The Interlocking of Gender with Nationality, Race, Ethnicity and Class: the Narratives of Women in Hotel Work

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Whilst gender in the workplace is has been extensively researched, investigation into how gender interacts with other factors such as ethnicity and class has been less explicitly considered. This article explores the interlocking of gender with other categories such as class, ethnicity, race and nationality in the context of hotel work. It draws on the narratives of women describing their experiences of working in hotels. Findings from this empirically based examination suggest that gendered and other representations at work are not constructed as a process of adding difference on to difference, where categories are considered as separate and fixed. Instead, what emerges is a negotiation of the many categories shaping identities at work, which exist simultaneously and shift according to context.

Keywords: gendered identities, hotel work, intersectionality

Introduction

In considering the nature of gendered identities, there is a growing wish to 'expos[e] the alleged uniformity of gender' (Gherardi, 1995, p. 19) and an interest in exploring the multiplicity and diversity of gendered identities in organizations. It is increasingly recognized that gendered identities are not fixed or unitary but are constructed through complex social processes and practices (Butler, 1990; Collinson, 1992; Gherardi, 1995). The simultaneous and shifting nature of gendered identities has been particularly examined within analysis of masculinities in organizations, Collinson and Hearn suggesting that:

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. . . analyses need to reflect and explore the dynamic, shifting and often contradictory social relations and identities through which men's differences, and their perceptions of differences, are reproduced and transformed in organisational practices and power asymmetries. (1994, p. 9)

Gender as a concept can be analysed separately from others, but in practice, gender is played out in conjunction with other categories. In the extensive literature on women's experience of work, little attention has been paid to the ways in which other aspects of identity such as nationality, race, ethnicity or social class impinge on women's construction of their experience. Part of the endeavour to explore the concept of gender as simultaneous and shifting necessitates its study in relation to these other categories.

    This article explores the narratives of women at work within operative level jobs in the hotel industry. This industry, in line with the wider hospitality industry, employs a substantial proportion of women (Lucas, 1995; Purcell, 1993). There have been many studies that explore the experience of women in jobs in the hospitality and wider leisure industry (Adkins, 1995; Hall, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Hughes and Tadic, 1998; Leidner, 1993). The fact, however, that the modern hotel typically has a diverse workforce — men and women from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds serving an equally diverse range of guests — has been relatively neglected by researchers. In addition, hotels are structured around a range of work roles that carry different expectations about gender, race, ethnicity and class. This diverse environment facilitates a discussion of the way gender identity interlocks with other categories in the context of work.

The construction of gender identities as shifting and interlocking with other categories

While the relation of gender to other categories such as race, ethnicity, class and nationality is still under-researched, theorization is developing in disciplines such as cultural studies, critical race theories, labour process theories and feminist theories. This article outlines theories that explore how gender interlocks with other categories in order to shed light on the construction of gendered identities within the narratives of particular organizational members.

Essentialism and the concept of difference

The concept of difference has been significant in theorization on the diversity of identities. In attempting to avoid essentialism, we can deal with diversity simply by fragmenting identities into multiple divisions: white women,

Asian women, black women, bourgeois women, proletariat women, lesbian women, heterosexual women, mothers, non-mothers, urban women, rural women, and so on. However, rather than counteracting essentialism, this approach may, in fact, reduce identities to categories that are in danger of implying a fixed or naturalized notion. Guillaumin (1995) warns of the dangers of theorization on the basis of difference and explains that we can succeed in avoiding the trap of essentialism only by making explicit the processes of social construction that identify groups as different.

Theorists have drawn attention to the significance of the dualistic nature of differentiation. Hall explains:

> . . . identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation of the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term — and thus its identity — can be constructed (1996a, pp. 4–5; original emphasis).

This theory is expanded in the work of Said (1978) who uncovers the relational identity between Orientalism and the west. Said examines how western representations ascribe difference to other places and cultures. He argues that in the process of negation, by identifying what is different; what is not, one simultaneously identifies what is. So, by identifying what the Other is, the west identifies what *it* itself is. The construction of the Orient within Eurocentric culture therefore reaffirms the sense of what is European and western.

Said also argues that an ascription of difference is an ascription of reduction (1978). By ascribing difference to the Orient, it is reduced to a relational identity to the west and it loses a meaning in its own right. This reduction also brings with it a notion of an essentialist, fixed and unchanging identity. The ascription of difference acts, therefore, as a power relation, relying on a dualistic relationship of one 'thing' to another and constructed within a particular context which carries specific sets of cultural assumptions.

In the theorization of identity, critiques of essentialism reveal the dangers of interpreting identity as a set of separate and fixed differences added incrementally one to another. These theories help identify two main aspects of the process of social construction of identity, namely that identity construction is both relational and contextual. It is relational in the sense that identity construction engages in Othering, a process which assumes a relationship of one identity to another. Identity construction is contextual in that the context in which this process occurs shapes the meanings, expectations and roles that particular identities carry. The relational and contextual aspects of gendered identities are explored in this article through the narratives of particular workers in the hotel context.

The interlocking of race with other categories

Like theorization on gender, critical race theorists and cultural studies theories reject the liberal notion that interprets race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation as separate and essentialist categories (Alfieri, 1997; Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995; Delgado, 1995). Within these disciplines the notion of intersectionality has been developed to describe the interconnections and interdependence of race with other categories. Critical race theorists emphasize the significance of what they term the intersectionality of social and cultural categories within systems of representations that construct racial and gendered stereotypes (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995).

Black cultural political theories, in particular in the work of Hall, describe the need for the recognition that the category 'black' is a politically and culturally constructed category used to represent a diverse range of positionalities in relation to social experience and cultural identities. Hall explains:

> . . . the end of the essential black subject also entails a recognition that the central issues of race is always historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender and ethnicity (1996b, p. 444).

Hall calls for a new politics of representation that displaces hitherto stable political categories and avoids the pitfalls of essentialism and reductionism.

Brah (1996) believes that gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and nationality are analytical categories that represent types of power relation and partly form identity. She argues that 'the idea of power holds that individuals and collectivities are simultaneously positioned in social relations constituted and performed across multiple dimensions of differentiation: that these categories always operate in articulation' (1996, p. 242). The intersection of these specific types of power relation produces 'a space of/for theoretical crossovers that foreground processes of power inscribing these interrelationalities; a kind of *theoretical creolisation*' (Brah, 1996, p. 210; original emphasis).

The concept of intersectionality helps to create a theoretical space for analysing the interlocking of political categories. It also avoids essentialism and enables the significance of context to be explored. Intersectionality does not, however, remain a merely theoretical concept: it is also played out in practice. This article provides, through the narratives of individual workers, empirical examples of how the crossovers of gender with race, ethnicity and class are articulated in particular workplaces. Brah explains the significance of this type of investigation as follows:

> What is of interest is how these fields of power collide, enmesh and configure; and with *what effects*. What kinds of inclusions or exclusions does a *specific articulation of power* produce? That is, what patterns of equity or inequality are inscribed; what modes of domination or subordination are

facilitated; what forms of pleasure are produced; what fantasies, desires, ambivalence and contradictions are sanctioned; or what types of political subjects positions are generated by the operations of given configurations of power? (Brah 1996, p. 248; original emphasis).

In our exploration of this data we explore the ways in which the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and class are articulated. This article does not deal with the material effects of these interconnections, but rather the ways in which these are played out in the narratives of respondents. This article, therefore, explores through empirical data how gendered identities intersect with other categories in the context of hotel work.

The interlocking of gender with other categories

Whilst the term 'intersectionality' is particularly used within discussions on race, the construction of gendered identities and its relationship with other categories is explored within some feminist analysis.

Dual systems theories have engaged in the interconnections between different systems of oppression, such as those relating to patriarchy and capitalism, to provided a structural analysis of the dual inequality of gender and class (Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Walby, 1986). These theories have been crucial in contextualizing the analysis of gender inequalities within a particular historical, social, political and economic setting.

At the level of the workplace, students of work have often analysed the interrelationship between gender identities and class. Studies such as Cockburn's analysis of printers and masculinity (1983) and Pollert's study of women and factory work (1981), for example, usefully acknowledge the interconnections of class and gender identities. These theories have, however, been criticized for implying that the systems of inequality are distinct from each other. Collinson and Hearn suggest that 'the problem here is that dual systems theory must inevitably treat patriarchal and capitalist relations as somehow outside each other' (1996, p. 63).

Deconstructionist theories have also been influential. They provide a critique of particular types of identity politics and highlight the discursive construction of identities. They have enabled a debate over categories such as 'woman' and a rejection of the binary assumptions underlying identity politics of masculine and feminine, even within feminism. Such theorization warns against separating out 'gender' from its constitutive context in order to analyse it as though it were a separate category. For the purpose of this article, these arguments help to highlight the need for theorization of gender, not simply as a separate category that connects with other separate categories, but interlocked with race and class, for instance, as a *fusion*. Butler explains:

[i]f one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered 'person' transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (1990, p. 3)

The individual as subject in the process of constructing identity

Empirical studies of the construction of identity in organizations are developing. In particular, critical labour process theorists examine the construction of identity, subjectivity and belonging to a workplace, from the point of view of the individual as subject. For example, Collinson argues for a need to consider 'power as a positive as well as negative, and workers as subjects as well as objects of *class* and *gender* relations' (1992, p. 38; original emphasis). His perspective considers human beings simultaneously as both subjects and objects, so that, while individuals are shaped by institutional arrangements of power, they also make sense of these and their position within this context.

Collinson's work on masculinities explores the investment of workers in particular gendered and class discourses in a specific organizational setting (1992). He argues that this investment represents an individual's existentialist search to secure a unitary identity. Collinson's theory suggests that the contested nature of identity may be to do with the complex nature of 'being', that is of being both part of and separate from the world around. Individuals attempt to make sense of the multiple social positions that they inhabit. For the purpose of this article, therefore, analysing how respondents, as subjects and objects of organizational context, construct meaning through narratives allows for an exploration of the systems of representation that shape identities.

One significant concept developed by critical labour process theorization is that of resistance (Collinson, 1992; Jermier *et al.*, 1994). What constitutes resistance has become an interesting debate (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Jermier *et al.*, 1994). However, a broad definition is offered as 'small-scale and informal means by which workers counter managerial control of the workplace' (Edwards *et al.*, 1995, p. 283). In the process of examining workers' narratives and how they make sense of their position within organizations, the concept of resistance is a useful analytical tool for identifying the transformative power of individuals' narratives. With respect to identity construction within workers' narratives, resistance to organizational arrangements of power needs to be considered. However, as the critical literature on resistance argues, the multiplicity of the types of resistance and the contradictory nature

of resistance itself suggests that workers' resistance can both reproduce as well as transform organizational arrangements and work role expectations.

The significance of the workplace setting in the process of identity construction

The organizational context in which identities are constructed is significant. Collinson and Hearn argue that place is significant to the exploration of shifting masculinities as follows:

> Multiplicity and diversity are relevant not only to the analysis of masculinity, but also to the different forms and locations of workplaces — the sites of work of masculinity. These sites will vary, for example, according to occupations, industry, culture, class and type of organization. These multiple masculinities interconnect with multiple sites. (1996, p. 66)

Placing this research within the location of hotels provides an empirical example of gender construction in a new setting, since hotel work has not previously been analysed in this way. Empirically informed studies of the complex ways in which gender is represented, constructed, reproduced and transformed within institutional arrangements help to examine the contingent nature of gender. This article analyses the representations of gender attempting to explore these in relation to institutional arrangements of hotels.

To the extent that hotels provide a 'home away from home' by offering essentially domestic services on a commercial business, hotel work may be regarded as quintessentially women's work (Novarra, 1980) where traditional gender roles at home are mirrored at work. However, as Purcell (1993) points out, hotel work is stigmatized because of its associations with personal servitude. Indeed much hotel work may be regarded as carrying a social taint because of this and thus may be defined as 'dirty work' (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Hughes, 1958). Women may predominate in certain hotel jobs, not so much because they are regarded as particularly appropriate for women, but because these jobs are regarded as appropriate only for those disadvantaged in the labour force. Certainly, the largest proportions of female workers are found in the lowest skill, lowest status and 'dirtiest' hotel jobs. Thus, men tend to be employed as managers or in craft or semi-skilled position (such as chefs), whilst women are found in 'operative positions': chambermaids, cleaners, waiting and bar staff, unskilled cooks and kitchen hands (Bagguley, 1990; Lucas, 1995).

The hotel workforce is, however, a diverse one in many ways. It comprises, for example, a high proportion of ethnic minority workers and migrant workers (Lucas, 1995). One writer who, at least, speculates about this relationship between race, ethnicity and gender within hotel work is Adkins (1995). In her study of customer service work in the hospitality and leisure industries in the UK, she suggests that black women may be

under-represented in such work because they cannot be represented as sexually attractive to (white, male) customers in the way that white women can. Thus white faces and white bodies are on show whilst black faces and bodies are kept behind the scenes.

This article focuses particularly on two categories of hotel work: the roles of receptionists and chambermaids. Both these jobs are undertaken predominantly by women. Reception work may be constructed as women's work in that it requires a substantial amount of emotional labour. The physical appearance and presentation of a woman on reception is important; she should be friendly, helpful and sexually attractive. If Adkins' proposition is correct, this is not just women's work but also white women's work.

By contrast, there is no assumption that chambermaids should deliver emotional labour or present an attractive appearance: indeed the maid is expected instead to be invisible or a 'non-person' (Goffman, 1959) who goes about her work without disturbing the guest. Chambermaiding is women's work to the extent that it is regarded as requiring domestic skills for which women are inherently skilled (Kinnaird *et al.*, 1994). No attempt seems to have been made to reconstruct this work as requiring male skills when undertaken in the commercial rather than the domestic setting, as happened with food service and food preparation. It is 'dirty work', in Hughes' terms (1958) in that it carries both a social and a physical taint — clearing up after guests. Whilst statistics are difficult to find, ethnic minority and migrant workers are clustered in the lowest graded work in the hospitality industry (Lucas, 1995) and it is common to find that all the chambermaids in a hotel are drawn from the same ethnic minority or migrant group. While reception work is 'respectable' women's work, therefore, chambermaiding is not constructed merely as women's work, but as work to be undertaken only by certain groups of women.

Methodology

This article is an exploratory study leading on from an earlier qualitative investigation into the harassment of hotel workers. In the course of the initial research, respondents were encouraged to discuss aspects of their job they considered significant: gender was of particular interest to many of them. This article draws on the narratives of four respondents from a total of 15 in the initial study. They were chosen to represent accounts of how the respondents felt positioned in terms of gender, race, nationality, ethnicity and class by both guests and co-workers.

The respondents are hotel management students from a London university, recently returned from a one-year industrial placement working in hotels as part of their degree requirements and who were all invited to participate in the study. The respondents took part on a voluntary basis. The

interviewer was a researcher who was not a member of the lecturing staff and was not previously known to the students. It was thought this measure would enable the interviews to be placed outside of the student/lecturer context, in order to avoid students reporting what they might feel the lecturer wanted to hear. In addition, the interviewer would not, in the future, be involved in any aspect of the respondents' degrees. The interview involved an audio-taped private one-to-one interaction between the respondent and the interviewer conducted at the university.

Because the initial topic under investigation was the harassment of hotel workers, it was thought that interviewing, rather than observation, was the most appropriate qualitative method of collecting data on any incidents, experiences or thoughts regarding the issue of harassment in the workplace. The setting of the university, rather than the workplace, also helped to enable respondents to discuss this sensitive topic without fear of retaliation.

The respondents worked as 'normal' operative staff: receptionists, waitresses, chambermaids and reservation staff as well as in duty management in hotels in the UK and abroad, ranging from two and five-star hotels. All the respondents in this study are in their 20s, except for one who is in her 40s.

The group of respondents in this study does not form a representative sample of hotel workers. In particular, their status as management students may affect their relationship with other workers as well as their interpretation of their experiences. Other studies have examined the use of students as respondents (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996; Folgerø and Fjeldstad, 1995). The respondents' complex identities, in terms of employee status and other politically marked characteristics, form part of the diversity of types of workers in the hotel industry. Indeed this industry attracts a young and diverse workforce, particularly in terms of ethnic background. As well as being young, the respondents come from a range of nationalities, ethnicities and racial backgrounds. In addition, their relatively short period of employment in the workplace reflects the high mobility of many hotel workers.

The interviews were semi-structured, using open-ended questions that covered chosen themes. The interview started with a general discussion about the work, the workplace and management styles. There followed a discussion on the respondent's interaction with customers, any incidents of problem customers, the 'performance' involved in providing emotional labour within the service encounter, the dress code and significance of appearance and whether flirting was part of the job in any way. Respondents were encouraged to share stories about how they dealt with customers and the coping strategies they developed when dealing with difficult incidents or demanding customers as well as if and how they found support amongst other workers and managers. They were then asked whether there had been any incidents in which they might have felt uncomfortable within the service encounter, if they had ever felt unsafe, badly treated or harassed.

The interview ended with a discussion regarding any harassment that might be suffered. Specific questions about gender were asked in relation to the gender mix amongst workers and whether respondents felt that being a man or woman affected their job. In addition, as mentioned above, gender was a recurring theme throughout much of the narratives gathered from these interviews.

The study does not take a pure grounded theory approach since the interview was semi-structured in relation to pre-set themes and the analysis is not based on linguistic discourse analysis. Instead, this article takes a narrative analysis approach, using the narratives of respondents as empirical evidence from which sociological information can be drawn (Franzosi, 1998). The incidents presented here have been selected because they raise issues that were felt to take the debate on the subject of gendered identities into new areas. Teasing out common threads, this article explores theoretical issues related to gendered identities from specific narratives in relation to a particular context. It analyses how particular respondents construct meanings relating to gender through the narratives collected. In the first instance, the analysis was initiated by following the thematic structure of the interview design. As the evolutionary process of analysis developed, the relationships between themes evolved. The analysis became more complex as the authors attempted to link the empirical information from the data to theories on the contingent nature of representations of gender. Initially focusing on the contested nature of identity in relation to gender, the interconnections of gender with ethnicity, nationality, race and class became the overriding theme of the article.

The narratives

The narratives presented relate to experiences of women workers in relation to two categories of hotel job: that of the chambermaid and that of the receptionist. Both these roles are feminized but they carry very different expectations about the type of woman undertaking them and therefore provide examples of the complex ways in which race, nationality, and class interconnect with gender in the representations of women workers. The first narrative provides an example of how one individual makes sense of her position working as a chambermaid and uses nationality to differentiate between workers. Amy, a white British trainee in her early 20s, who worked as a chambermaid in Guernsey, explains:

> I hated housekeeping, because all the staff working in housekeeping were Portuguese and we didn't get on, they didn't speak English to me . . . [they] basically had this impression that all English girls are tarts . . . they just think they're slappers basically . . . It was just the way they are with

all English girls really, unless they get to know you socially, which they
don't cause actually they don't mix with you, . . . it's the 'them and us'
thing, you know, they live together: they associate with Portuguese people;
and then there are the English.

Amy's narrative highlights how, in this all-female environment, she sees
nationality as the main category through which chambermaids are differen-
tiated and form separate groups. The housekeeping context in which Amy
finds herself makes her feel that she does not fit in. She also wishes to be
treated differently due to her status as management trainee, as she describes
when recounting a conversation she had with her manager:

I said basically I wasn't meant to be a cleaner and I was a management
trainee.

Amy's narrative illustrates how she constructs her identity as distinct from
the other chambermaids using nationality (British, not Portuguese) and occu-
pational class (management trainee, not chambermaid) as the two categories
that mark her out. This example reflects the complex processes involved in
identity building and differentiation within an all-female environment. The
categories of nationality and class are used within Amy's narrative to nego-
tiate Otherness and to make sense of who she is in relation to her colleagues.

Amy sees herself as a traveller in a strange world just as much as if she
was working in an all-male environment. In fact, drawing on Gherardi's
analysis of women in predominantly male work groups, Amy could be
described as the 'snake in the grass' (Gherardi, 1995, p. 109). She appears to
construct herself as an outsider who refuses to conform to what is expected
of her in this situation. Certainly Amy's narrative suggests that she is
'passing through' housekeeping: this is a transitional phase to better things
and that she does not belong in housekeeping.

Amy also reports her colleagues as describing English women as 'tarts'
or 'slappers', that is 'dirty' women. This put-down is clearly gendered.
However, it also interlocks with other categories. A connection is made, in
this example, between sexual availability and nationality. The juxtaposition
of 'English' to 'tart' suggests that what makes a woman a tart is her
'Englishness'. Amy highlights this intersection between gender and nation-
ality in her narrative. According to Amy's narrative, the Portuguese maids
describe someone as a tart according to their nationality. It is also interesting
that, in relation to a job which may be defined as 'dirty work' (Ashforth and
Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1958) it carries a physical and social taint, Amy recalls
a put-down which relates to Hughes' third form of taint: moral taint.

In this example of an all-female environment, gender is used in conjunc-
tion with nationality and class to form a variety of ways in which this cham-
bermaid represents herself and other chambermaids. We see the tensions in
workers' representations of themselves and others. Amy is a management

trainee doing a 'dirty' low-status job. She also relates to a culturally differ-
ent group to that of the other chambermaids. She both represents herself and,
in turn, reports being represented by the others, as different. Interestingly in
an all-female environment, whilst the insult used to denigrate the Other is
gendered, nationality is the discerning factor that separates and excludes one
worker from the rest.

The issue of resistance is significant in Amy's rejection of an organiza-
tionally ascribed identity as low-status. Edwards *et al*. explain how resistance
practices can be a means through which 'employees often begin to construct
an alternative, more positive sense of self, dignity and identity to that pro-
vided, prescribed or circumscribed by the organization' (1995, p. 284). Amy's
narrative indeed rejects the ascribed organizational identity of chamber-
maids. She does, however, appear to want to be ascribed the organizational
identity of management trainee and therefore her narrative resists one type
of organizational identity in favour of another. Particularly by using of the
word 'cleaner', Amy's reported narrative to her manager suggests that she
is not best suited to do 'dirty' work but instead she would be better employed
doing something more 'respectable'.

In examining worker resistance to managerial control, critical labour
process theorists have observed the contradictory nature of resistance and its
often intrinsic link with consent (Collinson 1992; Edwards *et al.*, 1995). The
rejection within Amy's narrative of any identification with other maids rep-
resents, on the one hand, outward resistance to managerial control. However
on the other hand, this resistance also implies consent to the idea that the
context of chambermaiding is low-status.

In the interview Amy takes the opportunity to reaffirm her difference and
her unsuitability to housekeeping. Her use of the phrase 'them and us' rein-
forces her sense that she belongs in a separate camp to the chambermaids.
Her narrative implies in fact that she, as separate to the other chambermaids,
belongs with 'them'. We can conjecture that she may think that she belongs
with the people working in the front-of-house who interact with the guests,
rather than the chambermaids, who are hidden from view, foreign and not
skilled enough to be interacting with guests. In addition, it might be that
the very sexualized insult Amy recounts as referring to English women is a
reference to the flaunting of sexuality insidiously present in the job of
receptionist, a job in which mainly white English women are employed.

The issue of status and race or ethnicity is highlighted in the second
example relating to chambermaids. Pauline, a Jamaican woman in her 40s
who was the first black receptionist in an exclusive five-star London hotel,
described the following incident:

> When I worked there I was asking things about colour . . . because when
> I started of course all the maids were black. . . . And a couple of them said
> to me, 'Oh you're going to be our new housekeeper'; so I said, 'No, actu-

ally, I'm gonna be working in reception'. . . . And they said 'Oh! How long
has that taken?' so that prompted me to ask Beverley [Pauline's immedi-
ate manager], 'Is there any reason why you've never had a black recep-
tionist?' . . . She explained to me that she had never really thought about
it to any degree, but she said, 'I must say that when you came for your
interview and I wanted to offer you the job, Mr. X [the general manager],
he said 'I would love to employ her straight away but I just want to toss
something up with the Head of Housekeeper. How do you think her life
would be with the other girls, with the maids?' That was his concern,
which I thought was quite interesting . . . a black person in reception; there
were all the black maids: would they try to make life a bit uncomfortable
— in a way like, I would almost be seen as some sort of traitor: what
was I doing there, why wasn't I in housekeeping? That was his concern,
because they are quite a vociferous lot of girls, I mean, they say what they
think.

Pauline's example, like Amy's, illustrates the expectations regarding who
does what in the context of hotel work. They reflect the observation within
hospitality literature that ethnic minority women are less likely to be
employed front-of-house or in customer contact jobs in the service industry
(Adkins, 1995; Bagguley, 1987; Lucas, 1995). They also reflect the common
practice that women workers from ethnic minorities are more prominent in
jobs in which they are required to be nearly invisible to the customer. This
may involve undertaking 'dirty' tasks such as cleaning, as in the role of
chambermaids.

   The intersectionality of gender with race in Pauline's account of what hap-
pened when she entered reception appears to provide her with a sense that
she does not quite belong there. Applied to Gherardi's analysis of women
entering male occupations, Pauline's account of her experience indicates she
identifies herself as a guest in a friendly culture (1995). Whilst she reports
being welcomed in her new environment at reception by the managers, who
she recalls expressing warmth at her arrival, she also recounts how they had
made an exception in letting her work there. Her story describes being wel-
comed in as different and as an exception, based on her colour.

   Pauline's example, therefore, illustrates how, within a female dominated
working environment, the category of race is used to differentiate female
workers. It appears from Pauline's narrative that race is the salient issue with
regards to how she reports being identified in relation to others. It is her dif-
ferent colour that overrides her gender in raising questions regarding her
suitability for the job of receptionist.

   In addition, the interconnection of gender to race is interlocked with a
third category of class. This is apparent in Pauline's report that the maids
believed her to be the new housekeeper; that is to say, their boss, rather
than another chambermaid. Pauline's demeanour suggests a middle-class

background. Pauline, therefore, describes herself as being differentiated by her class from the chambermaids,. This incident suggests there are multiple connections between gender, race, class and group belonging and provides an example of the multiple, simultaneous and shifting nature of identity construction. In one context, that of receptionists, Pauline is considered different because of her race, while in another she is different because of her class. The multiple and shifting nature of identity is also evident in the ambivalent feelings Pauline herself expresses about her position in relation to others. In particular, her choice of the word, 'traitor', suggests that she may feel some ambivalence towards a job with a strong representation as 'non-black'. Pauline's example demonstrates the variety of identities that workers negotiate in the workplace and how these identities co-exist simultaneously and shift according to different work contexts.

 Although Pauline did not encounter any problems with the chambermaids as she reports the general manager had feared, she did experience a disturbing incident of racism by a guest. She described her experience as follows:

> . . . a guest who had been coming to the hotel for several years and who was known to the managing director [came in]. His attitude towards me was hostile: I knew it and he knew it. There was nothing overt about his behaviour; he simply ignored me and spoke over my head to one of the managers as if I did not exist, had not spoken, and had not presented him with a registration card.

Pauline felt this guest treated her as though she were a non-person. Her experience of his refusal to engage in any contact with her reaffirms to her that she, as a black woman at reception, does not form part of his expectations of what a receptionist should be. Her description suggests he metaphorically moved her to the back regions, to where he could not see her.

 Interestingly, another respondent, Rachel, describes being hurt by an incident that she also interpreted as racist. This time it came from a black guest who she believed preferred to deal with a black receptionist rather than herself. This incident occurred in the USA and the respondent was a young white Israeli woman working as a receptionist.

> Rachel: . . . what I did notice is that a lot of people — even with colour, especially American, you know — have very discrimination, racial discrimination and, you know, if you are one: if you were black or whatever and the person dealing with you was black; yes: they were happy to deal with you — the guest I mean: and when I tried to deal with someone, they weren't very pleasant to me.
> Interviewer: So a black person, you noticed, preferred to go to a black person?

> Rachel: Yeah, not everyone. I don't want to make generalizations but for the first time in my life I was actually approached by that and that really hurt. And there was a black person next to me and so, when they left, I said to him: I looked at him and I said, 'Don't tell me that wasn't a racial thing, a racist thing'. And he said, 'No, you're right'. He even noticed it so it wasn't like I was paranoid.

This example of perceived discrimination against a receptionist apparently mirrors Pauline's example. Rachel, however, as a white female, holds the 'appropriate' attributes for this role whilst, it might be argued that the black male receptionist preferred by the guests holds 'inappropriate' ones. Rachel reports her reaction as that of shock and disbelief; she needs to check her perceptions against those of her co-worker to ensure that she is not paranoid. An initial analysis would suggest an inversion of the normal process of discrimination which brings into focus Rachel's 'whiteness': an attribute that would not normally mark her out. However, this incident follows a discussion in Rachel's narrative about her Israeli identity and the way that this affects her relations with the guests.

> I wouldn't speak Hebrew [though] I knew they [guests] were Israeli. I would hear them speaking and I wouldn't. The main reason why I don't is because, first of all, it happened to me once that I would speak and then they would say, 'What, do you think I can't speak English? Why are you talking to me in Hebrew?' You know what I mean? And that's embarrassing. Um, and the second thing is that once they know you speak the same language they are going to bug you non-stop. 'Oh, but, you know, you are one of us, you can do this for us', and I would try, but if my manager was there, I would say 'no'. You know, deal with other people as well. Which is right. I don't treat certain people [better] because they're from my country or whatever. I never did that, but I notice that other people did, in the front desk, a lot, and that was so wrong. And also, even my supervisor, she used to come up and say, not next to them, before they just arrived, she would say, 'Oh Rachel, your family is here. Can you deal with them?'

Rachel expresses her ambivalence about being marked out, in her role as receptionist, as an Israeli. The incident in which she perceives she is discriminated against by a black guest is not, in this light, a mirror of Pauline's experience. For Pauline, working in a white work group, the racist incident and the description of her hiring is clearly constructed in terms of a black/white dichotomy. For Rachel, rather than a black/white dichotomy, her concern seems to be whether the workplace is blind to colour and ethnicity, as she believes it should be, or whether inevitably staff and guests favour, and are favoured by, their 'families', be they Israeli or black. 'Being black' in Rachel's narrative seems to be constructed in opposition to

categories such as 'being Israeli', whereas in Pauline's narrative it is clearly constructed in opposition to 'being white'. The context in which Pauline and Rachel worked: a five-star hotel in which all other receptionists were white, compared with a mid-market hotel with greater heterogeneity of receptionists; arguably helped to shape these constructions.

Another example where gender interconnects with ethnicity and class involves an incident of male to female sexual harassment. Maria, a Spanish woman in her early 20s working in a two-star hotel in Washington in the USA, was being sexually harassed by the chef, who was from El Salvador. She describes how she dealt with the situation:

> The chef was harassing all the girls . . . this guy asked me to go out [with him] . . . when I was going to ask for my lunch, I need to speak to him and he tell me, 'OK, you be nice to me and I am going to be nice to you'. I don't need to listen to this kind of thing! . . . One day I was speaking with him . . . and after this he was more nice with me and I think it is because he saw me, not like a woman, but like a sister because I was speaking, 'Look, I am in the same situation' (the guy was from El Salvador): 'I have the same crap from the people here, so don't make my life difficult, OK?' . . . The point is that we speak Spanish: he was from a different country; he came here to make a new life and this is what I was trying to do.

The interlocking of gender with ethnicity and with class is enacted in this narrative. Firstly, Maria describes how she counters unwanted sexual advances from the chef by emphasizing her ethnicity rather than her gender. Maria rejects being considered primarily as a woman and her representation of herself as instead belonging primarily to a particular ethnicity allows her to become a 'sister', rather than a woman, to the chef. She renegotiates her gendered identity with the chef by appropriating her ethnicity. As his 'sister', Maria implies she is sexually unavailable to him and should be protected, rather than abused. In this narrative, therefore, the interlocking of gender with ethnicity forms part of the gendered process of constructing identity and of differentiation within a particular gender.

In addition, and in conjunction with the intersection of gender with ethnicity, the category of class and social status also engages in the process of identity construction. Maria presents herself to the chef as belonging to the same social status as him due to their common immigrant economic and social circumstances. Maria is also a management trainee, which could set her apart from the other workers in terms of occupational class. However her remark ('I have the same crap from the people here'), suggests she aligns herself with disadvantaged groups in opposition to 'the people here'.

The process of identity construction in this example involves the fusion of gender ascription to ethnicity and class ascription, all of which interconnect with each other. The categories of gender, ethnicity and class are interdependent. They construct each other so that, in Maria's case, the self-

representation of her ethnicity shapes that of her class and is, in turn, an attempt to reconstruct her identity in relation to gender as 'sister' rather than 'woman'. This process reveals the negotiation of simultaneous categories and involves the interdependence of these categories in the construction of identities.

In addition, the narratives related to ethnic/class belonging also illustrate the process of identity building based on dualism, negation and reduction (Hall, 1996a; Said, 1978). Like Amy in her use of the phrase 'them and us', Maria also constructs in her narrative an oppositional relationship between groups in which she is clearly a member of one and not the other. These groups are constructed in a dualistic way: you are either a member of *one* or *the other*, and if you are a member of one, it is because you are *not* a member of the other. This illustrates the relational, oppositional and reductionist nature of category ascription in shaping identity.

According to Maria, her strategy for avoiding harassment appears to have been successful. She believes, however, that other women were subjected to harassment despite their immigrant status and she states:

> All the time it was not an American woman, it was always with a girl from Ethiopia, or a girl from Italy, or another from Guatemala.

Maria's representation of the women harassed suggests that the lack of power resulting from their immigrant status might be the reason for the chef's targeting them as opposed to American women. She explains:

> Interviewer: Why do you think he didn't do it to American girls?
> Maria: I think because he was worried . . . He doesn't have a visa, he only have a work permit, he doesn't want to mess with this.

This narrative describes a circle of abuse in which the interlocking of a woman's immigrant status with her gender puts her in a vulnerable position. Again this highlights the significance of economic and social status in differentiating between women.

This example also illustrates the significance of differentiation within immigrant groups. In this situation Maria reports that her re-ascription as belonging to the Hispanic diaspora helped her to become a 'sister', rather than another women. It is the intercrossing of a specific ethnicity with her gender that enables Maria to become a sister.

Conclusions

This article has focused on the narratives of women working within hotels. We have attempted to highlight some of the ways in which gender is interrelated with other characteristics within these narratives, in particular with race, ethnicity and class background. The narratives demonstrate the

simultaneous and shifting nature of identity: at one point in the narrative the women's gender may be in the foreground and at the next point it may be her ethnic identity which is salient. They highlight the ways in which women differentiate themselves from other women at work. Collinson and Hearn comment, in relation to men at work, that 'the unities that exist between men should not be overstated. They are often more precarious, shifting and instrumental than first appearances suggest' (1996, p. 72). The same may be said about women at work.

If the focus is just on gender in the study of women's construction of their identities at work, we argue that much of the complexity and ambiguity of that experience is lost. But how do we then incorporate these other categories of race, ethnicity, nationality and class, which help to form identity? As with gender, categories such as race and class reinforce structural power relationships so, for example, whilst being female lessens one's power within the organization, being a black or migrant female further lessens one's power and tends to 'fit' one into particular types of backstage roles. However, the respondents do not seem to interpret their work experience in terms of one type of difference being added to another type of difference. Instead, their identities are fluid. Certain identities may be emphasized or downplayed as a form of resistance. Rachel resists her Israeli identity. Maria's narrative is an interesting example of a woman attempting to bring to the foreground aspects of her identity to her advantage.

This article is based on a small number of narratives that clearly can provide only a partial account of the interrelationships between gender and other characteristics of identity. Further empirical research is obviously needed. Much research on gender neglects even to comment on race, ethnicity or social class. Perhaps this is because it has been conducted in monocultural work environments. The diverse work groups described in this article are normal in many organizations and empirical investigations need to take account of this.

In addition to further empirical work, this article highlights the need for more theoretical development. As theory on gender tends to have neglected other aspects of identity, so theory on race tends to have neglected gender. This article has attempted to highlight the diversity and contingent nature of representations of gender. We advocate the theorization of gender, not as separate from other factors but instead as integrally interconnected with other characteristics.

In summary, this article contributes to the study of gender and organizations by providing empirical examples of the process by which gender interacts with other categories in specific narratives of hotel workers when exploring how individuals, as subjects, position themselves within institutional power arrangements. This endeavour is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it provides empirical accounts of the complex ways that individuals make sense of themselves in the world of work. This enables the

theorization of gender to be related to other categories that, in practice, co-exist with gendered identities. Secondly, in examining the process of the interlocking of gender with other categories, the article illustrates the complex nature of individuals' positioning according to the work context and the changing and relational character of the articulation of identity at work. This article illustrates that gendered and other representations at work do not represent a process of adding difference on to difference; where categories are considered as separate and fixed. Instead, what emerges from the data is a negotiation of many categories that exist simultaneously and that shift according to context.

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