

Garves says of sexist beer labels, “I have that ability now that I could turn away clients and say, ‘I don’t really like that beer you make where you are telling me to take my top off.’ That’s not the kind of beer I want to drink. That’s not the kind of beer I want to represent me.”

Eugene Weekly: So you were a UO student. How did you transition to where you are now?

Dana Garves: I spent four really incredible years at Ninkasi. We sent yeast into space. Somewhere around year three and a half or so, I started to realize how many people were bringing beer samples to the Ninkasi lab to be tested. These are professional commercial brewers who felt they didn’t have any place to turn for their analysis, except for this lab that would do it for free. It got to the point where a growler made its way across the nation just to get tested. And that’s sort of this really big epiphany that there’s something missing in this industry that is needed, and that is something I can provide.

So leaving the benefits and the family, leaving all of that was very terrifying, but this is what I want. This is what drives me in the morning. I didn’t know at the time, but Ninkasi was that springboard for me.

What services does your beer lab offer?

Now I only focus on commercial brewers, because they are the ones who want to have their beers tested and have to have their beers tested to follow federal and state regulation. I do pretty much the all analysis that is for your final product. You can send in your final beer product with the same bottle you are going to ship out or the same keg you are going to put on draft.

I also do education of commercial brewers and learning how to create a sensory panel to test your beer in a way that is analytical and not necessary subjective. I also do consumer education, so people can come in and learn how to taste a beer professionally and go through steps of drinking a beer with a critical eye.

In such a male-dominated industry, what does it mean to you to be a woman in the craft beer industry?

I’m a pretty vocal feminist. I don’t hide that in any way, and I have never felt in this industry I have to hide it. The issue where my gender comes into play is so nuanced that it’s difficult to have a conversation with another woman who is in a male-dominated field that isn’t beer.

The sexism I face in this industry is label-related — what’s on the beer, what it’s called, why that lady is half-naked? For instance, I have this client who I have been working with for two or three years, and they handed me this one sample, and it has a pretty offensive name. The brewery said, “Hey, this is the working name for this beer.” But it’s a sexist comment. And I looked at them and asked, “Is this what you think of me?”

“Well, no, why would you say that?”

“Well, I’m a woman, and this beer is named something that’s derogatory towards women so, you know, can you change that?”

They apologized as soon as I pointed it out — the working title got thrown out the window, then I got an apology email from the owner.

I think the sexism issue is going to arise, but my job as an individual and a female is to calmly point it out, “Hey, that’s kind of sexist!” “That kind of thing insults me and everything I do. Sure you don’t want to rethink this?” And the result is they are very amenable. Brewers want to learn, they want to change and they don’t want to be Budweiser. You don’t have to bring down the whole gender to sell beer, man.

I also face sexism when brewers doubt my results — I do have this initial concern that maybe it’s about my gender, that maybe there’s a distrust there because — women in beer, women in beer *science*. That’s a big leap for a lot of people to take, but luckily in this industry, word of mouth is a very strong bond, and I have so many great brewers who know me and my work ethic and integrity.

They know that if I mess up, I’ll tell you, and I’ll change it and make it better. So it’s not the brewers I have to convince, it’s the casual drinkers.

When I tell people I work in beer, they would assume I work at a tap house, serve beer or in marketing. I think the people outside the industry are the biggest barrier when it comes to my gender. Within the industry, it’s labels, and it’s a big battle.

Do you see any stereotypes about women in the industry? How are you fighting them?

It’s interesting because there are not a lot of us [women]. One of the things that I notice in this industry is that rumors are very common, but generally negative rumors happen about women. Something I have noticed and picked up on is that if you don’t know a female brewer and you just know of her, it’s possible there are negative rumors you have heard about her. “She’s a bitch.” “I heard she slept with this one brewer.” I’ve never heard that said about a male brewer.

If someone gives me a negative account of anyone, I’ll say, “Let me find out for myself how I feel about this person before you give me a spoiler alert.”

We fight it the same way we fight sexism everywhere else: trusting our fellow females and distrusting the patriarchy. I have had brewers contact me and say, “I experienced this sexist comment and I didn’t know how to stand up for that woman. What can I do?”

Those brewers, who know this is wrong but don’t know what the steps are, are the best — the fact that they recognize this is fucked up, that they are able to identify that something’s wrong. I’ll say, “Just say something, that’s it. Squash it, right there.”

But understand that these are isolated events that I’ve accrued in the past seven years — it’s not prevalent; it’s not rampant. And those brewers who do make those comments, who are extremely sexist, they don’t stay in favor very long. I feel like they get outed pretty quick, and people don’t want to work with them. I don’t. ■

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