Sexual discrimination and harassment in the hospitality industry

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\begin{abstract}
This exploratory study discloses and examines issues leading to sexual discrimination and harassment in the hospitality work environment. Using cluster sampling, demographic data were collected by questionnaire from a captive audience of 101 hospitality management students following 12-month international internships. Critical incidents of homophobic harassment and/or sexual discrimination were recorded anonymously online. Descriptive statistics then interpretational and narrative analyses were employed. A minority reported workplace sexual discrimination and/or homosexual harassment, all by males, on both male and female victims. Negative feelings and lack of appropriate actions taken were noted. Managers are urged to take seriously the problems identified and increase awareness of such incidents; while 'victims' must not be afraid to report incidents. Recommendations to tackle sexual discrimination and harassment using diversity management are made.

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1. Introduction

Sociological advancements and demographic changes led to a visibility ratio of one in six sexual minorities like lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) in societies and businesses (Lubensky et al., 2004). The increased prominence of LGBT workers has forced the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Commission (EC) to develop measures against LGBT employment discrimination (EHRC, 2011). In consequence, managers can expect increasing numbers of LGBT to work in the hospitality industry as qualified manpower. However, the prejudices, stigmatisation and stereotyping of LGBT in societies and workplaces have not diminished due to ignorance and ego defensive behaviour (Arabsheibani et al., 2004; Lubensky et al., 2004). On the contrary, evidence of LGBT violence and aggression in the workplace has surfaced (Pina et al., 2009). As such, hospitality managers are challenged to manage LGBT workers fairly in a predominantly heterosexual work environment, extending their understanding beyond equality legislation. However, research regarding sexual discrimination (SD) and sexual harassment (SH) of LGBT in the hospitality industry appears to be empirically under-developed, while a comprehensive method to address hospitality SD and SH of LGBT through diversity management (DM) has not been proposed to date. Along these veins, the present paper aims (i) to gather and analyse evidence of SD and SH in the hospitality workplace and (ii) to argue for and justify the implementation of DM as a comprehensive solution to intervene SD and SH of LGBT in the hospitality workplace.

This article comprises seven sections. Section 2 includes a critical review of SD and SH literature in the hospitality industry, and intervention of SD and SH through DM. The research methods employed are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 presents and analyses hospitality SD and SH evidence from the participants' narratives; while Section 5 discusses the findings. Next, appropriate conclusions and both theoretical and practical implications are provided in Section 6. Finally, Section 7 discusses the limitations of this study and provides suggestions for further research.

2. Theory

2.1. Sexual discrimination

Published discourse found evidence of gender, age, racial and disabilities discrimination of hospitality employees in various countries (for example Albert et al., 2011; Campos-Soria et al., 2011; Harcourt et al., 2005; Marnburg, 2006; Martin and Gardiner, 2007; Ng and Pine, 2003; Pinar et al., 2010; Slonaker et al., 2007). In addition, studies of SD in private and public organisations in the UK have been identified (for example Colgan, 2011; Sargeant, 2009; Senyucel and Phillpott, 2011). SD is explained as an act or a decision of depriving an individual of fair and equal treatment due to her/his sexual orientation (Elmslie and Tebaldi, 2007). Although research on LGBT discrimination in the hospitality industry is sparse, in general LGBT have been discriminated against on various differing grounds in societies and businesses. For instance, same sex marriage is not fully legalised in the United States of America (USA).
and prohibited by various religions (Olson et al., 2006); while the “immigration policy in the UK still does not recognise same sex couples” (Arabsheibani et al., 2004, p. 345). In addition, disclosed homosexuals were denied employment in masculine professions like the military and unfairly rewarded financially in comparison to their heterosexual colleagues in private organisations in the UK (Arabsheibani et al., 2004). Furthermore, elderly homosexuals have suffered discrimination when seeking employment and unfair dismissal from their jobs in the USA (Sargeant, 2009). Misconception of HIV transmission has increased prejudice against gay men in particular (Elmslie and Tebaldi, 2007). However, current developments against discrimination of LGBT workers in the workplace are not all gloomy. The UK and the EC have established legislation and measures, respectively, to champion against homosexual workers’ discrimination in the workplace (EHRC, 2011a). In addition, there are non-governmental organisations like Stonewall in the UK (www.stonewall.org.uk) to allow LGBT workers to voice their sensitive discrimination grievances. However, UK private companies have been criticised for the implementation of equal opportunity policies in the workplace for LGBT workers (Colgan et al., 2007). Hence, more effort is needed from private companies to embrace equality policies in order to fairly treat LGBT workers in the workplace.

SD in the hospitality industry can be analysed through the social identity theory as it examines the cognition and behaviour of LGBT and heterosexual workers interacting in their organisations (Hogg, 2006). The workplace interactions of these groups of workers can result in harmony (for example conformity and cohesiveness) and/or conflict (for example prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping) as the interaction progresses (Turner, 2010). The social implications for LGBT vary greatly: for men, “homosexuality is seen as a rejection of maleness” and for women, “it can be an assertion of feminality, of separateness from men, and of identity” (Weeks, 1990, p. 101). Hence, the antecedents of homosexual SD can be attributed to ignorance, misunderstanding, fear, ego defensive and sexism of heterosexual colleagues (Ragins and Cornwell, 2001); while the effects of SD on the victims and their colleagues can result in job dissatisfaction, low work performance, depression, anger, low self-esteem, negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Dawson, 2005; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001). The next section discusses the facet of SD referred to as SH.

2.2. Sexual harassment

Incidents of SH have manifested at different levels and within different sectors of the hospitality industry in different parts of the world (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008; Lu and Kleiner, 2001; Mathisen et al., 2008; Mkono, 2010; Poulston, 2008; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009; Yagil, 2008). A comprehensive explanation of SH has not been achieved, as claimed by Pina et al. (2009), due to the complexity of perpetrators’ behaviour, sexism, and negative effects on victims. However, the hospitality work context describes SH as a form of discernment or aggression that involves unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical sexual advances or of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating work environment that negatively impact employees’ work performance (Mkono, 2010; Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009; Yagil, 2008). Notably, in the hospitality industry, Mims and Kleiner (1998) reported unwillingness by gay men to report homosexual harassment, whilst Gilbert et al. (1998) found that nearly 40% of British hospitality managers do not regard SH as a serious management issue. Possibly, for these reasons, both LGBT and heterosexual ‘victims’ may not come forward so cases may not be reported. Nevertheless, the perpetrators of hospitality SH include co-workers, employers and customers (Mathisen et al., 2008; Poulston, 2008) and are predominantly of the male gender (Pina et al., 2009) due to the nature of the service industry (Yagil, 2008). However, the hospitality industry is experiencing increasing same sex SH (Sherwyn et al., 2000) and SH is not limited to the opposite sex (Theocharous and Philaretou, 2009). SH includes: making demeaning comments about a person’s appearance; indecent remarks; questions about a person’s sex; sexual demands by a member of the same sex or opposite sex; name-calling with demeaning terminology which is gender specific; and unwelcome physical contact and other conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or humiliating working environment (EHRC, 2011b; ILO, 2011a). The negative consequences of SH comprise unnecessary legal costs, payment of monetary compensation to victims, bad organisational image or reputation, labour turnover, absenteeism, lower employee productivity and morale, costs of recruiting and training new employees (Poulston, 2008), and negative physical and psychological health outcomes (Barling et al., 1996). Provisions against SH in societies and workplaces are established in limited countries and regions as summarised in Table 1.

With reference to Table 1, the interpretations of SH vary differently due to biological, sociocultural, cognitive and organisational complexities, and the provisions are mostly limited to the female gender, ignoring LGBT workers. In particular, the Zimbabwean national employment legislation only addresses heterosexual SH as homosexuality is prosecuted as a crime in the country (Mkono, 2010).

SH issues can be studied from the perspectives of single factor and multifactor theories (Pina et al., 2009). On the one hand, the single factor theories examine SH issues in-depth in the contexts of sociocultural (Tangri et al., 1982), organisational (Tangri et al., 1982), biological (Studd and Gattiker, 1991), sex-role spillover (Gutek and Morash, 1982) and social-cognitive (Pyor, 1987). On the other hand, the four-factor theory was developed to comprehensively integrate the key components of the single factor theories in order to study SH from: (i) the perpetrators’ motives to harass; (ii) the perpetrators overcoming their moral constraints to harass; (iii) the perpetrators overcoming external inhibitions to harass; and (iv) the perpetrators overcoming victims’ resistance to SH (O’Hare and O’Donohue, 1998). The scholars postulated that SH occurs when all the four factors are met. They tested empirically and validated statistically two (external inhibitions to harass and victims’ resistance to SH) of the four factors based on the perceptions of 135 female staff, faculty and students from a university in Midwest USA. Although the four-factor theory of SH has addressed the main criticisms of single factor theories, it has been criticised for focusing too much on organisations’ angles, and empirically under developing SH perpetrators’ motives and their moral constraints to harass (Pina et al., 2009). Hence, the present paper attempts to supplement the four-factor theory by: (i) involving both male and female gender as SH is not limited to the female gender in contemporary societies; (ii) exploring hospitality LGBT harassment issues based on empirical observations and experiences of international hospitality male and female student workers; and (iii) analysing student workers’ accounts and narratives to shed some light on SH perpetrators’ motives and their moral constraints in the context of harassment in the hospitality workplace.

2.3. Sexual harassment: Intervention through diversity management

The urgency to intervene in SD and SH in the hospitality industry is evident as explained in previous sections. Issues pertaining to SD and SH in the workplace can be tackled comprehensively from the legal, sociocultural, cognitive, organisational, and business dimensions through DM (Colgan, 2011; Lubensky et al., 2004; Shen et al., 2009; Wrench, 2007). DM is explained as an organisation’s approaches and commitment to encourage employers, employees and customers to tolerate, respect and treat fairly others of diverse
characteristics in the workplace in order to strengthen the organisation’s competitiveness and efficiency (Kandola and Fullerton, 2001; Wrench, 2007). However, DM has been criticised for the lack of quantifiable, observable and tangible positive outcomes to provide a convincing case with respect to managers’ support and commitment (Süß and Kleiner, 2007); whilst Kirton and Greene (2005) warned that DM is time consuming and requires commitment from management to be effective and efficient. DM is not law; rather, DM complements and supplements equal employment legislation to cover a broader area for businesses (Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007). Hence, it is likely that DM initiatives could address SD and SH of all diverse employees, including disclosed and non-disclosed LGBT employees in the workplace through education and training. However, the success and failure of DM initiatives are dependent mainly on “specific demographic profile and the legal, historical, political, and cultural contexts of equality” of countries (Cooke and Saini, 2010, p. 481).

Successful implementation of DM initiatives in organisations can generate many benefits like diversity tolerance enhancement (Maxwell et al., 2000), reduce excessive labour turnover and increase manpower retention (Kirton and Greene, 2005), attract diverse customers and access new markets (Wrench, 2007), and attract new ideas from fresh blood (Groschl and Doherty, 1999). In addition, the implementation of DM in the workplace should ensure employers’ fair recruitment, selection, training, orientation, promotion, appraisal and compensation for all workers regardless of their diversities (Shen et al., 2009). On the contrary, over-emphasis of DM can invite backlashs from non-diverse groups (Burke, 2005). Wrench (2007) also cautioned readers regarding the fact that the benefits of DM can be overstated and over-generalised, and DM can be harmful to organisations if practitioners do not apply it appropriately. Hence, Nishii and Özbilgin (2007) recommended the evaluation of DM approaches, to “fit with the country’s specific national concerns, workplace systems and structures, and core business objectives” (p. 1884), before employing them in another cultural context.

DM can address hospitality SD and SH through the “melting pot” (Wrench, 2007) or “mosaic” (Kandola and Fullerton, 2001) and/or transformative (Senyucel and Philippot, 2011) metaphors. The “melting pot” approach aims to help minorities (homosexual workers) to co-exist with the majority (heterosexual workers). For example, hospitality managers can organise formal and informal events to allow both homosexual and heterosexual workers to socialise in order to build up good rapport. However, this approach has been criticised for not maximising the potential of diversities (Wrench, 2007). Nonetheless, the “mosaic” metaphor is employed to address the limitations of the “melting pot” method whereby the uniqueness of individuals was pieced together to generate benefits (Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007). For example, hospitality sales and marketing managers can utilise fully their female, LGBT, and other diverse employees to attract and target markets of diverse customers (female, LGBT, and others). In this way, diverse employees can better understand, serve and retain their diverse customers. Furthermore, Senyucel and Philippot (2011) recommended managers to complement the transformative approach with the “mosaic” metaphor in order to strengthen the acknowledgement of the differentiation of homosexual workers so as to enable them to integrate in their organisations. The transformative approach attempts to build a deep learning and understanding organisational culture to support diversity effectiveness. For instance, hospitality organisations can execute the transformative approach of DM through education, training and clear communication. Hospitality employees can be educated in the need to tolerate and respect colleagues and customers from diverse backgrounds. At the same time, upper management can show their support for diversity initiatives by sending clear communication to all employees with reference to DM.

3. Methods

The methodological approach suits the ‘sensitive’ issues of SD and SH, safeguards the research participants’ rights to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (cf. Renzetti and Lee, 1993) and adheres to The Social Research Association’s Ethical Guidelines (2003). Quantitative data were collected by confidential survey (phase one) for generalisation purposes, supplemented by qualitative data (phase two) for exploratory in-depth analysis. In phase one, experienced or witnessed incidents of SH in general were noted and demographic data including age, nationality, gender, country of placement and sexual orientation were collected. Phase two focused on respondents’ experiences of SH through recollections of critical incidents that included personal or witnessed cases. The research population is defined as all student workers in the international hospitality industry who have been on industrial placement. Due to time and financial constraints, and internal validity reasons, cluster sampling was employed. The sample for phase one comprised 101 respondents who were studying at the same educational level, in the same institution located in the UK, of similar age and were hospitality management final year students. In terms of external validity, the respondents had undertaken 12-month industrial placements worldwide with over 90 different companies. As 90% of female workers believe that SD occurs frequently in the hospitality industry (Lu and Kleiner, 2001), and the occurrence of homosexual harassment accounts for 9% of workplace harassment (Mims and Kleiner, 1998), the sample (77 females; 24 males) was deemed to be acceptable. Following phase one, six respondents volunteered to take part in phase two. Anonymous hotline accounts were set up for contact to reduce the fear of being identified or stigmatised (cf. Renzetti and Lee, 1993). Detailed scenarios about SD were described by eight students, who volunteered the information immediately following their 12-month industrial placements, so the qualitative data for phase two of the study were confined to eight of the international companies. Participants were invited to describe in detail witnessed or experienced critical incidents that warranted personal responses (cf. Gill and Johnson, 1997), identifying who was discriminated against and stating if the occurrences were regular. Due to the anonymity of the data collection, it was not possible to verify the statements but, as the qualitative data provision was voluntary, the researcher was respected by the students and the number of reported
incidents was small (but in line with the findings of Mims and Kleiner, 1998), there is no reason to doubt the reliability of the information provided. The scenarios described the events, the behaviours of the dyad, the feelings that were evoked, and the consequences for each party and any subsequent actions or attempts to rectify the situation, followed by comments on how different actions might have prevented the incidents. Opinions regarding legislation that protected LGBT against discrimination in the workplace and whether someone should be treated less favourably because of their sexual orientation were also solicited. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS descriptives to produce the demographic profile of the sample. Chi square tests examined gender, nationality, openness about being gay and experiencing or witnessing SH differences. The qualitative data were analysed using narrative and interpretational analysis (Dey, 1993; Tesch, 1990). The scenario analysis substantiated and exemplified the quantitative data analysis in the context of the determination of relationships and identification of underlying patterns that emerged. An interpretational diagram was constructed from the narrative for each scenario, representing the timeline of the victim’s interactions with the discriminator harasser and divided between the social (re)actions and psychological (feelings) events. Interpretational analysis offers a way of displaying the chronological sequence of events in a more illuminating way (see Fig. 1 for an example). It demonstrates the way each of the dyad’s feelings unfolded as various incidents occurred and was particularly useful in analysing the connections between the themes induced from the scenarios (Patton, 1990).

4. Results

4.1. Demographic profile of the respondents

The respondents comprised 77 females and 24 males with an overall mean age of 22 years, ranging from 20 to 29 years; 85 of the students were British and the remainder were from Europe, China and Ireland. Of the total surveyed, 89% had neither witnessed nor experienced any form of SH, whilst 7% had witnessed it and 4% had experienced it (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998). Regarding incidents of SD, 4% had witnessed it and 8% had experienced it. The majority (n = 58) of the students had undertaken their placement in Britain; 21 had worked in America and the others (n = 22) had worked elsewhere. Only 12% reported being wholly or partially homosexual, with 73% being heterosexual and 15% refusing to disclose their sexual orientation and omitting the question. The former group comprised six lesbians, three gay males and three bisexuals. Interestingly, this minority group in this sample of UK hospitality management student workers comprised over double the reported proportion of 3.7 million lesbians, gay and bisexual people in Britain (Stonewall, 2010), that is 5.9% of the total population in 2010. Although 10 people who had experienced or witnessed SH or SD provided anonymous email addresses, as requested, for participation in the qualitative phase, only eight responded, three of whom were gay and the rest were straight (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998).

4.2. Gender, nationality, sexual harassment and sexual discrimination

It has been argued that national cultures can be described as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ (Hofstede, 1980), and that masculine cultures, such as the UK, have a low tolerance of homosexuality. However, eight of the 12 self-confessed homosexuals were British and the eight students who admitted to having ‘experienced’ SH personally were all female, in contrast with Mims and Kleiner (1998) who reported that the majority of homosexual harassment was by men to men. A series of Chi-square tests found no association between nationality (UK; Other) or gender, and openness about being gay and experiencing or witnessing SH. These findings may be attributed to the premise that males are more reluctant to admit to being gay than females (cf. Badgett and King, 1997).
4.3. The scenarios

The eight reported scenarios comprised two witnessed incidences of homophobic harassment (Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2) and six reports by females who had experienced SH personally (Sections 4.3.3 to 4.3.8). For consistency, the reports were transformed into narrative format (an example is displayed in Fig. 1), then, interpretational analysis summarised the key issues (see Table 2).

4.3.1. Customer abuse

A witnessed case of homosexual harassment involved a gay employee and a customer. The gay employee in question delivered an incorrect drink order to a male customer, who subsequently began to verbally abuse him; referring to him as a “gay twat”. This led to the employee feeling “threatened” and distressed by the man’s “abusive” behaviour and tone. The incident was reported to the bar manager who was “sympathetic” and “understanding”. However, despite her apparent empathy, she did not approach the customer and tell him that his behaviour was unacceptable; the employee was simply moved to another section. The situation was deemed to be handled sufficiently well by the abused, although the witness to the incident thought that the customer should have been told that his language was unacceptable and, if he continued, he should be removed from the bar. In summary, the witness believed that nothing could have been done to prevent the incident as “the customer was obviously homophobic” (cf. Croteau, 1996).

4.3.2. The ‘joker’ manager

A witness recalled a homophobic incident involving the restaurant manager making personal remarks about a gay employee because of the way he spoke and presented himself. This abuse, which occurred regularly both in and out of the workplace (cf. TUC, 2000), left the employee feeling upset and created an uncomfortable working environment. The incident was not reported so no action was taken against the manager in question. The witness thought that an apology was necessary and a promise that this would never happen again. He abused his position and used his authority for intimidation purposes (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998).

4.3.3. Abuse in the pub

A female member of staff in a public house was “yelled at in front of customers and staff for no good reason” by her manager. The behaviour of the manager was abusive and sometimes violent, involving throwing plates and verbal abuse (Lu and Kleiner, 2001). It was claimed that the perpetrator harassed, and discriminated against, all female staff on a daily basis and often threatened to “sack” the victim, evoking feelings of anger and frustration in the victim as she felt that her manager’s behaviour was unjust. Although the public house was run by a couple, little action was taken to rectify the situation; the husband said he “felt unable to do anything”, leaving the victim feeling frustrated. The lack of appropriate action led to the victim writing a letter of complaint to head office and her subsequent resignation (despite being earmarked for promotion). The victim was later offered the promotion but she felt unable to accept due to the poor working conditions and unacceptable behaviour of her manager. The victim was left with feelings of anger and frustration; she maintained that a closer interest by the area manager may have rectified the problem sooner.

4.3.4. The arrogant bar manager

A newly appointed male bar supervisor was of a “very archaic mind frame” and thought that women should be given “menial” tasks to carry out within the bar. He discriminated against “80% of the female staff” by not allowing them to perform any tasks which carried a great amount of responsibility (cf. Gilbert et al., 1998), leading to feelings of inadequacy and frustration amongst the females; male employees, who had less experience, were favoured for these tasks. Although the supervisor’s behaviour was non-threatening, he showed a lack of respect. This was a regular occurrence. His behaviour was reported to a member of management, whose attitude towards the situation was sympathetic but still no action was taken, leading to frustration and annoyance. The victim felt as though “none of the managers really cared”, so the SD was allowed to continue. The victim deemed the supervisor “inappropriate for his job” by the victim “due to his lack of abilities” and considered that he “should have been issued with a disciplinary action or moved to another department”. This situation created a hostile working environment (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998).

4.3.5. The ‘mentality of chefs’

The incident involved chefs bragging about their sexual prowess and explicitly “talking about raping and beating up the partner” in front of the female staff. This talk produced feelings of fear and disgust and left some female employees “scared” to enter the kitchen by themselves. It created a very intimidating and hostile working environment (cf. Lu and Kleiner, 2001). As the head chef had “no control” over the kitchen, the harassment continued until a female employee brought in her boyfriend which intimidated the chefs. The incidents were not formally reported. The manager showed a lack of understanding and respect by ignoring the situation and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Perpetrator</th>
<th>Initial thoughts/feelings</th>
<th>Reported?</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Subsequent feelings/action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Verbal abuse</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Gay male</td>
<td>Male customer</td>
<td>Threatened; distressed</td>
<td>Female manager; empathetic</td>
<td>Insufficient; Moved to another section</td>
<td>Not satisfied with limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Personal remarks</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Gay male</td>
<td>Male manager (regular)</td>
<td>Upset</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Verbal and physical abuse</td>
<td>Pub</td>
<td>Straight female(s)</td>
<td>Male colleague (regular)</td>
<td>Unjust behaviour; Anger; frustration</td>
<td>Male manager</td>
<td>No action taken</td>
<td>Anger; frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Straight female</td>
<td>Male supervising (regular)</td>
<td>Inadequate; frustration; fear; disgust; afraid</td>
<td>Obvious to manager but not reported formally</td>
<td>New head chef; written warnings</td>
<td>Hostile working environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Straight female</td>
<td>Older male</td>
<td>Sleazy; pervert</td>
<td>Not reported but colleagues knew</td>
<td>No action taken</td>
<td>Angry; possible revenge on wives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Personal and sexual remarks</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Straight female</td>
<td>Male colleague (reputation)</td>
<td>Fear; intimidation; reported in time to supervisor</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Annoyance with self; relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Verbal criticism</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Straight female</td>
<td>Male colleague</td>
<td>Humiliated; degraded</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Frustation; resentment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
putting it down to the “chefs’ mentality” (cf. Gilbert et al., 1998).

Subsequently, a new head chef was appointed and he issued the other chefs with written warnings. Their threatening behaviour stopped soon afterwards. Although the situation improved, the female members of staff were left feeling angry. They desired to take revenge by informing the wives of the offenders “how perpetrated their husbands were at work”.

4.3.6. ‘Special treatment’

A male manager forced a female member of staff to “perform oral sex on him” in the belief that she would receive some form of “special treatment”, which did not happen! The male member of management was “well known for being a pervert”. He would make sexual references and harass all the female staff and some of the customers. This indecent practice continued which led his employees to think of him as “sleazy” and a “pervert”. The incident in question was never reported. The other managers “turned a blind eye”, which led to the assumption that they were up to similar wrong doings (cf. Gilbert et al., 1998). Colleagues felt sorry for the girl and soon after she resigned. She stated that better management and control might have helped the situation and maintained that the offending manager should never have been placed in a position of authority.

4.3.7. The security officer

This incident of SH involved a young lady of 22 and a much older male security officer (cf. Lu and Kleiner, 2001). The harasser asked personal questions such as “if I had slept well” or “if I was alone last night”, invoking feelings of awkwardness and made the victim feel uncomfortable at work. The victim did not report the incident straight away as the man had been there a long time and she did not have the courage to do so. This treatment continued for weeks and the questions became more sexual and personal: “do I want some hot chocolate before bed tonight?”; and he began to taunt her sexually, exclaiming that she was “tight” or “frigid”. She found him “overwhelming and pushy” and was made to feel intimidated. The incident was informally reported to the supervisor who reported it to the human resources (HR) manager. The attitude of the manager was very “supportive” and intolerant of his behaviour. The security guard was later forced to resign as, due to the victim’s report, then another girl came forward with a similar story! These facts offered the victim some relief, yet provoked annoyance with herself for not coming forward sooner.

4.3.8. The bell man incident

As customers were waiting for the bell man, who was not around to assist, a female member of staff offered her services to help the guests. The bell man appeared and she was “sarcastically told in front of the guests” that her help was not needed. This incident left her feeling angry as she believed that he had questioned her capabilities due to her gender. As the incident occurred in front of the guests, she felt insulted. Although his behaviour was not particularly threatening, it was “humiliating and degrading” (cf. Lu and Kleiner, 2001). The incident was not reported as she took it upon herself to question the bell man about his “degrading tone and nature”. This confrontation achieved very little; it just caused frustration and resentment.

5. Discussion

Although the findings confirmed the fact that homophobia can act as a discriminatory tool in the hospitality industry workplace, SH was certainly not confined to same sex encounters. In fact, same-sex harassment was either witnessed or experienced with no significant gender differences. Twelve students admitted to having witnessed or experienced SD; all but one of these cases was noted by female British nationals. The discriminator was always male and the person(s) discriminated against was/ were always female (cf. Lu and Kleiner, 2001). The scenarios confirmed that such behaviour was not only a regular occurrence in the majority of the cases but was also deemed threatening or demeaning. Although feelings of inadequacy, anger, frustration, unjustness and humiliation were evident in these scenarios, only half of the incidents were reported to management and just one respondent felt that appropriate remedial action had been taken. Six cases resulted in hostile working environments (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998). When the harasser was male on male, in each case the gay male employee was the ‘victim’, with regular occurrences of abusive or intimidating behaviour; ‘hostile environment SH’ with remarks about clothing or the body was exemplified (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998). Although the students were aware of the legislation protecting them from discrimination, no appropriate action was taken and negativity prevailed (cf. Mims and Kleiner, 1998).

It was clearly evident that women suffered from SD at work whilst men, particularly in roles of greater responsibility and power, carried out the discrimination. Generally SD against females was associated with threats that resulted in feelings of ‘worthlessness’, ‘frustration’, and ‘fear’; notably, Lu and Kleiner (2001) found that 40.4% of women in the hospitality industry had reported SH compared with 17.8% of men. Most of the incidents were regular occurrences, and only 50% were reported with little or no subsequent action being taken to rectify the situation. This reticence to complain or to intervene may be partly due to the service nature of hospitality organisations (Gilbert et al., 1998). The hospitality industry may be prone to incidents of SH due to the ambiguity of “hospitality service” — the unusual hours and conditions of work, the close social interaction with co-workers, supervisors, customers and suppliers, and the importance placed on appearance — which focuses attention on people as sexual beings” (Gilbert et al., 1998, pp. 49–50). Waitresses are deemed particularly susceptible to harassment as they are encouraged to “sell the service” through ‘flirting’; blurring the line between work and social interaction, thus making monitoring harassment more difficult (Lu and Kleiner, 2001). The fact that the position of young female students in the workplace is fairly weak may impact on their confidence in dealing with people in authority (cf. Gilbert et al., 1998). Age, gender and inexperience, therefore, may be the underlying reasons behind incidents not being reported and the consequent lack of action taken. In turn, the older more experienced male harassers may not have perceived their own behaviour to be inappropriate.

Interestingly, all of the cases resulted in a hostile working environment, which itself accounts for 75% of sexual harassment complaints in the restaurant industry (Lu and Kleiner, 2001), perhaps contributing to high turnover rates and psychological distress, which has been linked to 23% of resignations (Gilbert et al., 1998). This fact seemed to be borne out by the data which found that all of the cases resulted in some form of psychological distress, reporting feelings of ‘intimidation’, ‘fear’ and ‘humiliation’. It would appear that there was a strong link between the harassment issues and lack of action taken. Four of the six scenarios ended with either a negative thought or a negative action, implying a lack of effective policy management concerning SD and SH issues. Despite an overall lack of appropriate action, only one person thought that the equal opportunities policy was not being adhered to.

The incidents of homosexual harassment supported the findings of a survey undertaken by the TUC (2000), which reported that the majority of discriminatory behaviour suffered by homosexuals was name calling and homophobic abuse. A prominent theme that arose from the analysis was an association between the lack of appropriate action taken and negativity. As such, 62% of the male workers who have been harassed by another man take no action (Mims and
Kleiner, 1998). This reticence maybe in part due to the management not having considered the seriousness of homosexual harassment or not having acquired the knowledge to handle such situations – or simply due to a fear of ‘coming out’. Nevertheless, Croteau (1996) was not able to provide sufficient evidence to support the claim that greater openness about sexual identity at work may be associated with increased experience of discrimination (including harassment).

6. Conclusions and implications

It is clear from the findings that SH and SD in the hospitality industry are not confined to minority groups; furthermore, same sex SH and SD appear to prevail. Gay culture has undergone many changes, developing from an “adaptation to a bad situation” (Cruikshank, 1992) to a prominent feature of today’s society. Consequently, societal attitudes towards homosexuality have generally become more tolerant, promoted by Stonewall (www.stonewall.org) and the Gay Liberation Front (Tatchell, 2010), who campaigned against discrimination and demonstrated for equal rights for LGBT. However, it is evident that, before the introduction of the new legislation in December 2003, there was no statutory law that protected lesbians and gay men from discrimination in the workplace (see Mims and Kleiner, 1998; Croteau, 1996; TUC, 2000; www.stonewall.org). Although Pease and Pease (1999) challenged the ‘heterocentric’ thinking of society that regarded gay men and lesbians as ‘defective’, claiming that people were more a product of their biology than victims of social stereotypes, evidence from the present study confirms the literature. Clearly, the fact that social stereotyping of homosexuals in the hospitality workplace has led to detrimental psychological consequences, namely ‘internalised homophobia’, which indicates that gay men and lesbians may be at risk from ‘negative psychological outcomes’ (Herek and Greene, 1995; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001). This prejudice is in spite of legislation including the Sex Discrimination Act, Equality Act, and Employment Rights Act (EHRC, 2011a) that attempt to mirror the societal acceptance of homosexuality. Overall, the findings relating to the prevalence and consequences of harassment/discrimination uncovered hostile working environments (Mims and Kleiner, 1998), feelings of intimidation and fear, (Lu and Kleiner, 2001) and the abuse of authority and stress related issues (Gilbert et al., 1998). It appears that SH may centre on heterosexuals harassing homosexuals (cf. www.stonewall.org) and that SD within the hospitality workplace would appear to focus largely on women (cf. Gilbert et al., 1998; Lu and Kleiner, 2001).

6.1. Practical implications

The issues relating to effective policy implementation and procedures when dealing with harassment and discrimination require attention. Firstly, hospitality educational institutions should educate their students about the concept of DM and its application in eliminating discrimination of diverse workers, cohorts and compatriots; students who are working in hospitality companies are advised to employ DM in their daily interactions with their colleagues, managers and customers. DM education can be delivered through a combination of seminar, case studies, desk research, lectures and tutorials; such educational provisions can strengthen the students’ level of tolerance of people with diverse characteristics. In particular, students going on placement should be made fully aware of the potential hazards associated with harassment and discrimination against and by both gay and non-gay persons, and be informed of their statutory rights to pre-empt and counteract workplace harassment, through designated lectures and induction programmes. To combat any fear of reporting incidents, students need to be reassured that the university will support their cases of SH and that they must not be afraid to voice concerns through their academic mentors. Furthermore, it is advised that, in preparation for industrial training, gay male and female students should consult with other gay students who have been on industrial placement about the potential problems they might face.

Because SH and SD may be a problem for female students in particular in the hospitality industry, they should not only be made aware of their legal statutory rights protecting them against any unfair treatment, but also warned about potential risks due to the working conditions in service industries. They should be advised to examine their company’s equal opportunities policy by reading the company handbook then demanding full training and knowledge of the organisational standards and procedures in dealing with harassment and discrimination, in order to protect themselves against any potential liability.

In turn, hospitality managers should learn about DM, DM initiatives and their benefits from experts and non-profit organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education and the Institute of Hospitality. It is important that both local and international hospitality HR managers understand and keep up to date with the applicable local, national, European and international equality legislation against SD and SH so that they can train and educate their subordinates.

Educators and management trainers should include examples of effective and appropriate behaviour for handling different situations using critical incident scenarios, such as those from phase two of the data collection. Ideally, an effective sexual harassment prevention programme should be implemented with a consistent message throughout the organisation regarding SH and SD in addition to continuous on-the-job feedback and appropriate development. Open group discussions or one-to-one meetings with employees should be arranged by managers to ‘air’ any work-related problems. In addition to initial training, employees should be provided with a company handbook that includes advice on dealing and coping with SH and SD and informs them about the relevant internet sites where they can locate the current employment legislation. Furthermore, hospitality managers at different levels should support DM initiatives in their workplaces to cultivate a SD and SH free work environment. Hospitality companies may be able to spread anti-discrimination messages to their customers through marketing and promotion materials and campaigns so as to attract diverse customers and diverse-oriented customers. To prevent any potential SH incident(s) from escalating, employees are encouraged to report them immediately, ideally to their immediate superior or to the HR manager, preferably accompanied by a witness who may or may not have been present during the original incident. If the case is not dealt with quickly and satisfactorily, the employee should complain directly to head office. It is, however, important that employees consult the company handbook regarding their rights as employees and follow the appropriate procedures for complaints. If, following initial confrontation, there is potential for a further incident to occur, the employee should inform the appropriate person immediately to prevent the issue from escalating. Finally, managers are recommended to take and address employees’ and customers’ SD and SH complaints seriously. As one possible area of contention may revolve around the boundaries between work and social interaction; all SH complaints need to be examined in this context as, ultimately, the manager has a responsibility to ensure that staff are supported and protected against unacceptable behaviour from peers, superiors and customers. It is essential that the manager informs the customer if his/her behaviour is causing an employee any distress and, if the behaviour continues, the customer should be removed.
6.2. Theoretical implications

The present paper contributes to knowledge regarding the social identity theory of SH, the four-factor theory of SH and the concept of DM in relation to the hospitality industry. Similar to other industries, the interactions of hospitality workers and customers have resulted in harmony and conflict as revealed in these primary findings. The evidence demonstrated that both gay male and female workers had experienced SD and SH respectively in their hospitality work environment due to ignorance, ego defensiveness and sexism of male colleagues and customers. Such treatment resulted in job dissatisfaction, low work performance, a negative work environment and psychological health outcomes. In addition, the role of customers in the hospitality industry has added a new research dimension in the social identity theory. The gathering, interpretation and analysis of hospitality student workers’ perspectives in the form of narratives has addressed previous criticisms of the four-factor theory that was claimed to focus too much on organisational angles by adding knowledge focusing on the biological, sex-role spillover and social-cognitive contexts. The inclusion of LGBT SH in the hospitality context has added a new dimension to the four-factor theory. Furthermore, the present study has revealed psychological distortion (sleaziness and pervert behaviour) of SH perpetrators’ motives to harass. As such, they acted against their moral constraints to harass their victims. Additionally, the accounts of hospitality student workers may provide an insight into future hospitality managers’ perspectives of SD and SH. With respect to the concept of DM, the present study confirmed the lack of DM knowledge amongst student hospitality workers. It appears that the need for a comprehensive solution, beyond equality legislation, to intervene in SD and SH in the hospitality workplace is inevitable.

7. Limitations and further research

It might be argued that the aims of the present paper were achieved. However, perhaps as there was reticence on the part of the male students to reveal the details of such incidents, the problem of male on female SH came to the fore. For greater representation and increased external validity, it is recommended that a sample frame should be constructed to include an equal number of males and females. Although the use of student workers as data providers saved time and cost, and elicited an appropriate amount of relevant information, their employment was only for 12 months so they had an ultimate means of ‘escape’; in contrast, it was likely that some victims tolerated the SH because they did not want to jeopardise their placement assessment. It is acknowledged that the sample is very small but this study is exploratory. Furthermore, as the subject is extremely sensitive, the data providers were promised anonymity so the truthfulness of the scenarios might be questioned. However, the final year student respondents volunteered some very sensitive information anonymously to a peer whom they trusted; it would appear that there would be nothing for them to gain by being untruthful. The reliability can be tested via a reproduction of the study in several UK universities where hospitality courses with international placements operate. It is also acknowledged that the quantitative sample was too small to provide internally and externally valid results; a larger international sample, including greater representation from minority groups would be necessary in order that further statistical tests could be conducted. The use of emails for phase two of the analysis ensured efficiency in the collection of information. However, in retrospect, perhaps one-to-one telephone interviews would have revealed greater insights into the respondents’ experiences of SD or SH. The study focused on SH and SD in the hospitality workplace in general. Further research identifying the sector of the hospitality organisation itself, for example, restaurant, hotel or public house, and its association with the prevalence of SH and/or SD, would be of interest. Future qualitative research should expand the SD cases to include more experiences of men to allow the exploration of gender differences. Finally, an in-depth, longitudinal study would be of value with persons who had experienced harassment and/or discrimination being monitored over a period of time to determine any of the psychological effects of SH and SD.

References


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