

# The hospitable body at work—A research agenda

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## Funding information

AFA Försäkring, Grant/Award Number: 180013

## Abstract

This paper critically examines the hospitable body and how it is put to work, how certain bodies are selected and become associated with certain occupations and spaces of work, and how the hospitable body is produced, transformed, and commodified in accordance with prevailing modes of production. Drawing on examples primarily obtained from the Nordic countries, I review current research on hospitality workers, while also manifesting how employers portray and, at times, exploit the hospitable body. This is followed by a presentation of a research agenda for the continued study of the hospitable body at work, addressing the need for in-depth, context-sensitive studies on worker strategies to counteract harassment. I conclude by suggesting that the working body can be theorized as concurrently being relational and “in the making,” and as a bounded territory in need of protection against the hazards of flexible work regimes, stress, harassment, and precariousness.

## KEYWORDS

body, hospitality, spatial, work, workplace

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Workers are often described as “human resources” or “human capital” (Herod, 2018). These are notions expressing a somewhat instrumental view on humans and which, at least to some extent, strip us of our corporeality. Even Marx (1970) conceptualized labor as abstract “labor power” and as a means of production under capitalism while also recognizing that labor deviates from machines and raw material because labor has a will and agency of its own,

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it can feel and think, and it needs to reproduce itself. Hence, the working body must be taken care of in order to subsist and to continue to “work,” and all work in turn depends on embodiment (McDowell, 2009). In this paper, I examine the micro geographies of the hospitable body at work, placing the working body and the hospitality workspaces at the focal point of interest. Theories regarding the working body in the servicing economy—the physical body and the imaginations that exist about working bodies—serve as my point of departure. Not only are workers selected for specific jobs and work tasks on the basis of their bodily attributes but working people and their bodies are also modeled to fulfill particular tasks (McDowell, 2009; Witz et al., 2003). Hence, like places, bodies are produced discursively and materially (Longhurst, 1995). My objective with this paper is to develop a research agenda for investigating the hospitable body at work. This agenda addresses both empirical as well as philosophical challenges including: The identification and analysis of strategies deployed to prevent and deal with harassment and (threats of) violence in the hospitality workplace, and; the systematic re-examination of hospitality jobs, occupations, and work tasks to properly appreciate the many dimensions and forms of knowledge that exist among people making a living from this industry. I would like to point out that the hospitality sector encompasses a wide range of jobs, stretching from housekeeping and maintenance to food and catering services, but also airline transport services. Some of these are performed back-of-house and out of sight of guests, while others are performed front-of-house and in close contact with customers. This back-of-house/front-of house division of labor normally entails different demands on workers in terms of esthetic and emotional labor and/or skills.

The formulation of a research agenda for the study of the hospitable body at work includes the philosophical task of exploring the body as a spatial entity in itself, an entity which is in constant interaction with the surrounding environment. Not least, this concerns the interplay between the working body and the *workplace* and the *work environment*, notions that have strong spatial connotations and which deserve a renewed attention from labor geographers (Hastings & MacKinnon, 2017). Consequently, and with regard to the fact that the hospitable body at work is exposed to the perils of chemicals, machinery, sexual and racist harassment as well as (threats of) violence, flexible work regimes, stress and so on, this paper also ties into recent attempts by scholars to theorize the body as a space in its own right (Holton, 2019; S. Smith et al., 2016).

As conveyed by S. Smith et al. (2016, p. 260) “bodies can both become and act upon territory, because their defended, vulnerable and porous borders are both the symbolic and material manifestation of political and geopolitical struggle.” This quote illustrates the experience of being both a subject and an object, meaning that the body is a site where social, economic, and political processes unfold, while equally being a place of agency. Similarly, Holton (2019, p. 1–2) finds that contemporary geographical scholarship is moving away from understanding the body as solely representational and/or socially constructed, and instead imagines “bodies as bordered spaces, the movements of which are shaped by an array of emotional, affective, embodied and material responses.” My own contribution rests on the argument that for labor researchers, a dual conceptualization of the working body as both a process of relational becoming (Holton, 2019) and as a bordered territory protected by law, is imperative. The latter is of particular importance considering that numerous workers are hired on individual, temporary contracts and may lack the protection guaranteed to workers with permanent contracts who are tied to a single employer and workplace and enjoy the benefits of collective agreements. The sanctity of the body may also gain increased prominence with recent trends among employers to treat the very *selves* of their workers as a raw material.

Although this paper constitutes a philosophical and/or conceptual inquiry, it relies on several examples, fulfilling the double task of constituting “signs” to be interpreted and analyzed, yet also serving as illustrations to support my arguments. These examples derive mainly from an array of sources relating to the Nordic countries (Table 1).

The focus on the Nordic countries is justified by the longstanding celebration of values pertaining to equality and equity (Kvist et al., 2011), but which nevertheless seem to host a series of problematic practices with regard to hospitality workers. Furthermore, I should stress that most of this material was not originally assembled with an eye to completing a research article but rather it results from 10 years of collecting examples with a sensibility to derogatory, prejudiced, and objectifying portrayals of the hospitable body, as well as to the lived experiences of hospitality workers being exploited by employers.

TABLE 1 Examples from advertising campaigns, Youtube videos and news articles

Brand	Medium
Finnair	Advertising campaign, Dagens Nyheter, 2014
First hotel	First hotels' advertising campaign "Sleep with us", The Swedish Advertising Ombudsman, 2010
Clarion	Talent hunt/audition at Clarion Hotel Signs Clarion post, Youtube video, 2007
Clarion	Talent hunt/audition at Clarion Hotel Sense Clarion post, Youtube video, 2013
Joe & the Juice	News article, Dagens Nyheter, 2016
Joe & the Juice	News article, Swedish television, 2016

As such, the method I have used constitutes a "bricolage" (Kincheloe, 2005; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991). The bricoleur is essentially "piecing together" whatever tools and materials are at hand, in a creative, open-ended process (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991), whereby the supposed boundaries between the empirical and philosophical inquiry eventually dissolve. What is more, "bricoleur" scholars also tend to combine several theoretical perspectives (Rogers, 2012), thus offering a multi-perspective description of a phenomenon. In line with this idea, I deploy an amalgamation of labor geography and feminist/post-Marxist theories. My belief is that the universal claims and systematic critique of capitalism, and the post-colonial emphasis on diversity and contingency, rather than being framed as adversaries, are better off in conversation with each other (Sinha & Varma, 2017).

The paper is arranged as follows: In the first two sections, I review some of the key writings on the assemblage and production of hospitable bodies to fulfill the need of differentiation and equalization of bodies within the experience economy. These sections also revolve around the transformative capacity that work and the work environment have on working bodies. I continue by discussing the portrayal of the (idealized) hospitable body, a body which also seems to be subjected to a pornographic gaze, and the repercussions that sexualized images and imaginations may have on the corporeal hospitality worker. Subsequently, I propose a research agenda, emphasizing the need for in-depth studies on: i) sexual (and racist) harassment, which together with threats of violence represents serious challenges to the welfare of the hospitable body at work, and; ii) emerging corporate branding and recruitment strategies which seem to prey on the body and soul of hospitality workers, and which equally seem to counteract the interests of workers by positioning them as low-skilled and, consequently, low-paid. I conclude by suggesting that the changing spaces of work, such as the development of highly flexible and spatially decentralized forms of paid labor, also call for a theoretical reorientation regarding the working body.

## 1.1 | The hospitable body as an accumulation strategy

There is a growing body of literature on the selection and global assemblage of workers, whereby people, due to their bodily characteristics, become associated with (and disassociated from) certain occupations, work-tasks, and spaces of work (McDowell, 2009; McDowell et al., 2008; Terry, 2011; Witz et al., 2003). Of course, the assemblage of workers of various backgrounds, colors, shapes, and sizes constitutes one side of the coin when speaking of the composition of an appropriate workforce. The other side of the coin is related to the *production* of bodies to ensure that they fit with dominant ideas of what qualities are required for particular jobs and tasks. Thus, both the practice of assembling workers from various parts of the world, and the production of bodies adapted to certain jobs and chores, add to labor market segmentation.

Marx (1970) argued that each mode of production produces bodies that corresponds to it. Consequently, the worker performing the same task over and over again in accordance with industrialist production, becomes what Marx and Engels called “the appendage of a machine” (Marx & Engels, 1848/1967). If we accept the idea of the body being produced as a “condensed sign of the wider spacetime of which it is part” (Munn, 1985 quoted in Harvey, 2000, p. 99) then we might assume that the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) also designates certain bodies for certain tasks. This is, in fact, reflected in the international research on consumer service industries (such as retail, hospitality and leisure services), which stresses the ways emotional and esthetic labor are becoming part of corporate recruitment as well as branding strategies (Hochschild, 2003; McDowell, 2009; Witz et al., 2003). According to this strand of literature, workers are obliged to display the appropriate emotions, the bodily traits, and the behavior fitting with the requirements of a certain company, its corporate values and branding strategy. In the case of hospitality, this translates into front-line workers being required to perform various kinds of emotional and esthetic labor as they interact with guests, while others, such as chefs, perform their work without direct contact with guests, and thus also without the same requirement to manage emotions or to entertain a certain esthetic (except meeting cleanliness and hygiene standards). These expectations of workers to manage both their emotions and bodies will be further explored in relation to emerging recruitment practices and corporate branding strategies, whereby employers select, “produce” and commodify workers to ensure continued accumulation of capital. Not only are employees and job-seekers expected to display the appropriate esthetic or emotions, but with the dissemination and intensification of the audit culture (Shore & Wright, 2015), they are increasingly evaluated on the basis of their performance and appearance. Thus, when staying in a hotel or visiting a bar, guests may be asked to fill in a form and to rate everything from the ambience to the friendliness and appearance of the people serving them. Such evaluations and rating systems are becoming standard, not least through the use of digital platforms such as TripAdvisor, Airbnb, Uber, and Deliveroo.

Approximately 20 years ago, Harvey (2000) theorized the body as an accumulation strategy. According to Harvey (2000, p. 105) “bodies are differentiated and marked by different physical productive capacities and qualities according to history, geography, culture and tradition [...] signs of race, ethnicity, age, and gender are used as external measures of what a certain kind of laborer is capable of or permitted to do.” Several scholars have pursued this line of thought, in particular exploring prevailing ideas around the “good worker” in a range of sectors, and the stereotyping involved in the recruitment of workers (Findlay et al., 2013; MacKenzie & Forde, 2009). Through processes of “interpellation” (Burawoy, 1979; McDowell et al., 2007) and subjective as well as collective forms of disciplining, workers strain themselves to fit with the expectations associated with their identity in terms of nationality, age, gender, occupation, contractual arrangements and so forth (Zampoukos et al., 2018). In fact, consumer services such as hospitality are distinguished by what McDowell et al. (2007, p. 3) term “a dual form of interpellation at work” since employees performing front-stage tasks “have to conform not only to managers’ imaginations of an idealized embodiment of service, but also to the expectations of customers’. In the present paper, this “interpellation” extends to include the many images of the idealized, desirable hospitable body, adding to imaginations of, and expectations on, people working in this industry.

## 1.2 | The differentiation and equalization of bodies

Clearly then, differentiation refers to the process by which workers, on the basis of their age, nationality, skin color, gender and so on, become associated with certain capacities. These, in turn, are linked to particular occupations and work tasks and, thus, are remunerated differently. However, as observed by Orzeck (2007), the production of the body under capitalism is characterized by a dual process of differentiation and equalization so as to fulfill certain systemic needs. In this context, equalization translates into practices whereby workers come to be perceived and treated as replaceable, as in the case with many low-cost agency workers for instance. The dual process of differentiation and equalization is convincingly demonstrated by Terry (2011) and McDowell et al. (2007; 2008) who

portray how workers are assiduously being differentiated and segmented in the global market of flexible, substitutable and cheap labor.

Hospitality is notorious for applying contingent forms of employment (e.g., seasonal work, part-time work, by the hour) and is also known for having high rates of staff turnover (Ainsworth & Purss, 2009; Lai et al., 2008; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2014). This practice partly reflects what I term a “throwaway culture,” where employers treat workers as expendable and replaceable, while at least some workers perceive a job in hospitality as a temporary opportunity to earn a living before starting a proper career (Henningsen & Jordhus-Lier, 2014; P. J. Riley, 1988).

Temporary contractual arrangements may be preferred by individuals wishing to have flexible work hours, and people not entirely depending on these jobs, for instance students wanting to make extra money or seasonal workers seeking to combine work with leisure. Yet for others, casual employment and the global competition over jobs might translate into a precarious situation, involving a never-ending job search and a lack of control regarding the continuity of employment, the amount and distribution of work hours, working conditions, and income (Fudge & Strauss, 2014). Meanwhile, insecurity at work might invoke precariousness in a range of related areas (Strauss, 2018). In the words of Kalleberg (2012, p. 445) precariousness at work may have “pervasive consequences for workers” health and well-being, for family-related decisions such as the timing of marriage and fertility, for decisions to invest in particular communities, and so on. As such, casual and contingent work may translate into difficulties in securing stable and affordable housing; insufficient and/or bad nutrition; difficulties in keeping up ones' personal hygiene and, of course; the economic and social stress that originates from the inability to control neither the present, nor the future (Ahmad, 2008; Zampoukos et al., 2018). I will return to the issue of insecure and temporary forms of work and the repercussions that such arrangements have on the welfare of hospitality workers. For the moment though, I wish to call attention to the fact that precariousness, on the verge of poverty, has an appearance, a flavor and a smell. Hence, flexible work regimes shape the working body in direct and indirect ways, simply because the way we work and live, leaves a mark on our bodies.

Clearly, workers' bodies are also shaped by the work environment and by the work itself. Workers may lose limbs, fingernails and eyes. They may develop repetitive strain injuries, respiratory diseases, illnesses due to the exposure to various kinds of hazardous substances and so forth (Orzeck, 2007). As far as the hospitality workplace is concerned, I ask the reader to imagine for a moment the restaurant kitchen, constituting a work environment where burns and cuts are likely to occur, or the busy bar of a night club where bartenders, surrounded by booze and immersed in loud music, run the risk of developing alcoholism and tinnitus. Another illustration of how bodies are transformed by work and by being exposed to certain work environments can be found within the hotel. For instance, hotel cleaners, who normally find themselves at the bottom of the employment skill and pay hierarchy (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Herod & Aguiar, 2006), and who often perform heavy, physical work, frequently suffer from musculoskeletal injuries and/or skin-related problems (Herod & Aguiar, 2006; Kensbock et al., 2015).

However, apart from these physical, visible and easy-to-observe injuries, long-term stress, bullying and harassment, the exposure to violence or threats of violence, also affect workers' health and inevitably their bodies (Kensbock et al., 2015; Poulston, 2008; Ram, 2015). I conclude that the restaurant or the hotel, rather than representing workplaces of homogenous character, essentially are made up of quite diverse micro spaces of work, meaning that the hospitable, working body is exposed to very different hazards, depending on *who* carries out *what* kind of work *where* (Massey, 1995).

Evidently, the corporeal constitutes an inescapable side of existence. The next section is particularly concerned with the body *imagined* as well as the body *image*.

## 2 | THE HOSPITABLE BODY IMAGINED AND IMAGES OF THE HOSPITABLE BODY

In what follows, I make three propositions as to the imaginations surrounding the hospitable body. These observations rely on the careful, qualitative analysis of two advertisement campaigns displaying and commodifying the

TABLE 2 Google picture search

Picture search on Google	Results and analysis presented under heading:
"Flight attendant": 100 first images	Desirable, hospitable bodies
"Maid": 100 first images	The pornographic gaze: French maids and Desirable, hospitable bodies
"Waitress": 100 first images	Not included

female hospitable body, and on a small experiment that was conducted in May 2019, when I googled for pictures using the search words *maid*, *flight attendant* and *waitress*. While the googling of *waitress* inadvertently led to images related to "Waitress the Musical" playing in New York and London at the time, the results for the two other occupational categories were more representative.

My three propositions can be summarized as: i) only certain hospitable bodies are perceived as desirable; ii) the idealized hospitable body is a body caring for others and; iii) some bodies and occupations in hospitality are subjected to a pornographic gaze. My overall argument here is that images like these are objectified and reflect prejudice. They also depend on conservative ideas of femininity. As such, they counteract the interests of hospitality workers to be treated with respect and fairness.

## 2.1 | Desirable, hospitable bodies

The *flight attendant* has succinctly been described as "a metaphor for femininity in contemporary Western societies" by Tyler and Abbott (1998, p. 434) in their study of flight attendants subjected to management-monitored weight watching. Images of flight attendants and those portraying maids reveal a highly specific desire, mainly directed towards the "idealized version of a slender, toned, deodorized, youthful looking, and white body—the type of body that is most highly valued in the new consumer-based economies of western cities" (McDowell, 2009, p. 9). Thus, among the 100 first images appearing when googling *flight attendant*, one picture clearly stands out as it portrays a black, overweight teenage girl with Down's syndrome, who was appointed honorary flight attendant at American Airlines as part of her 17th birthday celebration (A. Smith, 2019). Only one of the 100 first images depicted an older flight attendant, while two of the pictures showed overweight people. Only four images portrayed people with black skin color. Further, no more than four images included male flight attendants. A similar pattern was found when googling *maid*. No more than six of the 100 images portrayed women of Asian origin, of which four were judged to be Japanese and connected to the phenomenon of Japanese Maid Cafés where employees are obliged to wear French maid costumes. Only one of the first 100 images portrayed a woman with black skin and one image showed a maid wearing a hijab. Although the real bodies of flight attendants, waitresses and maids are certainly more diverse, the norm, it seems, is to portray exactly the kind of desirable body identified by several leading scholars in this field (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Adkins, 1995; McDowell, 2009); a light-skinned, well-groomed, highly feminine silhouette, always with a smile on her lips.

## 2.2 | A hospitable body caring for others

Images of idealized bodies such as these are abundant. Another image derived from an advertising campaign for Finnair, Finland's largest airline company, pictures a blonde, light-skinned, glowing and smiling air hostess, dressed in a tailored space-blue uniform, waist pinned, and wearing a flight attendant hat of the same color. The entire outfit is reminiscent of the 1950s. The image of an idealized Scandinavian female first caught my eye because of how it linked to the company brand and, simultaneously, to the Finnish territory. In addition, because of the association with the 1950s, the image signals nostalgia, encompassing the fantasies of the ideal

housewife, an impersonation further underlined by the woman carrying a pillow and some blankets and the accompanying text:

2014—the year when you will be attended to. We welcome you on board on a happy and successful new year. Let us attend to you so that you can attend to your business. Fly with Finnair, and arrive at your destination well rested and ready to work.

In other words, this particular female is strongly associated with “women’s work” (i.e., domestic chores and caring) (Guerrier & Adib, 2000). She is attending to someone else’s needs, possibly those of a male business traveler, thus adding yet another layer to how the hospitable body is imagined.

### 2.3 | The pornographic gaze: French maids

My Google search for pictures further highlighted that some hospitable bodies and occupations seem subjected to a pornographic gaze. Among the 100 first images of *maids*, the absolute majority did not depict real maids. In fact, 66 images out of the first 100 proved to have a sexual content, meaning that they were either showing a lot of skin and exposing parts of the female body associated with sexual fantasies and desires, and/or involved posing in a sexual manner. Many of the images were obviously aimed at selling adult costumes, hence they were accompanied by headlines such as “Sexy French Maid Costume,” “Latex Lolita Maid Outfit” or “Adult Sassy Maid Costume.” In fact, a large share of the images portrayed the “French Maid,” representing a widely diffused, eroticized fantasy involving sexual domination. The fantasies surrounding the “French Maid” can be traced back to the 19th century France (Louis, 1990, pp. 31–45) where housemaids serving in wealthier households were expected not only to keep the house clean, but also to satisfy the sexual appetites of their master(s).

The emblematic image of the French maid was picked up by the Nordic hotel chain First hotels in an advertisement campaign named “Sleep with us.” In one of the advertisements, a young and beautiful maid, dressed in a black silky dress with a small white apron, the lace-brimmed neckline exposing her bosom but not her breasts, is sitting on the bedside, gazing back at the spectator with her bedroom eyes. The First hotels’ slogan “Sleep with us” was accompanied by the suggestive phrase “Our first members are getting it on a regular basis. A free room, that is.” In addition, there was a clickable box with the text “Go to bed.” The campaign is a striking example of hospitality workers being presented as sex objects. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was censured by the Swedish Advertising Ombudsman in 2010 for being sexually discriminatory (The Swedish Advertising Ombudsman, 2010).

My aforementioned examples expose only the tip of an iceberg. Is it far-fetched then, to surmise that the sexual objectification may have repercussions for real hospitality workers? Some of us might recall the events that occurred back in 2011, when the Managing Director of the IMF Dominique Strauss-Kahn was accused of forcing himself on the hotel attendant Nafissatou Diallo.

## 3 | DE-NORMALIZING SEXUAL AND RACIST HARASSMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY WORKPLACE

This brings me to one of the topics that I am currently exploring, namely sexual and racist harassment, which together with threats of violence, represent serious challenges to the hospitality work environment. Since workers’ bodily attributes seem to connect them to (or disconnect them from) certain spaces within the hospitality work environment, this is also to an extent a determining factor as to whom is exposed to what kind of hazard, including various forms of harassment and threats.

So far, very few empirical studies have been carried out, and surprisingly few in a Nordic context (although see Folgerø & Fjeldstad, 1995; Mulinari, 2007; Bråten & Sletvold Øistad, 2018), given the tradition in these countries to celebrate values such as equity and equality (Kvist et al., 2011). Concurrently, the high proportion of casual, non-unionized workers, composed of young people, women and immigrants, underpins the power asymmetries between worker and manager, worker and guest and even worker and worker. Furthermore, the prevailing credo in many hospitality workplaces that the paying “customer is always right,” entails a fundamentally unequal relationship between the provider and the consumer of hospitality services (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Yagil, 2008; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2014). Some observers argue that the presence of alcohol and other illegal substances reinforces problems of verbal and physical abuse from customers, managers and co-workers (Boyd, 2002; Briggs et al., 2011).

Existing research suggests that workers perceive sexual harassment, threats and violence as normal features and as “part of the job.” Furthermore, experienced workers testify as to the development of an increased tolerance towards sexual harassment over time (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Poulston, 2008), thus indicating a process of normalization. A recent report from The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (Bergold, 2018) states that young women on temporary contracts are more exposed to sexual harassment than other categories of workers. Obviously, temporary and insecure employment in combination with little or no experience from working life and limited knowledge of one's rights make up for a dangerous mix (Kensbock et al., 2015). In response to sexual and racist harassment, workers develop various coping strategies stretching from avoiding certain customers, developing a “thick skin,” telling customers off, or laughing off an incident and so forth (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Kensbock et al., 2015; Yagil, 2008).

As mentioned before, a number of studies reveal that the hospitality workplace is characterized by a socio-spatial division of labor, whereby workers with different backgrounds and status in terms of gender, age, education, nationality and so forth are associated with (and disassociated from) specific competencies and tasks (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; McDowell, 2009). This division also contributes to a particular coding of the hospitality workspaces, where certain expectations and norms prevail. For instance, the hotel reception largely represents a “public” and highly feminized space where foul language is banned and the receptionist is expected to act in a kind and accommodating manner towards the guest (Guerrier & Adib, 2000), while preliminary findings from a Swedish study suggest that the restaurant kitchen often constitutes a male-dominated environment, where young, inexperienced women (and men) on temporary contracts are exposed to what I term a “back-of-house hugging, touching, and grabbing culture.” These norms and expectations form work environments at the micro-level.

A prominent example of how workers are put at risk, and of the connections to identity and space, can be found within the context of the hotel bedroom. For the guests, this represents an intimate, personal and potentially eroticized space whereas for room attendants, predominately female immigrants, the hotel bedroom can be a perilous workspace (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Herod & Aguiar, 2006). As observed by Kensbock et al. (2015, p. 41) in their study of 5-star hotel room attendants “guests might still be present while rooms were being attended or might return to their rooms while the attendant was there. Importantly, the hotel bedroom offers the harasser a context that is usually devoid of witnesses.”

While occupational injuries caused by machinery, chemicals and inadequate ergonomics have been covered in previous studies, health risks due to organizational and social aspects have largely been ignored. In fact, several studies indicate that organizationally sanctioned strategies and interventions for the purpose of preventing harassment and violence and threats of violence in hospitality are either completely lacking or underdeveloped (Folgerø & Fjeldstad, 1995; Kensbock et al., 2015; Ram, 2015; Yagil, 2008). I should stress that customer harassment, in particular, is far less likely to be covered by policies, than is co-worker or supervisor harassment (Handy, 2006; Kensbock et al., 2015).

The intersection of organizational and social aspects such as poor management, casual employment and staff turnover, stress, a sexist and sometimes also racist jargon in (parts of) the hospitality workplace, the presence of

alcohol and drugs, gendered expectations on staff behavior, and the prevailing credo in many hospitality workplaces that “the customer is always right” leads to various challenges in this industry with regard to the prevention and management of various kinds of harassment, threats and violence. That is why we—a team of researchers working together on a recently initiated research project—seek to identify and analyze the strategies employed to prevent and deal with sexual and racist harassment and (threats of) violence in the Swedish hospitality workplace. Thus, we will explore and analyze the strategies deployed by management and workers, individually and collectively, in order to cope, prevent, and counteract harassment and (threats of) violence. A secondary purpose is to provide a thorough examination and analysis of the conflicting aims and contradictions that seem to exist in the hospitality workplace, and which might constitute a barrier to effective, preventive action. One of these contradictions may in fact reside in the recruitment practices and branding strategies currently unfolding, which emphasize personality and bodily attributes over formal and intellectual skills, and which, in some cases, encourage sexual desires and fantasies with regard to certain hospitable bodies.

#### 4 | EMERGING RECRUITMENT PRACTICES AND CORPORATE BRANDING STRATEGIES—BODIES, PERFORMANCE, AND PERSONALITY PART OF THE EXCHANGE

Another theme worthy of further exploration is the part played by bodies in new recruitment practices, as well as the modeling of bodies and personalities to fit with corporate branding strategies. Arranging auditions and castings has grown in popularity among employers, especially in hospitality and retail. Nevertheless, since candidates participating in these recruitment “events” are evaluated on the basis of their performance, personality, and body language, these practices seem to resonate with Linda McDowell's (2009, p. 9) remark that the “embodied attributes of workers are part of the service—their height, weight, looks, attitudes are part of the exchange, as well as part of the reason why some workers get hired and others do not for particular sorts of interactive work.” In order to be employable, the job seeker needs to display a body and conduct matching with the corporate brand and specific work task, or at the very least have a body and behavior deemed to be *flexible* enough to be modeled for a particular brand and/or task (Witz et al., 2003). My argument here is that current trends in recruitment practices and corporate branding strategies counteract the interests of workers, not just because of the objectification involved, but because they impede the efforts made to accredit the knowledgeable hospitality worker, a term coined by Finnish sociologist Veijola (2010).

The narrative concerning hospitality work and many other jobs adhering to consumer services, is that few formal or intellectual skills are required. Instead, having a certain personality and being able to “perform” to customers is what qualifies job seekers, as is demonstrated by the following example from Clarion hotels. Though I have been unable to attend these auditions in person, Clarion has several video recordings from these events, accessible through Youtube. I analyze two of these recordings below.

##### 4.1 | It's all about personality and attitude

The first video was shot in 2007, documenting a talent hunt for Hotel Sign in central Stockholm (Clarion Post, 2011). In this video, job seekers are wearing competitors' numbers on the front of their shirts. Each applicant had 2 min to pitch themselves in front of the jury, composed of managers, regular customers and people from the recruitment agency. A speaker's voice, belonging to the CEO, informs the viewer that:

Knowledge is important. However, we believe that most people can learn how to use a computer system, and most people can learn about the routines of a hotel and about how this trade functions. So, by the end of the day, it's all about personality and attitude.

The second video portrays a similar event, only this time the setting is Clarion Hotel Sense, located in the city of Luleå (Clarion Post, 2013), in the north of Sweden. In the beginning of this video from 2013, a so-called “Director of Passion” states that:

If I were to go in there, to participate in the audition, I would probably put some effort in being myself. It is quite easy, for me, as I am a person with a lot of energy, to overdo it. Um... One should be on the edge of course, and one must be focused, but one must also display one's true self, and really... perhaps share a story about oneself, which affects the jury and which makes the jury understand that here is someone who is passionate about delivering service, but who is also in possession of a big heart.

That talent contests and auditions continue to constitute a vital part of the hotel chain's recruitment efforts is evident from recent postings and advertisements on the company's website (Nordic Choice Hotels, n. d.). Hiring practices such as these, take the expression “competing over jobs” to a new level. As some employers express a wish to exploit the *selves* of employees, one may contemplate the deeper meanings of such a want or intention, even though the commodification of the true self of an individual is inevitably associated with great difficulties (Hochschild, 2003): How does the treatment of workers' selves as “raw material” (Witz et al., 2003, p. 49) affect labor and, more broadly, what is the impact on our perception of humanity and of human rights?

## 4.2 | The sexual objectification and modeling of “juicers”

Another employer that exploits workers' bodily assets for profit is the Danish company “Joe and the Juice,” infamous in both Sweden and Denmark for its unorthodox methods ranging from recruitment practices to terms and conditions of work. An article published in *Dagens Nyheter* (Nandorf, 2016), reveals the exclusive hiring of young, fit and good-looking men, and a distinct macho culture systematically cultivated by management:

The employees are recruited via castings, where the applicants warm up with pushups and war paintings. To participate in these castings, applicants must first upload a picture of themselves online.

Ultimately, the objective is to produce a seductive service, as evidenced by a news article by Swedish television (Kasurinen, 2016), where “Markus,” former “juicer” at Joe and the Juice, shares the following details with the journalist:

In meeting with customers, you should always flirt. It's part of the job. Flirt, and even pick up customers. The target group is teenage girls. Those who work at Joe and the Juice serve as eye candy for teenage girls.

Hall (1993) in a study of sustained social and academic relevance has identified the “flirting game” as well as the interpersonal scripts constructed with certain gender stereotypes and service ideals in mind. In essence, Markus and his co-workers were expected to “act like men,” meaning they were supposed to display a vulgarized version of wolfish masculinity, rather than the deferential and docile behavior normally expected of consumer service employees (Nixon, 2009). Not only did this translate into staff members being required to wear fitted t-shirts that would highlight their muscles, they were also encouraged by management to engage in flirtation and even to pick up customers. Hence, Joe and the Juice provides us with a vibrant illustration of an employer who mobilizes, develops and commodifies certain embodied dispositions through processes of recruitment, selection and training, turning employees into “esthetic labor” intended to embody the corporate idea (Witz et al., 2003).

### 4.3 | Hospitable bodies as containers of certain “generic” skills

Undoubtedly, notions of what constitutes knowledge or skills are ascribed to certain physical attributes, depending on the specific industry, profession, and/or associated tasks. Yet the opposite is also true, for some physical attributes are discursively linked to special abilities and knowledge, and ultimately to specific industries, occupations, or jobs (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Hall, 1993; Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2005; Tyler & Abbott, 1998). Abstract knowledge has a privileged status in Western culture (Longhurst, 1995; Rose, 1993), and is repeatedly celebrated as an essential factor of production, not least in the so-called knowledge-based economy (Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2005; Walby, 2011). For instance, abstract knowledge is supposed to spur innovativeness, competitiveness and growth in male dominated sectors like software engineering and bio-tech industries. By contrast, hospitality work is often depicted as “low-skilled” and as “women’s work” (M. Riley, Ladkin, & Szivas, 2002).

Thus, hospitality workers’ skills are portrayed as “generic” and “soft” (Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2005; Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Veijola, 2010). This impedes workers who hold these jobs from being similarly remunerated to workers in jobs requiring skills and knowledge acquired through education and skill cultivation. Hence, the recruitment practices, and the objectification and commodification of employees’ bodies described above, effectively contribute to the double subordination of hospitality workers, in accordance with the longstanding tradition in Western philosophy of separating and dichotomizing male-female and mind-body (Longhurst, 1995; Rose, 1993). It is precisely perceptions and practices like these, which position hospitality workers within the capitalist, socio-spatial order where the “low-skilled” are also low-paid.

Ultimately, I suggest a systematic and critical re-examination of these jobs, occupations and work tasks, to open up alternative ways of understanding and of properly appreciating the many dimensions and forms of knowledge that exist among people making a living from hospitality and other consumer services. Furthermore, I encourage researchers to investigate and carefully analyze the implications of emerging labor recruitment practices, as well as engaging in careful analyses of the discourses whereby certain bodies are connected or disconnected from specific skills and wage levels. Such a scheme could eventually serve the workers’ interests by empowering them in the production of more equitable and just geographies, in the workplace and beyond.

## 5 | THE WORKING BODY AND CHANGING SPACES OF WORK: TIME FOR A THEORETICAL REORIENTATION?

In this paper, I have examined: The hospitable body and how it is put to work; how certain bodies are selected and become associated with (and disassociated from) certain occupations, work-tasks and spaces of work; how the hospitable body is produced, transformed, commodified and “wasted” in accordance with prevailing modes of production; how the hospitable body is imagined and; how images of the hospitable body may impact on the corporeal. Undoubtedly, the Marxist notion of abstract labor power is indispensable to understand the workings of capitalism, but to fully apprehend the above-mentioned processes, we also need to recognize that all labor is embodied and, as such, diverse.

I have fleshed out two avenues of future research as particularly pertinent. First, I propose in-depth and context-sensitive studies of the hospitality work environment, focusing on the social and organizational aspects, such as harassment and strategies among workers and management to prevent harassment. Second, I call for a thorough examination of the forms of knowledge existing among people working in hospitality, including skills connected to emotional labor, such as competence on how to respond to harassment without giving offense, or what Kensbock et al. (2015, pp. 43–44) refer to as “sophisticated social intelligence” and “key job-related skills.” In a perfect world, such knowledge would be redundant, but the present situation indicates that it ought to be recognized, and that workers should be compensated if not for their skills then for the risk and violation involved. Moreover, the impact of flexible work regimes and casual and contingent labor on workers’ livelihoods (and

consequently also their bodies), is a matter of further inquiries. Indeed, the precariousness of many hospitality workers has become even more acute with the current Covid-19 crisis. Massive layoffs have followed with the crumbling of hospitality and related services, amplifying the lack of social protection of many temporary and/or migrant workers, while workers still “in service” face a heightened risk of infection (Baum et al., 2020).

I wish to end with some propositions regarding the theorization of the body in connection to work and the workplace. As has been pointed out by many observers, the nine-to-five employment for one single employer is supplemented by a more fragmented and plural employment system, characterized by highly flexible and spatially decentralized forms of paid labor (Coe et al., 2010; Kalleberg, 2009; Lai et al., 2008). Transnational corporations and globalized supply chains effectively boost new forms of work and alter the spatial scale at which workers are assembled (McDowell, 2009). Not only do workers become increasingly mobile, but work itself becomes mobile, most recently through platform labor intermediaries such as the Amazon Mechanical Turk and Uber, by which local face-to-face domestic services as well as online services with a global reach are mediated (Graham et al., 2017; van Doorn, 2017). The above-mentioned observations have encouraged labor geographers to develop new ways of understanding and theorizing the workplace (McDowell, 2009; Hastings & MacKinnon, 2017; Jordhus-Lier et al., 2019). Among recent theorization is the idea of the workplace as a relational space, constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations (Massey, 1994, 2005).

Obviously, the working body can also be imagined as a site of becoming at the nexus of social relations and processes. As illustrated by the present examination of the hospitable body, worker's bodies and self-presentation are indeed supple and malleable relative to guests' (and managers) wants and wishes, to the work environment, to work requirements, and so forth. What is more, the working body is formed by the work itself, as evidenced from the aching backs and shoulders of cleaners, and the scarred underarms of chefs. Furthermore, flexible work regimes and contingent forms of employment shape the working body, in both direct and indirect ways. As much as I align myself with these constructionist ideas of the body as an open, unbounded space in the making, I also imagine the (working) body as a territory (S. Smith et al., 2016) and as an autonomous, inviolable space protected by law and international conventions.

This theoretical orientation is motivated by the current erosion of the workplace as a space for organizing workers collectively to pursue, for example, worker protection. Further, it is inspired by the combination of flexibilization and workfare (Peck & Theodore, 2012), which increasingly transfers the economic and social risks to the individual (Allen & Henry, 1997; Jordhus-Lier, 2014; van Doorn, 2017). The validity of such a perspective obviously extends beyond the study of the hospitable body at work, to include studies of forced labor, victims of trafficking, and surrogate mothers amongst others. As rightfully pointed out by Orzeck (2007), the production of the body under capitalism is distinguished by the dual process of differentiation and equalization. In addition to this, I suggest that the working body can be theorized as at once porous, relational and “in the making” (Massey, 2005), and as a (legally bounded) territory in need of protection against the hazards of flexible work regimes, stress, violence, sexual and racist harassment, and poverty. In other words, we should avoid the trap of binary thinking and rather embrace the intellectual possibilities of both perspectives, as we continue to research the hospitable body at work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Lusine Margaryan and Dimitri Ioannides, Department of Economics, Geography, Law and Tourism Studies, Mid-Sweden University, for their insightful reading of an earlier draft of this manuscript. The author is also grateful to Associate Editor Dr Andri Georgiadou and to Joint Editor-in Chief Prof. Banu Ozkazanc-Pan, and for the constructive comments provided by 3 anonymous reviewers. This research has been funded by AFA Insurance (project nr 180013).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are, with a few exceptions, available online. The author of this article used Google and Youtube to access the pictures and videos listed in Tables 1 and 2. News articles are available with the

permission of the publisher (Dagens Nyheter and the Swedish public service television, SVT) or through subscription. The First hotels' advertising campaign "Sleep with us" is publicly available at the Swedish Advertising Ombudsman webpage. The Finnair advertising campaign may be available from the airline company upon request.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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**How to cite this article:** Zampoukos K. The hospitable body at work—A research agenda. *Gender Work Organ.* 2021;1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12635>