**Distinction work and its consequences for women working as room attendants within
five star hotels on the Gold Coast, Australia**

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Abstract

This article highlights women room attendants' experiences of the consequences of distinction work in five five-star hotels located in the Gold Coast region of South East Queensland, Australia. Those consequences are demonstrations of deference, reification of lower social class standing and social ostracism. 'Distinction work' requires attendants to recognize the guest's superior class position as a key part of service interactions. An ontologically intertwined research stance was used with socialist feminism and critical theory epistemologies and a qualitative constructionist grounded theory methodology. Interviews were conducted with 46 room attendants working at five five-star hotels. This research contributes to hospitality literature by focusing on the influence of broader socio-economic hierarchies functioning within hotels, an arena not usually encompassed within hospitality studies. We argue that 'distinction work' involves a process wherein the causal aspects of demonstration of deference to guests during interactions, and the conditional aspects of the lower social standing of room attendants within the broader socio-economic arena, result in embedded ostracism. This article presents a new perspective on the low social value currently placed on room attendant employment.

distinction work

ostracism

room attendants

*Some people treat you like dirt you know, but I know which rooms and I do them when
they are out.*

(Adriane, hotel room attendant, 2010)

Hotel room attendants, as service workers in luxury hotels, are directly involved in the (re)production and reification of the status of higher class people; specifically, the hotel guests (Sherman 2011: 203). As social constructions, five-star hotels are imbued with perceptions of high status and class, which continuously serve to reify social status hierarchies. In this context, the (re)production and reification of status occurs as a result of the performance of ‘distinction work’ by room attendants. Distinction work, as described by Hanser (2007: 145), is service work, which requires the recognition of the guest’s or customer’s socio-economic class position during interactions. The term socio-economic class is used in this article to ‘indicate... one’s degree of political, social, and economic influence and the extent to which one has access to essential resources (e.g., food, medical care, shelter, and education) and material resources (e.g., wealth, money, and property)’ (Lott and Bullock 2010: 422). Expanding the concept of ‘distinction work’, we particularly highlight guests’ ostracism of room attendants and how that affects the attendants’ lived experiences of distinction work. Room attendant ostracism is derived from the causal aspects of room attendants’ demonstration of deference to guests during interactions, and the conditional aspects of the lower social standing of room attendants within the broader socio-economic or class arena of the five-star hotel setting, and society more broadly.

The study that informs this paper was conducted at five five-star hotels in the Gold Coast region of South East Queensland, Australia. These hotels offer prestigious accommodation and luxurious consumption for guests, which necessitates the production of

distinction work during service interactions. Such interactions reflect the power of guests' superior earning capacity and higher social status (Hayes 2009: 114). Guests' visits are therefore symbolic of a range of social markers. In this context, the role of hotel room attendant, in caring for guests, is subservient and demeaning. Their work requires them to engage in and perform 'distinction work', which is defined as 'service work that centrally involves the production and consumption of social difference' (Hanser 2006: 463). More broadly, room attendants' low occupational status mirrors broader society where economic life is embedded in class structures and gendered identities. The participating women room attendants in this study self-report that guest and private social interactions under-recognize and often ostracise the attendants.

This study fills both methodological and theoretical gaps in the literature on hotel room attendants. Most existing research is heavily predicated on 'a priori' theory, with some exceptions such as Shamir's (1975) participant observations and interviews at six hotels in England, UK; Saunders and Pullen's (1987) interview questionnaires at 30 hotels in London, UK; Hunter Powell and Watson's (2006) interviews at 12 hotels in Cardiff, UK; Sollund's (2006) interviews at two hotels in Norway; Onsøyen, Myukletun and Steiro's (2009) 13 focus groups at four hotels in Norway; Boon's (2007) interviews at seven hotels in New Zealand and Liladrie's (2010) interviews at one hotel in Toronto, Canada. This previous research reveals that room attendants work hard, are relatively low paid, and are generally excluded from decision making within the hotel. In this study, we chose to use socialist feminist and critical theory perspectives with grounded theory methodology to extend the knowledge of women room attendants' occupation as well as to provide holistic insights into women room attendants' employment experiences. Our approach operationalizes Harris, Wilson and

Ateljevic's (2007) and McIntosh and Harris's (2012) calls for a 'critical turn' in hospitality research to critique the dominant epistemology and methodology of hospitality studies.

Customary terms for people who clean hotel rooms include housemaid and chambermaid. The use of 'maid' illustrates the gendered nature of room attendant work, and highlights the more complex historical social mechanisms governing the employment of women domestic service (Onsøyen et al. 2009: 84; Sarti 2006: 188). As Bosmajian (1972: 305) points out, the transference of sexist role titles from the domestic to the public sphere often accompanies the devaluation of women's work, and in this case demonstrates how language can be a form of bias, reinforcing a gendered occupational and social hierarchy (Eichler and Burke 2006: 65). This research identifies the inequalities room attendants face as a collective, working-class group of employees, highlighting the disadvantages of employment as a room attendant. Pertinent here is Sennett and Cobb's (1972) concept of the hidden injuries of class. This concept refers to the effects on individuals of snubs or disparagement from others seeking to validate themselves as superior. These authors find that class membership is distinguished based on badges of identity, which includes occupation.

This research makes three major contributions to the hospitality literature. First, it used an intertwined socialist feminist critical theory epistemological stance not offered in previous studies. Second, the research contributes new knowledge by analysing how room attendants perceive their ostracism within the broader organizational and social milieu. Thirdly, we have filled a gap in the literature by adopting a grounded theory methodology, thus contributing to theory building from empirical world experiences rather than preconceived theoretical frameworks.

The following sections of this article present an overview of literature related to ostracism and this study's place within it. We view 'ostracism' as being excluded and ignored by guests who often refuse to interact with room attendants. We then describe the epistemological foundations of this research in socialist feminist critical theory, and the constructionist grounded theory methodology used to collect and interpret the empirical material. We then present the outcomes of the research, namely the women room attendants' perceptions of their performance of distinction work; in particular through their demonstration of deference and the reification of their general low social standing during interactions with guests. Emerging from this study was a social drama of human interactions from hotel room attendants' perspectives, as they experienced ostracism during their performances of distinction work, both during guest interactions and in their private lives.

Ostracism

Ostracism is defined as being ignored, rejected and socially excluded; it often occurs without excessive explanation or explicit negative attention (Williams 2007: 429). Perpetrators may not even see their behaviour as immoral, believing they are merely exercising rightful power over others (Brock et al. 2013: 157). Linguistically, the word originates from ancient Greek, where it denoted banishment by vote from one's city or town. Research on ostracism yields several important findings. Scholars in the field have pointed to the dehumanizing consequences of ostracism (Brock et al. 2013: 164). Ostracism minimizes our sense of belonging and connection with others, causing pain and distress and threatening the fundamental human needs of belonging, self-esteem and meaningful existence (van Beest and Williams 2006: 918). Negative reactions, including a loss of self-esteem and increased angst for victims of ostracism, have been identified in victims (Nezlek et al. 2012: 91). The latter

study found the ostracised are less pro-social and have lower levels of belonging and meaningful existence than those who are not ostracised, and that ostracism can increase sadness, anger and stress. Nezlek et al. (2012: 99) argue that ostracism is relatively common, and that even minimal experiences can decrease feelings of belonging and self-esteem.

Key topics for scholars have been the processes by which ostracism occurs, and the means by which it can be theorized. An important contribution here is Williams's (2007: 429) need-threat model, which identifies three theories of ostracism. Firstly, a temporal examination of ostracism, including the sequence of painful reflexive responses in the victim including threats to the need for belonging, self-esteem and meaningful existence. Secondly, the sociometer theory based on social monitoring systems, which examines how social exclusion thwarts the need to belong and how the individual learns to notice social cues in order to minimize future ostracism. Thirdly, the theory of cognitive deconstruction and self-regulation impairment, which holds that social exclusion is much like a knock to the head, causing a temporary state of cognitive deconstruction. Importantly, Williams (2007: 445) examines how victims respond to ostracism, such as behaving in ways so that they increase their acceptance, display antisocial or aggressive actions, assume a stunned state or attempt to escape the situation.

Ostracism is a potential problem for low-paid service workers, who have little opportunity to gain equality with or be included by their customers. For example, Hochschild (1983) identified the social disparity felt by service workers during interactions with customers and showed the detrimental consequences for the workers' psychological well-being. As others have argued, this co-option of workers' subjectivities for commercial interests is a form of exploitation in the workplace (Wright 2005:310). Ostracism is not

uncontested, of course. Sherman (2005: 132) highlights how some hotel staff used behind-the-scenes denigration of guests to establish superiority and cope with the stress of a hotel requirement that they assume subservient roles. In Sherman's ethnographic study, the hotel staff invoked their own competence, intelligence and morality to present themselves as superior to others. In sum, therefore, ostracism in the hospitality workforce is a manifestation of class and social standing by which higher-ranked individuals maintain a superior position over those of lower rank.

The outcomes of our grounded theory study revealed that experiences of ostracism by room attendants were very widespread and evoked strong reactions from participants, so we use the above literature to frame and examine our empirical material. As a consequence, we theorize that the role of room attendant exposes them to guest-initiated ostracism due to the differential power held by hotel guests. Such theorizing sets us apart from other extant literature by identifying this component of guest-initiated ostracism. Further, we have not identified any other research on distinction work or ostracism, which uses a grounded theory approach to build theory from empirical world experiences. As a result of our research, we have filled this gap, giving a voice to room attendants. This research thus differs from other research on women room attendants as we champion the perspectives of room attendants and ground our theorizing in the empirical material.

Methodology

The overall research was framed to investigate room attendants' service provider role. The axiological aim of the research was to raise awareness of the value of hotel room attendants and to advance transformational change (Jennings 2001: 60; Reinharz 1992: 251)

in room attendants' employment circumstances. The methodological approach adopted enabled understanding, grounded in the empirical material, of the social status of women room attendants through embodiment of their particular voices. Understanding room attendants' experience of their work is critical for the holistic understanding of hotel operations since taking account neglected viewpoints develops better insights into particular social and work settings. An ontologically intertwined research stance of socialist feminism and critical theory epistemology was chosen to explore how social hierarchy oppresses women room attendants. In this view of the world, hegemonic hierarchical social structures, such as those in hotels and in broader social arenas, are infused with power. This results in marginalization of lower level employees, such as room attendants, requiring critical perspectives to understand their experiences.

To provide ontological support for the researchers' epistemological stance, a qualitative inductive constructionist grounded theory methodology was developed (Charmaz 2006: xii). Grounded theory was chosen based on the researchers' belief in the importance of co-constructed understanding between participant and researcher and the need to recognize the influence of the researcher's interpretations (Charmaz 2006: 3). Constructionist grounded theory follows the central tenets of Glaser and Strauss (1967), wherein the conceptual framework is generated from empirical materials, rather than from preconceived logically deducted frameworks, as the latter may limit the information generated from participants. While this article foregrounds extant literature, this literature was engaged with - for contextual purposes - only minimally prior to the study. The researchers re-engaged with the literature during the interpretative processes associated with grounded theory. Grounded theory offers a systematic approach for handling large amounts of qualitative material (Glaser 1998: 15). Interpretation of empirical material using grounded theory methods is systematic,

simultaneous, and continuous through a process of coding and constant comparison of emerging concepts (Glaser 1998: 37). Theoretical sampling confirmed conceptualizations and, when new information was no longer provided by interviewees, saturation of concepts was achieved and therefore collection of related empirical material ceased.

The five participating five-star hotels on the Gold Coast, Australia are all part of multinational chains, charge similar room rates, and service mainly the leisure travel market. Initial access to the hotels was gained by progressing through approval processes involving several hierarchical levels of gatekeepers (general managers, human resource managers and executive housekeepers). Room attendants were given a verbal invitation to participate during housekeeping department meetings. They were provided with background information on the study and completed an informed consent form, which assured them of anonymity. Pseudonyms are used in published material in order to comply with ethical requirements.

Empirical materials for the study were gathered through one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the participating women room attendants, to allow them to voice their concerns from their perspectives. The grounded theory process of ‘purposive’ (or highly selective) theoretical sampling was used so that attendants could provide rich, expert information about their role. Interviews were conducted with 46 participants in staff cafeterias or an unoccupied executive housekeeper’s office. Interviews ranged from 15 to 75 minutes in length, depending on room attendant availability, with an average of 30 minutes. Room attendants were invited to comment on aspects of their employment experience using the following types of broad and open-ended questions:

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The interviews were conducted in clusters, interspersed with interpretive constructions of empirical material. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and interpreted with open coding, followed by selective coding. Table 2 provides a snapshot view of such manual coding practices associated with code development of the substantive codes *Deference* and *Differentiation*.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Following the establishment of substantive codes, Glaser's (1978) concept of *theoretical sensitivity* was applied to derive the theoretical codes. Theoretical codes express the interrelationships between the substantive codes as a consequence of selective coding. The outcome of interpretations was a conceptualization of the social influences room attendants experience as a basic social process of ostracism. This process is where room attendant ostracism is derived from the causal aspects of their demonstration of deference to guests. During these interactions the conditional aspects of the lower social standing of room attendants within the broader socio-economic or class arena is reflected within the five-star hotel setting.

We now present the outcome of our grounded theory interpretations of the room attendants' experiences and perceptions of their occupation during interactions with guests and others in the broader social community. Our interpretations coalesced into three elements of distinction work elaborated within the aspects of: demonstration of deference by room attendants, their broader social class standing and their experiences of social ostracism.

Demonstration of deference

Hotels have an unwritten code of behaviour that room attendants follow in approaching guests in a suitably friendly, yet formal and submissive manner. All establishments where participants worked had a culture that required staff to initiate greetings and display submissiveness when encountering guests. Generally, room attendants commented that guests recognized them and were polite; however, experiences of bad guest behaviour were relatively common. Glenda, in her 50s with three years' experience, explained establishment protocol for guest interaction and common reactions from guests:

We have to say hello to the guests first, but some guests are particularly rude, and the women are the worst, they're actually worse than men, because you don't expect it.

Many room attendants experienced rebuffs from guests, and became frustrated because they had little or no opportunity to respond. Elaine, in her 20s with five years' experience, offered such a scenario and stated how this made her feel:

I feel really low sometimes, like you're the bottom of the pile, they make you feel like dirt, that's got to be the worst part. I think about 20 per cent [of guests] are lovely; the rest are rude. It makes me more aware of how I behave.

The conduct of some guests caused room attendants to reflect on their own self-awareness and actions. Ivy, in her 40s with four years' experience, elaborated how she feels when responding to rude guests:

You have to be accommodating, sometimes you feel like telling them off but you know you can't, you just have to be nice to them.

Negative guest encounters included perfunctory greetings from guests to meet courtesy standards while using body language that implied these guests wished to minimize interaction. Maureen, in her 20s with one year's experience, explained:

The majority of the guests ignore you or they might say hello and that's all, they are looking at their watch and are a bit cranky so I guess they are busy.

Maureen's attempt at social interaction was constrained by customers' unreceptive behaviours. While room attendants are unable to engage in prolonged interactions with guests due to intense workloads (Kensbock, Jennings, Bailey and Patiar 2013: 361), they reported that many guests appeared to prefer completely avoid contact with room attendants. In addition, the hotels' interaction protocols reinforced the denial of identity due to the nature of expectations regarding desirable room attendant behaviour. Clare, in her 30s with four years' experience, explained that she felt this denied her normal persona:

You've just gotta know how to talk to them, like I've learnt customer service so I know what to do. I try to be 'sir' and the rest of it, and try to stop being Australian and go 'g'day mate', 'no worries'. We had to do luxury training, and learn exactly what luxury was; and so my biggest thing is to stop being so Australian.

Hotels train room attendants in an effort to inculcate rules so that they demonstrate deference during guest interactions. The experiences of Glenda, Elaine and Maureen illustrate guests' general incivility and discourtesy with respect to room attendants. This low intensity manifestation of ostracism (Tepper and Henle 2011: 488) meant that the guest sets the tone of interactions, to which room attendants could only respond politely (Sherman 2006: 192). These interactions reflect unseen class differentiation, which designates room attendants as low class based on 'badges of ability' predicated on their occupation (Sennett & Cobb, 1972:148). Whilst unseen, this class designation is hurtful and reduces room attendants' dignity. While there is little literature on how social class affects interpersonal interactions, scholars argue that people from lower social classes are more accurate judges of emotions in an interaction than higher class people, as the former are more focused on context rather than being self-focused (Kraus, Côté and Keltner 2010: 1716). The experiences of Elaine and

Clare illustrate this phenomenon, with their references to the ‘luxury’ environment that governed interactions and their attempts to interpret the behaviour of guests.

Room attendants negotiate a number of subtleties in interacting with guests. Hotels require room attendants to initiate a warm greeting as part of distinction work in order to provide guests with hospitality in the form of welcome and openness (Aristarkhova 2012: 164). However, the hotel culture also explicitly demands deference from room attendants in contexts that set the scene for unequal social exchanges (Bolton 2010: 215) in that room attendants are always required to defer to guests. Founded on the hotels’ requirement of humility, the stage is set for the guest to display power. As Glenda, Clare and Elaine indicated, the requirement to perform a humble greeting often resulted in a demeaning interaction. Goffman (1967: 32) describes the ‘deference imperative’, involving ‘status rituals’ that recognize unequal social positions and thus create the requirement for deference by one side. Hence, the participating room attendants subjugated themselves, acknowledging guests as having higher status (see Goffman 1959: 22). Status is defined as one’s social position, with high status socially recognized as having prestige (Dreze and Nunes 2009: 891).

Room attendants used various strategies to demonstrate deference, including emotional labour, in accordance with their understanding of their roles and the luxury hotel context. In this context, ‘emotional labour’ is defined as the requirement for demonstration of unfelt emotion by room attendants. This requirement has been noted particularly in service industries (Anderson, Provis and Chappel 2002: 1) and is illustrated by Ivy’s references to being ‘accommodating’ and ‘nice’. While emotional labour can be more or less formal, large organizations with strong brand management train staff in standardized display and

management of emotions (Dyer, McDowell and Batnitzky 2010: 638). Emotional labour has been shown to result in detachment and burnout, which has negative effects on psychological well-being (Tracy and Trethewey 2005: 175) and can lead to deterioration in the quality of service, job turnover, absenteeism and low morale (Anderson et al. 2002: 5). It can result in an empty performance called ‘surface acting’ or alienation from true self (Hochschild 2001: 142). For the most part, room attendants felt they had to be subservient or deferent to avoid guest complaints and supervisor reprimands. Emotional labour has a strongly gendered dimension as traditional gender roles frame women as self-sacrificing (Kmec and Gorman 2010: 9). Within the hotel hierarchy, gender functioned as a pervasive status cue in the role relationships room attendants assumed in interactions with guests.

Demonstration of deference is made possible by the commodification of labour, including the commodification of emotions via emotional labour. This increases capital returns for the hotel by creating surplus value via employees’ emotional as well as physical labour (see Bolton 2010:205). Inequality between room attendants and guests requires the former to allow rude behaviour from the latter, with room attendants’ sacrificing their dignity (see Sayer 2007: 566) in the process. This perpetuates differences in social status structure and contributes to systematic exclusion from power. Within traditional boundaries the ‘guest’ has obligations to the host also; however, as the experiences of Clare, Glenda and Elaine demonstrate, room attendants’ greetings, as an expression of hospitality, were not always appreciated by guests. Following Sherman’s (2005: 147) argument that social interactions are the performance of social class entitlements, we argue that room attendants permit class privilege through distinction work and in particular via the demonstration of deference, which simultaneously reinforces guests’ higher class position and room attendants’ lower social standing.

Social standing

By purchasing superior five-star accommodation, guests obtain social differentiation from their hospitality experience. Opulent five-star surroundings provide settings which entitle guests to certain social goods and services as markers of class privilege. Room attendants perceived that the kinds of cursory and rude behaviour from guests, described above, meant that they were not worthy of attention due to the low social standing of their occupation and hence their lower class position. Daja, in her 40s with four years' experience, echoed a commonly expressed perception:

You are looked down upon by the guests.

Rose, in her 60s with 11 years' experience, expressed herself similarly:

There is status with a job; you don't have dignity of labour. Guests look down at people who work in a lower job.

Valerie, in her 50s with 25 years' experience, expressed it in explicit class terms:

In what is termed a 'posh' hotel the majority of the time you are the worker and you are a lower class.

Further demonstration of the perceived low social evaluation of room attendants by some guests is related by Clare, in her 30s with four years' experience:

They think because they are paying a certain price that they can treat you however they like, they think we are here to pick up after them, and we're not.

In servicing hotel rooms, room attendants make direct contact with guests in a context where room attendants are constantly reminded of their lower position within the social arena. As noted by Hanser (2007: 416), consumption and lifestyle are important markers of class affiliation, and hence social interactions are sites where class operates in daily life. Room

attendants' social status is derived from their occupational role (Boon 2007: 166), which renders them low class, as exemplified in the reflections, above, of Daja, Rose and Valerie. Hence embedded in service interactions within five-star hotels are indications of class hierarchies and differentiated privileges. The effects of this go beyond the workplace; Hanser (2007: 423), for example, identifies how interactive service work produces class differences and provides a powerful rationalization of broader social inequalities. This is important in that central to who we are in western worlds, is our source of living or employment, with our livelihoods offering one of our major sources of engagement and interaction with other people (Radel 2012: 63). As demonstrated by the empirical material, social differentiation is situated within social interactions that normalize inequalities in the context of the performance of distinction work.

To further elaborate on these findings, it is necessary to explore the theorization of class. Studied since the mid-19th century, class can be theorized in two ways. Firstly, there is the Marxist perspective, which identifies three classes: the bourgeoisie (upper class), the petite bourgeoisie (middle class) and the working class (proletariat) (Craib 2002: 343). This perspective analyses class in terms of relations between classes with respect to the production of goods, land and/or capital. Secondly, Weber offered a more fluid class model based on life chances of ownership of property or from incomes deriving from education credentials (Morrison 2006: 276). Class has been further elaborated by many other scholars. Bourdieu (1984), for example, argues that social class reflects varying levels of social, economic and cultural capital that are reproduced in lifestyle and consumption. Rose and Riley's (1997) class classification identifies 14 levels, each containing sub-categories, which are occupation and education based with cleaners, such as room attendants, near the bottom. Gender and ethnic differences contribute to the increasing complexity of class (Craib 2002: 345). Class

designation has very significant impacts on the social consciousness, behaviour and success of individuals and groups (Craib 2002: 348). Sennett and Cobb (1972: 118) posit that class designations are hurtful, unseen and often unchangeable due to the protocols of social interaction. They coined the term ‘injuries of class’ to describe this phenomenon, which has been further elaborated by others. Dicks (2008), for example, applied the concept to the service environment in a study of former coal miners who had taken up jobs as interpretive guides in a coal museum. In their new roles, these individuals faced a contradiction between the dignity and autonomy of their working-class lives on the one hand, and continual subjugation and defeat or repression in their role as guides (Dicks 2008: 436). The concept of the injuries of class usefully encapsulates the experiences of room attendants and the hurt they expressed, and the empirical material underscores Sennett and Cobb’s point that the injuries of class may not be completely hidden. Room attendants were required to be subservient, denying their own authenticity and injuring their dignity, but there was some desire to challenge the status quo despite their powerlessness. As Clare observed, guests’ behaviour reflected the distinctions of broader gendered social structures, which stigmatize occupations such as the predominantly female room attendants as ‘lower’ class. Thus, the broader hierarchy of social class is reflected within hotel organizational hierarchies, which place room attendants at the lowest level. This hierarchal social structural process has a profound effect on room attendants’ performance of their jobs and how they see themselves.

Room attendants’ low class designation is related to the requirements to undertake degrading or ‘dirty’ tasks. Dirty work is viewed as physically, socially or morally tainted (Mavin and Grandy 2013: 232). Many in-room tasks were described by the room attendants as ‘dirty’, and literature documents room attendant work as ‘dirty’ (Hunter Powell and Watson 2006: 298) and “often unpleasant ... work” (Faulkner and Patiar 1997: 102). From a

feminist perspective, women room attendants' gendered socio-subordination is a socially constructed differentiation of 'the other' (de Beauvoir 1949/1972: 48). That is, the inherently servile behaviour associated with room attendants' lower occupational and social position places them as 'other' or of less importance than the 'guest' who is dominant over them, thus further contributing to room attendants' subjugation (Sherringham and Daruwalla 2007). This gendered othering is reflected in the distinctions felt by room attendants vis-à-vis guests' placing them in a low social position, as observed by Daja, Rose and Valerie.

Social interaction is a key mechanism of class display (Bourdieu 1998). Extending Bourdieu's conception of social differentiation, we argue that room attendants' distinction work and their deference to guests' class position and social status - exemplified in the examples given by Daja, Rose and Valerie - involves the production and consumption of social difference. In these interactions room attendants and guests perform class, with the role of the room attendant legitimizing class structures of inequality, resulting in their ostracism.

Social ostracism

Related to the social hierarchy room attendants' experienced within their hotels, their occupation exposed them to broader social hierarchies outside the hotel workplace. For this reason, some room attendants did not disclose their occupation in social situations. As noted above, the perceptions of hotel guests' and broader society regarding room attendants are based on economic and cultural structures identified as 'class'. Working (or low) class occupations categorized into the lowest social order they may experience a 'stigma' outside the workplace due to the social inferiority of their occupation (Goffman 1959: 12). This

stigma may translate into ostracism, a common experience, which Ivy, in her 40s with four years' experience, recounted:

When my husband's boss found out I worked here he was looking for a discount and two days before he actually came here he asked what I did, and I said actually I was a room attendant, and he doesn't talk to me anymore, yet they had a brilliant two nights here at discount so I don't know, their loss.

Ivy's description of how information about her occupation was received by her husband's employer shows how social distinctions relating to her job placed Ivy at a lower socio-economic status and subsequently caused her to be ostracised. This was despite the fact that Ivy's husband's employer should have felt indebted to her, rather than snubbing her. Ivy's low social status therefore restricted her ability to mix socially. As noted previously, room attendants felt that as 'cleaners', with its connotations of 'dirty work' (Hunter Powell and Watson 2006: 298), their gendered occupation positioned them in a lower social class. Subsequently, in social settings, room attendants experienced a dilemma: disclosure of their occupation or not. Fear of social stigmatization and ostracism resulted in some room attendants concealing the nature of their jobs from others and, internally, reframing their socio-economic status by emphasising positive outcomes of their employment, including financial independence. Elisabeth, in her 30s with five years' experience, often failed to disclose her occupation:

Some days I don't like it. I think most of us are treated poorly, like if you are out and people ask what you do I don't say oh I'm a cleaner. If you do they say 'Are you?' and that's usually it, they go and talk to someone else! So you try to avoid telling people what you do for a job, and it makes you angry. Like I say to my husband I own my own home and pay my bills and I've brought up three great kids, but they make you feel cheap and useless.

Room attendants coped with social positioning by reminding themselves of their own worth.

Rebecca, in her 50s with three years' working as a room attendant, shared her experiences:

Some people are snobs, if they see me in my uniform you can see the look on their face like 'oh you're down there', but I try to not let that worry me, I own my own home and we are ok.

Rebecca, offended by the social categorization she experienced based on the social class cue her uniform provided, engaged in self-allocation or reframing her socio-economic status by emphasising her financial independence, as did Elisabeth. It is noteworthy that attendants' uniforms provided a strong marker of class. All hotels included in this study required room attendants to wear distinguishing clothing, which offered symbolic representation to guests and the broader community of room attendants' low position. Further, the uniforms were often made of synthetic materials inappropriate to the Gold Coast's subtropical climate, and were almost invariably skirts, which room attendants found restrictive and sexualizing (Kensbock et al. 2013). The uniforms are part of the social subordination of room attendants, and the requirement that they be subservient to guests (see Chowdhury 2010: 305). In this they form, for room attendants, part of the patriarchal structure, a dominant gender ideology that shapes livelihoods, identities and relationships (Radel 2012: 63). Hence the room attendants' uniform contributed to their ostracism within and outside the hotel.

For some, experiences of ostracism result in coping responses that may be either aggressive or pro-social. While unlikely to engage in an aggressive response, room attendants did engage in pro-social responses as ostracism threatens the fundamental needs to exercise control over one's social environment and to be recognized in a meaningful way (Williams 2007: 445). This was demonstrated by Rebecca's and Elisabeth's reaffirmation of their property ownership status and also by Adriane's avoidance tactics in the opening quote.

Threats to belonging and self-esteem may motivate pro-social or inclusion actions to please others (Williams 2007: 443). This was demonstrated by Ivy's efforts securing a discount for her husband's boss. The participating room attendants in this Gold Coast located Australian study sought to see themselves as egalitarian and were hurt by guests' and others' ostracism.

Discussion

The experiences of deference, social positioning and ostracism for the participating room attendants can be understood in terms of the concept of distinction work. Five-star hotels create sites of social differentiation and reproduce social class by providing luxury amenities and positioning the guest as entitled to consume the labour of others (Liladrie 2010: 59). Hence, five-star hotel consumption is a symbolic marker expressing the superior lifestyle of guests, whose self-concept is reinforced by attention from and recognition by room attendants (Sherman 2005: 132). The hierarchy of hotels in relation to guest interactions reflects 'the increased importance of consumption and consumerism as organizing institutions of contemporary life' (Wright 2005: 296). These observations can be framed by the theory of conspicuous consumption, which holds that the motivation to consume goods and services is the basis of distinctions amongst people (Veblen 1899/1994: 29; Sherman 2006: 3). Consumption has long been identified as a domain for performance of class, and recent studies of elites and privileged middle classes suggest that consumption and lifestyle have become important markers of class affiliation and identity (Hanser 2007: 416). This applies to five-star hotels, as patronage leads to higher status for guests based on establishing differences through 'symbolic consumption' (Bourdieu 1984: 291). Consumption of five-star hotel services provided by employees who do distinction work offers to the world a symbolic representation of guests and reinforces their self-perception as high class. In the simultaneous

production and consumption of the hospitality industry's products and services, the relationship between guest and room attendant is shaped by the room attendants' performance of distinction work.

Service interactions predicated on distinction work reify class, particularly, in this case, the guests' social class as higher than the room attendants'. Our findings differ from those of Sherman (2005: 134) who showed that New York hotel workers were arbiters of entitlement to the consumption of luxury service and saw themselves as superior to guests in their social worlds. From the participating women room attendants' perspectives, their self-worth derives from the low regard given their occupation by the wider community. Thus attendants were subjugated by ostracism in their personal as well as working lives, which reinforced inequalities of power between social classes. Attendants' demonstration of deference established the guest as belonging to a higher class, thus permitting them to display ostracism towards room attendants. As noted by Sennett & Cobb (1972: 159) workers designated as belonging to a lower class are often unsure they have any right of redress. As a consequence, the injuries of their class remain un-addressed and hidden.

Conclusion

In this article we have shed light on the nature of the interaction between distinction work and social class with respect to hotel room attendants. This article fulfils the authors' axiological aim to raise awareness of how room attendants' occupations situate them in low social class positions, such that they are often ostracised during their interactions with guests and how this, in turn, impacts on their identity construction. In choosing to champion room attendants' perspectives, we argue for a greater respect for room attendants. Their contribution to the

hotel operationally, through demonstration of deference, contributes to the enhanced experience of guests as consumers. During this distinction work, room attendants perform deference predicated on social class meanings that reflect perceptions of class inequalities in the broader social milieu. The subservient nature of room attendants' work serves to reinforce social hierarchies, leaving them without any means to redress to guest behaviours. Room attendants' interactions both within and without their work settings continue to reflect outdated hegemonic practices of patriarchy, which genders them, and renders their presence and value unacknowledged.

Theoretically, this article contributes to hospitality research by representing the occupational stigmatization experienced by hotel room attendants. This stigmatization was affected by hotel operational hierarchies and related praxes and reinforced by their uniforms. Given the aim of this research was for transformational change, the authors call for greater awareness of how room attendants' occupation places them low on social hierarchies and how this impacts upon their sense of self. From an applied or practice-based perspective, transformation can be best achieved by acknowledgment and inclusivity across hotel hierarchy levels and departments to foster an appreciation of room attendants' performances within the hotels, so room attendants do not feel so socially ostracised. The room attendants' uniform should be redesigned so they are not sexualized and immediately recognized by guests as being from a low-status occupation. This may also reduce the social stigma room attendants experience within the hotel and in broader society. Finally, it would be useful to advise guests - through an in-room customer code-of-conduct card - that the hotel values these employees and expects guests to do the same.

This research contributes in three ways to extant hospitality knowledge. First, the research used an intertwined socialist feminist critical theory epistemological stance not offered in previous studies. By working in a paradigm that differs from other studies, we provide additional insights grounded in room attendants' perspectives. These insights add to the literature by acknowledging room attendants' experiences of social isolation and ostracism that result from interactions with guests and the broader social milieu. The second contribution is the focus on a largely overlooked subject, the ostracism and concerns of hotel room attendants. Third, we have filled a gap in knowledge by adopting a grounded theory methodology, thus contributing to theory building from empirical world experiences rather than preconceived theoretical frameworks.

To conclude, distinction work in hotels involves a process wherein the causal aspects of the room attendants' demonstration of deference to guests during interactions, and the conditional aspects of the lower social standing of room attendants, results in their ostracism. Importantly, the perspectives of room attendants revealed herein provide insights for hotel operational praxis; in particular, the acknowledgment and appreciation of room attendants as fellow human beings worthy of respect. Just as the paper commenced with the voice of a room attendant, so too does it end:

I think they should really get down here and talk to us, see what we are doing, see what they can do to make it better for us, appreciation is another thing too.

(Ying, hotel room attendant, 2010)

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Table 1: Interview Guide

How would you describe your employment experience?

What is the most challenging part of your work?

How do you feel about your work?

What is the most significant part of your work?

Tell me about your interaction with hotel guests.

Do you feel recognized and valued for your work?

Table 2: Open and Selective Code Development

Open Codes	Selective Code	Substantive
Discriminating	Acknowledging	<i>Deference</i>
Acknowledging		
Getting Respect		
Lacking Respect		

Being Ignored

Entering Room

Initial interaction

Judging Guests

Withholding

Complaining

Monitoring Guests

Communication

Social Stigma

Differentiation

Unfair

No Voice

Cultural Barriers

Egalitarian Social Structure

Discrimination Hidden

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