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Perceptions of hospitality careers among ethnic minority students



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ABSTRACT

Ethnic minority is a comparatively important group that comprises a large sector of the American hospitality industry. The purpose of this study was to investigate the career expectations of ethnic minority students majoring in the hospitality industry and to examine if ethnic minority students perceived more career barriers than White students. Results showed that ethnic minority students perceived more discrimination, access barriers, and job search barriers than White students. Ethnic minority students who perceived workplace discrimination in the hospitality industry were more likely to perceive more job access barriers and job search barriers.

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1. Introduction

There has been a considerable growth in the number of hospitality programs at universities around the world and particularly in the United States (Weber & Ladkin, 2008). In the United States there are more than 170 programs offering degrees in hospitality management (Weber & Ladkin, 2008). Students, who are well educated, well trained, and skilled, tend to be a highly desirable source of talent in today's hospitality and tourism job market. However, research has shown that not all hospitality and tourism students pursue the hospitality industry after graduation (King, McKercher, & Waryzak, 2003; McKercher, Coghlan, & Williams, 1995).

Considering the fact that a percentage of students from hospitality programs will not choose the hospitality industry as their career, a growing body of research has investigated the reasons hospitality students leave the industry by studying students' perceptions of the hospitality industry and their career expectations. For example, Chuang and Jenkins (2010) found that career intentions in hospitality were closely associated with student's gender, work experience, transfer status, and outcome expectations in the industry. By studying the career expectation and aspirations of the hospitality industry, Maxwell, Ogden and Broadbridge (2010) found that hospitality students' career expectations and aspiration focus mainly on their personal career development or employability factors.

Even though a number of studies focus on the career decision-making process and career expectation of college students who majored in hospitality, only a few have studied the career expectations or perceived career barriers of ethnic minority students. This is a surprising limitation in the literature given that as a result of immigration and demographic trends, today's American hospitality workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. In fact, Hispanic and African-American individuals are the fastest growing groups in the U.S. workforce (Madera, 2011). Thus, ethnic minorities are a growing important group that comprises a large sector of the American hospitality industry.

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Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the career expectations of ethnic minority students majoring in hospitality management. In particular, the current study examined if ethnic minority students perceive more career barriers in the hospitality industry than White students. The current study focused on perceived career barriers because perceived career barrier are related to career choices among students (Chuang, 2010; Stead, Els, & Fouad, 2004). The more barriers a student perceived they will face in an industry, the less likely they are to choose a career in that industry after graduation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social identity theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides a useful framework to understand why ethnic minority students might perceive more career barriers in the hospitality industry than White students. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), ethnicity is one of the personally meaningful dimensions that individuals tend to use to categorize themselves and similar-others in the in-group and to the out-group of perceived dissimilar-others. Thus, individuals tend to act as a representative of a whole group or category of people rather than act as a single individual when they interact with other people at work (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) comprises of two fundamental psychological mechanisms: social comparison and self-esteem. Social comparison is the first psychological process when individuals compare their own social groups with other groups. This indicates that social groups have more power, prestige or status compared to individuals' own groups. Self-esteem is an important mechanism in that maintaining positive self-esteem is seen as a basic motivation for humans. The second psychological process relates to the tendency for people to use group membership as a source of positive self-esteem. Therefore, people often compare their own group with other groups.

Social identity theory builds upon the attraction-similarity theory (Byrne & Griffitt, 1973), which also suggests that perceived similarity plays an important role in interpersonal attraction. Specifically, individuals tend to communicate easily, share common interests, and make sense of their environment more effectively when being around similar others. In this case, ethnic identity, one of the demographic identities, may explain the similarity or differences perceived by individuals (e.g., Avery, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2004; Perkins, Thomas, and Taylor, 2000; Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, and Baits, 1997). Ethnic minorities generally identify more strongly with their racial/ethnic group than do White individuals and use their racial identity as frame of reference to interpret occurrences at work (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2008; Goldman, 2001; Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006).

This line of reasoning suggests that ethnic minorities might be cognizant of how they and other ethnic minorities are treated and valued in the hospitality industry, because their racial minority status is a source of identity. In the United States, ethnic minorities tend to experience more prejudice and discrimination and tend to have lower status positions than do White individuals (Goldman et al., 2006; Simpson & Walker, 2002). For example, in the hotel and lodging industry, Jackson and DeFranco (2005) found that although ethnic minorities comprise about 52% of all hourly, low-waged employees, they only represented 20% of salaried management positions. Because ethnic minorities are numerically a minority in higher status positions, they are more conscious of their racial identity and have significantly higher expectations of experiencing discrimination than do White individuals (Avery et al., 2008; Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor, 2002). Thus, it seems likely that ethnic minorities who work in the hospitality industry will be more aware of career barriers that they might face than White students.

2.2. Perceived career barriers

Perceived career barrier are those aspects of both social and organization life that hinder the individual's career development (Weber & Ladkin, 2008). Perceived career barriers influence the career choice process for students, because they are likely to detract from the realization of career goals (Stead, Els, & Fouad, 2004). In the career counseling and educational psychology fields, career barriers can be classified in several ways (Chuang, 2010). For example, Crites (1969) argued that career barriers could be distinguished into either internal (e.g., self-concept or motivation) or external (e.g., discrimination). Weiner (1986) mentioned that people would passively accept career barriers as fate if they view them as external and uncontrollable, and they will develop coping strategies to overcome career barriers if they view them as internal and controllable.

Perceived workplace discrimination is one of the most widely researched career barriers that affect ethnic minorities' workplace attitudes (Avery et al., 2008; Madera, 2011; Madera, King, & Hebl, 2012). For example, using a sample of hospitality employees, Waight and Madera (2011) found that organizations that offered diversity training for employees were more likely to have minority employees that perceived less discrimination, reported more job satisfaction, and were less likely to quit their jobs than organizations that did not offer diversity training. In contrast, since White employees are not the typical target of discrimination and not the focus of diversity training, offering diversity training did not influence White employees' work attitudes.

Workplace discrimination can be very costly for both individuals and employers (Avery et al., 2008). Perceived workplace discrimination can lead to an increase in work tension, psychological and physical health issues and diminished job satisfaction. At the same time, perceived workplace discrimination can undermine employee commitment, morale and job

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