Sexual Harassment of Women in Hospitality Workplaces: Whose Responsibility is it Really?

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Sexualisation and harassment in hospitality workplaces: who is responsible?

Abstract

Purpose: This qualitative study examines employee responses to sexual behaviour in hospitality workplaces, to determine their roles and responsibilities in harassment prevention.

Design: Female workers in restaurants and bars were recruited using the snowball technique, and data collected through 18 interviews. An interpretivist approach was used to guide the data collection and analysis.

Findings: The study found that harassment coping strategies developed with age and experience rather than through training, and those who dressed and behaved provocatively attracted more unwanted sexual attention.

Practical implications: Recommendations focus on the role of managers in moderating employee behaviour and providing training in assertiveness.

Social implications: Industry norms and perceptions about managers' expectations are considered strong influences on employee behaviour, and therefore, in attracting harassment.

Originality: Although this study locates the responsibility for stopping harassment with management, it takes an unusual and potentially unpalatable approach by acknowledging the role of victims in stopping unwanted sexual advances, providing new approaches to reducing harassment.

Keywords: Hospitality, Power, Sexual Harassment, Sexualisation, Women.

Introduction

Sexual behaviour in workplaces is largely unwanted and therefore offensive, and as such, deemed harassing. Sexual harassment is a persistent workplace problem in the hospitality industry (e.g. Hoel and Einarsen, 2003), where female workforces are often sexualised (Wijesinghe, 2009) and power structures explicit (Kensbock et al., 2015). Some theoretical approaches to understanding harassment acknowledge that sexual behaviour is natural (Tangri et al., 1982), and difficult to prevent in a working environment (Gilbert et al., 1998), and there is an implicit assumption that management is solely responsible for eliminating harassing behaviours. This study challenges this assumption by examining employees' experiences of and responses to sexual behaviour in hospitality workplaces, to determine their roles and responsibilities.

The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2001) defines sexual harassment as sexual behaviour using 'physical, verbal or visual means, which is unwelcome or offensive and is either repeated or so significant that it has a detrimental effect on another person' (p. 8). As harassment is by definition unwelcome, and sexual behaviour at work may not always be unwelcome, what constitutes harassing behaviour may lie as much in the recipient's attitude as in the behaviour. Different perceptions about the nature of sexual harassment make it difficult to define, and therefore, to eliminate.

The literature on sexual harassment generally assumes that sexual behaviour at work is always undesirable (Aquino *et al.*, 2014), and often focuses on management's role in sexualising labour (e.g. Kensbock *et al.*, 2015). However, as a recent study demonstrates that labour sexualisation can occur naturally (Sadaraka *et al.*, 2015), employees may have a role in preventing and managing sexual behaviour at work; this role tends to be avoided in the literature.

This study explores the experiences of women serving men in restaurants and bars in Auckland, New Zealand, to develop an understanding of sexuality at work, and from this, propose strategies for the minimisation of harm. While the study acknowledges that managers are ultimately responsible for providing safe and comfortable workplaces, it also explores the role of those harassed, to determine their potential to encourage or deter sexual behaviours at work.

Literature review

Theoretical approaches to explaining sexual harassment

In California, USA, Gutek and Morasch (1982) interviewed 1232 male and female workers to determine the role of power in unwanted sexual behaviours. They concluded that harassment theory was over-reliant on the role of power, largely informed by the view that rape (and therefore harassment) is an expression of power. Accordingly, Gutek and Morasch (1982) proposed that the sex-spillover model developed by Nieva and Gutek (1981) is a more useful approach to understanding sexual harassment. Sex-role spillover is a 'carryover into the workplace of gender-based expectations about behavior' (Gutek and Morasch, 1982, p. 71) and explains that gender-based roles spill into the workplace, so women may be expected (for example) to be more nurturing, and better cleaners. Importantly, Gutek and Morasch (1982) extended this model by applying it to workplace settings to explain why some women behave sexually at work, even if not explicitly required to do so. They contend that work roles are sexualised the same way as domestic roles, but when one gender dominates, workers become

unaware of the influence of sex-role expectations, because they apply to most of the workforce, and are therefore normalised. Therefore, in workplaces dominated by women (such as in housekeeping or food services), workers may think that their sex-role expectations are part of their job. Hence, in hospitality, women report that management expects them to behave sexually (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995, Gilbert *et al.*, 1998).

A further model developed by Tangri *et al.* (1982), the natural model, proposes that sexual behaviour results from natural sexual attraction, and is aligned to sex-role spillover, in that it does not attribute harassment to power differentials between individuals. Gutek and Morasch (1982) note that this model acknowledges the occurrence of sexual behaviour without intent to harass.

While it is acknowledged that power differentials account for a substantial portion of harassing behaviours (Ilies *et al.*, 2003, Popovich and Warren, 2010, Sojo *et al.*, 2016), this study explores the notion proposed in the sex-role spillover model, that women may behave sexually because they believe this is expected of them.

Influences on sexual harassment in the workplace
Sexual harassment is prevalent in hospitality because of the industry's characteristics, such as power imbalances (Popovich and Warren, 2010, Sojo *et al.*, 2016) and organisational climate (Willness *et al.*, 2007). However, while power differentials are an important contributor to harassment, this paper argues that these are less influential than women's sex-role identity, which causes them to sexualise their labour.

Cortina and Berdahl (2008) and Lucas and Deery (2004) suggested that power inequalities in business largely account for sexual harassment. After reviewing early studies of harassment (Farley, 1978, MacKinnon, 1979), Cortina and Berdahl theorised that harassers are motivated by a combination of sexual desire and a need to dominate their victims: 'power inequality facilitates sexual harassment, and conversely sexual harassment reinforces power inequality' (p. 475). Similarly, Yagil (2008) observed from literature on customer aggression and sexual harassment in the service industry, that power accrues to customers when they pay for service, creating a power and status differential between the servers and those served.

Gutek and Morasch's (1982) sex-role spillover theory proposes that sexual harassment is the result of a sexualised working environment that utilises the sexuality inherent in women's gender roles, irrespective of power differentials. This theory considers women more as sex objects than workers; therefore, in predominantly female occupations such as food service,

sexual harassment may be a natural consequence of being a woman at work, because gender role and identity are more dominant than work roles (Bem, 1981). Wijesinghe's (2017) conceptual article on the influence of sexual hospitality on the contemporary industry also draws on women's gender role, by linking the historical provision of sexual favours in a domestic setting to contemporary expectations of women's sexuality.

After interviewing ten Norwegian hotel students, Folgerø and Fjeldstad (1995) concluded that frontline employees consider sexual behaviour an unavoidable part of their work, but only feel harassed when it interferes with their work. Most feel they need to adopt a different persona at work – one that accommodates sexual behaviours happily. In a study of students on supervised work experience in the United Kingdom (UK), Worsfold and McCann (2000) also observed that employees may think they need to flirt or behave sexually at work, which may be reciprocated by customers. Management's high expectations of customer satisfaction can explicitly condone difficult customer behaviours, particularly in settings that offer both alcohol and anonymity (Worsfold and McCann, 2000, Pritchard and Morgan, 2006, Poulston, 2008a, Karatepe et al., 2009) such as many bars and nightclubs.

Sadaraka et al.'s (2015) study extended Folgerø and Fjeldstad's (1995) work by showing that female dancers in the Cook Islands gradually changed their attire to become more sexually provocative, to fit in with the norms of the dancing group. This study demonstrated that peers are a greater influence than management on labour sexualisation, and that some labour will naturally self-sexualise unless management intervenes.

Handy's (2006) interviews with 13 women in a small New Zealand town, showed that familiarity influences the ways women deal with customers. If they know their customers, they are more likely to be more assertive in dealing with harassment, whereas with strangers they will be more constrained. This observation, combined with Hayner's (1928) view that people behave differently away from home, suggests that women working with strangers in a tourist resort will be more prone to harassment than those serving regular customers in their home town. This study therefore examines the views of women working with both regular customers and strangers.

While some research shows a link between personality and organisation type (Judge and Cable, 1997), little work has been done in this area except Silva's (2006) study of the relationship between personality and suitability for hospitality work. However, hospitality research into a partying culture (O'Neill, 2012), depression (Karatepe and Tizabi, 2011) and

theft (e.g. Poulston, 2008b) suggest that those attracted to hospitality work may bring with them a particular set of characteristics, some of which may attract sexual behaviour. Agrusa *et al.* (2002) described restaurant employees as 'outgoing, personable and energetic' (p. 29) and posited that this explains the high levels of sexual harassment in their industry. Many young women working in hospitality tolerate verbal comments, touching, sexual harassment and physical abuse from customers because they may perceive they have no choice (Poulston, 2008a, Rosenthal *et al.*, 2008). However, more experienced employees are better at distinguishing between their work and personal selves (Yagil, 2008), so are less vulnerable. In a study of cleaning staff in Australian luxury hotels, Kensbock *et al.* (2015) observed that young, inexperienced workers, were acutely vulnerable to sexual harassment, as they lacked experience in dealing with difficult people and situations.

Some managers try to enhance customers' experiences by dressing frontline staff in uniforms that accentuate their sex appeal (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995, Gilbert *et al.*, 1998, Warhurst and Nickson, 2009). Seymour (2000) found that uniforms distinguish staff from customers, but are often in degrading styles, particularly in housekeeping, where frilly aprons and caps were once commonplace. Similarly, Kensbock *et al.* (2015) found cleaners felt self-conscious and sexualised in their uniforms, even though housekeeping uniforms are not generally sexualised. Many employees prefer a uniform, believing that this helps them represent and promote their company's image (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). However, where none is provided, and if guidelines are unclear, employees may sexualise their appearance as they deem appropriate.

Effects of harassment
Aggressive and poorly behaved customers can generate anger and stress in employees. This can result in feelings of degradation, humiliation and worthlessness, leading to problems such as anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Yagil, 2008). Pizam's (2008) research note on the results of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health in the USA (SAMHSA, 2008) identified female hospitality employees as those most likely to suffer depressive episodes at work. Causal work-related factors are likely to include gender-specific issues such as sexual harassment, as women are the primary targets (Poulston, 2008a).

Sexual harassment reduces job satisfaction, affects both physical and mental health, and generally has a destructive effect on victims (Sczesny and Stahlberg, 2000, Willness *et al.*, 2007). Commonly cited effects on organisations are employee disengagement (Willness *et al.*, 2007, Jiang *et al.*, 2015) and staff turnover (Jiang *et al.*, 2015). Choi and Dickson (2009)

calculated the replacement cost of a front-line staff member as around 30% of the annual wage. However, economic imperatives for reducing sexual harassment, while perhaps attractive to managers, are not the focus of this study, which is more interested in the effects on individuals, especially with regard to their personal safety.

Conclusion

The hospitality industry suffers from high staff turnover and poor productivity (Williamson *et al.*, 2008, Choi and Dickson, 2009), both of which are associated with sexual harassment. Harassment leaves employees feeling degraded, humiliated and worthless, generating anger and depression (Pizam, 2008). However, many front-line employees consider sexual behaviours to be part of their role, and therefore tolerate or even enjoy them (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995), although some do find them unpleasant (Poulston, 2008a). Therefore, customer power and sex-role spillover may combine to sexualise labour in such a way that customers reciprocate with flirting and other sexual behaviours, generating harassment.

As the literature does not explore this combination of factors as an explanation for sexual harassment, this study explores experiences of harassment, with a view to understanding employee-related influences. This has resulted in three objectives:

1. Explore and identify employee-related influences on sexual harassment;

2. Identify the role of employees in the sexualisation of labour; and

3. Determine the role of managers in the sexualisation of labour.

Methodology

Interpretivism rejects the positivist notion that knowledge is objective, and instead, seeks to construct knowledge through the subjective perceptions of those studied. (Chowdhury, 2014). In essence, it seeks to discover and understand the meanings and mechanisms underpinning social interactions, rather than cataloguing and enumerating them. Hence, an interpretivist rather than positivist approach was selected for this study, as sexual harassment is a subjective experience, and as such, can be neither described nor predicted accurately. The study particularly sought to reveal the hidden roles of victims, by interpreting their perceptions and experiences of harassment.

The interpretivist approach allowed for a meaningful analysis of the data rather than just a description of participants' experiences, and provided an understanding of the relationship between participants' experiences of sexual behaviours at work, and influences on these. Interpretivism helps gain insights into experiences by exploring multiple rather than single

realities of phenomena, thereby improving knowledge of the phenomenon studied (O'Donoghue, 2007). This approach is well suited to an understanding of sexual harassment, because the individual experiences of women can form a cluster of views, allowing a more thorough investigation (Schwandt, 2001, Mertens, 2005, O'Donoghue, 2007).

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) describe the interpretive style as a subjective yet personal approach in which the researcher feels part of the participants' experience. This is advantageous for a sensitive issue such as sexual harassment because participants need to feel able to speak freely and confidently about their experiences, and the relationship needs to be personable and comfortable for both interviewer and interviewee.

Sampling
Snowball sampling is common in qualitative research (Rubin and Babbie, 2010), and involves identifying participants suited to the study, who then find other participants. This study required women who had worked in a restaurant or bar for over six months, so after participants had been recruited from personal contacts, they referred friends and workmates to the researcher (See Trochim and Donnelly, 2006, Bernard and Ryan, 2009). This sampling technique was well suited to the study, because (apart from the first group) those who did not want to participate did not have any contact with the researcher, so all recruits were comfortable discussing harassment and sexual behaviours at work.

Data collection
Data from face-to-face interviews help interpret a social phenomenon such as sexual harassment (Kwortnik, 2003, Mertens, 2005). Because of the sensitive topic, it was essential to build trust and allow participants the freedom to express their opinions and describe experiences in their own terms, while still allowing the interviewer to manage the direction of the interview. McNeill and Chapman (2005) considered semi-structured and unstructured interviews particularly appropriate to an interpretivist approach because the interviewer can probe participants' perceptions of their role and how they react to and address harassing behaviours.

Apart from demographic questions, participants were asked up to 15 questions based on a series of prompts, designed to find themes to identify employee-related influences on harassment. Questions concentrated on causes and effects, such as the characteristics of participants and harassers (what can you recall about this customer?), uniforms (do you have to wear a uniform – if so, describe it), financial transactions (what is the effect of tips and other rewards from customers?) workplace settings (where were you harassed?), as well as

experiences of harassment (can you tell me about it?), such as how participants felt and responded to harassment, and processes around prevention. Participants were asked if they had been harassed, where and when it happened, how this made them feel, what (if anything) they did about it, the age and gender of the harasser and whether or not the harasser was a VIP, part of a group, or frequent guest. They were also asked what they thought could be done to minimise harassment at an individual, social, company and legal level.

Interviewer bias was reduced by allowing participants to speak freely and control the conversations, eliminating question-order bias, and to some extent, wording bias, as some questions did not need asking if they had already been answered in the conversations. Culture bias was reduced by using a young female interviewer familiar with the industry and topic through her own extensive industry experience. Bias at the analysis stage was minimised with regular meetings between the researchers to discuss themes and interpretations.

To meet the requirements of the university's ethics committee approving the study, participants were guaranteed confidentiality and gave written and informed consent. Written information about the research was provided before each interview, and participants chose an interview location away from their work to protect their identity. Interviews took between 10 and 40 minutes (depending on how many questions needed to be asked and the length of responses given), were digitally recorded, and fully transcribed. Field work was undertaken over two periods of a few weeks each, several months apart, as after saturation had been reached and the initial analysis undertaken, it was decided to interview a further eight participants to check for new themes. However, no new themes arose in the subsequent analysis.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis exposes themes through exploring, categorising, explaining and defining the data (Huberman, 2002). Some themes 'are so unique they can be seen straight away' (Dey, 2003, p. 41), whereas others need data grouped into categories for sorting. A manual cutting and sorting technique was used, which meant common themes could be identified without knowing the identity of participants (see Gough and Scott, 2002). Using a content analysis approach, this was achieved by sorting data into codes (e.g. 'power', 'youth', 'uniforms') which were then grouped into categories of influence, from which the main themes (customer power, employees' expectations, youth, and the sexualisation of labour) were extracted.

The interpretivist approach allowed multiple themes to emerge from the experiences discussed in the interviews. The study was interpreted through the lens of the researchers' personal experiences, as both women had worked extensively in bars and restaurants. Close attention was given to the relationship between the research objectives and questions, and as some themes addressed the objectives directly, the researchers were confident the data were valid.

Results

Three main themes were evident – the subjective nature of sexual harassment, influences on harassing behaviours, and responsibility for stopping harassment. The influences fell into four main categories:

1. Employee perceptions: industry norms and management's expectations;
2. Customer factors: customer power, group mob behaviour, and relationships with management;
3. Employee qualities: youth, inexperience, and appearance; and
4. The sexualisation of labour.

Participant profiles
Two thirds of the participants were in their twenties, and half had a tertiary qualification (Table 1). Their age profile was consistent with that of the local hospitality industry, and as results showed, rendered many particularly vulnerable to harassment, and less able to cope with it. Pseudonyms are used in the results to protect identities, with those identifying as managers given names starting with 'M', although as their comments indicate they worked with customers regularly, they are considered to be more at supervisory than management level.

Table 1 about here

Subjective nature of sexual harassment
Participants defined harassment as 'unwanted attention', or 'uncomfortable' interactions, but did not agree on what constituted these. Younger participants found most sexual behaviours unpleasant, although as two explained, 'some customers could get away with more than others'.

> *I suppose it's just where you feel comfortable, and being strong enough to say 'oh no, too far'.* (Kathy)

Some disliked being touched, whereas two older participants considered the 'odd grab' acceptable. Annie's comment illustrates the difficulty of delineating between some sexual behaviour and sexual harassment.

> *I just think it's human nature, you know. People try to pick up people all the time. It's really hard to not have someone flirt with you, you know, but is it harassment or is it flirting?* (Annie)

Although harassment was subjective, harassing behaviours could still be described.

> *Men commenting on my breasts – that happens quite a lot, especially if they drink more and they feel like it's their right to do whatever they want to your body ... they'll be like 'You got such a good figure' or 'Hey sexy, come over here'.* (Mary)

Influences on experiences of sexual harassment
Data provided a range of influences on the likelihood that sexual behaviours (and therefore harassment) would occur.

Customers: customer power, group mob behaviour, and relationships with management
The role of customer power was evident, and linked to tips, customers' relationships with management and participants, and their tendency to behave badly in a group.

> *He threatened me with his position because he was a regular at the bar and the owners knew him.* (Mary)

> *He [a customer who harassed her] was a regular that used to spend big money.* (Melody)

> *He would get pretty mouthy when he was drinking like that and he demanded to be a sexist pig. He spoke to other women like that because he had money and brought customers into the bar.* (Mary)

Others mentioned that some customers who were friendly with management, abused this relationship by treating staff badly, with no concern about repercussions. Some regulars abused their relationships with participants, who tolerated more from them.

> *If it's someone you see every day you develop a close relationship with them ... you're not going to be so fazed by someone even touching your arm or anything like that ... if it's people I don't know there's no need for them to touch me.* (Kathy)

One participant (Mary) said she would be 'absolutely appalled' if strangers treated her the way some regular customers did. Another described an altercation with a regular in which he threatened to have her dismissed, and yet another (Charlotte) recounted an incident she did not complain about because the offender was a regular customer, so she feared management would not support her.

Social groups provided a strong power base for customers and encouraged negative pack behaviour. Moana recounted the story of a man who tried to climb over her bar, supported and encouraged by his laughing friends. Harassment was more extreme when customers were in a group, and drinking.

If you get large groups of men (nine times out of ten they're really nice guys if you get them on their own) … mixed with a lot of alcohol they do get cheekier and they do forget their inhibition. (Kathy)

Younger men … in a group … I think they just like to show off by saying gross things or chatting me up. (Beverley)

Employees: perceptions of industry norms and management's expectations

Restaurants and bars were perceived as places where sexual behaviours were anticipated and tolerated.

It's a flirtatious industry anyway, so you do get banter, you do get sexual innuendos. (Kathy)

In the hospitality industry I think sexual banter is okay. (Madeline)

As a hospitality worker you can't tell them to go away. (Rose)

There was a persistent view that managers recruited young and attractive women to encourage tips and customer loyalty, which limited their ability to reject unwanted behaviours.

Although evidence of management's expectations around sexual behaviours was scant, Moana (identifying as a manager) suggested that her managers (referred to as 'they') had been more explicit about using women to attract male drinkers.

They wanted women to draw the guys in, get the bar pumping, get the money going over the bar, and they told us that is how we got our rewards – our tips. (Moana)

Interestingly, although one the following quotes is also from a manager (Madeline), both Beverley and Madeline reveal a sense of tolerating the unavoidable, based on what they think management expects.

Constantly needing to be friendly and approachable, this can also make customers think the staff are keen on them or are able to put up with their behaviour. I don't know, maybe staff also think it will affect tips or think they may get bad feedback to the manager [if they are not friendly enough]. (Beverley)

We are all to an extent expected to flirt because we have to sell beer and beer is generally sold to men. (Madeline)

Employees: youth, inexperience, and appearance

Younger participants said those who harassed them were generally in their late twenties, and although two older women considered sexual behaviours and inappropriate comments part of their role, younger women found these uncomfortable and intrusive:

I find it harder to deal with it. (Hayley)

I was going downstairs to get more bottles of alcohol and I got stopped at the stairs by a young guy … he would not let me go … so I just tried to push him out of the way

and walked back down the stairs. That's what you get when you're a young person. (Hannah)

Several said they were nervous at first or found it 'creepy', but as they gained experience and confidence, they coped better.

[He said something] really rude, something dirty and disgusting, and he told me he was going to get me dismissed. I ended up grabbing him and slamming him against the wall. After that when I was at work he came and sat across the road and stared at me all day but I told my bosses and they banned him. (Mary)

I was downstairs locking up and as I was coming upstairs he was at the top. He said to me 'Oh you're quite new aren't you; you're quite young', then he started to make his way down the stairs. Being the bullish person I am I just walked straight up to him and pushed him out of the way. Then he goes 'Oh you like it rough do you?' (Moana)

Many showed concern for the younger and less experienced women at their workplace, noticing they were more vulnerable to intimidation. One (Stella) observed young trainees sometimes moved to the end of the bar when they were nervous, to escape unwanted attention. Just a few years' experience or maturity seemed enough to develop the confidence needed to deal with unpleasant behaviour.

I don't think it would happen to the older ladies as much; they have more experience and are probably more wise and confident to handle it. (Beverley)

The younger staff are in the firing line a lot more. I've been in my job a long time [four years] and people have tried it on but not much anymore. With the new staff they do. (Stella)

The objectification of 'pretty girls' was evident in participants' language.

If the girls are pretty you know guys look at them like you're easy meat. Some of them are drunk when they come in and end up going for the girls. (Tui)

Perceptions around industry norms were evident in views of management's expectations; around half thought their company hired only attractive employees. Indeed, Madeline (a manager) explained that her workplace liked to 'employ the girls with the looks and the boobs [breasts]'.

Generally they tend to be young pretty girls, the types I imagine to be harassed the most, as they are more vulnerable. (Beverley)

The boss at my previous job … used to say to me we only hire women and we only had young women. (Moana)

Sexualisation of labour

Managers who prefer to recruit attractive young women are guilty of sexualising their labour, but so are the employees who flirt with customers and wear provocative clothing; these women sexualise their own labour. Motivations for doing this were to encourage tips and

increase turnover, therefore meeting management's assumed expectation that flirting and tolerating sexual behaviours was part of their job. However, evidence that management had sexualised the labour was skimpy.

> *The reason you're there is to talk to customers, to make friends and make them feel comfortable and so they keep coming back. You kind of have to put yourself out there more I think.* (Aria)

Several were required to wear a uniform. One was a fitted upper garment, but most wore a white or black top with black skirt or trousers. Where uniforms were compulsory, they were conservative and not revealing, and those who wore them were not harassed as aggressively as those wearing their own choice of clothes. One participant (Annie) enjoyed choosing her own clothes so she could 'dress up', but Kathy observed that sexualising their labour was dangerous, and preventable with uniforms or modest clothing.

> *Uniforms are a great idea. I've worked in bars where girls haven't had to wear a uniform and they do choose to wear skimpier clothing and it shows a bit more … I've worked in bars until 4 am in the morning and I'll wear a shirt top, because everyone else around me is all dressed up. I think that's what would stop it [sexual harassment] though; if you're wearing a shirt with high collars you're less likely to receive harassment.* (Kathy)

Others agreed that clothing choices affected the likelihood of harassment.

> *Most uniforms are pretty ugly, but some are quite revealing and some are quite tight around the bum or low cut. I mean you're pretty much just putting yourself out there to get harassed.* (Stella)

> *I think that the dress standards and make-up and especially length of uniform needs to be addressed to stop them being targets.* (Beverley)

> *I like the idea of uniforms. I think what you wear can control the amount of attention you attract. I worked with a girl that wore really low-cut tops and push-up bras and she would get comments all night but that is something they're asking for, whether they think about it or not. I think if you had really nice shirts you're not going to get as many comments as you are if you've got breasts sticking out in their faces.* (Mary)

Responsibility for stopping harassment
Further to observations about the relationship between clothing and harassment, participants also mentioned ways to protect themselves against unwanted behaviours.

One manager was adamant she would protect her staff from harassment, but more for fear of losing them than a genuine desire to provide a safe workplace.

> *We don't have any problems here with sexual harassment, and that's because my staff know that I will back them up. They're not afraid to come to me and tell me because I will defend my staff; that's only twenty dollars walking out the door compared to a staff member that I would have to replace.* (Margaret)

Several had developed sufficient confidence to tell customers their behaviours were unacceptable, without embarrassing them publicly:

> *I said to one guy the other day I didn't like his behaviour and he said sorry. He didn't even realise he was doing it, that it was actually offensive.* (Charlotte)

However, most younger participants were reluctant to react in case their customer complained to management, their accusation was not taken seriously, or they were dismissed.

Summary

While there was evidence that experiences of sexual harassment are subjective, three clear categories of influence permeated the data: the role of customers, employees' perceptions about their own role, and the influence of youth, inexperience, and appearance. The perceptions of employees (and managers) are particularly germane from a research and practice perspective, because their behaviours are more easily controlled than those of customers. That is, employees and managers have an assumed interest in stopping harassment, whereas customers may not.

The role of customers included customer power, mob behaviour, and customers' relationships with management and participants. Employees' perceptions about their role included perceptions about industry norms and management's expectations, which are considered to partly explain the sexualisation of labour. Notably, there was little evidence to support the view that management sexualises its labour force, but plenty to suggest that participants behaved sexually because they considered it role-appropriate, consistent with the sex-role spillover model proposed by Gutek and Morasch (1982). This theme also included the influence of youth and inexperience on harassment; younger and less experienced participants had more problems with harassment, partly because they had not learned how to repel unwanted behaviours, but also because harassers were often their own age and may have seen them as somehow accessible. Younger participants may also have been more vulnerable to harassment if they were attractive.

The discussion particularly addresses the role of youth, inexperience and appearance, as well as implications for practice and research, including responsibilities for stopping harassment.

Discussion and implications

Influences on sexual harassment generally confirmed findings in prior research, such as the influence of power (Popovich and Warren, 2010, Sojo *et al.*, 2016) and organisational climate (Willness *et al.*, 2007). However, sex-role spillover theory (Gutek and Morasch, 1982) and the natural model (Tangri *et al.*, 1982) were of particular interest, as both acknowledge the

role of those harassed, and therefore, offer opportunities to explore ways of stopping harassment.

The research objectives, to 1) identify employee-related influences on sexual harassment; 2) identify the role of employees in the sexualisation of labour; and 3) determine the role of managers in the sexualisation of labour were all met, and are addressed in the following section.

Employee related influences: Youth, inexperience and appearance
Most participants were under 30 years old and many had worked in hospitality for several years. However, age differences between participants and customers often led to power imbalances that were difficult for the younger and less experienced participants to manage. The ability to repel harassing behaviours was most evident in those more experienced (and those identifying as managers), and appeared to be developed through experience rather than training, as employees new to the industry were notably lacking in skills.

In New Zealand, 42% of women in frontline hospitality roles are under 25 years old (Whiteford and Nolan, 2007), and probably enjoy the lively and social environment of a hospitality workplace (Guerrier and Adib, 2000). However, young women are reluctant to complain of harassment in case of reprisals from customers and/or managers (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2008), leaving a large proportion of hospitality workers vulnerable to abuse, and due to their personalities and ages, likely to attract it. Kensbock *et al.* (2015) also found that youth and inexperience rendered workers more vulnerable to harassment, as these employees were unable to deal with difficult situations.

Results of this study show that some younger participants such as Mary felt comfortable approaching management for support when confronted with harassing behaviours, but could also feel intimidated by a customer's relationship with management. For these employees, their only recourse was to avoid customers who harassed them, an approach that leads to problems for both employees and managers (Gilbert *et al.*, 1998, Choi and Dickson, 2009).

The role of employees in the sexualisation of labour
The self-sexualisation (i.e. voluntary) of labour observed by Sadaraka *et al.* (2015) was also evident in this study, and considered a significant influence on sexual harassment. Although some participants believed managers sought physically attractive employees, this alone should not cause harassment. One manager (Madeline) thought employees were expected to flirt, but her inclusive language ('we' rather than 'they') suggests this was her view as an employee, rather than her expectation as a manager. No participants reported they had been

directed to flirt, nor had any been directed to behave or dress sexually – in fact to do so would probably breach health and safety regulations, given that sexual behaviours may attract harassment. As many participants reported they were expected to behave sexually, this study concludes that this is a perception rather than a reality, influenced no doubt by workplace context and social norms (see Good and Cooper, 2014), but ultimately a matter of personal preference. The tendency for labour to self-sexualise is explained by Liu *et al.*'s (2014) observation that 'managers and organizations lack awareness and place emphasis on customer relationships, thereby leaving the onus of customer sexual harassment on employees' shoulders' (p. 350).

The role of managers in the sexualisation of labour
Although early studies on harassment show that some hospitality organisations trained staff to flirt (Gilbert *et al.*, 1998), and in a recent study, participants complained of sexualised hospitality uniforms (Kensbock *et al.*, 2015), evidence that management explicitly sexualises labour is scarce, and employees may have a different view of organisational expectations than management intends (e.g. Jiang *et al.*, 2015). This study agrees with Liu *et al.*'s (2014) view that, if anything, managers tend to abdicate responsibility, leaving front-line hospitality workers to behave and dress as sexually as they wish, and face the inevitable consequences. As such, management is not so much requiring staff to behave sexually, but more allowing them to, influenced no doubt by the context and social norms of their workplace (Good and Cooper, 2014). Sexual behaviours may work in management's favour, being attractive to some customers.

Who is responsible?
Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015), New Zealand employers have a duty to look after the health and safety of those at work. Similarly, in the UK, the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) protects employees against harm, placing the onus of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of employers and their representatives. Managers therefore have a legal, if not moral, responsibility to prevent sexual behaviours at work, but instead of focussing on customer behaviours, data from this study suggest managers would be better to focus on their employees' behaviours.

Implications for research and practice
This study exemplifies sex-role spillover theory (Gutek and Morasch, 1982), in that some participants behaved sexually by dressing provocatively and flirting with customers, mostly because they thought it was expected, even though this was not explicit. These behaviours seem a likely cause of harassing behaviours from customers, although no direct link was

evident. Front-line staff seeking to please management and those who enjoy flirtations at work are likely to dress and behave provocatively, which may provoke a sexual response from customers. Managers therefore have three major responsibilities in this regard:

1. Implement dress codes (or uniforms) that are attractive but not provocative;

2. Educate employees about the risks of dressing or behaving provocatively; and

3. Teach employees how to block unwanted behaviours without offending customers. Assertiveness training (and even self-defence classes) may be helpful in this regard.

Whereas the literature generally accepts that management has a responsibility to stop sexual harassment, there is little advice on how to do this apart from prohibiting it, which is difficult to operationalise, as customers are the main perpetrators (Poulston, 2008a). The approaches recommended in this study are avoided in the literature, perhaps because the perpetrators of harassment and assaults are ultimately those responsible, and asking anyone else to take responsibility seems unfair. However, this approach deprives potential victims of ways to avoid difficult situations, and is somewhat akin to thinking it is acceptable to leave an unattended wallet on a park seat, because people should not steal. Similarly, although harassing behaviours are unacceptable, some individuals will still behave badly in certain contexts such as restaurants and bars. Prevention, therefore, seems a better approach than just advising that harassment and/or stealing is not allowed. While these suggestions would not be difficult to implement, suggestions for behavioural changes affecting employees are predicated on the assumption that these in turn, will help modify customers' behaviour. However, it is important to acknowledge that employees cannot control customers' behaviours, but only attempt to repel unwanted behaviours. Also, a mind-set that sexual harassment is solely the responsibility of the harasser will present a challenge for organisations wishing to take this approach, which necessarily recognises the role of those harassed.

Prior research into sexual harassment in hospitality has uncovered major influences such as customer power (Popovich and Warren, 2010, Sojo *et al.*, 2016) and the peculiarities of the industry (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995), which can include perceived expectations to behave sexually (Worsfold and McCann, 2000). This study extends some of these ideas by exploring these expectations more carefully, and also, by attempting to discover what is being done to stop harassment. However, more work is needed in both of these areas as the following section outlines.

Future research and limitations

This study does not purport to offer reliability in terms of replicability, because it takes a snapshot of events and experiences and interprets them through the lens of the participants. It explores influences and rather than firmly determining causality, and having identified these, offers opportunities to examine them in future studies, using either positivist or interpretivist methods. However, and most importantly, it provides new insights into the mechanisms behind sexual harassment by uncovering the roles of harassment victims through the 'conscious and unconscious explanations' (Lin, 1998, p. 162) for participants' experiences of harassment.

Implications for future research fall into two main categories.

1. Data suggest that many restaurant and bar workers may believe management expects them to behave flirtatiously. It would therefore be helpful to interview employees and managers to determine how this expectation is communicated, and also, if some managers do expect or require this.

2. As participants with less industry experience were more vulnerable to harassment, it was assumed that this was because skills in handling difficult situations were developed with age and over time. It would therefore be productive to establish what (if any) training is routinely offered to prevent harassment, and any effects this may have.

One final note of warning. Recommendations from this study are aimed at preventing harassing behaviours such as solicitations for sex, and demeaning comments of a sexual nature such as the participants working in restaurants and bars experienced. They may not necessarily prevent repeated or severe bullying, or assaults, which may be more physical in nature, and are not necessarily in response to provocation by a victim. Nothing in this article is intended to exonerate the perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour, nor lay blame on victims. The ultimate responsibility for unwanted behaviour lies with the person who behaves badly, but this study demonstrates the role of victims in unwittingly facilitating this.

This study also has limitations to be taken into account before attempting to generalise from the findings. Firstly, this was an exploratory study of 18 participants working primarily in bars and restaurants in Auckland, New Zealand. Their views may well reflect the culture and norms of a few workplaces which may be different from similar workplaces elsewhere, and most likely different from those in large and perhaps internationally branded hotels, where appearance and behaviour is more carefully proscribed, and harassment less common

(Poulston, 2008a). Secondly, and most importantly, the topic of harassment is fraught with problems because of the subjective nature of the phenomenon, and like much social scientific research, research on harassment can only provide data from a particular group at a particular time, which may be different from data solicited from the same group at a different time, or even a different group at the same time. It is exploratory in nature, providing a general but in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, rather than a firm explanation for what happened, that can be extrapolated and generalised to other groups.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore employees' responses to sexual behaviours at work, in order to understand the influences on these, and therefore strategies to minimise harm. Results show that younger and less experienced employees lacked the skills to manage difficult behaviours, rendering them vulnerable to harassment. Data also revealed that some employees dressed and behaved provocatively, believing this was the industry norm and expected by management; this behaviour may have attracted harassment.

Workplace context and social norms (Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995, Good and Cooper, 2014, Sadaraka *et al.*, 2015) help explain why some women dress or behave provocatively at work unless management deters them from doing so. This article has therefore focussed on management's responsibility in this regard.

Sexual harassment is a major problem in hospitality workplaces, where one in four women are subjected to unwanted and offensive sexual behaviours (Hoel, 2002, Poulston, 2008a). The effects of this are well known, and include negative job-related outcomes such as staff turnover, as well as physical and psychological harm (Chan *et al.*, 2008). Reduced job satisfaction, poor physical and mental health, and post-traumatic stress disorder have all been established as potential effects of sexual harassment (Willness *et al.*, 2007). Alongside these victim impacts, the industry has a tradition of sexual behaviours dating back to 1700 BC (White, 1968). Removing sexual harassment from hospitality workplaces would therefore not only prevent harm to victims, but also improve the reputation and status of the industry.

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Table 1: Participant profiles

Name	Age	Education	Experience	Role
Hannah	20 – 25	High School	6 months	Barmaid
Charlotte	20 – 25	Certificate	2 years	Barmaid
Stella	20 – 25	High School	4 years	Barmaid
Nadia	20 – 25	Undergraduate	4 years	Barmaid
Hayley	20 – 25	Undergraduate	4 years	Barmaid
Michelle	20 – 25	High School	5 years	Manager
Annie	36 – 40	Undergraduate	5 years	Barmaid
Aria	20 – 25	High School	6 years	Barmaid
Beverley	20 – 25	Postgraduate	6 years	Waitress
Mary	20 – 25	High School	7 years	Manager
Heidi	20 – 25	High School	7 years	Barmaid
Madeline	26 – 30	High School	8 years	Manager
Maxine	46 – 50	High School	8 years	Manager
Melody	46 – 50	Bachelor degree	10 years	Manager
Moana	31 – 35	Undergraduate	12 years	Manager
Tui	46 – 50	High School	15 years	Supervisor
Margaret	26 – 30	Undergraduate	16 years	Manager
Rose	31 – 35	Undergraduate	18 years	Waitress

About the Authors

Beth Waudby has worked extensively in hospitality, particularly in nightclubs and bars, where she became interested in sexual harassment issues. She completed her Master of International Hospitality Management at AUT, and is currently fully occupied caring for her three children.

Dr Jill Poulston leads the hospitality postgraduate programmes at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and is an Associate Director of the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute. Jill worked in senior hotel management for over 15 years before joining AUT, and now researches ethical issues such as sexual harassment, age discrimination and ethical food consumption.