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The Owl in the Room: Public Hypocrisy and the Sexualized Workplace

Imagine you're on a road trip, alone in the middle of nowhere when all of a sudden you hear a rumble. It's not thunder, it's just your stomach. Then all of a sudden, a bright orange sign with an owl and two suggestive "Os" catches your eye. Hooters. You hesitate. You know what awaits; tight shorts, bubbly waitresses, and the lingering question, does eating here make you complicit in misogyny? As you pull in, you feel uneasy. The parking lot is quiet, but you hear a voice in your head, "Who would willingly go to Hooters?". You take a few shaky steps in. The air is humid, and the lights dim. Photos of swimsuit-clad women hang on the walls like relics of a bygone era. You're not sure if you should stay. Your neck hairs start to rise, you feel as if you're being watched. You hear fast footsteps. Then you hear, "Hi darling, welcome to Hooters! Just a table for one?" It's a brunette with big curls and long lashes, most likely a past cheerleader. Embarrassed, you ask to sit at the bar. You notice the other sinners in the room, a few rugged men, and a group of girls laughing loudly, clearly having fun. You try to focus on the menu, but your eyes wander. You blush ashamed. The waitress, "Kitty" smiles and walks away. You quickly order wings and Diet Coke, eat, tip well, and prepare to bolt. But just as you're about to leave, Kitty says, "Hope you had a great day, sweetheart!" On impulse you blurt, "Why to work here?" She flashes a cheeky smile like it's not the first time, "I'm a college student, the job helps ease the pressure on my parents, and I love the girls here, some of the best people I've ever met". You nod, struck and ashamed by how quickly you judged. We all judge Hooters, some harshly,

some casually but why? Many bars and restaurants use sex appeal to sell, yet Hooters is often singled out. The truth is, that criticizing Hooters while ignoring similar practices elsewhere reveals our inconsistent standards. Maybe it's not the uniforms, but how comfortable we are admitting that sexuality exists in public space. While Hooters is often criticized for its overt use of sex appeal in marketing, at its root the very foundation of the criticism is hypocritical. Despite the fact that many other bars and restaurants employ similar marketing strategies they do not receive the backlash. This contradiction reveals deeper societal biases about when and where sexuality is deemed acceptable.

Hooters, from its first steps as a breastaurant in 1983 to its place in today's pop culture, has always served more than just ice-cold beers, delicious wings, and hot chicks, it's also served controversy. Since its doors opened in Clearwater, Florida the franchise has sparked debate for its unabashed use of sex appeal. You might be wondering who would come up with such a cheeky business model, one that openly capitalizes on the sex appeal of its workers.

Unsurprisingly, Hooters was the brainchild of six mid-western men. Imagine greying gentlemen with neatly trimmed mustaches, Carhartt jackets, and sipping some ice cold beers. Lynn D. Stewart, Gil DiGiannantonio, Ed Droste, Billy Ranieri, Ken Wimmer, and Dennis Johnson unveiled their devilishly provocative establishment, Hooters. They had shaken their money maker, Hooters, to life, conceived as a bar/restaurant that offered cold beer and finger-licking wings, but with one key selling point: the pretty, young, voluptuous Hooters girls. Fittingly, their grand opening was held on April 1st, April Fools Day, since even the founders didn't expect the idea to take off.. As VF Franchise Consulting notes in their article "The History of Hooters: From Humble Beginnings to Worldwide Fame", the goal was simple, "hire attractive women and have them wear revealing uniforms to attract customers," creating a safe haven where men

could enjoy sports, beer, and sexy ladies. This mission statement, largely unchanged since the 1980s, shows just how little the brand's identity has evolved, even as the public discourse around gender and workplace equality has shifted. Despite being mugged or moralized, Hooters is no more exploitative than other mainstream bars and restaurants, its reputation stems less from what it does and more from how it openly does it, exposing the public's own discomfort and double standard around sex appeal in the service industry. While Hooters may have started with an unconventional and provocative business model, its transformation into a corporate kingpin is a testament to how successfully it capitalized on its sexualized brand identity. Beyond its origins in a small Floridian nightclub, Hooters grew into a global franchise, complete with its own airline, although not operating anymore, annual international beauty pageants and even a Hooters Girl Hall of Fame featured on its website. The company has been incredibly transparent about its image, embracing a marketing strategy centered on sex appeal and traditional gender roles. What makes Hooters so memorable is not just the nature of the business, but its unabashed business model. Unlike restaurants that may use sex appeal a little more subtly, Hooters operates in plain sight, inviting both admiration and backlash. This transparency exposes the cultural discomfort around commodified sexuality, it is not the presence of sexual marketing that offends, but it's unapologetic visibility.

It wouldn't be Hooters without the iconic uniform: cheeky orange shorts, and tight white tank top, stamped with a strategically placed owl logo that exposes just enough cleavage to be titillating but not enough to be tacky. Many people probably know at least one person who dresses up as a Hooters Girl for Halloween, but wearing the uniform for a night of partying is very different from wearing it every day for work. The women who clock in know what the job entails, and they're mentally prepared to perform a specific role. But what exactly transforms an

average server into a Hooters Girl? And what beyond the uniform defines that role? In Michelle Newton-Francis's journal article, "Not Winging it at Hooters: Conventions for Producing a Cultural Object of Sexual Fantasy," she explores these questions in detail. She argues that "the employee handbook asserts when the woman is 'in uniform' she is literally playing a role; having been cast for that role, [she] must comply with the image and grooming standard that role requires"(pg. 9). In other words, that bubbly and flirtatious banter isn't always genuine, it's part of a carefully curated performance that allows its customers to feel individually appreciated and more likely to come back. Newton-Francis also includes how the uniform itself is described by the company as "athletic in nature", and is key to presenting a "wholesome, yet sexy" image. But it doesn't stop at the clothes. The Hooters Girls handbook "prescribe[s] standards for physical appearance regarding hair and makeup as well fingernails and bodily adornments to ensure the women look the part"(Newton-Francis pg. 5). So if you ever think looking like a Hooters Girl is effortless, this ought to put some perspective into place. It's labor and it's theatrical, a distinction that is often overlooked.

In many ways, the Hooters Uniform is the true centerpiece of the brand but most people overlook the performance part of the job. While the wings may be good, it's unlikely that the food alone has kept customers coming back for decades. The real deal, for many, is the sight of young women in tight revealing outfits serving drinks and food with a smile. This visual performance links Hooters to a broader cultural conversation about sexuality, gendered labor, and even sex work; in that it exposes the inherent nature of sex work, or work that revolves around the sex appeal of its workers. Many different types of physical laborers, especially bartenders, cart girls, and different types of entertainers must tailor their appearance in order to make money. This type of work is tip-based labor, where a woman depends on her attentiveness

and attractiveness to make money. In the book, *Invisible Labor: Hidden Work in the Contemporary World*, Marion Crain, Winifred Poster, and Miriam Cherry critically analyze this connection, explaining that Hooters relies on “internal branding is accomplished through recruitment practices, work rules, gendered uniform and appearance requirements, and tipping norms that shape and control the emotional and aesthetic labor expected of the breasaurant servers” (Crain et al. 174). In short, the Hooters Girl image is not just about clothing, it's a form of branded performance that demands emotional and sexualized labor from its workers, so just having a pretty face isn't enough, you need personality and grit to succeed. Since Hooters, like most restaurants, is tip-based, the workers need to be in character at all times if they want to capitalize off of their emotional labor. The authors continue to argue that “without question, breasaurant servers are hired to engage in a sexualized display and performance, and their jobs should be considered, at least in part, as a form of sex work” (Crain et al. 175). This framing, while provocative, invites the general public to hopefully view their labor more seriously; the work is emotionally and physically draining. Hooters Girls are subjected to sexual exploitation until they clock out of work and even then they are subjected to negative comments by other “working civilians”. A YouTube video by DCP Entertainment, “Hooters is Sex Work and All The Ways We Consume Yet Demonize Sex Work” featuring filmmaker Sarah Jones, reinforces this idea by placing Hooters within a broader continuum of sex work. Jones argues that women have long commodified their bodies and sexuality for personal gain and that Hooters is one example of this practice, even if it's sanitized for mainstream consumption. While the video didn't explore Hooters in-depth, it resonated with the idea that what society often ridiculous or moralizes, like working at Hooters, isn't radically different from other accepted forms of labor that use sex appeal, especially when women are the ones profiting from it.

While Hooters may have started as a wild gamble by six inexperienced Midwestern men, it is actually a gamble that paid off, transforming into a cultural mainstay. Hooters didn't just open a restaurant; it pioneered an entirely new genre of dining by combining food, sports, and overt sex appeal into a brand built as much on atmosphere as on menu items. Credited as the original "breastaurant" Hooters gave rise to a term, defined by Collins Dictionary, as a breastaurant "a restaurant where the waitresses wear clothes that draw attention to their chest" (Breastaurant). This definition doesn't just describe a dress code, it encapsulates the business model and branding tactics that Hooters was able to normalize and mass-market. The fact that this term is recognized in a formal dictionary, a word I didn't even know existed until this paper, speaks to how deeply Hooters has embedded itself into our culture. It also reflects how the public or at least Collins Dictionary had accepted a business that blatantly relies on sexualized labor. Additionally, in Will Fulton's article, "The Strange, Resilient Story of the Breastaurant", he gets to the heart of the Hooter's concept and notes that "if there's one thing guys love more than cold pints of beer, it's the soft, supple sight of two perfectly shaped pulled pork sliders. Just kidding, it's boobs" (Fulton). This unapologetic appeal to male desire helps explain how Hooters has been able to grow to 425 locations worldwide, the key trick they employ is preying on a traditional form of masculinity. This form, as advertised above, appeals to a niche type of man, one that appreciates traditional gender norms and wants to wind down with tasty, cheap food and hot chick bending over backward, and stroking the ego of hardworking men.

Of course, no discussion of Hooters is complete without its iconic logo, a wide-eyed owl that seems harmless until you realize its "O"s are strategically positioned to represent breasts. The sweet image of a doe-eyed owl didn't seem so sweet to me when all I could see were two breasts, it felt as if I was relearning about menstruation for the first time, uncomfortable, funny,

and oddly formative, but in an objectifying and mocking way. According to the website, 1000 Logos, in its article, “Hooters Logo” the brand's name carries a double meaning, referencing both owls and breasts, with the visual branding driving the double entendre home. The article notes “the Hooters logo is one of the most important parts of the company’s concept and recognizability,” emphasizing how the owl’s eyes align with the chest area on employee uniforms (1000 Logos). It's cheeky by design, both literal and suggestive, and that dual symbolism is central to the brand’s identity. In essence, the logo itself serves as a visual thesis for the company’s marketing strategy: provocative, playful, and impossible to ignore. Its happy medium between its sexually suggestive visual and the name of the restaurant also helps separate it from the branding from a strip club and a run-of-the-mill restaurant like Applebee's aesthetic. What began as a tongue-in-cheek business venture turned into a global franchise that cemented the breastaaurant as a commercial category, showing just how powerful and lasting sex appeal can be when embedded directly into brand identity.

One of the more pressing issues that emerged in research on Hooters is racial discrimination. The brand has been widely criticized for favoring women with a lower number on what is known as the Fitzpatrick system, a classification system of the amount of melanin in an individual's skin tone. Or to put it bluntly, Hooters overwhelmingly favors caucasian women over those with darker complexions, including Black, Hispanic, Indigenous individuals, etc. This seeming discrepancy is also reflected in the numerous lawsuits and testimonies against Hooters alleging racial discrimination against former employees. The majority of Hooters Girls depicted in media, promotional materials, and employee testimonials tend to conform to a narrow aesthetic; that happens to be white, often blonde, and blue-eyed women with your token people of color. I can not say this accurately, as I had a hard time finding advertisements like billboards

or signs across the nation, but I personally have observed an overwhelming amount of white women in advertisements, the only diversity being shown is hair color, especially in the Hooters Wall of Fame. This trend is substantiated by legal action. For instance, in a 2021 report by the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) titled, “Hooters of America, LLC to Pay \$250,000 to settle EEOC Race and Color Lawsuit”, a Hooters in Greensboro, North Carolina, agreed to pay “\$250,000 and provide relief to settle race and color discrimination lawsuit after terminating forty-three employees, primary Black or darker-skinned women during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the restaurant resumed operations and began rehiring in May of 2020, “92% of those rehired Hooters Girls [were] either White or[had] lighter skin tones” (EEOC). The lawsuit also included testimonies of the women who had felt racial hostility and recalled that the women with lighter skin tones received preferential treatment, emphasizing they were not hired back because of their race. A similar case in Metairie, Louisiana involved reports of racist remarks and discriminatory behavior directed at Black employees dating back to 2017, with indications that such behavior may have occurred earlier. These non-isolated incidents expose how the company's curated image of attractiveness, and by extension, its brand of acceptable sexual performance is shaped not only by body type but also by race. These incidents show that the backlash Hooters receives is not simply about its sexualized branding, but about whose sexuality is being represented, revealing the uncomfortable reality that society and Hooters uphold racially biased standards for what is deemed acceptable display of sex appeal.

A common question surrounding Hooters is whether men are allowed to serve as part of the waitstaff. It would seem not, but how is the company able to legally justify these gender-exclusive hiring practices when the law, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibits employers from any sex-based discrimination (Equal Rights Advocate)? Just based on this act

alone, Hooters should have never been able to open, it seems rather unfair since it's allowing the franchise to sidestep anti-discrimination laws. By doing this it is excluding a large pool of qualified applicants solely based on their gender, which is actively reinforcing outdated stereotypes about who is allowed to perform certain kinds of labor. This question came to mainstream attention when, in 2009, Nikolai Grushevski applied for a server position at a Hooters in Corpus Christi, Texas, and was denied employment based on his gender. In his article, "Can Gender Discrimination or Provocative Dress Requirements Ever be Appropriate for Your Employees" Daniel Brown explains how Grusheveski filed a gender discrimination lawsuit, alleging that "the on-duty manager told him that 'Hooters, locally and nationally, would not hire males for waiter's positions'" (Brown). I think after hearing or reading that most people would say "That doesn't seem right". And it's not, it is in direct violation of Title VII. Despite these violations the case never went to court and ended in a private settlement, mirroring a similar lawsuit in 1997 in which a group of men sued Hooters and ultimately settled for \$3.75 million. These outcomes highlight a pattern in the company's legal strategy: rather than risk a court ruling that could challenge the foundation of its branding, Hooter chooses to settle and avoid setting any public precedent. If another case like this were to arise and be taken to court, Hooters would need to invoke the Bona Fide Occupational Qualification (BFOQ) defense. As defined by Cornell Law School, BFOQ is a legal exemption that allows employers to consider traits like sex, religion, and or national origin in hiring if they are "reasonably necessary to the normal operation" of the business. Basically, Hooters can legally justify hiring only female servers as long as they argue that the sex appeal of female employees is central to the company's business model, which, I'm sure we're all aware is. Additionally for BFOQ to hold in court Hooters would need to prove that sex directly relates to the "essence or central mission of the

employer's business," and must be demonstrably necessary to job performance (Cornell Law School). This legal loophole positions Hooters not as a conventional restaurant but as a business that markets entertainment through sexualized performance. This distinction ties directly into a larger question of societal hypocrisy around sexuality in the workplace. Hooters does not hide its intentions, instead, Hooters openly markets the sexualization of its female servers as the brand itself. While many restaurants rely on sex appeal subtly, Hooters happens to make it the focal point, which has allowed it to exploit legal gray areas like the BFOQ defense. By doing this, the company continues to operate within the law while backing up the double standard that certain types of commodified sexuality are acceptable, as long as they align with a specific male-centered fantasy.

Do women actually go to Hooters? It's a fair question to ask, especially since Hooters and strip clubs have more similarities than they do differences, both cater to the male gaze, using skimpy uniforms and overt sexualization of women. A couple of weeks ago my friend Ashton mentioned how she wanted to eat at Hooters and just experience the environment. While she uttered those God-forsaken words, two girls nearby shot her the stank eye, she might as well have been wearing an "I hate women" shirt. That moment made me question why we judge women for taking advantage of opportunities in environments that are built around a woman's appearance; even though most bars hire attractive women because it's good for business, yet Hooters is grilled with criticism simply because they don't deny their motives.

Still, not all women feel comfortable with Hooters, in fact, some want nothing to do with it. On the blog, *DC Urban Moms and Dads*, a post titled, "Do you eat at Hooters? Are you a woman?" featured strong opinions from parents, predominantly moms, many of whom were quick to slander the name. One anonymous woman had passionately written, "I would stab

myself in the eye before I would enter that establishment...Its existence in 2013 America is a disgrace". While her response may seem dramatic, and possibly wine-fueled, her comment sparked similar reactions and many female bloggers were quick to criticize the "sickening orange logo". Similarly, in Adriel Booker's article, titled "What's the Big Deal About Restaurants Like Hooters?" Booker described how her community, a quaint town, opposed a new Hooters opening, calling it a symbol of outdated patriarchal values that sexualize women under the label "family-friendly" (Booker). Despite all this criticism, there are plenty of people, especially men, who are quick to defend those provocative "O's". In that same blog that was mentioned earlier, several male bloggers retaliated against the negative remarks with one person saying, "I am very surprised how many women can not see past the clothes the girls wear". Another added "I wonder how many of these women against Hooters are also for girls to not be judged by "what they wear". Yet even among the defenders, some people admitted that Hooters feels more like a "men's club", similar to less intense Masonic Temple, with one commenter writing, "The point is: are normal women really welcome at Hooters? No. It's a men's club. Its whole point is to appeal to men." (DC Urban Moms and Dads). While these comments mostly reflect male perspectives and represent one community, they show two things; the first is that men are more likely to defend Hooters, and the second, the audience is overwhelmingly male. In fact a journalist, Jordan Weissman, for *The Atlantic* once reported that about two-thirds of Hooters' patrons are men (Weissman). This divide in perception reveals the contradiction at the center of Hooters' backlash, while many businesses quietly depend on sex appeal, Hooters is targeted more frequently because it makes that appeal visible.

Hooters is often seen as a place to revel in one's manhood, catering to a hetero-sexual, testosterone-filled, crowd, but surprisingly, Hooters has unknowingly become a safe space for

young gay men. In Peter Rothplatz's New York Times article, "Why Dads Take Their Gay Sons to Hooters", he reflects on a childhood memory of when his conservative grandfather brought him to the restaurant in an effort to reinforce heterosexual norms. Instead, Peter had described a moment of unexpected affirmation from a Hooters Girl, who had quietly told him, "You're perfect just the way you are" (Rothplatz). After sharing his story, Rothplatz received hundreds of similar messages from queer men, revealing how the restaurant's performative femininity can sometimes create a space for identity affirmation. These experiences can be perceived as counterintuitive to Hooters image, conveying that while it profits from traditional gender norms it can also intentionally or unintentionally offer moments of unexpected acceptance. Peter's story, while seemingly wholesome, also exposes how many men are introduced to Hooters as a rite of passage, a way for some men to validate their masculinity by being immersed in the stigma of hyper-sexualizing women in a male-dominated space. This cultural norm reinforces traditional values about manhood; which reveals how Hooters upholds gender expectations and sexual norms that define the brand.

I assumed that working at a place like Hooters would have some requirements for the girls working the show, and during my research, that assumption was confirmed, especially regarding weight and appearance. Unsurprisingly, it was difficult to find honest feedback, but after searching through the bowels of the internet, I stumbled upon job reviews from Indeed, a job website. Of the 3,351 reviews that Hooters got it was on average rated 3.7 stars, 1,200 of those reviews being five stars. Multiple reviews had mentioned toxic attitudes around weight, with one ex-employee writing, "[they were] very judgmental on weight gain or weight loss" (Indeed). In an environment like Hooters, it's not shocking to hear experiences like this, it doesn't make it right but it does go hand-and-hand with Hooters business model; which profits off of sex

appeal, that is reflective of traditional beauty standards, in this case favoring thin women.

Additionally, I was able to find Megan Hageman's article, "8 Strict Rules That Have Gotten Hooters Girls Fired", where she points out that there are some inexcusable actions that can result in termination, but at Hooters those reasons can look a bit different than your average nine to five. Many of these rules revolve around maintaining the brand's image, such as requiring natural hair colors, styled thought shifts, and very limited jewelry. Hooters also enforces, unspoken, weight standards with some employees reportedly being let go for weight gain and pregnant workers assigned with "special uniforms" (Hageman). Policies like these emphasize that physical appearance is not just part of the job but actually is the job. Some Of the other rules consist of how girls are not supposed to have any tattoos peeking out, always be camera-ready, and not to touch any of the customers unless it's for a picture. All of that said, I'm sure there is some leeway in all of these or this establishment would have been closed from the sheer amount of lawsuits this would cause, but nevertheless it's obvious that these girls are held to a high standard . Overall, it is clear that Hooters holds its employees to strict and sometimes controversial standards, reinforcing the idea that their image is just as important as their service, for better or worse.

While Hooters is welcoming of its customer bases, behind the scenes it's less hospitable especially when it comes to hiring members of the LGBTQ+ community. In Geoff Herbert's article, "Trans Woman Sues Hooters in Upstate NY for Discrimination" he explains how Brandy Livingston, a trans woman, had tried three separate times to work for Hooters in Albany, New York, and was denied all three attempts and faced mistreatment during the process (Herbert). As a result, Brandy has filed a lawsuit against Hooters for the repeated discrimination. Although Livingston was a loyal customer, she was never hired, exposing the reality that Hooters enforces

its image to cater to a “good ole boy” customer base that is resident of gender inclusivity. Her experience and lawsuit show how gender identity discrimination remains ingrained in companies that prioritize maintaining a narrowly defined brand appeal over inclusive hiring practices.

Although some people may think it’s impossible or anti-feminist, many Hooters Girls enjoy their work environment, challenging many negative assumptions about the job. In Cheryl Wischhover’s article, “What It's Really Like to Be a Hooters Waitress” she interviews Courtney Diaz, a former employee who worked at Hooters for almost four years. Diaz had stated that she had, “nothing bad to say about Hooters” and that she even met some of her best friends while working there. When asked why she chose the job, she explained, “when I was a cheerleader for [the University of] Louisville, a bunch of people decided to go work there because we needed the money” (Wishhover). While the job does come with certain stigmas and occasional creepy, much like any other service job, customers, many employees report positive experiences that challenge any negative connotation. While acknowledging the random presence of inappropriate customer behavior, many Hooters Girls described a supportive work environment where management promptly addressed these types of issues. For example, one former employee had shared on a forum on Reddit, that when a customer attempted to record her without consent, a fellow waitress had stepped in immediately (Reddit). While there are the occasional issues with inappropriate behavior, it was a common trend to see many women enjoying their time at Hooters. Experiences like these aid in revealing the deeper problem with public perception; it's not the sexual marketing that draws the criticism, but the fact that Hooters does it so openly. In this sense, Hooters transparency around sexuality makes people uncomfortable, not because it's unique, but because it refuses to hide what other businesses subtly exploit.

As one might suspect, Hooters isn't the only child in the world of "breastaurants" though it did kickstart the trend of serving food with a side of cleavage. Inspired by its success, other entrepreneurs launched their own versions. Twenty-two years after the first Hooters, Twin Peaks introduced a sports-lodge-meets-sexy-lumberjack theme, and according to Candace Davison, became "one of the fastest-growing restaurants in the country." Then came Tilted Kilt, pushing the provocative envelope even further with its schoolgirl-inspired uniforms. Davison described them as "Scottish-highlander-meets-naughty-school-girl-esque". And to answer any concerns over whether there is a male version of Hooters, fear not. Gender representation is constantly improving, even in restaurants. Candace mentioned Tallywackers, a "Hooters for women," featuring scantily clad men (Davison). Though it's a small step toward equality, it's also a reminder that female hypersexualization remains more normalized and profitable than male sexualized work. In the midst of this research two things became clear: one, it's hard to change public opinion without getting side-eyes or creepy approval; and two, Hooters truly opened Pandora's. As Kevin Allman put it, in his article, "Breastaurant Confidential", Hooters is "just as Pinkberry spun off a thousand sour-frozen yogurt places, Hooters has spawned a whole sub-genre of casual eateries that combine burger baskets with mammary glands" (Allman). While Hooters may have pioneered the concept, it also unleashed a wave of imitators that reflect both society's evolving tastes, and its ongoing obsession with sex appeal in the restaurant industry. I would also like to add that the public is less critical of these spin-offs, our society targets Hooters much more aggressively since they were the pioneers, which frankly is unfair in so many ways. This growing chain of imitators proves that while society may critique Hooters, it also continues to embrace and profit from very gendered and sexualized dynamics the brand helped popularize, underscoring the cultural contradictions at the heart of the breastaurant phenomenon.

Hooters, once a cultural icon of old-fashioned ideals and casual dining, has experienced a significant decline in recent years, reflecting broader shifts away from businesses that capitalize on the objectification of women's bodies. This past March, Hooters filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which allows businesses to reorganize their finances and debts while still being able to operate (United States Courts). The chain's decline is due to shifting consumer preferences, particularly among younger generations who are more likely to prioritize inclusivity and ethical business practices over establishments that perpetuate outdated gender stereotypes. Its decline can also be attributed to rising costs of operation and increased competition. In order to appeal to a broader range of demographics, Hooters has made steps in brand revitalization, including remodeling its locations to attract Millennials and Gen Z patrons. The cooperation had also made efforts to diversify their menus to attract more patrons. Despite these changes, Hooters is and will also struggle with its image and the broader societal shift away from businesses that capitalize on the sex appeal of its customers. However on that note, no one can ignore that at its core Hooters relies on the sex appeal of its workers, and we have seen they are not the only ones to do it transparently, or subtly.

Hooters stands as a cultural mirror, not just for what it markets, but for how openly it does so. While critics are quick to point out its use of sex appeal, they are quick to ignore that many other establishments rely on the same tactics and strategies; which is just hidden behind polished branding. The backlash that Hooters receives shows less about the company itself and more about our society's collective discomfort with visible sexuality, especially when the women are profiting from it. From uniform policies to customer expectations, from its relation to sex work, to legal battles, Hooters exposes the contradictions in how society policies gender, sexuality, and labor. Despite ever evolving attempts to modernize, the brand continues to operate

within a cultural framework that is both drawn to and repelled by its transparency. This contradiction, demonizing hooters while tolerating similar behavior elsewhere, exposes a deeper societal bias about when and where sexuality is acceptable, making the restaurant not just a breastaurant, but a battleground for gender norms across the nation.

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