

# Hospitality management



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Originality/value -? Customers are susceptible to subliminal messaging from staff appearance, their empathy and environment. Keywords Hospitality management, Employees, Scotland Paper type Research paper Introduction Contemporary researchers are starting to explore the concept of aesthetic labor (AL). Social scientists have however studied emotional labor (EL) for several decades, for example, Household (1983) and Coffman (1969). The use of AL in the UK may have its roots in the early post World War II proliferation of airline travel when young women were recruited to the then fledgling British Overseas Airline Corporation.

These “ sky girls” as they were known were not only attractive but they also had to be of good complexion, be well poised, have good posture and be well groomed (Mills et al. 2002). Subsequently, some of these attributes are now referred to as generic terms to encapsulate researchers’ definitions of AL. Nicks and Warhorse (2003), Nicks et al. (2005), Warhorse and Thompson (1999) and Payne (2005) provide considerable evidence of AL in various service sector environments. Additionally Espies and Warning’s (2005) work in the study of the sexualities labor force takes on even more significance as this research develops.

As more data were captured from respondents International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research Volvo. 2 No. , 2008 up. 77-85 q Emerald Group Publishing Limited 1750-6182 DOI 10.

1108/17506180810856158 STITCH 78 what became clear is that AL was not perceived to be as politically incorrect a concept as was envisaged.

Instead some respondents went further and alluded to having a sexy workforce operating in sexy environments who captured the imagination of the customer by several means.

This was done by, the permissibility of the worker, the use of corporeal assets and the actual workplace itself. Completing the holistic assault on the senses of the customer was clever use of subtle imagery provided by uniform and emotional empathy, both worn as a costume by the worker. A great deal of previous research has been carried out in the greater Glasgow area of Scotland, however as far as can be ascertained to date, there has been no research on this topic in the Scottish capital.

This investigation was important therefore to determine if there is any evidence of AL in hospitality venues in Edinburgh that mirrored or disputed the results from Glasgow. Previous researchers have considered various definitions of AL: Dean (2004) suggests that, ‘ the aesthetic labor process in reforming is about the need of the employer to conjure particular associations through the use of the workers body/’ Payne (2005) states, “ aesthetic labor includes things like body language, dress sense, grooming, deportment, voice/accent, body shape, demeanor and general stylishness” and Warhorse et al.

2000) address not only style but describe a need for interaction with the customers and importantly staff that can portray the image of the company while appealing to the senses of the customer. The interesting dimension to this particular phenomenon is that there is no clear benefiting of who, either female or male may be considered to be attractive. There are no gauges or

easy assessment templates to assist the researcher in the identification process of possible candidates.

Similarly this research attempts to include both heterosexual and the gay/lesbian scenes to give a broad representation of views and observations. The problem of access to gay social life if not part of it was highlighted by Humphreys (1975) and in this instance is challenging.

Additionally, previous researchers show a reluctance to use the term attractive in defining AL.

However, preceding circumstances may have suggested that the individual might not have to be attractive but perhaps that an emphasis was on a certain look combined with person to person social skills (Warhorse and Thompson, 1999) or grooming and presentation (Payne, 2005). What is of interest in this context however is that while researchers distance themselves from the politically incorrect language of the street, that they have paradoxically perhaps invented a new language of the mode or trendy speak to describe good looking or trendy staff; Oaf (2003) who suggests “looking” to describe these staff.

Subsequently, this research examines the concept of AL and the presentation of self in conjunction with the permissibility of the worker and this is considered in analogous reference to the workplace being similar to a theatrical stage and similarly the permissibility of the workers' body as it may be used by the worker or as directed by the organization.

Household's (1983) theory that some institutions have become very adept at influencing deep acting in the workforce and directing the worker how to imagine and how to feel is explored to assess how the concept of EL may be linked to AL.

Espies and Warning's (2005) account of sexualities labor in South East Asian airlines is taken into account and is of interest as a contemporary contrast to early "sky girls" and how modern advertising may subliminally suggest sex in the mind of the customer.

These concepts become increasingly important as the research unfolds and crucially Downloaded by University Of Surrey At 06: 08 30 December 2014 (P T) links the importance of the so-called aesthetic worker from an appreciation from the customer to the customer interactively buying into and participating in the aesthetic environment. The results therefore appear under the following sections: (1) Background of AL, evidence and tacit/explicit admissions of attractive staff.

Molding of the employee, subordination, parity and subordination. (2) AL – is it attractive, beautiful, stunning or sexy staff? Pose, poise, polish, performance and prettiness.

(3) Permittivity, stage and EL – performance of the individual, transition, how to imagine and how to feel. (4) Aestheticism and the relationship between staff and customers introduction to an aesthetic labor. Method The aim of the research was to ascertain from employers if they target good cooking staff as part of their recruitment strategy.

A series of qualitative semi-structured interviews from a humanist perspective supplied the main source of raw data used in this research. The qualitative approach was taken due to the preference of inductive hypothesis-generating research rather than simply hypothesis testing (Silverman, 2001). This approach was justified as a quantitative approach may have missed the development of the interview observations that included the use of the uniform, the premises and subtle deep acting techniques used by an organization as well as by individuals.

Consequently, the sample was chosen by the selection of a large number of hotels, restaurants and bars that the researcher had never before entered. Managers and HER teams were called and only once was an interview granted did he enter those premises for the first time. Observational notes were made at a later date as to the general layout and ambiance within the premises but it is recognized that these could not form part of the findings with the exception of the introduction of aesthetic labor which was a suggestion made as an antonym to AL.

**Development of aesthetic qualities** The term aesthetic was first used by the eighteenth century German philosopher, Baumgarten who took the phrase from the Greek astronomical meaning, “perception by means of the senses” (Bud, 1998). Hosiers (1969) describes the “aesthetic experience” as may be applicable to objects of nature and human beings while Johnston (1969) defined aestheticism to mean, “Broadly, a devotion to beauty, and to beauty as primarily found in the Arts”.

Anger (1969) adds that works of art are made of sensuous elements but not all sensuous materials will do. Dancer et al. (2000) cite Faculty who describes: “ the art of the self’ from a philosophical viewpoint: . . .

Those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being and to make their life into an oeuvre (work of art) that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.

This research therefore takes these aforesaid basic concepts as preparatory points of reference to begin the investigation. Contemporary commentators suggest that not all people are looking for the same things from their staff, but they are looking for that AL, rocky 79 2, 1 Downloaded by university of surrey At 06: 08 30 December 2014 (PET) 80 [special] something” (Giggle, 2003, cited by Nicks et al. , 2004). In Edinburgh respondent 5 replied that a potential worker was hired immediately because, “ I thought she’s got what it takes to wow people”.

Payne (2005) adds that aesthetic skills are now at a premium within the up-market segments Of service sector industries and that it is, “ the embodied attributes of the bar staff or sales assistant that helps to make the service being offered stylish or trendy”.

Additionally Ball (2004) describes, “ new style workers, working upon themselves in the beatifications of image. ” Nicks and Witt address not only style but describe a need for interaction with the customers and importantly

staff that can portray the image of the company while appealing to the senses of the customer.

Nicks and Warhorse (2003) present the argument that this style of AL is now occupying a niche market and that the relationship between the customer and the worker has now mutated into one of three possible interactions: “employee/customer subordination, parity or subordination”. Therefore, the standard “traditional” interaction between the customer and employee is recognized to have been one, of the employees being inferior to the customer.

This control by the customer is known as subordination.

Parity is acknowledged to happen between meetings of equals where neither the customer nor employee feel subordinate to the other. Subordination is a distinct control or intimidation, when the customer feels out of place, out of depth or uncomfortable by the totality of the images of both the employees and the surroundings where the service encounter is taking place (Nicks ND Warhorse, 2003). This may be seen in many service industries when the customers do feel that the employee may be better dressed, better spoken or even better looking than the customer.

Interestingly, this issue was raised with all respondents and with the exception of one, all suggest parity with the customer.

Respondent 6 states that his staff does not wear name badges because they are expected to strike up conversation with guests naturally and “get to know them”. Similarly respondent 3 states “it’s not a tiered effect, it’s very



much equal”. The one main exception was from respondent 7 who states that his staff would never be subordinate to anyone and “ I won’t let them [staff] take any crap... I’ve always kind of remembered that I’m better than these people”.

His clear inference was that customers coming into his premises were not superior or even equal to the staff but were something else below that description. The reluctance of researchers to use the term attractive when describing certain workers in this context is interesting and whilst taking into account the rather politically incorrect suggestion that employees are recruited for their looks only, was one concept that this researcher was keen to address. Subsequently, all respondents are asked if they recruited attractive staff or if they believed that their staff were attractive.

Respondents were surprisingly candid with their replies.

Respondent 2 replies, “ they’re all quite handsome girls and boys”. This respondent is also asked if he favored attractive people during the interview and he responds “ if they’re in the front line serving customers, especially bar and restaurant, it’s probably a good thing’. Respondent 3 states that “ young and funky, confident and good looking people do really well on the floor, looks good, people are attracted by that” ND respondent 5 suggests that her staff “ are stunning”.

Respondent 7 suggests that all of his staff have to be good looking and that “ these are all very good looking kids, if this was a straight bar I would have all very good looking girls behind the bar’. Pose, poise, polish, performance and prettiness Subsequently, AL would encompass; pose of the worker , this may

be a general first impression of the holistic message that is being transmitted by the individual and would be a broad spectrum image of the body, dress and image.

Poise would be suggested to be important as to how the individual is actually using his/her corporeal qualities, for example the slouching individual does not present the same image as the naturally erect, well carried one.

Polish is important and is a common factor in the image presented to the customer; generally the worker may have worked upon their personal grooming standards to an extent that goes beyond simple cleanliness. Hair may be stylishly coiffures, shaped and/or colored.

Tasteful make up applied (may be both male and female) nails given extra attention and clothing of a high standard, not only by cut but also by care to shape enhancement and eatable accoutrements. Performance is all important and these aesthetic individuals are encouraged to add a sense of drama at appropriate times to the service encounter.

This should be taken to mean however not drama in its purest sense but as a method of engaging the customer more by a mix of the aesthetic image and the emotional attack on the senses of the customer.

The performance will usually be indicative of an act that the worker is engaged in; the stage is the workplace and the customer buys into the act because of the personal show that is put on for him or her only. Finally, retainers is all important; the individual may have a good body shape, good manners, a nice way of interacting with customers but the actual

appearance must be of a pretty, good looking individual. An interesting codicil came from this part of the research.

One concept that was suggested to be of importance was that of the sexualities work force.

Espies and Warning (2005) suggest that this labor force is subliminally marketed to appeal to the us pugnacious of the customer to imply that the staff are sexy or even erotic. Consequently, within this research in Edinburgh, the question of sexiness in Taft started to naturally appear within the interview process and it was us abstinently looked at further in depth with the respondents. Two of the respondents in particular highlighted not only good looking staff but also sexy staff. When pressed further if their staff are sexy they reply, “ yes, young, sexy, attractive” and, “ yes it sells beer”.

One of the most important issues however was that respondent 3 introduced the connection between sexy staff and the sexy brand Of the hotel , “ which is quite funky and quite sexy’. Deep acting within the organization This leads the researcher to look further at the appearance of staff in this environment and in particular the uniforms of the staff and the atmosphere generated by the brand. Household’s (1983) theories that some institutions have developed very sophisticated techniques of deep acting implies an environment that is a catalyst for instigation of how to feel and how to imagine.

This is subsequently taken further by looking at how the brand or organization may influence both the worker and the customer when they meet then in the service encounter. Dean (2004) interestingly suggested <https://assignbuster.com/hospitality-management/>

that née part of the AL process is related to the employer being able to conjure particular associations through the use of the workers body. Battle (1989) viewed participants, physical evidence and process as part of a marketing mix and that “ actors” who play a part in service delivery can influence buyer’s perceptions.

1 Downloaded by university of surrey At 0608 30 December 2014 (PET) 82 Respondents are therefore asked about performance and the stage analogy within their particular organizations. Respondent 1 discussed the movement between back and front of house (within a five star hotel) “ at the back bare alls and then you pass through here and you have chandeliers”. She subsequently describes that movement as being similar to the actor going on stage from behind the curtains, out to the bright lights of the theatre and the audience.

Several other respondents allude to the stage analogy with another stating that “ they [staff] bond with them and they connect with them”. Respondent 13 is an image consultant and discussed how the wearing of uniform affects the wearer, the viewer and the service environment.

This respondent proposes that the worker may use a “ halo effect” to expand the ay that they look and that the uniform may enhance this effect. When shown some photographs of smart female business suits she is asked if they are in any way sexual or sexy.

This respondent indicates that even the wearing Of simple black boots “ almost goes into bondage” and perhaps intriguingly that “ you’d never get it so that it isn’t slightly sexual”. The question then of sexy staff is a concept

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that needs careful consideration. Whereas some respondents may candidly suggest that their staff are sexy, this was an admission of corporate strategy, but for other staff the distinction may not be tie so clear. For those staff who may wear some sort of uniform, this may provoke subliminal thought in some customers that the wearer is sexy, even when the wearer is unaware of it.

This may be caused by the cut of the uniform enhancing wide shoulders, bust, small hips or lengthening of legs. There is therefore the possibility that for some viewers that business suits may always be in some way sexual or that the organization may be utilizing deep acting techniques inspiring certain thoughts and inciting certain acts by clever use of the worker, their uniform and the actual service encounter arena. The guest either feels compelled or readily recognizes and buys into the brand and accepts that the brand requires certain behaviors or actions In response.

When the guest pays to enter a particular hotel, it is on the understanding that he/she will dress in a certain way and behave in an acceptable manner within certain protocols.

The reward for doing so is the appreciation of the possible aesthetically pleasing environment and interaction with the staff. This subsequently leads this researcher to suggest a further catalyst may be involved that invites the customer to more readily buy-in to this particular environment. It is proposed therefore that this final phenomena may be described as the 007 Dynamic.