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Women in the Restaurant Industry

“Hot pan, hot pan!” “Coming down, move aside.” “Seating begins in five minutes, where the hell is my knife?” Chaotic, messy, stressful, loud, and unrelenting; all these attributes lay the foundation of what the professional kitchen environment looks like. Working in a kitchen is not for the weak. There is an emotional, mental, and physical toll that comes with taking on the grueling tasks demanded of chefs. Constantly pressed for time with little to no room for error, a restaurant worker must perform with this pressure hanging over them. When failure occurs, and it undoubtably will, cooks face an uproar in the dining room. Worse yet, they face a pissed off head chef, who will use some choice words to express their anger and disappointment. With such a tense and high-pressure environment some people believe that women have no place in the restaurant industry. Women are not built the same as men; I will admit men are typically stronger and taller. Even though men have this physical advantage, it does not mean that women are incapable of the physical demand this industry calls for. Not only does this industry demand physicality, but it also calls for a mental toughness. [Emotions generally run higher in women, and some people believe this makes them inadequate to work in a kitchen.](#) In a restaurant every person must be quick to think when problems arise; however, it is a common misconception that women are sub-par at making these quick decisions. Similarly, some folks believe that women simply do not possess the ability to command a kitchen. Since men are traditionally in places of power, achieving head or executive chef proves extremely difficult for the average woman. [The](#)

truth is, women are equally physically capable, use their emotions as an advantage, are exceptionally intelligent, and make remarkable leaders in the kitchen.

Rigorous. Exhausting. Draining. There is nothing like working in a kitchen with hundreds of people flooding in by the hour. No doubt it drains stamina, and while some people think women cannot measure up to the challenge, I have experienced otherwise. It baffles me to have come across people who truly believe a woman's body cannot stand such a laborious job. In this day and age, countless people stand up for women's equality, but some stay stuck believing that only men can achieve success in this industry. After working in three professional kitchens, I have had my share of sexist people. Occasionally, a male co-worker of mine would make off-handed comments about the women only working the short shifts or not being able to get through the day without an energy drink. Although to some, this statement may seem insignificant, but to hard working women we take it as a sexist insult.

"Did the Redbull come on the truck today?" No doubt about it we had been shorted our shipment of Redbull. "How are the ladies gonna make it through the night now?" joked one of our chef de parties. Everything was a joke to him when it came to the women working in the kitchen. With anger rising in me I went to find my fellow women co-workers to ask their thoughts on this "joke." [Sure enough I wasn't overreacting; all the women were disgusted with the blatant sexist comments. We receive this belittling on a daily basis.](#) If we go to a supervisor, we're told we are being too sensitive, so it seems our only option is to prove the men wrong. After this harmless little joke, us women decided to show our strength without energy drinks. Weeks went on like this and sure enough there were no more so called "jokes" made on the subject. I won't lie, working twelve-to-fourteen-hour shifts on my feet all day tires me out, but it also shows resilience. Women I work with have shown they can work these grueling hours.

Conclusively, I have noticed that working these long intense hours everything comes down to willpower, not gender.

“What do you mean you’re having a woman emergency?” “Don’t you see there’s no time for that, we have a timeline to keep!” “Get yourself together and get back on the floor.” When service is in full swing, time works against us. No time to have emotions and certainly no time for a break to let frustrations out. As women, we face an extra challenge that comes once every month: our cycle. Hormones skyrocket, [causing our emotions to spiral out of control](#). Given all this, it is incredible how women keep their emotions in check. Moments happen where we need a second to compose ourselves, so we alert a female co-worker and run to the bathroom. I run quickly to the safety behind closed doors to let out my anger or frustration. Finally I reach my safe haven, close the door and instantly begin to cry. Frustration sweeps over me like a thick dark fog choking me. I let my tears fall while balled on the floor, knowing that my missing presence in the kitchen will soon be noticed. I let my last couple tears fall, wash my face, compose myself, and instantly walk back onto the floor like nothing has happened. I know my female co-workers have done the same. I have covered for them, just as they cover for me because we understand one another. Some people think this makes us weak, but what they don’t realize is the strength and mental toughness it takes to walk back out onto the floor like everything is going smooth. [Men do not have to face this arduous challenge every month](#). This goes to show that women are indeed both emotionally and mentally stronger in the kitchen.

[Sexism persists in this industry because many believe women should be stay at home moms, teachers, or do desk work. This assumption of women happens frequently; however, for several women, it is a misconception](#). Another statement I hear too often is “a woman who works in a kitchen only ended up there because she lacks the academic intelligence for a better job.”

Why choose an industry where sexism is prevalent, drug and alcohol abuse exists, and woman are constantly undermined? Simply answered, passion. It looks different for every person, but for me I find exhilaration and joy working in the restaurant industry. [Despite this, people search for an excuse](#) “well maybe you just hated school and took the easy road.” Quite the opposite for me; I actually love learning and pursuing education, it’s fun and expands my horizons. However, I love cooking more, so I seek to find a balance between the two. While I pursue my business and entrepreneurship degree, I also seek experience in the kitchen. When I started working as a pastry chef I was bombarded with questions about my schooling. “What was your GPA in high school?” “Not likely that you have a college degree.” As I stood there shocked by these questions and statements, I realized some men assume women were forced into the restaurant industry. Proudly, I was able to state my schooling experiences and explain that I was currently in college pursuing one degree and planning to achieve another after my first. My statement was followed by silence. One man even chimed in how impressed he was that I had goals and a plan in motion. Never judge a woman for their passion or consider them less academically inclined because of what they love.

Anyone can possess leadership skills and qualities; it all depends on the person. [Some would argue that only men should be put in places of authority, while women should stay in the background.](#) Why is that? Many believe men simply lead with more authority and respect. However, I have seen women step up and take charge in situations where men were clueless. At one restaurant, I had an executive chef that could not communicate clearly. Confusion and frustration constantly plagued the staff, including me. Last minute menu changes, lack of communication on dietary restrictions, and no instruction left me boiling with anger and puzzlement inside. Luckily, we soon hired a woman as our front of house manager. She swooped

in and made sure the communication was cleaned up. With her on board, we rarely went into a night unprepared. She kept the executive chef on track and made sure everyone knew what was happening on any given night. Organization and clear instructions guided the restaurant to success. Women are just as capable in leadership roles as men. Through my experiences, women understand how to communicate more efficiently.

Overall, in my experiences women are full of endurance, made stronger by their mentality, are academically motivated, and make incredible leaders and head chefs. Sadly, it seems no matter how hard women fight to have equal opportunities in the restaurant industry, they will still face discrimination. In many fields of work women face sexist biases, it does not pertain only to the restaurant industry. Because of this, I challenge women to stand up for equal opportunities. We belong in the workforce and if we have to fight for equality in it, then we will. I want to continue to spread awareness on this and help people to see the misconceptions that women face. We are ostracized constantly simply for being women, most men won't stand up for us, so we must stand for ourselves and for each other. With all the negativity revolving around women working in the restaurant industry, it proves difficult to climb the ladder of success; but if we keep fighting for equal opportunities, we can create an environment where both men and women alike are treated with equal respect.

Author's Note:

After reading and reviewing my initial essay I decided to make some changes on the conciseness of my tone. There were many unnecessary small words that I went back and omitted and/or changed. I wanted my paper to flow better and not sound so wordy, and I believe I did a good job changing that. I thought many of my points and evidence were strong already, but I went back and took away repetitive parts and stated my “I say’s” clearly, confidently, and concisely. I read this paper aloud and made sure to also fix any typos and reword sentences that sounded stiff or strange. I have loved writing this paper, I was able to share my experiences and reflect on how I can use them to impact others. I have learned to think deeply about how to present my material while also being respectful if anyone were to disagree. Overall, this paper revealed a lot about myself and hopefully helped expose the restaurant industries unfair treatment of women.