



An exploratory study on the sexual intimacy of male hotel workers and foreign female tourists



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ABSTRACT

Depending on 47 semi-structured interviews conducted with mostly male hotel workers and participant-observation, this qualitative exploratory study examines sexual intimacy between male hotel workers and female tourists within service interactions in apart (apartment) hotels and starred hotels in Marmaris, Turkey. Drawing on practice theory, this study distinguishes between 'playful' and 'non-playful' service interactions. The findings reveal that playful service interactions enable individuals to interact spontaneously within a wide range of behavioral areas, in contrast to scripted interactions. Hence, playful service interactions enable workers and tourists to build sexual intimacy. Management attitudes to sexual intimacy depend on how service intimacy aligns with the hotel's economic interests.

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1. Introduction

Although there is a wealth of studies on the sexual intimacy of co-workers (see Zelizer, 2009), few studies have examined the issue of sexual intimacy between workers and customers (Cabezas, 2006). In the contemporary world, economic organizations try to build intimacy with their customers (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010). Within intimate service interactions, or service intimacy, workers and customers can socialize with each other within "proximity, warmth, spontaneity and trust" (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010: 28). Service intimacy can overlap, or lead to sexual intimacy (Andrews et al., 2007; Cabezas, 2006). The tourism context is suitable for addressing sexual intimacy. Addressing mostly female tourists' non-commercial and consensual sexual intimacy, "sex in tourism" studies highlight that the tourism context, as an escape from everyday life, encompasses its own normative aspects and loosens everyday norms. Thus, thanks to the anonymity and freedom of being on holiday, female tourists can engage in more sexual relations, either with their partners or with strangers (Berdychevsky et al., 2013a; Berdychevsky et al., 2013b).

Several scholars note that male tourism workers and female tourists can be sexually intimate (Cabezas, 2006; Scheltena, 2014). Hotels have unique aspects for addressing the sexual intimacy of hotel workers and tourists, because workers and tourists may inter-

act twenty-four hours a day over several days within a wide range of services—accommodation, food and beverage (F&B), entertainment (Cabezas, 2006: 509). However, we know little about the organizational aspects of the sexual intimacy of workers and tourists; for instance, Cabezas underlines that previous studies, surprisingly, "have ignored sexual encounters between hotel workers and guests" (2006: 509). Organizational aspects of these relations may embrace the physicality and spatiality of hotel spaces, the division of labor, and the management policy on the social quality of the interactions (Crang, 1997; Shamir, 1978). Addressing the aforementioned aspects requires going beyond determining "the sheer presence or absence" of intimate relations, instead highlighting their intersections with "organizational configurations" (Zelizer, 2009: 48). Analyzing service interactions can achieve this endeavor, since worker-tourist sexual intimacy emerges within these interactions (Scheltena, 2014).

This exploratory study addresses how service interactions in apart hotels (AHs) and starred hotels (SHs) in Marmaris—a sun-sea-sand (sex) tourism destination in Turkey—are related to male hotel workers' sexual intimacy with Western female tourists. In this study, "sexual intimacy" refers to diverse playful embodiments of sexuality in the public spaces of hotels between workers and tourists, encompassing flirting, sexual humor, and sexual bantering (Williams et al., 1999). Moreover, sexual intimacy embraces embodiments of consensual sexual desires such as intercourse, touching, and kissing (Berdychevsky et al., 2013b: 145) between workers and tourists in private spaces.

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In Marmaris, where the research data was collected, most hotels are AHs or SHs (Tataroğlu, 2006). AHs are small informal organizations, where tourists pay only the accommodation fees in advance. AHs provide the equipment for tourists to cook in their rooms. SHs are like enclavic spaces (Edensor, 2000); they are bigger than AHs and mostly use all-inclusive systems where tourists pay all the holiday expenses in advance (Tataroğlu, 2006). As Tataroğlu remarks, the difference between AHs and SHs “are well beyond the service they provide and the physical conditions they possess, for they are more of a cultural and social nature” (2006: 130). This study addresses this difference within service interactions in AHs and SHs, and relates service interactions to sexual intimacy.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism and hospitality service interactions

Hospitality service interactions can be playful and non-playful (Guerrier and Adib, 2000). Ritzer and Liska (1997) note that service interactions in the hospitality sector are non-playful, with an emphasis on rationalization, embracing “efficient, predictable, calculable and controlled” services. Non-playful service interactions are “boundary-closed” (Mars and Nicod, 1984, quoted in Siehl et al., 1992). They mostly hinder the unfolding of spontaneous affects and expressions for workers; for instance, in non-playful interactions workers are required to please customers even when they do not feel like doing so (see Hochschild, 1983). Moreover, because some tourism work is sexualized, the workers are required to tolerate sexual banter and harassment (Poulston, 2008).

However, the conceptualization of hospitality service interactions as being non-playful does not reflect the full story (Crang, 1997). Wang structurally differentiates modernity into Logos-modernity and Eros-modernity (2000: Chapter 2). Whereas Logos-modernity embraces rationalization, control, efficiency, order, and work, Eros-modernity is about emotion, sociality, intimacy, play, and sexuality. The relationship between Logos-modernity and Eros-modernity is “dialectical and complementary” (Wang, 2000: 27). Because Logos-modernity may produce alienating and dehumanizing effects for individuals, Logos-modernity also produces Eros-modernity. Eros-modernity embraces approved zones in which individuals search for intimacy, play, sociality, and sexuality, and tourism is one of the essential approved zones (Wang, 2000). For instance, tourist practices provide a considerable degree of anonymity and freedom for sexual intimacy (Berdychevsky et al., 2013a,b). However, within tourist practices, intimacy between individuals is not restricted to sexual intimacy. Wang notes that tourists can form friendships and socialize with each other beyond their social status (2000: 69–70). Wang (2000) does not stress if worker-tourist interactions can be intimate. However, his analysis can be extended to worker-tourist playful interactions.

As tourists may seek sociality, intimacy, spontaneity, and hospitality within the tourism experience (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010; Shamir, 1978), the standardization of the worker-tourist interactions can backfire and “devalue the product” (Crang, 1997: 140). Moreover, the co-presence of workers and tourists in service interactions necessitates some tourism work to be like play, which embraces practicing “the bodily pleasures and forms of sociality appropriate to the setting”, such as “swimming, dancing, drinking, flirting” etc. (Crang, 1997: 151). Playful service interactions are “boundary open” (Mars and Nicod, 1984, quoted in Siehl et al., 1992); they blur the distinction between worker and customer, and they are more “expressive than instrumental” (Price and Arnould, 1999). Within playful interactions, workers and customers can “transcend commercial transaction boundaries” and build intimacy

(Price et al., 1995: 85). “Customer orientation” in the hospitality sector (Korczynski, 2002) also enables certain workers to befriend tourists (Cabezas, 2006; Crick, 2002). Playful worker-tourist interactions embrace service intimacy, but this intimacy may turn into sexual intimacy (Cabezas, 2006; Crick, 2002).

2.2. Hotels as sites for sexual intimacy between workers and tourists

Being synonymous with sex, freedom and play (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006), hotels may be spaces of anonymity and sexual freedom (see Berdychevsky et al., 2013c); they are among the main spaces where workers and tourists build sexual intimacy (Cabezas, 2006). However, when analyzing worker-tourist sexual intimacy, merely addressing the hotel’s provision of anonymity and freedom to tourists is inadequate (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006: 765, 768). Since tourists interact with others in tourism contexts, tourists are not completely devoid of surveillance and social norms (Berdychevsky et al., 2013a; Jordan, 2008). Pritchard and Morgan underline that hotels cannot be conceptualized simply “as liminal spaces; but also contested spaces, where employees and guests are subject to surveillance and scrutiny” (2006: 768).

To conceptualize hotels as contested spaces requires addressing service interactions in and within hotels (see Jordan, 2008). In hotels, service interactions pertain to diverse normative and affective aspects in terms of appropriate ends, affects, and activities (Korczynski, 2002; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006: 768–769). Moreover, materiality and the spatial organization of the hotel mediate worker-tourist interactions in terms of how proximate tourists and workers are, how frequently they make contact, and “service intensity”, which refers to the range of services in which they interact (Conlon et al., 2004; Shamir, 1978: 300).

For instance, big enclavic SHs—where rationalized and efficient interactions are privileged (Edensor, 2000)—provide a wide range of service to tourists, with a strict division of labor.

They are also “self-contained” spaces with rich material facilities, including swimming pools, beaches, several bars, restaurants, and recreation spaces with high standards (Edensor, 2000: 329). Within these enclaves, workers and tourists may not build intimacy, as they meet each other rarely within a limited range of services (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010; Shamir, 1978).

On the other hand, in small hotels, because of the limited size of the hotel and the blurred division of labor, the same worker and same tourist may meet frequently; also, the single worker can deliver a wide range of services, such as taking orders, delivering food, entertaining tourists (Conlon et al., 2004; Shamir, 1978). These factors enable worker-tourist interactions to be playful, embracing intimacy, sociality, and having fun (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010; Crick, 2002; Tataroğlu, 2006).

However, addressing service interactions merely within the size of the hotel may be misleading (Wood, 1994: 75). Since the hotel is a configuration of diverse spaces and practices, service interactions differ within the hotel. For instance, in the resort hotel, the pool is the space “of conviviality, hedonism and relaxation”, where individuals enjoy being together in an easy atmosphere (Pons, 2009: 98). The entertainers and tourists enact this atmosphere within playful service interactions (Crick, 2002; Pons, 2009: 100–101). In contrast to the easy atmosphere of the pool, the hotel lobby has a formal atmosphere with “rational socialization” (Pons, 2009: 94), embracing “brief tasks” such as check-ins, check-outs, solving problems, etc.

Cabezas notes that in Cuban all-inclusive hotels some “[w]orkers are recruited to provide sexualized care services, ‘friendliness, subservience, and flirting’” (2006: 515). Cabezas remarks that those workers, especially entertainers, whose work activities embrace play, should keep a boundary between “safe flirting and sex-

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