Smashing Backdoors in and the Wandering Eye: An Introduction to Bartenders’ Experiences with Unwanted Sexual Attention while Working in the UK

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Abstract
Literature on unwanted sexual attention in the night-time economy has focused predominantly on patrons and ignores those who are employed in it. This paper draws on participant observations of, and interviews with, 10 current, and 5 former, bartenders’ engagement with unwanted behaviors at a public house. Data gathered will outline the common and infrequent forms of unwanted sexual attention and who the perpetrators are. I also remold the concept of ‘feisty femininity’ to reflect female bartenders’ combative strategies against male customers. I end with a suggestion for the implementation of specific training strategies for all employed in licensed venues.

Keywords
unwanted sexual attention, barstaff, masculinity, feisty femininity, night-time economy

Introduction
Generally, upon entry to a licensed establishment in the UK, it is likely that a customer will be greeted by a member of staff who will introduce themselves as the providers of service. They are possibly physically attractive as many venues in the night-time economy (NTE) rely on the good looks of their staff to bring in the so-called punters\(^1\) (e.g., Colosi, 2010). Once settled, a bargoer may notice forms of sexual performances on
display “through dress... corporeal presentation [and] sexualised dancing” (Fileborn, 2016, p. 122). They will potentially be in the company of young people who are seeking wanted sexual encounters (Fileborn, 2016) and those who expect to consume large quantity of alcohol (Christmas & Seymour, 2014). While many bargoers strive to have an experience that leads to a positive outcome, the sexualization of the space allows unwanted contact to flourish. Groping, molestation, and other forms of unwanted contact are obstacles that patrons are faced with whilst participating in a “night out” (Christmas & Seymour, 2014). In commercial bars and clubs, unwanted sexual pursuits between patrons usually functions heteronormatively (Lindsay, 2006) with men acting sexually predatory toward women (Anderson et al., 2009), whilst women may be passive in their exchanges or feisty with their responses (Gunby et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013). But what happens if patrons move their sexualized gaze toward bartenders?

Although there has been mention of bartenders in licensed venues experiencing unwanted sexual attention from patrons (e.g., Coffey et al., 2018), to date there appears to be a lack of academic inquiry in the UK into understanding bartenders’ experiences with this phenomenon, how they negotiate, combat, and struggle with this whilst working, and who the perpetrators are. A minority of scholars from countries including Australia and Nigeria (e.g., Aborisade, 2020; Coffey et al., 2018) explore “gender, sexuality, pleasure, and risk” (Coffey et al., 2018, p. 728) and sexual harassment within the industry. Aborisade’s study in Nigeria found that some female bartenders were involved in a series of conflicts whilst at work, including receiving sexual harassment from customers, colleagues, and management, and punished for implementing combative strategies to deflect perpetrators’ actions. An interviewee summarizes this point, “...there had been cases where some individuals assaulted my colleagues. They were severely punished with deduction in wages just because they defended themselves” (Aborisade, 2020, p. 18). Both papers contend that experiences of sexual harassment are normalized in licensed venues. Nevertheless, much of the current literature surrounding unwanted sexual attention in the NTE claim that the workforce actively creates an environment where sexualized behaviors are normalized, tolerated, and encouraged (see Fileborn, 2016, 2017; Graham et al., 2017; Gunby et al., 2019). Scholars also highlight that a small minority of barstaff have refused to help customers as it did not result in financial gain, and, in some cases, they were the perpetrators in generating unwanted sexual attention (see Fileborn, 2016, 2017; Fox & Sobol, 2000).

It has been recommended that bartenders should receive training on how to recognize and handle violence of a sexual nature on venue premises, and that obtaining and retaining information regarding due diligence is needed to prevent serious cases of harm (Fileborn, 2016, 2017; Gunby et al., 2019).

A widespread theme for many scholars whilst engaging with research in the NTE has been to focus predominantly on unwanted sexual interactions between patrons in licensed venues (mainly pubs and clubs) which, in general, document the male patron(s) exhibiting their sexual desires, in various forms, onto the female patron(s) (Brooks, 2008; Fileborn, 2012, 2016, 2017; Fox & Sobol, 2000; Graham et al., 2014, 2017; Gunby et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013; Nicholls, 2018; Watson, 2000). Many
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scholars focus on the male failure “to listen to young women’s rejections” (Griffin et al., 2012, p. 193) whilst succumbing to their bodily lust for sexualized contact. The inability to recognize rejection has often been linked and blamed on intoxication rather than the individual agency of the perpetrator (Christmas & Seymour, 2014; Fileborn, 2012). Unwanted sexual attention in the NTE is “a highly complex, fluid, and situated occurrence. It is not necessarily an experience that can be defined easily or neatly” (Fileborn, 2017, p. 5).

Alongside this, focusing on the other side of the bar, there has been acknowledgment of sexualized cultures between employees in hospitality environments. There has been reference to staff conducting sexual play amongst themselves whilst on shift which is undertaken in many forms including sexual touch and talk (Erickson, 2009, 2010). Sexual play and relations among staff are seen as the norm especially in the bar/restaurant industries (Erickson, 2010; Giuffre & Williams, 1994) as “under some conditions, a sexualized dynamic between workers may act as a bonding agent or work adhesive, a way to smooth over differences and show respect and allegiance to one’s coworkers” (Lerum, 2004, p. 773). This is usually enacted with those who are part of an insider group (servers, bartenders, or waitresses), as others from an outsider group (chefs, other kitchen staff, or, presumably, customers) who attempt to participate in sexual play may blur the boundary of acceptability. Those who have overstepped their mark have had cases of sexual harassment and complaints filed against them (see Erickson, 2010).

The following study is to add to existing accounts of the sociological, ontological, and epistemological understanding of experiences with unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues. It also highlights the importance to recognize the fluidity of the NTE and the need to further understand this milieu from all perspectives. This paper will outline unwanted sexual attention as a daily struggle for predominantly female bartenders who are/were employed at a public house in Camden, London named The Watch Tower (not real name). From the data gathered, I collate and describe the frequent and sporadic forms of unwanted sexual attention that are produced by male patrons. There will be comparisons drawn between customers and bartenders’ experiences of this phenomenon, with the similarities and differences being explained through the understanding of how both parties occupy the space. I also develop the concept of “feisty femininity” (Gunby et al., 2019) to incorporate the experience of the workforce and set out how it is a process that is learnt and adopted over time.

**Identifying Unwanted Sexual Attention**

Throughout the research and analytical process, I adhered to Fileborn’s (2012) understanding of unwanted sexual attention as “any unwanted advances or behavior that participants interpreted as being sexual in nature and intent” (p. 244). This definition does not “exclude or deny experiences” (Fileborn, 2017, p. 5) that are interpreted as malign, threatening, or emotionally scarring by an individual which may not be specified as a sexual offence under the law (Kelly, 1988). What makes interactions “unwanted” are shaped by a range of intersecting factors, initially understood for those who are patrons in the NTE, these include the perceived physicality and severity of the
behavior, the context and identity, and cultural factors. The physicality and severity can be understood “from the ‘minor’ to the ‘extreme’, inclusive of actions such as staring, verbal comments and groping, as well as behaviours that would likely fall within legal definitions of sexual assault or rape” (Fileborn, 2017, p. 2). The context and identity of unwanted interactions is central in knowing whether an exchange is classified as “unwanted and harmful” (Fileborn, 2017, p. 2, emphasis in original) by an individual. It may be the case that an interaction with another results in the production of unwanted sexual attention, however, harm may be stripped from the equation if an individual is located in a familiar setting with peers and/or other patrons who “look out” and act as a barrier to protect them from harm. It is also occurring in a cultural context where “wanted sexual attention” (Fileborn, 2017, p. 3, emphasis in original) is a feature and/or aspiration of the night out. However, it may not always be clear whether an interaction with another is going to end up being unwanted. Initial behaviors and interactions do not always end up in the rigid box of right and wrong; they are impressionable and fluid and can change depending on the progression of the events that occur during the course of a “night out” (see Fileborn, 2017).

**The UK Context: The Law, Pub Terminology and Job Roles**

Unwanted sexual attention has the potential to progress into sexual assault, but only when physical contact is incorporated into an interaction. Under section 3 of the *Sexual Offences Act, 2003*, sexual assault in England is defined by the victim experiencing non-consensual sexual touching of the body whilst the perpetrator reasonably believes that the victim does not consent to his/her/their actions. For example, this would include grabbing or touching the victim’s genitalia and frotteurism. Yet, verbal forms of unwanted attention (sexual comments) and nonverbal acts (wandering eyes, sexual hand and/or mouth gestures) are not deemed criminal offences if they have occurred on a one-off basis toward an individual. If they were to take place on two or more occasions, the consequences of verbal and nonverbal acts could result into cases of harassment and stalking of which are criminalized under the *Protection from Harassment Act, 1997*. As this study is focusing on unwanted sexual attention between customers and bartenders at a workplace, legislation focusing on employment disputes, such as The *Employment Rights Act, 1996*, are not relevant as the former are not a part of the workforce.

A public house, or pub, is a venue open to the populous that is licensed to sell alcoholic drinks for consumption. A gastropub on the other hand is an amalgam of a bar and a restaurant, they sell alcohol and specialize in providing high-quality food. Although The Watch Tower did offer food it was not its specialty, therefore, the business relied heavily on drink sales to make a profit. Thus, throughout this paper, it will be referred to as a public house (or pub). It is also important to note the job roles and titles of those who are employed within licensed venues to fully understand the differences in worker duties. In restaurants, *waiters/waitresses/servers* are likely to have most of the customer contact during work hours. They tend to the customer’s needs, provide them with food and beverages, and make the overall experience enjoyable.
(Erickson, 2009). For many pubs in the UK, bartenders’ role can vary from site to site but for many small venues bartending and waitressing are not separate entities, but inclusive in the employer’s expectations. They have contact with customers at and around the bar, serving beverages and taking food orders (as table service is not common in British pubs) and when designated, serving sustenance via what many describe as “the floor” (Martha, 29, General Manager), which is the surrounding area of the bar where seating is positioned.

**Setting the Scene: Understanding Venues**

Pubs and clubs are created for the mass to enjoy a space of pleasure. They can provide a momentary escape from the monotony of everyday life, provide forms of relief, and present a potential for memorable and positive emotional experiences to ensue (Fileborn, 2017; Waitt & De Jong, 2014). They are used extensively on weekday evenings and weekends in the “complex emotional realm of the night” (Fileborn, 2017, p. 20) and are usually governed by the consumption of alcohol (Waitt & De Jong, 2014). Venues are said to use a range of techniques to inspire, or create illusions, to direct clientele to enact certain emotional responses. Hubbard (2005) notes that the physical surroundings of licensed venues heighten an atmosphere to becoming sexually charged through the physical surroundings (e.g., dimmed lighting), music, and interior design. Emotionally charged nightlife spaces combined with alcohol consumption allows transgressive behaviors and emotional intensities to arise (Waitt et al., 2011), as well as opportunities for individuals to violate boundaries to which, in some circumstances, are encouraged (Hubbard, 2005; Waitt & De Jong, 2014; Williams, 2008). It is also widely recognized that participation in the NTE is “kept rigorously separate” from the monotony of the everyday work and life balance (Smith, 2014, p. 152).

The construction of space in a pub or club (interior and exterior design) is devised through understanding the wants of the targeted clientele and is determined by appealing to either commercial or niche audiences (Lindsay, 2006). Commercial spaces adhere to the generic tone of society and are presented in the form of “branded pubs such as ‘Irish’ pubs, and large outer suburban dance clubs” (ibid, p. 42). They aim to attract a varied mainstream clientele, including manual workers, office workers, and university students and “play commercially popular music including top-20 hits. . .” (ibid, p. 43). Niche venues, on the other hand, are diverse spaces that select a subtle approach to marketing and include “‘grungy’ quirky pubs and inner city bars and lounges” (ibid, p. 40) that “promote noncommercial popular music and DJ’s, independent artists and jazz” (ibid, p. 40). The Watch Tower is a commercial venue that encompasses an aesthetical blend of Camden grunge in its décor.

**Masculine Interactions, Lad Culture and “Feisty Femininity” on a Night Out**

Masculinity is largely a “homo-social” experience: performed for, and judged by, other men (Kimmel, 2008, p. 47)
Some heterosexual male friendships and tightly knit homosocial groups pose a threat to others on a night out. Their presence and actions can be problematic and maintain harmful/hyper masculine ideals which manifest in the resistance of other men (e.g., gay men) and affirm the gender divisions between men and women (Anderson et al., 2009; Grazian, 2007; Gunby et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2012). Sexualizing conversations, sexist joking, girl watching (Quinn, 2002), girl hunting (Grazian, 2007), showing off for the “lads,” and expecting to get “laid” may play a role in establishing a heterosexual masculine identity on a night out. When performed, they enable boisterous male groups to thrive hegemonically (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 1987) especially in commercial licensed venues (Anderson et al., 2009; Fileborn, 2016; Gunby et al., 2019). Being a part of a heterosexual male, or laddish, group on a night out has the potential to generate a culture of sexual competitiveness and camaraderie in which attracting a sexual partner is not a necessity, but participation is key in cementing friendships, and consolidating homosocial bonds (Gunby et al., 2019). All of these behaviors create opportunities to distort boundaries which may encourage male patrons to (re)produce structures that objectify and sexually exploit women (Grazian, 2007; Gunby et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013). Being part of a problematic laddish group and/or adhering to dominant masculinities results in the production of unwanted sexual attention in the NTE.

On the other hand, many young women who enter the NTE are expected to conduct themselves with actions that simultaneously radiate a sense of freedom but also constraint. This includes being “sassy and independent—but not feminist; to be ‘up for it’ and to drink and get drunk alongside young men—but not to ‘drink like men’. . . act as agentically sexy. . . but to distance themselves from the troubling figure of the ‘drunken slut’” (Griffin et al., 2012, p. 184). These contradictory requirements, and the threat of being engaged with harmful forms of masculinity, prompts many women to alter their preparations and expectations. Before leaving their homes, during the night out, and after, many female partygoers generate and frequently employ a range of strategies to minimalize the risk of experiencing unwanted sexual attention when in the NTE. This is ritualized in various forms, including: prior discussions with family members on what not to do; always being accompanied with friends during and after visiting venues; limiting the consumption of alcohol; dressing modestly; always keeping an eye on their beverages; wearing appropriate footwear (to run in); and, if in unwanted exchanges, to seek protection from male companions and/or doorstaff (security) (Brooks, 2008; Gunby et al., 2019; Hobbs et al., 2003; Nicholls, 2018; Snow et al., 1991; Waitt et al., 2011). Although responding aggressively to the sex-seeking male has been described as being a poor strategy as it poses a greater risk of harm (Fileborn, 2012). In the UK, there has been an emergence of literature that reveals women blurring the traditional gender roles and becoming increasingly feisty in their opposition.

“Feisty femininity” is a concept coined by Gunby et al. (2019) that suggests female bargoers adopt a unique way of performing gender on a night out which “speaks back to unwanted attention” (p. 18). It is a form of resistance to the patriarchal structures inherent in the NTE that allows women to challenge the oppressive, dominant, and
sexualized actions of men. Feisty femininity is said to be produced by the female bar-
goer through verbal “overt retaliatory responses” (Gunby et al., 2019, p. 16) and/or, in some circumstances, by strategical retaliation in mimicking unwanted actions and bestowing them onto the initial perpetrators. Verbal responses could include telling the wrongdoer to “fuck off” (ibid, p. 16), whereas strategical retaliation consists of “doing it back to them” (ibid, p. 16) in the form of, for example, pinching back a male’s but-
tocks. These responses are adopted to help create a protective shield whilst being vigi-
lant of others and wary of their motives during a night out. The overt and subvert reactions are usually a product of instinct, emotion (anger, humiliation, frustration), and a demonstration of self-worth felt alongside suffering or witnessing unwanted sexualized contact. The authors argue that this form of femininity can play a part in ending gendered violence (see Gunby et al., 2019). I will be analyzing the concept of feisty femininity, coupled with other preventive strategies, to reflect female bartend-
ers’ actions that combat unwanted sexual attention whilst working.

Performing feisty femininity could, might, should be considered as an informal sanction to deter unwanted interactions. Informal sanctions are unofficial punishments that may encompass dialog/actions of condemnation and ridicule toward individuals and/or groups improper behavior. This contrasts with formal sanctions that represent the legal consequences of actions. The threat of informal and formal sanctions can act as a deterrent for criminal/immoral conduct. The theory of deterrence is built upon the notion “that if state-imposed sanction costs are sufficiently severe, criminal activity will be discouraged, at least for some” (Nagin, 2013, p. 206). It is argued that there are three key elements to the process of deterrence: “the severity, certainty, and celerity of punishment” (Nagin, 2013, p. 206) which could trigger absolute or restrictive deter-
rence. Absolute deterrence is defined as where “an individual has refrained [during some period] from a particular type of criminal act because in whole or in part he or she perceived some risk of someone suffering a punishment as a response to the crime” (Gibbs, 1975, p. 32). Restrictive deterrence explains two distinct thought processes: probabilistic reasoning and particularistic techniques. The former refers to “some individuals curtail their violations of law in the belief that repetition is likely to result eventually in their suffering a punishment” (Gibbs, 1975, p. 33). The latter implies that the “reduction in offense frequencies based on tactical skills offenders use that make them less likely to be apprehended” (Jacobs, 1996, p. 425). The findings section will outline the forms of feisty femininity as informal sanctions conducted by female bartenders whilst working.

Methodology

The main research questions that I am keen to address are: How do customers present their sexuality toward barstaff in The Watch Tower?; and do the sample adopt forms of feisty femininity? If so, what strategies or mechanisms do they implement whilst working? Are they different from previous theoretical thought? Thought provoking sub-questions will also be asked: Who are the perpetrators of unwanted sexual attention in The Watch Tower?; and are the forms of unwanted sexual attention directed
toward barstaff systemically different to those already mentioned in the literature? Before assessing the research questions, ethical approval was granted by Goldsmiths, University of London’s Sociology Department.

Methods

My conclusions and analyses about this workplace culture surrounding unwanted sexual attention are based on an ethnographic research design which includes participant observation and interviews. Located in the London Borough of Camden, The Watch Tower is a pub that has been serving guests since the 1920’s. With tourists, residents, office employees, construction workers, and concertgoers visiting the pub on a regular basis the clientele that visit this milieu varies on a day-to-day basis. Although the pub is accommodating to LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other) people, it is dominated by the heterosexual matrix with classical performances of gender and heterosexuality on display (see Butler, 1990). While I worked at The Watch Tower for just under two years as a bartender, the participant observation for this study began in October 2017 and finished in July 2018 and involved 30 to 35 hours per week of working, observing and recording detailed field notes. My shift patterns were erratic and did not follow any particular structure, I worked both “night/late shifts” (e.g., 5pm to 1am) and “day/early shifts” (e.g., 11am to 5pm). I found that, although present and problematic during the day, unwanted sexual activity occurred more often during evenings and weekends (predominantly Thursday, Friday and Saturday) (field notes). The interview process began in March 2018 and ended in June 2018. It encompassed a semi-structured interviewing technique with the interview itself lasting for a duration between 40 minutes and 1 hour 40 minutes. It should be noted that female participants’ interviews, on average, lasted 13 minutes longer than their male counterparts.

Sampling

The recruitment process for the participants of this study was comprised of contacting both current and previous front of house (barstaff) employees of The Watch Tower. I spoke to current employees during work hours to confirm participation and contacted previous employees via social media platforms. Previous employees were included as their experiences and characteristics were considered to assist the topic of interest. I adopted a purposive sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2016) and contacted six previous employees who I knew would be easily accessible and willing to detail their experiences. Overall, the participants for this study included a total of five previous employees (three female and two male) and ten current employees (five male and five female) who all held different positions (in hierarchal order: Bartender, Team Coach, Shift Supervisor, Assistant Manager, General Manager). All current members of staff were interviewed for this study apart from one male employee who refused and stated after my request to interview that “do people actually think this is an issue?” (field note). Kitchen (back of house) staff were not selected for this study as they are situated in an “employees only” part of the building and had no contact with customers.
Analytical Strategy

In the section that follows, I explore the data gathered using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive reasoning was applied, and the interview transcripts were analyzed using the software platform, NVivo. The outcome from the coding of the data and analysis, alongside an extensive literature review, saw the construction of three interlinked themes (unified with sub-themes): forms of unwanted sexual attention (common and infrequent); perpetrators (laddish groups and the loner); and developing feisty femininity (veterans and the naïve; the bar top divide). It became clear during the analysis that this paper will focus on the issues surrounding unwanted sexual attention that female bartenders experience with male customers. Although male bartenders did experience unwanted sexual attention from male customers, albeit on a smaller scale, during the interviews they all were inclined to discuss the events between male customers and female bartenders as they “get it a lot less than the female staff do” (Clifford, 22, former Shift Supervisor). As Boris and Noah summarize: “I observe quite a bit. . . and. . . you know. . . it’s mainly builders or when guys are in groups with their friends. . . they are all trying to be laddy. . . it’s mainly men. . .” (Boris, 27, Bartender); “I think between all the girls, It’s a daily occurrence” (Noah, 22, Team Coach).

Findings: Forms of Unwanted Sexual Attention

This place. . . sexual harassment center. . . One guy. . . grabbed my hip once, and I sorta pushed him away and I was, like, “don’t do that. . . don’t fucking touch me” . . . and he was like “I was just seeing if we could get another round of drinks” . . . I was like “that’s not how you ask for a round of drinks, go to the fucking bar (Selena, 25, former Shift Supervisor)

Showing the multiplicity of different experiences to which bartenders were exposed to, forms of unwanted sexual attention consisted of two main contrasting features: common and infrequent. The former captures interactions of an unwanted sexualized nature occurring on a daily and/or weekly basis, whereas the latter details the intermittent (bi-monthly, monthly, or sporadic) encounters. This, however, is not to suggest that these are the only forms of unwanted sexual attention experienced by bartenders in licensed venues. As Heberle and Grace (2009, p. 2) argue that “. . . there is no singular form that sexual violence can be reduced to even as we seek to make it visible as an unjust and damaging action.” The below accumulates the experiences detailed by the participants during the research process. It should be recognized that all past and present workforce selected for this study have experienced forms of unwanted sexual attention from customers whilst working at The Watch Tower.

Common forms of unwanted sexual attention presented itself to the employees non-physically and verbally: “. . .They’ll be ordering a drink and say, “can I have a. . .” whilst staring directly at your chest. . .” (Vinné, 22, Assistant Manager Trainee). Unwanted staring and the wandering of eyes leering toward female bartenders’ breasts
was experienced daily. Lewd comments of a sexual nature occurred every week on heavy drinking nights (usually Thursday, Friday, and Saturday) and, when verbalized, often linked the bartender in performing, or already performed, sexual acts. Customers have been documented declaring: “I should just bend you over the bar right now” (Martha); . . . someone once said that I have good blow job eyes. . . (Selena); “I wanna cum all over your tits and face. I’m going to take you back to mine and smash your backdoors in” (Patricia, 26, Team Coach). Pet names also occurred frequently and, although they are forms of verbal commentary, they have been distinguished from lewd comments as they are used to address a bartender for service and are not overtly sexual. In contrast, lewd comments occurred after a rapport had been built between both bartender and customer and are sexually explicit. Male bartenders would initially be addressed by male customers with pet names, for example, “buddy, pal, boss, or boy” (field notes), whereas female bartenders are typically greeted as “darling or babe” (field notes), or as Patricia notes “. . . we get all, like, darling, gorgeous. . . sexy. . . that kind of thing.” Suggestive staring and allocating pet names to bartenders became apparent when customers were located at the bar and transpired without the need of alcoholic sustenance, though lewd verbal comments usually occurred when bargoers were at a level of inebriation (field notes).

Infrequent unwanted sexual attention directed toward female barstaff consisted of unwanted physical contact, overtly and covertly taking pictures, and stalking. Unwanted touching highlighted by Selena previously were themes expressed by all female bartenders with customers grabbing or touching certain parts of the body (hip, waste, bum, arms, and breasts), ungracefully caressing hands, enforcing embraces, and distributing “wet slobbery forehead kisses” (Patricia). On average, this type of unwanted contact occurred three to four times per month and usually on heavier drinking nights. Overtly and covertly taking pictures and filming female bartenders on the bar whilst serving has happened six times during the research process. Patricia describes the aftermath of an incident: “there were three pictures of me and one or two of Camilla. Like, Camilla just walking up the bar, of her back, like blurry, and my face, like, blurred, kind of, just, serving.” During the time of interviews, many of the female bartenders were concerned with being stalked by customers. This was heightened due to the interviews being held around the time where a Camden bartender, Iuliana Tudos, was sexually assaulted and brutally murdered on her way home from work (BBC, 2018). Being stalked by patrons from The Watch Tower was a reality for three of the bartenders of this study to which were established sporadically. Vinné describes an incident, after finishing her shift, with a customer who she was serving throughout an evening:

. . . he said “can I come and join you” . . . I said “no, I’m sorry” . . . he was always very touchy feely. I went to next door to [a bar] and he followed me there and then he was like “Can I join you for a drink”, I was like, “no, I’m going home in a second”. He was like “I’ll meet you by the tube then” . . . I was like “well I don’t want you to do that” . . . I ended up going to [a club] . . . and he must have been waiting around the corner. . . cuz he followed me there as well. . .
The forms of unwanted sexual attention mentioned above are similar to the experiences that have been previously mentioned in literature that are primarily concerned with patron-on-patron interactions (Fileborn, 2016; Gunby et al., 2019). The differences between patron-on-patron and patron-on-bartender interactions lie in the occupation of space and the boundaries that are physically in place within a venue. This will be further discussed later in this section.

Perpetrators

...you’re often approached by large groups of men... and that makes you feel immediately vulnerable (Camilla, 25, Bartender)

All female and male participants concluded that the main perpetrators of eliciting forms of unwanted sexual attention toward them at The Watch Tower were men (Brooks, 2008; Fileborn 2012, 2016, 2017; Gunby et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013). As summarized by Jonas (22, Assistant Manager) “...it’s only been male customers. I’ve never had any unwanted sexual advances from women here, or in the service industry at all. Women flirt as much as men do, but my experiences... as soon as I tell them that I have a girlfriend or I’m not comfortable with this it stops. They’re friendly, they take it on the nose and it’s fine. Whereas men seem to be more aggressive about it.” Four participants did articulate situations of where female bargoers did interact with them sexually (to the degree of it being unwanted), this occurred irregularly unlike the daily struggles with male customers. Male customers interacted with sexual intent whilst being part of a laddish group and being alone or distant from other bargoers. Thus, this theme is divided into two parts: laddish groups and the loner.

Laddish groups entering the establishment triggered a sense of unease for many of the participants. Their girl hunting (Grazian, 2007), girl watching (Quinn, 2002), carnivalesque and boisterous practices (Thurnell-Read, 2012) had been well documented by the workforce which normally generated a sense of unease. Large groups of young to middle aged men visiting The Watch Tower was a frequent occurrence as it was highly likely to serve at least one group of “lads” per day. It was common for female bartenders to experience “leering” (Camilla) at “girls’ arses and stuff” (Boris) and lewd verbal comments from laddish groups. Ginni (20, Bartender) was located on the “floor” when a lascivious interaction with a group of rowdy “lads” ensued:

There was a group of lads standing outside of the smoking area and they had smashed a glass and didn’t care to tell anyone, and I had gone outside to clear it up—and as I was clearing up, they were whistling and making comments about my... backside!

This “showing off for the lads” (Gunby et al., 2019, p. 11), has previously been linked to some male customers objectification of female bargoers that solidifies homosocial bonds, reinforces their heterosexual ideal and enables, maintains and mobilizes hegemonic forms of masculinity (Grazian, 2007; Kavanaugh, 2013). As the above example highlights, the workforce is not immune to such performances as they
encounter similar interactions with male customers that female bargoers have whilst being in establishments within the NTE (Fileborn, 2016; Gunby et al., 2019).

*The Loner* bypasses the need to be in the company with other men and act sexually expressive toward bartenders *alone*. It has been observed whilst researching in the field that “loners” replace the need for laddish confidence building, camaraderie, and boisterousness with the consumption of alcohol (usually to excess). They were more inclined than a group of “lads” to situate themselves by the bar, drink alcohol, and commence interaction with the barstaff whilst they were performing their duties *behind* the bar (field notes). Unwanted touching, staring, lewd sexual comments, stalking, and overtly or covertly taking pictures were all said to have been enacted by lone male customers. Almost all (seven of eight) of the female barstaff sample detailed their experiences with lone men “hitting” (Okiana, 19, Bartender) on them. Most of the sample focused on the age of the perpetrator when recounting unwanted interactions, as Ket (21, former Bartender) described: “One guy once asked if he could fuck me, and my mum, and my sister [laughs] . . . at the same time. And this guy was about 75 and I was 19. . . .” These lived experiences allow entrance into the debates surrounding masculinity as a homosocial experience (Kimmel, 2008) and that girl hunting (Grazian, 2007) on a night out is performed for, and by, groups of men. Sexually interacting with barstaff *did not* require an army of male others to impress as the substitute of alcoholic sustenance and a conversation starter proved just as effective.

The daily presence of *laddish groups* and *the loner* in the pub has led female bartenders to perform gender differently whilst at work. Like other women workers in the NTE, for example doorstaff and lap-dancers (e.g., Hobbs et al., 2007; Wood, 2000), strategies have been adopted that allow them to take control and resist masculine dominance. Hobbs et al. (2007) research into female doorstaff observed that some transgress their perceived emotional qualities and dominant forms of femininity “to exhibit control, power and strength within traditional masculine environments” (p. 32). This may include embracing “masculine codes of violent action” (ibid) by physically fighting unruly bargoers. In addition, Wood (2000) notes that occasionally strippers employed emotional techniques to resist masculine power. This could include staring, enforcing awkward eye contact, and giggling at male customers to make them feel uneasy about their decision to visit the strip club. The section below details strategies implemented by female bartenders to resist male sexualized advances.

### Developing Feisty Femininity

The initial construction of “feisty femininity” was established by Gunby et al. (2019) and centered on female bargoers producing “overt retaliatory responses” (p. 16) as a form of risk management in the aftermath of receiving unwanted sexual attention by “lads” during a night out. This explores and pins together a form of resilient femininity that challenges hegemonic masculine ideals and the unwanted sexualized interactions that occur whilst participating in the NTE (see Gunby et al., 2019). However, it focuses on bargoers who are participating on a night out and fails to incorporate the workforce’s experiences and how they may negotiate and adopt certain forms of femininity
whilst working. Further to this, there is also a disregard into the excursions that individuals undertake to successfully implement a feisty demeanor. For the workforce, retaliating with feistiness is a mode that is undetermined without experience. It is learnt, tested, and molded overtime by undertaking a level of professionalism and acknowledging the high volume of social interaction that the job role entails. To support this, and to develop this concept further, the theme is separated into two sections under veterans and the naïve and the bar top divide:

**Veterans and the naïve.** . . . it is like for newer staff, they . . . feel like they have to go along with it even though the definitely don’t, and they definitely shouldn’t. (Clifford)

On several occasions, the veteran management team stressed to the workforce to not accept and tolerate unwanted sexual attention elicited by customers. They recommended if interactions were deemed as unwanted to inform a member of the supervisory team or doorman so they could deal with the issue(s) appropriately. The upholding of this recommendation came into effect during episodes of infrequent unwanted sexual attention. However, during the occurrences of common forms of unwanted sexual attention, it was mostly up to the individual to fend for themselves. This is due to the sheer magnitude of unwanted sexual attention experienced whilst on shift. It was easier for the participants to tackle the issue subjectively rather than to formally (or informally) make a complaint to management (field notes). Unlike the original concept, being feisty with a response was not limited to “lads” but to all whom sought sexual interactions with reluctant employees. Whilst being aware of this, there was a need for the participants to adopt strategies to deflect unwanted male sexuality. This, however, was a complicated process for those being new, or naïve, to the job role or employer, as there were initial difficulties in separating feisty responses to unwanted sexual attention and being professional. Below, Selena recounts issues experienced early on in her career:

> you find someone staring at your boobs, I was gonna say tits. . . or breasts! . . . when they were talking to you, but because they were older you just were naïve to think that, maybe, their eyesight wasn’t good or. . . but the thing is, like, I was always thinking I’m going to be polite, I’m going to be polite cuz [I] wanted to do really well. . .

Speaking back to unwanted sexual attention for the newcomers with inexperience in the industry placed them in a distinct juxtaposition. Being “good” (Okiana) at their job was paramount and measured against not speaking back to unwanted sexual attention as they would connect this with being “bad at your job” (Okiana). Justifying untoward interactions, accepting unwanted advances, and wanting to be “good” at their jobs was a newcomer’s way of dealing with sexual adversity in their new job role. For many at the beginning of employment, this autopiloted strategy was implemented which allowed them to navigate through the space and job role whilst being in the gaze of the relatively unknown employer’s expectations and the sex seeking customer(s). It is with the duress of time and experience that allowed the autopiloted strategy to be
lifted which inevitably saw informal sanctions, such as feisty femininity, being performed assertively.

The acquisition of feisty feminine strategies was adopted with haste if the bartenders were in full-time employment and marginally slower for the part-time workers (field notes). Establishing a *veteran* status meant that the participants felt more comfortable in the surrounding space, they understood the employer’s expectations and the level of professionalism required to combat unwanted sexual attention. Now an established *veteran* bartender, Selena notes her thoughts and actions whilst experiencing unwanted sexual attention at work:

... when you’re serving someone, they get this idea in their head where you are the maiden or maid... It’s all about give and take, I don’t stare at my customers dicks at the bar... I’m not going to be like “oh, I’m going to stare at your cock because I’m a little bit drunk”... No. It’s unprofessional both ways. That’s why we have the right to refuse to serve people because people think they can treat you like shit

Being feisty for veterans did not solely mean speaking back to unwanted attention aggressively, it is sometimes met with physicality, as Martha recounts after an altercation with a male customer “... he stood back, just looked me up and down and it took him 10 seconds to look at the top of me to the bottom of me... So, I just grabbed the guy and said “... you should just come with me” and he was like “oh... really” so I just pushed him out the door and told him to fuck off and if I was to see him again that would be it.” It also translated to being passive aggressive and employing dismissive tactics: “... if you sense a situation is getting dodgy sometimes the only way to get out of it is to be, kinda like, “oh I can’t give you my number, I’m not allowed” (Patricia). Further, the experienced female barstaff that had received an excessive amount of unwanted sexual attention often became creative with their responses. For example, Ket would regularly respond to male sexual advances with a passive aggressive demeanor to prevent them becoming irate when/if they felt rejected. Whilst being asked for her number was an occurrence that happened regularly, she crafted a passive albeit feisty coping strategy: “They don’t accept that you don’t wanna talk to them even though they are a drunken old man... I would give it out and then not answer it and say I’ve lost my phone... I’ve once given out my ex’s number, which is really funny. So, he answers the phone...” These are examples of informal sanctions that may potentially influence the perpetrators sentiments and cause them into being fearful of further untoward behavior.

*The bar top divide.* The feisty forms of femininity detailed above are introducing how female bartenders combat unwanted sexual attention whilst working. This is, in some respects, similar (verbal retaliation) but also vastly contrasting to what is in the literature that centers on the forms of femininity, coping mechanisms, and strategies that female bargoers adopt during a night out (Brooks, 2008; Gunby et al., 2019; Hobbs et al., 2003; Nicholls, 2018; Snow et al., 1991; Waitt et al., 2011). Whilst both female bartenders and bargoers dwell in the same establishment, there are concrete
differences that impact their feisty mechanism to deflect and speak back to the male patron’s sexualized advances. As mentioned previously, it is important to note both sets of realities and how they occupy the space. Venues for bartenders are contractually binding places where they; earn their livelihoods, handed expectations to provide satisfactory customer service (by presentation of self and products), and required to act with hospitable professionalism by their employers. Whereas, for the bargoer, this is an unchained space for gregarious enjoyment, a place where the consumption of alcohol is the norm, and where the “nine to five” monotonous professionalism is absent whilst mingling with acquaintances and strangers. The physical occupation of the space is also dissimilar, as bartenders are positioned behind the bar with the bar top acting as a partition between them and the bargoers. Bargoers solely reside on “the floor,” which is where tables, chairs, a dance floor, and group standing areas are located. Bartenders fragment the boundaries whilst being located on the floor and performing waitress/waiter like duties (Snow et al., 1991). By being bound to the location by contract and duties, bartenders are compelled to choose between being overtly feisty or more strategic in their responses. They are required to alter their strategies and chosen stance dependent on the circumstances and their innate sensations. Especially in retaliation to common forms of unwanted sexual attention, their feistiness must be fueled by creative passive aggressive and dismissive tactics rather than immediately reverting to overt retaliatory responses. Unlike bargoers, they are unable to retaliate and mimic the perpetrators actions (Gunby et al., 2019) or acutely “say things you wouldn’t say to male strangers in the street” (Griffin et al., 2012, p. 191) without having to deal with repercussions from irate customers and management. Bartenders are also contractually, and professionally, bound to the space and have limited freedom of movement, whereas customers are able to leave and enter an establishment at their own request (Brooks, 2008; Snow et al., 1991).

Adopting feisty femininity in retaliation to unwanted sexual attention can be applied for those both in front and behind the bar, with the tactics and modes of combat being malleable and dependent on the recipient. As unwanted sexual attention for both patrons and the workforce of venues is experienced in abundance, it is the differences in motives of being in venues that acts as a hinge on deciding the modes and production of retaliation. Thus, the performance and forms of feisty femininity in the NTE is complex and subject to context. It is not solely defined by producing angered or overt retaliatory responses (Gunby et al., 2019), it also encompasses a range of physical, dismissive and a passive aggressive acts learnt through subjective experiences with men in the NTE.

Conclusion

This study has investigated a topic that has had little consideration in a sociological context. It has advanced contemporary knowledge around the extent and forms of unwanted sexual attention received by the workforce of a public house. Through interviews and participant observation, I have identified who the main perpetrators are, how the workforce negotiates and resist these whilst working, and expanded the theory
of feisty femininity that concerns the workforce of a public house. The findings and analysis of female (and some male) bartenders’ experiences of unwanted sexual attention offer an opportunity to further evaluate the extent of this issue in the context of the UK. With many female bartenders experiencing this type of behavior daily suggests that sexually interacting with barstaff is normalized within The Watch Towers’ culture (and arguably others too). The normalization is supported by the informal setting, alcohol consumption, sexualization of the space, and arguably historical factors. Since the 19th century women have been able to be employed as bartenders and from this beginning they have been seen as a sexual figure by male customers. From the 1890’s the barmaid being viewed as “busted and breast, a sexual lure. . .,” to the 1960’s campaigners writing poems on how male customers “wanted a beautiful barmaid” to serve them their alcohol (Kirkby, 2002, pp. 167–168). The ebbs and flows of power among male customers and female bartenders have been present throughout previous centuries to which most refer to the barmaid a servant, adhering to sexual economics and male fantasies, whom were presumably economically dependent on male custom (Kirkby, 2002). As this research has shown, history is not far from contemporary reality and the general impetus for gender equality and status was not manifested in my observations inside this particular social milieu. The results of this study shows that heteronormativity, patriarchy, sexualization and objectification of the female body is rife within this commercial public house culture. It is not a phenomenon limited to the female bargoer as previously recognized (Brooks, 2008; Fileborn, 2017; Gunby et al., 2019; Nicholls, 2017, 2018), as the findings of this study suggest, it is experienced regularly by the female bartender.

Whilst much of the literature on this topic focuses on bargoers’ encounters, authors have argued toward educating young people to stop tolerating sexual harassment and molestation (Christmas & Seymour, 2014). However, with further investigation, Gunby et al. (2019) argue that it is not in fact tolerated at all, but heavily contested through overt and diplomatic means, and by being “brushed off” (Gunby et al., 2019, p. 18). This data questions whether suggesting further education is vital to all bargoers as it is shown that unwanted behaviors are being challenged on a night out. A similar argument can be directed to authors who suggest that bartenders need to be educated on the events surrounding unwanted sexual attention, how to prevent and deal with such phenomenon, and to not encourage or tolerate certain sexually discriminatory behavior’s (see Fileborn, 2016, 2017; Graham et al., 2017; Gunby et al., 2019; Watson, 2000). To recommend education solely for bartenders implies that the researchers are uninformed of barstaff’s lived experiences with customers, employers, and the dynamics within the workplace culture. It also indicates that bartenders are the only section of the workforce that would benefit from further knowledge. Pubs, like many businesses, comprise complex hierarchical employment structures. In The Watch Tower specifically, bartenders are located at the bottom of this hierarchy, below general managers, area managers and directors (decision makers) who are present behind the scenes and away from service and customer contact. I argue, therefore, that education for all employees, regardless of status, should be introduced at the start of employment to build knowledge and perspective in all areas of business. This should be delivered in
the form of an online training covering: unwanted sexual attention as an issue endemic to the NTE; examples of forms of unwanted sexual attention; descriptions of strategies on how to handle unwanted advances; and contact details for victim support. This training will also aim to entice decision makers to implement tougher measures for wrongdoers in licensed venues. This should entail, for example, overt policies (visibly displayed) on stricter rules enabling the workforce (managerial staff/security) to punish those who transgress acceptable boundaries including the immediate removal from venues and the barring from premises. Tougher rules must also impact on decisions surrounding profit and sales, as the ejection of perpetrators will signify the support of staff and bargoer safety rather than the backing of controversial custom for monetary gain. Furthermore, additional research should be conducted to gauge the impact that unwanted sexual attention has on the lives of the workforce both inside and outside of work.

Authors’ Note
The author whose names is listed above certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers’ bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Notes
1. Informal British word that is synonymous with patron or customer.
2. Doorstaff presence in the Watch Tower was limited to Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.
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