

Working at 'breastaurants' damaging to women's mental health

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Women who work in restaurants that require their bodies to be on display through revealing uniforms may experience higher levels of anxiety and disordered eating, according to a new University of

Tennessee, Knoxville, study.

The study also found that female servers in these types of restaurants—dubbed "breastaurants" because they feature scantily clad servers—felt that they had less power and control at work.

The findings were published recently in the *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

"We want to raise awareness about the negative impact that these types of restaurant environments may have on female servers," said Dawn Szymanski, UT professor of psychology and the study's lead author. "We want the public to use this data in personal decisions about whether to support or not support these types of restaurants."

Szymanski and co-author Renee Mikorski, a UT graduate student in psychology, surveyed 252 female servers, ages 18 to 66, who work in a variety of United States restaurants, including "breastaurants" such as Hooters and Twin Peaks. Forty-nine percent of survey participants were currently enrolled in a college or university.

The findings suggest working at "breastaurants" is detrimental to the psychological health of [women](#).

The study notes that these restaurants put women's sexuality on display and sanction men's supposed right to stare at and visually scrutinize female servers' bodies and judge their physical appearance and sexual desirability.

Szymanski and Mikorski focused on restaurant environments because the restaurant industry is one of the fastest-growing areas of the US economy. They found that restaurants practicing [sexual objectification](#) are not only growing in number but flourishing.

Szymanski's previous research examined how "breastaurants" affect the emotional well-being of their female employees. She found that female servers experienced negative emotions including sadness, anxiety, degradation, anger, insecurity, confusion, and guilt.

"However, no other researchers have examined the associations between sexually objectifying restaurant environments and anxiety and disordered eating," the study states. "Our study extends current research by investigating how [these restaurants] may be associated with mental health outcomes beyond depression."

The findings of the study may help psychologists better understand and counsel female clients who are employed at these restaurants.

"Psychologists might help their clients explore ways they might alter their work situation, change the internalized effects of working in that type of environment, and gain more power and control through strategies such as setting boundaries and creating psychological and physical distance to resist objectification," the study states.

Psychologists might also explore other restaurant employment or career options with their clients and encourage them to get involved in organizations that promote workers' and women's rights as a means of empowerment.

"These findings underscore the need to implement both system-level and individual-level interventions to combat the existence of sexually objectifying [restaurant](#) environments and the negative effects they may have on women who work in the industry," the study states.

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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