Customer and manager's perception and preference on food server gender in fine-dining establishments

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CUSTOMER AND MANAGER'S PERCEPTION AND PREFERENCE ON FOOD SERVER GENDER IN FINE-DINING ESTABLISHMENTS

by

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2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

Customer and Manager’s Perception and Preference on Food Server Gender in Fine-Dining Establishments

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American fine dining established itself as a lucrative business opportunity in the 19th century and was significantly influenced by European dining practices, which mostly notably included the practice of hiring only male servers (Prewitt, 2000). Despite changes in contemporary fine dining that are trending toward a less formal environment, some restaurants still hire only male servers. The purpose of this study is to explore how managers and customers feel about server gender in fine-dining establishments. It will also determine whether a disconnect exists between customers and managers’ perceptions regarding the gender of fine dining servers.

Qualitative research, using the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET), was performed with five fine-dining patrons from locations throughout the United States and five fine-dining restaurant managers from various establishments in Los Angeles, California and Las Vegas, Nevada. One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with participants who brought images they selected to represent their thoughts and feelings about the gender of food.
servers.

The results illustrate that some disconnect exists between managers and customers in their perception and preference on food server gender in fine-dining restaurants. Customers are slightly more open to female servers whereas managers tend to feel more comfortable working with male servers. However, it is interesting to note the paradox that managers do not feel uncomfortable with female servers when visiting fine-dining restaurants as patrons. In addition, the culture and experience of managers and customers has played an essential role in forming the perceptions and expectations of food server gender in fine dining.
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CHAPTER I

THE GENDER OF FOOD SERVERS IN
THE FINE DINING INDUSTRY

Introduction

In 2004, Palm Restaurant Management Corp., owner and operator of 29 Palm restaurants nationwide, agreed to pay $500,000 to women who were denied jobs as servers because they were female. Based on job applications and other evidence, there were more over 400 female applicants who declared they were claimants. The settlement resolved a sexual-discrimination charge filed in 1999 by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The commission had alleged that the steakhouse chain failed to recruit and hire women as servers, and instead preserved those jobs for men (News Digests, 2004). Joe’s Stone Crab in Miami, one of the highest grossing independently owned restaurants in the United States, had to pay $154,000 in damage to women who tried to apply for food serving positions and were not offered jobs. A federal district judge found that from 1986 to 1995 this popular restaurant maintained an all male hiring policy (Prewitt, 2000).

According to critics, this exclusionary tradition of hiring only males to work as servers in fine-dining establishments is not only against the law, it’s also unjust and bad for the image of the industry (Prewitt, 2000). Although female food
servers account for approximately 76% of all food servers actively working in the market (National Restaurant Association, 2005), some fine dining restaurants today still hire only male servers (Prewitt, 2000). One consideration that emerges is whether employing more males than females as servers in expensive restaurants is performed to appease customer preference and satisfaction or because the practice supports the paradigm and traditional perception of restaurant management that male servers are more appropriate and effective for the fine-dining industry. Although extensive studies have been done on gender related topics in various industries, very few empirical studies have been completed regarding gender in the fine-dining industry.

Researchers of labor markets have suggested that male servers are favored in high-priced, formal restaurants where wages and tips are higher. Male servers appear to have the vast majority of jobs in high-priced restaurants, hotel dining rooms, private clubs and other establishments where meal service is formal (Neumark & Bank, 1996). Bergmann’s (1974) study claims that conflict between waitresses and other male employees in restaurants is one reason that leads to the segregation of waiters into high-price restaurants and waitresses into low-price restaurants. The study claimed that restaurants in the United States offering fine food and luxurious settings are so expensive that tips and wages for the wait staff are high enough to attract male waiters who traditionally win the most lucrative jobs in fine-dining. In cheaper restaurants, the owners cope with gender conflict rather than supplement the tips to the extent necessary to be able to hire male waiters. Moreover, Bergmann (1974) stated that many
restaurant owners don't employ waitresses but if they were to hire females they would assign them to hostess positions or to less lucrative shifts, leaving the males with shifts that offer higher tips.

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurants, which are described as establishments that undertake to provide a formal, structured dining experience at the premium end of the market (Restaurant Category Definitions, 2005). The National Restaurant Association has defined a fine-dining restaurant as the type of establishment where waiters and waitresses serve elaborate meals that customers would not likely prepare at home (National Restaurant Association, 1990). One key to this study will be to delineate or to determine what distinguishes fine-dining and other less-expensive or more informal restaurants where female servers are more prevalent.

One benefit of this study is that it should improve the service quality relating to the gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurants by presenting findings that may improve training and hiring policies in fine-dining establishments. The results will also help both industry researchers and restaurant managers better understand the phenomena of male only hiring in fine-dining restaurants. Lastly and most significantly, the study will help answer the question of whether there is a disconnect in the perception and preference between customers and management regarding the gender of food servers in fine-dining establishments.
This study will benefit restaurateurs who will be able to make more customer-oriented decisions when hiring and training their food servers; instead of following the traditional practice of hiring male servers for fine-dining establishments, restaurateurs may begin to question the paradigm of using only males servers, and whether or not contemporary social issues have changed customer perceptions. The study will also elicit customers' points of view about current fine-dining practices that will clarify customer preferences when eating at expensive restaurants.

Research Question

The prior literature reviews related to this topic have not yet paid much attention to the customer's point of view. Although the study by Neumark and Bank (1996) has pointed out that some customer discrimination regarding food servers' gender may exist, it still was not clear exactly why certain customers preferred male servers over female, and no explanations were offered. Most studies have examined what is commonly practiced in the industry through observations and management, but previous researchers have not yet specifically studied the fine-dining industry. Most fine-dining research has been included with other types of restaurants such as fast food, family, and casual dining.

From the literature and throughout other research, there has been significant scrutiny of luxury dining establishments that employ only male servers. Although many managers and owners of fine-dining establishments claimed that they had
not discriminated against females and would welcome them to work as waitpersons just like other male servers, the practice still continues. An example is the Palace Arms, a 50-year-old premiere luxury fine-dining restaurant in Denver that has not had a female server for eight years from 1992-2000 (Prewitt, 2000). The explanation given by the owners and managers of those restaurants is that there are not many skilled female servers who are capable of working in fine-dining restaurants because they lack of experience when compared to male servers. Many managers and owners claim qualified women are hard to find and that the turnover rate among female servers is much higher than male servers (Prewitt, 2000).

The question that emerges from this study centers around whether there is a disconnect in the perception and preference between customers and management in fine-dining establishments regarding the gender of food servers. This study will explore consumers' and managers' minds and attempt to explore their food-server gender preference and their attitudes towards servers in fine-dining restaurants. This study will also attempt to elicit and decipher both managers' and customers' feelings and thoughts about having service providers of the "unexpected" sex in fine-dining establishments (Neumark & Bank, 1996). In-depth studies will help unveil the impact of the tradition and prestigious factors of fine dining in association with the prevalence of male waitpersons.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Fine-Dining Industry Overview

The influence of French cuisine and dining has impacted fine dining today in the United States. Before a restaurant was formally recognized as a place to eat, restaurant was something to eat, bouillon, or restorative broth. Encarta Dictionary: English (North America) defines bouillon as a clear liquid that is traditionally made by boiling meat, bones, and vegetables together. The restaurant concept was originally a place of urban sociability that sold very little solid food and focused on selling bouillon. By the 1820s many restaurants in Paris started to offer a wide variety of food products served by well-mannered and polished waiters. Restaurants were exclusively considered a Parisian phenomenon until the middle of the nineteenth century. American and English travelers to Paris were in awe of its restaurants and considered them remarkable (Spang, 2000).

American fine dining established itself in the 19th century and copied the European restaurant model by most notably using an all male service staff. European fine dining is historically gender specific, especially in relation to server positions (Prewitt, 2000). In addition, European influence on American fine dining had culinary roots as many United States renowned chefs and successful
restaurant owners came from Europe and brought with them what they learned during their apprenticeships in France and other countries in Europe. Jean Jaques Rachou, chef and owner of New York City's famous La Cote Basque, is an example of someone who came to the United States after enduring difficult and rigorous apprenticeships in France and Europe. Rachou never acquired a formal, academic culinary education and came to New York in 1968 (Prewitt, 2003) and managed to become successful in American fine dining.

Over the years, the European apprenticeship system has developed and spread throughout the United States. Currently, many culinary schools offer formal training and hands-on apprenticeship programs for students who are interested in cooking. This is a departure from the past, when the only way for students to learn how to cook professionally was to toil for years in many kitchens until they became established chefs (Steintragger, 2001).

Initially in the United States, the most luxurious dining was found in the large hotels of a few major cities. The era of the luxury hotel started in 1829 when the Tremont House opened in Boston, followed soon after in the 1830s by the elegant Astor House in New York City. The earlier inns had the custom of offering all guests set meals, paid for by the guests whether eaten or not, and served at long tables during fixed hours. During the 1830s, the larger metropolitan hotels started offering their table meals in courses. Some of the larger hotels abandoned the fixed courses in favor of menus from which each guest ordered separately. This became a general feature at major hotels by the 1850s. French cuisine was particularly favored in these establishments, although
a number of hotels were openly American in their offerings (An American Feast, 1998).

French cuisine became popular in the United States around the end of the 19th century. By 1880, and as the American economy expanded rapidly and new middle and upper classes emerged, more people developed sophisticated tastes in food, fashion and design. Also during the 19th century, many cookbooks written by Urbain Dubois (1818-1901), helped demonstrate the influence of French cuisine in American fine dining. Dubois was a celebrated chef who cooked for the Rothschild family and for Prince Orloff of Russia. He produced eight cookbooks, many of which were translated into English and sold in America and England. The French menus and table settings of Dubois' work gave ambitious restaurateurs a chance to imitate the elegant manners and cuisine of France (Not by Bread Alone, 2002).

During the 19th century, many city restaurants rivaled and surpassed the great hotels as centers of good cooking. In particular, two restaurants in New York City created the most sophisticated fine dining experience. Taylor's flourished during the 1850s and had a very elegant appearance, and offered customers an extravagant ambience. Delmonico's, founded in the 1820s and open for nearly a century, was a restaurant that concentrated on cuisine and became a standard of culinary excellence in New York City (An American Feast, 1998). The restaurant was a novelty in New York, and it frequently offered a wide variety of new menu items. The restaurant also maintained a courteous staff, and achieved a level of
cooking that was unmatched within the homes of even the wealthiest New Yorkers (O’Connell, 2001).

The fine-dining industry in the United States developed rapidly throughout the 20th century, and most recently has undergone significant changes that were primarily caused by customer desire for a more informal dining experience. Casual and contemporary fine dining has become trendy (Koteff, 2006), especially in major cities and for younger generations.

Fine dining is a major element of the United States economy, and it is a healthy and growing market segment. The restaurant industry employs an estimated 12.5 million people, making it the nation’s largest employer outside of government. Restaurant industry sales are expected to reach a record $511 billion in 2006 (National Restaurant Association). Labor and materials are the two largest and most important expenses that restaurant businesses have to address in their budgets (Crandall, Vozikis, & Sparks, 1996). Almost 70% of fine dining operators expect business to be better in 2006 than 2005 (National Restaurant Association & Malcolm M. Knapp, Inc., 2006). Although female food servers are the majority of all food servers actively working in the market (National Restaurant Association, 2005), some fine dining restaurants today still hire only males to be food servers (Prewitt, 2000).

The industry in the United States traditionally has been highly gender segregated. Female servers tended to work in less lucrative restaurants such as local diners, family restaurants, or fast food establishments with little or no advancement opportunity. Male servers on the other hand, worked in similar
establishments, but far more men than women made their careers in the most prestigious fine-dining restaurants where much higher earnings were established and higher status positions such as maitre d', connoisseur, or captain could be achieved (Cobble, 1991).

Because a substantial percentage of business in fine-dining restaurants is repeat business, customers appreciate being served by familiar staff. Therefore, most staff in fine-dining restaurants is full-time and regards their job as a career (Davis, Lockwood, & Stone, 1998). While fine-dining restaurant operators admit that maintaining customers' loyalty is getting more difficult, about 60% of fine-dining restaurant sales come from repeat customers (National Restaurant Association & Malcolm M. Knapp, Inc., 2003). The percentage of restaurants today that may be described as quality restaurants or fine-dining restaurants is small; it may be as little as five percent of the total number of restaurants in all sectors of the restaurant industry. However, there is expected growth in the future (Davis et al., 1998).

Perceptions and Expectations

Providing the best food and drinks can be as important as quality service, especially in fine-dining establishments. Consumers today believe that they have the right to receive products and services that meet their expectations (Hart & Casserly, 1985). Fischer, Gainer, and Bristor (1997) conducted a study linking the perception of service quality to the gender of service providers. The study explored whether the gender of the service provider has any influence on the
perceptions of the service quality in the restaurant industry. This study has focused on the theory of in-group bias or homophily based perception and consumer's "server stereotypes" concerning which gender does a better job of serving food in a particular setting (Fischer et al., 1997). Homophily is the tendency for people to associate and develop friendships, marriages, work relationships, etc. with people similar to themselves. Various demographic characteristics, like age, gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, education, occupation, etc., can provide boundaries around relationships. An individual's beliefs and values (i.e., religious, political) can also be influential. As an example, the in-group or homophily based assumption occurs when male customers feel that they have received better service from male servers or conversely, when female customers feel that they have received better service from female servers.

Although the overall result of the study by Fischer et al. (1997) suggested that server gender stereotypes have some impact on the assessment of service quality, it appeared that sex-based in-group bias or homophily did not influence assessments of service quality. Women and men do not expect that they will receive better service from servers who are the same gender. This study pointed out the possibility that most men and women tend not to define themselves on an in-group/out-group basis depending primarily on their sex. In other words, they may also define themselves or group themselves by considering other categories such as race, age or religion. This would mean that the gender of a server is not a relevant or sufficient cue to trigger in-group bias. This study suggests that in order to successfully understand the whole concept of service quality,
researchers and managers must be sensitive to the interactions between: (a) the gender of customers; (b) the gender of service providers, and (c) the "gendered" expectations associated with particular service settings. Failure to take these factors into account can be problematic.

Gender Related Issues in Restaurant Hierarchy

It is necessary to discuss restaurant hierarchy as it is highly related to gender’s role of food servers and other restaurant workers. The hierarchical characteristics of a restaurant’s internal organization are often justified in terms of perceived levels of skill differences. Levels of skill are often ideologically constructed rather than empirically based (LaPointe, 1992). Although the waitress’s job is different than that of other workers, the belief that it requires less skill or shorter periods of time to learn finds little basis in the reality of the work. Again, a good example is the difference between serving in a fine-dining restaurant, which is often done by male waiters, and the serving done by female waitresses in a diner. Working in these two restaurants is different but equally demanding. A diner’s food server has to learn to deal with diverse customers, a fast pace and a physically demanding environment. In a fine-dining restaurant, service is conducted at a slower pace. However, servers must learn a great deal about food and wine to be able to recommend and successfully sell these products (LaPointe).

The gender of the servers affects customer’s perceptions of the encounter. Waiters are often considered more prestigious and skilled, but waitresses are
seen as simply doing a job that comes "naturally" to them (LaPointe, 1992). According to the study by LaPointe (about gendered social distance in restaurants), men fail to see themselves as working with co-equals, but rather attempt to maintain subordinate/dominant relations through actions that symbolize their higher status and undermine their common interests with female coworkers.

In the restaurant industry, formal organizational procedures, such as gendered dress codes, affect both the way food service is perceived and the process of interaction with customers, as when restaurant employers use female sexuality to sell. In addition, prevailing assumptions about the male breadwinner role are clear; waitresses' tipped earnings are lower than waiters (LaPointe, 1992). In occupations filled predominantly by women, especially those in service sector, men are often hired as supervisors, while women continue to toil in the lower positions (Sokoloff, 1987). Waitresses must also typically be responsive to a foray of male bosses, such as chefs and managers. Waitresses not only have to perform their everyday job, but must cope with the gender hierarchy they encounter.

Gender Stereotypes

From the previous studies with regards to work and sex roles, the work role often overrides behavioral or attitudinal differences attributable to gender. Regardless of the socialization that causes males and females to behave similarly, there are instances in which sex role differences override work roles,
which suggest different reactions and behavior between men and women (Babin & Boles, 1998). Differences arise on the basis of male tendencies toward high assertiveness, task mastery, and individualism, and female tendencies toward concern for people, devotion, and compliance. Personality research is generally consistent with men showing relatively high levels of exploratory or mastery tendencies and women showing greater passiveness (Pulkkinen, 1996). Social cognition research suggests that the most commonly associated characteristics of the typical female or "woman" stereotype are "emotional, weak, dependent, passive, uncompetitive, and unconfident" (Fiske & Stevens, 1993, p. 179). Although stereotypes contain misconceptions, they sometimes contain "kernels of truth" (Hoffman & Hurst, 1990, p. 197) with regard to behavior. Despite progress, there is still a workplace power discrepancy with correspondingly smaller number of women in managerial positions, and this is the case in the fine-dining category

Previous research suggests that women in the service industry are affected more severely by increased stress, especially in customer-contact environments. Research also suggests that women might need more concrete guidance about what they can and cannot do to fix conflict between customer’s and manager’s expectations. Male service providers, on the other hand, need more room to make their own decisions as they have more confidence in doing their jobs (Babin & Boles, 1998).

In the traditional restaurant literature, male servers dressed as butlers in the home were expected to provide "professional" service in upscale dinner houses

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while female servers wearing sexy uniforms were expected to provide friendly service in family-style restaurants and coffee shops. Hiring young attractive women and giving them uniforms that reveal their sexuality is a very common practice in restaurant industry (Hall, 1993b).

There are many existing stereotypes that one gender is better than the other at providing a certain service and there is a well-documented tendency for an occupation that has been dominated by one sex to be stereotyped as being better suited to the skills and characteristic of the persons of that sex (Basow, 1992). The study by Cialdini and Goldstein (2002) shows an interesting finding of the smiley-face strategy, which suggested that female servers who smile at their customers could increase their average tip size by 18%. The same strategy is not only ineffective for male servers but it could potentially reduce their tip size because of the perceived violations of gender-based expectations. Moreover, delivering "excellent" service may mean different things to men and women (Lacobucci & Ostrom, 1993). Although many studies have been conducted regarding gender stereotypes and preference in analyzing restaurant servers, none have clearly identified the reasons behind the continuance and dominance of male servers in fine-dining restaurants, and the further research is required.

Discrimination in Hiring

The lawsuits against Palm restaurants, Joe's Stone Crab in Miami and other fine dining restaurants proves that discrimination against hiring female servers exists in fine-dining restaurants. It is necessary to look into the hiring process in
order to answer the question of why there are significantly more male servers than female in fine-dining settings. Sex discrimination occurs when a person is treated differently because of his/her gender and when the different treatment negatively affects the “terms or conditions of employment.” The practice of sex discrimination is illegal. “Terms or conditions of employment” include: position, pay, title, being hired or fired from a job, and advancement and training opportunities. The federal law prohibiting sexual discrimination in the workplace is Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VII applies to private employers, state and local government employers, labor organizations, employment agencies, and joint employer-union apprenticeship programs with 15 or more employees. The California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) also prohibits sexual discrimination in employment. FEHA applies to private public employers, employment agencies, labor organizations, state licensing boards, and state and local governments that have 5 or more employees (Equal Rights Advocates, 2006).

Union activism has also played an important role in helping to protect workers from many types of unfair treatment from employers, especially in Las Vegas and Los Angeles where labor unions influence many service industries such as casinos, hotels, and restaurants (Chandler & Jones, 2003).

The audit study of sex discrimination in hiring by Neumark and Bank (1996) suggested there is discrimination against women in high-priced restaurants where earnings are higher. This study compared men and women applying for jobs as waiters and waitresses at restaurants in Philadelphia. The results
indicated that there was significant evidence of discrimination against men in low-priced restaurants and women in high-priced restaurants. The study suggested that customers may be partially responsible for discrimination against women in restaurant hiring. The study shows a preference of male clients for the types of restaurants that hire male wait staff. However, customer discrimination is not a direct preference of male clients for male waitpersons but a preference of male customers for the types of restaurants that hire male wait staff. Further exploration and research is required to determine if male (and female) customers prefer male servers more than female servers in fine-dining restaurants.

The Change in Fine Dining

The new definition of fine dining in a new era might not comprise the same formal service, traditional food and style. Since expense account entertaining for many companies has been cut, many fine-dining establishments have opened up to more casual concepts to sustain strong profitability. However, many fine-dining restaurateurs no longer exist in the business because of fierce competition. Old traditional French and other European restaurants in major metropolitan cities such as New York City have been affected by the more casual trend of fine dining. California fine dining has shifted to younger clientele while still catering to older generation as well (Spector, 2003).

Customers now prefer more casual and relaxed eateries with less formal decorations and service. Customers expect the menu to be original and fresh (Koteff, 2006). Atlanta is a city that has opened up to a more informal fine dining
concept. The food price in these fine-dining establishments in Atlanta is lower, and they feature less formality but increase attention toward staff energy, guest interaction, entertainment and "neighborhood" ambience. Many restaurants offer much less formal décor such as creating a warehouse-like atmosphere for the new-generation experience (Hayes, 2003). National Restaurant Association (2006) forecasted that the casual upscale type of restaurant will become a threat to traditional fine-dining restaurants. These changes in the fine dining industry might affect the way the service is offered in those establishments, especially by creating more opportunity for women to work as food servers.

This literature review contains analysis and evidence of inequality and varying opportunity between female and male food servers in fine dining restaurants. The evolution of restaurants, starting from French cuisine and culture to trendy and casual fine dining, was presented as well as were other aspects from many studies regarding the perceptions of food server gender in fine-dining establishments. However, further qualitative studies are needed to more clearly identify the reasons behind the prevalence of male servers. In addition, the disconnect or difference in perception between consumers and restaurant managers should be explored further as the results and answers may offer an alignment of perspective that can greatly benefit fine-dining restaurants that wish to attract more customers and provide optimal service.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Instrument

The Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique, ZMET, a method developed by Gerald Zaltman, professor Emeritus of Harvard Business School, was chosen for this study to obtain a better understanding of fine-dining customers and restaurant managers' perspectives with regard to food server gender in fine-dining establishments. The ZMET method is based mainly on various fields of clinical psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and sociology and operates under the assumption that people think in images, not in words (Zaltman, 2003). This study utilized the ZMET method over other interview methods for several reasons.

First, the ZMET approach considers the customer's unconscious state where the vast majority of human thought occurs, and explores how people “don’t really know what they know.” Managers think about consumers by using both conscience and unconscious levels of thought, and this process also occurs with consumers when they consider a restaurant’s offerings. The managers' conscience and unconscious levels of thinking will eventually unite with the same processes of customers, and both parties will ultimately influence each others' perspectives (Zaltman, 2003). Thus, ZMET can help clarify perception.
differences between managers and customers by reaching more deeply into their unconscious thoughts when compared to other interview methods. Next, Zaltman's method is qualitative based and attempts to access the mental process and behaviors of the population in the target markets studied. Since this type of in-depth qualitative approach has not been used to study gender in the restaurant industry, this study should provide an opportunity to more deeply explore the minds of consumers and managers in the fine-dining industry specifically. Because people's feelings about gender might not be a topic they can easily explore or reveal or perhaps are not willing to discuss truthfully, metaphors can reveal cognitive processes beyond what's shown in literal language (Zaltman, 2003). The role of ZMET research is also to provide useful building blocks or tools for managers to create new product or service concepts, reposition or alter current offerings, or develop more effective visions for their brands and organizations (Olson Zaltman Associates, 2006).

ZMET method, when compared to other research methods either qualitative or quantitative, allows participants to be more actively involved in the study and subsequently allows them to communicate their thoughts and feelings more effectively. The use of a metaphor-based method would help surface the unsurfaced knowledge (Ratneshwar, Mick, & Huffman, 2000).

Sample Selection

Since this study aims to explore the thoughts and feelings of managers and frequent patrons of fine-dining restaurants, two groups were selected. The first
group included participants who represent and manage fine-dining restaurants in Los Angeles, California and Las Vegas, Nevada. The second group of participants was frequent diners who ate in a wide variety of fine-dining restaurants. Ten participants (five for each group) were first chosen through referrals and later were screened for qualifications that made them suitable for the study. Those qualifications were: 1) being 30 years or older, 2) (customers) must dine frequently (at least twice a month) at fine-dining restaurants and 3) (managers) must have at least three to five years in the fine dining restaurant business. Data from four or five participants are generally required to generate all of the constructs in a consensus map (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). These participants were divided into two groups; five fine-dining frequent patrons and five managers and owners. The group of five managers represented the management point-of-view relating to the gender of food servers in their businesses and the industry as a whole. The five fine-dining frequent diners were the voice of fine-dining consumers. Each participant was asked to bring three to five pictures to represent their thoughts and feelings about the study topic prior to the interviews.

The justification for sample size in this study is based on the perception that the mind is not the possession of the individual because it has developed from interpersonal associations and other interactions within a sociocultural world. These associations arise in a sociocultural context that produces commonly shared meanings for objects or events found within that context. Since emotions and perceptions of the mind are socially constructed, the constructs in a
consensus map that are based on a small sample of participants can be representative of a larger population. However, the relationships between constructs must be observed with caution and tested with a larger sample (Zaltman, 1997).

The city of Los Angeles was chosen to represent California as the restaurant industry is the largest private employer in California. According to California Restaurant Association, California's restaurants provide 957,100 jobs in 2005, which accounted for almost seven percent of those employed in California. Las Vegas, Nevada is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. Las Vegas is adding new restaurants each year, some of which are fine-dining establishments located in casinos and resorts. Las Vegas' food and beverage industry is high-growth and offers very diverse cuisine from world-class chefs. Las Vegas is a prime location for owning a restaurant. The city has expanded each year as restaurant sales growth increases representing the fastest growing regions in the lodging and foodservice industries (Nevada Restaurant Association, 2006). Figure 1 illustrates the ratios of male and female servers in fine-dining establishments run by the managers who participated in this study.
Figure 1. Ratios of male vs. female servers in fine-dining restaurants run by managers interviewed in Las Vegas, Nevada and Los Angeles, California.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants, managers and customers, were asked to interpret their own lives and situations, and in this case their fine dining experiences, by finding three to five pictures that represented their thoughts and feelings about the male versus female food servers in fine dining establishments. Participants were given seven to ten days before the interview to think about the topic and search for the
images from various sources such as magazines, books or the Internet. This pre-interview stage was very important, as it prepared the interviewees to discuss their impressions about the topic and to give them control over the choice of stimuli used in the interview (Zaltman, 1997). Participants later revealed their interpretations of their images during a one-on-one interview. The interviews were between 30 to 90 minutes in length per participant.

Each interview started off with general conversations about the informants' experience in the industry (managers) or their experience dining out in fine-dining restaurants (customers and managers). This stage was intended to ensure the participant was comfortable with the interview. After informal conversation, each participant was asked to explain the impressions of each image they chose and to describe their thoughts and feelings about the image with regards to food server genders at fine-dining establishments. Then they were asked whether there were any images that they would like to have presented but could not find for the interview. Next, the participants were asked to group similar images and exclude the odd image(s) and support their choices with explanations. The informants were also asked to use their imagination to envision themselves in the picture and use their senses to describe their thoughts and feelings. One of the last questions asked in the interview was to have the informants create an outline for short story or a one-act play that was related to the topic (see Appendix II). The informants had the freedom to create any kind of story as long as it was related to the gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurants. The last two creative and participatory questions noted above, were intended to explore the
further dimensions of the participants' thinking. In the case that some participants did not sufficiently prepare for the interview, open-ended questions could be used throughout the interview to encourage participants to elaborate their thoughts more clearly and completely.

The interviews were conducted in various locations throughout Southern California and Las Vegas, Nevada. All managers were interviewed at their respective restaurants, and customers were interviewed at their residences or coffee shops. Each interview was audio recorded onto miniature cassettes, which were replayed to transcribe the discussions into constructs, visual and data analysis.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data Analysis

Interpretation can be found "everywhere" in the ZMET process. Data must be interpreted before it can be as useful for statistical and mathematical analyses as it is for qualitative analyses (Olson Zaltman Associates, 2006). The Visual Analysis in this study (see Appendix I) was created to illustrate the participants’ thoughts and interpretations of their selected images. After the interpretation of the data, consensus maps were created to identify mental models that are networks of interrelated constructs.

Consensus maps or "mental" maps are considered higher order representations of consumers and managers' perceptions as they place individual constructs into context, and establish a structural flow between and amongst these elements (Eden, 1992). The constructs elicited during the interviews are aggregated to produce a consensus map that represents the thinking of the participants. Consensus mapping creates an understanding and analysis of the ideas obtained from the in-depth interviews. Constructs were recorded and aggregated based on linkages mentioned within each interview, and were based on the total number of respondents who mentioned each individual construct.
Zaltman (1997) mentioned a rule of thumb used in developing the final consensus map that each given construct must be cited by half or more of the participants in a project and be associated directly with another such construct by one-third of the participants. A completed consensus map usually includes between 25 and 30 constructs and represents 85% of the constructs surfaced by any one participant. Christensen and Olson (2002, p. 484) also recommended the development of maps that included constructs linked by one-third to one-fourth of all participants. Figures 3 and 4; therefore, generated using a cut-off level of two or more participants from five participants from each group with each construct representing three or more participants per group (of five) or five of the total participants of ten. Conceptual associations were first developed from the key thoughts of the participants followed by cluster associations to organize the outline of each concept. These associations are presented in Table 1 as well as in Figure 2 and 3 as part of the consensus maps for both male and female fine-dining servers. The maps of male servers are shown separately from female servers to make it easy to see the concepts and major ideas of the managers and customers associated with these two groups. The perceptions of managers and customers are identified by two different shapes designating their respective thoughts, and are collectively illustrated by a third shape that represents their shared feelings. Figure 4 shows the overall fine dining experience associations as perceived by both customers and managers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Association</th>
<th>Conceptual Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception: Male Servers</td>
<td>Formal: Well groomed, Suit and tie, Professional, and Not Distracting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional: European, Old Generation, Prestigious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strength: Physical, Emotional, Ego and Domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career path: Committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy to work with and manage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suitable for Fine-Dining Restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception: Female Servers</td>
<td>Casual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Generation, Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suitable for diners, fast food or family restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual Object: Cocktail Waitresses, Distracting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional, High Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part-time job or Short-term career: less committed, family obligation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Female fine dining food servers associations as perceived by customers and managers.
Figure 3. Male fine dining food servers associations as perceived by customers and managers.
Figure 4. Fine dining experience associations as perceived by customers and managers.
During the study, the participants not only expressed their opinions on the gender of food servers in fine-dining establishments, but also addressed other aspects of fine dining including the food preparations, the decoration of the restaurants, and the image of restaurant service staff. All names except where otherwise indicated are pseudonyms. It was anticipated that the participants would express their ideas about various topics related to fine dining, especially during the interviews, which were intended to be conversational rather than a series of formal questions and answers.

Rod, a director of food and beverage, expressed his thoughts about the importance of a customer's first impression when visiting a fine-dining restaurant. He feels that the person who first welcomes the guest to the restaurant immediately establishes the mood of the customer's visit. Roberta, a customer participant, had an awful experience visiting a very expensive fine-dining restaurant where the hostess was condescending toward her and her husband and made them feel unwelcome. Although the food was excellent, they never returned to that restaurant.

Both managers and customers participating in the study stated that the location, décor and tables appearance are very important. Chris, a general manager of a well-known French restaurant in Southern California said, "The restaurant has to look great with no mistakes. First impressions are very important to the guests' total experience at the restaurant." Additionally, more than half of the informants in this study mentioned the importance of the food
and food preparation with regards to their fine-dining experiences. Many used the images of chefs, kitchens, and well-decorated food for the ZMET interviews.

There is also a very strong association between fine dining and its physical appearance. Almost every participant in the study selected the images of well-decorated dining rooms and restaurants. This reveals that the fine dining experience is not complete without having the right presentation of ambience.

Ambience in fine dining is not simply about décor and food; it also includes the staff, especially the hostesses and the servers who have direct contact with the customers, and who have a great responsibility in ensuring that the customers have a great dining experience. Restaurant managers spend a lot of time trying to find the right talent for those positions, especially servers. As a frequent patron at fine-dining restaurants, Roberta expressed the importance of the appearance of food servers. "Male and female food servers should wear the same uniforms," said Roberta. She preferred to see food servers dressed in very clean black or white uniforms. She also imagined that a female server should have her hair pulled back, and only wear light and tasteful make-up to create wholesome look. Lastly, Roberta noted that female servers should have a light colored manicure to show that the person who has contact with the food is well groomed and clean.
Manager's Perspectives in Managing Female vs. Male Servers

Chris, the general manager of a French restaurant in LA said, "In Los Angeles, we have a good mix of male and female servers, although the classic fine-dining concept is to have male servers and to hire women only as hostesses." Chris believes that in the Los Angeles market, customers prefer to be served by both male and female servers. "Like my restaurant here, I have female servers not because it's my choice, but because the customers want to see female as well as male servers" Chris said. Chris recalled his experience back in his native France where only male waiters work in very formal fine-dining establishments. Chris feels that he can deal with male staff easier than female. He thinks that males can handle and cope with pressure better than females. He believes that female workers tend to be dramatic and that they are not emotionally strong. "As a male manager I think it's easier to work with male servers, but my boss wants to hire female servers so I have no choice. I feel like I cannot be as straight forward with female servers because I don't want to hurt their feelings. However, as a customer, I feel comfortable being served by female servers."

Mark, a general manager of a fine-dining restaurant in Las Vegas also had some difficult experiences dealing with female servers. "I had a lot of very high maintenance female servers in the past," he said. Although some of his male servers are hard to work with, he felt that his female servers were more difficult to manage. However, Mark admits that the female team (his restaurant employs
three females out of nineteen servers) is one of the best he has ever worked with. At the previous restaurant he managed, the staff complained that if the restaurant had employed all male servers, they would have made a lot more tips and the customers would have been happier. When asked about problems he had when dealing with male servers, he brought up male egos issues. To deal with and manage ego, he listens to his staff and gives them some freedom to work. He tries to support them, motivate them and he never disrespects anyone.

Mark has no preference on the gender of the food servers in his restaurant. “I want good quality people who smile a lot, have a good personality, like to laugh, and have good energy around them,” said Mark. He always looks first at the experience of the applicants and the caliber of the restaurants they used to work for.

Dan, an assistant manager at a fine-dining restaurant downtown Los Angeles, mentioned that women are better off being a cocktail waitress; they can work less and make much more money. He talked about his previous job at a five star hotel in Beverly Hills, and noted that its restaurants have only male servers. He said he had no idea why there are only male servers. Sebastian, Dan’s assistant from Germany, joined the interview. He stated that from his experience in European fine-dining restaurants, he sees about 90% more male servers compared to female. Restaurants owners and managers in Europe prefer bilingual or multi-lingual food servers, and when it comes to fine-dining establishments, they prefer males who can speak multiple languages.
Manager's Perspectives in Fine Dining Careers

There appears to be a strong association between working in a fine-dining restaurant, and having earned a long, prosperous career. Although many people working in restaurant industry have part-time jobs for the short term, fine dining tends to be a job that takes more commitment and offers more of future and a career path than other types of restaurants. During the interview, a restaurant general manager, Jason, stopped by and gave some thoughts about the gender of service staff in fine-dining restaurants. He said that those individuals working at fine-dining establishments see their jobs as a career path, and not just a part-time job. Although there are more women in the workforce today than in the past, they still tend to take time off from work to care for their children and their households. Jason felt that women are not likely to have long-term food service careers without taking extended breaks. Jason noted that men, on the other hand, tend to stay in their career paths longer and hope to be promoted and get ahead in the industry. He felt this happens everywhere, and not only in the restaurant industry. Cocktail serving is a good example of female dominated type of job. However, cocktail waiting does not offer a clearly defined career path like fine-dining industry does to its servers. “People who want to work in fine-dining restaurant don’t want quick money and to get out; they want a career,” said Jason.

Rod, director of food and beverage, also has the same thoughts about the role of men compared to women. He mentioned that what had been practiced in the past has been passed on to today’s world. Men have always been the
providers of the family, and women used to stay at home taking care of other
domestic chores. Fine-dining that has been established a very long time ago
started off in a male dominated era. Therefore, when we look at the traditional
classic type of fine-dining restaurants, we see all male servers.

Dynamics between Genders

Both restaurant managers in Las Vegas mentioned the dynamics that exist
between the genders. They believe that a little flirting and good service between
male server and female customer or female server and male customer will
increase guest satisfaction. The nature of the attraction between male and
female is something to consider when hiring servers. David, the general
manager of a French Mediterranean restaurant in Las Vegas, said that presence
of male servers could lead female customers to follow their recommendations
about what to order. On the other hand, if there are other male customers at the
table, women will not entirely agree with the male server. David believes that the
waiter's male presence influences the way the female guests order their meals.
Mark said that male servers at his restaurants could sell more products to female
customers and vice versa. If he sees a group of female customers or a female
customer coming in by herself, he usually sends a male server out to take care
of them. "They seem to like it," Mark added. Rod mentioned that he would like
to have female bartenders at his hotel because the number of male patrons
visiting the bar is much higher than female patrons, and he thinks that female
bartenders will attract more male customers who will spend more money.
The study by Hall (1993a) supported the idea of the attraction between genders, which is something that was noted by Mark and David. The interviews with servers showed that both male and female servers prefer to wait on customers who were from the opposite sex. As part of customer-provider interactions, servers and customers do flirt. Although flirting in fine-dining restaurants appears to be inappropriate, upscale restaurants tend to have a lot of flirting. Servers admitted that they smile, flirt, and talk more to customers from the opposite sex. Sometimes the flirting can mean giving good service.

Customer's Expectations

Barb, a fine-dining customer, has no preference of the gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurant, but favors male over female servers for business lunches and dinners. "It is less distracting," she said. She does not like to hear other male executives or her male coworkers make sexual or discriminatory comments about the waitresses. She wants to get right to business and male servers tend to satisfy Barb’s expectations at business meals because her coworkers are mostly male and they won’t be distracted by the service. In addition, Barb prefers male servers during business lunches because she also feels uncomfortable hearing sexually biased comments directed at female servers. Barb has no preference regarding the gender of food servers when dining out with her family and friends. However, she thinks that female servers can do a better job describing the food, dessert, and the experience they have had because males are often more ambivalent when offering descriptions. Barb
has an emotional connection with female servers especially when communicating about the food choices of the restaurants she visits. She believes that female servers can understand what she wants better than male servers.

Gerber, a writer from Los Angeles, has a similar idea about business meetings at restaurants. He also thinks that businessmen feel powerful and a sense of camaraderie by having male waiters serve them. He recalled his experience working in New York City where he often went to business meetings in various fine-dining restaurants. Male servers tended to be very professional and were not distracting to the meal. Mark, in addition of not having any preference on the gender of food servers when he attends business lunches or dinners, preferred to use his male servers to take care of female patrons and vice versa because he believes in the dynamics between genders. As a manager and a customer, Mark does not believe that gender has a big impact on providing good service.

Customer and Manager’s View on Restaurant Ambience as Related to the Gender of Food Servers

Rod, director of food and beverage, mentioned that before choosing the gender of food servers in a fine-dining restaurant, the manager has to study the theme or the mood of the restaurant. Some restaurants have strong feminine characteristics and some are very masculine. For example, male servers will be more suitable in a steakhouse or in a restaurant that has very formal setting that
shows masculinity (e.g., dark colors, resembling a hunting lodge). Rod believes that the contemporary influence on fine dining, especially in metropolitan cities like Los Angeles, is suggesting that women can blend in to that setting and environment as well as men. Gerber showed the picture of a steakhouse in association with male servers. Lenny also believes that the theme and type of restaurants can also influence the hiring of male or female servers.

David, the general manager of a fine-dining restaurant at the Bellagio, Las Vegas, said that he could see female servers working in his restaurant without any problems. He said the look of the restaurant is quite feminine because it has flowers, drapes, paintings, and lighter colors. Although the restaurant now has only male servers and the only female workers are the hostesses, he thinks female servers would fit very well in this environment.

Customer and Manager's View on the Change of Generations

All managers felt that changes in the industry were coming. As stated earlier in the body of literature, there is a decline in traditional fine dining, especially in major cities like New York City and Chicago (Koteff, 2006). According to Dan’s experience, most customers who eat at fine-dining places are from older generations. The main customers of his restaurant in Los Angeles are patrons about 50 years and older. Dan, who is 30, thinks that customers from older generations are used to seeing women in the role of housewives and men as breadwinners. Dan does not believe that the older generations enjoy eating out
at fine-dining restaurants because they have more money than the younger generations. Rather, he thinks that most customers from this group enjoy not only eating out in fine-dining settings but also enjoy seeing and being served by male servers. It might be because male servers make them feel more comfortable about their male dominated generation. Dan sees the trend will change when that generation departs and he feels we will definitely see an increasing number of female servers in fine-dining restaurants.

Rod, director of food and beverage, addressed the change of generations from the server’s perspective. He agrees about the fact that generation and age of customers affect their expectations of whether to prefer male or female servers. He believes that as the generations have changed and women are more involved in the workforce, we will see more women who are very successful with their careers. He believes that because women have long been suppressed, they have a stronger desire to excel and work harder than men.

Although we have already seen some changes in fine-dining industry that trends toward contemporary and innovative types of dining, many still believe that female servers will still be the minority group of servers in fine-dining establishments. David, a general manager of a fine-dining French-Mediterranean restaurant in Las Vegas, has a different opinion about the changing world and the increasing number of females in business. When talking about the restaurant industry, David still believes that not only are the majority of servers in fine-dining restaurants male, but that top chefs, head chefs or head
maitre-dés are mostly male. He pointed out that the world today is still a male dominated society and that things will not change any time soon.

Manager's Justifications on the Hiring Process

Is it possible that there are not enough women in the labor pool or that only a few women are interested in working in fine-dining establishments? Dan, a general manager, said that there are not enough female servers applying for the jobs at his restaurant and at the previous restaurant he used to work at. All managers I interviewed for this study shared this same point of view. "There are not enough women in the job pool," said one of the managers from Las Vegas. In Las Vegas, two fine-dining general managers in two mega resorts said that there are far more male than female fine dining servers in Las Vegas. Both of them said that they are not responsible for prescreening the applicants. The applicants who come for the final interviews with them have already been pre-selected by the resorts' Human Resources department.

However, I had a chance to talk to one female server at a fine-dining restaurant in Los Angeles, California about her experience in getting jobs in fine-dining restaurants. Elizabeth is one of two female servers in a restaurant that has about 20 male servers. She said that many times after she walked into fine-dining establishments to apply for a food serving position, the hostesses or even some restaurant managers told her that they don't hire women for that particular position. After my short conversation with Elizabeth (personal communication, September 8, 2006), I called ten well-known fine-dining restaurants both in Las
Vegas, Nevada, Los Angeles, California, and a few in New York City, New York and Chicago, Illinois to apply for a food serving position (personal communication, September 15, 2006). An Italian restaurant with all male servers in New York City and a few other restaurants responded that they were currently not hiring. None of the restaurants stated that they hired only male servers. A few restaurants unenthusiastically requested a resume and two restaurants suggested that I apply through their corporate Human Resources department. My experimental phone calls suggest that most of these establishments are aware of the law; however, Elizabeth’s experience indicates that some restaurants are breaking the law. Although discrimination hiring is illegal, many restaurants continue to maintain the tradition of hiring only male servers, and very few women have careers in fine dining.

Geographical Limitations

All the managers from California that I interviewed for this study agreed that fine dining in California is less formal and less strict (i.e. the dress code) when compared to other places such as Europe, New York, or Chicago. Listening to customer preferences is extremely important for a restaurant’s survival. “Young generations, especially those in Hollywood with a lot of money, do not like to be told what to wear and what to do when they go out for a nice meal,” said Rod, one of the managers who has lived in Los Angeles for over twenty years. He added, “The world today is so hectic and has a faster pace than in the past. People give very little notice to certain details and they could care less about the
gender of food servers. The bottom line is if the service is good and the food is great, nothing else should matter."

Lenny, who travels extensively for his job, agrees that locations do affect the type of fine-dining restaurants. He sees the trend today in Los Angeles where fine-dining restaurants use themes such as warehouses, contemporary art galleries, and present fusion foods instead of traditional foods. When these restaurants want to be different they have to be less traditional. As a result, having male or female servers is not a significant consideration for many trendy or innovative restaurants.

Conclusion

The research findings reveal the similarities and differences of thoughts and perceptions between customers and managers regarding the gender of food servers in fine-dining establishments. Customers and managers tend to agree that the formality and tradition of fine-dining restaurants are highly associated with male servers. They see that all male servers are tradition and from the past, and perhaps, are preferable for older generations of customers. However, casual and contemporary dining unites both groups because they agree that male or female servers are suitable in this type of setting. The study reveals that women are much more acceptable to both customers and managers if they are working in a more relaxed setting. In addition, almost everyone in the interview believes that the change is coming, and that we'll see more fine-dining restaurants employing female servers.
Customers and managers also agree about the fact that male servers are generally stronger than female servers, both emotionally and physically. In terms of skills, one customer thinks that female servers are better communicators than male servers. Sometimes she felt like she was forced to order something that she didn’t really want because male servers did not give her a good explanation of the menu.

Both managers and customers agree that male servers have a more professional appearance than female servers. Some customers believe that female servers are distracting, especially for business meetings in a fine-dining setting. Some managers believe it is easier to work with male servers although they have to manage egos by offering those servers more autonomy during the course of their jobs. Female servers were often described as high maintenance and emotionally less stable than their male counterparts. Managers also believe that women are less committed in their jobs than men who chose fine-dining because of career possibilities.

A few customers associated female servers with cleanliness because he believes that women take care of themselves better than men. Jon feels comfortable being served by female servers because he knows that the food will be clean.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion of Results

The purpose of this research is to determine whether there is a disconnect in the perception and preference between customers and management in fine-dining establishments regarding the gender of food servers. With the exploration of consumers’ and managers’ minds using the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET) for data collection, conclusions drawn from this qualitative study regarding the gender of food servers in fine dining are presented in this chapter.

The findings show that there’s still some disconnect between managers and customers regarding the gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurants. It seems that customers are slightly more open to having female servers than managers in fine-dining establishments. Managers are more comfortable working with male servers than female with the reasons given in the previous chapter. This might be because they are all male and would feel more comfortable working with servers that have the same gender. However, all managers, when given their perspectives as customers did not have any preference on gender of food servers and do not feel uncomfortable having female servers in fine-dining restaurants that they visit with friends and family.

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The informants' experience and culture have a lot of impact on their preference on gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurants. French and German managers who grew up in Europe have experience with a very traditional type of service in fine-dining restaurants where servers are predominately male. They are more accustomed to seeing and working with male servers; therefore, they tend prefer male to female servers, especially in very formal restaurants. Managers who work in California all agree that the fine dining market in that region tends to be less formal and has become very trendy. They believe that California customers enjoy being served by male and female servers. A French manager in California personally prefers male to female servers but hires females to please the customers and appease his boss. Some customers who frequent business lunches and dinners tend to prefer male servers, as they tend to be less distracting.

The type and ambience of restaurants shape the perceptions of both customers and managers about the gender of food servers in fine-dining restaurants. Steakhouses and other formal fine-dining settings are often mentioned when the informants feel comfortable seeing male servers. Outdoor casual restaurants or contemporary fine dining establishments are examples of where the informants likely expect to see female servers. Informants often see the gender that “fits” certain types of fine-dining restaurants.

The passage of time and the perspective of many generations have played an important role in the current state of fine dining and will continue to impact the industry in the future. The literature review and the interviews illustrate that the
old expectations of formal fine dining and its service will change over time and will eventually affect the imbalance of male and female servers in fine dining.

The use of ZMET in this study helped elicit both rational and emotional thoughts and perceptions of both customers and managers, which otherwise might have been left out if this study used only conventional in-depth interviews. The images and metaphors brought deep understanding about the subjects interviewed. Without images, the information received from participants is only derived from surface level thoughts. For example, when Roberta was whether she preferred male servers over female, the answer was no. When asked to imagine herself in the picture of a fine-dining restaurant with very formal décor and atmosphere, Roberta could see only male servers in that situation. Again, without the use of images, Roberta’s thoughts of seeing male servers in certain types of fine-dining restaurants would not have been discovered or elicited.

Limitations

There are some important limitations in this study that need to be addressed and considered.

1. The locations of the fine-dining restaurants are limited to the Las Vegas and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. It is possible that managers who work in fine-dining restaurants within these two cities maintain stereotypes, beliefs, and attitudes towards the gender of food servers that are different than managers in other cities. Each individual manager has a different
background and relationship with their male and female coworkers, subordinates or even with family members.

2. The small sample size is another limitation of this study. However, consistent with the principles of qualitative research, a small sample facilitates the collection of "thick description," that is rich and full-bodied data (Geertz, 1989). Because of the restraint of time and resources in this study and the characteristics of most qualitative studies, only a small sample size of ten participants can be reasonably and closely studied. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to other populations.

3. Note that all the managers interviewed in this study are male. All managers recruited for this study were through referrals. I had no preference for male managers, but from the lists of fine-dining restaurants I used, female managers of fine-dining restaurants could not be found or contacted at the time of the study.

4. This study represents only the customers and managers' point of views about the topic. Another dimension that needs to be studied is through the food servers and their direct experience of working in fine-dining restaurants.

5. Some perceptions and ideas by managers about the gender of food servers are from their direct experience managing the restaurants whereas customers cannot express their thoughts on this side of analysis.
6. Exploration of cultural differences in various types of fine dining establishments was not explored in this study and could be an important addition to the study of food server gender in fine-dining restaurants.

Implications
This study has numerous implications for managers and those who are related to the industry. The male traits that customers prefer in male servers such as the service style, professional appearance both traditional and formal, can be used to train the restaurants' female servers. Knowing male and female servers' strengths and weaknesses will help managers utilize those traits at the right time and for the right tasks. Both male and female servers can use their strengths to compliment the restaurant's operation and customer service, which will eventually yield higher customer satisfaction.

This study presents the differences and similarities of perceptions and preferences between the managers and customers about the gender of food servers. It gives the managers an opportunity to learn more about their customers and observe the disconnect between their own and their customers' perceptions. Having and hiring more female food servers in fine dining will not only improve the image of the fine dining industry in general, it will also narrow the chance for the lawsuits that restaurants or firms may risk because of sex discrimination in hiring.

Companies that desire to hire more female servers but have difficulties should look into the reasons why there are not enough female applicants interested in
fine-dining jobs. Studying fine-dining food servers directly will answer these questions, and will perhaps help the restaurants to find a way to encourage women to apply for the jobs and consider fine-dining careers.

Learning and understanding more about customer and management perceptions, attitudes and preferences will not only help female servers move into male dominated fine-dining occupations, but will also improve training, recruiting, and human resources management in these restaurants. Being a knowledgeable, fair and understanding employer will attract both customers and high quality workers.

Directions for Future Research

Extensive research on the gender of food servers in the restaurant industry has yet to be conducted before definitive conclusions can be drawn about the criteria by which customers assess service quality and how best restaurateurs can improve their service offerings.

Since less formal fine dining is becoming more popular, it is also becoming more acceptable to employ more female servers. An additional investigation is needed to answer the question of whether a "mixed sex" group of servers in fine-dining restaurants enhances the quality that the customers perceive they will experience.

The reasons given by fine-dining managers regarding hiring more male food servers than female servers should be thoroughly investigated. Both male and female managers should be interviewed to compare their thoughts and feelings
about gender when hiring food servers. Whether there are not enough female servers applying for the jobs or because they do not have enough experience and skills to work in fine-dining restaurants, these issues must be addressed and explored further.

Fine dining is likely practiced and perceived differently by multiple cultures throughout the world; therefore, the gender of food servers in fine dining restaurants could also be observed and examined throughout a spectrum of various cultures. Different concepts and practices of fine dining in different cultures and what influences such practices in each culture are subjects that the restaurateurs and researchers could further explore. Researching and understanding cross-cultural fine dining will help restaurant managers and owners efficiently generate the best service and product offerings for their customers.
APPENDIX I

VISUAL ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Barb</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>Customer / Frequent Diner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>San Jose, California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This picture shows the deep connection between female customers and servers. Barb feels that there are certain things that women can do better than men, especially in the fine-dining environment. The picture of decadent chocolate chip cookies makes Barb think of the times she goes to fine-dining restaurants where she usually orders dessert after a nice meal. She thinks that female servers do a much better job describing desserts. Female servers can better explain the texture and the experience of the desserts better than male servers.

The picture shows the busy kitchen environment with a male server and a male chef. This picture reminds Barb of fine-dining restaurants and their kitchens where she can usually find more male than female chefs and sous chefs as well as the kitchen crew. She sees the domination of men in fine-dining restaurants from her experience visiting these restaurants and their kitchens. In general, Barb finds men less distracting when she has business meals with co-workers.
Emotion and Connection with Female Servers

Food served in a fine-dining restaurant usually is well prepared and well presented. This fish entrée doesn’t appeal to her. Again, she thinks female servers can do a better job describing the food in detail that will help steer her away from something that she doesn’t like. Male servers pay less attention to detail and try to somehow use their power to control what customers should order.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gerber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>Customer / Frequent Diner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Los Angeles, California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A picture of a waiter holding a torch in one hand and a menu in the other reminds him of statue of liberty in New York City. However, instead of Lady Liberty holding the torch, it is a waiter standing with a torch in a similar position as the Statue of Liberty. This picture is from his experience living in New York City where he often visited Smith & Wollensky restaurant for business lunches and dinners. This is a good example of a fine dining restaurant that uses mostly male as its wait staff. He feels less distracted to have make servers when visiting fine-dining restaurants for business meals.

This picture of a meat locker with rows of red meat and is very much related to Smith & Wollensky or any other steakhouses where Gerber thinks male customers are found more often than females. The meat is traditionally associated with men and when visiting expensive steakhouses, he often see s almost all male waiters at these types of restaurants. He thinks male servers fit more into the environment of steakhouses than female servers.
Gerber chose the picture of the New York City skyline because it is hard to consider fine dining without commerce. Large metropolitan areas are typically where the greatest restaurants are as they can attract a number of wealthy patrons. These wealthy patrons represent money and male dominated society in business. He thinks businessmen still prefer to be served by male than female servers but I also believe that things are changing too.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Jon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Chief Financial Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>Customer / Frequent Diner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Newport Beach, California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultural Differences**

A picture of two female owners of a Japanese restaurant in Dallas, Texas. The restaurant is well decorated with plants and woods reflecting a very fine taste of the owners. It will be interesting to see this restaurant during operating hours having all female waitresses with a lot of customers. Especially in Texas, a male dominated and very conservative state, Jon felt it was nice to see two women running the business on their own in a male dominated industry.

**Feminine: Warmth and Comfort**

A beautiful outdoor dining table with white tulips situated amid beautiful garden at Pinot Blanc restaurant in St. Helena, California. Jon associates casual but elegant fine dining with female. The clean color of white and green makes him think of women. He sees the femininity in the image and would feel very comfortable having female servers giving service in this type of dining.
The picture of a waitress at Sunset Bar and Grill was chosen to state the point that women can be as skillful if not better in food serving than their male counterparts. Although this is not a fine dining restaurant, the waitress looks happy and very proud of what she does. The way she’s holding a tray in one hand and a basket in the other shows that she’s very skilled and has a lot of experience working as a waitress. If you enjoy doing something, there’s no right or wrong gender for it. You can be good at anything you want to be.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Lenny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Sales Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>Customer / Frequent Diner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Irvine, California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The picture of a female chef and a lobster dish with side salad and a drink in the outdoors area of a seafood restaurant by a marina. Lenny feels that California is blessed with such perfect weather. It is the place we can enjoy eating outside in a laid back but elegant setting. The lobster on the plate, a chef, and a white tablecloth tell us that this is a fine dining place. Most restaurants in California, even the fine-dining ones, are pretty casual. Either male or female servers will fit in this picture because there’s nothing show that it is a traditional and formal place.

A picture of a very attractive art glass. This contemporary vase with an unusual look evokes me of those nouveau trend restaurants especially in Los Angeles where Lenny usually visits. There are a lot of interesting décor and art works in trendy restaurants. These types of restaurants do not last long. With regard to the gender of the food server, today’s contemporary fine-dining restaurants usually do not have an emphasis on any particular gender of food servers. Having both male and female servers can be a good addition to a trendy fine-dining restaurant.
This is a more formal restaurant where we can see the guests are all well dressed with suits and ties and the waiters are wearing ties. This could be a more upscale steakhouse with dark wood. Whether to use male or female food servers, Lenny thinks it depends on the type and theme of that restaurant. However, as long as they can give good service, he thinks he doesn't mind being serviced by both men and women in a fine-dining restaurant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Role in the study</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roberta</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fashion Sales</td>
<td>Customer / Frequent Diner</td>
<td>New York, New York</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Male = Fast and Strong**

A picture of a table overlooking the harbor. The table is set with nice flowers, breadbaskets, and three glasses of red wine. This looks like a banquet room where we would usually see male servers wearing clean and formal uniform. It is something that Roberta is accustomed to when going to weddings and parties in nice hotels and restaurants. Male servers are really fast and strong especially when they have to work in a fast pace and heavy-duty functions like big parties.

A more formal dining room compared to the first picture overlooking the city with a skyline. This picture gives Roberta the sense of formality especially when it's dinnertime. She imagines seeing three male servers servicing each table in a very busy night. Male servers would fit this type of formal meal for me. They tend to blend in with the whole restaurant.
A postcard of a fine-dining restaurant from Manhattan. From this picture she can see a breadbasket, flowers, plants, and fruits. This postcard is a mystery like this restaurant. When she went inside this place for the first time, she felt excited to guess what kind of food and service she would be getting. It turned out to be Indian. She did not remember whether the servers were all male or not. All she knows was that the service was excellent. She would not feel uncomfortable if there were female servers because this is a very contemporary type of restaurant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Chris</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>General Manager of Fine Dining Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuisine Type</td>
<td>California French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Los Angeles, California</td>
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</table>

**Male = Passion for their Jobs**

An image of a male chef wearing a white clean uniform preparing a dish. This picture makes Chris think of an experienced and talented chef who enjoys creating delicious and interesting food. He looks very focused and calm. The dark background makes him think of only the cook and the food without any interruptions from the outside world. Almost like nothing can come between him and his food. Like this chef, many male servers that Chris works with tend to be the same way as they have a lot of passion in what they do. They take the job very seriously.

**Balance and Formal**

Chris is impressed with how the tables are set up in this picture. The positions of the tables, the napkins and everything there is in balance. He can't find any mistakes in it. It is a very formal dining room with a lot of details in its presentation. Male servers with black suits would fit very well in this picture as it makes me feel very formal and very important. This is the tradition of fine dining.
Male: Classy

An image of a waiter servicing a couple at an upscale fine-dining restaurant. This picture gives us a good example of formal fine-dining restaurant where there is all male service staff. Male servers are very classy. As a manager Chris feels more comfortable working with male servers and male staff than female. He doesn't have to try to be soft and worry about their feelings. He gets right to business without worrying that male staff will be upset.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rod</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>Director of Food and Beverage, Omni Los Angeles Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuisine Type</td>
<td>Contemporary Progressive American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Los Angeles, California</td>
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</table>

An image of a dining table inside an all white restaurant. The all white interior of this restaurant gives Rod a sense of contemporary, clean, and very modern. This is a good example of a restaurant that should have female servers; very chic, intimate, and professional. Especially in California where there's a lot of contemporary fine dining, it's not that common anymore to find a fine dining restaurant with a strict dress code and a very formal like in New York City or in Europe.

Before choosing the gender of food servers in a fine-dining restaurant, the manager has to look at the theme or the mood of the restaurant first. This is a very formal setting Victorian style dining room at the Ritz Carlton in San Francisco. Rod can see all male servers wearing a nice jacket, a bowtie, a cuffed long sleeve shirt and a white apron. Male servers fit better in this picture because it is a very formal setting that links to traditional fine dining where male servers were more prominent.
An image of a male server serving white wine for a couple at a fine-dining restaurant. This scene is what we normally see in a typical fine-dining restaurant, very formal. The opposite scene of this picture should be an image of a busy diner with all female servers wearing a dress with an apron. If Rod goes to a diner, a breakfast place or a coffee shop, he feels a little strange to see male servers there. Female servers give me the feelings of home like these diners where we can find comfort foods and friendly service.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dan</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>Assistant General Manager of Fine Dining Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuisine Type</td>
<td>California French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Los Angeles, California</td>
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A cartoon image of an older male waiter slipping and spilling the food all over the place. This image tells us that no one is perfect. Whether you are an experienced fine-dining restaurant waiter or a waitress who has worked only in the family type of restaurants, Dan doesn't think males are particularly better than females in food serving. Men just have a lot more opportunity to do this job in society. Dan has been in a business for a long time and he still thinks that there is still a lot to learn everyday. For me male or female servers are the same to me.

An image of a lamb dish with beautiful food presentation and a glass of red wine on the side. This picture makes Dan think about how detailed the restaurant business is. Everyone from every part of the restaurant contributes to the success of the restaurant and the guest experience. His mother owns a small restaurant in the south of France and Dan grew up with her. He knows that every detail matters. In this case, no matter what gender your servers are, if they can work in a team the restaurant will definitely be successful.

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An image of a well-decorated dining room with high wooden ceiling. This elegant dining room gives me a sense of formality. Dan sees only male servers here wearing a black vest, a white long sleeve shirt with a bow tie, and long black pants. He thinks it's common that people will have an image of male servers when seeing a very formal fine-dining restaurant. Especially for him growing up in Europe, it is hard not to imagine seeing male in a formal setting with dark wood ceiling like this.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mark</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in the study</td>
<td>General Manager of Fine Dining Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuisine Type</td>
<td>Contemporary Classic French and American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Las Vegas, Nevada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A picture of a beautiful dining room with high ceiling and glass chandeliers. This picture is chosen because this is a great restaurant with a nice view of Las Vegas. The chandelier represents the rain. Although the meal is pretty expensive we are pretty casual. We are more a liberal type of fine dining and want our staff to have fun with the guests and entertain them. We are formal in the respect of our passion and desire for excellent food and beverage not the gender of service staff we use.

An image of a smiley female server taking care of her customers. This picture reminds Mark of how much he would like to have more female servers in his restaurant. They have a few of them now and they are such great workers. Mark can say that they are in the top six best servers he has ever had. He thinks female servers can easily convince male customers to buy products and male servers can sell more to female customers. They definitely need gender diversity to run a great restaurant.
An image of a male waiter serving food to customers. The reason Mark chose this picture is to show the whole dining experience. The gender of food server here is not really a factor to guest’s satisfaction. He likes that the waiter is explaining the food and interacting with the customers. That’s what a good server should do whether it’s a male or female server. One thing he learns from his experience in F&B is that when you are engaged and develop the rapport with the guests, if something goes wrong it is easier to recover than being standoffish and impersonal to the customer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role in the study</th>
<th>Cuisine Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>General Manager of Fine Dining Restaurant</td>
<td>French-Mediterranean</td>
<td>Las Vegas, Nevada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An image of a restaurant worker polishing wine glasses and setting up dining table. We cannot see the face of this person. David likes this picture because he cannot tell whether the person in it is male or female from just seeing what he or she does. What he's trying to say is that gender of food servers does not make any difference in providing good service. He doesn't think that any job is good only for one gender.

A picture of a waiter pouring some campaign into a glass for a female customer. This picture shows a special kind of relationship between a male server and a female customer. We can see from her smile and the way she looks at the waiter that there's something going on between them. David thinks a good-looking male server can sell the food and drink to female customers better. And vice versa, female servers attract male customers. It does not hurt to flirt in this kind of business. That's why it's good to have both genders of food servers at the restaurants.
A colorful image of two female adults and a girl shopping in a farmer’s market. Their hands are all occupied by a lot of produce such as vegetables and fruits. This image reminds David of his home, France. He grew up in a village where farmers will go to the market to sell their products. The male farmers will be the ones producing and the wives will be selling their products. This French market tells us that women and men should work together as a team to create the best work results like having both male and female servers in fine-dining restaurants.
APPENDIX II

Examples of Short Stories Created by Participants during the Interviews

Roberta:

I am going out with a group of friends in New York City for a show and we plan to meet for dinner before the show starts. It is winter and really cold outside. I arrive at this trendy French fine-dining restaurant a little early and an attractive female hostess wearing all black greets me and directs me to wait near the lounge area. I have a martini while waiting for my friends to arrive. The male bartender is very attractive, nice and talkative.

As soon as my friends arrive, we are led by the same hostess to the dining area of the restaurant, which has a high ceiling and is very well-decorated with expensive paintings. We are served by a well-groomed male server wearing a black tuxedo. “Good evening ladies, my name is Rob and I will be your server tonight,” Rob announces. He explains the menu clearly and gives us some time to decide what to order. Rob looks very professional and has an adorable British accent. All the female guests keep looking at him, including all of my friends from the table.

We order food and wait for the food to arrive. About 20 minutes later Rob comes back with our food that looks and smells wonderful. After a few bites of my delicious dinner I feel that something is wrong. It turns out that the smart and
handsome Rob forgets to tell the kitchen that I am allergic to mushrooms as I start to itch and my mouth becomes swollen. I not only have to abandon my meal, but I have to go to the hospital and will miss the Broadway show that night.

Gerber:

Viola, a female waitress at a well-known upscale fine-dining restaurant in Beverly Hills starts working for the first day. Her father is the owner of the restaurant which typically hires more male than female servers. Viola is one of out two women working as servers in the restaurant. She made a promise to her father to come work as a waitress after she receives a brand new sport car for her 20th birthday. About eight o'clock at night, Viola has to serve a table of five businessmen who always come to the restaurant for their business meetings. An older customer asks for their regular server but he was not there that day. Viola is nervous at first but feels better when she starts talking to the guests.

Everything went well from the beginning until the end of the meal. However, an older gentleman complains that Viola is not that well-trained to work in a fine-dining restaurant. He asks to speak with the manager or the owner of the restaurant. Viola's father happens to be there that night and he comes to the table and asks the guests to explain their problems. All they say is that Viola is not a good server but they cannot really identify any mistakes they purport that she made. The owner apologizes and tells them that Viola is his daughter and has just started working for the first day. After that night the same group of
customers always request to be served by Viola every time they come and never complain about the service again.
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Thesis Title: Customer and Manager's Perception and Preference on Food Server Gender in Fine-Dining Establishments

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Committee Member, Dr. Jean Hertzman, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Michael LaTour, Ph. D.