

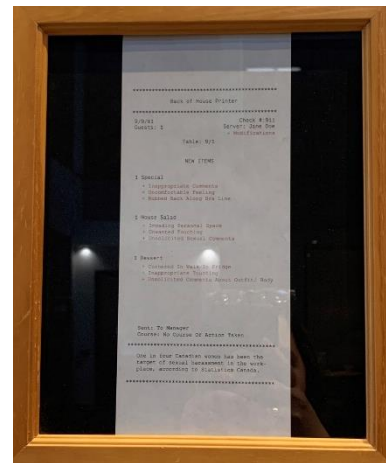


Art Review

Distasteful: Sexual harassment in the restaurant industry

Reviewed by Stefanie Foster*

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Distasteful Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry
 By Annika Lusia

The restaurant industry represents the largest number of sexual harassment complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Women working in all sorts of restaurant jobs report experiencing sexual harassment, often from multiple sources, owners/managers, coworkers, and customers. Many women do not feel actions such as unwanted sexualized jokes or touching are worth reporting, with some even suggesting it is part of the process of hazing or acceptance by the staff. Normalizing this behaviour, coupled with drinking and substance use, fans the flames for sexual harassment/assault to occur. There are also cases where women do choose to report and are met with resistance from their employers due this behaviour being normalized. In some cases, this caused some women to choose to leave the industry. My submission piece will be a framed chef's jacket and pants with handprints over them to represent the sexual harassment that women have faced in the culinary industry. The handprints will be made to look as if they were covered in food. Alongside it will be another smaller piece that will resemble a restaurant ticket/chit. The ticket will provide the progression of sexual misconduct along with a statistic of sexual harassment in kitchens.

Keywords: Sexual Misconduct, #Me Too, Chefs, Women, and Workplace Harassment

I am currently attending George Brown College in the Honours Bachelor of Food Studies degree program. I have a great passion for anything related to food or the restaurant and hospitality industry.

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DOI: [10.15353/cfs-rcea.v11i1.675](https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v11i1.675)

ISSN: 2292-3071

Presented at the 2023 Canadian Association of Food Studies (CAFS) Conference as part of the Exploration Gallery, *Distasteful: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry*, a contemporary piece by artist and Food Studies student Annika Lusiš, exposes the stark and distressing reality of sexual harassment in the food service industry. Through a simple yet thoughtful display, Lusiš shines light on the disturbing experiences endured by women in this field, leaving a lasting impression on viewers. The centerpiece of the artwork, a crisp, black chef's coat, carefully framed, belies the presence of two chaotic handprints stamped in flour on the chest (breast) area. These grasping prints mimic groping hands and serve as a powerful representation of the violation and objectification endured by individuals subjected to workplace sexual harassment. As a woman with firsthand experience in the food service industry, I found this visual statement immediate and affecting—I was taken back to my time spent washing dishes in hot kitchens, and the feeling of forcing myself to smile as foul-mouthed chefs told “NSFW” dirty jokes and sweaty prep cooks got way too familiar, a feeling only *nearly*-forgotten now after twenty years or so.

Beside the floury chef's jacket, in its own small frame, is a restaurant chit. At first glance, it appears to be a regular ticket from a back-of-house printer—anyone who has used a restaurant Point of Sale (POS) system will be familiar with the faded black and red ink and the instantly recognizable, industry-standard sans serif font. Upon closer inspection, however, we see that the three “menu items”—the Special, the House Salad, and the Dessert—are not food at all. Instead, these dishes are built of the

disturbing experiences faced by victims of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace: getting “inappropriate comments” and “uncomfortable feelings,” being “cornered in walk-in fridge,” and facing “inappropriate touching” and “unsolicited comments about outfit/body,” among other heinous ingredients.

At the bottom of the chit, a disheartening revelation: the order has been “Sent: To Manager” but with “No Course of Action Taken”; then, as a quick denouement, a chilling Statistics Canada statistic: one in four Canadian women has been the target of sexual harassment in the workplace. These brief but impactful notes help the viewer to understand the prevalent and systemic nature of the issue and act as a reminder of the industry's failure to support victims and address workplace sexual violence and harassment. As Lusiš mentions in her project description, the restaurant industry is the source of more sexual harassment complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission than any other field, and, in some establishments, unprovoked sexual attention and touching from colleagues is so normalized that victims do not report the harassment or even recognize it as such. Lusiš' artwork captures the essence of the message it aims to convey through simple, but evocative, visuals. The simplicity of the framed coat and its accompanying ticket echoes the cruelty of the underlying message—women in the food service industry are frequently exposed to unwanted attention and danger and often lack the protection they deserve. It is a great example of poignant storytelling done with easily recognizable visual elements, and it effectively raises awareness about

this pressing issue, urging viewers to reflect upon the experiences of those who have and are suffering, often in silence.

Distasteful: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry is a thought-provoking piece that compels viewers to confront the uncomfortable realities that persist within the food-service industry and, by pointing out the harsh realities of the current

situation, advocates for a safer and more equitable working environment for all. It was an engaging addition to the CAFS Conference 2023 Exploration Gallery.

Stefanie Foster is a former elementary school teacher and principal with a background in community-level, non-profit food security work. Today, she puts all of her experience to use as a researcher with the University of Saskatchewan, examining and advocating for culturally-responsive, universal school food programs. A settler-Canadian, Stef is grateful to live, work and play on Treaty 6 territory and the Homeland of the Métis and is proud to work towards a food secure future for all our relations.