

Understanding gender and sexual politics in hospitality as Hospo-gender

1. Introduction

This paper introduces the concept of Hospo-gender, the idea of hospitality as gender and sexual politics, which encapsulates the contributions to this special issue. Derrida conceptualised hospitality as transformational; the stranger becomes familiar with the symbolic step over the threshold (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000). Hospitality brings with it the status and trappings of its actors, and visible expressions of hospitality convey who is welcome and who is excluded. This special issue asked for submissions that would reveal the hidden corners of hospitality in our society, in our homes, at work, in transitional spaces, and in places that might be viewed by others as hostile, rather than hospitable. The final papers selected collectively express the complexity of hospitality interactions, the ways that contextual gendered social relations shape hospitality expressions and encounters, and how, in turn, hospitality changes gendered relationships. This conceptual paper firstly presents the rationale for this special issue, then positions gender research in the context of *Hospitality & Society* and beyond, before presenting the papers in this special issue. The paper concludes by explaining the concept of Hospo-gender and future research aspirations.

2. The rationale for the special issue

The genesis of the special issue on exploring gender and sexual politics in hospitality arose from Mooney's (2020) protest that the hospitality/tourism academy, and its knowledge production systems are gendered, with gaps in how gender is researched and who are the subjects. Therefore, the aim of this special issue was to learn more on how gender and gendered relations are conceptualised or enacted, wherever hospitality is offered or consumed. Two decades ago, Martin (2003, p. 352) advised that 'gendered practices are learned and enacted in childhood and in every major site of social behavior over the life course, including in schools, intimate relationships, families, workplaces, houses of worship, and social movements'. However, Martin also reminded us that natural and 'easy' as it is to practise gender as an individual, it is much harder to record all its minute details or capture its essence. It is challenging to write critically about gender; and for academics based in business schools, it can be challenging to write about hospitality from a non-managerial perspective. Therefore, combining both perspectives, critical hospitality and critical gender requires mastering two fields of scholarly endeavour. For this special issue, the 14 abstracts that were submitted ranged from philosophical and anthropological essays to statistical analyses of women's positions in the workplace across different locations. However, the difficulties of expressing the gender and sexual politics of hospitality are reflected in the reality that only four papers managed to navigate their way home. The final papers featured in this unique special issue managed to walk the tightrope between the two worldviews. However, they did not merely cross the divide, they danced across it, at some stages risking a leap across.

3. Gender research in the context of Hospitality & Society

Before the advent of *Hospitality & Society* in 2011, a powerful alternative critical voice in hospitality studies was missing. In the foundational first issue, alternative perspectives such as *Embodied hospitality* and *Hospitality as work* (262), were presented and represented in the articles. *Embodied hospitality* was visible in Harris et al.'s (2011) exploration of the sexualised and migrant representations of housekeepers in familiar the well know *Hotel Babylon* TV series of the time. *Hospitality at work* was revealed in Zampoukos and Ioannides (2011) examination of the ways that gender, immigration status, race, class and age intersected to funnel immigrant and women into low quality 'dead end' jobs in tourism and

hospitality. The feminised nature of hospitality work was further discussed by Harris and McIntosh (2012) in their special issue on (in)hospitable work. Traditionally, hospitality had provided a fertile ground for sociological or anthropological research, as many papers published in non-hospitality journals indicate. While hospitality papers from a managerial perspective have been abundant, quantitative studies on increasing the motivations or increasing the performance of hospitality workers did not reflect the reality of a contingent, precarious and insecure workforce, of whom a high proportion are women, migrants, minorities and youth (Baum 2013; Rydzik and Kissoon 2022; Zampoukos and Ioannides 2011). Although gender studies are the most represented of all diversity studies in hospitality management journals (Manoharan and Singal 2017) and likewise, gender has featured as a major theme in the *Annals of Tourism Research's* analysis of its employment studies over its life course (Ladkin et al. 2023), the launch of *Hospitality & Society* gave an exciting new landing spot for original research on gender in hospitality. In a review of the first 10 years since the journal's inception, Lynch et al. (2021a) highlighted the contribution of the many groundbreaking critical papers on gender. I will not repeat their analysis but proffer two examples of papers that resonated with the aim of this special issue. Rydzik et al.'s (2012) study on the experiences of Central and Eastern European women working in the United Kingdom illustrated the complexities of individuals' decisions to stay in a job or move on, and how hospitality employment both encourages and restricts mobilities. In seeking to understand hospitality gender norms, Wijesinghe (2017) delved into antiquity to discern the origin of sexual stereotypes that began 'the tradition of the sexualized, objectified and later commodified roles imposed on women through their hospitality provision' (181). The papers in this special issue continue the trend of innovative and original research, using contemporary theorising and methodological approaches. The next section will discuss how evolving understandings of gender and sexual politics are shaping society in the context of the wider literature.

4. Gender in society

The way that masculinity should be performed and what forms of sexuality are permitted shapes societal norms of hospitality and hospitality work. Critical organisational studies have delivered profound new understanding of how gender and sexual ideologies work in organisations, which mirror changes in societal attitudes. Gender and power are inescapably intertwined and reinforced by an individual's positioning in social hierarchies, with women expected to assume a subordinate position (Acker 2006; Gherardi 2014). Hospitality and tourism researchers have benefited greatly from fresh insights into gender. For example, Porter et al. (2021) explore the question of what it means to be a man in field research and performing different masculinities. Gender scholars have long moved away from the premise that women form one homogenous group, and men also do not fit into one convenient category. Berdahl et al. (2018: 427) argue that in the hierarchy of masculinity, which subordinates women, hegemonic masculinity is dominant and used to reinforce race, class, age 'hierarchies and heteronormativity'. In two of the papers in the special issues, different forms of male upmanship define specific hospitality workplaces. In gay bars, gay men harassed heterosexual employees, without concern for their sexual identity, and in professional kitchens, chefs harassed and hazed women peers.

Disregard for the targets of sexual attention is an expression of male entitlement and privilege and Neely's (2022: 238) research into the masculine culture of the finance industry suggests that 'reports of sexual harassment and assault are symptoms of a context in which masculinity is defined as powerful through the control of women and racially and class-marginalised men'. Similar findings are recorded in the masculine 'bro' culture of the tech industry (Neely et al.

2023) and military organisations (Bonnes 2021), where the constant heteronormative banter, including sexist and racist jokes, loads an additional burden of emotional labour (Hart 2021) on to less favoured groups in the workplace.

Although sexualised banter is a feature of many hospitality workplaces, sexuality, especially expressions of non-heteronormative sexuality, remains relatively unexplored. Williams and Giuffre (2011) highlight that although professional organisations are sexual, because the trappings of heteronormativity are normalised, sex is not obvious. In contrast, they argue, organisations and spaces such as gay bars that render queer sexuality visible are not considered 'normal' and are portrayed as 'sexual and erotic' (Williams and Giuffre 2011: 559). Hierarchies of power are also reflected in the behaviours shown to LGBT people. One Spanish study on discrimination against trans-women and trans, non-binary people suggests that age, context, and location were important predictors of harassment. For example, trans women ran the highest risk of harassment in the workplace, family, and public spaces. However, the degree to which a LGBT person was 'out' also mattered. When this factor was controlled for, Mallory et al.'s (2022) study in the US showed cisgender bisexual and gay men often reported higher rates of unfair treatment compared to lesbian and bisexual women. The research outlined here is a small taster of the directions in which gender research is moving and the papers in this special issue. Collectively, the papers below illustrate existing strengths and new directions in critical hospitality research.

5. The papers in the special issue

The first paper by Hadjisolomou, Nickson, Baum, and Walters (2023) examines the pervasive sexual harassment of men working in the gay tourism industry in Spain, by men. The authors bring a lens of hegemonic masculinity and introduce the novel concept of 'submissive masculinity' to reveal the significance of context in how men deal with unwanted sexual attention from customers. The paper expresses the stigma of sexual assault and harassment for men, as it conflicts with the view of men as strong and invulnerable. In this way, the multiple forms of masculinity in a hospitality service setting are laid bare.

The second paper by Chen and McIntosh (2023) addresses the experience of women executive chefs working in the gendered professional kitchen environment. The participants' life histories illustrate how women succeeded in an environment that has historically been inhospitable to women chefs. Women engaged in both 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987) and 'undoing gender' (Butler 2004). They adapted how they behaved in the kitchen as a coping strategy, and to fulfil the gendered expectations of their role. The authors' study also makes an important contribution to the burgeoning research in critical hospitality studies and issues of gender in hospitality work. The life history method enabled the otherwise marginalised voices of women chefs working in the hospitality industry to be privileged by articulating important narratives about their lives, and the gendered experiences they have encountered. Significantly, women's strategies for success could give useful insights into other occupations.

Abdallah, Dashper and Fletcher (2023) are the authors of the third paper set in the hotel work context of Qatar, a location that drew considerable negative media attention for its attitudes to male migrant construction workers in the run up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Women migrants perform an increasingly important role; however, Qatar presents an environment with repressive and normalised gender norms for women. The originality of this paper lies in its insights of life below the surface for women working in Qatar, a strength of the ethnographic approach used in the study. Yet, gender privilege and penalty depends on context, and, in some ways, Qatar was a liminal space. The authors illustrate that rather than

pushing migrant hospitality workers to the margins of society, Qatar presented a hospitable destination for women migrant workers, from a background of different ethnicities, cultures, employment skills and experiences.

In the final paper, Moysidou and Stanley (2023) examine the influence of gender on social power relations in various homestay settings in Guatemala, and the theoretical positions that shed light on host-guest conflict. The authors make an original contribution to the critical hospitality literature by *queering* gender in this context, ‘understanding it as something one does/performs rather than is’. The authors combined qualitative interviews and ethnography to focus on women’s and LGBTIQ+ people’s experiences in homestays, as part of wider mobilities. Their original contribution is to illustrate how gender roles may be performed, negotiated, constructed, and, above all, contested (Shryock 2012).

6. The future of gender research in hospitality

Harking back to Lynch et al.’s (2011) original call to consider hospitality in new ways, Lynch et al.’s (2021) new hospitality research agenda identified a further relevant area where gendered dimensions could be studied, within *Hospitality as a movement*. ‘Hospitality as a movement’ arose from Sanjaume-Calvet’s (2015) exploration of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca – Mortgage Victims Platform (PAH), a social movement in Spain, through the concept of hospitality. They concluded that PAH promotes unlawful hospitality through civil disobedience, which created the “possibility of a socialized and politicized hospitality”; this concept, construed as ‘hospitality as a movement’ (230) can be used as a tool of social advocacy and action for other marginalised or disempowered groups such as workers, immigrants, gender or LGTB groups. Support for the concept of ‘hospitality as social action’ is echoed by Lucena et al. (2021) in their special issue on gender and sexuality in tourism and hospitality. The authors suggest that while the marketing of ‘gay tourism friendly destinations’ represents the dominant heteronormative narrative, harnessing the LGBTIQ+ agenda in hospitality and tourism holds the promise of being ‘simultaneously commercial and political...in highlighting the visibility of non-heteronormative identities ...they can be instrumental in social change’ (429).

7. Conclusion - Hospitality as *Hospo-gender*

In conclusion, this paper suggests one final addition to Lynch et al.’s (2021a) list of hospitality research themes, the concept of ‘Hospo-gender’, which expresses hospitality as gender and sexual politics. If hospitality is society (Lynch et al. 2021b), and society is the embodiment of sexual and gender political norms, then hospitality *is* sexual and gender politics. In all manifestations of hospitality, gender and sexuality are embedded, reproduced, and transmitted, reproducing hierarchies of power and privilege. Traditionally, the delivery of the materiality of hospitality in the home is mundane and undervalued (Veijola et al. 2014), women are ‘of the hearth’ whereas men are in the world (Bourdieu 2001). In male dominated workplaces, men control the world of work (Berdahl et al. 2018), and such control is demonstrated in many hospitality organizations, including the studies in this special issue. Yet, dominant men also control access to the resources in the home in different ways, such as access to food, or entitlement to personal time. For example, in the United States, in a contemporary dual-career married household with children, a husband does even less housework than his wife, and it decreases if her income exceeds his (Syrda 2023). In some societies such as in North India, women are socialised into eating small portions, and in times of food scarcity are denied access to food resources in favour of men and boys (Chandra et al. 2022). In the workplace, traditional perspectives of women’s roles have transferred to contemporary hospitality environments. In hyper masculine workplaces, women and men

displaying non dominant identities may be objectified and commodified for commercial purposes (Cabras et al. 2022) or be the target of negative behaviours designed to reinforce their subordinate place in the hierarchy.

Hospo-gender has six defining features:

1. Gender and sexual identities are an expression of power and marker of inclusion/marginalisation of women and minority men. Identifiers such as non-binary sexual identity, or minority race, class, ethnic origin, and/or religion may be associated with negative outcomes. The effects will vary according to the intersections of identity, but in the power hierarchy, one's standing is influenced by gender and sexual identity.
2. Spatial demarcations separate masculine and feminine expressions of identity and permitted spaces of hospitality, establishing one-upmanship in hierarchies of power. Women and minorities are segregated in 'Back of House' (BoH) areas or play subordinate service roles commensurate with their ethnicity and gender, while men perform managerial roles in Front of House (FoH) areas.
3. Where a lesser role has been elevated or transformed to a worthy role for men, the BoH may become a privileged space, where dominant identities entertain their guests, or the area may be moved physically from BoH to become a performance theatre, where technical mastery is on display.
4. The offering of hospitality and the transformation of stranger to friend is an expression of symbolic power controlled by men. It is an expression of masculinity designed to protect and preserve privilege and resources.
5. Women's role in the offering and consumption of hospitality is subordinate or objectified. Women's embodiment is as a token of masculine favour to other men. Historically, sites of hospitality have transmitted norms of gifting and commodification of subordinate individuals as sexual objects into contemporary hospitality spaces.
6. There has been an intellectual silence on how alternative forms of sexuality that diverge from the dominant heteronormative binary classifications which influence hospitality roles and outcomes.

So finally, what is an aspirational ambition for future research into hospitality as a site of gender and sexual politics? There is a need for more hospitality studies that show how Hospo-gender reproduces privileges for dominant groups with the caveat that hierarchies of power are fluid and contested in nature. Individuals on the margins can, and do, use their agency in innovative ways to resist and disrupt gendered and sexualised hierarchies. Researchers across all disciplines, but particularly in hospitality, can use hospitality contexts as a translation ground for transferring contemporary and novel insights on hospitable and hostile behaviour to different locations and settings. A worthy and achievable vision would be to use those insights to become a significant social movement that benefits groups marginalised by intersecting gender, sexual and other markers of difference from dominant norms. Over time, hospitality researchers may play a small but important part in creating a more equal and just society.

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