and "Scabs", and the cultural status of all was the same but the most intelligent, forceful and efficient girls belonged to one or the other of these organizations" (p. 193). Donovan herself was referred to the Alliance by a co-worker after being fired from one of her many waitressing jobs. It was through temporary work provided by the Alliance that Donovan gained the skills to hold onto future permanent waitressing jobs. It was also in the Alliance office that she met various waitresses and gained vital friendships. It is clear that without the Alliance Donovan would have never received the attention and support needed to complete her fieldwork. Today, without these unions and organizations, waitresses no longer have an organized place outside of the workspace to discuss their grievances, share their ideas and develop their skills. With that said, nostalgia for this period remains unhelpful because, amongst other things, the changes in the material conditions of servers (e.g. the tipping wage and casual employment) have made these types of organizing and unions irrelevant.

2.5 Conclusion

With waitressing developing out of distinctions of femininity and waitressing unions following suit, changes in feminist ideas over time aided in dismantling waitressing unions. Waitressing, a career secured by its distinctly feminine job skills, was an easy target for disapproval when women's movements demanded equal working rights and recognition for labour skills outside distinctly feminine ones. The waitressing profession was left behind as an archaic, sexist, demeaning, unskilled job that could only be seen as a stopping ground for bigger and better professions and opportunities by the women's liberators. More to the point, the cultural deskilling of

the profession led to a tension in the profession between the precariously employed part-time workers seeing it as a stopping ground in a larger career and permanent full-time employees in it for the long haul.

This rejection of feminine labour skills by a more radical feminist movement emerging in the 1960s led to a split between older waitresses and a new generation of women. I argue, a combination of this rejection of feminine labour-power by radical feminists and the industrialization of the image of women that occurred in the 1950s changed waitress' feminine labour-power role as a commodity on the market by not only devaluing it but also fetishizing it. In the next chapter, I explore how the fetishistic characteristics of waitress' feminine labour-power led to an extraction of the commodity from her hands and into the market as a new commodity, an immaterial object that I refer to as the iconographic image of the waitress.

3 Iconography of the American diner waitress

In the previous chapter I unpacked what feminine, and particularly emotional, labour is and how historically, in the early years of the waitressing profession, waitresses were able to utilize these socialized skills to carve out a career. This chapter builds on that history and asks: what is the iconography of the American diner waitress and how has it been extracted from the labour of waitresses? This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part constitutes a feminist Marxist analysis of the extraction of the icon from the labour of waitresses. I argue that the fetishization of the feminine labour-power of the American diner waitress produced a commodity. Once this commodity was placed on the market it was extracted from the power of waitresses and became a simplified version of waitress' complex labour-power. This simplified version of waitress' labour-power is the iconography that we associate with American diner waitresses today. The focus of this section is, therefore, on unpacking the immaterial, emotional labour and experiences that go into the production of the icon. I ask what the icon is and seek to define it in terms of feminist theory on feminine labour including theories on invisible labour, emotions and affect. Furthermore, I attempt to unpack the religious terms such as 'fetishization' and 'icon' used by Marx and Marxist theorists including post-structuralists and feminist Marxists. This leads me to an analysis that draws from both the post-structuralist analysis of the image and Neoplatonic understandings of the icon.

The second part of the chapter attempts a semiotic analysis of the American waitress iconography, by drawing on images of the American diner waitress from Google Images and popular culture filmic references. This chapter aims to link my historiographic exploration of the position of the diner waitress in American society in the previous chapter with my practice-based methodological approach of the relationship of the iconography of the diner waitress and our labour in the next chapter. By defining both the iconographic abstraction of diner waitress' labour and analysing what that iconography is, I will have the structure in place to understand how my co-workers and myself produce and (re)produce the diner waitress that I perform, adhere to and play with in my film and autoethnography.

3.1 Extraction of an icon

3.1.1 Part 1: Fetishization of invisible feminine labour made visible

The commodity fetish of feminine labour-power deserves a closer look. Marx's intentional use of religious language when writing about the commodity in chapter 1 of *Capital Vol 1* (1982) is significant in regard to understanding the iconography of the waitress. Marx uses words such as 'transcendence' and 'fetish' (1982, p. 47) to emphasize the transformation of people's relationship with material objects in capitalism. The oddly vital and mystical quality the consumer assigns to an object feeds into the system of production. Concurrently, this fetishism of objects and commodities creates a need for continual production, as the desire to consume an object becomes its very use-value. Building on Marx's analysis of material objects, Italian Marxist scholar Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) uses the term 'immaterial labor', which he defines as "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (1996, p. 132).⁸ Using this term in relation to the production of cultural content, waitresses, strictly speaking, produce a cultural experience. More explicitly, waitress' feminine labour-power as an immaterial commodity gains new value when entered into the market: it is desired for the fact that it is an immaterial commodity to be consumed. In the previous chapter, I reference Berlant and Rowbotham's arguments to understand how waitress' emotional and affective feminine labour fulfil a sentimental love plot and (re)produce a glossier, simpler version of womanhood. As will be clarified further, the consumer of waitress' emotional and affective labour is not consuming the labour as such but the simplified narrative and 'idea' of womanhood and femininity.

Interestingly, the labour-power that waitresses place onto the market has been tied with their abilities to produce meaningful human relationships like communication skills, maternal skills and sexuality. What was previously a woman's feminine personality and body is now an object to be consumed in a market. This objectification brings with it new meanings and new value as the labour of waitresses does not happen in a vacuum, but within context of a social, living history. The waitress-as-

⁸ Later, in section 4.4.2, I expand upon this concept of immaterial labour, with the support of feminist academics including Emma Dowling.

object relates to other commodities through her exchange value, which then inverts the meaning and significance of the object as illustrated through Marx's famous example of the 'life' of a table:

It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will. (1982, pp. 163–164).

As Marx explains, the wooden table is transformed when it enters the market, with its value becoming relative to a vast network of other objects. The transformation in question can be seen as the radical diversification of the table's value extending well beyond its use-value. In other words, like the table, the value of waitresses' labour-power is made visible when placed on the market.

In regard to feminine-labour, women in the early 20th century entering the low wage workforce as waitresses were transferring their labour from inside the home (or outside the 'real' economy) to the outside world or visible economy. Feminist theorist Maria Mies (1986) uses the terms 'invisible' and 'visible' labour to discuss women's relationship to the economy via the lens of the patriarchal capitalist system. She asserts that visible labour is supported by invisible labour, "the invisible parts were per definition excluded from the 'real' economy. But they constituted in fact the very foundations for the visible economy" (1986, p. 17). The clearest examples of this operation lie within daily housework such as emotional support to a partner, remembering birthdays, to do the laundry, and that there is no milk in the fridge. I argue that like the table, waitress' labour-power is made 'invisible' through waitresses being perceived as sensuous, ordinary, *natural* objects. For that reason it is able to remain outside the framework of 'real' economy. Mies highlights the issue of viewing reproduction as natural:

It is one of the greatest obstacles to women's liberation, that is, humanization, that these [giving birth and producing milk] activities are still interpreted as purely physiological functions, comparable to those of other mammals, and lying outside the sphere of conscious human influence. This view that the

productivity of the female body is identical with animal *fertility* – a view which is presently propagated and popularized the world over by demographers and population planners – has to be understood as a *result* of the patriarchal and capitalist division of labour and not as its precondition. (1986, pp. 53–54).

Mies takes issue with the orthodox view that women's use of their body for reproduction is natural and physiological and therefore outside the capitalist framework. Women's labour associated with their femininity is thus paradoxically required by 'real' economy and erased as 'natural' by this very economy at the same time. In this sense, this labour is not really invisible but only conventionally and conveniently so. Yet it is precisely this paradox that waitresses effectively turn on its head. As I have explained previously, when waitresses placed their feminine labour-power on the market to be exchanged, they were attempting to highlight themselves as having a unique position in the market against their male counterparts. By bartering for their position they highlighted their 'natural' abilities as women. But, what they were in fact doing, was demanding that their abilities be made visible within the capitalist system. It could be thus argued that perhaps Mies' stance against reducing reproductive labour as natural is irrelevant to waitresses in the early 20th century; that waitresses were able to negotiate the idea that their labour was feminine, naturally associated with their gender *and* warranted monetary compensation.

Similarly to Mies, Italian Marxist feminist Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) argues that reproductive labour (labour associated with the reproduction of people and capital) is a separate category in capitalism as a 'natural' mode of production. She says, "the real difference between production and reproduction is not that of value/non-value, but that while production both *is* and *appears as* the creation of value, reproduction *is* the creation of value but *appears otherwise*" (1995, p. 8). What is at stake in this subtle distinction is the phenomenology of value itself; in our case, while it may *appear* that waitress' 'naturally invisible' labour-power becomes visible only when placed in the market, it was in fact always already visible but *appeared* to have no value. The transformation of waitress's labour-power from seemingly non-valued to valued labour is thus nothing else but an exposure of the myth of natural production. Waitress' labour-power as a commodity not only began to relate to other commodities, but also gained new, more grotesque ideas of value and appearance.

When the table in Marx's example was outside the market, it was a simple sensuous object. It was in the moment that someone recognized a potential use-value in that table that it entered the market and then, only after entering the market, it gained new value as a commodity. Similarly, it was in the moment that waitresses recognized their reproductive labour-power's potential use-value beyond its 'natural' restrictions that they ceased to *appear* in 'other', assertively visible ways. Like any commodity, reproductive labour is only invisible to the extent that it remains outside the market.

It is the discussion that appeared in the market, culture and state during the 1950s that I see as this marked moment of change for waitress' labour-power. As I highlighted in the previous chapter, Rowbotham discusses this cultural movement of the 1950s and the images formed of women during this conservative era. She uses images of Hollywood stars such as Doris Day and Marilyn Monroe as exemplars of these cultivated images of women. Like other commodities in the market these images, commodities in themselves, converged with waitress' commodities. The image of women as sexual yet tamed and forward yet maternal spoke to waitress' labour-power as commodity. The conversation between the conservative, Fordist, capitalist culture in America and waitress' labour-power led to the commodity being subsumed by the culture and spat back out as a fetishized icon. This is not to say that waitresses did not have ownership of their commodity (i.e. their feminine labour-power) because, as Marx explains, without ownership of their labour-power they would be slaves (1982, p. 119). Waitresses created the commodity and the commodity flourished and took on new forms in capitalism. This commodity would not be owned and controlled by waitresses but instead it would be a commodity that waitresses would negotiate with. It is this negotiation that forms the basis of my reading of waitress iconography. As I will proceed to show, it was not only the conservative pressure to preserve the heritage of femininity and women as housewives that created the iconography of the waitress – more importantly, it was the tension between how waitresses negotiated these images that lie at its basis.

As Rowbotham explains, television and Hollywood portrayed women in simplified archetypes that directly related to the 18th and 19th century concepts of femininity. These reproduced images of femininity presented as a nostalgic hark back to a time lost can be seen as commodities sold to American citizens in their capitalist,

marketized culture. Waitresses negotiated the value and use-value of their feminine labour-power as commodity precisely in relation to these images. In other words, waitresses owned their feminine labour-power and placed it in a market where their labour-power related and responded to a distinctly American culture of consumerism that, as Berlant argues, suppressed those deemed outside the norm. Those outside the norm (i.e. whiteness and maleness) did not have the privilege to legitimize themselves through abstract personhood but rather had to embody or 'place on' themselves codes and norms. Berlant unpacks the concept of 'abstract personhood' within American culture as a means to suppression:

[B]y designating certain forms of legitimacy in abstract personhood and not the flesh, in American culture legitimacy derives from the privilege to suppress and protect the body; the fetishization of the abstract or artificial "person" is constitutional law and is also the means by which whiteness and maleness were established simultaneously as "nothing" and "everything". (2008, p. 140).

Berlant argues that the privilege to make personhood both abstract and simplified archetypes is a form of suppression and control. Furthermore, the 'artificial person' is grounded in constitutional law and creates a framework to which those that are outside the norm must continually respond. Berlant's use of 'fetishization' in the description of the abstract person raises further ideas. The argument that American culture, born out of America's constitutional roots, is grounded in the religious-like obsession of abstracting a person away from flesh and a movement to an immaterial, abstract notion connects to the commodification of waitress' labour-power. Waitress' labour-power can be seen as an abstraction away from the embodied being of the waitress and towards the iconography and fetishization of the idea of the waitress. As a result, the new commodity formed is outside waitress' own labour-power. Waitress' labour-power must negotiate with this commodity – a more grotesque, more meaningful mirror image of the waitress. Yet, it is important at this point to note that the icon is not beyond the waitress' control. As I will reveal in my ethnographic research, the icon is an immaterial commodity that is used to exploit waitresses and is exploited by them at the same time. The icon as a commodity is thus not to be seen as waitress' labour-power but as a third party that waitress' labour-power must engage with in the market. My argument therefore is that the iconography is constitutive of what the waitress actually sells.

3.1.2 Part 2: What is the American waitress icon formed of?

Having introduced the process by which the icon of the waitress abstracts from waitress' labour-power and the respective intersection of this immaterial object in the market with conservative cultural images and sentimental narratives, the next step is to ask: what is the American waitress icon formed of? The American waitress icon is not simply an image that waitresses adhere to; the icon is part of a larger nationalist narrative that connects to Berlant's critique of sentimental American culture and to what feminist theorist Sara Ahmed calls 'objects of emotions' (2004). As will be presented in this section, I argue the American diner waitress icon is, what Ahmed calls, an object of emotion. That is, the icon is a narrative and image formed to simplify the histories and experiences of waitresses and their labour-power to then be sold back to them. For American diner waitresses this narrative is grounded in emotional and physical sacrifice. Through Berlant, Rowbotham and Ahmed I hope to unpack and reveal the complex history of waitressing and feminine labour-power that is erased through the simplification of our narrative and image.

The process of abstracting the iconography of American waitresses from the emotional and affective labour associated with our work can be viewed through Ahmed's book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), which unpacks how emotions relate to objects, creating and re-creating objects of emotion. Rather than directly defining what objects of emotion are, Ahmed tracks the movements of emotions and, more importantly, the effects of their movements:

I suggest it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such. My argument still explores how emotions can move through the movement or circulation of objects. Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension. (2004, p. 11).

To be clear, Ahmed's discussion of objects embraces both physical and immaterial objects including experience and memory. So, for example, objects of emotion can often be the historical, social and personal experiences that tie us to our emotions. Objects' values rise and fall in the relation of objects with other objects and her interest lies in how emotion could be the crux of this relationship as well as in its results. Through Marx, Mies, Berlant and Rowbotham, I argued in the previous section waitress' labour-power cannot be controlled by the market. Rather, the commodity

that is formed out of the relationship between waitress' labour-power (born out of invisible feminine, emotional labour) and images of femininity and American culture, produced an object which waitress' labour-power relates to. Similarly, Ahmed argues that unlike objects of emotion, emotions cannot be contained as they are not property. What are in fact contagious and contained are the objects of emotion that are formed and relate to emotion. Ahmed moves between a discussion of the objects of emotion and emotion, distinguishing the two as both affecting and forming each other, perhaps in an ebb and flow manner: "emotions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects" (2004, p. 6). In other words, emotions are in a constant state of change as they come in contact with and relate to objects. If we consider the iconography of the American waitress to be an object of emotion, we can view how emotions and emotional labour relate to the object being formed and continually re-formed. Iconography and emotional labour are in a conversation of sorts, responding to this contact and being reshaped by it. While emotions cannot be contained, objects of emotions as stories can be contained, re-formed, expropriated and can also create new meanings for new causes. For example, the story of an experience of being served by an American diner waitress becomes a contained object that the storyteller owns. But, with 'serving that story up' at a dinner party, for example, it can be expropriated by the listeners who create new meanings of the iconography of the diner waitress.

Furthermore, Ahmed makes a strong argument for focusing on the production of emotions:

Drawing on Marx, I argue that emotions accumulate over time, as a form of affective value ... Objects only seem to have such value, by an erasure of these histories, as histories of production and labour. But whilst Marx suggests that emotions are erased by the value of things (the suffering of the worker's body is not visible in commodity form), I focus on how emotions are produced. It is not so much emotions that are erased, as if they were already there, but the processes of production or the 'making' of emotions. In other words, 'feelings' become 'fetishes', qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation. (2004, p. 11).

In other words, emotions become values that are wrapped up in the objects producing fetish-like qualities but only through the erasure of the history of those emotions.

Through erasing the complexity of how emotions are produced, it becomes easier to

create a simplified narrative. The emotional labour of waitresses is not erased, but the production or learning of how this emotional labour is produced is lost. This helps to make the labour invisible and normalize the idea that women are 'naturally' equipped for these forms of labour. If we consider the iconography of American waitresses as the object of emotion that emerged from the marketplace, it is waitress' affective and emotional labour-power that becomes fetishized. Waitresses subsequently lose their complex narratives and histories to become the more simplified shell of their former selves. In other words, when waitress' affective labour-power entered the market it grew into new narratives that built and affected other narratives and objects of emotions. This ultimately led to the formation of a new commodity separate from waitress' labour-power that was re-sold back to waitresses and consumers as the American waitress icon. This commodity acted as an object of emotion, relating to waitresses' and consumer's emotions and flowing narratives, which is constantly playing towards what Berlant calls American sentimental culture (2008).

Berlant highlights the use of sentimental culture to create myths and stories that individuals outside the white-male-hetero norm can identify with. Berlant's admittedly depressing view is that American capitalist culture has successfully marketed "conventionality as the source and solution to the problem of living in worlds that are economically, legally, and normatively not on the side of almost anyone's survival, let alone flourishing. Nonetheless, flourishing happens" (Berlant L., 2008, p. 31). Of course, the stories that are created and sold back to citizens are double-edged swords. A citizen is provided with a sentimental plot that connects to their ideas of individualism, of being a sacrificial member of society. These sentimental narratives provide a space for members, excluded from the decision-making power elite, to feel like active members of culture and society. Furthermore, Berlant fittingly connects this artificial legitimacy to consumers, "the artificial legitimacy of the citizen has merged with the commodity form: its autonomy, its phantasmatic freedom from its own history, seem to invest it with the power to transmit its aura, its 'body,' to consumers" (Berlant L., 2008, p. 141). Such a fusion of the artificially legitimate citizen and the commodity connects to the fusion of the commodified labour-power of the waitress and the simplified extraction of the commodity to create the 'aura' of the waitress. A citizen is artificially legitimated through simplified narratives that are

formed through culture and the state and sold back to the citizen. The abstraction of the citizen into an idea separate from the embodied instance gives it the power to relate in a market. Like Marx's table gaining new and grotesque ideas through its relation to other commodities, the abstract form of the citizen is sold as an immaterial object to be consumed and reproduced in different simplified forms. 'Waitress' became an abstract form through the creation of the icon in the market; it is this abstract notion of 'waitress' that appeals to consumers.

This process of abstracting the waitress links back to the previous chapter's discussion on simplified images of women produced during the conservative culture of the 1950s. During this period a "culture of containment" (Rowbotham, 1997, p. 334) was formed whereby mass production not only standardized cars, appliances, homes and TV dinners but also beauty and lifestyle. This period of standardization produced a culture of consuming both objects and culture. For waitresses, their legitimacy as American citizens directly related to their work and the mythical narrative that surrounded their work performance. The iconography was part and parcel to the selling of this narrative. The narrative is wrapped up in the iconography, and waitresses perform to that narrative. The same depressing double-edged sword mechanism that Berlant highlights in relation to citizens occurs with waitresses. They were sold a position through a sentimental, nationalist narrative and image that they exploited and were exploited by. As I have noted before, emotional and physical sacrifice was the predominant sentimental theme in this narrative.

A waitress' performance creates a simplified iconic image that satisfies the customer and sentimental American culture. Feminist Marxist scholar Emma Dowling uses her own experience as a waitress to unpack the dining experience in her essay *Producing the Dining Experience: Measure, Subjectivity and the Affective Worker*. Dowling was encouraged to give the patron a familial dining experience: "this process was one in which the experience of dining in the restaurant was intrinsically part of the overall product being sold, thus our labour as affective workers was constituent not attributive" (2007, p. 16). The waitress is an intricate, knowing part of the dining experience. Waitresses perform a form of emotional and affective labour that is in conversation with the consumer's expectations and needs. These performances are constantly at play with the iconography of the job. Cultural and personal histories

merge with the waitress' own history, cultural knowledge and skilled feminine labour to create a dining experience. The waitress performs as desired by her patron and in return the patron is able to provide a gift to support the iconic downtrodden waitress.

In this way waitresses often take ownership over the stereotypes that canonize them. Cobble dubs this the "theater of eating out":

The waitress plays multiple parts, each reflecting a female role. To fulfill the emotional and fantasy needs of the male customer, she quickly learns the all-too-common scripts: scolding wife, doting mother, sexy mistress, or sweet, admiring daughter. Other customers, typically female, demand obsequious and excessive service – to compensate, perhaps, for the status denied them in other encounters. For once, they are not the servers but the ones being served. (1992, p. 2).

Cobble's assessment of the feminized roles waitresses play for their customer's needs connects back to the role I took on as a waitress. I performed parts that made my customers feel more at ease with my service and played into their needs of the simplified narrative of the American diner waitress. I was the struggling student-slash-artist there to earn a living and better my life. I was both the future America they could invest in and the charity case to which they could donate; and all to help me achieve the American dream of furthering myself through the ethics of hard, back-breaking work with a smile. Career waitress Faye Blackwell, quoted in Candacy Taylor's coffee table book of interviews and photographs of diner waitresses, sums it up: "to my customers, I'm psychiatrist, a nurse, a mama, a grandmamma ... I'm whatever they need me to be" (2009, p. 53). But the role I played was not just for customers; it was equally for my co-workers and managers. While Cobble and Owings discuss the role waitresses play in relation to their customers and the labour that is involved in administering this performance, they neglect this key co-worker relationship. In my methods chapter I will provide more detail on my experience waitressing and in chapter 6 I will tease out some of this relationship and how it affects the day-to-day labour of waitresses.

As I have explained so far in this chapter, American waitresses controlled their labour-power when they purposefully placed it on the market in order to distinguish themselves in the service sector. But, by placing it on the market they were also 'playing with the Devil', for once in the market other commodities were able to relate

to their labour-power and create a new commodity. What was created out of this relating was a simplified, sentimental version of our labour-power that would place waitresses at the whim of the newly emerged commodity. In other words, waitress' labour-power transformed into a commodity fetish through a process that led to the absorption of their labour-power by capital and the extraction of it in the form of an icon, thus leaving waitresses precariously at the whim of the iconographic image of their labour-power. The commodity was fetishized and turned into an immaterial object based on sentimental, simplified narratives that our emotions, stories, and labour needed to relate to. With meagre wages from proprietors, waitresses must (re)produce that iconic image that was once our labour-power. This puts waitresses in a precarious position, where we are at the mercy of our patrons – exchanging our emotional, affective labour for alms.

In this next section, I repurpose the religiously grounded use of the term 'iconography' with structuralist philosopher Louis Althusser's arguments about ideology and Barthesian semiotics. I then use semiotic analysis to deconstruct the iconography of the American diner waitress.

3.2 Narrative formations of the diner waitress icon

When I speak of the icon of the American waitress, I speak of the visual and aural narratives that are formed through the signs that inform the observer/consumer of who waitresses are and what their place is within American culture. In other words, I use a term that is coded with ideas, narratives and histories that have been perpetuated through experiences and the representation of these experiences. When I say the icon of the 'American diner waitress' to a person, they come back with stories, images and one-liners ("cawfee?" or "Hey, hun, how ya doin?" being the top two) that perpetuate a stereotype. In the first half of this chapter, I examined how the process of extraction and the subsequent fetishization of waitress' labour-power produces this icon. This was in an attempt to unpack the formation of the image and narrative that creates the iconography of the American diner waitress. In this half, I uncover what these codes and signs are and how they affect the labour of waitresses. In order to do this I will first utilize cultural theorist Martha Banta's work in *Taylored Lives: Narrative Production in the Age of Taylor, Veblen and Ford* (1993) to ask who is

speaking and listening; and, more importantly, what the power struggles are that form out of this relationship of speaker and listener. Through Banta's discussion on cultural theorist Stuart Hall, I argue for an approach that includes myself in my formation of the diner waitress narratives. Next, because I use the term 'icon', which is religiously grounded, I will use Neoplatonic thought to unpack the history of the concept. I will then cross-reference this with cultural theory through Roland Barthes' semiology (Mythologies, 2000), along with Althusser's concept of the subject in relation to ideology (2008) and art historian WJT Mitchell's critique of iconology (1986). These theories will then be put into practice through a semiotic analysis of images that represent the American diner waitress icon. Through grounding the term 'icon' in both religious and cultural theory, I am able to utilize semiotics as a method of analysing the images and narratives that form the iconography of the American diner waitress. Furthermore, I will be utilizing semiotics in my analysis of my fieldwork experience in chapters 5 and 6 in the form of semiotic 'riffs'. I call them 'riffs' because, although a full excursion into semiotics is beyond the scope of this thesis, I am inspired by semiotics as a way to reflect and interrogate my creative practice.

3.2.1 Who is speaking and who is listening?

Banta places her argument within Foucauldian discourse analysis, developing from his question 'who is speaking?' by further asking 'who is listening to the talking?'. She links the two positions as both "the manager-author and the worker-reader" (1993, p. 14). This places the relationship between the speaker/listener within the material conditions of the workplace as a producer/consumer relationship. It can also be seen in light of the production and consumption of culture; in other words assuming that the producer of culture is also the manager of the workplace, while the consumer of culture is the exploited worker. Banta quickly (and rightfully) highlights the problem of this production/consumption relationship through the useful comparison of the liberal narrative approach versus Stuart Hall's approach. As she explains, the liberal narrative is a top-down approach where the narrator (manager) "draws forth the submerged story of the 'hidden self' and corrects it with a 'happy ending', thereby ending the nightmare of a ceaseless repetition of 'stability, monotony, and stupidity'" (1993, p. 31). The liberal approach does not seek to change

and by its nature does not create the conditions to change. Instead, this approach produces a narrative that has the listener (consumer) accept their position. In contrast, Hall argues for an approach that places agency into the hands of the listener (consumer) by “relocating us within the narratives of agency” (p. 32). Hall radically suggests “that we, not others, can seize the opportunity to reorganize in new ways ‘the old economic, social, cultural order’ – to ‘refashion, to modernise and move ahead’” (p. 32). This opportunistic approach argues placing consumers (workers) at the centre of the narrative provides the potentiality of workers to own their narrative. In consideration of Berlant’s argument that I presented earlier in the chapter that those outside the white-male-hetero norm must navigate around and through these American cultural norms, Hall’s suggestion of re-centring narratives could open up new formations and new opportunities.

So, how does Banta’s discussion on narrative formations relate to the power struggle of the waitress narrative that surrounds the icon? Perhaps by prioritizing Foucault's question of ‘who creates the narrative?’ we run the risk of giving credence to the liberal narrative formation. If approached through this liberal narrative formation the iconography through the narrative of waitress’ struggle is created, narrated and managed by those in power. This allows for a top-down approach where consumers respond to the narrative and are managed by it. Instead, by centralizing, or at least giving equal space for the question ‘who is listening to the talking?’ we are revealing and prioritizing the effects of the narrative. As Banta prefers, Hall approaches the narrative as opportunistic where the worker/managed/narrated can ‘refashion’ this narrative and subsequently the iconography formed from the narrative. It is in this latter approach that I situate my own attempt at (re)producing the visual and aural narrative of the waitress in order to re-appropriate the image produced. Through my autoethnographic approach and my experience as a waitress, my answer to ‘who is listening to the talking?’ is ‘we, the workers and consumers of the commodity’. It is this answer that allows for the potential follow-up questions ‘how do we consume the narrative?’, ‘who is producing the narrative?’ and ‘how can we take it back?’. It is through situating myself as central in the consumption and potential formation of the narrative that autonomy and potentiality to change it occurs. This will be explored further in my methodology chapter. In the next sections I hone in on the concept of

'iconography', the religious underpinnings of the term and the subsequent use of it in structuralism.

3.2.2 Icon as a religious concept

At the end of this chapter I produce semiotic analyses of examples of the iconography of the American waitress. This section and the subsequent one act as a review of the literature surrounding image, ideology, myth and iconology/iconography and clarify the various terms within the critical study of image-production. Through defining these terms I hope to clarify the production of icons through the relationship between image and ideology. Historically speaking, the study of icon is based in religious depiction of belief through motifs, paintings, and statues using iconographical and iconological symbolism. Mitchell provides an important investigation into the study of icons in his book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986) where he grounds a set of definitions for icon and their critical study. According to Mitchell, "the critical study of the icon begins with the idea that human beings are created 'in the image and likeness' of their creator and culminates, rather less groundly [sic], in the modern science of 'image-making' in advertising and propaganda" (1986, p. 2). I will first begin with the religious understanding of icon before moving on to the modern study of images that link to their 'mystical' predecessor. Mitchell further explains "images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency [sic] concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification" (p. 8). The decisive use of religious terms loosely concealed within Mitchell's (and Barthian semiologists') language in explaining images today deserve a demystification in themselves in order to bring clarity to the development of image-making and image-reading.

The prominent understanding of image in Judeo-Christian thought is historically grounded on the work of Greek philosopher, Plotinus. A follower of Plato, Plotinus and Neoplatonic philosophers in general proposed the reflection of the One in the Nous. The One is infinite and outside of our comprehension, the Nous is cast out as a perfect reflection of the One and forms our platonic understanding of Being. Ultimately, our understanding of God is one step away from the Infinite, the One – a mirror projection that all other projections formulate. Within this form of mysticism that has dominated

much of Judeo-Christian and Muslim thought since the third century, all ideas, thoughts, objects and things form from this relationship between us and the Nous, a mirror reflection of the One. It is the logos, translated as the utterance of the word, which is spread from the One down to terrestrial life. For example, Jesus is often seen as the incarnation of logos – the reason or word of God. The main point being that we are projections of infinite projections that eventually lead to the Nous, the mirror projection of the One (Corrigan, 2005, pp. 9–14). With the emphasis on image and idea production within Neoplatonic thought, the production of icons became an obvious point of contention within dominant western religions for the subsequent century. The use of iconography to produce images of Christ, God, and religious narratives can be seen as a step in order to understand and move closer to the One. A denotative, simple religious understanding of ritual is at the base of this hierarchical system. Through a process of ritual and worship with the idols, a person gains a more connotative understanding of the One. Historically, religious tension has arisen when the iconographical tool becomes an idol of worship in and of itself.⁹ As Mitchell highlights, the image is “a site of a special power that must either be contained or exploited; the image, in short, as an idol or fetish” (1986, p. 151). This tension between fetishization and worship of idols and the need for symbols, images and words to express thought becomes central to what I will further unpack through Althusser’s and Barthes’ work on ideology and image.

Theo van Leeuwen (2001) argues in his book *Handbook of Visual Analysis* that representational meaning, iconographic symbolism, and iconological symbolism are the three layers of pictorial meaning that iconographic images produce that differentiate them from other images. Van Leeuwen uses the language of semiotics to define representational meaning, against Hall’s definition outlined above. He explains it is like denotative meaning; the basic ‘who and what’ is being depicted. Iconographical symbolism is, to use semiotic terminology, the signified within the image that corresponds with more specific meanings that are then placed in an

⁹ Examples of this include the Calvinist and Puritan movements, or the issue of transubstantiation more generally. Transubstantiation is the belief that when a priest performs the ceremony of offering the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ to believers, the bread/wine transforms into the body/blood. This is a core difference between protestant Christianity and Catholicism.

iconological analysis, and “draws together the iconographical symbols and stylistic features of an image or a representational tradition into a coherent interpretation which provides the ‘why’ behind the representations analysed” (2001, p. 116). The most obvious example is our ability to recognize a cross as an iconographical symbol of Christ and all of his earthly sacrifices as the Son of God instead of a plus sign.¹⁰ Van Leeuwen claims the primary difference between iconography and semiotics is that “iconography uses textual analysis and contextual analysis” (p. 101) meaning iconography is interested in seeking the original meanings of images versus current cultural interpretations. Semiotics, on the other hand is interested in understanding the cultural context of an image and how it relates to the culture within which it sits. In other words, semiotics is not focused on the original meaning, but rather how new meanings emerge and relate.

3.2.3 Iconography within semiotics

While the study of iconography has predominately remained within the art history and religion disciplines, the development of semiotics and Marxist cultural critique of images and ideology in the 20th century has developed visual analysis beyond that of religious iconography. Marxist cultural critiques of capitalism in the 20th century look towards the production of the image; not to bring us closer to the One but to reproduce capital. Althusser argues that it is through our understanding of selves as subjects of the state that we replace our individuality and therefore constitute ideology. As individuals within the state, we are subjects, and through our position as subjects within capitalism we reproduce labour for capital. To elaborate, Althusser argues that in order to reproduce labour within capitalism the state implements two forms of control: Repressive State Apparatus (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISAs). RSAs are physically oppressive forces like the military and rule of law, while ISAs are institutions that produce ideology and allow the bourgeoisie to maintain power via hegemony over these ISAs. Ultimately, for Althusser the question comes back to ‘who controls the image/ideas?’. For him it is through our acceptance of

¹⁰ A reflection of my lack of success as a godparent was my godson asking if his parents would “put a plus sign” in the grass where they buried their deceased cat! Needless to say, the Catholic Church would claim I have failed in teaching him the iconographical symbols of the faith at even the most denotative level.

being subjects that we omit our control and accept the exploitative system that controls us; we work by ourselves. With this said, Althusser notes we are born into the capitalist system whereby our future position as subjects is already in place through our families and social structures. Althusser concludes 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (2008) with a metaphor of Christianity:

If the reproduction of the relations of production is to be assured, even in the process of production and circulation, every day, in the 'consciousness', i.e. in the attitudes of individual subjects occupying the posts which the sociotechnical division of labour assigns to them in production, exploitation, repression, ideologization, scientific practice, etc. Indeed, what is really in question in this mechanism of the mirror recognition of the Subject and of the individuals interpellated as subjects, and of the guarantee given by the Subject to the subjects if they freely accept their subjection to the Subject's 'commandments'? The reality in question in this mechanism, the reality which is necessarily ignored in the very forms of recognition is indeed, in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them. (2008, p. 170).

Through his metaphor, Althusser links social formations' need for the production of ideologies and images in order to continually exist to the Christian/Neoplatonic need for the reproduction of ideologies and images. The system cannot produce without reproduction, and to reproduce is to create a mirror image of what comes before. Althusser sees these systems as hidden in plain sight whereby the process of reproduction is accepted as normalcy and therefore is unquestioned. This can be linked back to Mitchell's view that the strength of Marx's commodity fetish is in a capitalist's double forgetting. First in "forgetting that it is he and his tribe who have projected life and value into commodities in the ritual of exchange" and second "the commodity veils itself in familiarity and triviality; in the rationality of purely quantitative relations and 'natural, self-understood forms of social life'. The deepest magic of the commodity fetish is its denial that there is anything magical about it" (1986, p. 193). Althusser and Mitchell use Marx to argue that forgetting our role in producing value creates the conditions to produce fetishized commodities that reproduce ideology. As will be further explained, Barthes takes on the task of demystifying commodities.

The influence of Neoplatonic thought in Althusser's work becomes more apparent when the question of an individual's autonomy is raised. As I stated

previously, Althusser claims we are stripped of individuality before birth because of the institutions already in place to make us subjects; in other words, parents produce subjects to the system/citizens. How different is this to the Neoplatonic idea of beings as mirror images of the One that cannot be seen? The unravelling of the image, with each copy one step further away from the original image, spends a lifetime attempting to go back to the One. Through the production of and devotion/prayer towards icons we connect what is not seen to the material world. In Althusser's words, "ideology *interpellates* individuals as *Subjects*" (2008, p. 160). In other words, ideology brings into being or gives identity to individuals as subjects. Or in Neoplatonic terms, the Nous, which flows from the One, brings into being all ideas and images through the logos. Althusser's argument that we are born into being subjects through ISAs already in place links to the Neoplatonic idea that logos, the first word/idea, breathes life into people. That which gives us life takes us further away from the first word/idea and new ideas merge and reproduce. To Neoplatonists, we produce and reproduce images through ideas and, likewise, ideas form through images. These all become tools to demystify and understand God and bring us back to the One. As subjects, ideas and images become our primary tools while simultaneously being the weapon that separates us from our freedom. For Barthes (2000) the strongest ideology is the ideology not perceived as ideology, where the conditions of production and reproduction are hidden. He provides a compelling argument and tools to critically analyse ideology and subsequently demystify it.

In *Mythologies* Barthes uses semiotics, or the study of meaning-making, to reveal the ideological strength the mundane, ordinary people, places and things of modern culture hold within them as part of what he deems mythology. As presented by Barthes, "myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (2000, p. 109). Myth is not the object of study but the evolving form that is produced from the communication of things and ideas. Myth is mystical in that it can be seen as an aura that is produced and constantly evolving from the relationship between images and ideas. It is historically grounded and therefore constantly developing with the evolving interpretation of what it represents; not hidden but naturalised (2000, p. 131). Like Marx and Althusser, Barthes presents myths

as apparatuses of control whereby their political strength is in appearing apolitical. In *Mythologies* Barthes unpacks the meaning of common images of his time through creative associations, metaphors and finding hidden meanings in seemingly mundane images. He unpacks what the photographs, images and objects may mean in their relationship to culture, including unpacking the meanings behind the colours, fonts, and drawings.

What happens when we try to reveal the power of myths, ISAs or fetishized commodities? What happens to the subjects through uncovering the answers to the questions 'who is speaking?', 'what are they saying?', and 'who is listening?'. Within Neoplatonism the goal is always to seek oneness, a return to *Nous*. This system is hierarchical in nature and through the individual acts of linking back to the other, unseen world, the individual is moving closer to the One with the ultimate goal of merging with One or becoming One. This freeing oneself through returning to *Nous* ultimately removes oneself from individualism and living as we know it. Does demystifying the ISAs, myths and commodities that maintain our subjugation bring us to a higher plane and remove us from the capitalist system we are confined to? Does it, as Barthes and cultural theorists hope, dismantle the system? Barthes grapples with the questions of how to approach this process of demystification without creating new myths around it:

The fact that we cannot manage more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it, and if we acknowledge its full weights, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified. (159).

Barthes presents a 'playing with fire' scenario that with demystification comes both the liberation and destruction of the object. Presented with the destruction of one myth, Barthes argues a new myth will emerge in its place through the narrative of destruction:

It is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside: for the very effort one makes in order to escape its stranglehold becomes in its turn the prey of myth: myth can always, as a last resort, signify the resistance which is brought to bear against it. Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. (2000, p. 135).

Here, Barthes calls for an internal subversion of myths through creating artificial myths allowing for new myths to emerge. In other words, Barthes calls for a dismantling of myths through utilizing the tools of myth making to create new myths. Connecting back to Banta, this can be viewed as a liberal approach in assimilating and admitting the continual need and existence of mythology instead of a more militant approach of overthrowing and vanquishing myth. Barthes' viewpoint is limited to the hierarchical system in which we are situated, falling short of a vision to topple down or move beyond the hierarchy. While he keeps his goals opaque, the semiotic methodology he provides to critique and demystify ordinary and everyday objects, images and icons is effective nonetheless.

As I defined earlier, semiotics is the study of meaning-making. Semiotics is a step-by-step process of moving from denotation to ideology. To do this, an image is analysed for both its denotative and connotative meanings. As mentioned above, denotative is recognized as the 'literal' meaning of an image, establishing a non-ambiguous relation with the object the image is supposed to refer to. An image of a rose is recognized as a rose. On the other hand, connotative meanings are those that are socio-culturally understood; this could be connected to emotional, personal, or ideological understandings. In this case, the connotative meaning of a rose can be a representation of love in some cultures. The rose is a signifier to potentially multiple signifieds. A signifier is the image that points the viewer towards interpretations and meaning, or the signified. The rose is the signifier and love is one of its many signified meanings. The image of the rose becomes a sign for the flower that is presented, but also for the beauty and pain of love. The thorns become representation of the pain, while the red petals are signifiers to passion and femininity. It is through ideology, or the cultural sets of belief, that we are able to read signs. In *The Rhetoric of the Image* (2002) Barthes uses advertising images to conduct a semiotic analysis and unpack the connotative meanings behind the image. Through his analysis he argues that the visual medium does not only represent the lived world but it constructs meaning as well.¹¹

¹¹ See <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem06.html> for a useful summary of semiotics and Barthes' work (found 30 May 2017).

As will be explained further in the next chapter, this is the feedback loop between representation and construction of meaning that I wish to interrogate in my film.

My own intention to unravel the myth that purports the American waitress icon utilizes Barthesian semiotics. Barthes' fear of the myth re-appropriating the effort of the instigator reflects my own fear: that my process of (re)producing the iconography associated with American waitresses will be subsumed by the ideology that exploits it. As will be seen in the following chapters, instead of trying to remove the mythology completely I will use the language of the myth to reproduce the image as a new grotesque form of itself. Ideally, this new myth will be intertwined with the struggle and potential empowerment of the labour associated with waitressing. This includes a process of reformulating the nostalgic, denotatively understood history to one more nuanced and critical that reveals the labour of waitressing. Perhaps, my feminist approach of utilizing my own experience of waitressing will not reproduce the myth but help to dismantle it. In the next section I attempt to pin down what the iconography of the American diner waitress is through a Barthesian semiotic analysis of the images that appear on a Google search.

I chose to use Google Images because they were part of my exploration into the question 'what is the iconography of the American diner waitress?'. When trying to unpack this, I typed these words into Google and the following images were on the first page of the search (January 2013). I chose to use these images over, for example, film references, because I feel these were (at the time) the most up-to-date cultural representations of the iconography of the American Diner waitress. In other words, these images were in the public consciousness of the time as the top hits on Google and, I argue, a response to people's experiences of the icon.¹² These experiences include lived experiences of being served by an American diner waitress and the films, images and re-productions of the American diner waitress they had consumed. These images are a part of the process of the feedback loop, producing and re-producing the image of the American diner waitress.

¹² By using this method of choosing I left out a few films that were often mentioned to me when I spoke about my research or my history as an American diner waitress. The most common films mentioned were *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), *Waitress* (Shelley, 2007), *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), and my personal favourite - *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz, 1945)

3.3 Analysis of the icon

When I put 'American waitress' or 'American diner waitress' into Google Images I am inundated with variations of the same two 'types' of waitresses: the young, sexy waitress and the older, haggard waitress. These two images entangle with each other to create a wider narrative of waitressing. The comparison and development from a sexualized, youthful image to a purposefully non-sexual or even anti-sexual image of the older waitress, that were discussed in chapter 2, is important in the unpacking of the actual labour of waitresses versus the labour sold through the image.

3.3.1 The young, sexy waitress



Figure 4: 'American Diner Waitress' (Google search in January 2013)

To begin with the younger waitress, the images predominately feature women in pink uniforms with the sexier images connoting the French maid style attire – frilly

short skirt, a cap and with breasts exposed (see Figure 1).¹³ The hyper-sexualized image of the waitress is one that plays on a fantasy of the accepted mistress. She is a safe playground that titillates and submits but remains outside emotional favour. The uniform connotes servitude and a position of being working class. This hyper-sexual uniform gives the master the permission to forgo an equal relationship with another person and instead lets him 'slum it' with the help. Furthermore it relieves the woman wearing the uniform of the mask of dainty femininity and gives her the power to be crass and sexually promiscuous. The uniform confirms the position as working class, which allows for a sexual aggression. The French maid and the sexy waitress, like 'the whore', are being paid to serve but unlike the whore, the waitress and maid are teased with their movements, their clothes, and their smile. The waitress holds her food high, emphasizing her role. She will bend over to drop the food on the table revealing her backside and front-side for her male customers. Her smile reflects her power, or more specifically her labour-power. She feels sexy in her submissive role: she is turned on by the potentiality of what might happen. Her job is to be looked at and toyed with but it would be naughty to take it further – it is out of her job remit and therefore punishable by firing or leaving her position. This image is not meant to represent our actual experiences with waitresses (high heels are an impractical and illegal footwear for waitressing) but a specifically sexualized fantasy aimed at the male market. There are countless waitress costumes for sale, all of which speak to the sexy waitress. The costumes are sold for submissive role-playing sex games and for Halloween (because after all, Halloween is a sexy time).

This sexy waitress, along with the softer young waitress, is a nostalgic image meant to connect us with the 1950s. The waitress does not carry beer, but the innocent soda pop and fries because she represents a simpler time when the economy was flourishing and women served your food with a smile. But, this image mixes decades, the yellow hot rod car is too old – it is from the generation previous. It is nostalgia that matters; nostalgia for a time when cars were new, powerful and expanded your horizons. This hot rod behind the server can be seen as an emblem of

¹³ For a good read on the connotative analysis of pink see Koller, V. (2008) 'Not just a colour': pink as a gender and sexuality marker in visual communication, *Visual Communication*, 7(4), 395–423.

masculinity and power. Johnny gets to drive in, turn on her engine, fire her up! Palm trees, California sunsets and bear skin turns us on and reminds us what an American experience entails, or at least used to entail – a westward expansion imperializing the unlimited territory ahead. It is old world Hollywood where people journeyed out to become someone – this waitress does not get a back story but is part of the scene that entices the male viewer to aspire to travel West, get rich and conquer this girl en route.

3.3.2 Not really a waitress (or at least one still young enough to be saved)



Figure 5: OPI nail polish campaign (Google search in January 2013)

An interesting comparative image is the successful nail polish campaign for OPI. The colour, named 'I'm not really a waitress', is bright red and has over the years won numerous awards by fashion magazines.¹⁴ The ad campaign featured a model in a pink uniform, carrying a tray and a menu (or is it a script?). It is specifically aimed at a female market and is playing on the cultural insinuation that bright red nail polish is

¹⁴ <https://www.allure.com/review/opi-nail-polish-not-really-a-waitress>

tacky. This colour, OPI is telling us, is not tacky like other reds – hidden under the red paint is something more than a tacky woman: an artist, model, actress ... researcher perhaps? Her bright red colour defies more muted tones; instead of being a marker of low class, it reveals the sophistication of the woman serving you. It is a revealing disguise. The model acting as a waitress is not really a waitress, we can tell by her carrying of the tray and her interest in her script over the customer. A *real* waitress would be looking directly into the camera, smiling at us, the customers. She would be placing the tray above her head to balance the food. This waitress is somewhere else and we as young, beautiful women can connect to this because we are not really waitresses. We play the role, dress up as them, serve with a smile, put on the red lipstick and nail polish but it's a facade. There is more to us than meets the eye and this nail polish affirms that. This waitress is paying for her next adventure – she is saving up for her European vacation or for her Master's degree. She is loving life and marking this period of waitressing as part of her adventure. She is performing manual and emotional labour; she is wearing this costume for now so she can do her real performance in that theatre production for free tomorrow. Waitressing is fun! It is fun because it is not permanent! The line 'I'm not really a waitress' plays on the cultural stereotype that to be a waitress is to be a failure or not to have reached your potential. It is a step down on the social hierarchy, and to be a waitress at a diner is a further step down because you are not serving those above you, but your equals – other working-class people. Waitressing is a step away from what we are really meant to be. To be a waitress without being something else implies you have lost your way and it makes people sad, especially when you are pretty and young!

As seen through the images of older waitresses, we accept the maternal, older waitress as a career-woman – we even revere her, but to be young and *really* a waitress is to be a failed dream at best and at worst an American without a dream. The image of the 'not really a waitress' is ultimately a temporary one because we want to believe the young waitress will move beyond her position (often through being saved by a man). When this fails the make-up falls off and we watch the transition into the career-waitress icon. This transition is often not portrayed in still images but in films. Jane Collings takes to task the representation of waitresses as working class in Hollywood films in her article 'The Hollywood Waitress: A Hard-Boiled Egg and the Salt

of the Earth' (1996) by asking "why is it important that the women in these films be working-class, and if working-class, why they must be waitresses?" (p. 264). She concludes "the films that deal with working-class waitress characters do so in order to present tales that deal with female characters in a mode that is very close to that of wife and mother" (1996, pp. 278-279). By placing the female character in a uniformed, working-class job she is given the space to play out more severe issues around wife and mother that a non-working-, middle-, or upper-class woman is not permitted to. Collings uses films like *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), *The Accused* (Kaplan, 1998), and *Frankie and Johnnie* (Marshall, 1991) as examples of sexual violence being played out on screen. Through the working-class persona waitresses are able to express themselves emotionally in a raw form while remaining unthreatening to the overall social order because they embody feminine, emotional labour. Their ability to express themselves openly with the public plays as a double-edged sword because through presenting their sexuality and their plain-speaking attitudes they run the risk of being used and abused. In *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), a pair of working-class best friends leave their jobs and lives for an epic road trip after murdering one of their abusive partners. The film ends with a police chase and the two women choosing to plunge off a cliff in their vintage convertible instead of face the law for their crimes. There is no justice for waitresses, they are outside the rights of citizenship – the law will not protect them because their wiles lie outside the laws of femininity. Their expressive emotional nature and independence do not follow the social orders of proper femininity. It is the sacrifice they must endure in order to better serve America and they do it with a smile!

For the most part Hollywood films save the waitress just before it is too late. In *Frankie and Johnny* (Marshall, 1991), Michelle Pfeiffer plays Frankie, a rough-around-the-edges, once-beautiful diner waitress in New York in the 1980s. Her plight and transition from the beautiful, young 'I am not really a waitress' to her acceptance as a career waitress (represented in her co-workers) is represented in her masculine mannerisms, lack of make-up and general unkempt look. Through her relationship with Johnny (Al Pacino) we discover her history of abuse that has brought her on the trajectory of a wayward, lost American dream. She is saved through Johnny, just as Carol (Helen Hunt) is saved through Melvin's (Jack Nicholson) charity in *As Good as it*

Gets. In *As Good as it Gets* (Brooks, 1998), Carol is a single mother working to pay for her sick child's medical expenses. Melvin is the much older (and wealthier) curmudgeon-regular that needs saving from his miserable, self-loathing. The women in both films are not past their prime as fertile, potentially sexualized women but the clock is ticking and the tension in the storylines is to release them of the shackles of waitressing before it is too late. Of course their fertility and visual appeal is necessary in this plot line because their saving grace is that of a male patron.

3.3.3 The career waitress

The final stage of iconography of the American waitress is the career matron waitress. She embodies hardship, struggle and defeat but she is resolved in her position. This waitress is often a warning to women to not stray from their dream for they will become 'the spinster'. The position of spinster provides certain rights and privileges: because she has remained on the peripherals, not fulfilling her femininity beyond that of the commodity she has sold for years, she is able to speak freely. I have provided two examples of the older waitress. The first image is of Sally from the original *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980) and the second photo is from a news article about an Iowan waitress whom was allegedly stiffed by Hillary Clinton in 2007 during her presidential primary race.¹⁵ While the two images are from different genres, each informs the other. The first image is an artistic representation of a waitress while the second image is of a working waitress represented in a news article. Both of the images are from the same Google Image search and, interestingly, the second image was the only one of an actual working waitress. I chose to analyse this image because, while the person is not performing a waitress (but rather is a waitress), the photographer has opted for a representation of her and her labour that is informed by the other visual representations of waitresses. The photos identify particular signs and signifiers that inform their mythology.

¹⁵ Stiffed is a colloquial term for being slighted a tip. When you stiff a waiter or waitress, you do not leave a tip for them. It is seen as a snub or to cheat someone out of money.



Figure 6: Sandy from *Friday the 13th*, an iconic lifer (Google search in January 2013)

In figure 4, Sandy (Sally Anne Golden) from the classic, 1980 horror film *Friday the 13th* is represented. She is not a main character, but comic relief in an otherwise tense storyline of a villain, Jason (Ari Lehman), that murder teenagers one by one at a summer camp. Her hair and make-up are over the top. Sandy is in the diner, greeting a regular off screen. She is confident and ready to wave, and her smile is not sensual but instead feels authentic. Her raised arm reveals her excess weight and her smile reveals her double chin – she does not care anymore. She is not self-conscious but confident that she is where she is supposed to be, imparting some humorous words of wisdom before the death of another teenager in this otherwise sleepy countryside location. Sandy wears the red nail polish that reveals she is *really* a waitress. I argue these waitresses recognize they are past their prime and their gregarious make-up reveals their irreverence towards the beauty system. Their techniques do not attempt to maintain a youthful femininity but rather present something more outlandish and fun. This beauty system is the one that failed them: they spent a lifetime working to meet the demands of bourgeois femininity and failed. They failed because to be feminine is to be nice, soft spoken, dainty, beautiful, smooth and delicate and to be a waitress hardened their skin, ageing them beyond their years.



Figure 7: Iowan waitress, 2008 (Google search in January 2013)

In Figure 5, an Iowan waitress is interviewed by a journalist about her experience of serving presidential democrat primary candidate, Hillary Clinton (2008). Because Iowa is one of the first states to vote in the primary elections, it gains notoriety once every four years when it sets the stage for the election trail. A Midwestern, farming state, its brand is iconographic for Americana. On your move westward to the Pacific Ocean, you would expect to stop in a small, pleasant, predominately white Iowan town and be served by this waitress. This is where 'good people from hearty stock' are from. This waitress will be used as a political pawn in the game of what 'true-blue-America' is. What hard work and good values mean. Her story of being 'stiffed' by Clinton and her campaign team goes viral. This lack of tip from the presidential nominee is seen as a reflection of Clinton being out of touch with American culture and values. This image shows the waitress 'telling it how it is' – instilling these values through her outrage that this potential president does not understand the value of a good tip. This waitress is not making a complaint on her lack of a living wage and is not demanding from a future president to be paid a fair wage, rather to be gifted a fair tip after performing her duty. Sure, there are no *laws* saying Clinton needed to tip her, but there are cultural rules, and to break these rules Clinton will be publicly shamed. This older, career waitress performs her narrative through the media. This narrative is one built on feminine labour-power and what that labour

deserves: a fair tip. She utilizes her labour-power, presenting her sassy, tell-it-how-it-is charm to broadcast her story. We will listen to a lifer when she is wronged.

While young waitresses are often presented in pink uniforms, both of the older waitresses are in blue. Pink incites nurturing, compassion and unconditional love, while the blue uniforms present a boyish quality. These women have lost their pinkness and have been neutered. They remain maternal, matriarchal but they are no longer youthfully innocent. To be a life-long waitress (a lifer) you have a lifetime of knowledge and expression to provide. *You tell it how it is*. They are no longer touting their breasts; instead their hands become the focal point. Furthermore, we no longer see their legs: the images become mid shots, cutting off their bottom halves because their ovaries are no longer necessary and their legs are no longer judged to be attractive. At most we will see a counter for her legs. She is an extension of the diner: she has morphed into the furniture. These images are extracted from a history of waitressing, one which feminine labour-power was a central point to secure the job in its development. That narrative entered the market and stuck to other narratives: the mother, the girlfriend, the American dream, beauty, personal stories and experiences to name a few. These formed and reformed the image and subsequent iconography of the American diner waitress that we understand today.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to provide an analysis of both the process of extraction of the American diner waitress icon and also the result as seen through image productions of the waitress. In order to realize this I drew from multiple disciplines including classical Marxism (Marx Capital Vol 1), feminist theory including feminist Marxism (Fortunati, Mies), feminist theory on image production (Berlant, Rowbotham, Collings), feminist labour theory (Ahmed, Fortunati, Cobble, Rowbotham), and post-structuralism (Althusser, Barthes) in conjunction with the Neoplatonic heritage of understanding the image in western thought (Mitchell). The image of the American diner waitress is one that is grounded in the subjugation of a working-class female workforce through the degrading status of emotional and affective labour. The image becomes one that is played back to waitresses and that waitresses must compete with in the market in order to effectively work (and get paid).

In the following chapters, and my film, I build on the discussion in this chapter on iconography. Specifically, through ethnography and autoethnography I will argue in chapter 5 on material conditions that the image produced plays into the wage relations of waitresses, particularly in regard to tipping. In chapter 6 on immaterial labour, I use Fortunati and Skeggs to argue the icon is embedded in the affective relationship waitresses have with our work, our bosses, our co-workers, and our patrons. Furthermore, in both chapters I utilize semiotics as a method to produce semiotic riffs in order to engage with and interrogate terms surrounding my analysis of my labour as a waitress.

In the following chapter, I will set out the practice-based methodology I embarked on in order to play with this iconography of the diner waitress, producing and (re)producing this image as a terrain of struggle in the daily work relations of waitresses. Specifically, I discuss experimental documentary filmmaking and autoethnographic writing as methods to interrogate how the labour of diner waitresses relates to the iconography. Can (re)producing the image of the American diner waitress be a way to untangle, play, and ultimately change the image creating new possibilities?

4 Methodology and methods: merging film practice with autoethnography

4.1 Background to methods: I am a waitress from New Jersey

As outlined in the timeline in my introduction (section 1.3), before embarking on my fieldwork in the summer of 2011 I spent two years conducting academic research into the history and theory set out in the previous chapters. I then spent six months on my ethnography where I worked as a diner waitress in my home area in New Jersey, USA. While my research into the iconography of the American diner waitress began in 2008, with the start of my PhD, my research is grounded in a longer history and relationship with waitressing. My motivations for engaging with this topic are both personal and political.

I worked as a waitress throughout the USA (from diner to cocktail to fine dining) on and off for over five years before moving to the UK in 2006. The summer before I moved to the UK, I worked in a seasonal mid–high-end restaurant in a wealthy countryside area in Connecticut. The restaurant had a policy of ‘pooling’ tips. This meant at the end of each shift waitresses would hand in our tips to the manager. At the end of the week, with our paychecks, we would receive an envelope of cash that was supposed to be a dividing of tips amongst service staff as the management saw fit. I quickly noticed the money was not evenly distributed when I compared my envelope of cash with co-workers. This incentivised me to research the legality of the restaurant’s practice of pooling tips. I found that under Connecticut labour laws a ‘tip’ is between a customer and staff member only and that any management control over a tip deems it no longer a tip.¹⁶ This, in turn, meant the employer was not legally allowed to pay the ‘tipping wage’. As I will explain in more detail in chapter 5, the tipping wage is a reduced minimum wage based on the assumption that the server’s wage will be topped up by tips to reach at least the minimum wage.

¹⁶ According to the Connecticut Department of Labor website, “Gratuities (more commonly known as “tips”) are defined as a voluntary monetary contribution received by the employee directly from a guest, patron, or customer for service rendered. Notice that this definition says that in order for a payment from a customer to be considered as a tip, the employer cannot exert any control over it” (Connecticut Department of Labor, 2015).

Just before I left the US I wrote a letter to my employer explaining that they were legally obliged to back-pay this shortfall in my earnings, as I did not technically receive tips while employed by them. They rejected my request in a letter, so I forwarded my complaint to the Connecticut Department of Labor. A year later, in the summer of 2007, after the Connecticut Department of Labor investigated the case, I was sent a check for lost wages. As a cash-strapped student finishing my MA I welcomed the money, however I experienced an immediate sense of guilt that I was able to use my relatively privileged position (a lawyer father, higher education, enough free time) in order to construct this complaint, navigate the bureaucracy to have the complaint heard and patiently wait for the money. I did not need a job reference, and I was not dependent on this income and I had the tools in order to make a successful complaint. Lindsay Smith (Smith & Kleinman, 2010) engages with her own feelings of liberal guilt during her fieldwork with a charity for the missing children of Argentina. As a white, educated American she was confronted with occasions where her position was seen as an opportunity to be heard and supported by less empowered women she interviewed. While Smith did not yield political power, the women she interviewed assumed she did and therefore assumed she could do more for them than was in her power. She recognizes her 'white guilt' as rooted in our fear of our own complicity in other's suffering and references Audre Lorde's recognition of guilt as a useless emotion unless it leads to changing one's actions or "the beginning of knowledge". She explains that Lorde instead calls for anger as a more productive emotion (Smith & Kleinman, 2010, p. 179). While starting this PhD was inspired by this guilt, through reading feminist histories of waitressing, feminist theories on work and attempting to produce a piece of academic work that aims to change the conditions of waitressing in the US, I did move beyond my guilt. And the experience did, as Lorde demands, lead to seeking knowledge through my growing rage.

This experience of legal action, and the countless other experiences of exploitation of mine and my co-workers' labour, infuriated me. I often loved working as a waitress, particularly on busy nights when the tips were good and the hours flew by punctuated by short breaths of laughter or gossip with co-workers. I loved the multitasking, the need to think on my feet, and the physicality of the job. I am a talker, and I loved to schmooze, flirt, role-play, and laugh with my customers. I did not like

slow days where I came home penniless and the shift dragged on with a manager finding busy-work for me, grumbling or barking orders, cooks yelling at me for messing up an order, racial slurs mumbled against migrant bussers and dishwashers or minority customers.

However, I hated the sexism (from managers and customers), the condescending tone, and, as I moved beyond university years, the presumption that I was somehow a fallen woman – because why else would such a middle-class, educated, white woman be working as a waitress if she hadn't messed up in some way? Drugs? A man? Lack of a man? All of the above? It was a desire to come to terms with some of the contradictions between these lived experiences and my emotional responses to them that informed my decision to embark on this research project and continue to motivate my research.

I began by studying the labour and class context of diner waitresses, as developed in the preceding chapters. The aim of this chapter is to explain the methodological approach to the merging of my ethnographic fieldwork in the form of autoethnography with my practice in the form of experimental documentary filmmaking. In order to do this, the chapter is broken into three parts. In the first part I explain how my practice and theory informed each other and, as a consequence, changed over time from a participatory-based film project to an experimental autoethnographic one. In the second part I delve into my methods. I rationalize the practical decisions I made in order to produce my practice including: the technology I used, my editing choices, and my merging of re-enactment scenes with observation and interviews with co-workers. Furthermore, I introduce the title of my film and the ethical implications of producing a film with my waitressing co-workers. Then, in the final part of this chapter I further explore the roles affect theory and autoethnography play in my methodology. This section builds on my literature review of feminist and Marxist theory on affect in chapter 3. It ends with an autoethnographic piece that reflects my affective immersion as a diner waitress and sets the tone for the following chapters on my ethnographic fieldwork experience.

Before I move into my methodology on the merging of theory and practice, I think it is important to set the scene of my fieldwork. The next section is a description of my home area of southern New Jersey as I know it. The second half of this

autoethnographic piece was developed and placed into *Diner Wars* (see 15:10 – 16:05) where I travel down Route 38, past the Cherry Hill Mall and land at the Cherry Hill Diner.

4.1.1 Locating '*Diner Wars*' the film

Southern New Jersey (or South Jersey as it is regionally known) is a densely populated suburban and semi-rural area that includes the famous casino-filled Atlantic City on the Jersey shore and is divided by the Delaware River on the western side with its neighbouring states of Delaware and Pennsylvania.

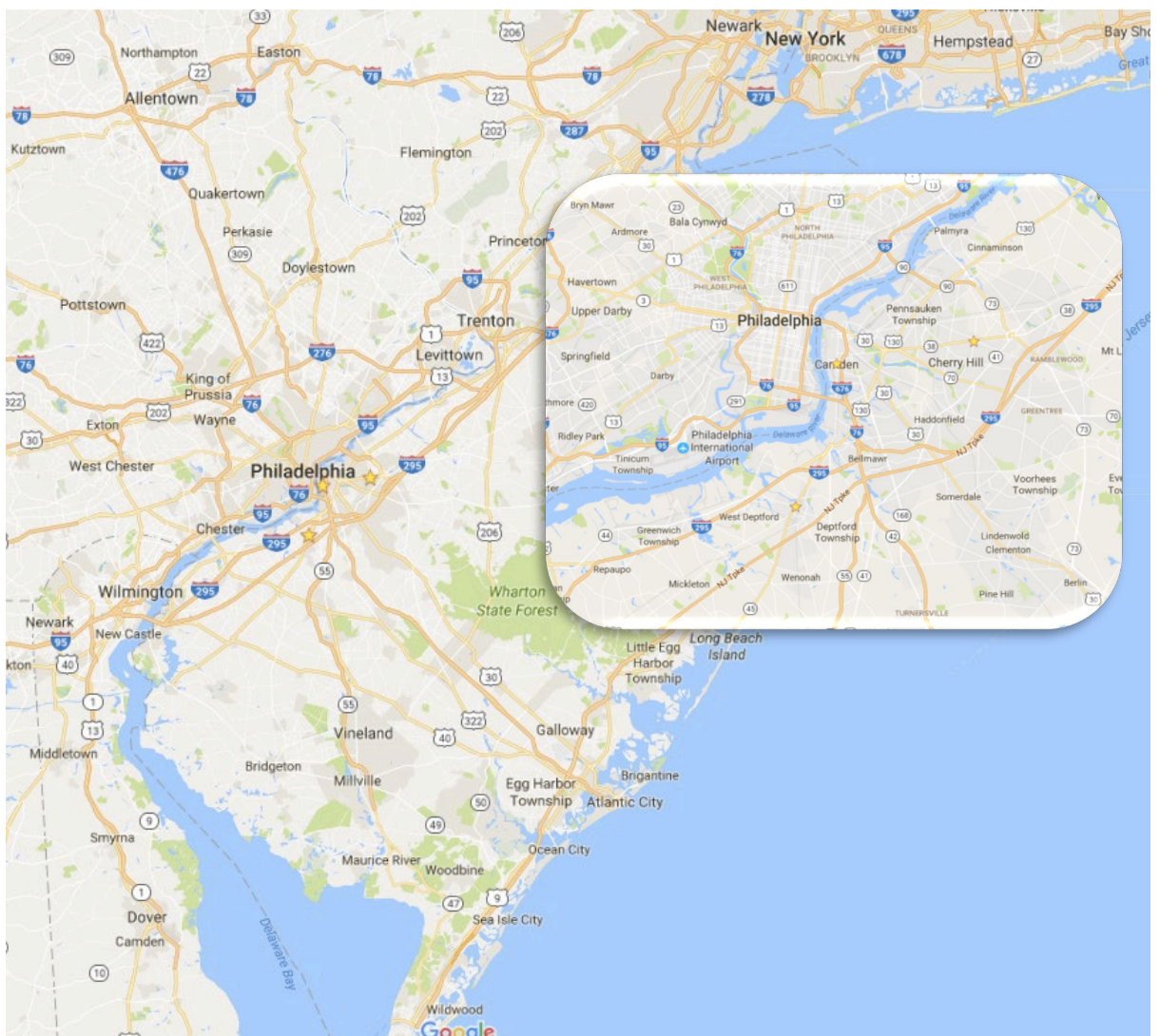


Figure 8: Map of Southern New Jersey

I went back to my home state of New Jersey in 2011 after five years abroad to conduct my fieldwork. The five years living abroad, on top of the four years previous to that time where I lived in other regions in the USA, have provided me with a particular perspective on my home region. Returning I could hear the distinct regional accent that I never realized was present growing up. Also, I became more aware of the lack of public transport and the racial and class borders between towns. My description is a mix of factual description of the region and a reflection of my insider/outsider experience of the region.

I grew up a quick 11 miles outside of centre city Philadelphia in a small town that used to be surrounded by farmland but is now suburban sprawl as far as the eye can see. My father who was born and raised in the area used to speak about when Deptford and Cherry Hill were pig farms when he was growing up. The City of Woodbury, our hometown, was the 'town' that people would go to for shopping, the cinema and Woolworths for soda at the counter. Broad Street in Woodbury is a short segment in the long connecting Kings Highway. If you drive along the slow-moving Kings Highway you will go through all the historic 'Main' streets of South Jersey (many dating back to the 1600s). Most are now run down empty shells of a more glorious, nostalgic past and a few that have managed to revitalize into a posh road filled with antique shops, overpriced cafes and boutiques.

Unfortunately, Woodbury is one of the empty shells with numerous closed down storefronts and high turnover of the limited businesses that remain. The streets have dried up in the past 40 years because neighbouring towns like Deptford and Cherry Hill no longer house pig farms, cornfields, and horses but shopping malls! There are indoor mazes of chain stores, fast food and Santa Claus to have your picture with. In fact, Cherry Hill Mall boasts about being the first indoor shopping mall in America. These huge indoor shopping centres with endless parking lots meld together with the ever-increasing megastores that continue to pop up in complexes we refer to as strip malls. Do you prefer Target, Wal-Mart or Kmart? It does not matter: they are all on the same road. "Turn right at the Best Buy, go past the old strip mall that used to have Radio Shack before it closed in 2008, and you will find Borders on the left, inside is a Starbuck café". All of this, along with Cherry Hill Diner, lie on Route 38, a wide, fast, hard to navigate, no left turn/u turn only, road. NJ is famous for being a state filled with

complicated roads; we are the only state where it is illegal to pump your own gas, have left-hand turns from right lanes and still use circles (roundabouts) with awkwardly placed traffic lights. These roads are fast, there are rarely sidewalks and almost never crosswalks.

Occasionally I spot caged-in, overhead walks that cross the six lanes of traffic, I have never dared or found a reason to use one. They are uninviting at best; outright dangerous at worst and usually lead to the other side of the road that lacks a proper walking path. I remember looking up at those overhead walks while sitting in my mother's station wagon and trying to understand why they would exist. My naïve little mind would ask 'why would people use those when they can just drive between stores?' It was not until the first diner job I had at 19 years old that I began to notice all the young Latino men riding their bikes on the slim side median to and from work. I finally noticed that not everybody has a car in New Jersey. My brother, a former state worker, recently mocked me when I told him I rode my bike to that same diner last year. He scoffed, "nobody rides a bike in NJ, Heidi, it's impossible to". I replied, "except for all of the migrant workers at diners and menial hard labour. Look at the side of the road, you will see them, they manage".

The public transport in Southern New Jersey is minimal and is predominately buses. Most buses lead in and out of Camden, which reflects the majority of people that use public transport. Most people in the region would know little about the buses and would not consider using them. Growing up my parents never informed me that there was, in fact, a bus stop around the corner from our home that would take me directly to the Deptford Mall. It was through my friend who lived in Camden that I learned I could take a bus home from our school that was a 20-minute drive away. I began using this bus instead of the private school bus that my parents paid extortionate amounts of money for. A lot of people would laugh when they heard I was taking the public bus and ask me about what 'junkies' were on there with me. Needless to say, the public bus system in South Jersey is decidedly not for the masses, but for the poor.

In my 20s I took a bus the eleven-mile journey from my hometown to Philadelphia. I have driven to and from the city for years via major highways but the bus skips all highways and weaves through the various towns in between Woodbury

and Philadelphia including Camden. This journey reflects the inequality between the wealthy white suburban towns and the downtrodden remains of communities that once flourished, each town line is marked by a disparaging difference of wealth, with the houses dramatically changing in size and cleanliness. With each town, things become bleaker until you recognize what could only be Camden. There are no longer shops to fill the empty storefronts, every other house is boarded up with many covered in smoke and ash. The emptiness of the streets is jarring. I imagine it as a western ghost town but instead of tumbleweed blowing down the empty main street its balls of plastic soda bottles and shopping bags tumbling past, and instead of the villains having tipped-over cowboy hats and colt 45s they have black hoods and gats. Prostitutes do not wave out of second-story windows; instead they sit on front stoops and gather at street corners. Most people getting on the bus have government subsidized bus passes that allow them to journey on NJ Transit. This discounted journey does not include trips to Philadelphia because it is in another state. This further limits job prospects and community relations between the neighbouring cities. Instead Camden residents must find work in South Jersey by taking the buses to the wealthier predominately white suburbs. They are limited to the walking radius of the buses, which, must be emphasized, is very limiting.

4.2 The development of my film and performance practice: activist, experimental, situational and reflexive

[Video] might better be thought of as a sensory method, not simply because it blends what we see with what we hear, but because it evokes a sense of feeling – a feeling there and a feeling for the spaces and people, the animals, things, relationships, and practices that we seek to understand through our research. (Bates, 2015, p. 1).

There are multiple reasons for my decision to use documentary filmmaking as an output for my practice-based PhD. First, with a background in documentary filmmaking, it is the medium with which I am most familiar and comfortable. Second, as this is an activist-led research project, it is to my advantage that documentary filmmaking has a long history of being used as a tool for social change, both by its radical potential in the production process and as a way to disseminate stories and

issues.¹⁷ Lastly, I chose to use a time-based medium because it is able to best capture the iconography of American diner waitress through both image and sound. As in the quote that introduces this section, video can be seen as a ‘sensory method’ that produces an emotive experience through both what we see and what we hear. So while I knew I would use video, and more specifically a documentary genre as a basis for my research output, how that transpired changed over the course of my research. In the next two sections I will explain in more detail my journey from attempting a community-based film project to producing an experimental autoethnographic documentary. In this section I position my final product within visual ethnographic film practice as an experimental documentary film that is grounded in a desire for social change. Furthermore, as an experimental documentary film based on an ethnographic experience it is both situational and reflexive.

As noted above, as a documentary filmmaker I considered the form a natural choice for me to use when embarking on a practice-based PhD because my research is based on a desire for social change. As documentary film producer and academic John Ellis (2012) argues the documentary form is grounded in the idea that documentaries should have a social purpose so that viewers can make “judgements” and be “informed” (p. 153). Documentary and media theorist Michael Renov (2007) expands on this definition and argues there are five functions of the documentary form: the preservational, the persuasive, the analytic, the expressive and the ethical (pp. 15–16). Renov further asserts that most documentary practitioners focus on the first two: preservation of a time or space (recording/documenting) and making a case for social change or persuading the audience of a viewpoint. In the meanwhile, he further argues, they often dismiss the analytic and expressive elements of the form. It is these latter two functions of documentary filmmaking that most overlap with the art world and is the space where experimental documentary filmmaking takes shape. Both Renov and Ellis take the case that the central difference between documentary and art

¹⁷ I have an MA in Screen Documentary from Goldsmiths College (2007) and at the time of entering my PhD I was working as a part-time lecturer in digital filmmaking and a freelance filmmaker. During the PhD I continued to work as a freelance filmmaker, particularly doing arts facilitation and community based film projects with young people in the UK and USA. In more recent years my career and filmmaking has moved towards ethnographic filmmaking in the social research sector.

practice is this grounding in a social purpose and therefore, the central need for a wide audience and maintaining an ethical truth. For this reason, there is a pointed need for honesty, or perhaps transparency, in the relationship the filmmaker has with the participants and how that transpires in producing information that allows the audience to make judgements. While some art practitioners may identify with this need for honesty or truth, it is not central to the critique or questions of the form. That is to say, it is rare to screen a documentary film and not have questions of ethical decisions during the post-screening Q&A. Later in this chapter, in discussing the ethical implications of making a film with my waitressing co-workers I will delve further into my attempts at producing the film in an honest and transparent manner. With these definitions of documentary, art film practice and experimental documentary in mind I place my film in the genre of experimental documentary practice. This is because, while it has become more artistically experimental in its form through integrating fictionalized scenes and autoethnography, it has consistently maintained the primary goal of social change and is grounded in an ethical responsibility towards my waitressing co-workers.

Furthermore, as I have explained in my introduction, my academic work and film practice is founded in a feminist perspective whereby I position myself as subject within the documentary and within my research. I chose a topic with which I'd had personal experience and struggles; I saw the research and film as an opportunity to open up those struggles and concerns to a wider audience. As will be explained in this chapter, my practice overlaps with art practice in my experimentation with fiction, time and space but it does so with the aim of presenting a fuller, more transparent social truth. My film and experimentation of autoethnography and performance practice is an attempt at Renov's third function of documentary film, the analytic. I do this through presenting and demanding of the audience a situational analysis. As Ellis presents it:

A situational analysis, then pays attention to the only reality that documentary can truly bear witness to: that of an interaction between individuals at a particular time, each individual bring to that situation their own expectations and understanding of what's going on and how that will define how they ought to, and want to, behave. (2012, p. 43).

In other words, a situational analysis takes into account the relationship between the filmmaker and the participant/interviewee, the participant/interviewee's knowledge of future audiences, and the audience's knowledge of the situational element of this constructed reality. Central to my thesis is unpacking how American diner waitress' labour relates to the iconography of the American diner waitress. As will be explained in more detail in this chapter, in my film I am (re)producing that very image that adds to the exploitation of our emotional, affective labour. How does my film and my (re)producing of the image affect that relationship? The audience is a participant in that relationship, and through my performative autoethnography in the film I demand a situational analysis. How much am I performing? How much are my waitressing co-workers that I interview performing for me? For the camera? For the academic, film and art audience far away in Europe?

As presented above, my practice developed into an experimental autoethnographic documentary film that is non-linear and includes fiction elements. It aims to produce an experience, but I argue, that experience produces information that is ethnographic. With the development of video technology in the 1970s, visual ethnography has developed extensively. The technology made filmmaking more financially accessible to people and, with that accessibility, generated further debate on its uses. The more purist approach to ethnography attempted to hide the filmmaker's voice in production and post-production in order to achieve 'honest' or 'neutral' representations. In other words, the filmmaker should not conduct interviews, attempting a 'fly-on-the-wall' approach, carry out minimal edits in post-production and keep the chronology footage as it happened in real time. Some academics using visual methods attempted to distinguish between forms of films that were being produced. For example, ethnographers Collier and Collier separated observational films and ethnographic films, believing ethnographic films are not as academically valuable because they are constructed for narrative value, as opposed to undisturbed or raw footage. Their purist views of ethnography and observation fell in line with the popular Direct Cinema movement, which began in the late 1950s and continued into the 1970s.¹⁸ This movement focused on 'truth' through observation

¹⁸ See <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/cinema-verite-the-movement-of-truth/> for a good

and minimal interviewing. While the movement produced some classic films (*Titticut Follies* and *Salesman* are personal favourites), their view on truth through pure observation attempts to minimise the affective relationship the filmmaker has in being present for the observation. Furthermore, their view does not consider the view of the audience as an active participant in documentary or ethnography as presented through Ellis' examination of situational analysis above. Film theorist Paul Arthur considers the autobiographical documentary to have been a patent reaction to Direct Cinema by political factions, noting feminists "turned to documentary as a remedial tool. Their assault on the putatively liberal, masculinist verite ethos overturned prohibitions on blatant interference in the recording process in favor of subjectivized forms of narration" (2007, pp. 867–868). Autobiographical documentaries were a way of crossing the constrictive boundaries outlined by Direct Cinema and politically expressing through a medium in which women's experiences and perspectives could be valorised. Film theorist Michelle Citron further argues that autobiography as an empowering tool for women has often been degraded through labelling it as 'confessional'. This label takes away the political power leaving it as reminiscent of trashy magazines (1999, p. 272). Importantly, the autobiographical documentary allows for the individual to express politically charged cultural subjects in a subjective, personal manner. And, as Citron advocates, I should own my feelings and see them as a mode of politicizing and questioning cultural norms. Filmmaker and academic Jill Daniels further reasons in her review of her autobiographical documentary *The Border Crossing* that:

[A]n important component of the exploration of autobiography in documentary cinema, is the utilisation of reflexivity as a deliberate filmic strategy in order to demystify the filmmaking process, thus drawing attention to the ideological position of the film itself and also that of the filmmaker. (2013, p. 22).

Daniels' argument brings us back to the beginning of this section and my review of Ellis and Renov's position that a documentary filmmaker has a responsibility to present truth, in perhaps a more nuanced way than had been considered before. In other words, in order for an audience to engage in a 'truthful' situational analysis the filmmaker must be transparent in their relationship with the subject(s) within the film

summary of the Direct Cinema movement (accessed on 10 Jan 2016).

in order to decipher the social message of the documentary. As Daniels presents it, autobiographical documentary 'demystifies' and makes clear the filmmaker's and film's ideological position.

Visual Ethnographer Sarah Pink argues in her book *Doing Visual Ethnography*, "video is 'ethnographic' when its viewer(s) judge that it represents information of ethnographic interest" (2007, p. 98). Where Collier and Collier dismiss the narrative form as academically uninformative, Pink defines 'ethnographic' by centring the audience's experience of the video to answer the question of if a video is 'ethnographic'. Her definition opens up the idea of what is being observed as an experience that is, as Bates explained in the quote that opened this chapter, sensory and emotive. This definition allows for new opportunities to creatively play with what is observational and how to inform the audience. As I have presented, and will continue to expand on in this chapter, my film attempts to provide the viewer with new insight into the sensory, emotive experience of the profession that I believe could not be achieved by undisturbed footage with minimal logistical edits.

In keeping with my autobiographical theme, I chose a more reflexive approach to my experimental documentary. I follow Pink's view that "the intersection between image production, image-producing technologies and the ethnic, racial, gendered and other elements of the identities of those who use or own them is crucial for a reflexive approach" (p. 26). In other words, as this relates to my own work, I have continually considered my own position in connection to power-relations while conducting my research and have amended my approaches to my research and research output with this in mind. This self-reflexive process can be seen throughout the entirety of my PhD. For example, in my introduction I included an autoethnographic piece where I revealed my emotional journey of conducting a PhD while experiencing sexism, monetary struggles, and family illness and death. These experiences informed my research journey from the feminist literature I chose to engage with to the experimental, autobiographical style of my film. Later in this chapter I engage further with the ethical issues of power-relations and my own position within the research process. Through autoethnography, in chapters 5 and 6, I also refer to my own position of power while working as a waitress and conducting research as a white, middle-class academic.

This reflexive approach to my fieldwork has meant my documentary film project is also situational as a visual ethnographic project. In other words, in line with Pink's opinion, my research methods have been informed by my subjects and my experience in the field (p. 3). This is not to say I did not 'plan' for my time in the field, but that my plans changed as things unravelled during my fieldwork. Throughout the changes and developments in the fieldwork and visual component of my research, I have applied an intersectional feminist ethical approach to my reflexive ethnography. Later in this chapter I will unpack some of these practical issues including: being fired from one job before I could begin filming, personal financial difficulties, visa issues that forced me to leave and come back to film, and my participants' long working hours and shift work that meant we were never off at the same time. Furthermore, I will also unpack how the role my film took within my research and analysis changed as my theoretical ideas around autoethnography developed.

4.2.1 Participatory film project: failed

Originally inspired by David and Judith MacDougall's formative visual anthropological work in participatory cinema, along with activist-based research methods, I aimed to produce a participatory documentary project with my co-workers. The MacDougalls' early development of 'participatory cinema' was seen as "one of collaboration and joint authorship between filmmakers and their subjects" (Pink, 2007, p. 9). This type of ethnography is grounded in applied visual anthropology, a movement towards favouring self-representation where the visual component "create[s] platforms on which people can represent their experiences, views and culture" (p. 3). Pink defines applied visual anthropology as a merging of academic and goal-orientated (public policy forming) anthropology. While this methodology is commonly seen as more progressive within anthropology, as an activist I was further influenced by and grounded in what has been termed militant research as a methodology. The Militant Research Handbook coins the term to mean "the place where academia and activism meet in the search for new ways of acting that lead to new ways of thinking" (Saab, 2013, p. 4). Adopting this concept of militant research allowed me to position myself as a waitress and activist first and, through those lenses, engage with my research. As explained previously, my interest in the subject of my

research is both personal and political and militant research methods helped to foster those positions and experiences. Through a militant research lens the goal of my research was to inquire into ways waitresses could organize and create solidarity in a precarious job.

This militant style, collaborative documentary can be seen in Barbara Kopple's acclaimed classic documentary, *Harlan County, USA* (Kopple B. , 1976). The film follows a miners' strike in 1973 in Kentucky, USA through the workers' and their families' eyes. While Kopple's physical presence is minimal in the film, her viewpoint is clear: Kopple is a pro-union, pro-workers activist. Going into my fieldwork I was inspired by Kopple's militant activist approach. In her film she does not hide her perspective, and her film is seen as actively supporting the struggle. While Kopple had previously worked with direct cinema filmmakers such as the Maysles brothers (Gaydos, 2015), as presented below I argue Kopple's activism and position as a woman allowed her to take a more affective and community-based turn.

In the course of shooting the film over multiple years Kopple and her crew became a part of the community activism and picket lines. For example, in order to prevent violence the crew continued to pretend to film at protests when they had, in fact, run out of reel (Gaydos, 2015). This is a reflection on Kopple's awareness of her own privileged position as a filmmaker and a middle-class white woman. By showing solidarity with the miners and their families, she gained further access. Kopple and her camera crew lived with miners in squalid conditions over a period of 14 months. This experience gave her a further insight into the material conditions of her subjects. Going into my fieldwork I was also financially destitute and dependent on the tips I would receive while conducting my fieldwork. This experience of struggling provided me with further insight into the experiences of my co-workers. With this said, I understood I was only a tourist to their lived realities because I would return to the academic world and with my qualifications be in a better position to earn a living wage.

Another inspiration for my filmmaking was Kopple's personal relationship with her subjects. Kopple was able to gain a specific insight into the community through identifying with the women. For me, this was a refreshing shift from the 'neutral' masculine voice of direct cinema. Kopple shifted the focus of her documentary to the

powerful women behind the scenes and holding the community together. In one scene an outspoken wife of a miner pulls a gun from her blouse in a women-only community meeting. Kopple's associate director, Anne Lewis, later compared that moment to the Women's Liberation movement occurring during the same period, "which is more liberating, burning your bra or pulling a pistol out of your bra?" (Fuchs, 2006). Through focusing on the women, Kopple makes visible the housework and invisible labour behind striking. Like Kopple, my militant activist approach aimed to shed light on the invisible, affective labour of women and their work. This can be seen in the emotional scene at the end of the film where we watch the community and Kopple mourn the death of a young miner killed in the protests. Kopple does not exploit the mother's grief, but brings empathy to the effects of these strikes on families and women specifically. While Kopple's role as an ally was an inspiration in my own engagement to waitresses working rights, my relationship to my subject was more personal. I felt able to engage with a community-based film project because of my position as an on and off again waitress. This position as an insider/outsider as described in the previous section, placed me past observer and into the territory of potential subject.

With these methods and this inspiration in mind, I went into my first diner job at Crystal Lake Diner interested in organizing a community-based film project with my co-workers. In the two months I worked there I had begun to develop friendships with co-workers, including spending time with them outside of working hours and discussing a potential film project. I had garnered some interest in making a film with co-workers but no logistical details had been discussed. My main concern was our fluctuating hours and schedules meant it was difficult organizing a group that could meet outside of working hours. At the same time as I was building these friendships I was also agitating around working conditions. As will be explained in more detail in chapter 5, I raised issues with management in regard to how our stations were delegated and the lack of tips waitresses were receiving in a shift. I argued we were not receiving enough tips in a shift for them to pay us the 'tipping wage'. As explained by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, a tipping wage is:

Your total earnings (hourly wage plus tips) must equal at least the minimum wage per hour. The hourly rate is up to your employer; however, the suggested rate is a

minimum of \$2.13 per hour. If the hourly rate plus tips does not equal at least the minimum wage per hour, the employer is required to make up the difference (New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development).

My agitation led to a long conversation with management and I was fired over the phone the next day. This meant I did not have an opportunity to say goodbye to my co-workers and could not continue the film project.

When I was finally able to secure a new position as a diner waitress at Cherry Hill Diner a month later I realized a participatory film project was not tenable for multiple reasons. First, I did not have the time to develop and implement the project as restrictions to output times for UK PhDs limits the amount of time I could spend in the field before returning to write up. Second, my co-workers did not have the time and I did not find it fair or ethical to request so much time out of their working hours to produce a film. Third, my research was developing with a stronger focus on autoethnography to which a community-based film project did not so clearly connect. Furthermore, while my research remains 'militant' in terms of the goals of the research (to interrogate potential terrains of struggle for better working conditions), it became focused on the potentiality of the image and iconography of the diner waitress and how this is performed and (re)produced. I found my work as a filmmaker and artist could produce and (re)produce this idea through more self-reflexive styles of documentary filmmaking.

4.2.2 The new project: an affective, autoethnographic approach to documentary film

The feedback between the theories I was consuming, particularly affect theory and autoethnography, and the grounded experience I was having as a poor student/waitress in a precarious situation, motivated the development of my practice to a performative affective documentary experience. As explained in detail in the next section, I have merged my own voice into interviews with co-workers and present it as part of a performance where I am able to 'serve' theory and ethnography to my audience/consumer. Furthermore, as will be explained in more detail in this chapter, I have integrated autoethnographic writing into the PhD that parallels the film. In a sense, I have attempted to produce an affective immersion into the dining experience to reveal how our own idea of the waitress and our dining experience feeds into the

labour of waitresses. My practice is not just about my own subjectivities but, as Pink expresses it, “the relationship between the subjectivities of researchers and informants that produces a negotiated version of reality” (2007, p. 24). As discussed previously, I had originally thought a participatory film project would be the strongest way of presenting a more honest experience of my co-workers and ‘informants’. During later fieldwork, and the critical evaluation process, my approach evolved in a way that I feel better represents our experiences to the audience.

As I shifted towards an autoethnographic approach, I was inspired by the significant films within the genre. These include: Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), Jill Daniels’ *Not Reconciled* (2009), Tony Dowmunt’s *A Whited Sepulchre* (2008), John Maringouin’s *Running Stumbled* (2006), Hara Kazuo’s *Extreme Private Eros: Love Song 1974* (1974) and Minou Nourozi’s *Anatomy of Failure* (2008). However, it was Israeli filmmaker Iris Zaki’s work that stood out for me, because of its relation to feminine performative labour and how she draws on the relationship between the filmmaker, subjects and audience. Zaki utilized her own experience and position as an insider/outsider within the Jewish community to raise highly political and social questions. In her first film, *My Kosher Shifts* (2011), she sets up the camera to cover herself over-the-shoulder as she works as a receptionist at a London kosher hotel. The film is a series of snapshots of the people who come to stay at the hotel and her short interactions with them. As an insider/outsider to the Jewish community she is able to engage patrons in questions on Jewish identity, gender and marriage.

In her second film, *Women in Sink* (2015) Zaki returns to her home city in Israel and becomes a shampoo girl at an Arab hair salon. Zaki cleverly sets up the camera above the sink for a framed image of the patrons having their hair washed by her. For most of the film we only see her hands and hear her voice as she purposely asks these women questions about their identity as Israeli Arabs. The patrons are in no doubt they are being filmed and as an audience we know they know they will be watched by us. Zaki even reveals the staged camera set up at the end of her film to bring this point home. Like Kopple, she places her left-wing politics front and centre of this film. But she takes the notion of participation one step further and offers a platform to the participants, yet one that is within a familiar setting to them. Through an ordinary

moment (getting your hair washed) in ordinary women's lives, she asks them how they feel about the Israeli occupation and their respective position in Israel. Zaki and I both have a fascination with our home regions and through engaging in employment back in our home communities, we function as both insider and outsider. That is, we recognize our own privilege, Zaki as a middle-class Jew in Israel and myself as an educated white woman that has left her home. We both use low-paid affective work as a starting point to unpack social issues such as gender, class, and religious identity. Zaki does not interrogate the role of the affective labour but rather uses it as a tool to address political issues that concern her. For me, these two things overlap, in that the political issues I wish to address are tied into my affective labour as a diner waitress. Where Zaki sets a stage for these conversations in this temporary workspace, I recreate a stage after my fieldwork through both my 'bathroom scenes' and performance lectures.

The performance lectures, developed in addition to the bathroom scenes (whereby I performed my autoethnography to re-create the emotional experience of waitressing in my film), further introduce and contextualize the finished film and my role in it. These performance lectures were always 'works in progress' and acted as an opportunity to process the affective relationship my film and my own experience had with the audience (an example of this performance has been included as an appendix on the DVD of my film). I was fortunate to have sociologist Les Back, who at the time was head of Goldsmiths Graduate School, see an earlier experimentation with a performance lecture in 2012 and to write about it in his book *Academic Diary: Or Why Higher Education Still Matters* (2016). As he describes:

Heidi, dressed in her waitress uniform, greeted the conference delegates. 'Can I get you a coffee? Cream? Sugar?' ... As we settled to listen to Heidi give her paper – still in costume – we realized that she had been embodying her argument. Central to this kind of work is a gendered form of emotional labour. Part of what a waitress does is the performance of a gendered cultural script. This involves tending to the patrons' needs but also making them feel attended to and cared for. Heidi inhabited her argument before she explicated it. (Back, 2016, p. 148).

The aim of these performances is to parallel the experience of (often) academic audiences consuming academic theory by the knowledge producer with the experience of the customer consuming a meal served by the waitress. In both

situations I produce an experience and my 'reward' is complicated through precariousness, ultimately at the whim of my immediate audience for capital (whether it be cultural, institutional, academic, or monetary). As I interrogate throughout my writing, the production and (re)production of images attempts to play with the creation of new ideas and new meanings that are formed when these images are placed for public consumption. Pink argues, "analysis is not a simple matter of interpreting the visual content of photographs and video, but also involves examining how different producers and viewers of images give subjective meanings to their content and form" (2007, p. 118). With my viewers in mind, integrating live performance into the viewing of the documentary also allows flexibility in the narrative I construct and present. I become what the audience needs me to be in order to consume the knowledge while I am also able to keep in consideration the prejudices and experiences of my audience in order to reveal and unpack the image I am (re)producing. It is playful, but that's what I loved that about my work as a waitress!

While my research comes from a political and activist standpoint, in that I have sought to understand the position in order to find potential points of agitation for change in working conditions, I have also chosen to include my emotional experience, both from the past and during my fieldwork, allowing it to ground, inform, develop, and challenge my research. In his edited book *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience* (ed. James Davies, 2010), James Davies proposes the aim of including emotions in one's research "is to show how certain emotions, reactions, and experiences that are consistently evoked in fieldworkers, when treated with the same intellectual rigour as empirical work demands, can more assist than impede our understanding of the lifeworlds in which we set ourselves down" (p. 1). This decision to move beyond 'traditional empiricism' which focuses solely on evidence-based research and rejects emotional experiences, brought me to a community of ethnographers that seek to explore the states of beings of researchers in the field.

As explained above, in order to bring mine and my co-workers' emotions, and affective relationship to waitressing and our image, to light I have taken a cross-disciplinary approach to my ethnographic fieldwork, predominately grounded in participant observation and video methods developed across the social sciences. This

cross-disciplinary approach expands my research output beyond traditional written analysis towards experimental audio-visual autoethnography and performance. I draw from non-representational theory along with elements of autoethnography, semiotic analysis and video ethnography methods. In the previous chapter I utilized semiotics to introduce the image of the waitress that is reproduced and forms the icon. I continue to use semiotics throughout my analysis and writing as a tool to think through concepts, terms and images that are brought forward and reproduced through my own critique. A common thread between these methods is the belief that more traditional approaches to fieldwork, that emphasize impartiality and deliver the fieldwork in structured, formulaic outputs, limit the potentiality of knowledge and knowledge production through experiential, sensory experiences. All of these methods place the affective senses of the knowledge producer and the audience at the forefront of the research with a belief that through recognizing our own subjective experience we can produce new insight.

In the next section I explain the practical methods of my ethnography, specifically the production of my film and performance scripts. I also explain further how these methods informed and were informed by a rolling analysis of the theory discussed in the previous chapters and my ethnographic research experience.

4.3 Methods for film practice

4.3.1 Filming at the diner

As presented in the timeline in my introduction (section 1.3), my fieldwork occurred over a period of six months in the South Jersey area. As presented above (section 4.1.2), I chose the South Jersey area because I am originally from the area, there are an abundance of independent diners and I had worked in the area years before.¹⁹ I was offered my first job on the spot at Crystal Lake Diner and asked to come in the next day at 2pm for training. I worked there for two months and then worked at a second diner, Cherry Hill Diner, for nearly three months and returned a few months later to film with my waitressing co-workers and my managers.²⁰ At both

¹⁹ An aside: my first waitressing job was at another diner in South Jersey when I was 19 years old.

²⁰ It is worth noting, I had actually applied to work at the second diner in the first week of diner scouting. They had rung me and offered me a job but I turned it down because I had just begun

diners I worked approximately 30 plus hours a week, predominately on the dinner and graveyard shifts.²¹ While some of my autoethnographic writing and performance is based in the first diner where I was fired, the footage and interviews are with people from the second diner.²² Over those filmed shifts at Cherry Hill Diner, I conducted in-depth interviews with four waitresses and one manager. I also conducted informal interviews with nearly a dozen diners, including the group of older Greek men that also work in the diner business, multiple regulars, a few partners of waitresses and a few random diners. For a more detailed explanation of the practicalities of filming at the diner see Appendix 1.

4.3.2 Re-enactment: Filming my bathroom scenes

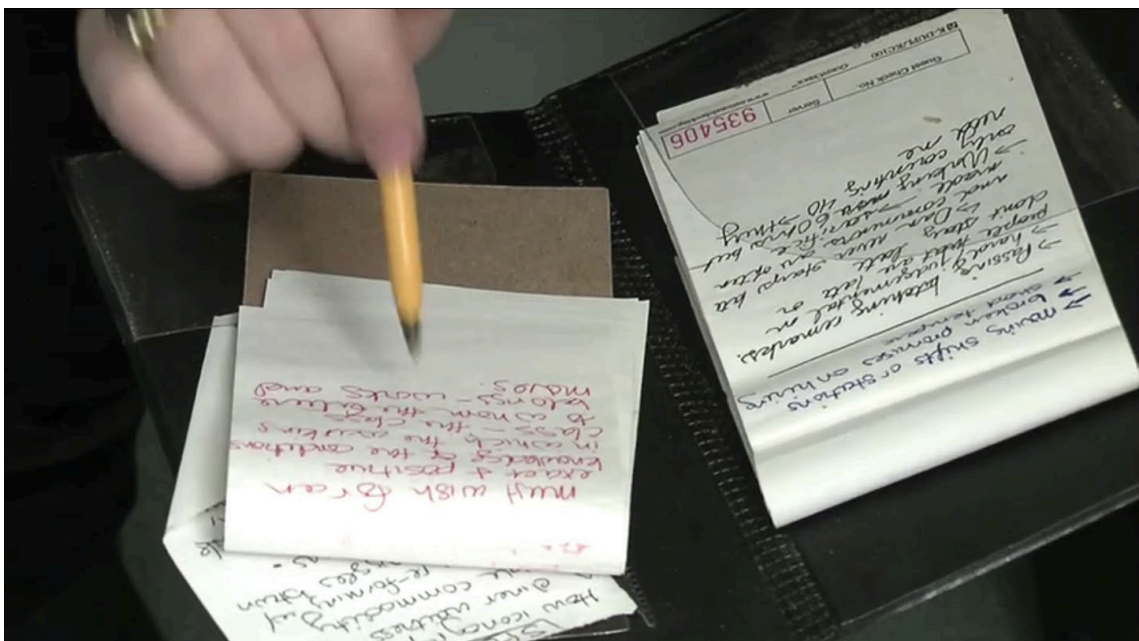


Figure 9: Still frame from Diner Wars. Reviewing my field notes in the bathroom (an enactment)

After I completed my filming and returned to the UK, I went into a period of analysis where I reviewed my field notes and my observational footage along with my interviews in light of the theory outlined in chapters 2 and 3. It was during this period

working at the other diner. When I came back to work there a few months later, the boss asked me, "What happened? We offered you a job before and you said you got another one!" I explained to him the tips were terrible at the first one and they were really slow. The boss seemed unfazed at my change of restaurants and not surprised to hear the other restaurant was doing badly.

²¹ A graveyard shift is an overnight shift.

²² Because of visa restrictions I was forced to come back to the UK early but returned a few months later to conduct interviews with my co-workers.

that I began to experiment with the autoethnographic writing and the performance lectures I refer to in the previous section. I filmed my performative pieces in the bathrooms of Goldsmiths College with the support of my partner and cinematographer, Matthew Gunton, to recreate the experience of writing my field notes and present my story with an embedded critique. More specifically, my autoethnographic performance pieces experiment with merging feminist and Marxist theory with my own stories, reproducing my own schismatic experience of going between the roles of researcher, filmmaker and waitress. These interpretive re-enactments of my emotional experience were shot in a bathroom to recreate the diner bathroom atmosphere. As I explain in the film, the bathroom was the only sanctuary I had to sit down and scribble notes in while working. Those cubicles were my only alone time in a chaotic, social job. The stories I tell on this toilet seat are taken directly from the notes I had scribbled while sitting on toilet seats at work. I had feelings of inferiority for being a waitress and a lack of confidence in my academic abilities during those periods, and the lowly status of the location attempts to reflect this. I also chose to do multiple shots while at the bathroom sink.

These shots mix between being in character and breaking character to address the audience. While in character I look at myself in the mirror; I primp, put on make-up, pick at my face and speak to myself. I then break these moments by looking into the lens of the camera through the bathroom mirror speaking directly to my audience. I let my audience know I know they are there. I use the mirror as a reflective tool – reflecting the image I am creating and re-creating and that the audience is consuming and re-consuming. *I know, they know, I know...* The feedback loop is apparent and exaggerated. This is all a process of mixing constructed truths with documentary interviews, observations both personal and real-time in order to create an affective experience for my audience. But what is the effect of reproducing my own narrative and image? In reproducing this narrative am I amplifying the iconography? Am I changing it? My goal with the film, and with this thesis, is twofold. First, I unpack the image and its relation to waitress' labour. Then, my aim is to affect it, change it, and find potentiality in it to improve the material conditions of waitresses. Through playing with narrative form, moving between re-enactment mixed with fictionalised self-

reflective scenes and addressing the audience I attempt to make my position clear; to pull the audience out of the moment and affect them.

Re-enactment has a long, complicated history within documentary filmmaking but the shift from the technique being seen as controversial to accepted has been swift. It was only in 1988 that Errol Morris' *Thin Blue Line* (1988) was not accepted into the documentary film category for the Academy Awards because of the film's re-enactment scenes to the controversy. The shift towards acceptance has, to some, been seen as too far. This can be seen in the controversy over *The Mighty Times: The Children's March* (Houston, 2004) winning an Academy Award for Best Documentary short when the film blurred the line between what was re-enactment and archive footage (Lacher, 2005). The continually changing landscape of how to achieve 'truth' within documentary filmmaking has meant filmmakers are always pushing boundaries on what the format is and how to ethically present it. Errol Morris speaks about his own decision to include re-enactment in *Thin Blue Line* as an attempt to get at the truth from multiple perceptions of truth and memory

Memory is an elastic affair. We remember selectively, just as we perceive selectively. We have to go back over perceived and remembered events, in order to figure out what happened, what really happened. My re-enactments focus our attention on some specific detail or object that helps us look beyond the surface of images to something hidden, something deeper – something that better captures what really happened. (Morris, 2008)

Like Morris, my own re-enactments are an opportunity for me to present to the audience my experiences of waitressing as I remember them. Except, unlike Morris who is attempting to unpack a moment of tangible truth, I am trying to present how my experiences are tied up in my role as a researcher. I am unable to separate the theory and critiques of labour that I was reading to my personal experiences of that labour and my re-enactments attempt to reflect this complicated truth. They are how I remember them but muddled in the theory I was reviewing them in. Documentary theorist Bill Nichols argues that the very nature of re-enactment removes it from the event and instead "introduces a fantasmatic element that an initial representation of the same event lacks" (Nichols, 2008, p. 73). It is through the weaving of memory, fantasy, and representation that a version of the truth is reproduced. I had the privilege of hindsight to reflect on my feelings and ethnographic experiences to then

present them. This privilege also means that the truth of them is blurred. How honest can I be when my memories are muddled with other stories, other experiences, the theory I continue to read while I produce my film? The truth I attempt to present in these re-enactments is that schismatic experience and the unpacking of a critique of my labour and the labour I experienced. In the following section I present my editing decision that further unpacks how I landed on re-enactment and collage and how that decision transpired over time.

4.3.3 Editing my film

My film has been edited and re-edited multiple times with the development of my written analysis.²³ The story of being hired and fired at the first diner I worked is a subtle linear narrative that weaves through the film and told through my bathroom scenes. Otherwise, I have purposely chosen to present a film that is non-chronological and instead allow the stories to overlap and weave through, to present them thematically. These themes are critiqued and brought to life with my autoethnographic bathroom scenes. On a practical level, this allows me to pick and choose themed stories to present when performing next to the film. Furthermore, this artistic licence that I have taken is part of an attempt to deconstruct the narrative and place emphasis on the themes rather than the chronological journey. In other words, my narrative is formed through my reflective analysis of my experience and the themes that form my written work. I also feel the chronology of the events of these particular waitressing experiences is less important than the standalone stories and experiences. These stories of health issues, being fired, financial difficulties, drug addiction, and emotional labour are not new to me; they feel timeless. By deliberately removing them from time, I am attempting to turn them into myths that affect the waitress narrative and, in turn, potentially affect the iconography of the American diner waitress.

This choice to have a non-linear narrative goes against the traditional social science argument for organizing footage sequentially in order to produce an ‘authentic narrative’. But, as Pink points out, sequential organization of images can limit potential

²³ I edited my film using Final Cut Pro.

meanings that could form from other thematic organization (2007, pp. 129–131). In fact, the process of playing around with the time and space of my footage brought out new meanings to my footage and further informed my analysis. As Phillip Vannini (2015) argues, editing is “a political and ethical practice” where the process is a mode of analysis where we must consider our audience:

It is a highly technical activity requiring an equally high level of reflexivity that allows us to come to terms with the symbolic, aesthetic, affective, and educational potential of our productions, as well as the possible mobilisations of our work by others with different goals than our own. (2015, p. 236).

Outside of analysis, working in non-linear forms has allowed me to present overlapping, merging and equally juxtaposing experiences of my co-workers with the aim of embodying the research and providing an embodied, sensory experience for the audience. Academic, writer and performer Jackie Orr (2006) plays with performance lectures, autoethnography and fiction writing in her own work on panic disorders, attempting to create an experiential knowledge of panic disorders grounded in both theory and her own personal experience with panic attacks. Orr calls this non-linear form of working ‘collage’ and roots it in Dada and surrealism:

Collage can be one performative strategy for telling *more than one story at a time*, bringing together on the same textual surface – and outside the common sense or sensation of linear time – pieces of history, fiction, ethnography, dream, and autobiography in a noticeably constructed, suggestively *surreal* evocation of social realities. (Orr, 2006, p. 29).

My film takes on a fictional collage through my own appearance in it. I made the decision to feature in my film some time after collecting the video footage of my co-workers. The film portrays me telling ‘stories’ of waitressing and sometimes re-enacting my experiences as a researcher taking short moments to reflect on my time.

As explained above, all of this takes place in a bathroom, similar to the one you would find in the diner. As I explain in the film, it is the only sanctuary where I can reflect, sit (on a toilet) and breathe during chaotic long shifts. I often took scribbled notes in my checkbook trying to decipher my feelings and record moments that would otherwise be fleeting. I speak directly to the camera about my ethnographic experiences and analysis of my working conditions. I am dressed in my old waitress uniform and use the bathroom as a space to speak to my audience because it was where I took my ethnographic notes but also because it is a private space I am making

public. I am purging my frustrations, stresses and humorous tales while sitting on a toilet, or picking at my face in the mirror.

As will be discussed in the next section, I aim to be self-reflective of my own ethical issues, my position as an academic – I am not really a waitress, *but I am*, and my insecurity and poverty are things I am acutely aware of while I do my research.

I need the tips too.

But I am privileged, I am educated.

This is a means to an end.

I have entered into a profession for a short period of time because I can. The job is precarious, there is no job security because the job was historically ‘deskilled’ and de-unionized. Middle-class young women that needed ‘spare cash’ in a developing youth economy in the 1950s were an intricate part of that process, something I discussed in chapter 2.

I am the tool in union busting.

4.3.4 Diner Wars: ethical discussions

There is a belief that truth is not so much a function of filmic representation as a result of the filming process. Truth is sought not in the photographic but in the interpersonal, in the exchanges between filmer and filmed. So filmmakers have to be careful not to exploit their subjects, and those subjects have a duty to be honest, however much they perform for the camera. The role of the viewer in forming their judgements is one of seeing through the most flagrant performances to a greater truth, whether it is the truth of personality or the true course of particular events. The role of the director’s ‘voice’ is to assist the viewer in that process (Ellis J., 2012, pp. 153–154)

Leading up to my fieldwork, during my post fieldwork analysis and my experimentation with performance lectures, where I presented edited clips of my film, there was a healthy discussion generated amongst my academic and filmmaking peers in regard to the ethics of my film and ethnography. The two most prominent discussions that I will address in this section are the ethics of presenting an honest interpretation of my participating co-workers’ experiences and informed consent.

As addressed earlier in this chapter (see section 4.2), as a documentary filmmaker, the ethical consideration of presenting a truth, specifically a truth of the subject, is central to the form. This responsibility of honesty is both towards the participants/subjects of the film and the audience. An honest portrayal of a subject

allows the audience to safely gain information and make a judgement. There is also a responsibility of care towards your participants/subjects to ensure you are presenting a truth. I opened this section with a quote from Ellis where he rightfully argues that the filmmaker and the subjects both have responsibilities to present an honest portrayal of themselves and their experiences. As he points out, this is a complicated request because we have many faces we present depending on who and in what situation we are speaking. Our performance of self is constantly altering and that would include when a person is being interviewed on camera. My responsibility, as a filmmaker in control of the footage and the edit, is to, as Ellis puts it, “assist the viewer in that process”. This is one of the reasons I decided to place myself in the film so prominently. I wanted to make my position and relationship to my co-workers clear to the audience. I edited the film to present an analysis of waitressing in relation to the iconography that informs and relates to our labour. The stories of my co-workers presented in the film are there to guide that analysis and critique but they are also lived experiences and therefore deserve the audience and my respect. I use their stories to further my argument and my justification for this is, like many documentarians, because I want to see positive social change in the form of better labour conditions for waitresses.

Another ethical reason I place myself in the film is my role as an insider and outsider to waitressing. In chapter 6 I go into more detail about this position but, as explained in this chapter, I was born and raised in the region I conducted my fieldwork and I returned after living abroad for five years to waitress in a diner again. While I am native to that region, my position as a white, middle-class educated academic temporarily working as waitress separated me from my co-workers. Filmmaker and academic Cahal McLaughlin similarly discusses his insider/outsider relationship to producing a documentary film project in his home city of Belfast about people’s experiences of the ‘troubles’. While McLaughlin had personal experiences of losing friends, being arrested and going on protests, the people who participated in his film had much more dramatic experiences:

While I remained relatively unscathed, given the prevailing conditions, I connected with the stories in my research and felt a kinship with them. If I did not identify with all of the participants, I was at least curious about them as the ‘other’. The ethical dynamics in these latter relationships offered all parties,

including myself, the opportunity, especially at the exhibition stage, to empathize, with the 'other'. (McLaughlin & Bannerman, 2009, p. 77).

Like McLaughlin's connection to his subjects' stories, my experience of the effects of the labour conditions of waitressing was minimal. Both of us, as he puts it, "remained relatively unscathed". Through presenting my autoethnography alongside my co-workers I hope to present my dynamics with my co-workers and, with that, my empathy towards the 'other'.

There is a second ethical element I think it is important to address in regard to producing *Diner Wars*: the ethics of informed consent. Gaining informed consent from my co-workers was a challenging balancing act. The issue was not that they were not willing or interested in being filmed (quite the opposite in fact) rather it was that I wanted to ensure they understood the intentions and the potential consequences of the produced film.²⁴ I was often frustrated by the discussions around ethics because I felt my academic peers were focused on 'informed consent' through an academic lens. In other words, that my participants would fully understand my research aims and the potential implications of their participation. I found this to be a struggle for two reasons. First, I needed to have my co-workers listen long enough for me to explain the academic purposes of the research and film. Second, I had to mitigate their expectation on how the film would be used. In short, my co-workers did not care to understand my academic research and practice outside of whether or not it would make them famous.

My waitressing co-workers thought it was great that I did 'arty' things (I was often asked what a documentary film was) and taught at the local community college, but their engagement with the subject of my research or even the discipline it might fall under was non-existent. They could not comprehend why anyone in academia would be interested in 'studying' waitresses in New Jersey and thought it seemed a bit silly. In the end, I explained that my research was on women and work and that my supervisors were fascinated by the stories I had of waitressing and my co-workers, so I wanted to bring these stories to life by filming in the diner. They were flattered that

²⁴ The film produced is for research purposes and the dissemination of it remains limited to the dissemination of the research. In other words, I did not seek their permission to sell the film for commercial purposes.

other people in another country thought they were interesting, despite finding it peculiar. When I tried to engage past this point, explaining it was a critique of their labour and the conditions of their labour, they actively stopped listening. Throughout these discussions with my co-workers, I was left wondering if I had truly gained informed consent or if the understanding I had of informed consent was wrapped up in a disconnected academic world that assumed others cared about their work and critiques. I never hid my thoughts on our working conditions and I often brought up the connections between the work we were doing and traditionally 'women's work'. In this way my co-workers knew the position I would take in the film and my position more generally, but it still did not stop them dreaming of grander outcomes upon the production of the film.

This leads to why I chose the title *Diner Wars* for my experimental documentary film. As shown in my film, Debbie came up with the title when she 'pitched' the concept of a reality TV series to me throughout an evening of filming (see 1:30–1:35, 22:59–23:14 in film). At the time I nervously tried to reiterate this filming would not result in a reality series, while laughing along to the well-structured concept she was creating. It was in fact a good idea! "I would watch it!" I thought. It was only later when I went to review the footage I realized there was more to untangle in what Debbie was saying. In chapter 6 I unpack this title more through a semiotic analysis and contextualizing it in the reality TV series that were popular at the time of my research.

In the following section I delve deeper into how affect theory influences my experimentation with writing and documentary filmmaking. This links to my use of autoethnography in both my film and writing that is threaded through the PhD.

4.4 Affective immersion as a methodology

Effective collage is also affective, opening up emotional, sometimes contagious, not fully conscious forms of feeling. (Orr, 2006, p. 29).

The nature of my research methods can cause schismatic moments where I am lost in the space between researcher, activist, filmmaker and waitress. As explained above, during my fieldwork as a diner waitress I would find myself in the bathroom of the diner, in tears, staring at myself in the mirror. Here I was with my cheap uniform:

an apron stashed away with single dollar bills, fry grease and ketchup stains telling myself

It's ok, Heidi, this is research – not my life! I am not just a waitress. Breathe.

I was trying to convince myself waitressing was not my life because in those moments it felt like my life. I was being affected by my fieldwork. During many shifts I found myself lost in the moment, moaning about a bad tip or secretly pleased that they sat me the guaranteed tippers. My emotional pull between academic researcher and worker often paralleled Carol Rambo Ronai's (1992) experience as an exotic dancer/researcher, as described in her essay 'The Reflexive Self Through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Exotic Dancer/Researcher':

I try to rationalize away my emotional outburst. I'm here for research purposes; I'm not trapped by this but here voluntarily, I say to myself ... Reacting to the characters in the setting cheapens me, whittles away at my resolve, demonstrates that in fact I'm not totally shielded from their opinions. (1992, p. 105).

It is through the fruitless experience of trying to divide emotional experience from rational thought that both Ronai and I end up degrading the job, our co-workers and our patrons in order to feel a sense of self-respect. We both feel guilty for being emotional and personalizing a work experience, especially when we have the safety of knowing our experience is time-limited and voluntary. We do not want to be known as a dancer or a diner waitress and so we fall into the very trap of moralizing that we hope to question in our academic work: "I am not *just* a waitress. I am *better than* a waitress". We do this to rationalize an emotional experience that we feel is out of our control. This experience is a reflection of our twofold failure. We fail as 'traditional' academics that can plunge into fieldwork both rationally and objectively *and* we fail as emotional affective workers.²⁵ As I will explain later, I perform emotions and affect outside of my own lived experience. I may pull from my experience, but my job is not to experience but to create an experience for my patrons.

As detailed earlier in the chapter, after waitressing I returned to academic life for a few months before going back to the Cherry Hill Diner to film with my former co-

²⁵ Spry addresses the 'traditional academic researcher' "as a detached head ... floating from research site to research site thinking, while its profane counterpart, the Body, lurks unseen, unruly, and uncontrollable in the shadows of the Great Halls of Academe". (Spry 2001, 720).

workers. When I went back with a camera I found myself comfortable and confident, potentially more at ease than in a room full of academics. I am not sure when my performance began, ended or if it ever existed. Which performance? Well, all of them really. In my academic work I aim to reproduce the precarious, performative experiences that waitresses encounter in our affective labour. As Laurel Richardson eloquently puts it:

I desire to problemize sociology's concepts and methods by grounding sociology in lived experiences, to write sociology as 'windows of lived experience'. I struggle now with ways to unite people's subjective experiences with my sociological utterances. I strive for forms in which sociology can be an effective and affecting discourse, a nonalienating practice. (1992, p. 136).

Through video, autoethnography and performance I attempt to use affect as a method to present and represent the affective labour of waitressing and, furthermore, the cyclical relationship the iconography of waitresses has to waitressing. In other words, by presenting both my own and my co-workers lived experiences, emotions and reflexive stories I aspire to reach beyond academic reflection and critique to produce an 'affecting' and 'non-alienating' piece of work.

As explained, in order to achieve this I pull from both performative autoethnography and feminist documentary practice. Furthermore, I utilize affect theory in relation to emotions as a theoretical thread throughout my writing. This predominantly manifests itself in the form of autoethnographic writing (presented in italics throughout the thesis). This thread informs my performance-based film project and links it with my critique. I engage with these traditions in an attempt to develop a mixed-method practice. Both autoethnography and feminist documentary practice pull heavily from feminist traditions of grounding theory in the personal; for example, feminist documentary practices attempt to question traditional modes of documentary practice, including observational documentaries and 'neutralised narrative voiceovers', for radical political and social change. Both practices argue their aims are ultimately political and action-orientated, but performative autoethnography stems out of academia, while feminist documentaries are primarily grounded outside of it.

4.4.1 Inspiration from Patricia Clough's 'Ecstatic Corona'

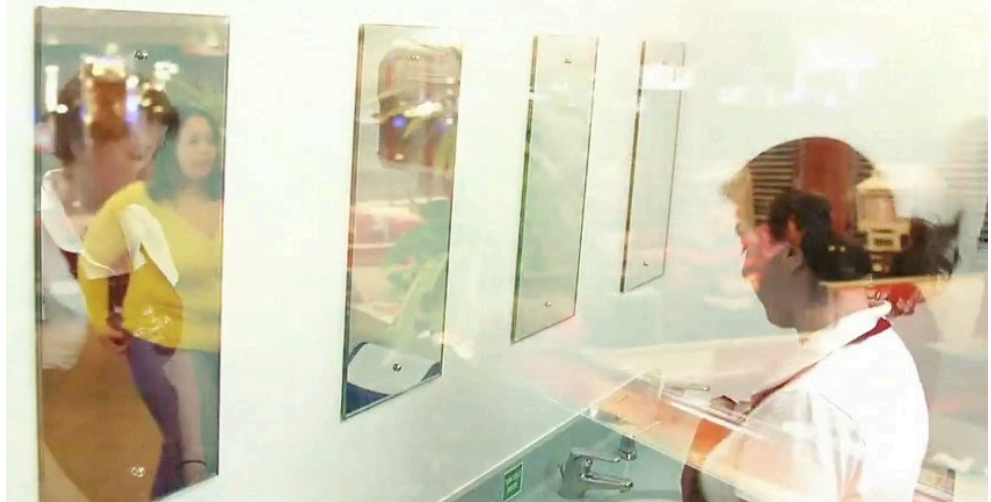
In my attempts to merge these two modes of research-activism I have found myself amongst a growing number of feminist scholars bringing the study of affect theory into affective, practice-based, forms of research, including Patricia T. Clough and Orr (2006). As a seminal theorist in affect and feminist theories, Clough's work has taken an affective turn as she has moved towards using live and multi-media performances to develop autoethnographic research. Clough's multi-media performance piece, *Ecstatic Corona* (Clough, Garcia, Kim, Montana, Morris, & Wong, 2017) works as a poetical journey through her hometown of Corona in Queens, New York. The film is part of a larger performative project created by a collective of artists and academics from Corona. The film relies heavily on a multi-layered soundscape of voiceover, diegetic sounds of the video scenes and emotionally charged music. For most of the film the screen is split with a larger video on the left and changing still images on the right (see figure 7). The first male voice takes us through the psychogeography of Corona, and the viewer gazes at the video: a handheld camera walking us through the neighbourhoods. There are few cuts, so we quite literally learn the route and lay of the land: a poor, multi-ethnic, grungy urban landscape.

The male voice delves into the historical make-up of immigrants, minorities, and poverty. Clough's voice cuts in, bringing the viewer a personal perspective. It is no longer 'the' sociological perspective but an example of what feminists have called 'herstory'. The viewer begins to move their eyes between the video and the still images on the right. The images match with the personal narrative, a more historical view of childhood of a specific cultural upbringing – Italian American, Catholic, working class. More voices emerge including a Latina dancer and a man from a neighbouring wealthier town. The piece presents as a poetical, emotional experience. The different voices paint a larger picture of the location's unique history, geography and cultural make-up. The stories present both a need to get out and nostalgia to go home. Clough cannot untangle her relationship to Corona and the images of the church. She utilizes the music as a tool to thread the piece together, reminding us of that relationship even when she is not speaking. In her keynote lecture at the Esri conference at Manchester Metropolitan University, Clough presented her own movement towards creative expression "from a drive to deconstructive abstraction" in her work in her acclaimed

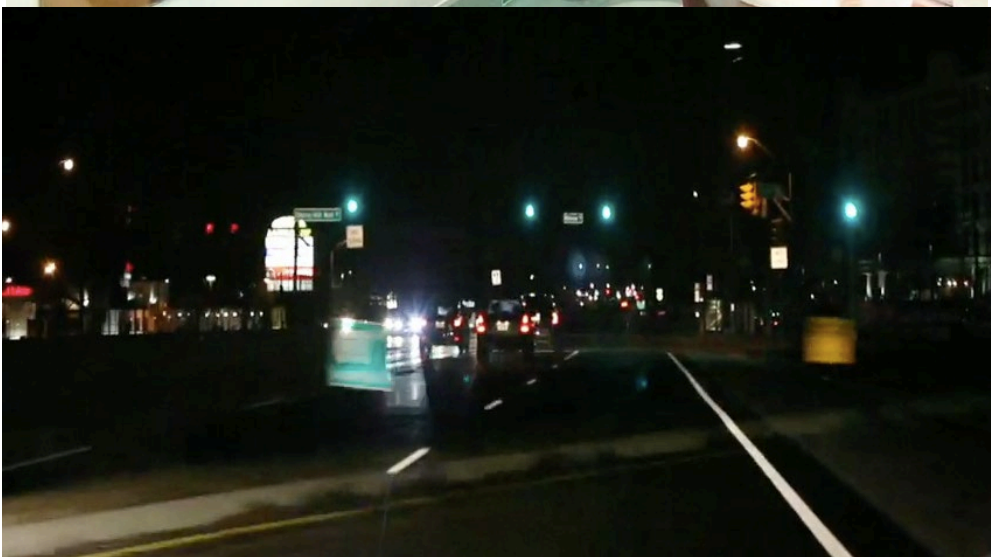
book *The Ends of Ethnography* “to constructive creative expression or what might be described as the calculative ambiance of the biopolitical conditions of our living” (Keynote Lecture, 2015) as seen in her creative work. Clough rightly argues that a form of creative ethnography grounded in affective experience is inevitable when seeking to understand affect and experience, particularly through ethnography.



*Figure 10:
(left) Still
frame from
Ecstatic
Corona
(Clough,
Garcia, Kim,
Montana,
Morris, &
Wong, 2017)*



*Figure 11: Still
frame from
Diner Wars.
An auto-
ethnographic
fictionalized
bathroom
scene with
me.*



*Figures 12:
Still frame
from Diner
Wars. The
highway drive
to Cherry Hill
Diner.*

My own experience of merging my story of labour (waitressing, performance, academic, filmmaking) into an ethnographic understanding of diner waitresses retrospectively feels inevitable. In order to understand affect, I must be affected. The influence of Clough and the Corona collective's performance and film work can be seen in my own project, particularly in relation to soundscape. While I utilize more traditional forms of documentary interview, I layer those interviews with my own narrative through fictional performance (see figure 9). I find their use of voices that move between geographic and cultural explanations grounded in political histories, affective personal stories, poetry and music present a complicated love-hate relationship to a space that is ultimately home (see figure 8). Watching this inspired me to delve further into my personal, complicated relationship to the space my research takes place – home. Like Clough, I 'escaped' but I constantly feel pulled back. I hover in a space of feeling alien yet safe. While conducting this research my relationship to the space was being tested. As presented in my autoethnography in chapter 1, I came home to conduct my research but my home had changed and was still changing; my family was in strife, my best friend became life-threateningly ill, my financial situation was dire, and the home I was raised in was gone, meanwhile my immigration status in my adopted home (England) was also being tested. These upheavals hit me hard and affected my connection to the research and my co-workers/informants /participants in ways I continued to untangle over the coming years. After my time in the field it became clear that removing myself from my research would produce a dishonest portrayal of my ethnographic research because my ethnographic research was as much about my own experience and relationship to waitressing and the space as it was about unpacking the profession. My emotions with waitressing are tangled up with my emotions around the space and time I was waitressing. In my film and autoethnography I attempt to present these emotions, untangle them and unpack their relationship to feminine, emotional, and affective labour.

While Clough's research similarly relates to the personal, my work further focuses on affect in relation to immaterial labour. For this, I pull from contemporary Marxist feminist scholars including Fortunati and Dalla Costa. The conversation about immaterial and precarious labour is most rich when discussed in relation to

reproductive and affective labour. Dowling best discusses the issue of the current use of immaterial labour in her work on critiquing the dining experience. Like Dowling, I find the main sources of discussion on immaterial labour (including Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri, and Bifo Berardi) limit their analysis towards “informatic labour mediated through communication technology” (2007, p. 118). Through situating my research within Marxist feminism I am hoping to carve out a space that is more nuanced and attentive towards affective labour. Furthermore, I aim to produce a piece of research that is emotionally charged, aesthetically focused and militant in its goals for material changes in working conditions for waitresses.

4.4.2 Autoethnography as a writing and performative tool

Autoethnography developed out of multiple disciplines using ethnography in an attempt to move beyond what I consider the misguided assumption that we can remain objective in our research. Traditional empiricism upheld rationality and capacity for detachment through ‘concealing’ or ‘subduing’ feelings and affect. Anthropologists Davies and Spencer argue this subduing and concealing was counterproductive to seeking honest knowledge, “the irony being that the neglect of these data offended empiricism more deeply. True empiricism does not ignore the facts but is obliged to accept them, embrace them, and advance theoretical formulations upon them” (2010, pp. 2–3). In order to gain a complete empirical understanding nothing should be ignored, all things are to be uncovered. In this sense, emotional experiences are objects to be uncovered and unpacked. As Spencer and Davies argue “a researcher’s emotional experience can actually present opportunities for understanding” (p. 3). They name this movement towards acknowledging emotions in ethnography ‘radical empiricism’, defined as research that equally looks at ‘the relations between things’ as the objects themselves. Furthermore, radical empiricism is critical of fieldwork that does not move beyond ‘self-contained’ methods and look at the informal moments, or the “spaces between” (p. 23). I place autoethnography within this methodological genre, arguably in some forms taking the importance of emotions one step further by placing them central to the research.

Clough suggests that the aim of autoethnography “is to give a personal accounting of the location of the observer, which is typically disavowed in traditional

social science writing, traditional ethnography especially. It does this by making the ethnographer the subject–object of observation, exploring experience from the inside of the ethnographer’s life, emphasizing emotions or feelings” (2007, p. 16). This form of inquiry takes ethnography one step further than by beginning with our own lived, emotional experiences. Because, as Clough argued in her earlier work *The End(s) of Ethnography*, a traditional ethnographic approach lacks realism as it is grounded in, what she claims at the time, Oedipal/sexual desires being ignored. Using psychoanalysis and post-structuralism she highlights the traditional white, male ‘objective’ eye as colonialist and false. This ‘objective’ eye forms narratives that lack a self-reflection or critique. As I raised in my introduction (1.4), not only do we position ourselves within our research, as feminist grounded theory desires, we begin with the ‘I’ and then relate it to further social discussions.

As discussed, my research is not only focused on the labour of the American diner waitress; I also seek to understand the iconography associated with this labour and the relationship the labour and waitresses have with this iconography. What is at play between the icon and the waitress? How was the icon created? Who controls the icon, if anybody? How does the iconography relate to the exploitation of the labour of the diner waitress in America? Can this icon be used to change the working conditions of waitresses? To attempt to answer all of these questions I feel my craft as a filmmaker, storyteller and performer becomes crucial. As I outlined above, I feel that writing a piece attempting to express the powerful physical and emotional experiences of waitressing would not adequately express or critique the subject. Carolyn Ellis, a central scholar in autoethnographic research, emphasizes the power of performance in autoethnography:

Performance also can disrupt discourse or interrogate the personal ... It demonstrates that personal narratives occur in cultural contexts – context is as important as text – and offers a site for contesting human agency. Personal narrative can disturb the master narrative. By empowering self and others, performance can lead to social change. Denzin says a good performance text ‘must be more than cathartic, it must be political, moving people to action and reflection’. (2004, p. 208).

My interrogation of the affective experience of waitressing through providing an experience that will affect an audience is not cathartic but political. I aim to reproduce

the very images and experiences that (re)produce the iconography that affects and is affected by American diner waitresses. Through incorporating performance and filmmaking into my research methods and presentation I aim to replicate the feedback loop that exists between waitresses, our iconography and our labour. Furthermore, by replicating this feedback loop I hope to open up or reveal possibilities for political action and new organizing strategies. This objective is where I shift away from Carolyn Ellis' approach to autoethnography. For Ellis and her partner, Arthur Bochner, autoethnography must be connected to emotional pain.²⁶ It is the process of feeling pain that is the 'real work' of autoethnography. I sway away from this bold statement as it limits the field as a whole and limits my capacity to utilize the form.²⁷ My experiences as a waitress, both for this particular project and in my previous waitressing positions before entering academia, do not produce this deep emotional pain that Ellis and Bochner call for. For me, waitressing has been stressful, exciting, ridiculous, frustrating, cringeworthy, hilarious, rewarding, degrading, exhausting, exhilarating, depressing ... and these are perhaps the reasons I have such a strong pull back to it – that it suits my personality, challenges my understanding of myself, other people and the wider world. But, I would not claim that waitressing has provided 'deep emotional pain' in my life. If I focus all of my autoethnography on the negative experiences, you, the viewer/reader/affected agent, will gain an unwarranted understanding of the experience and the labour.

One could argue that my work with autoethnography is more closely aligned with its use in organizational research methods. The field of organizational research methods is traditionally a conservative field based in business studies. The use of autoethnography is a break away from this more rigid methodology so common in the discipline. Michael Humphreys and Mark Learmonth have embarked on this more radical approach to empirical research but differentiate their work to C. Ellis and

²⁶ Ellis and Bochner are both academic and personal partners. The two work together in autoethnographic research and are in a long-term relationship. Perhaps their most famous piece of work produced together was an autoethnographic essay about their decision to have an abortion.

²⁷ I am not the only person that finds it limiting. See: Jenks, Elaine Bass, Searching for Autoethnographic Credibility: Reflections from a Mom with a Notepad, in Ed. Bochner, Arthur P and Carolyn Ellis. (2002), *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature and Aesthetics*. (Walnut Creek, CA. AltaMira Press).

Bochner's, recognizing two strands of autoethnography emerging across disciplines. They define Ellis' work as 'evocative autoethnography' that writes from the heart with a goal of evoking rather than including formal analysis. They feel this genre of autoethnography "refuse[s] to engage with – conventional sociological analysis" and therefore, the danger becomes that there can be multiple ways the writing can be perceived (Humphreys, 2012, p. 315). They equally recognize that too much analysis can lose the evocative power of autoethnography and a fine balance is needed in order to both engage with theory and analysis and provoke new and more emotive meanings. This balance of allowing the autoethnography speak for itself, particularly when I perform the role, creates a tension: how do I provide an analysis and critique without breaking out of character and thereby losing the impact of my performance? But, without an analysis, how do I reveal my ethical decisions from my research? Without presenting the ethics of my methodology and ethnographic research I run the risk of reproducing the positionality of a white, pretentious, privileged scholar.

The critique of Ellis and Bochner's prioritization of pain to produce narrative and Ellis's feeling that the stories must be based on the exceptional versus the ordinary (2004) can be seen through Amy Shuman's critique of storytelling and the production of empathy in her book *Other People's Stories* (2005) Shuman uses Walter Benjamin's and Joan Scott's work to emphasize the danger in the production of narrative to form our understanding of experience, subjectivity and self.

Both Benjamin and Joan Scott have tied our understanding of experience and subjectivity to the production of narrative. We learn from them, and from others who have written about nostalgia for narratives of coherent selves and the fragmentary nature of modern narratives, about the ways in which narratives essentialize both identity and experience. (2005, p. 159)

Shuman walks a line between feminist discussion of personal narratives and the critique of the danger of these narratives to produce an essentialist, limited identity and experience. In my view, Shuman is not against the use of personal narratives, but warns that there are problems within them that should be considered. Her main concerns are the production of empathy in regard to grasping others' stories and the ownership of narratives. While Shuman does not address these issues using the term 'affect', I read her description of the relationship, knowledge and emotions formed from storytelling to be a production of affect.

Shuman's critique highlights the issues of 'owning' identity and experience and the entitlement that forms from this possession. In my view, the process of producing narrative and stories parallels the problems with the production of any commodity. My story is my labour-power, and when I write it, perform it, tell it, I release it into a market to become a commodity. My story becomes a commodity that can be interpreted, used, retold and resold. One effect of the production of my story is the empathy another produces in the process of relating to my story. But, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is no longer *my* story. It becomes something else and the control I have over that story becomes lost, or at least diminished when it enters the market. Pink addresses these issues of representation with any ethnography and the development of producing and representing knowledge and experiences. These experiences, Pink argues, are always intertwined with our own and rather than hide that perspective "[autoethnographic writing] should engage with issues of representation that question the right of the researcher to represent other people, recognize the impossibility of 'knowing other minds' and acknowledge that the sense we make of informants' words and actions is 'an expression of our own consciousness'" (2007, p. 22). Autoethnography, it could be argued, addresses these issues directly by placing the researcher at the centre of the research.

Affect can be defined as the space that exists between people, that bubbles to form something else like emotions or relations, both physical and psychological. It can also relate to the performance itself, the reveal and cultivation of emotions. The process of creating affect is often through the use of affective labour (Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 108). We pull from our previous experiences of affect to create new affect and affective relations. In other words, affect is built upon affect. I use affective labour in order to create an experience that could be deemed affect. For example, I produce an experience in my performance lectures that is intended to affect the audience, this affect builds on other experiences of affective labour (my waitressing experience) and will inform both mine and my audience's relationship to this affective labour in the future. By grounding myself at the centre of my research, I am using affective immersion. The schismatic experiences I had, while they were draining, proved fruitful for experiencing the precariousness that can be caused through emotional, affective labour. Furthermore, choosing to use a medium such as film as an intricate part of my

research methods allowed the performative affective labour to be revealed in the physical, visual manner that we experience it as waitresses and as customers. While waitresses performed for the camera, they reproduced the affective labour that produces and (re)produces the iconography associated with their profession, in turn, acting as a feedback loop to the iconography and their immaterial, affective labour.

My intention to reveal this feedback loop comes at a price: I have added to the (re)production of the images associated with diner waitressing. These images provide expectations of a certain experience that I, and my co-workers, will have to (re)produce at a later date for our future patrons. Rebecca Coleman (2013) contends that we should not ask what the image is but what it can do. Using images of transformation in reality television shows that focus on people receiving makeovers, Coleman specifically looks at how the images of transformation are affective (over the transformation itself). In other words, images of the transformation “are affective in that they address hopes and dreams of a better future and engage the body through the intensity of feeling” (2013, p. 23). With Coleman’s view in mind, how can the image of the American diner waitress affect or transform the waitress who equally consumes the image of her labour? How can we move away from American-dream based transformations that remove the need for structural and cultural change and instead victim blame (‘If you just work hard enough, you can make it!’)? How can my practice be transformative towards new, more positive futures without the viewers falling into an individualized, liberal guilt for not tipping their waitresses better? Shuman ends her book with a suggestion – not to avoid telling and retelling stories but to address the vulnerabilities face on:

To address these vulnerabilities in the retelling of other people’s stories, I have proposed that we begin by asking a few questions: whose story is it ... what is it being used for ... what does it promise ... and at whose expense? Together, these questions help us to address not only how other people’s stories traverse boundaries but also and importantly how they fail this redemptive promise. (2005, p. 162).

With Shuman’s warnings of authority, authenticity and ethics I have to consider the role of ownership. While I take the feminist standpoint that *I* and *we* have stories to tell, which assumes an ownership to them, as I explained in the previous chapter, Ahmed raises the issue of the ownership of the emotions that form these stories.

If we consider my story of waitressing as the object produced, the value of my story is built on emotions that accumulated over time. In Ahmedian terms, these emotions are not my own, but an accumulation of the affective relationship I have had with others' emotions. When the story is produced the process of the accumulation of these emotions is lost, but what remains is a fetishized understanding of these emotions. As I explain in the previous chapter on the development of the iconography, when waitress' affective labour-power entered the market it grew into new narratives that built, bounced on and affected other narratives. This ultimately led to the formation of a new commodity separate from waitress' labour-power and being sold back to us today as the American waitress icon. In my performative autoethnography I run the risk of producing a story that will oversimplify, lose meaning and be reinterpreted in ways I have yet to imagine. Without sounding nostalgic, the original emotions used to produce this story will be lost in the new object of emotion that I have formed. Part of the reason for forming these objects of emotions is to be able to understand, place and interpret emotions. Without expressing emotions, they do not become grounded in our past, current and future lived experiences. In turn, they do not exist past the original experiencing of them. They do not join the collective experience. Sharing our emotions and experiences is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, through producing objects of emotion, like narrative and stories, we lose emotions to the market. On the other hand, if we do not grab the sticky emotions and produce something with them, they are never articulated and therefore lost.

Using this analysis of emotion and story, I remove the ownership of our emotional experiences as researchers and begin to relate our emotions to the objects of emotions that are formed from them. My moment of anxiety and stress in the bathroom was built on a history of emotions, experiences and narratives that formed my experience of that moment and the subsequent narrative I formed around that moment. To be more specific, I experienced that anxiety and stress, and the succeeding rationalizing and calming of those feelings, because of my social and cultural understanding of gender and class. Not only was I reminding myself of the space being impermanent and outside my experienced and expected class realm, I was also experiencing the anxiety and stress due to my understanding of self-respect, equality and political values including gender equality. I was reacting to sexual

harassment, degradation and bullying and my understanding of these concepts are intertwined in my knowledge base and my social and cultural experiences. I had previously built narratives of not only myself but also of what constituted appropriate behaviour. Other people's affective actions were affecting these narratives in an uncomfortable way. The emotions of my boss came out in barks: he barked at me for insignificant things, he barked at me to shake up my own narrative and sense of self. His bark stuck to my narrative and changed it so I went to the bathroom, looked in the mirror and told myself to calm down. I attempted to shake off his bark but the sticky residue of his bark remained. My emotions of calm rationalizing were swayed, new objects of emotions were formed including nervousness and anxiety, and I was affected.

4.4.3 Flashback, flash-forward

I have been affected, constantly affected throughout the whole waitressing experience. I look in the mirror and flashback to the first diner I worked in for my fieldwork, months earlier. I replay scenes in my head, the development of my narrative, my affected and affective self forming and changing.

Rewind.

I am rusty at waitressing but determined not to show it. Kelly, the waitress training me, cannot be bothered with me. I am another person in the long succession of people to train. I am extra work that she will not get paid for outside of the self-satisfaction in knowing she is the only person that they can REALLY trust to train. I am nervous going back to waitressing not only because I have been away from waitressing for five years, I have also been away from NJ and the US. My American accent is affected, or should I say infected, with a British inflection. This adds to my feelings of confusion and culture shock being back in the suburbs of the States. People do not see me as local, but I do not see myself as foreign – we are at a stalemate.

Kelly has been working at the diner on and off for ten years, she has regular dinner hours and a lot of regular customers. I follow quietly trying to not get in her way. In order to engage her I compliment her waitressing knowledge, highlighting how many regulars she has I also legitimize my abilities with my past experience of waitressing. I tell her my first job was at another local diner nearly ten years ago and

since then I have worked at various restaurants from family-style to four-star. Of course my 'funny accent' is questioned and I have to inform her I have been living in England for the past five years and have only just moved back. Everyone knows within minutes; it is exciting gossip that I have been living abroad and it leads to a lot of questions about my life. People seem generally mesmerized by the idea of packing up and changing countries. I find this excitement peculiar because half of the staff that work in the diner are immigrants from either South America or Greece (the owners are Greek). Nobody seems interested in immigrants but an emigrant is fascinating! They think I am 'classy' and they like it. I am worried it will cause an uncomfortable class divide but in a strange twist it becomes part of my quirky personality. Every waitress adopts a quirky personality and mine is entwined in my travels, my education and my art. I am performing my quirky waitress self. With Kelly I attempt to walk a fine line between compliments, kindness and assertiveness. Kindness can be a sign of weakness, not quiriness. After a few hours of working with Kelly she gently reminds me that it may have been a while since I worked at a diner but formal dining will not work here, I should relax and get to know my customers if I want to build up a list of regulars. Apparently I am coming off as too nice and too sophisticated, I need to show a bit more of my down-to-earth, rough, Jersey personality. I am saddened to know I had lost it.

Fast-forward.

I am no longer the new girl. It doesn't take long, really. I have been at the diner just over a month and I have already seen others hired and fired. But things at the diner are slow, really slow. Nobody is making any money, and to top it off, the managers are not cutting people early (that volunteer) in order to better divide up the patrons. Nope! Instead we stand around the empty back dining room shooting the shit, gossiping and complaining. Two waitresses, both of whom have on and off relationships with drugs, abusive boyfriends and each other, provide their assessment of the situation.

"There's too many freakin' people on the floor. This shit is ridiculous."

"You know, what they should do is just fuckin' cut some people, there ain't enough tables to go around and I GOT BILLS TO PAY."

"Seriously, Katie's nice and all, real sweet, but she is only like 16 and don't have no bills to pay. They should take her off the floor."

They continue to analyse everyone's (who is not present) financial and social standing. Anybody that lives with her parents does not need the job, nor does anyone that is seemingly rich. I try to remain distant from the conversation because I know that if I join in I will have to legitimize my financial need to be there. I know it won't stand up – they recognize that I could get another job much easier than they could. Beyond the middle-class, white privilege cultural capital that I hold, I do not have a police record. When they turn to me for my opinion or for my cue to leave (I cannot tell which one they want) I reply,

“The whole thing is bullshit. I have never experienced a restaurant that is so fuckin’ disorganized. They probably wouldn’t have to let anyone go if they just shortened some of the shifts. You know, I tried to cut down my shifts, I told them it was pointless – me being here that day – it takes away your money and I don’t come home with any either. They wouldn’t let me. APPARENTLY they think there is a really big crowd just around the corner – they are just taking their sweet fucking time getting here!”

The girls burst out laughing.

“Girl, you’re crazy!”

I feel like I have diffused the situation. I want to show my solidarity, they are right to complain about the bad money and the over-staffing of the floor, but there are solutions outside of firing people and I want to re-route their frustration. Their analysis of the situation is quickly spiralling to a conspiracy that could lead to an unnecessary drama and unnecessary tears for the unknown victim of their blame. The blame lays squarely on bad management not on the 16-year-old, peppy middle-class high school girl. But, where is my place? I feel an overwhelming sense of guilt. They needed money, there are too many people working here and I am taking up space. I, the undercover activist, the not-really-a-waitress, well-educated, well-bred woman is taking tips away from my fellow workers. But, I am broke as shit and do want better tips!

Fast-forward.

I realize I have been in the bathroom for too long. I have a two top waiting for their food and there is a chance I have been sat again. I leave the bathroom, side step to pick up the pot, head to my table, “would you like some more caw-fee, sweetheart? How’s everything? A’ight?” At least these months have brought my Jersey accent back.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to explain my methodological approach to my practice-based research. In order to do this, I explained my practical approach to working as a diner waitress for my ethnographic fieldwork including the region I chose to locate my research, the timeline of my fieldwork and the places I worked. I gave further explanation into how I approached filming interviews and observational footage within the diner along with reproducing fictionalized bathroom scenes after my fieldwork. This included the ethical considerations of filming interviews and conducting research within the diner. I also reviewed the changes and developments of my work that coincided with the development of my reading of feminist theory on affect and autoethnography. This allowed me to further engage with the literature set out in chapters 2 and 3 on feminist theory to unpack my methodological decision to use autoethnography and experimental approaches to documentary filmmaking. I also discussed how the issues and contradictions of making the film, and the including of self-referencing in it, led me to consider extending the performative elements, so that the finished film could be screened in the context of further performance. This chapter concluded with an autoethnographic piece that begins and ends with me in the bathroom, talking to myself. This piece was later developed into one of my autoethnographic scenes in my film and can be seen at 33:10–35:39. Both the written piece and the scene in *Diner Wars* are intended to bring forward my emotional experience of waitressing: the complex affective relationship I have with waitressing I explained earlier in the chapter.

In the following two chapters I continue to weave autoethnography into these chapters to draw out theoretical themes that presented themselves during my fieldwork. Both chapters not only experiments with autoethnographic writing (in italics) but also semiotic riffs of terms that present themselves in my research. Going into my fieldwork I knew I wanted to unpack the material and immaterial labour that underpins waitresses' jobs. In chapter 5, I focus on the material conditions that most affected my experience waitressing: the tipping wage and my relationship with management. These two themes became front and centre at the first diner I worked at (Crystal Lake Diner) and was subsequently fired from. In chapter 6, I focus on the

immaterial labour, particularly emotional labour. I utilize the theory set out in early chapters, particularly Skeggs' work, to think through not only waitresses' relationships with our customers but also our relationships with co-workers and a wider audience. Both these chapters seek to understand how both the material and immaterial labour waitresses produce, (re)produce the iconography of the diner waitress. How do we speak to this image? How do we exploit it and how are we exploited by the image.

5 Material conditions: managerial control and the tipping wage

In the following two chapters I delve into an analysis of the iconography of the American diner waitress through autoethnographic writing of my waitressing experience during my fieldwork period at both diners. The writing within these chapters runs in parallel to my film and performance practice. Some of the ethnography was used as loose scripts for my film, or in the live performance lectures I experimented in throughout my analysis period, and benefits from being read alongside the film. Like my performance in the film, these chapters aim to flow between analysis, field notes and creative writing. In this light they can be seen as part of my practice as much as part of my theoretical writing. In this chapter I argue that material conditions, specifically the tipping wage and managerial control, add to the iconography and our performance as waitresses of this image through producing precarious working conditions.

In the previous chapters, I have presented the historical background to waitressing in the US and explained how the job entails both physical and emotional labour. In this chapter, I further unpack this labour through my own experience of returning to waitressing. I then explore the relations between management, tipping and precariousness as I experienced it during my fieldwork. As revealed in my autoethnographic piece at the end of the previous chapter, going into my fieldwork I had not lived in the US for over five years, which was also the last time I had waitressed. I was on a learning curve to reacquaint myself with the American service sector. This learning curve was steep because the last restaurants I had worked in were mid- to high-end and because, after years living abroad, my accent and inflections had changed and presented a challenge to my authenticity. In the next chapter I will go into these challenges in more depth, but what I also discovered was that my physical ability to waitress was still there; it was just a bit rusty.

5.1 The physical job

5.1.1 Clock in. Check my station.

Do the station hand over (5–6 tables): Most waitresses try to drop all the checks before handing over a station to ensure they receive the tip.²⁸ A waitress is often frustrated when her station is sat 15 minutes before her shift is coming to an end – it leaves her with little time to put the order in under her name and drop the food to guarantee that final tip. Likewise, coming into my new shift I want my station ready for me, a bunch of tables taken up by the previous shift means I lose out on new customers.

Note my side work (usually done at the end of the shift or when free): this could be chopping lemons, rolling silverware, cleaning and filling ketchup/syrup/salt and pepper, cleaning the coffee maker, salad station. Legally this work does not come under the remit of the tipping wage but I have never experienced being paid minimum wage for this work that can often take up to an hour of my shift. Most waitresses don't realize this should be paid at a different rate.

***Party of 4 at table 6!** Introduce myself to the table (tap water in hand²⁹)“Hi! My name is Heidi and I'll be your waitress today. How's everyone doin'? Good! Can I startchya with somethin' to drink? Cawfee? ... Do you wanna hear our specials today? We've got chicken noodle and navy bean soup. Early bird special is Roast Beef with your choice of two veg. Our veg today is steamed carrots, pickled beets, and creamed spinach ... yup it comes with your choice of soup or salad. It also comes with a drink ... Let me give yous guys a few minutes to decide while I getchyer drinks!”*

Rush over to grab drinks but en route pick up some dishes at table 3 and ask “How's everything going? Sure, I'll get you a refill”. Take mental note. Table 1 waves me over. “Yes dear? Well you can get ice cream or pudding with the special. We've got tapioca, vanilla or chocolate. Tapioca, sure! Anything else? Cawfee? Does the little guy

²⁸ ‘Dropping’ checks means to leave the check at the table for customers to pay their bill at the host counter on their way out the door. Unlike European custom where it is considered rude to give a customer their check before they request it, in American culture it is rude to make customers wait for their checks. This may connect to the idea of fast versus slow dining cultures.

²⁹ In higher-end restaurants management discourages bringing tap water without the customer asking in order to encourage drink orders. At a diner, it's about speed – it's an extra visit if they ask for tap water during introductions. Two birds with one stone.

wanna go check out the cakes? We've got cookie monster cupcakes! No? That's a'right. I'll be back with your pudding, coffee and check."

Pour two Cokes, get out three teacups for coffee, a side dish of creamers. Grab a tapioca pudding. Go to computer, print check and take a moment to write 'Thanks, [heart] Heidi!' Just in case they want to remember my name and ask for me the next time.

Drop off pudding, coffee and check at table 1, reassure them if they need anything else just ask. "Have a nice day!" Do a fly by with the soda for table 3, scurry to table 6 to get their order in – the faster I get their order in the faster I turn around the table. It's peak time and the goal is to turn as many tables as possible for best income. Sitting and drinking coffee refills for hours is for the late-night shift.

"What can I getchya? Oh, good choice! It's one of my favourites! ... Hmmm... between the two, I'd always go for chicken. It's a big hit here ... Soup or salad? How would you like that? Anything else? Ok, so that's two roast chickens, one veal, and a medium-rare burger, salad with Russian on the side instead of fries. And two navy bean soups to start. I'll be back with your soups in a hot second!" Repeating the orders from memory instead of from paper is always an impressive extra learned from memorizing the menu, **maybe another dollar in tip.**

I rush back to put the order in, notice table 6 is just finishing their meals so pick up a few more plates and ask, "How was everything? Good! Can I getchya anything else? A'right I'll be right back with your check". Table 2 has just been sat, I smile as I pass them and say, "I'll be over in a sec!"

I head to the computer to put the new order in and print out the other check. Grab two waters. Two soups, bread. Drop table 3's check "Have a good one!" Serve soup to table 6. Note: they want hot sauce. To table 2 with tap water. Repeat intro.

Get drinks for table 2, hot sauce for table 6. Drop off hot sauce, take order for table 2. Put order in computer.

Table 6's food is ready. Go into kitchen, grab large tray under collection point – call out to chefs the side orders to go with early birds. Grab salad for burger. Don't forget the gravy! Four mains and a side salad unsteadily positioned heaving over the edges of a 2ft x 4ft oval tray. It's heavy! Lift it over your shoulder, back out through double doors and yell, "Coming through!" to avoid a collision. Grab a tray stand en

route. Hand out dishes, “Careful hun, the plate is really hot!” **My own hands don’t feel the heat anymore.** Ask if they need anything else: sauces, drinks, did I miss anything? Off to grab the salads for table 2 and get those extra bits ...

Another hour and the rush will be over and the long haul of the overnight shift will take over. Milkshakes for drunken teenagers, coffee refills for lone truckers, flirt with the lonely nerdy types too shy to go to a club or bar, **punctuate the evening with busy work:** roll more silverware, slice more lemons, wipe the countertop again.

I am new so my station is furthest away from the computer and kitchen that are on opposite sides of the room. These extra steps add up over time, maybe 20 extra minutes of walking to the kitchen and the computer equals one less table I can turn over in the night. **One less table means fewer tips – maybe a \$6–8 loss of earnings over a shift.**

Waitresses aren’t the only employees in the front of house³⁰. Most diner waitresses will work with busboys and busgirls. A busboy is one step below a waitress in the restaurant totem pole. In my experience, he or she is often either too young to sell alcohol, has an undocumented migrant status, or does not have strong enough English language skills to speak to customers. The busboys will clear and reset tables when the customers have left. They will also wash dishes, restock cutlery and glasses and sometimes bring tap water to the table. At the end of each night the waitresses tip out the busboys on average 10% of their tip.

During peak hours (breakfast, lunch and dinner) the front of house also has a hostess. The hostess’ main responsibility is to seat customers. She greets each customer and then chooses a table in one of the waitress’ stations. In theory the hostess is supposed to scatter the customers between the different waitress stations so that the clientele are evenly distributed and time-managed. In practice, a bad hostess can lead to a waitress having no tables for two hours or being ‘slammed’ with three seatings at once. At most of the diners I have worked, middle-management also act as the host seating people. This mid-level manager also determines the stations of

³⁰ ‘Front of house’ is the area of a restaurant that is seen by the clientele. This is where the tables are. The ‘back of house’ is the behind the scenes areas where the cooking and cleaning is done.

the restaurant each shift and therefore has the power to determine the success of a waitress' shift. This adds an extra layer to wage relations.

In the back of house lie the cooking and cleaning staff. A waitress is a liaison between the two halves of the restaurant. The patrons will rarely see what is happening in the kitchen, and the cooks and cleaning crew will rarely catch a glimpse of the people for whom they cook. A waitress must relay the needs and wishes of the customer to the chef. She must furthermore present the food of the chef to the customer. While the front of house is female dominated, the back of house is often male dominated. The production line requires precision and one break or mistake from the administering of the order to the presentation of the food can cause frustration and chaos. In my experience the back of house is often a fractious, scary place for waitresses where cruel words are bandied about, aggression and aggravation is taken out on you and physical assault is not unheard of. I have been called an idiot, a moron and a bitch and been thrown out of the kitchen. I have watched other waitresses be hit with missiles of bread rolls, had wooden spoons chucked across the room, had their buttocks pinched and their breasts grabbed. Fearing the repercussions, I have often asked for senior waitresses to send back the unwanted food from my customers for me. Their fierce confidence and knowledge of the restaurant meant they could take on the cooks and not come out sobbing (like me). With that said, I have watched waitresses of 20 years walk out of the restaurant in the middle of their shift because of an argument with a cook. The other tension is in a waitress' relationship to management.

5.2 My first diner as a researcher

5.2.1 *Crystal Lake Diner, day 1. The boss*

It took me less than a week to find a job at a diner. In the end two diners called me back, but since I had already confirmed with the first one I turned down the second (which would strangely become my next diner job).

I had never been to Crystal Lake Diner before, even though my high school boyfriend had lived just around the corner. The diner was situated on a hill next to a

gas station, liquor store and Wendy's fast-food restaurant.³¹ Neither the interior nor exterior were attractive. Its ability to thrive was based on its proximity to the local high school and its 24-hour status. When they hired me I was told I needed to wear a solid black t-shirt, black pants and black shoes and to come in the next day at 3pm to start training for my first shift. I went out that same day and invested in new waitressing garb, excited and nervous about my first venture. The following section is also reflected in the opening scene of my film where I reproduce my experience of taking field notes in my checkbook while hiding in the cubicle (00:05 – 01:20).



Figure 13: Still frame from Diner Wars. Reproduction of me scribbling field notes while hiding in the bathroom cubicle at work

On the first day of work at Crystal Lake Diner I found myself in the bathroom (the only sanctuary where I could sit quietly without being scolded) scribbling notes in my phone in an attempt to hold on to my first moments of observation and anxiety.

Started at 3. Met the angry Greek boss. I introduced myself, he looked me up and down and pointed at my ankles - apparently skinny jeans are too fashionable for the diner. He showed me the polyester flares of another waitress and said, "get those". Ray,

³¹ I use the past tense because the restaurant burned down in a fire the year after I worked there. See <http://6abc.com/news/fire-damages-landmark-diner-in-haddon-twp/89198/>. The diner was rebuilt and re-opened in the spring of 2017: <http://www.courierpostonline.com/story/life/2017/03/23/after-fire-crystal-lake-diner-evolves-times/99545584/>.

the assistant manager, was on my side and sees me as 'sophisticated'.

I felt the intimidation and was annoyed with myself after for not being more prepared. They meet you and assume you're scum. They pick on you for the sake of it and thrive off the threat of firing you. Equally the servers thrive off the threat of quitting.³²

My first day was met with anxiety and disappointment in myself for reverting to old emotions of fear and anxiety towards my managers. While I had attempted to dress the part for work, making an effort to buy new waitressing kit, it was met with disapproval from the boss, Tony. This disapproval was explained to me with glaring eyes and an angry mumble that I could not understand. I looked bewildered at him, I did not understand how my open, bubbly introduction could be met with disdain and grunts. Tony pointed to the ankles of other waitresses and told me to come in tomorrow wearing those. I would later find out that Tony is particularly famous within the Greek diner circuit for his aggressive and mean personality. In the next diner I worked I met a retired Greek cook who had worked with Tony for years. He laughed when I told him I had worked at Crystal Lake Diner recalling the three times he walked out due to Tony's anger management issues. Rumours were passed around that Tony had settled for tens of thousands for harassment and abuse charges from former employees. For the rest of my time working at Crystal Lake Diner I would avoid Tony like the plague. He rarely worked in the evening, so when he would be in I would hide in the kitchen, playing the revolving door game always keeping myself at the opposite side of the diner to him.

In my first day and my first encounter with my boss I was presented with the reality that I was not performing to the visual needs of the diner waitress. When I was hired I was informed to wear black pants, black shoes, and a black top and I would be given an apron. Through being reprimanded for getting my uniform 'wrong', I was being informed of the deeper intentions of the uniform beyond that of being identifiable as a waitress to the customer. In chapter 2, I discuss the role of waitresses as part of the décor. Cobble brings to life the images of early waitresses in 'theme'

³² 6 June 2011, log notes.

based uniforms to provoke semi-sexualized visual experiences. In other restaurants I worked, I experienced the need for a uniform to be 'sexy', from wearing a dirndl at an Austrian themed restaurant to a birds of paradise, tight, Asian style dress. Through this reprimand for not getting the uniform right, Tony was presenting another function of the uniform. In her influential historical and sociological text on fashion, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress & Modern Social Theory* (2015), Joanne Entwistle argues that in contemporary culture dress is linked to individuality and connectedness:

We experience our bodies as separate from others and increasingly we identify with our bodies as containers of our identities and places of personal expression. We can use dress to articulate our sense of 'uniqueness', to express our differences from others, although as members of particular classes and cultures, we are equally likely to find styles of dress that connect us to others as well (p. 138).

If fashion and dress are so closely linked to 'uniqueness' and are an opportunity to individually communicate who we connect, or associate with, in regard to class, culture and subculture, then what role does the uniform play? And in this particular circumstance when the uniform is bought from simple instructions 'black shirt, black pants', what else is this request of a uniform asking? Tony's request for me to purchase the uniform, I argue, was a request that I conform and connect to a particular class and culture. Taking into account Entwistle's point on identifying with our bodies, I internalized my fashion choices as reflections of my political and social class, and being told they did not fit was an affront to these identities. As explained further below, my uniform removed an individualized identity through stripping away the social cues that would inform others of my potential for thought or ideas outside of my station as a waitress. One could argue, then, that the uniform's purpose is not just to add to the décor of a restaurant or help identify workers versus customers, it also neutralizes the waitress from being political or future thinking and creates an atmosphere of apolitical safety.

We were not *just* supposed to be in black and aprons; we were supposed to represent a certain type of waitress. Skinny jeans were not just too trendy for the time, they engaged with a language of youth, independence and future thinking. Tony was informing me that being a diner waitress is not just about being sexy or maternal, it is also about being working class and conforming to our station. Taking on board Skeggs'

argument³³ that femininity is a performance to display in particular situations, my performance of femininity was inappropriate for the space (1997, p. 108). At the time my skinny black jeans and my black combat boots were a representation of defiance: they informed Tony I was radical. It was not that I would stand out more, for some waitress' hairstyles or make-up would easily make them stand out from the rest of the community. It was that I would stand out as progressive and future looking. Entwistle argues that in modern society "obvious symbols of class identity have become less distinguishable, smaller details can still mark out distinctions" (2015, p. 134). My skinny jeans and boots were the subtle distinguishing factors between being a conformist and being forward thinking. My skinny jeans were too urban and my combat boots too political. I was to be a sexy young(ish) waitress under the terms and conditions of suburban working class. I was to honour the flared stretch polycotton blended pants and generic black trainers because the clothes represent the position I was taking on: one that is nostalgic but not retro.

A diner waitress is just a touch out of fashion. Is the image and position of the diner waitress like a polycotton blended flared pant made from the offcuts of outdated, unbreathable fabric? A patchy, cheap imitation of an outdated concept of Americana that does not give room to breathe or grow? To upcycle my uniform through loud make-up, plastic buttons (badges) declaring my crankiness or cuteness, or colourful pins in my hair was an approved form of individualism. These upcycled elements of defiance are within the confines of one's performed position as approachable but inferior. They are gaudy, they are silly and they are *not* progressive. In other words, wearing cat ears on Halloween is flare and a talking point whereas combat boots mean I have opinions that could be defiant³⁴. Our uniform reflects our narrative of sassy and opinionated but not political. Your waitress is supposed to challenge you through banter but not have you question your values, politics or identity. Our clothes look inwards towards our community, not outwards towards larger societal questions. We mirror the community we serve and never patronize. To

³³ See Chapter 2.2 for introduction to Skegg's work on appearance and femininity.

³⁴ For a history on combat boots and general subculture fashion I recommend Hebdige, Dick (2007), *Subculture: the meaning of style* (Oxford. Routledge).

be too trendy is to make someone feel uncomfortable. The awkward lonely young man does not want a waitress that is cooler than him: he needs an attainable image of beauty.

Interestingly, years earlier in my first diner waitress job, I was similarly reprimanded for not adhering to the unspoken elements of the uniform. That time it was black skirts and white collared tops. I wore a knee length flared skirt that ironically harked to the 1950s era the diner conjured in its décor. They thought it was too long, sat too high on my waist (low rise was the standard fashion at the time) and too ... too ... something. They couldn't explain it because it was not the skirt itself but what it represented. The skirt was not the right type of sexy. Just like my skinny jeans and lace-up boots, my skirt was an act of defiance and deep down the manager and myself knew it. Shedding my defiant clothes was to strip me of the barrier I continued to hold as an outsider. If I wanted to immerse myself in diner waitressing culture, I needed to remove the clothes that distinguished me as an outsider and become a part of the community. While Tony's aggression towards my clothing was a response to my defiance to conforming to his rules and vision of his business, it was also a barrier to connecting with my co-workers. Skeggs addresses the role of 'looking good' in her study of working-class care workers in northern England:

[Looking good] was central to the women's sense of self: their interpretations, labour, display and performance ... it enables them to share interests and intimacy with friends, generate admiration and signal desirability, but it also induces the fear of getting behind or not having the right knowledge, of getting it wrong. The act of construction was as significant as the final appearance. (1997, p. 108).

I got my uniform wrong on my first day. I went back out that day to my local Wal-Mart and bought a pair of black polycotton blend flared pants. They were long enough and flared enough to hide my boots underneath. I begrudgingly shed a bit of my individuality to conform to the needs of my boss and in the process opened myself up to better connecting with my co-workers. Over time I got used to working as a diner waitress in those flared cheap pants and began owning my position as a financially struggling waitress. I still continued to wear those boots, hidden under those pants, a subtle reminder that my uniform was a costume and my performance as a waitress had other intentions outside of cash-in-hand tips. There was only so much of myself

that could integrate into the diner waitress culture: my accent could only adjust so much back to my Jersey roots. I was still a highly-educated woman temporarily visiting a space for my own gains. I was, ultimately, an outsider.

5.2.2 *The assistant manager*

This section reads in line with *Diner Wars* (see 5:23 – 6:55).

After Tony walked away, Ray, the dinner shift assistant manager, attempted to console me. Ray was unusual in that he was not Greek or related to any of the owners and was working as an assistant manager. Generally speaking, management is left to family members and the Greek community only. Ray was approachable but lacked real training in management and therefore struggled in situating his authority. He wanted to be friends with everyone but also felt the heat from higher management and would turn on the servers, pulling rank when necessary. I often heard complaints from co-workers that Ray was a liar or could not make up his mind on the rules. Staff wanted rules and authority and Ray was not providing them. Ray was excited to hire me and worked very hard at making me feel comfortable and at home in the diner. On the first day he checked in on me constantly, complimented my skills as a waitress and tried to tell me the workings of the kitchen. At the end of the shift he pulled me aside and attempted a friendly manager's speech.

"Heidi, always ask for help if you need it, you to come to me. There's a lot of bullshit around here, you know? You're gonna have a lot of girls like bitching, and you're gonna have a lot of problems. But, you know what? You just stay out of it. You come to me. You've got a problem, you come to me because I'll sort it out for you."

"OK, thanks, Ray. Everyone seems really nice here. Not a problem. Cool. Thanks Ray."

"Good, good. That's what I'm talking about. Like, we are all a family here, we all get along, we all have fun. We go out afterwards. You'll be on my shifts mostly and some of us hang out, too. You know what I mean. I'm an easy-going manager, and I'll help you out, once you get your feet on the ground you'll definitely pick up some regulars, I can tell. You're good. You know, I saw that, that's why I hired you. I've got two rules – one: ask for help. Two: and if you mess around and don't do your job – you're fired. You know what I'm sayin'?"

In that one statement I was informed I was part of a family but I could also be dropped from the family at a moment's notice. In that first conversation a complex contradictory work relation was formed that I had long experienced working as a waitress. I was part of a complex, unstable family and my relationship to it would be intense from the moment it started to the moment it ended. We both start from a defensive position with "I can always quit" and "I can always fire you" being our parameters. For me, this point of contention came sooner than anticipated.

This first experience meeting management was my introduction to a wage and employment relation that can be seen as central to the experience of precarious employment. Numerous empirical studies within management and hospitality studies (along with social psychology and sociology departments) have tried to unpack the unusual wage relations of tipped employees within the service industry, and particularly restaurant servers.

Catherine Curtis et al (2009) attempt to unpack employee motivation (for a management audience) in relation to tipped and non-tipped restaurant employees through a survey study within an established chain restaurant. For both categories of employees working conditions, job security and good wages were all top motivators. The major difference in motivating factors surrounded career development and depth of work. For non-tipped employees, career development and depth of work were motivating factors whereas tipped employees ranked them low. Curtis rightly argues "one speculation given the nature of tipped jobs is that perhaps tipped employees, due to the practice of tipping are much more like subcontractors in that work interest, promotion room and gratitude may pale in comparison to excellent tips" (2009, p. 266).

5.2.3 A semiotic riff: subcontractors

The use of the term 'subcontractors' denotes both an independence from the restaurant and a service offered to the employer. Subcontractors are often brought in to do a job or service that the primary contractor finds more efficient or affordable to hire out instead of maintaining employees with the skillset to implement the job internally. In this case, the restaurant finds it more beneficial to subcontract servers instead of maintaining a staff with this skillset. The servers on contract become a

service not just for their patrons but their employer. The term suggests a contractual meeting of equals whereby an external service is offered that the primary contractor cannot produce.

A subcontractor is not a part of the family that Ray welcomed me into; a subcontractor is extra-familial. Is the waitress subcontractor outside the nuclear family? Is the waitress the mistress that fulfils the needs that the spouse is unable or unwilling to fulfil? Is she the older nanny that comes with years of experience for the overworked family? Or perhaps the young au pair that is in it for a bit of cash and experience before her next stage – she is the cheaper option after all? A waitress is never permanent, but rather there to fulfil a function and move on to service someone or somewhere else. A subcontractor is often a specialist, even if that specialism is low-skilled or basic labour, they focus on one job that is part of a larger project. They fulfil a specific need – for waitresses this could be could be a meal, a chat, a little flirting. As Ray indicates, a waitress can be fired at any moment so while she may *feel* like a part of the family – and a vital one at that – she is not. She is not deemed central to the family, even if the family could not function without her. To make her a part of the family is to admit she is not just valued but invaluable to the running of the household or business. And by making her valued (or even invaluable) you are legitimizing her position and raising her status. By muddying the relationship a waitress has with her place of work, through treating her as extra-familial, I argue her precarious position is intensified. This blurring of personal and professional lines works in parallel to waitress' labour that I will discuss further in the next chapter: to produce an affective, emotional experience. In other words, like waitress' labour works as a reproduction of familial experience, so too does her relationship with her subcontracting status. By intensifying this blurred line and removing professional boundaries, the job feels both more precarious *and* personal. Does a family want to admit they need their mistress? Or their au pair? Does needing them undermine the nuclear family? *Am I not a good enough husband? Am I not a good enough mother? Do we need her or is she just a hiccup in our busy lives that will get back on track?*

So how does the waitress feel in all of this? Are we part of the family? Do we want to be? Curtis et al present a more professional view of the tip and argues it is a negotiated standpoint for the waitress as a subcontractor in that she enters into the

wage relation replacing career development and depth of work for fast, cash-in-hand tips. Their argument falls short because it is based on an assumption that a waitress' transitory relationship to establishments is desired instead of a necessity born out of the precarious working conditions of a wage relation that is precarious and lacks career development. In other words, I would argue that tipped employees reporting being unmotivated by career development is not a result of their own needs but a result of the deskilling and undervaluing of the career outlined in chapter 2. To present the option of career development as a potential motivating factor to a person that is in a career with no development is asking something that is out of their remit. This relates to my own experience of being at loggerheads with my boss and manager from my first day at Crystal Lake. A wage relation was established on terms that were non-negotiable. I was to be a part of the family or I was to leave or be fired; or rather I was to be a mistress to the family's needs and when my needs became too great or their needs lessened I was to be dismissed. A psychological and emotional tension arose from this whereby I was presented an opportunity to be a part of something that is (in idealistic terms) linked to warmth, stability and support but positioned on the peripheral. My role as a waitress was to provide a positive experience to a community that I was to remain on the edge of. For as long as I was there, I was to perform as an emotionally present, positive member of the family. As I will unpack more in the next chapter, I was to make each customer feel like a part of the family during their short dining experience, particularly as this was an informal lower-end restaurant: familiarity was central to the dining experience. As seen in my film (see 22:15), these customers were not just guests in their home but extended family – regulars – that they came to depend on. To establish regulars reduces precariousness in two forms, by guaranteeing an income and by making a case to recognize themselves within the family circle. *You need me in this family, I bring people over for dinner!*

In my time as a waitress, I was to have a triangular wage relation. I would provide customers with a familial experience in exchange for tips and the restaurant management would provide a familial eating atmosphere for me to work for tips in lieu of a living wage. Both would dispose of me when I was no longer needed, the patron at the end of their meal and management when I went outside my subcontracted role within the family.

Before moving further into this wage relation, I must first explain the current tipping wage system in the US and more specifically how it functions in New Jersey.

5.3 Tipping



Figure 14: Still frame from Diner Wars. Waitress counting tips at the end of a shift.

In the previous chapters, I discussed tipping in relationship to the historical development of the tip and my own history of working for tips. This last chapter opened with a story about my own experience of an employer exploiting the tipping wage in order to pay my co-workers and myself an unfair wage. In this chapter I unpack how I confronted an employer abusing the complicated tipping wage system again. As a reminder, a tip, or gratuity, as defined by the US Department of Labor is a discretionary gift given by the patron directly to their waitress for her service.³⁵ This gift exchange remains discretionary and legally optional, but it is socially accepted in American culture that a tip should amount to 15–20% of the final bill. Even though the tip remains optional, a waitress in the US is economically dependent on the tip for her primary source of income. At a federal level, servers are legally exempt from receiving the minimum wage if their tips top up their wage to at least its value, and with the

³⁵ See <https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs15.pdf> for further detail on the US federal legislation on tipping (retrieved 10 July 2017).

exception of a few select states, waitresses receive a substantial amount less than minimum wage from their employer. As Dowling asserts, tipping is an example of how “capital continuously seeks to externalise labour costs” (2007, pp. 16–17). It is through the tipping system that restaurant employers are able to rationalize sub-par wages. She further explains, “it is collusion between employer and customer, where, similar to the service charge, the employer seeks an indirect control over the worker’s performance through asking the customer to evaluate how well the duties are performed” (p. 16). By placing tipping as the primary source of income, the waitress’s wage is not only being outsourced, but management’s duties are also being contracted out. The customer becomes the manager and determines the value of the waitress. Management no longer has the responsibility of evaluating the waitress. While the intentions of this practice may be to motivate the waitress to ‘make the customer happy’ and receive her monetary reward from the patron, in practice, research has shown the value of the tip rarely coordinates with satisfaction levels (Dowling, 2007, p. 16). In my own experience, the majority of my customers followed the pre-determined cultural tipping standards. The few experiences of exceptional tips, that were often accompanied by comments on my extraordinary service, were motivations to continue to extend my labour. Likewise, the experiences I had with low tippers or being stiffed were emotional, personal experiences that negatively affected my labour production.

As I explained in chapter 2, while tipping has always been a part of the American service industry, the transition from the tip being a gift for appreciated service to being the primary form of payment did not occur until the post-war era. Today, for example, in New Jersey the minimum wage for waitresses is over \$5 lower than the state’s minimum wage, at only \$2.13 per hour. This wage has not increased in over thirteen years. Sammi, a New Jersey diner waitress explains:

After making only \$2.13 an hour and all of the tax deductions, this check is \$47.45. They go by our gross sales. They don’t care what you actually made. In other words, if you come in to have dinner and it was a \$100 check, they’re saying we should have made \$15–\$18 on that check, if you leave me \$5, I’m still paying on \$18, regardless (Taylor C., 2009, pp. 97–98).

Waitresses are not just taxed on the wage provided by the employer, but also their tips. The current system in New Jersey forces servers to pay taxes on their gross sales of their shift, not on the amount of tips they actually receive. For each shift the state

expects the waitress to make 15% of her gross sales. If customers decide to tip her less than 15%, she is forced to pay taxes on unearned income. This is further complicated by the fact that the employer determines her taxable income including an assumed amount in tips. Servers are not contractors or independent employers able to declare their own income, but employed and at the mercy of their employer's discretion or system for declaring tips. There is no other job in the US that the state taxes on *assumed* income, not *actual* income. Furthermore, the state has redefined the meaning of tip to be a source of income not a gift. The relationship between the patron, the waitress and the restaurant becomes a unique employer–employee triangular relationship. The patron/employer has an option whether or not to pay their employee/waitress, but the employee/waitress does not have a legal right to demand her taxed earnings. From multiple angles, this relationship is extremely patronizing: the server is at the mercy of the patron's gratitude and not trusted to handle her own taxed finances. The employer has no responsibility of paying a liveable wage but taxes the waitress for one. Many part-time and precarious employees often see this taxing situation in their favour as it allows for large tips to go unnoticed and presents the idea of cash under the table. For more permanent employees that want to present strong finances (to be able to gain a mortgage, rent a nice property, buy a car), this tipping and tax system further complicates the situation because their income is not recognized as stable.

5.3.1 Part 1: Wage discrepancy 'issue raised'

This section reads in line with a scene from *Diner Wars* (see 36:37 – 37:40).

A couple of weeks ago I had only worked one shift (I was away for most of the week). That single shift was a Monday from 3pm–10pm. In the time I worked (I was cut by 8:30³⁶) I made \$9 in tips. So, including my tipping wage from the restaurant (\$1.95ph) my earnings were approximately \$3.59 per hour. I knew my rights from my previous experience of fighting the illegal use of the tipping wage and my own research. I knew the official minimum wage in the state of New Jersey is \$7.25ph. The

³⁶ To be 'cut' from a shift means to be released from your shift early. In some cases they can cut your shift before you even arrive by ringing ahead. Other times you are halfway through your shift and if it is particularly slow they ask if anyone wants to be released early.

tipping wage can only be enforced if the tips received by the waitress bring the hourly wage up to or above \$7.25. I recognized this as an opportunity to test boundaries with my employer and also agitate my workplace. I intended to point out the problem.

Leading up to receiving the paycheck I discussed these facts with my co-workers and said I would ask for the 'top up to minimum wage'. The responses I received were either "Heidi, you are badass!", "Heidi, you're freakin crazy!", "I didn't know that was the law? Are you shitting me?! They owe me fuck loads of money then!", "What do you expect, this is a diner ... the owner is a Greek prick". Needless to say, they all wanted to see what would happen. I was warned that I would be fired, I assured them that I recognized they could and potentially would fire me, but I would happily sue them for my earnings. "We are not slaves and there is no excuse to work on slave wages". I saw I was in a more privileged position than my co-workers and felt I could afford to lose my job more than they could. Some of the other waitresses could also afford to find a different restaurant in the area, but some had police records and would have a harder time finding new employment.

When I received my check for that week's earnings I saw they paid me just under \$6.00. As four waitresses leaned in and watched at the counter, I looked at the check as middle-manager Ray looked back at me with a quizzical face.

"Anything wrong Heidi?"

"Yes, Ray. This says that I made \$25 in tips that Monday, you and I know that nobody makes that kind of money on Monday and I certainly didn't! Remember how awful that Sunday and Monday were?"

"So you won't sign it?"

"I can't sign it, I would be lying to the tax man."

"Hahaha, ok. I'll take it back then."

Ray walked away and as he was going through the swinging kitchen doors he hollered back to me in a moment of condescending and slightly light-hearted defiance, "Ever work at a diner before?!"

"Yes I have Ray ..." He exited and I turn to the waitresses and say under my breath, "And I have sued one as well!" They burst out laughing and we all dispersed.

My previous experience (discussed in section 4.1) of making a formal wage complaint to the Connecticut Department of Labor had provided me with the

knowledge to recognize my bad tips as a legal issue and the strength of conviction to make a case for it. I was keenly aware that my act of defiance was not going to change my income. Unlike that previous experience, this time I was more interested in my colleagues' welfare and rights. I assumed I would be fired for raising the issue but in the process I hoped my co-workers would gain more insight or curiosity into their own rights as workers. I speak more about this experience and their reactions and my feelings in the moment in my film (see 33:15 – 35:39).

Historically speaking, the tip was not always seen as income. Waitresses have been aggressively part of the movement for minimum wage laws since 1910 and arguments over abolishing tipping within the service industry were on par with this advocacy. Cobble (1992) explains that the tipping custom was not standard until the 1940s, and in the early 1900s “a vocal and organized reform movement arose that viewed tipping as “un-American” in its encouragement of social distinctions and class superiority” (p. 41). Ironically, tipping was seen as recognizing class relations of servitude, an old-world relationship many American immigrants were supposedly escaping. For America's European counterparts today tipping is often seen as a perk for somebody going above and beyond their job requirements, while guide books on America explain the customary obliged 15–20% gratuity expected when being served to unknowing tourists.

Other female reformers saw tipping as producing potentially loose morals with male patrons, and in turn, male patrons potentially taking advantage (through sexual harassment) of their power over the livelihood of their waitress. A Chicago waitress union official felt tipping “made it pretty hard for a [waitress] to draw the line – where the line of propriety should be. She knows that the man is going to leave her a dime or a quarter, and ... while she resents things that are said to her ... she hesitates about it because she wants the money” (Cobble, 1992, p. 42). As this union official explains, in order for waitresses to receive tips, they may feel forced to sacrifice their own morals or self-respect to appease the customer. The customer also may take more liberties knowing he holds this power. A report written in 1912 by the Chicago Juvenile Protection entitled *The Girl Employed in Hotels and Restaurants* concluded that waitresses were generally badly treated by the public. The report noted patrons' and employers' preference of pretty girls and the waitresses employed that would give

them prospects outside of the service industry (Owings, 2004, pp. 15–18). The report claimed there was a public perception of waitressing as similar to prostitution and further argued this connected to the public’s poor perception of tipping. In the end it called for abolishing tips and providing a relaxing shelter for the women in between shifts. The few studies that were done in the 1940s and 1950s made similar conclusions and called for abolishing tipping. They saw the tipping structure as lowering the social standing of the job and the waitress (Owings, 2004, pp. 16–18). Beulah Compton, waitress union organizer in the 1940s and 50s, asserted, “tips ... give waitresses no dignity” (p. 57).

Even though I had assumed I would be fired for speaking up, I did not realize it would escalate so quickly and I would have the opportunity to speak to a more senior member of staff (whom I had never met or heard of previous to the conversation). Along with the written autoethnographic pieces below, this experience is also represented in my film (37:40 – 39:48).

5.3.2 Part 2: Wage discrepancy ‘addressed’

So the next day when I came into work (Sunday shift), Ray had me go speak to the accountant, Terry, a middle-aged woman married to a Greek restaurant man. Terry had been doing the books for a couple of diners for nearly 25 years. She also is a manager for two shifts a week. Ray hurriedly and somewhat excitedly sent me into the back office to speak with Terry. I think he was as excited as the waitresses by this drama. Waitresses were waiting to see what would happen. I could feel the gossip buzz around me. The night before I had Christina, a 22-year-old self-proclaimed “white-trash waitress” who wanted to own her own little pizza place one day, ask me about the issue. She was genuinely interested and seemed somewhat motivated by the way I pragmatically stood up to Ray. Christina is an ally; she is young, smart and funny. She also has a life ahead of her so doesn’t take her current job too seriously.

Ready for Terry with my activist hat firmly on, I walked in the back and sat in the office for the next 20 minutes to engage in what was an incredibly fascinating moment in my waitressing career. I was not scared leading up to it because I knew Tony, the Greek owner of whom I was petrified, was not in. It seemed like, for the most part, the management and staff didn’t tell Tony things unless they had to because

everyone was scared of him. I also was not scared because a part of me wanted to be fired. Not just for the experience but because I felt I needed an excuse to get out of what was a shitty job. I could not kid myself, while I was more privileged than most of my co-workers, I was also drowning in student debt and impending costs for immigration visas towards my adopted country (the UK). Better tips would help. Lastly, I had never had the opportunity to have an official 'adult' conversation with a restaurant manager where reasonable discussion was present. Generally, I would get fed up with a job and quit on the spot or not bother to show up for future shifts. Perhaps I could be proven wrong and experience a form of professionalism I always assumed was lacking within this informalized industry.

Terry was very friendly in her tone but really knew how to play the game. I felt like she was testing me. A passive aggressive form of bully, unlike the more barky types I was accustomed to. I felt she assumed I was unintelligent and did not know what I was doing. I ran to the bathroom and jotted down notes on the meeting that I later transformed into a hastily written email to my PhD supervisor. So much to remember!

1. She's tried to trick me out with mentioning unrelated, unnecessary, petty complaints like I did not put my last name on my hours time sheet.

2. She explained in detail the way they break down the tips for the servers. Instead of looking at each server's gross for the night and assuming 10% in tips, they instead do the gross for the night for the whole restaurant and then determine the average tips from this. I explained that currently the people working the back sections of the restaurant are receiving very few customers and are leaving with little to no money, while servers in the front are receiving a lot more customers. There is little rotation happening between the front and back sections and this means a very uneven distribution of customers.

3. It would be too hard on her to determine my tips separately because I would have to report them and my tips would be a different number than everyone else's which would look suspicious to the tax man. I explained, politely, that is not really my problem - the way the system currently works is claiming tips that don't exist and we aren't currently equal so why is our wage breakdown.

4. She tried to claim that currently it's a give and take and in the end I will win because there will be weeks that I make a lot more money and they will still claim the average/minimum amount in tips for us so we still receive that basic wage of \$2 an hour. If I start declaring my taxes there will be weeks I will receive no money because it will come out in taxes and there could even be weeks I would owe money. I said I would be happy with that! I don't think she was expecting my response!

5. Nobody else has complained to her. This was my favourite one! I'm quite proud of my response, 'I cannot speak for the other employees here, but I can say there are a lot of people that do not understand the tipping wage and there are a lot of people that are scared of losing their job.' This is a great point to explain to the other servers about organizing. There is more power in numbers - they are even saying that to me. One lone person will not get what is deserved, but if we went in as a group then we stand a better chance.

6. "If you got that little in tips why don't you leave and get a different job somewhere else. It sounds awful getting that little money!" This comment shocked me. Her logic is not that they need to fix the problem that their servers are making under the legal amount in tips, it was that I should go get another job so they can exploit the next person. I attempted to strategically emphasize that I like the people I work with and I enjoy working for this diner, I just know that when times are slow I still have the right to make minimum wage.³⁷

I went back to working my shift and had a few waitresses ask me what happened in the meeting. I explained to them that it was very civil and friendly and that it was also left ambiguous.

This conversation revealed both the complexity of the tipping system and the abuse of it by restaurant management. Terry flipped between a demand for me to take individual responsibility for my lack of tips to my responsibility towards easing stress or responsibility for management. The conversation began by highlighting my individual problems as an employee, moved to group management, and ended with me as the

³⁷ 15 August 2011, log notes.

problem. *I was not filling in time sheets correctly > tips are looked at communally and not individually* and individualizing tip breakdown would not be beneficial to the team > *I am the only complainant* so if I don't like it *I should leave*. We were in it together except when things were not working, and then it was my fault! For me, the experience felt like a test of my wits and vulnerability. I felt the meeting was not set up to understand my grievances or concerns as an employee and work to remedy them but instead was an opportunity to express that there was no room for my grievances and concerns. There was a system in place that worked for them and if it was not working for the employees, the employees could leave. Before I unpack the notion of locating the problem, by utilizing Ahmed's work, I will first untangle waitress' relationship to the tip.

The last point brought up in the meeting (number 6) heavily relates to waitress' emotional relationship to the tip. Greta Foff Paules (1991) dedicates a chapter in her book *Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a NJ restaurant* to the art of getting and making a tip. She argues that waitresses formulate a view of patrons as material objects or substances that must be processed and extracted of money in order to preserve their own personal feelings. "If the customer is perceived as material that is processed, the goal of this processing is the production or extraction of a finished product: the tip" (p. 34). In other words, a customer becomes an object to 'process' for a tip. This process is one that includes affective emotional labour. If we succeed in unlocking the correct affective response, we receive the tip. By objectifying the customer as an object to process and extract, waitresses are able to remove themselves from the failure of receiving a bad tip. This can reverse the emotions expressed when a waitress receives a bad tip: it is no longer her fault but a bad 'material'.

... [bad tips] are felt to reveal the refractory nature or poor quality of the raw material from which the tip is extracted, produced or fashioned. In less metaphorical terms, a low tip or stiff is thought to reflect the negative qualities and low status of the customer who is too cheap, too poor, too ignorant, or too coarse to leave an appropriate gratuity. (Foff Paules, 35).

According to Foff Paules, the waitress is able to justify her monetary losses in a manner that disassociates her own skills and labour from the actual tip. Instead the bad tip is written-off as having a bad seed at the table. The waitress can put in the labour to

extract the tip from the object but if the object is cheap, rude or poor the tip extracted will always be less than deserved. With so much of a waitress' exerted labour connected to her ability to create an emotional, affective experience it is easy to internalize a bad tip. A tip can feel like a reflection of your own personality.

The tip has multiple symbolic meanings, the most prominent one being the evaluation of the quality of service. Because of this, the waitress must find ways to ensure she does not feel that the quality of her work is being challenged when an individual does not tip her well. Foff Paules argues when a waitress receives pennies as tips she is equally as offended as it is a reminder of another symbolic meaning of the tip: the confirmation of inferiority and servitude (p. 44). She points out that many of the waitresses that she observed would refuse to take the change, and sometimes even throw it back at the customer (pp. 36–37). I personally experienced fellow waitresses at other restaurant I worked hand the money back to the patron and remark, "if this is all you can tip, you must need this more than I do!" Foff Paules registers these moments as times of defiance and resistance by the waitresses. Importantly, in my experience, the only times I saw these confrontational moments between patron and server happened in working-class establishments, such as the diner Foff Paules observes. I never watched a waitress or waiter create a scene with a patron at the high-end restaurants I worked at. Foff Paules' argument that waitresses are emotionally disconnected to the tips they receive does not stand up to the experience of the waitresses she observes, nor does it stand up to the experiences I had as a waitress. The justification for bad tipping, I would argue, reflects waitress' emotional connection to the tip and its relationship to their working abilities. As I will untangle further in the next chapter, waitress' labour is equally grounded in providing an emotional experience. Authentic emotions become entangled with performance; the performance is grounded in being able to read and experience other's emotions. The labour is an emotional one and, in this way, to justify bad tips is an act of self-preservation.

This act of defiance against being seen as a servant can also be connected to class relations: in casual, inexpensive restaurants the patronage is mostly working and middle class, like those who serve them. Cobble notes these class relations in her book on the history of waitress unions in the US, "...in restaurants serving the working-class,

the waitress had much more leeway in her exchange with customers. The equality in social status allowed a greater degree of familiarity” (1992, p. 47). She explains further that it is in the diner space that waitresses take on the maternal or spousal role to the male patrons, a space which often lacks the formalities and politeness found in higher-end establishments. Cobble continues with a quote from patrons and waitresses within working-class establishments throughout the 20th century, “a devoted regular observed: ‘I’ve been coming here for 10 years and I doubt if they’ve ever said ten civil words to me ... they don’t put up with nothing. I get treated here same as I do at home’” (p. 47). This tradition of patron–waitress relations in working-class establishments has continued into the 21st century. A diner waitress throwing her bad tip in the face of a customer or making a scene when stiffed can be seen as an obvious reaction in the informal space she occupies. The maternal/spousal role the waitress encompasses allows her to express her emotional reactions more openly than at a higher-end establishment. She is not going to take degrading comments or tips in ‘her home’. She throws the tips, not because she is defying her role as a servant but to re-establish her role as the matriarch. If the waitress’ job is connected to her maternal abilities, then her act of defiance may even go deeper than class relations, but also be connected to the validity of her feminine labour-power. Terry’s suggestion that others have not complained was an attempt at individualizing my own experience and tapping into an internalized notion that a bad tip is a reflection on a bad performance and not bad restaurant management. My refusal to engage with this led to a follow-up argument that the problem is not the restaurant but the person raising the problem and therefore the problem to be fixed or removed is me.

5.3.3 Part 3: Wage discrepancy ‘resolved’

Fast-forward to Wednesday:

I received a phone call from middle-management Ray:

“Hi Heidi, it’s Ray here from Crystal Lake Diner.”

“Hey Ray, your number didn’t come up, weird ... anyway, what’s up?”

“So I got some bad news. After looking through the accounts and books it looks like things have been pretty slow here this summer and in order to make up for it we are cutting some shifts as we don’t need as many servers on the floor.”

“Oh, yeah?”

"Yeah, so unfortunately, your shifts are being cut as we don't need the extra help on the 5-1 shift over the weekends. I'd love to call you in the fall when things pick up again if that's cool. It's just too slow right now."

"Hmmm ... Ray, be honest, does this have anything to do with my paycheck complaints this past week?"

"Oh, no no no no no! It's honestly because we were looking at the current situation and there are just too many night-shift workers standing around and chatting and messing around because there is not enough to do. Management looked at the books, that's all."

"It just seems odd to me Ray, that as soon as I complain, I get fired."

"Oh, no, I'd like to call you when things pick up."

"Has anybody else been let go because their shifts are expendable?"

(Serious tone) "It would be inappropriate to talk to you about other people's shifts, at this point I cannot tell you who else might be dropped" [Which tells me nobody else has been.]

"Well, I actually just switched shifts with Eileen (new waitress), so she would be doing the Sunday 3-11 and I would be doing the Saturday 3-11. What happens with that, since it's a change of shifts?"

"Oh, I'll let her know when to come in, don't worry about her."

"Hmm ... ok Ray ..."

"Well, I'd like to call you when things pick up in September. Is that cool?"

"Sure Ray, give me a ring."

And there we have it. Heidi loses her job!

As Sara Ahmed expresses in her work as a feminist killjoy, by naming the problem of tipping and wage discrepancy, I became the problem and I was removed.³⁸ My wilful decision to raise an issue made me the issue that needed to be removed.

We sense why willfulness is such a useful charge. Through this charge, feminists become the cause of the problem we cause; almost as if to say, to become feminist is to cause a problem for oneself by making oneself one's own cause. (2017, p. 74).

In many ways, Ahmed's description of the wilful feminist is the crux of the motivation for my research and film. This act of raising an issue was a feminist act that I had anticipated and hoped for after snapping from my previous experience waitressing and

³⁸ Ahmed's book *Living a Feminist Life* is based on her blog feministkilljoys.com. In the blog, along with in her academic work (*The Promise of Happiness, Willful Subjects*), she speaks about how naming the problem makes you the problem. I followed Ahmed's blog throughout the analysis period of my ethnographic fieldwork and found it helped me work through the idea of 'becoming the problem'.

making a wage complaint. Ahmed's work on living a feminist life and the promise of happiness is particularly relevant in understanding how my raising the issue led to my being removed. As she explains in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), there are rules that women must follow in order to maintain the idea of happiness. These rules are grounded in the notion that a woman's happiness must always be considered in relation to others' happiness. *I* cannot be happy unless *your* happiness is considered first. If *you* are happy, then *I* am happy: we are all happy together. Therefore, to present or raise a grievance is to remove the air of happiness. This system of happiness is not balanced because if *you* are not happy, then *I* am not happy and I must work to make you happy so I can be happy. But if I am not happy then there is something wrong with me and I must also fix it to ensure that you can be happy. To announce unhappiness is to bring unhappiness to the group. Of course, as Ahmed points out, the collective joy was not really there because one person was, in fact, unhappy.

Ahmed calls this announcer of unhappiness the 'feminist killjoy'. The complaining miserable feminist trope arises: a feminist can't take a joke, a feminist is a 'Debbie Downer', a feminist is ruining the fun. This belief that the calling out of the problem *is* the problem links back to the concept that a woman's happiness is not her own because she must always relate her happiness to others' happiness. By demanding happiness be disconnected to the ease and comfort of others and for autonomy of our happiness, we are placing a spotlight on the oppression of being happy. We are breaking what Hochschild (2003) calls 'feeling rules'; these are the rules of what we *should* feel versus what we *may* feel (p. 81). Hochschild explains further that our ability to decipher what we *should* feel is built on levels of knowledge including the person, the situation and history. I was being fired from a job where the core skillset is the ability to respond to the social situational; to create an atmosphere of safe, normalized happiness. Hochschild even provides the example of the waitress of the commodification of this normalized, socialized happiness, "such commercialized niceness is enormously important as a form of needed reassurance that in the midst of many strangers we are safely out of harm's way" (1983, pp. 83–84). On my first day of work I was told that I was part of a family and my social situational experience told me that I therefore *should* feel safe, nurtured and communal. But, on the same day, I was also shown the repercussions of not conforming to the family. The oppressive

patriarch scolded me and I was reminded that this family dynamic was one teetering on dysfunction. It relied on traditional patriarchal fear tactics: the fear of being reprimanded, the fear of verbal violence and rage, and the fear of being removed from the family. The responsibility of feelings of safety and nurturing were my job, not my bosses. I was to provide an atmosphere to my customers and to my co-workers that I was content with the family dynamics. My issue raising was revealing cracks in the system and leaving the family vulnerable. I was ruining the atmosphere by admitting the atmosphere was rotten.

There is a substantial history of feminists killing the blissful ignorance of a culture, of the process of becoming a feminist and seeing, feeling, internalizing and uttering the injustices as an act of rebellion (Ahmed, 2010, p. 60). My decision to speak of the problems, to challenge the status and refuse to smile for the restaurant family was a feminist act. Through challenging this wage disparity, I was refusing the familial relations discussed earlier in this chapter and I was demanding emotional, affective labour be seen to have monetary value. Equally, the inability to un-see the injustices and the problems was also a part of living a feminist life. Hochschild highlights the effects of new or changing ideologies on feeling rules. She points to the internal tensions where new ideologies arise but histories are residual. To be a feminist, to see oppressive forces and to feel the impact it has on my being, is not comfortable. To understand the psychological warfare and tactics of management at the diner does not make it feel less upsetting. In many ways I feel doubly upset: I hold histories that make me fearful of male power and authority that upset me, and I become upset that I am upset by this situation. I know I *shouldn't* let being fired upset me but I still cry. My act of defiance empowers me but it is exhausting and in those moments it is easy to think of how ignorance is bliss. But, as Ahmed and many feminists in a long genealogy point out, living a feminist life is not about a desire to be unhappy, but is rather to seek authentic happiness through refusing systems that cause unhappiness (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 263–264). The process of becoming a problem through naming a problem is a process of refusal; in particular, it is the refusal to present happiness in order to keep an air of happiness for others. Through complaining, and by the expression of unhappiness, I was putting a dent in the cyclical happiness machine. “It is simply that feminism by refusing to go along with public displays of happiness can participate in

the widening of horizons in which it is possible to find things” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 69). I am not sure what, if any, the outcomes of my act of defiance were because I never set foot in that diner again (it burned down a year later). My irrational fear of seeing my former boss, of breaking social codes, and of failing as a good waitress partly kept me away. I am not sure if my act of defiance, of naming the problem, only made me the problem so when I was removed things could continue as they had done. I do not know if it struck enough of a chord with co-workers that people uttered their own acts of defiance, or perhaps sought to remove themselves from the space. In the next diner I waitressed, I did not rabble-rouse so explicitly; perhaps I conformed or perhaps I just changed tactics or perhaps I needed more time to shed the residual histories that were at odds with my wilfulness.

5.4 Conclusion

So how does all of this relate to the icon? How does this experience of being fired play into the icon? In this chapter I set out to unpack how the material conditions of diner waitressing I experienced relate to the overall iconography of the diner waitress. More specifically, I looked at how managerial control played out in a space where our primary income as waitresses is through tips from customers. I set the scene of my working conditions through an autoethnographic glimpse into the physicality and pace of the job along with a description of the space including the people I am likely to encounter and work with. From my autoethnography followed the story of the first diner I worked and was fired from while conducting fieldwork. In my first day on the job, I experienced two forms of managerial control that set a standard throughout my waitressing experience. The first was the owner of the diner’s dismissal of my attempt at the basic uniform. I argued his unhappiness with my uniform choice not only took away my individualism and identity as progressive or political, it also forced me to further integrate and connect to my co-workers and better perform the image of the diner waitress. My act of defiance by wearing ‘trendy’ skinny jeans was an act of defiance against the iconography of the diner waitress. My action, even if unintended, brought to light the more nuanced signifiers of what is the diner waitress that my semiotic analysis in chapter 3 was unable to provide. As Entwistle argues through Bourdieu:

The structuralist method; in seeking to find the relations between elements in a structure, put a distance between the theorist and the subjects under investigation, since semiotic analysis can be done in the armchair or office and does not require entering the field of action itself. (Entwistle, 2015, p. 69).

By including an analysis of my own ethnographic experience of a challenge to my clothing, I am able to get closer to what the image of the American diner waitress is and how it can be potentially challenged.

The second element of managerial control came through in a conversation with a young manager who was trying to make me feel 'at home'. This conversation exposed a complex relationship between the emotional labour of our job, the familial and often unprofessional dynamics of working relationships, and waitress' precarious position. How does this familial relationship put forward by Ray merge with servers' working conditions and wage relations? Ray's presentation of the 'family' extends the image of the diner waitress I set out in chapters 2 and 3 of the girlfriend/wife and mother in relation to customers to include relationship with the diner as a whole.

With the image of the subcontracted girlfriend/wife/mother in mind, the second half of this chapter focused on my experience of challenging the tipping wage and subsequently being fired. I believe through pushing against the wage problems at my diner, the iconographic image of the diner waitress was further revealed. It was through becoming the problem I recognized what being a waitress embodies and what it does not. As will be discussed more in the next chapter, the good woman does not complain, she sacrifices because she is a mother, a girlfriend and a wife first. Her primary happiness is through serving others, through being a part of a happy atmosphere, to create a safe space to serve. Her wage relations are a secondary motivation, a reminder of her success and value added to the atmosphere, and, therefore, bad tips are a personal problem not a family problem. The image of the diner waitress is an image of a woman confident in her station and who does not seek to push beyond it. The job does not have potential for career progress through titles or wage increases, rather wages go up through better stations and more regulars. To receive a better station a waitress must embody the image of the waitress, she must be a mother or a sexy girlfriend, and she must play to the rules and not object to her bad station. For example, having a bad station in the far corner of the diner meant I

was not sat tables and therefore was refused an income. While Foff Paules argues waitresses objectify their customers in order to remove self-blame when they receive a bad tip, I argue a good waitress would see this as a personal failure and to improve is to sell your image better. This includes embodying the girlfriend role, flirting with the managers appropriately, wearing the right polyester flared pants, and supplying a familial banter that does not question the structures that may have brought about the poor pay. The image of the diner waitress is one that is hard done by but not one that will confront this through demanding changes of her working conditions. It is this image that I challenged through the subtlety of my jeans and boots to the more direct action of confronting management on unfair wages.

6 Immaterial labour/emotional labour

The long and continual process of representing the working class did not have its history in the re-presentation of an original, of a real; yet the continual re-presentation of representations, which some theorists would identify as a process of reiteration (where representations continually reference themselves through daily reproduction) does have real effects in the response that people make to them. Representations, however, as this study shows, are not straightforwardly reproduced but are resisted and transfigured in their daily enactment. (Skeggs, 1997, pp. 5–6)

This quote, from the introduction of Skeggs' *Formation of Class and Gender* is intended to set a tone for this chapter. As can be seen in my film and will be discussed in this chapter, the women I worked with at both diners were actively part of the formation of their identity through both reiterating the reproduced images of their labour and resisting and transfiguring those images. My attempt, through autoethnography, to understand how this process of reiteration plays into the labour of waitresses, is one that is still an outsider gazing inwardly into the world of waitressing. As expressed throughout previous chapters (see chapters 1 and 4), my educated, middle-class background is present throughout my fieldwork and research. This means that while I also resisted and transfigured the representation of the diner waitress, my engagement with it was and is different from many of my co-workers. For many of them, the struggles around identity, including femininity and feminine labour-power, are grounded in their experiences as working-class women. The ways in which they re-produced, resisted, and transfigured the representations of their labour and identities are unique to these experiences and this chapter seeks to understand that relationship.

While chapter 5 predominately focused on my experience of being hired and fired at Crystal Lake Diner, this chapter primarily focuses on my co-workers from the second diner I worked, Cherry Hill Diner, and that are seen in my film. In this chapter I will focus on some of the main characters of my film (Ellen, Debbie and myself) to discuss how we embody the iconography of the diner waitress and how that plays out in our labour. Before I embark on analysing my film and the second diner I worked, I return to another conversation with Ray, the assistant manager from Crystal Lake Diner that I discussed in chapter 5, who welcomed me to the diner 'family'. In this autoethnographic piece I explore my own experience of internalizing affective,

emotional labour through Ray's advice. This advice was provided about a month into my fieldwork. In it, Ray tries to educate me on how I could better perform in order to receive better tips from my customers. This advice links closely with the section of my film where my former night shift manager and his older Greek friends (who also managed local diners) talk to my camera operator, Erin Taylor Kennedy, and myself (see 25:05). I will then move into how Ellen, a lifer waitress that I worked with at Cherry Hill Diner, embodies the maternal sacrificial role in order to maximize tips. This segues into a semiotic analysis of 'catfight' in relation to co-worker dynamics at the diner. This analysis links to a section of my film called 'The Drug Story' (see 18:57) about a co-worker that struggled with heroin and prescription pain medication. This co-worker overdosed at work in the two months between me working at the restaurant and returning to film interviews. Lastly, I will go back to the title of my film, *Diner Wars*, to unpack how Debbie's pitch for a reality series encompasses the themes raised in this chapter.

While the majority of this chapter is dedicated to my co-workers' relationship to embodying feminine labour-powers, the following autoethnographic piece and the scene with the Greek regulars and my former manager in my film, reveal how I internalized feminine labour-power and embodied the icon.

6.1 Become the waitress

I got stiffed, again. Only three tables in two hours and one of them stiffed me out of a tip. With five bucks in my apron (four of which I would have to tip out to the busboys) I had made one dollar in three hours. Adding in the \$2.15 an hour I received as a wage my grand total was \$7.45 in three hours of work. Having been out of the waitressing game for over five years I admit I was rusty. But the lack of customers being sent my way, and the few I had being the less desirable types (teenagers!), I headed to the floor manager, Ray, to make my complaint heard. I may have forgotten how to call some orders to cooks but I had not forgotten how to get the ear of the floor manager to ensure they knew I was not getting my fair share of tables or tips. I also just needed to moan.

I marched over to Ray as the front door still swung from my cheapskate customers leaving and blurted out for nearby waitresses to hear "the fuckers stiffed

me! I've made like zero bucks tonight, Ray. The dining room stations suck". From the day I was hired Ray saw me as both his new friend and his little project. He was going to make a good waitress of me yet, and here was his opportunity! He began with a gentle coddle of my stirred emotions and moved quickly towards suggestions of betterment. It was, after all, my fault that I had made no money: not the lack of customers, bad seating arrangements, cheap customers, or lack of wages. It was my ability to provide the right experience. The diner experience.

"It's a'ight Heidi, don't stress. I am sure you'll get the hang of it and start pulling in regulars. That's the key, ya know? Regulars. You've been away too long, you got too polite and all. It's a diner after all. Don't be so formal. You gotta be who they want you to be ..." I went to interject that my complaint was rooted in my lack of customers not my abilities as a waitress but Ray was already off on a tangent.

"Man, Heidi, I used to get some crazy tips here. I had these regular gay guys that came in. I'm not gay or anything, but I don't have anything against them, you know? Anyway, gay guys like me, they are always hittin' on me and shit so I like totally played to it. I was all like (Ray then began to impersonate a camp gay man with the classic limp wrist stereotype) and so they would come in every week and tip me like \$20. It all went to shit when I slipped and mentioned my girlfriend once. But, the trick is Heidi, you gotta be who they need you to be and you gotta get friendly with them. You're a pretty girl and you're smart too. You're too smart for most these losers working here, we gotta stick together Heidi. If you get some regulars then before you know it you'll be in section one or two (the coveted front booth window sections) and raking it in. But you gotta work it, girl."

Here is where the trick lay: use my womanly charms and hook some people to make sure they come back for more, then I can get a front row station and 'rake it in' – except my chances of hooking customers were extremely minimized by my lack of customers! "Either way," I told myself "heed his advice, become the waitress."

The story above about Ray's advice to me was an honest attempt at teaching me how to perform my labour. He recognized the skillset required to be successful at waitressing was to perform and reproduce the needs of the customers. The performance he requested out of me was one grounded in my youth and sexuality. In order to become a successful waitress I needed to embody the image my customers

reflected on to me. It was not enough for me to *be* pretty, I had to *perform* pretty. Ray used his own experience of performing something he was not (a gay man) in order to gain regulars and tips as an example to me, perhaps as a way of informing me that I did not have to *be* the waitress, I just had to *perform* her. I did heed Ray's advice, and I did begin to flirt more, to present the sexy side of myself to my customers and to provide them with an experience. Embodying the image of the sexy, young waitress, I gained more tips and I even gained regulars. Ray's advice was given to me at the beginning of my fieldwork when I was rusty at waitressing. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I want to present this story in juxtaposition to the scene in my film with the Greek regulars and my Greek manager (see 25:05). This scene was at the end of my fieldwork when I was no longer waitressing but had returned to interview my former co-workers.



Figure 15: Still frame from Diner Wars. Greek regular offering a wad of \$100 bills to my camera operator

In the scene Erin, who was also an experienced waitress, and myself are talking to a group of older Greek men that were sitting at the counter drinking coffee and keeping their manager friend company on his night shift. This scene continually makes me uncomfortable to watch as I recall the feelings I had when I was attempting to keep up with the 'banter' of these men. I could not fully understand them because of their thick accents and their move between speaking in Greek and English. My response to

their sexual harassment was an awkward attempt to reaffirm my intelligence through my status as an academic. They immediately dismissed my assertion and offered to 'take care of me'. The scene concludes with one man exerting his power through presenting a wad of \$100 bills to Erin and propositioning her. He laughs and his friends laugh. We laugh awkwardly.

These men did not see us as professionals or equals: they saw us as women to be bought. Was this a direct reflection of his response to our previous positions as waitresses? Would this have felt less inappropriate if we were in our waitressing uniforms? Did I not stand up for Erin and myself because I felt confused by my role as a waitress or academic? Is their harassment an inescapable workplace hazard that cannot be prevented? In the next section I argue Ellen's role as the sacrificial maternal waitress is a strategy that both ensures a steady income and impedes her as she internalizes this role to her own financial detriment. Perhaps, it is fair to say, my internalization of the sexy waitress did the same thing. I had experienced the monetary reward of laughing along to men's 'banter' when I waitressed. That is not to say it was Erin's or my fault that these men sexually harassed us. But, rather, that we had internalized this form of harassment and learned how to laugh along or respond with banter which, while sometimes having a monetary reward, in many cases led to our own detriment.

In the next section, I build on my discussion of Berlant's concept of sentimental love plot and waitress' relationship to it (see section 2.3) in order to dig deeper into the advantages and disadvantages of performing feminine labour-power. More specifically, I unpack sacrifice as point of tension within the image of the American diner waitress that can both exploit and be exploited by waitresses. To do this, I look towards Italian radical feminists work from the 1970s, specifically Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati. The following section reads in line with *Diner Wars* (see 14:53 – 18:50).

6.2 Ellen and sacrifice



Figure 16: Still frame from Diner Wars. Cutaway of Ellen while I speak about her sacrifice.

At the Cherry Hill Diner I am one of the few workers with my own car. Most of the workers rely on public transport, or friends and family dropping and picking them up from work. The closest bus stop to the diner is nearly a mile down the road across from the Cherry Hill Mall. The overnight shift is particularly stressful. Waitresses shifts end between 4–5am and must either walk down the road and wait for the sporadic bus or wake up a member of the family to come and pick them up. A lot of negotiating happens between the waitresses with and without cars for rides.

Ellen often gives \$10 to anyone who will bring her home to Camden. After an 8–10-hour shift where she has made \$70–\$120, this is a large portion of her earnings. The few taxi companies in the region charge a minimum of \$20 to drive the three to five miles to Camden, as it is considered an undesirable location. Nearing 50 years old, Ellen is a lifer. Short, with grey stringy hair pulled back in a ponytail, Ellen does not wear make-up or much jewellery. Her teeth represent America's lack of a public health system with numerous missing or rotting away. She is a supportive and kind-hearted person who takes her job seriously and personally. When New Jersey had a fluke Nor'easter in October, Ellen walked three miles in the snow, sleet and high winds to get to work two hours early because the bosses called her in and as she explained:

“I knew girls wouldn’t show up and use the weather as an excuse and they know who to call when they need help. They know I am reliable and I am a good waitress. I am a good waitress. I have never called out, (turning to another waitress) have I Doreen? Have I? That’s right, I am a good waitress and they needed me. I’m working a double shift tonight because other waitresses don’t care, do they?”

Ellen commends herself on her sacrifice. On another occasion I asked her how many hours she works in the week. She told me sixty hours and when I asked if she gets paid overtime for the extra twenty hours she replied:

“Oh no, I don’t ever clock in after forty hours. It’s not worth it and they need me.”

I asked her what she meant, and why she would not take her overtime and she brushed it off further, saying:

“The bosses know who to call when they need a waitress. I’ve been here for years and they can rely on me. They need me and I feel bad, they can’t afford to pay me overtime.”

I was astonished to hear this. Ellen was sacrificing her wage for a man that owns multiple diners and assumedly has a net worth over a million dollars.

Ellen, like many other lifers, would explain that they could not miss work or change shifts because of their regulars (i.e. regular customers). While this was connected to the steady monetary income that having regulars creates, there was also a sense of emotional responsibility to their clients. For example, in my film, while rolling silverware Ellen explains to me that she has gotten balloons for one of her regular’s birthdays (see 31:10 – 32:00). She proudly explains that they invited her to their birthday party in Philadelphia but she had to work that night. She calls these regulars ‘my boys’ in a maternal voice and boasts how they take care of her through gifting her such things as makeovers and photo-shoots. Waitresses often said things like “they come here for me, I cannot disappoint them” or tell stories of their regulars calling managers if their regular waitress had been out to check if she was in and on her general health. Ellen felt an equal level of responsibility for her regulars as for her bosses. So much so she was willing to sacrifice hours of her day walking to work in order to be there in time for her first regular.

Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa’s 1978 ‘manifesta’ of radical Italian feminism that was at the forefront of the wages for housework movement, aptly titled *The Work of*

Love, breaks down the role of the domestic worker and the nuclear family. She ultimately reveals the destructive and exploitative system that is propped up through what Berlant (2008) later called a 'culture of sentimentality'. While many of Dalla Costa's thoughts are based on 1970s Italian society, where women were predominately outside the waged workforce, and are therefore outdated in today's waged workforce, there are still the underlying themes of the exploitation of love and sacrifice that resonate today. This is particularly true in relation to waged service work and affective labour. As Dalla Costa explains of the ideal wife and houseworker:

The good woman, we could say, is the woman that works, that gives without reserve, without limits, without asking for anything in exchange beyond her own survival, who keeps her part of the love pact which she has agreed to until the very end. It is the woman, obviously, who must not even consider the possibility of seeing her domestic work as work per se, but who must rather unconditionally assume it to be an expression of love. (Dalla Costa G. F., 2008, p. 88).

What Dalla Costa points to is the sacrificial role a woman is expected to take if she is to consider herself a 'good' member of society. This 'good' citizen is not a shadow or invisible part of the workforce, but an esteemed one that is propped up through feelings of devotion and sacrifice.

Dalla Costa argues that women's movement to the paid workforce is equally state sponsored and plays on the sentimental, sacrificial love plot that has been engrained into women since birth. Furthermore, women's skills as a sacrificial domestic worker translate to their waged work:

... in the extra-domestic job as well, she will be more highly appreciated the more she carries the load of performing domestic work without pay, this time not for the husband but for the man with whom she works. Here too a firm identification of herself as a house worker will be the best guarantee of a good external worker. (Dalla Costa G. F., 2008, p. 94).

In other words, it is not only women's emotional, feminine labour-powers that translate to the paid workforce but also our ability to be exploited. The form of sacrifice that Dalla Costa speaks of is not affective labour in that it is not an *active*, but a *passive* form of labour. Dalla Costa is speaking about the internalized notion of sacrifice to be a good woman and this internalization is passive in its use. I argue that while sacrifice in the form of internalizing our sacrificial role is passive, sacrifice can *also* be a form of affective labour in that it can be emphasized or exploited in the

market as a labour-power. *The act of sacrifice* can further one's career. These differences are important when considering what waitress' labour is and how they are exploited by and exploit their feminine-labour-powers. A waitress can be exploited through her internalized understanding of self-sacrifice, but equally a waitress can 'play martyr' to her customers by emphasizing the sacrifices she must make as a good woman in order to serve them. These sacrifices often play on the same sentimental narratives based on nuclear families and duties of women. She may emphasize the sacrifices she must endure like time with her children or her relationships in order to further serve her patrons. On the other hand, the act of sacrificing wages and time, due to women's socialized feminine 'habits' of giving up without demanding or expecting something in return, and then furthermore, having a sense of self in this act, is not affective labour but an exploitation of labour. In my experience waitressing, I often felt my managers attempting to tug on my sentimental heartstrings in order to work later or for less. The conversation I had with management that led to my firing at Crystal Lake Diner is an example of this. As explained in the previous chapter, I was brought into a back office to have a patronizing conversation that was meant to intimidate and make me feel guilty for demanding a fair wage. Likewise, Ellen's relationship with management at the diner is one where management responds to her internalized notions of sacrifice through allowing her to work for free, or as Dalla Costa calls it, a purposeful exploitation of internalized understandings of self-sacrifice. She argues that the state produces this internalized understanding of self in women and then aims to exploit it in the market.

Fellow Italian radical feminist Leopoldina Fortunati (1995), whom I discussed in chapter 3, takes the position that men *consume* what she deems non-material use-values like love while women *produce* these use-values. With this point, Fortunati brings in a third view of sacrifice; that it is not a labour-power or a commodity:

Non-material use-values are those goods produced within the housework process which have no material basis: affection, sexuality, companionship, "love," and the like. These goods satisfy the individual's non-material needs ... But these non-material use-values are not commodities which have real or true exchange-values; they have no "free" market. They are intermediate moments within the process of commodity (labor-power) production, they are use-values for value. (Fortunati, 1995, p. 74).

Fortunati argues sacrifice is a use-value in order to produce another commodity, labour-power. It is the substance that is produced out of sacrifice that is the labour-power and the commodity. In other words, sacrifice is one of many tools that function to reproduce workers in the same way that a hammer is a tool used to produce an object. While Fortunati's argument possesses some truth, in that sacrifice is used to produce or reproduce workers, I believe her argument can be taken further. Sacrifice is an internalized part of women's psyche. This internalization of working for the sake of love, and its connection to one's understanding of the self as a citizen, feeds into the exploitation of citizens in a capitalist state. This internalized sense of sacrifice is a non-material use-value, but, when the individual becomes aware of their internalized sense of love and sacrifice it ceases to be only a use-value: it becomes an immaterial commodity. Sacrifice is both a non-material use-value and a labour-power that is affective. In the non-waged housework that Dalla Costa and Fortunati critique, sacrifice is a tool that has the use-value to exploit women to reproduce labour for free. When women recognize sacrifice has a use-value that can be exploited and place the skills they have acquired through socialization onto the market they are transforming sacrifice into this immaterial affective commodity. This process initially *appears* empowering, but as I have explained previously in chapter 3, new ideas and meaning emerge when things are placed on the market. As will be explored below, this supposed empowerment through recognition of the value of sacrifice can be lost when the commodity enters into conversations with other commodities in the market.

Skeggs (1997) warns of the limits of sacrifice and other distinctly feminine forms of labour. She does this through adapting Bourdieu's metaphors for forms of capital to incorporate issues of gender and sexuality as unique forms of cultural capital, particularly when intersected with working-class culture.

Femininity ... can be seen as a form of cultural capital. It is the discursive position available through gender, sexuality, region, age and race which ensure that it will be taken up (and resisted) in different ways ... the ability to capitalize on femininity is restricted. It provides only restricted access to potential forms of power. (Skeggs, 1997, p. 10).

Through naming femininity as a form of cultural capital, Skeggs presents the limits of the commodity. As I have outlined in chapter 2, femininity is built on 19th century

notions of womanhood that were exclusive to middle- and upper-class women.³⁹ Femininity was never intended to have high value because, at its core, femininity is a position opposing masculinity: a position of power. Femininity encompasses the traits that sit outside capitalism: softness, sacrifice, niceness, and sensitivity are all in opposition to the hardness, aggression, self-centeredness, and rationalism that capitalism thrives on. Femininity is the pedestal position of non-waged work: an image of a woman untouched by the harshness of the world. Similarly to the women in Skegg's study and the history I reviewed in chapter 2, the women in my research are aware of the value of their feminine labour-power along with its limitations. But, unlike the women in Skeggs' study that have their skills and knowledge valorised through formalized vocational training to become care-workers, my co-workers are not provided formal training. Instead they must invest in their skills in other ways such as building a clientele of regular customers or comparing their own work and self with their co-workers.

Perhaps it is this lack of formalized recognition of forms of labour that adds to tensions and 'cattiness'. Skeggs notes the formalization of the skills of care-work are a way of putting into doubt women's sense of security – that their previous way of doing things may be wrong. This can be particularly problematic because what are correct and incorrect forms of care-work can be deeply embedded in class judgements. For the diner waitresses I worked with, this lack of formal training and the particular community we served meant the feminine labour skills required from us were intertwined with a particularly working-class identity. In this situation, my educated, middle-class background meant that I lacked the correct skills for the job. While I had feminine skills, they were too middle class. As presented in my earlier autoethnographic piece (see section 4.4.3), when I came back to waitressing I was rusty and out of touch with South Jersey culture. I was too formal and polite. My

³⁹ As presented in chapter 2.2, in the early 20th century, through accessibility to cheaper beauty products and fashion, working-class women could present aspects of femininity. The nuanced relationship between presenting or putting on the mask of femininity and the ability to be feminine continued to limit the opportunities of working-class women to capitalize on femininity. With that said, it was through recognizing the unique skills of femininity that waitresses in the early 20th century were able to unionize. But, as Skeggs points out, "femininity brings with it little social, political and economic worth. It is not a strong asset to trade and capitalize upon" (1997, pp. 10–11).

accent was off key and my ability to 'shoot the shit' had drastically reduced after years of living abroad. I was re-educated by my manager and my co-workers. Being 'sophisticated' made me interesting and liked but it was not going to get me regulars or good tips. I needed to put on the mask of a regional, working-class woman to succeed. I needed to present myself in an image that would sell my feminine labour more. So while there was no formal training on how to be a diner waitress, there were still investments, performances and recognitions that took place on an informal level (informality being particularly pertinent to an ultimately informal culture and career) to skill-up on being the best diner waitress. Lifers like Ellen built these skills through a process of presenting and (re)presenting images of their selves and distinct working-class forms of femininity. This does cause a complication or struggle around the blurred line of the performance of self and the subject. As Skeggs aptly argues, "the caring subject is constructed by the conflation of caring *for* with caring *about*, in which the practices of caring become inseparable from the personal dispositions" (1997, p. 56). In the next autoethnographic piece I explore this 'caring subject' through another conversation with Ellen, my sacrificing co-worker.

6.2.1 Car ride with Ellen

I drove Ellen home once. Another waitress, who had only started working two weeks earlier, had promised Ellen a ride home at the beginning of the night shift. Ellen began work at 3pm and was working till 5am. On top of the 14 hours she was working, it was daylight savings, which added an extra hour of unpaid labour to our shift. The new waitress had her husband pick her up at 3:30am and claimed they did not realize it was daylight savings so thought it was 4:30am. To all of our astonishment the manager let her leave an hour and a half early and without Ellen. Ellen, after her long double shift was understandably emotional about this. She was near tears in her anger and stomping around the floor telling anyone that would listen (which was the few other waitresses and one regular sitting at the counter). I held out offering to give her a ride; partly because I wanted to see how the other waitresses that she was closer with would support her and partly because I was hesitant about driving to Camden alone at night. I did not hold out for long and I offered her a ride. She first tried to sacrifice part of the ride to show her gratitude. "You can just drop me off on Rt 130 and I'll walk from

there". Then she attempted to offer me money "I can give you \$10". I refused both of these and insisted that I would drive her home, it was not a big deal or very out of my way, and the gas money is minimal so do not worry about it. I did not tell her that I was afraid of Camden or nervous about the journey home alone after I dropped her off. I was more embarrassed than her by my middle-class naivety. She made reassuring comments to me about not being 'deep in Camden' and told me to drive through the traffic lights at this hour.

During the car journey to her home she explained that she has a car but it broke down. She is saving up the \$300 to fix it. She also spoke about the cats she feeds and her nieces and nephews that she supports. I had heard about these cats from another waitress, Debbie, the night before. Debbie, a good friend of Ellen's, was complaining that Ellen was wasting her money on "those damn stray cats" and, if she was going to waste that money, at least go to a dollar store and buy the food in bulk instead of wasting money at the convenient store for overpriced cat food. She was actually spending \$5.00 per night on cat food for feral cats. Beyond the feral cats that greet her each night, she was saving up so her niece could go on a special field trip to Washington DC because she won an essay contest. She often told me about her smart nieces and nephews and their achievements. She would brag to customers that her money was going to helping to support these bright kids and that she wanted to be a part of their accomplishments. This sacrifice was adding to a larger problem in her life. The kids, who had parents that had jobs that could support them, did not need their aunt's money or presents: but Ellen needed a car.

Ellen's personal narrative was constructed around her sacrifice to both her work and her family. While she was not taking on sexual aspects of femininity, she qualified her womanhood through her maternalistic self-sacrifice to her bosses, her customers, and her extended family. Her bragging to her customers about supporting her smart niece was an honourable way of making tips. She did not want to be seen as a charity case that needed money for a car, she wanted to show she is more and does more with the money her customers give her. It was only in those exhausted moments with no ride home or after being stiffed on a table she ran in circles for that her anxiety and fear of bills, car repairs, and food on the table came out. This was often reserved for her co-workers or the most intimate regulars that she considered friends. I argue

Ellen's personal narrative of sacrifice is grounded in a sentimental canonization of older waitresses and their labour produced and (re)produced by the iconography of American diner waitresses.

As referenced in chapter 2, a strong example of this sentimental canonization of waitresses is in Candacy A. Taylor's book *Counter Culture: The American Coffee Shop Waitress*. Taylor travels the US taking photographs of life-long diner waitresses, 'lifers', glorifying their hard work and claiming them as unsung heroes of the US. While she attempts to move away from nostalgia for diners, she is often trapped in purifying the life-long, career waitress as a profession becoming extinct with the ageing women that carry the role. Taylor romanticizes these aged waitresses, emphasizing the 'genuineness' of their kindness and love:

Their patience and love of people is genuine; it's not something they can fake for tips, because saccharine sentiment is often transparent. They can almost always find a warm spot in their heart for strangers. It's innate. Average, everyday servers aren't in the same league as the waitresses in this book. These women are the cream of the crop. (Taylor, 5).

This desire to place lifers in a higher esteem and to see genuineness as a scale to measure the quality and skills of a worker is at the heart of Hochschild's concept of emotional labour. Hochschild argues that in a capitalist culture, where the corporate world has seized our emotions as a form value and opportunity for profit, we hold 'genuineness' in a higher esteem:

[A]s a culture, we have begun to place an unprecedented value on spontaneous, "natural" feeling. We are intrigued by the unmanaged heart and what it can tell us. The more our activities as individual emotion managers are managed by organizations, the more we tend to celebrate the life of unmanaged feeling. (2003, p. 190).

For Taylor, the life-long diner waitresses encapsulate the success of managing emotions in a commercialized form. These lifers achieve the corporate guidebook's goal of the customers receiving a 'sincere' smile from their employee. Ironically the waitresses Taylor interviewed felt the 'corporatization' of restaurants and diners was making them more reserved and formal and, in turn, losing the authenticity that corporate manuals aspire for in their workers.

Taylor's romanticizing of such waitresses is ingrained in the need for recognition of their feminine skills in Berlant's liberal sentimental politics. As I

discussed in chapters 2 and 3, Berlant argues the role of sentimentality in women's culture in the US is central to sustaining the simplified feminine fantasy. Furthermore, the use of sentimentality in liberal politics is a safe capitalist mode for change based on a central idea that white middle-class men are the norm, and all other people belong to sub-groups. Through sentimental politics, marginalized groups are able to identify themselves in relation to the norm. Women are simplified to a basic love plot where their sense of self becomes wrapped up in their emotional labour and sacrificial relationships with others:

The sentimental bargain of femininity is, after all, that the emotional service economy serves both intimates and the woman herself, who receives her own value back not only in the labour of recognition she performs but in the sensual spectacle of its impacts. (Berlant L , 2008, p. 19).

The desire to be loved is achieved through emotional labour. In other words, in the servicing of love for others the waitress receives recognition. Waitresses' daily sacrificial gift of emotional labour and our emphasis on our relationships with our customers is connected to our desire to fulfil the sentimental love plot.

Another example of Ellen's use of sacrifice as a tool is when I requested extended time off from work. I thought there was a chance I would lose my job and have to come back and beg when I returned. Instead, the bosses gave me the time off and waitresses offered to cover my shifts while I was away. Ellen was the waitress that informed me she was taking two of my shifts while I would be gone. She told me it was because I was a good waitress and she wanted to see me stick around so she was willing to increase her hours for a few weeks for me. She emphasized:

"Hurry back though, these hours are going be crazy. I am doing it so you can come back though. Tony needs people to cover the shifts so of course they came to me. They like you, I heard them talking about you. You're a good waitress."

Her reassurance and compliments were genuinely endearing but I also felt the pressure of her sacrifice. She did not let it go that she would be doing this *for me*. I was an exception that she was sacrificing 30 hours of her life for and I needed to remember that when she needed my help. I could sense that I owed her one and this sacrifice could potentially haunt me later.

I was not the only person that heard the martyrdom of Ellen. On multiple occasions I would hear waitresses mock Ellen after a rant about how much work she

does for the diner and other waitresses. Laura, the overnight waitress whom I spent most of my time with, would often call out Ellen and other waitresses on their complaints or professing statements. *"You're so full of shit. Whatever, Ellen. You don't do anything more than anyone else."* This would often be followed by Ellen snapping back, shrugging with a finalized 'whatever' and walked away. Laura would continue ranting, *"I am so sick of hearing this bullshit. Everyday it's bullshit. It's a bunch of winey bitches up in here"*. Laura's sentiments were common amongst waitresses I worked with in various diners. These "I'm over it" statements often came after another waitress' bitching session, or a small drama at the beginning or end of a shift. While there are similarities to Mitchel Duneier's (Sidewalk , 2002) definition of the 'Fuck it! Mentality' in his longitudinal study of the lives of sidewalk vendors in New York City, this "I'm over it" mentality slightly differs. It is, like Duneier explains, "a particular subsequent for of retreatism, an attribute of the individual interacting with a particular situation" (2002, p. 62). For Duneier's sidewalk vendors this retreatism was an acceptance of a substandard living environment and lifestyle, a moment of lowering standards even more. In my experience, waitresses' "fuck it" or "I'm over it" was, equally, reflective of their overall state of accepting a substandard work and living environment, but it also had another effect. Often this was an affirmation that things were getting too ridiculous and they were retreating out of the negative experience in front of them. I would not go as far as to claim their refusal to engage in what they found substandard for a work environment was a moment of empowerment, but an acknowledgement of an absurdity. It is an overall feeling they cannot change the absurdity as a whole but they can disengage with it for a moment to feel morally above the situation. It is not unheard of to see waitresses walk out to never return. In the scene in my film called 'Lois' (07:04), Lois lists through the different diners in the region she has worked at and quit over the years. She laughs about how she has quit every job she has ever worked in *"except this one, yet!"*. Lois knows she can get a job at the next diner down the road and so, as the subcontractor described in chapter 5, she can walk out. In many ways, it is still a retreatism because is not moving beyond "I'm over it". She does not demand a change in the profession: she acknowledges her current situation is something she is not happy with and steps away from it emotionally for a moment. In Lois' case, her take it or leave it attitude seems to be in

the past and she is happy with her current employer and her regulars. For a younger waitress like Laura, often this resignation is after an antagonistic rant that reflects her emotional distress. It punctuates the 'bitching' to place them in a momentarily empowered position of being 'above' or at least separate from the bullshit.

6.3 Semiotic riff: cattiness

Another difference between Duneier's analysis of the "Fuck it!" mentality and the experience of diner waitress' moments of "I'm over it!" is that, in my experience, diner waitresses were not only reacting or responding to an experience of class but also gender. As I have explained in this chapter, the labour associated with diner waitressing is an explicitly working-class feminized form of labour. Likewise the rejection of the labour conditions and relations is grounded in the tensions that form out of the intersection of these identities. While 'cattiness' or 'girl-fighting' are recognizable terms and spoken about in culture, there is little cultural critique or unpacking of what the concept means and how it plays out. In psychology there is a body of literature focused on adolescent girlfighting but little is written about how this translates to adult relationships.⁴⁰

To describe female workplace arguments and general female-to-female aggressions as cattiness is a distinctly gendered micro-aggression.⁴¹ Cattiness denotes a purposeful aggression, an act that is callous and with intent to hurt. Cattiness is also associated with verbal aggression but can, of course, be escalated to a catfight. The Oxford English Dictionary references the term 'catty' as having derived from cat, a slang term for the contempt of women (13th century) and later as prostitutes (15th century). But what is more interesting is the deciphering of it by language enthusiasts on the internet.⁴² There you will find metaphorical reasons concocted to connect women to cats or the feline; connections made between cats – witches – darkness –

⁴⁰ Perhaps this can be read into as a further condescension of women as childlike and infantile.

⁴¹ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a micro-aggression is "a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority".

⁴² <http://english.stackexchange.com/questions/341062/why-do-so-many-female-specific-words-and-phrases-reference-cats/341102>

unknown. Women are subtle, they are conniving, territorial and calculated. We are not the dogs that you can read at face value stomping their mucky paws about. Instead, we walk with grace and delicacy.

Be careful! We can pounce! Hissss! Those delicate paws have sharp claws and that dainty mouth is hiding sharp teeth. To be catty is to be sharp: to stalk our prey subtly then pounce! Cattiness is to engender the harshness of the feline, the undomesticated cat. You can domesticate a beautiful cat, keep it indoors, feed it, and pamper it but there is still a wild side waiting to come out. A stray cat is one without domestication, left to its own devices – it is feral and will over-reproduce. A stray cat has nobody to stop it, to control its instincts to go wild. A stray cat will stalk through the shadows, hug the walls as it turns corners. It will use its charm, its purr, rub up against a stranger in exchange for some food. But when that exchange is over the cat will vanish reminding the giver that the value of the food was worth one or two strokes only, nothing more. A stray cat is more likely to get into a catfight; to come in contact with other stray cats and fight for their territory. Too many cats in one space and tensions arise. Catfights arise with the absence of an owner and the absence of resources and space.

Woman-to-woman altercations are not human: they are animalistic. Woman is an animal that is both domesticated and seemingly wild. An animal that we are fascinated with but nervous around. Cats are not pack animals, they roam alone and only become social when it suits their needs. So what happens when you place a bunch of stray cats (women) in an overcrowded alley (diner) without enough food to share? Tensions rise, they pace, they circulate, and they fight. Cleverly.

6.4 The drug story and competition

In my film (18:50 – 20:35) there is a scene where Lois is telling the story of our co-worker, Laura, overdosing on the floor of the guest bathroom at work while I was away. This is the same co-worker that had the ‘fuck-it’ mentality about Ellen’s sacrifice. There was a lot of gossip about co-workers during work hours, particularly about Laura. While Laura often claimed to distance herself from ‘the drama’ she was often central to the drama itself. In some regards, the ‘cattiness’ about Laura was grounded in a frustration of working with her. As I express in my film, she was often high on

drugs during these late shifts and the burden of her inability to perform rested on the only other waitress working this graveyard shift. And on Sunday nights this was me. It was easy to become resentful and lose empathy for her struggles with addiction at 4:00am on a 10-hour shift.

Lyn Mikel Brown produced one of the few large academic studies on girlfighting with a focus on girls from early childhood through to adulthood. In her book *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls* (2003) Brown argues through a feminist lens that girlfighting is grounded in experiencing patriarchy and fighting a social construct of oneself versus the complex realities of oneself. In other words, as individuals, girls must navigate the complexity of their individual character in a patriarchal structure that constructs a simplified, sexist version of us. She argues this leads to holding each other to account for social structures of oppression and legitimizing one's own position through attacking others. Ultimately, Brown argues, this self-policing is a socially constructed divide and conquer tactic. All of this competitive behaviour whilst navigating a patriarchal world is coupled with intense female relationships in girlhood. Brown points to the intensity of female relationships from childhood to adulthood as part of the complication and integral to unpacking girlfighting. This is where the metaphor of the cat falls short. Cats rarely build intense relations with their own kind (outside of siblings) and instead are fiercely independent. Brown's emphasis on these intense relationships is a nod towards the potentiality of solidarity outside the competitive nature of the subjugation women experience. While the most affecting experiences are the often nuanced and cutting cruelty of female-to-female bullying, so too are the intensely positive experiences of female solidarity through relationships. With this said, Brown avoids the simplification of female solidarity through emphasizing the intersectional experiences of women of colour and working-class women that are distinctively different from white middle-class women. This distinction is important and relates to my own experience as a waitress and conducting my fieldwork. I was able to form solidarity and relationships while waitressing, but there are specific realities that I cannot connect to, particularly in relation to class and ability. My own experience was separate from co-workers like Ellen, for reasons such as: my access to healthcare; the emotional and monetary

support of my middle-class family if I fell on hard times; and my education. So where does this leave diner waitresses and the 'cattiness' I experienced while working?

Foff Paules (1991) argues waitresses' dismissive and antagonistic comments are part of their larger empowerment through their autonomy as nearly independent contractors. She would see the "I'm over it" statement as an act of subversion that reinforces her argument that working-class women's inability to organize does not mean they are resigned to subordination and exploitation:

In concentrating on women's failure to engage in methods of organized, cooperative action such as unionization, observers may have failed to take notice of the types of informal and by no means selfless strategies of action which have been examined here. (Foff Paules, 1991, pp. 181–182).

Foff Paules argues collective action and unionization is not an interest for waitresses, due to the competitive nature of the position in regard to the tipping structure. "Aggressive individualism is fostered by the structure of the waitress's job, which allows her to conduct her work independently of the concerns, needs, or habits of her co-workers" (1991, pp. 174–175). While I agree there is a form of subversion at play and small levels of empowerment through waitresses separating themselves from the 'drama' (to which they have often been a lead player in initiating), it is not in place of collective organizing. In other words, I do not believe it reflects an individualism that cannot be renegotiated. As I argued in chapter 2, waitress unions did not dismantle because of individualism. But, instead, because their feminine labour, which they had used to distinguish themselves from their male counterparts, was devalued. I argue the "I'm over it" mentality is not because she is able to work independently from the 'concerns, needs or habits of her co-workers'. In contrast, waitresses' relationships with each other are an integral part of the daily movements and successes of the workspace. As mentioned above, I was left burdened with a lot of extra labour due to Laura's inability to perform her duties. It would be in my benefit for Laura to be able to perform her responsibilities as my co-worker. Foff Paules ultimately relies on an idea that waitresses are emotionally disconnected from their work experience and that the emotional labour placed on the floor of the restaurant does not flood into the emotional experiences of other relations within the workplace. Perhaps the "I'm over it" statement can be seen as a frustration for the competitive system at work. By

seeing the defeatist attitude as both a mature decision to separate oneself from the emotional experience *and* as a reaction to the competitive nature of an already emotionally charged job, the “I’m over it” or “fuck it” mentality becomes an opportunity for collective organizing and change. By interpreting these individual emotional outbursts as small individual acts of self-empowerment, Foff Paules’ argument ends up falling short of seeing these as opportunities for collective organizing and potential camaraderie that Brown would argue for.

Furthermore, I argue that the cattiness often found in the diners where I worked was coming from a response to the need for external validation of the distinctly feminine forms of labour produced for public consumption. As Skeggs argues in relation to the care-workers she studied:

Their investments and practices generate an individualistic, intuitive form of caring dependent upon external validation and continually subject to scrutiny in which they are consigned to forever proving themselves through the reiteration of reproductive caring performances. (1997, p. 72).

In other words, through placing their feminine labour-powers onto the market for public consumption, their skills that are heavily connected with their identity are placed in the public domain for scrutiny. This, in turn, makes women at work vulnerable to a different type of scrutiny that is specifically gendered. Complaining about another waitress’ looks or attitude is to critique their ability to perform their emotional, feminine labour. To call someone ‘dramatic’ is to question their authenticity of their performance of gender. To tear down another waitress’ femininity, feminine labour-power or their performance of emotional labour is to attempt to position your own as more profound or authentic.

Through the title of my film, *Diner Wars*, I purposefully play on these ideas of performing cattiness and competitiveness. As I explained in chapter 4, my co-worker, Debbie introduced the idea for the title. This can be seen in the title sequence of my film (see 01:30). In the next section I place the title of my film, *Diner Wars*, and Debbie’s recommendation of it, in the cultural context of popular reality television during the time. This is in order to reflect on how waitresses perform the iconography of the American diner waitress.

6.5 *Diner Wars* performance

Particularly from a class perspective, this politicizes the idea that celebrity, and reality TV in particular, is perceived as a means of realizing one's own identity in modern society. (Holmes, 2006, p. 22).

While my film only shows Debbie presenting *Diner Wars* with her menu, off camera Debbie confidently pitched a reality TV series about diner life. Debbie's pitch was for a reality series that would reproduce the image of a distinct working-class culture in South Jersey. Her series would not only follow the waitresses but the community they serve – the locals that come in at all hours and the crazy things they get up to. She recognized herself and her workspace as unique and filled with unique characters and felt the public would be thoroughly entertained by them. Debbie's reality series was easy for me to picture because she grounded it in the workplace 'cattiness' and organizational chaos that I had also experienced. It was also easy to picture because at the time of my fieldwork there was a surge in reality TV that followed working-class culture through 'unique' jobs.



Figure 17: Still frame from opening sequence of *Swamp People*

One of these popular reality TV series is on the History Channel and called 'Swamp People' (2010-present). It follows a community of people in the swamplands of Louisiana who hunt alligators for a living. The show reveals the poverty of this

community, where a 30-day hunting period is the main source of income for many of the show's participants. The show is presented as a high drama competitive space that makes blatant metaphorical references to the hunters being foreign and savage like the alligators they hunt. The opening credits conclude with the hand of an alligator stretching across the title 'Swamp People' insinuating the alligator's reptilian hand is in fact the hand of a person (see image above). Through this image the viewer is told to other this community: to gawk and mock their poverty and lifestyles. This community is meant to feel foreign and backwards in their traditional ways of maintaining a livelihood but also within the spirit of American capitalist culture. The show is nationalistic, presenting the community as a proud sideshow of America's unique entrepreneurial spirit (when in fact the earnings are through a state sponsored culling). The participants themselves are nationalistic, often adorned in American flag paraphernalia.

As mentioned previously, this show is amongst a growing genre of reality series following unique white working-class communities. While each show emphasizes the unique entrepreneurial skills of the participants (pawn shops, storage wars, shrimping, duck hunting, alligator hunting), the theme of competitiveness, heightened drama, pride and hyper-nationalism links them. The participants are hyper versions of themselves with strong accents (sometimes even subtitled for the viewer), eccentric clothing choices and loudness. They bad mouth other people in the show and focus on interpersonal dramas as central stories while the job that brought the cameras to them in the first place becomes a back story. Most of these shows are male centric with a few women that perform either masculine roles or a hyper-sexualised supporting role. Su Holmes connects this interest in fame to western ideals of individualism in her essay *When Will I Be Famous?* She argues that the status associated with fame is a route towards self-validation (2006, p. 12). Participants in these reality series frequently speak of their authenticity with common statements such as 'being true to myself', or being a 'straight-talker'. Nobody likes 'liars' or people that 'cheat' or 'break codes' yet everyone is performing. Real dramas such as domestic violence charges, robbery, and assault cases are never brought to light in the show (only found out through the media sensation around the shows). The show is for small drama, for shouting and shoving as part of a performative game.

Where does *Diner Wars* fit into this line up? How was Debbie imagining the show to play out? How did I interpret her suggestion? To understand Debbie's interest in producing a TV series I take into consideration Holmes' argument that becoming famous is an opportunity to validate one's inner self in modern society and Skeggs' argument that the women she studied live in the public sphere because "their subjectivity is produced from and for public knowledge" (1997, p. 163). If one's subjectivity is wrapped up in the public sphere for public consumption then a reality TV series is a clear opportunity to be both curated and validated. Through Skeggs I would argue diner waitresses having a TV show is an opportunity to construct an identity in a public sphere when their lives are centrally located in the public. The concept of the divide of public and private self is a class-based one in that, as a struggling diner waitress, there is no space or time for a private self, so validation, by necessity, occurs at the point of public perception. Debbie was thinking of these other shows when she suggested *Diner Wars*. She was linking the high interpersonal drama between staff and customers with the high-level drama of shows like *Swamp People* or *Storage Wars*. She understood the tropes and roles different characters would play in the show. She understood that she would get more airtime if she was catty. She understood how to speak to the camera; the power of a dramatic pause; when to raise an eyebrow; or laugh at her own jokes. Ellen also understood this. She performed for my camera, coming over and saying her line 'would you like any 'cawffee' multiple times so I could capture it. Lois pointed out regulars, performed banter with customers, walking off camera seamlessly as she responded to my questions and rolled silverware. They performed themselves in front of my camera but they also were themselves. In chapter 4 I presented my film in the context of a situational analysis (as defined by J. Ellis) in that the audience seeks to understand the truth through the momentary relationship/dynamic between the filmmaker (me) and the subject (my waitressing co-workers). The performances of my co-workers for the camera and for me are apparent throughout and add to the layer of (re)producing of the American diner waitress. My co-workers that perform for me on camera are talented lifers, and they make the customer feel like they have received an authentic experience through the performance of their authentic selves.

The co-workers I interviewed understand the value of their performance, and Debbie further understood the potential value of her performance in a reality series. *Diner Wars* would tick boxes of Americana, white working-class culture, high-level drama, and all with the ability to ignore the serious drama that may be happening in the background. Debbie would not have to reveal her struggles with addiction or her relationship with her family in order to be interesting in this series. While those experiences have defined her in real life, reality TV life would validate her performed life as a waitress.

6.6 Conclusion

Sometimes you get some angry people that come in, and maybe they carry an attitude from outside, and bringing it inside with them. And it's like 'ok, I'm not gonna be angry with you I'm just gonna make you happy and make you feel really good and your gonna give me a good tip when you're on your way out.' Cuz that's what waitressing is all about: is making money, taking care of the people you have to take care of; and after awhile you get close to them people too. (Lois in Diner Wars, 35:42 – 36:09).

In this chapter I set out to explore how waitresses use feminized forms of immaterial and emotional labour as an integral part of our job and, while this can seemingly have its advantages, it also adds to the exploitation of our labour and precarious working conditions. The quote that opens this section is the same one that I used to open the thesis. It is a quote from *Diner Wars* where Lois explains (in a sentimental performance) what waitressing is all about: money and the customers. Or, as she puts it, 'the people you take care of'. She recognizes her job as a waitress to mould people's emotions so that when they leave they have enjoyed their experience enough and she gets paid. This quote encapsulates Lois' professional relationship to her affective emotional labour. But, she also reveals that the relationships she builds in the process of making money are equally important. In the process of performing emotional, affective labour, Lois is also affected. She builds relationships that do not just pay the bills. She creates an authentic experience of care to her regulars through performing as the maternal, lifer waitress – playing to the iconography of the lifer waitress – and simultaneously, she affects that image. The image moulds and changes ever so slightly with every encounter these professional diner waitresses have with their customers. The image moulds further with their performance in my film. Lois

knows this when she says this line. It is a sentimental performance. A professionally, skilled performance of the waitress.

In order to unpack the effects of our immaterial, emotional labour on both our labour conditions and the iconography of the diner waitress I began this chapter with my own experience of owning my sexuality in order to garner regulars. My internalization of the sexy waitress backfired when I felt sexually harassed by regular customers during my interviews for my film and not empowered to speak out. I retreated, or accepted, this position as banter and pressed back through attempting waitress banter back. It was only with distance, academic reflection and a feminist lens that I saw the harassment for what it was and my acceptance of it at the time. From there I explored a different angle of feminine affective labour, that of the lifer waitress. To do this I primarily looked at my co-worker, Ellen, and how her acts of sacrifice both ensured a steady wage and also caused her other monetary problems. In the next section I looked at how the relationship between individual identities and workplace culture affected each other. I questioned how 'cattiness' erupts out of a highly competitive, female environment and attempted to unpack the highly gendered term and the implication of emotional, feminine labour on a workplace. I explored this term and tension through the 'Fuck it!' mentality and argued that, while there is a self-preservation element to these micro-explosions, there are opportunities for solidarity and change within them. After looking at individuals and internal, workplace dynamics, the last section of this chapter explored how waitresses see their own performance in a public space. Through a discussion on the naming of my film, *Diner Wars*, I argued that these presentations of self are purposeful acts of self-valorisation of waitress' labour that are deeply embedded in the iconography of the American diner waitress.

7 Conclusion

In this thesis and through my experimental documentary film I unpack, analyse, and (re)create in new contexts the icon of the American diner waitress. In particular, I explore how the emotional, affective labour of American diner waitresses relates to the relevant iconography drawing on cultural studies to approach the subject matter from a cross-disciplinary perspective. I extend my practice to experimental documentary filmmaking and combine it with autoethnographic storytelling, semiotic riffs, and performance lectures. Throughout this endeavour my focus has been both personal and political. As I lay out in my writing, I have experienced the exploitation of my own labour as a diner waitress and wish to change the exploitative nature of the job as it stands today. To achieve this, and drawing on my capacity as an academic, I armoured myself with a camera, and feminist, cultural and labour theories, and engaged in an autoethnographic study of diner waitressing. It is through this cross-disciplinary approach that I address the core research questions in this thesis, which revolve around the formation of the American diner waitress icon and its relationship to the material conditions of waitresses' labour.

7.1 Research findings summary

With little academic research into American diner waitressing to work with, I begin with a historical analysis of women entering the casual dining sector and a review of 18th and 19th century ideas of femininity to contextualize both the contemporary labour of diner waitresses and the iconography associated with our labour. By crossing Cobble's historical analysis with feminist cultural theory of the image I place the icon of the American diner waitress at the centre of my analysis in order to expose the activist opportunities afforded by that very icon. I argue: the icon is simultaneously used as a tool to exploit waitress' labour-power and something to be exploited by them in turn. In this sense, my research alleviates the lack of academic attention to how waitresses relate to and transform our own image and the conditions of our labour.

From this critical perspective, I elaborate on how the American diner waitress icon is extracted from waitress' labour-power. To do this I pull from multiple theoretical traditions including radical feminist labour theory, Marxist theory, feminist theory on image production, semiotic structuralism, theories of image production, and Neoplatonic thought. Through this unique, cross-disciplinary and mixed-method approach to the image, narrative and subsequent iconography of the American diner waitress I contribute to the growing field of feminist affect theory and visual methods. A specific implication of this cross-disciplinary approach is that I am able to shed new light on Italian radical feminist Marxist theory (Fortunati, Dalla Costa) through bringing it into discourse with more contemporary theory on emotion, including Ahmed's work on emotion, and Clough and Ellis' work on affect theory and autoethnography. I also perform a semiotic analysis of the image of the American diner waitress and I ground it to the subjugation of a working-class female workforce through the degraded status of emotional and affective labour. I argue that the image becomes one that is played back to waitresses and that waitresses must compete with in the market in order to effectively work and get paid. This proposition has implications on how activist research can engage with empowering workers. In other words, by centralizing the icon as a point of contention for workers' rights, I propose that a new, deeper understanding of the labour of waitresses can emerge through the conscious reworking of that image by waitresses themselves.

In my ethnographic chapters, and with my film, I test this hypothesis by analysing my own experience working as a diner waitress. I argue that the image produced affects the wage relations of waitresses, particularly in regard to tipping and managerial control. To explore these material conditions of our labour further, I look at how managerial control played out in my own workspace during my fieldwork where our primary income as waitresses is through tips from customers. I investigate the complex relationship between the emotional labour of our job, the familial and often unprofessional dynamics of working relationships, and the waitress' precarious position. I also analyse my experience as a waitress in context of housework theory and feminist labour theory on femininity provided by Skeggs, to argue that the icon is embedded in the affective relationship waitresses have with our work, our bosses, our co-workers, and our patrons. My position is that, while using specific forms of feminine

labour such as sacrifice can seemingly have its advantages, it also adds to the exploitation of our labour and precarious working conditions. In the process of performing emotional, affective labour, waitresses are also affected. I present multiple examples in my autoethnography and film of how my co-workers perform feminine labour and create an affective experience. In this sense, I remedy a significant gap in the analysis of waitressing as an affective performance and also make visible the icon as a commodity within that performance. My thesis builds on the academic move by theorists such as Clough and Orr for affect theory to consider fieldwork as a valid mode of not only theorising but also actively intervening in the affect. As presented in my thesis, autoethnographers such as Ellis and Bochner centralize emotional pain as a necessity to produce affective and critical autoethnography. I, instead, add to the discipline through engaging with subtler and less traumatic emotions while still maintaining the political stance for changing social structures that autoethnography calls for. The implication being that this opens up autoethnography to be engaged with by ethnographers on issues beyond personal trauma. My research thus responds to a need to construct a feminine labour studies as the grey area where affect theory, autoethnography and radical feminist Marxist theory meet and relate to established theories of practice including documentary practice.

Through a discussion on the naming of my film, *Diner Wars*, I argue that these presentations of self are purposeful acts of self-valorisation of waitress' labour that are deeply embedded in the iconography of the American diner waitress. Through my co-workers' performances as waitresses, my own performance as a waitress, and all of our performances for the camera, we help shift the image of the waitress. We are affecting the image as much as the image is affecting us. Additionally, through experimenting with performance lectures and fictionalized scenes inserted into *Diner Wars*, I engage with what sociologist Kat Jungnickel says is "making things to make sense of things" (2017). While the live performances are out of the scope of this thesis, they nonetheless helped me to engage with one of my core research questions: *how can I utilize semiotics, experimental documentary practice, and autoethnography to unpack, interrogate, and potentially affect the relationship between the iconography and labour of American diner waitresses?* This insight opens up new opportunities for

activist-based research to engage and change narratives, providing potential change of working conditions.

When I began my research I intended to conduct a more militant research approach that would have a stronger, immediate impact on waitresses through potentially organising them or at least disrupting the poor working conditions. There were many unexpected events and experiences that altered the course of this research and perhaps limited by ambitious scope. While in my first diner I attempted a more agitating stance, in the second I took a more reflexive approach to the research. Through the experience of how little is needed to get fired I realised there was more groundwork and more thinking to be done. Waitressing is a precarious job where waitresses migrate between restaurants regularly – quitting or getting fired. With my adopted home being another country, it made it hard on my trips back to the US to find my former co-workers. I also lacked the consistency of being in New Jersey to continue to fight for my co-workers rights. So when other issues arose, like Crystal Lake Diner burning down, I was not on the ground to experience it or find my co-workers.

The performances I conducted were to an academic audience in a foreign country so the scope of this change is extremely limited. Nonetheless, it was a starting point towards affecting the icon. The icon is a simplified version of the women it represents. Through revealing the history, working conditions and labour of waitress I interject a new narrative onto the icon and disrupt its exploitative elements. My thesis could be viewed as a feminist activist toolkit for interrupting the power of icons to produce dominant narratives in general. As a toolkit, this methodology could be extended to other research conditions in collaboration with unions and other activist organisations in order to expose points of intervention.

7.2 Future research

Since beginning my PhD the political climate has dramatically shifted in the USA. While I was conducting my fieldwork the Occupy movement swept the nation, bringing radical ideas centre stage for the first time in my generation. Before this, socialism was a term I would not dare to utter in front my American, non-academic peers and family. Then, all of the sudden, I had apolitical friends and family asking me

about these ideas or openly debating the merits of capitalism at a party. Furthermore, I have seen and experienced a feminist resurgence in the USA, one that is questioning the white-feminism and post-feminism branded by the neo-liberal mainstream. When I started this PhD I had never heard of the terms 'emotional' or 'invisible' labour, and now I see 'clickbait' articles online about the subject (Guardian, 2015). Importantly, another major shift has been the conversation and the grassroots movements for a living wage in the USA. There has been a huge focus on the service and restaurant industry including fast-food workers going on strike (Guardian Business, 2014). Furthermore, the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC, 2017), which was founded in New York City in 2001, has expanded across the US. The work the ROC is doing is progressive, radical thinking about the need for changes to the working conditions of restaurant workers. This includes activist led workers inquiries, investigations, films and lobbying around issues such as the minimum wage. When I started this PhD I had not heard of the ROC and they had no presence outside of a few major cities. As a waitress, I could have only dreamed of an organization or union that would take such a strong stance for my rights. These changes in the climate are not necessarily reflected in this study. I see the next steps for this research as being to link it to the wider political climate today and movement towards workers' rights happening within organisations like the ROC.

Furthermore, my experimental autoethnographic documentary practice has challenged my understanding of methods for political engagement through practice. Moving forward, I feel more emboldened (or perhaps braver) in wanting to explore my practice in autoethnography. As already stated, the US has had major political and social shifts during my research, and I would like to explore some of those shifts in relation to my own life and family. I do not merely exist in an academic bubble, where all of my family and friends are progressive and critical. I come from a family that is populated with people who have various political views – some on the extreme right, including white nationalists. I envision my research and practice continuing to develop towards questioning how identities are formed through culture, and how those identities inform the material conditions of citizens through an autoethnographic lens. For example, how have my cousin, who I idolized as a small child, and myself come to opposite sides of the political spectrum? How have we experienced our identities as

white women and how has that informed our politics? How have our life experiences been shaped by our parents, who were siblings and how did their experiences of a broken nuclear family affect our own upbringings? How is my own family a microcosmic reflection of a larger national issue?

Lastly, as reflected upon in the previous section, my performance lectures were out of the scope of my thesis. While performance practice has a large, healthy theoretical discussion, particularly in the field of affect theory, I am interested in practice as a form of thinking through ideas. Filmmaking not only becomes an output that represents ideas but the process of developing it becomes one that allows for interrogation into ideas. The feedback loop between my practice methods and my theory could be further expanded in future research and would allow me to branch out beyond filmmaking.

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9 Appendix 1: Technicalities of Filming at the Diner

The filmed interviews were conducted over multiple graveyard shifts with a DSLR camera and omnidirectional microphone. DSLRs, or 'digital single-lens reflex' cameras, have become an industry standard professional and semi-professional photography camera in the past 20 years, replacing film-based cameras. In the past ten years technology has developed to allow DSLRs to shoot high-quality, filmic-looking video footage. Where professional and semi-professional digital video cameras in a similar price bracket (under £2,500) often have a wide depth of field, which makes more of the foreground and background in focus, DSLRs are able to produce a shallow depth of field. Not only does a shallow depth of field more closely mimic the way the human eye focuses, it also looks more similar to film. Essentially, digital filmmakers working on small budgets can achieve a filmic look that we previously struggled to achieve with digital camcorders. I kept the equipment simple, and did not use a tripod or Steadicam, to keep it as unobtrusive as possible. Setting up a tripod could be seen as a health and safety issue within a diner and a Steadicam mount felt large and daunting for patrons and staff. On a more logistical level, I also already owned this equipment and could transport it easily between countries.

To ensure the waitresses would explain things in more detail and not assume knowledge of the restaurant and working conditions, I brought the support of documentary filmmaker Erin Taylor Kennedy, who had also worked as an American waitress in the past.⁴³ Erin's work in filming and recording sound allowed me to focus on the interviews and the logistics of recruiting participants on the spot. I was no longer working at Cherry Hill Diner but gained permission from my former manager, who was working those nights, to film both front of house and in the kitchen.

Erin and I casually 'hung out' at the diner like two waitresses who had finished their shift would do. This included ordering food, hanging around the server stations where the computer to input orders was based, sitting with the waitresses as they did side work such as rolling silverware or chopping lemons, and joining regulars at the

⁴³ Erin supported me through filming interviews and observational footage. She also informally interviewed co-workers in the process.

counter, along with chatting to any late night strays that might arrive. The waitresses took Erin on a tour of the kitchen, introduced her to the back-of-house staff, and were generally welcoming to any and all conversation. As seen in my film (see 25:04 – 29:24) and will be explained and analysed in more detail in chapter 6, Erin is present in a conversation with the Greek regulars. I chose to film the graveyard shift both because it was a shift that I worked and because it is the quietest shift. These long periods of boredom with minimal customers allowed me to interview the waitresses. Furthermore, I was able to use my feminine labour to gain access: the manager on duty, while generally known amongst waitresses as grumpy, liked me and so I knew I would gain further access than on other shifts.

I captured multiple hours of observational footage including: the point of view of a regular sitting at the counter, a tour of the back kitchen, wide shots of the nearly empty diner, close-ups of activities such as rolling silverware, pouring coffee, and lifting trays and mid shots of conversations amongst staff and customers. Outside of the restaurant, further footage was captured of the surrounding area to contextualize the region the restaurant sits within. These shots were mainly taken from the car, driving along the busy roads I describe in my autoethnography. I also pulled over to capture the diner both in day and night time – a brightly lit, chrome building on the side of a roundabout. In future trips to the USA to visit family I captured more footage of the surrounding area that helped contextualize the social geography of the space.