

Serving men and mothers: workplace practices and workforce composition in two US restaurant chains and states

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In this paper, we apply a ‘gendered lens’ to research that has sought to understand how private firm practices and public policies shape employment conditions. We report on a study of the realities facing a highly female-dominated job, that of waiter in low-end chain restaurants. Through interviews with managers at 16 sites of two international restaurant chains located in Seattle, Washington and Chicago, Illinois, we examined how the gender and family caregiver compositions of waiter workforces intersect with private employers’ practices related to waiter wages, fringe benefits, and staffing and scheduling and preferred job qualifications, on the one hand; and with mandated minimum wage regulations, on the other. Male waiters were most heavily concentrated in the chain with more generous benefits and input into scheduling, while the largest proportions of women were found in the chain offering few or no benefits and little scheduling control. Sites with the most waiter-caregivers came from both chains but were mostly in Seattle, aligning with a US state policy context assuring a higher minimum wage. Paralleling those findings, we observed that managers in especially male-heavy settings stressed intellectual and experience qualifications for waiter positions, while within more female and dependent caregiver employing sites they prioritized factors such as personality and ‘good hygiene.’

Keywords: low-wage jobs; gendered work; minimum wage laws; human resource management

En este ensayo, aplicamos un ‘lente de género’ dentro de un proyecto de investigación que ha buscado entender como las practicas de las empresas privadas y las politicas públicas determinan las condiciones de empleo. Reportamos un estudio sobre las realidades que se enfrentan en un trabajo principalmente dominado por mujeres, en el caso de mesero(a) en restaurantes de cadena de bajo perfil. A través de entrevistas con administradores de 16 locales en dos restaurantes de cadena internacionales ubicadas en Seattle, Washington y Chicago, Illinois, examinamos como el género y la estructura del cuidado de familia de la población activa de meseros se cruzan con las prácticas de empresarios patrones privados relacionados con los sueldos de meseros, los beneficios marginales, y la contratación y selección de horarios así como las calificaciones preferidas para los trabajos, por una parte; y con regulaciones sobre el salario mínimo por otro parte. Los meseros hombres fueron más predominantes en los restaurantes de cadena con beneficios más generosos y más influencia sobre sus horarios, mientras que la población más grande de mujeres fueron encontradas en los restaurantes de cadena que ofrecen pocos o que no ofrecen beneficios y tampoco influencia sobre

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el horario. Los locales con la mayoría de mesero-cuidadores llegaron de los dos restaurantes de cadena pero estuvieron mayormente ubicados en Seattle; en donde en acuerdo con las políticas del estado que aseguran un salario mínimo más alto. Asemejándose a esos resultados, observamos que los administradores de los locales con más hombres hicieron hincapié en calificaciones intelectuales y experiencia para trabajos de mesero, mientras que entre los locales de empleos con más mujeres y cuidadores dependientes dieron prioridad a factores como la personalidad y 'la buena higiene.'

Palabras claves: empleos de bajos ingresos; oficios tradicionalmente desempeñados por determinado género (hombre/mujer); legislación sobre el salario mínimo; administración de recursos humanos

As considerable research has documented, the 'gendered structuring of organizations' leads some jobs to be ultimately more available to, or habitable for, one sex than the other (Acker, 1990; Gerson, 2004; Kmec, 2005, p. 323; Skuratowicz & Hunter, 2004). Societal norms held by employees who self-select into or out of given types of employment, and employers who adopt practices that open opportunities to one sex more than the other, may significantly shape the relationship between workforce and workplace and job characteristics (Bielby & Baron, 1986; Kmec, 2005, 2008; Reskin, 2003; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999). In addition, a range of objective conditions of work can facilitate participation by one sex more readily than another, given predominant sex roles and their associated responsibilities. For dual earner-caregivers and heads of households, for example, such constraints can be embodied in how work is scheduled, and the flexibility and predictability of job hours; access to fringe benefits like time off and personal and family health insurance; and basic wage levels (Henly, Shaefer, & Waxman, 2006; Lambert, 2008; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). These normative and logistical elements of employment combine to create contexts in which it is more or less feasible for women (or men) and those with primary caregiving roles to thrive, and where workers develop personal strategies for managing their diverse work and non-work circumstances (Gerson, 2004).

Drawing on these insights, in this paper we apply a 'gendered lens' to the research tradition that has sought to understand how private firm practices and public policies shape the conditions of employment. We report on a study of the realities facing a highly female-dominated job, that of waiter in low-end chain restaurants. By sampling restaurant sites from two international chains and in two US states with disparate minimum wage laws, we were able to examine, first, whether and how employers' practices for compensating and managing the position of waiter align with particular chain ownership and state employment regulation. Our interest in the 'gendering' of waitstaff jobs led us to investigate additionally how workforce sex and caregiver characteristics correspond with chain- and policy-related patterns among employer practices. That is, we considered how business strategy – in the form of chain ownership – and US state minimum wage policy may link to contexts in which waitstaffing work is done by certain types of workers. To conduct these analyses, we drew upon data we collected from managers at 16 chain sites in suburban Seattle and Chicago about employer practices related to wages and tips, fringe benefits, staffing and scheduling applied to the job of waiter, and on waitstaff workforce characteristics.

Literature review

Accounting for variation in workplace practices

Several management and sociological perspectives provide accounts for why employment practices may vary across firms and jobs. Strategic human resource management scholars suggest that organizations design human resource approaches to fit with their larger performance goals, ranging from strict cost minimization to product differentiation or quality (Arthur, 1999; Burud & Tumolo, 2004; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Employers adopting 'high commitment' approaches to employee management view generous work benefits as a strategy to reduce labor costs related to hiring, training, and turnover and enhance worker and firm productivity (Appelbaum, Berg, Frost, & Preuss, 2003; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). These explanatory frameworks parallel the body of sociological research on segmented and internal versus spot labor markets (Althausen & Kalleberg, 1981; Jacobs, 1994).

Studies of variation in employment practices have often focused on high-skill jobs, where competition for 'talent' is expected to generate differentiation in firm human resource strategies (e.g., Barnett & Hall, 2001; Tsui, et al., 1997). By contrast, lower-skill jobs have been characterized in the literature as generally bad – and getting worse (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; see Hudson, 2007 for a review). Yet recent research reveals striking differences in working conditions facing comparable low-level positions within as well as across firms, including housekeepers, cashiers, bank tellers, nursing assistants, and front-line hospital staff (Appelbaum, et al., 2003; Hunter, 2000; Lambert, 2008; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). Variation in employer practices may be particularly consequential for employees who fill lower-skilled jobs, since they likely have access to fewer offsetting resources outside of the workplace for taking care of themselves and their families (Heymann, 2000). Building on these studies of entry-level employment, we examine variation across restaurant sites in firm practices for wages and tips, fringe benefits, and staffing and scheduling applied to the single job of waiter.

Sociological and management scholars have also tended to investigate variation in employment practices in firm and job samples drawn from the same economic and political environments. Neoinstitutional theory suggests, however, that firm behavior can be significantly shaped by diverse outside forces, including regulative regimes and social norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Zuberi's (2006) study of Seattle and Vancouver chain hotel jobs suggested that more expansive Canadian employment policies buoyed discretionary employer practices in workers' favor. Variable state minimum wage laws that are highly binding for restaurant waiter positions, and a focus of the present study, represent a potential external force upon firm employment practices (Azar, 2003).

Perspectives on imbalanced workforce sex and caregiver composition

A separate literature has investigated determinants of workforce composition within employing organizations, a substantial portion of it attending to organizational and job segregation by sex and caregiver status (Bielby & Baron, 1986; Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Kmec, 2005, 2008; Reskin, 2003; Reskin et al., 1999; Swanberg, 2004). Employers may hold varying 'conscious or unconscious sex preferences and

stereotypes' that, when implemented in their recruitment and hiring of staff, produce imbalances in sex and caregiver representation even when they engage in comparable practices for managing existing employees (Kmec, 2005, p. 322; Skuratowicz & Hunter, 2004).

The structures of workplaces and jobs applied to established employees, including aspects of worker compensation and management, are also implicated in 'ultimately produc[ing] sex segregated workplaces' (Acker, 1990; Kmec, 2005, p. 323; Skuratowicz & Hunter, 2004). Low pay, limited fringe benefits, and intense and unpredictable work schedules make it difficult for workers with family responsibilities and limited non-work supports to sustain employment (Henly et al., 2006; Scott, 2005). We extend this research on the association of employment practices with workforce composition by focusing on the same job across workplaces operating in the same industry.

Restaurants as workplaces and workforces

Gendered work

A range of scholarship has considered the gendered aspects of service, and particularly waitstaff, work (Erickson & Pierce, 2005; Hall, 1993; Leidner, 1991; Rose, 2001). Skills related to rapport-building are societally defined as 'womanly arts' (Leidner, 1991, p. 166), and the jobs requiring them are deemed more appropriate for and are consequently more inhabited by women (Hall, 1993, p. 329). Hall (1993) observed two distinct work roles of 'waiter' and 'waitress' within the table server occupation, however, corresponding with 'formal' and 'familial' workplace environments, respectively. The latter jobs and restaurants are 'low-prestige,' signifying motherly care, while male waiters 'congregate in the prestigious ranks of the occupation' (Hall, 1993, p. 342). Echoing Hall, Neumark (1996) found that higher-priced restaurants favored male applicants for the position of server, while lower-priced restaurants hired more females.

Chain ownership

Within the low end of the full-service restaurant market, firms occupy two traditionally distinct niches that appear to correspond with Hall's (1993) dichotomy: 'casual' vs. 'family' dining. The two chains included in the current study – 'Community Spot' and 'Breakfast Place'² – reflect this distinction. Historically, casual dining businesses have been associated with an orientation to service quality best realized by investing in personnel, while family dining peers focus more narrowly on keeping costs, labor included, low. Recent competitive conditions and consumer cost-cutting behaviors, however, have compelled restaurants to adopt new business strategies. As a result, a restaurant's market segment positioning may be less predictive of its employment practices (Gale, 2007).

The sampled sites in this study are also franchises. Their employee management is therefore the product of a combination of independent decision-making by owners and corporate oversight to standardize aspects of restaurant 'brand' identity, including employee training, scheduling, and to some extent compensation (Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001).

State policy contexts

In the USA, waitstaff jobs are strongly influenced by public policy in the form of variable state minimum wage laws that constitute the prevailing hourly pay, and in the majority of states also regulate tips (Azar, 2003). Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have minimum wages above the federal level, currently set at US\$7.25 per hour (\$5.85 at the time of our data collection in 2007); 31 states match that rate, while in five states the minimum wage falls below \$7.25 (US Department of Labor, 2009). Forty-three states also permit employers to partially recapture waiters' tip income by paying a sub-minimum wage to tipped employees. In states with such 'tip credit' policies, the effective minimum wage for waitstaff through the time of our data collection spanned a low of \$1.59 in Kansas to a high of \$7.00 in Hawaii.

Comparing Washington and Illinois, Washington has the country's highest state minimum wage, \$7.93 at the time of our data collection in 2007 and \$8.55 presently. It is also the first of only nine states to have adopted an automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment, and is one of seven that has not passed a tip credit law. Illinois' minimum wage increased from \$6.50 to \$7.50 in July 2007 as we began interviewing for the study, though it does not feature an annual adjustment (the rate has since been increased to \$8.00, however). The state now allows employers to pay tipped workers just \$4.80 per hour through a tip credit, though in summer 2007 that sub-minimum was just \$4.50.

Employer practices in restaurant workplaces

In this study, we investigated employer practices related to wages, tips and fringe benefits that we anticipated would be consequential for employees by substantially determining the monetary rewards of their work; and staffing and scheduling practices, given their role in shaping both waiters' take-home pay and their ability to combine work with other responsibilities. Within restaurants specifically, employers often impose 'tip out' rules requiring waiters to share a portion of their tips per shift with non-tipped coworkers (Azar, 2003). And when managers limit employees' input into work hours or days, change schedules frequently, or both, waiters may experience scheduling conflicts with non-work (namely caregiving) responsibilities along with unpredictable hours and income. To the extent that more employee-supportive practices align with chain ownership, firm management or both, a given restaurant may have elected to pursue a higher-investment vs. cost-minimizing approach. State minimum wage laws in the US context potentially influence employer practices by establishing different floors for pay, and by counting tip income (Illinois) or not (Washington). How these potentially chain- and state-based conditions of employment link to characteristics of workforce composition constitutes the exploratory focus of this study.

Methods*Suburb and chain sampling strategy*

This research followed a comparative organizational case study approach, per Ragin (1987, 2003) and Yin (1994). The data come from interviews conducted in person with managers at 16 sites of two US-based chains in suburban Seattle and Chicago

from July to September of 2007 (four from each chain and each suburban core; see Table 1). Restaurants in the states of Washington and Illinois were selected for sampling in order to introduce public employment policy variation, as noted earlier. We focused on suburban locations of the chains since there was far greater suburban than urban saturation of both chains. The costs of living for the two suburban areas were quite comparable. The Consumer Price Index for August 2007 was 216 for Seattle–Tacoma and 206 for Chicago (95% of the Seattle–Tacoma level); the Economic Policy Institute’s 2007 annual family budgets for Seattle and Tacoma metro areas were \$52,507 and \$51,195, respectively, and \$48,880 in Chicago (94% of the Washington figures; Economic Policy Institute, 2010; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

As this research was part of a larger study that also sampled sites of the same chains in urban and rural areas of Washington State, ‘Community Spot’ and ‘Breakfast Place’ were selected based on their presence across all of those markets.³ Although both chains are full-service and operate at the lower end of the industry, they exhibit several differences that align with Hall’s (1993) distinction between higher status, male-attracting restaurants and the more ‘familial’ settings where women waiters predominate. Community Spot restaurants are busiest during the lunch and dinner hours, and do not serve breakfast. Unlike Breakfast Place, Community Spot serves alcohol. Although Breakfast Place is most busy during the breakfast hours, it experiences additional, notable rushes of patrons during the dinner and graveyard shifts (midnight to 2:00 am). Food pricing also differs between the chains: entrees at Community Spot ranged from \$8 to \$12, while those at Breakfast Place were slightly cheaper, from \$6 to \$10.

We approached managers to participate rather than making initial recruitment contacts at the corporate level since all the sites were franchised rather than chain-owned.⁴ To minimize potential labor market differences among suburban towns in each metro area, we attempted to sample restaurants from suburbs having both

Table 1. Summary of sampling strategy.

		Chain participation	
		Community Spot	Breakfast Place
Seattle	Suburb 1	X	X
	Suburb 2	X	X
	Suburb 3	X	
	Suburb 4		X
	Suburb 5	X	
	Suburb 6		X
Chicago	Suburb 1	X	X
	Suburb 2	X	X
	Suburb 3	X	
	Suburb 4		X
	Suburb 5	X	
	Suburb 6		X

Note: Seattle suburbs 3 and 4 were demographically and economically similar; Seattle suburbs 5 and 6 were similar; Chicago suburbs 3 and 4 were similar; and Chicago suburbs 5 and 6 were similar.

chains. In cases where this was not possible, we used 2000 Census data to identify the nearest economically and demographically similar suburb.

Data collection instrument and procedure

We developed a semi-structured protocol for the manager interviews drawing on questionnaires from previous research (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2002; Haley-Lock, 2003; Jencks, Perman, & Rainwater, 1988; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). Detailed questions on employment practices asked about firm approaches to wages and tips; fringe benefits; staffing (including proportions of part- and full-time positions, total staff size, and staffing during busy and slow shifts) and scheduling (e.g., extent of employee input on work hours and days); job qualifications for waiters; and characteristics of restaurant sites and workforces. Given the potential influence of local labor market and other economic conditions in these workforce–workplace relationships, we also examined the former set of data in the course of our analyses.

Data analysis

Our analysis used methods from Ragin (1987, 2003) and Yin (1994), as well as traditional content analytical techniques (Weber, 1990). Data on employer practices applied to waiter jobs were organized into unit-by-topic matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Subsequent analyses involved comparing these matrices for the four locations with the highest percentages of male, female, and caregiver waitstaff, respectively (12 total); and examining how variation within and across these clusters of sites corresponded with chain ownership and state location, as well as local labor market, industry, and other economic indicators. We selected four sites for each cluster given that the concentration of each demographic group consistently dropped off between the fourth- and fifth-ranked locations. We then examined the data on job qualifications and managers' descriptions of current waitstaff for the 12 sites to detect patterns suggesting gendered connotations toward work and workers. Lastly, using Census data we compared the 12 restaurants on a range of labor market and other economic indicators.

Results

'Male,' 'female,' and 'caregiver' workplaces

All but one of our sites employed more female than male waiters, consistent with previous research documenting the disproportionate concentration of women in waiter jobs; the median male representation across all locations in the study was 19% (Table 1; Hall, 1993; Leidner, 1991). Breakfast Place had a larger percentage of female waitstaff than Community Spot. Locations of the former had between 70 and 99% women waiters, with a median of 90%; the latter ranged between 40 and 90%, with a median of 71% female (Table 2). To note, all of the managers interviewed for this study were male.

We observed some variation across the states and chains in the composition of dependent caregivers on waitstaff. Within the chains, Community Spot site managers

Table 2. Comparison of waitstaff gender and dependent caregiving characteristics, by chain and state.

	Percent male		Percent with dependents	
	Range	Median	Range	Median
Community Spot	10–60	29	10–85	38
Washington	10–40	18	51–85	82
Illinois	20–60	39	10–25	10
Breakfast Place	1–30	10	27–75 ^a	30
Washington	1–20	10	30–75 ^a	30
Illinois	6–30	13	27–61	31

^aOne of the Breakfast Place managers in Washington did not know whether waiters had dependents.

indicated that between 10% and 85% of their waiters had dependents, with a median of 38%, while 27%–75% of those in Breakfast Places were reported to (median of 30%, Table 2). In the Washington restaurants, waitstaffs were comprised of between 30% and 85% caregivers; the range in Illinois was 10%–75%.

Workplace opportunity by workforce type

'Male' restaurants

Of the 16 sites, the four with the most male waitstaff included from 40% to 60% men (Table 3; the fifth most male-employing site fell to 30%). Several patterns emerged from these four. All were Community Spot locations, three in the Chicago area. This result is consistent with Hall's (1993) and Neumark's (1996) findings that higher-priced and -status restaurants attract more male employees. All four managers reported relying on students to fill waiter positions, though we found no consistent pattern of employment among very young (under age 21) or older (35 and up) incumbents in these settings. Only the single Washington restaurant employed a sizable fraction of waiters with dependents, at 51% (Table 3). These sites had large total staff sizes, ranging from 57 to 80.

We identified several patterns in benefits offered to waitstaff at these restaurants. All four sites had an employee health insurance option after 90 days, and the three in Chicago also offered dependent coverage. All but one Chicago site offered paid vacation after 1 year of employment. Compared to sites with the highest proportions of women and caregivers, however, the 'male' locations required waiters to share the largest percentage of their sales in tips, often 2.5% as compared to 1%–2%, constituting a generally larger drain on their take-home income (Table 3). In addition, a comparatively low proportion of positions across these restaurants was full-time; half of the waitstaff at one Chicago area site was part-time, while at the remaining sites nearly two-thirds were (Table 3). As health insurance eligibility required working between 20 and 30 hours per week at the restaurants, most waiters would not qualify to enroll.

Notably, waiters were said to have 'a lot' of input over the days they work and 'some' say in the hours (one site suggested none, however; Table 3). This greater input into their work schedules compared to the female sites likely meant that waitstaff at

Table 3. Waitstaff characteristics for sites with the highest proportion of male waitstaff.

	Community Spot			
		Illinois		Washington
Workforce				
Total staff size	60	57	80	75
Total waitstaff size	35	25	35	35
Percent male	60	35–40	40	40
Percent with dependents	25	10	10	51
Percent under age 21	30	85	60	6
Percent 35 or over	None	None	5	23
Use of student workforce	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Percent white	95	85	95	86
Job				
Percent required to tip-out	2.5	2.5	2.5	1
Employee health insurance	Yes ^a	Yes ^a	Yes ^a	Yes ^a
Paid vacation	No	Yes ^b	Yes ^b	Yes ^b
Percent full-time	50	28	29	29
Frequency of schedule changes	Occasionally	Often	Often	Often
Employee input in days worked	A lot	A lot	A lot	A lot
Employee input in hours worked	Some	Some	Some	None

^aAfter 90 days of employment.

^bAfter 1 year of employment.

Note: None of the same sites are represented twice in Tables 2–4.

male sites was better able to balance work with non-work responsibilities. According to these managers work schedules changed often (one indicated just ‘occasionally’), but as a result of waiters’ switching shifts with one another rather than management initiative. Such adjustments therefore indicate even more waitstaff control over work schedules (Table 3).

While managers in our sample generally looked for similar qualifications when hiring waitstaff, including experience and intelligence, personality and outgoingness, and hygiene or appearance, we noted some differences between sites with the most males, females, and caregivers in the priorities managers placed on these different attributes. Three of the four managers at sites with the most males in our sample listed experience or intelligence as the primary hiring criteria used. Only the fourth manager cited good personality as the key standard.

‘Female’ restaurants

In contrast to those featuring high levels of men, the top four restaurant sites for employing women were all from the Breakfast Place chain (Table 4; the fifth most female-employing location had 90% women on waitstaff, still very high). Two each were in Seattle and Chicago areas. This finding also aligns with Hall’s (1993) and Neumark’s (1996) observations about restaurant status and price and waitstaff sex composition. We found few other workforce-related patterns among these four. Apart from the preponderance of women, these waitstaffs exhibited a mix by caregiver status, age, and student status. The most female employing restaurants were

Table 4. Waitstaff characteristics for sites with the highest proportion of female waitstaff.

	Breakfast Place			
	Washington		Illinois	
Workforce				
Total staff size	40	30	26	32
Total waitstaff size	14	14	15	18
Percent male	1	7	6	6
Percent with dependents	Didn't know	29	27	61
Percent under age 21	14	29	53	28
Percent 35 or over	14	43	20	22
Use of student workforce	No	No	Yes	Yes
Percent white	82	71	27	80
Job				
Percent required to tip-out	1.5	2	1	Waiter discretion
Employee health insurance	No	No	No	No
Paid vacation	No	Yes ^a	No	No
Percent full-time	29	79	27	22
Frequency of schedule changes	Rarely	Often	Occasionally	Occasionally
Employee input in days worked	None	A lot	A lot	Some
Employee input in hours worked	Very little	Some	A little	Very little

^aAfter two years of employment.

Note: None of the same sites are represented twice in Tables 2–4.

smaller than those featuring the most men and caregivers, however, with total staff sizes ranging from 26 to 40.

We found several patterns in the benefits offered to waiters among these heavily female sites. Unlike the locations with comparatively high proportions of male waiters, these workplaces provided virtually no fringe benefits. None offered employee or dependent health insurance options. One suburban Seattle restaurant offered paid vacation, but only after two years of employment. With the exception of one Seattle Breakfast Place location that employed 79% full-time waiters, less than a third of waiters were full-time (Table 4). With respect to scheduling, compared to the heavily male restaurants waiters at the most 'female' sites had less input over their work days and hours, though managers said schedules changed less frequently (Table 4).

Two managers offered personality and outgoingness as priority characteristics of job applicants, another listed 'good hygiene,' and only one listed experience as primary, assessments of prospective employees that suggest feminized notions of the ideal qualifications for waiting work. One manager at a heavily female-waitstaffed Breakfast Place site in Seattle noted that for servers and hostesses, 'Shy doesn't work well.' At two of the four of these sites, further, managers used diminutive, gendered terms and even sexualized language to refer to waitstaff. One manager referred to waiters as 'the girls' repeatedly during the interview. During an interview at a different site, a female waiter approached the manager with an envelope of money after 'cashing out' at the end of her shift, and the manager replied, 'Thanks, sweetie!' After the waiter initialed the envelope, the manager responded, 'I love you too,'

joking with the interviewer that the waiter had just written him a love note. The fact that the only managers to use such language during our interviews were from these predominately female sites is notable.

Restaurants for caregivers

While the heavily female and male sites were concentrated by chain, the sites with the most caregivers were concentrated by state. All of the top four sites for waitstaff with caregiving responsibilities were located in Washington (the fifth most heavily caregiver employing site, located in Illinois, featured just 61% of waiters with dependents, compared to 80%–90% in the first four; Table 5). This pattern is striking given the contrasting policy contexts between the two states in the study, with Washington State offering both a higher minimum wage and no tip credit deduction. As noted earlier, this guaranteed Washington waiters an employer-paid hourly wage of \$7.93 at the time of data collection, while those in Illinois received just \$4.50 pre-tips. In addition, waiters at sites with the largest proportions of caregivers also enjoyed the lowest tip out expectations, at an average across the sites of 1.25% of sales vs. 2.13% and 1.5% at the ‘male’ and ‘female’ restaurants, respectively (Table 5).

We found some variation in benefits, staffing and scheduling practices among the locations with the most caregiver–waiters. Aligning with chain ownership, the three

Table 5. Waitstaff characteristics for sites with the highest proportion of caregiver–waitstaff.

	Washington			
	Breakfast Place	Community Spot		
Workforce				
Total staff size	34	62	65	71
Total waitstaff size	17	28	36	31
Percent with dependents	Most	80–90	83	80
Percent male	12	18	17	10
Percent under age 21	6	None	28	20
Percent 35 or over	38	60	8	10–15
Use of student workforce	No	No	No	Yes
Percent white	94	100	95	90
Job				
Percent required to tip-out	2	1	1	1
Employee health insurance	No	Yes ^a	Yes ^a	Yes ^a
Paid vacation	No	Yes ^b	Yes ^b	Yes ^b
Percent full-time	95	71	61	16
Frequency of schedule changes	Occasionally	Often	Often	Rarely
Employee input in days worked	Depends on scheduler	Some	Some	A lot
Employee input in hours worked	A lot	None	None	None

^aAfter 90 days of employment.

^bAfter one year of employment

Note: None of the same sites are represented twice in Tables 2–4.

Community Spot locations offered health insurance at 90 days and paid vacation after one year. The Breakfast Place restaurant exhibiting the highest level of waiter–caregivers offered neither benefit. At two Community Spots and the one Breakfast Place restaurant, most waiter jobs were full time (from 61% to 95%); the proportion at the fourth location was just 16%, however (Table 5). Waiters at three of the four sites had no say over work hours; all of the restaurants varied in the amount of input they allowed waitstaff about what days they worked and in the frequency of schedule changes (Table 5). Limited input into work schedules may be particularly challenging for caregivers who must balance the demands of work and their caregiving roles.

Managers at these locations also appeared to prioritize fairly gendered notions of job qualifications. Three managers referred to personality traits, including ‘great smile,’ ‘personality,’ and ‘friendly’ as the most critical attributes, while only the fourth listed experience first. These restaurants had relatively few males (10%–18% of waitstaff), younger employees (0%–28%) or students (only one site mentioned student employment; Table 5).

Local labor market, industry, and economic conditions

Although the costs of living were similar across them, the 12 suburban towns differed along several economic, educational, and occupational indicators in ways that may at least partially account for the workplace practices we observed. The ‘caregiver’ restaurants were located in suburbs with higher white to non-white population ratios than were ‘male’ and ‘female’ restaurants (Table 6). Consistent with this observation, the ‘caregiver’ sites employed higher percentages of white waitstaff compared to ‘male’ and particularly ‘female’ restaurants (Tables 3–5). As research on racial marginalization would suggest, the less supportive practices we observed in the study’s ‘female’ restaurants may correspond to some extent with workforce racial as well as sex composition.

Compared to suburbs where the ‘female’ and ‘caregiver’ restaurants were located, those with the ‘male’ sites featured higher average rates of resident Bachelor’s degree completion, household income and home ownership, and employment in professional and managerial occupations; they also had a lower mean proportion of workers employed in service occupations (Table 6). In addition, those same suburbs had the most full-service restaurants (Table 6). These contrasts suggest greater competition for waitstaff among the ‘male’ locations as a result of both a somewhat smaller service labor pool and more restaurants seeking to hire them.⁵ Labor competition may therefore have induced these restaurants to engage in more worker-oriented practices to attract workers. Whether or not these external factors have shaped restaurant behavior, it is striking that in our sample men are most heavily represented in the most supportive employment settings.

Discussion and conclusion

Our results echo Hall’s (1993) finding that men are concentrated in the most prestigious restaurant sites and women in those that are least lucrative. In this study, settings with the highest proportions of male waiters were disproportionately Community Spots, offering more generous if not overwhelming fringe benefits and substantial input on scheduling, though less access to full-time work and higher

Table 6. Comparison of sampled suburb workforce and industry characteristics, by sex and caregiver classification.

	Suburbs, 'male' sites		Suburbs, 'female' sites		Suburbs, 'caregiver' sites	
	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean
Total population ^a	22,000–89,000	65,000	40,000–94,000	72,000	30,000–194,000	88,000
Median age	32–38	35	31–36	33	34–36	35
Percent 15–19	6–7	7	7	7	7	7
Percent 20–24	6–9	7	6–8	7	6–9	7
White	56–85	73	56–83	71	69–87	80
Bachelor's degree or higher	29–39 ^b	34	16–29	23	16–39 ^b	25
Civil labor force employed	2–5	4	4	4	3–5	4
Workers in service occupations	8–16	11	12–17	14	12–19	16
Workers in professional, managerial occupations	27–44	37	26–37	31	26–43	31
Median household income (\$)	39,000–68,000	60,000	39,000–68,000	54,000	38,000–59,000	44,000
Residents own home	47–88	68	36–88	61	36–68	50
Residents in poverty	3–13	6	4–13	9	5–16	12
Full-service restaurants	18–44	28	7–27	18	13–44	23

Data source: US Census Bureau (2000).

^aPopulation and household income numbers have been rounded to protect the confidentiality of participating sites and managers.

^bData unavailable for one site.

Note: Data are reported in percentages unless otherwise noted.

imposed tip-out expectations. Terms that managers stressed for waiter job qualifications focused on experience and intelligence.

By comparison, highly women-dominated waitstaffs were found most heavily within Breakfast Place sites that extended virtually no benefits (none at three, vacation one site) and more constrained input over work hours and days. Several of these sites were also those at which our interviewers received the most gratuitously gendered comments from managers about waitstaff. The more 'male' employment settings, then, made human resource investments to a somewhat greater extent, while those where women were particularly concentrated seem to have embraced a labor cost containment – and given the manager comments, a labor value-diminishing – strategy. Strikingly, the latter waitstaffs also exhibited the highest proportions of non-white waiters among the restaurants we analyzed.

Workplaces that were the most populated by waiters caring for dependents were a more varied group with respect to chain ownership but were consistently located within Washington state, where public policy guarantees a higher minimum wage and no tip credit policy. The three Community Spot locations provided benefits, but scheduling input varied across the four sites, a condition that may be particularly problematic for waiters balancing employment and caregiving. Similar to the highly 'female' sites, managers in these locations also stressed personality and 'a great smile.'

The study has several limitations that bear noting. We lacked the resources to collect information directly from waiters, data that could help illuminate potential gaps between employment practices 'on paper' from those effectively experienced by workers. We were thus also unable to learn the implications of job conditions for workers and their families. In some cases, for example, practices we may have anticipated to be very constraining to one or another demographic group may have been offset by other benefits we either failed to measure or else undercredited in our analyses. Future research could helpfully investigate how employer-reported practices and public employment policies correspond with employee-reported, waitstaff experiences and outcomes.

With only cross-sectional data, we were unable to determine whether employer practices had been in place before patterns emerged among workforce characteristics, or instead that employers had formed preferences for certain demographic groups and then tried to lure and retain those individuals by adapting working conditions. Because the latter strategy could readily run afoul of equal opportunity law, we were unlikely to obtain accurate information during our manager interviews to clarify this causal order. In their review of research on organizational sex and race composition, however, Reskin et al. (1999) cite two longitudinal studies finding that employer practices causally precede workforce demographic attributes (Baron, 1984; Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1987; Reskin et al., 1999). If true for restaurants in the current study, opportunities for enhancing working conditions and diversifying workforces may exist through providing firms with technical management assistance, financial incentives as well as higher governmentally mandated floors for employment practices.

Without identifying causal direction, the study findings nonetheless suggest patterns by which workforce characteristics correspond with workplace practices – those established at employers' discretion, as well as governmentally mandated – and gendered notions of work. Restaurants choosing to offer what in this sample most closely resembled an internal labor market had the highest proportions of men. Conversely, the chain whose sites appeared consistently to relegate waiter jobs to fairly opportunity-less 'spot' labor markets instead had the highest levels of women. Although the latter managers recognized the value of waitstaff for their business success, they did not use 'high commitment' employment practices.

Though greater competition for waiters may partially account for the more generous employer practices at 'male' compared to 'female' or 'caregiver' sites, that possibility is disconcerting from a gender equality standpoint. To the extent that women waiters occupy less rewarding and supportive positions than their male peers, they face greater obstacles to employment success. Those barriers are substantially

structural, moreover, rather than individual-level as has been the emphasis of considerable literature on low-skill, low-wage workers. The convergence of female and non-white waiter concentrations in the same sites of our study may further indicate that both sets of employees face similar workplace challenges.

By comparing restaurants in two American states with divergent policy regimes for low-wage and specifically tipped employment, our results further suggest that state-level policy contexts are associated with the demographic composition of jobs. That is, the finding that caregiver waiters cluster in sites located within a state that has adopted a higher standard of labor support – through the relatively high minimum wage and lack of a tip credit policy – point to an important role for public tools in mitigating some barriers to work faced by socially and economically vulnerable employees.

Scholarship has already well begun to consider the state of the match between what lower-level workers need and what employment provides, noting a significant and growing gap (e.g., Heymann, 2000; Kochan & Shulman, 2007). Parallel research has considered issues of accessibility of employment, both structurally and culturally, by sex and family status (Bielby & Baron, 1986; Kmec, 2005, 2008; Reskin, et al., 1999; Scott, 2005; Swanberg & Simmons, 2008). A deeper understanding of the association between employer practices applied to a range of lower-skill hourly jobs and the characteristics of the workers occupying them could inform both public policies and private firm practices designed to reduce gender inequalities in labor market outcomes specifically, and enhance the employment experiences of entry-level workers more generally.

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Notes

1. This work was completed while the second author was a graduate student at the University of Washington. The views expressed on methodological and theoretical issues are those of the authors and not the US Census Bureau.
2. Restaurant names are pseudonyms.
3. Both of the chains have locations worldwide. At the time of data collection, Community Spot had roughly 2000 sites in 20 countries, while Breakfast Place had more than 1300 restaurants in fewer than five countries (numbers have been rounded to protect confidentiality).
4. Managers generally reported limited corporate influence over local operations. Community Spot managers, however, described somewhat more involvement by its larger company in setting wages and benefits and in scheduling than their Breakfast Place counterparts.
5. We initially suspected that tip income at the ‘male’ sites may be larger than at their ‘female’ and ‘caregiver’ counterparts by virtue of customers who are on average wealthier and may

in turn tip more. Manager-reported tip data do not support this, however; in fact, tips appeared to be the greatest at the 'caregiver' restaurants.

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