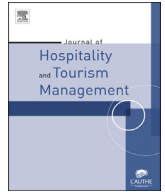


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The hidden power of memory-work for hospitality and tourism researchers

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explain the value of memory-work for researchers wishing to critically explore issues concerning hospitality and tourism employment. The memory-work research method, based on feminist theorising, centres on the group analysis of individual written memories, invoked by a cue phrase about a specific topic of common interest. In the article, the author illustrates how memory-work was used to explore aspects of gender in hospitality work. The group analysis by academics who had worked in the hospitality industry for many years uncovered rich and complex understandings of power relations in the sector. The conclusions have implications for researchers who wish to adopt a critical approach to understanding gendered hospitality and tourism organisations.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to explain the benefits of using memory-work as a critical methodology for hospitality employment studies. Memory-work is a group research method that involves the collective analysis of individual written memories (Onyx & Small, 2001; Small, 1999). It is seldom used in hospitality studies, a regrettable omission as it provides an extraordinarily rich and multi-layered means to collect and analyse organisational data. This neglect may be based on trepidation for researchers considering methodological boundaries. However, I will explain how the potential rewards outweigh the challenges associated with using an innovative method. In the hospitality career study on which this article is based, using a gender lens with memory-work gave unique insights as long-term employees shared their experiences about 'belonging' and 'shifting from the front line' in hospitality work. The article is structured as follows; firstly, the context of memory-work as an emerging feminist methodology is explained. Secondly, the way this memory-work study was designed and implemented is outlined in detail. The benefits and challenges associated with the method are summarised before the article concludes by appraising the suitability of memory-work for critical hospitality employment studies. In the article, I take a reflective theoretical stance; my experiences are supported by my field notes and references to the written memories as well as discussions of

the memory-work groups.

2. Memory-work as a feminist methodology

The origins of the memory-work method lie in a feminist collaborative writing project in Germany during the late 1970s where women wrote reflective stories about their bodies and then collectively examined the memories. The collective's intention in subjecting these intimate accounts to critical analysis was to create a new practical theoretical discourse for themselves and those who read the stories (Haug et al., 1987). The method has since been adopted by other researchers as an insightful, feminist research process with the group discussion providing a deep level of analysis (Markula & Friend, 2005). Methodologically, memory-work is derived from two theoretical traditions: hermeneutics, which assumes an interactive knowledge construction process; and phenomenology, which emphasises the importance of lived experience in knowledge construction – meanings and simultaneous different identities are created indirectly through a particular social context (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1990). A group of people with a common interest choose a particular topic to explore based on a 'trigger phrase' or cue, then each writes an individual memory; the aim is to understand the participants' subjective experiences. Personal meanings are attached to memories (Markula & Friend, 2005) and in asking participants to write one specific memory, the participant becomes aware of (possibly unacknowledged) meanings associated with their experience. During the group discussion, the individual meanings are transformed into mutual

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meanings and, consequently, move beyond personal experiences (Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, & Hyle, 2008). Here, at this crucial point, is the key contribution of memory-work as a transformative research method.

Frequently, researchers such as myself are drawn to feminist methods based on personal experiences that drive their research attention in a particular direction (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2014). Due to the hospitality and tourism academy's well-documented reluctance to engage with gender or with less traditional or feminist research methods (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015), hospitality researchers may regard feminist approaches as an even more formidable hurdle. In a comprehensive, both in depth and detail, critique of the literature on women as managers in the hospitality and tourism sector, Carvalho (2017) finds it "remarkable" that *only one study* (my italics), Mooney and Ryan's (2009) hotel study, used feminist theory to explore women's careers in the sector. Carvalho (ibid) suggests that this does not necessarily mean all the other studies demonstrated no awareness of gender or were gender-blind but that "women in management" career studies consider gender as merely another variable, in the same way, for example, as chronological age, rather than using a "gendered analytical framework" (p.125). Using a non-critical lens has a detrimental effect on studies about women's experiences in hospitality and tourism. Such studies may ignore local or organisational context, a factor of utmost importance for meaningful career or diversity research (Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, & Bell, 2010). A further significant disadvantage is that 'female as variable' is a homogenous label that includes all women and does not reflect the complexity of varying biological role stereotyping based on a woman's life stage. In career terms, the organisational commitment of a young woman with children will be regarded very differently than that of an older woman without children (Lyng, 2010). Such non critical studies also fail to reflect the intersectionality of women's myriad identities; different combinations of socially ascribed identity, such as race, ethnicity, or life stage will each significantly influence individual outcomes and the effects of these intersections will also vary according to context (Holvino, 2010). Feminist research models, for example, Acker's (2006) 'inequality regimes' and feminist methods such as memory-work, allow complexities to be revealed in ways that a quantitative study, using gender as a descriptor, just cannot do. Therefore, a clear need exists for hospitality researchers to challenge current methodological and topic boundaries in the academy. Reflexive feminist methods are sorely needed to expose the visible and invisible identity intersections in the power relations that regulate how work is performed by women, and men, in hospitality organisations.

The aim of the study was to discover what motivated hospitality workers to build long careers in hospitality, in the face of the body of research that appears to confirm the transient nature of hospitality employment. By exploring the career experiences of hospitality workers through the perspectives of gender and other dimensions of socially constructed difference the study aimed to shift hospitality research beyond superficial, descriptive and empirically based norms to one where power relations are placed at the forefront. For the purposes of this article, the focus will be on gender; memory-work is particularly useful for exploring how gender 'works' in different hospitality social contexts. Adherents of hermeneutic approaches, such as memory-work, not only seek to understand the meanings objects hold for the perceiver(s), they also strive to understand the relationships between them, including traditions, culture and social settings (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). In memory-work, the aim is to understand both the participants' subjective experiences as well as their inter-subjective

experiences (Small et al., 2007). There will be acute differences between individuals' recollections of the same event; however, Markula and Friend (2005) argue that such memories do not need to be precise and accurate recollections of past situations; all memories are unreliable; importance lies in the layers of meaning behind the memory.

As is frequently the case with feminist researchers, who wish to achieve social justice aims (Olesen, 2011), my interest was sparked by reflections about my previous career as a hotel executive, where I saw that women managers did not reach the same high positions as men in spite of being equally capable, an enduring situation in the hospitality sector (see, for example, Cleverger & Singh, 2013). However, choosing an appropriate research approach was not obvious and my reflective diary illustrated my dilemmas at the pivotal early stage of research design. Hearing Jennie Small speak at a conference about the ways group discussion created multiple layers of meanings convinced me to use memory-work to explore the subjective meanings of hospitality careers. Instituting or incorporating a feminist approach in any discipline, not solely hospitality, is complicated. Additionally, although emergent methods develop from the desire for more sensitive research instruments, because they are innovative they are more likely to be challenged than more traditional approaches. As with all research projects, in order to be seen as robust and effective, they need clear reasoned explanations about their theoretical foundation and their epistemological base, methodology and method (Anderson, 2006). Memory-work is not excluded from such theoretical debates and the following section will reveal the dilemmas I encountered during the study.

3. Designing and implementing the memory-work study

It is generally accepted that there are three stages or phases involved in the memory-work process (Crawford et al., 1990; Kaufman et al., 2008; Onyx & Small, 2001; Small, 1999). The first phase is when each participant writes a memory about a particular topic. The second phase begins when group members meet to discuss the individual memories that the participants read aloud in turn. Commonalities and discrepancies are commented upon with everyone contributing to the analysis and identification of particular significant phrases. The third, and final, phase consists of appraisal of the memories and discussions to explore further theoretical connections.

As explained previously, the objectives of my study were to uncover what motivates hospitality workers to build long hospitality careers and to explore participants' career experiences through a gendered lens. For this study, hospitality educators with prior lengthy industry careers of at least 10 years were recruited from a hospitality tertiary institute that offered hospitality courses at certificate and degree level. A purposive sampling approach was used to find participants with the "core experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 234) of 10 years spent in a hospitality career. The recruitment notice and information sheet invited volunteers to participate and reflect upon their experiences in hospitality organisations and highlight how gender (and other dimensions of difference, such as age) shaped career experiences. Academics are considered ideal participants for memory-work as they are familiar with the process of synthesising and analysing information from various sources and different perspectives (Crawford et al., 1990) and hospitality academics shared the vital interest in the discussion topic, which Haug (2008) regards as essential. By the end of the recruitment phase, eight men and four women aged from 30 to 62 years old volunteered to take part in the study. The group was composed of chef-lecturers, some of whom were also concurrently employed in the industry, operational restaurant managers/tutors, and

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