



Young Hospitality Workers in their Own Words:

Working Conditions,
Labouring Practices
and Experiences of
Hospitality Labour

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NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

NEWCASTLE YOUTH STUDIES NETWORK



Young Hospitality Workers in their Own Words: Working Conditions, Labouring Practices and Experiences of Hospitality Labour

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About Us

The **Newcastle Youth Studies Network** is an international network of research collaboration in the sociology of youth, led by researchers at the University of Newcastle, Australia. The network consolidates the University of Newcastle's concentration of research excellence in the sociology of youth and facilitates collaborative relationships between international network members. The network is focused on creating new horizons in youth research driven by five key concerns:

Young People and the New Economy

Youth Gender and the Body

Youth, Class and Culture

Youth, Intergenerational Dynamics and the Future

Young People in the Global South

The network also includes a wide range of methodological expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods, including: large surveys, interviews, focus groups, visual methods, photovoice, ethnography, figurative methodology and discourse analysis.

The network is co-directed by Dr David Farrugia, Dr Julia Coffey, Dr Steven Threadgold and Dr Julia Cook. Information about members and current projects can be found on this website. Follow the Newcastle Youth Studies Network on Twitter [@studies_youth](#) and [Facebook](#).



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Executive Summary



Executive Summary

This report explores the working conditions, demands and experiences of hospitality labour from the perspective of workers' narratives about themselves and their work. The report intervenes in public discussions about the entitlements of the hospitality workforce at a time when wages and working conditions in this sector are being increasingly contested. This report describes workers' narratives about the conditions in which they work, the skills they bring to their labour, their relationships with their employers and customers in their venue, and their attachments and identifications with the industry. The report is unique in understanding hospitality labour from the perspective of workers, and the value that workers contribute to their venues as they labour. The report is based on research conducted by members of the Newcastle Youth Studies Network at the University of Newcastle, and funded by the Australian Research Council (G1800136).

In this report, young workers describe the conditions that they work under as characterised by widespread insecurity and informal or illegal working conditions. Workers report that award wages are unusual and a 'perk' of working in particular venues. Workers also report that hospitality labour is frequently experienced as degrading because of the routine incivility they experience from customers and sometimes from their employers. This includes the sexual harassment of young women workers, which is endemic in the industry and negotiated differently in different venues. Workers in late night venues also describe the threat of violence as a routine aspect of their work.

Hospitality work is widely regarded as 'unskilled'. However, hospitality workers describe a wide range of skills and capacities that are required by hospitality work. This includes the capacity for 'emotional labour', a term which describes strategies of relationship management that produce positive experiences for customers. This emotional labour must be provided in precarious employment conditions and amidst fast-paced and physically demanding work, often in unsociable hours. Young hospitality staff are also skilled interactional workers, able to read the bodily demeanour of others for signs of excessive intoxication or the possibility of problematic behaviour and violence amongst clientele. Providing service with a smile when their labour is not respected by customers or employers has negative effects on employee wellbeing.

Despite these conditions, hospitality workers also describe a strong attachment to the industry due to the relationships they form with other co-workers and in some cases due to the nature of the venues in which they work. Hospitality workers value venues that are inclusive and diverse, and in which customers and employers accord them respect and allow them to have pride in the products of their work. Hospitality work demands much from employees, but in the right conditions workers can identify with their venues and co-workers in ways that create lasting attachments.

With these findings in mind, the report concludes with recommendations and implications raised by hospitality workers' narratives. These include stricter enforcement of award conditions, a stress on respectful relationships at work including especially a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, and greater consideration of the enormous value that hospitality labour produces for the industry in public discussions about wages and working conditions in this industry.

SECTION ONE: Introduction and Literature



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The hospitality industry is at the forefront of public discussions about wages, working conditions and worker entitlements in the Australian economy. Hospitality is an important employer and one of the sectors in which young workers are over-represented. However, hospitality labour is poorly understood. It is widely regarded as 'unskilled' work, the details of what people 'actually do' in hospitality work receive little attention. Moreover, while recent 'wage theft' scandals have placed the hospitality industry into the limelight, workers' own experiences have been largely absent from public discussions about the nature of contemporary hospitality work. The purpose of this report is to gain a new understanding of the experiences and demands of work in this industry from the perspective of workers themselves. In this way, this report explores the working conditions and working practices that make up hospitality labour, and shows how workers respond to the considerable demands placed upon them in this precarious and poorly remunerated work. The report is part of the collaborative work of the Newcastle Youth Studies Network, an interdisciplinary and international network of academics specialising in the sociology of youth based at the University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia.

This report is based on data collected as part of two research projects focusing on youth and labour in the hospitality sector. The first was a small-scale pilot study funded by the Faculty of Education and Arts at the University of Newcastle between 2016-2017. The second is a larger ongoing project funded by the Australian Research Council to run from 2019-2021. As part of these projects, our research team has interviewed 45 young hospitality workers in Melbourne and Newcastle. The report's uniqueness lies in its reliance on qualitative data gathered in interviews in which young workers describe their experiences of work in their own words. Current data about the hospitality industry is limited to economic indicators or surveys that report on issues in the industry. The actual experience of doing hospitality work is rarely foregrounded in this research. By drawing on workers' own words, this report explores the practical, emotional and material dimensions of hospitality labour itself.

Hospitality workers do not usually have the opportunity to speak on issues that impact their work. Workers may be reluctant to speak on widely reported problems such as wage theft, routine underpayment and informal/illegal working arrangements in case this will jeopardise their employment, both in terms of their current job and for fears of developing a reputation as a disruptive employee. The same can be said about the endemic nature of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry, which is sometimes discussed by young women as 'just part of the job' however they may wish otherwise (Coffey et al, 2018). It is in qualitative work like ours that workers' stories can come to the fore in public discussions that impact on their work. In this report we situate workers own narratives within broader academic understandings of contemporary service labour, as well as within broader social and economic trends within Australian society. However, before we can explore the data it is important to situate workers' experiences within the existing sociological literature on labour in the contemporary economy. We can develop a framework for understanding workers' narratives through the academic literature on the 'post-industrial economy'.

Recently, hospitality labour has been at the forefront of public discussions about working conditions in what sociologists have described as the shift to a 'post-industrial' economy. Post-industrial economies are characterised by the economic dominance of the service sector, and by the increasingly precarious nature of work in general. The shift from manufacturing to a service economy has been accompanied by increased levels of casualisation and the stagnation of real wages. However, post-industrial economies also entail new and complex value-production processes which make unique and poorly understood demands of workers. Hospitality work is an example of 'interactive service labour', in which social interactions constitute the key task that is required of workers in the course of their labour. Through their service interactions, hospitality workers attribute value to the commodities they sell. Workers are required to provide 'service with a smile', and therefore to contribute to the fun, relaxed and convivial atmosphere that consumers seek when they enter a venue (Farrugia et al, 2018). These interactions must also be suited to the branding strategies of the venue and to the clientele that the venue is aiming to attract, from the formality of fine dining to the relaxed, informal and grungy atmosphere of inner-city music venue bars. Young people are often the preferred workers for this kind of service employment, because they are perceived to possess the kind of energy

and bodily demeanour (and physical appearance) that will fit with the experience on offer (McDowell, 2000; Farrugia, 2018). Some venues also deliberately hire young workers with the right kind of 'subcultural cool' in order to fit the image that the venue is trying to project to consumers. In general, the workers whose experiences are explored in this report are of enormous value to their employers due to the kinds of interactions that they – and only they – can offer to customers. They are critical to the creation of value in this industry and their labour is enormously complex at the level of face to face interactions, despite taking place in precarious and often exploitative conditions. These contradictions are at the heart of working in the post-industrial economy and are the background conditions to the narratives we explore in this report.

Across the chapters of this report, workers describe their working conditions and experiences, and the skills and practices that they bring to their labour. Hospitality work is physically demanding and emotionally draining, and workers describe the impact of work in which 'service with a smile' is required regardless of how a worker is feeling or has been treated by customers or their employer. However, the other side of this coin is that the socially intensive nature of hospitality work means that some workers also identify strongly with their workplaces. Work can be an important source of belonging, and workers may be motivated to seek work at venues who treat employees well and that are inclusive. In this sense, our report also offers recommendations as to what makes a 'good' hospitality venue. Through the voices of workers, we hope this report can inform public discussions about hospitality working conditions and the status that young hospitality workers occupy in the broader economy.

Methods

This research report presents data from the first round of interviews from the ARC funded Discovery Project 'Young Hospitality Workers and Value Creation in the Service Economy' (DP190102103). The study was conducted with the approval of the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics Committee (H-2019-0088).

Interviews were conducted in Newcastle (15) and Melbourne (18) in 2019-20, before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down much of the industry. Young hospitality workers between the ages of 19 and 34 were recruited via social media and snowballing to participate in semi-structured interviews that asked questions about their working conditions and pay; the style, atmosphere and management of the venues they work in; their interactions with customers and workmates; and the skills required to be a good hospitality worker.

Interview data were analysed thematically and inductively, following qualitative analytic techniques. The interview transcripts were theoretically and thematically coded in NVIVO. Further rounds of research in the project will entail ethnography, photo elicitation and follow up interviews.

SECTION TWO: Working Conditions



SECTION TWO: Working Conditions

Across our sample, the most significant issues raised by young hospitality workers related to their employment conditions, including rates of pay and the informal or illegal working arrangements that participants reported as widespread throughout the sector.

They say, "sweet like we got heaps of work", but the heaps of work was like getting start times that were nine o'clock and then if it was dead you'd be knocked off after two hours. You might be scratching your head going like you know, I've been rostered on three...you'd go yeah all right, cool I've got a Thursday shift, I've got a Friday, Saturday and Sunday and then Thursday's two hours. Then Friday's like oh yeah sweet you've got a 9:30 start and you're assuming that you're working till close and then you do two hours, it's quiet...You got the same story on Sunday...you end up with only six, seven hours for the week and then you know, you're chasing your tail. You're stressed and it's not good in that aspect.

Have your contracts in hospitality been...

Contracts?

Yeah. Have you ever signed a contract or has it just been verbal?

Pretty much verbal. Working casual...so really intangible. (Elijah, Newcastle)

Many participants recounted stories of being paid below the minimum award rate, or having employers deliberately withholding benefits:

They were not paying us properly. We found out one day they were paying below minimum wage, which was upsetting, and they weren't paying super but they were telling us they were...Now, this venue also owned a few other venues...They weren't paying super to any of their employees...So yeah, underpaid, not being paid super.

But being told you're being paid super?

Yes. Yes, all the payslips reflected that, yeah. Yeah, it was not ideal. Not ideal for the people who had been there for so many years. (Sophie, Melbourne)

High profile cases of wage theft have recently come to light, especially in the restaurant industry. These are often portrayed as isolated incidents or attributed to an over-complicated award system leading to accidental underpayments. However, the consensus across our sample is that being paid to the award is unusual in the industry, with most workers receiving

below award wages and often being paid cash in hand. Some workers even listed receiving award wages as a 'perk' of working in specific venues.

If they pay you award wages it's not that bad these days. It's still kind of shit, like everyone should be getting paid more, but it's better than other bars where I've got like \$15 cash in hand or something like that. That's pretty bad. But I think as well choosing the venues that you work at and working with good people, you make sure that you get paid right as well. (Cassie, Melbourne)

I've never really thought about it, whether it's fair or not. I just get on with it. I guess it's like that with hospitality. (Alex, Melbourne)

These conditions were especially common in smaller urban venues, whilst large employers owning multiple venues and catering companies were considered to be more reliable in their adherence to the award. When they were not paid appropriately, many young workers spoke about feeling disempowered and unable to resist this exploitation:

I have been taken advantage of heaps of times by bosses. That's just the cold hard truth. Ripped off left, right and centre. Super, not getting paid the right award, stuff like that. Not being allowed holidays, all these things. (Jessica, Newcastle)

The fact is you go to work, you get your money and you don't complain about it no matter how much it is. So, I mean, there was no leverage for me to say, "oh, the pay - what's the deal with this" - because if I did that he would say "oh, you're confident!"... Pay was never really an issue until I asked to be on the books...but it was just that I couldn't - you know, I never ended up getting that sorted because I was like my God, I feel threatened, weird and I don't really feel secure and I didn't think they were ever really going to give me a job properly. (Ash, Melbourne)

Here, Jessica and Ash emphasise feeling an imbalance of power in relation to their employers when negotiating their entitlements. In an overall precarious working environment, workers know that if they are too forthright in arguing for their basic entitlements they will be let go, or de-prioritised for shifts. This can make them feel as though the wages and conditions in their award are somehow 'special', rather than an entitlement of employment. If they feel they are being treated unfairly, they often feel their only option is to leave and seek other employment.

It's like the whole industry intimidates you to make you think you can't say anything. If you say something, it's going to put a mark on your name and then they won't hire you. It's like for example, there were times when I wanted to file for bullying and harassment and stuff like that but then it would be that situation where it's like oh yeah, if you do that, people will find out and then they'll talk. That industry is this big [makes small gap between thumb and forefinger]. It's tiny. People talk, people know each other. So it's like, if somebody says, "oh no, no, she done me for bullying and harassment" and if someone's a heartless bastard and thinks "oh, I didn't even do anything", then that means you're out of a job. You have one bad name, no one will hire you. (Hannah, Newcastle)

A couple of jobs ago, it was [cafe name] in [Melbourne Suburb], I ran that for a couple of years and I had this staff member towards the end of my time there, who was - I didn't realise how much she was getting paid. We were all being underpaid but she was being severely underpaid and she was doing as much work as everyone else. I didn't really realise because I had very little to do with payroll. It got back to me and I put it up and the owners made this big song and dance about it... This sort of snowballed and [another staff member] made some noise about what he was getting paid and they fired him for that. So, I feel like the conversation with the owners as to like, how do you think this is okay?, has never gone well and will never go well. (Noah, Melbourne)

In a previous quote, Jessica reflected on her early experiences in the industry. However, she is now an experienced bar worker, and feels more empowered due to the skills that she has built up over time. This means that she feels more able to demand her legal entitlements:

And now I'm just really not very tolerant of it. I'm just like, no, well you can just do it without me. If you want a skilled person, I'm here, but you're going to have to meet me halfway. (Jessica, Newcastle)

Feeling undervalued is a common story. New hospitality workers come into the industry and are told how much they will be paid by an owner or manager. They either do not know what the award is, or go along with it at first with the expectation it will change. When it doesn't change, they either accept it, look for another job, or leave the industry. Workers who remain in the industry for years may be able to secure work at the award wage. Where the award wage should be a given, in many instances it is a reward, rather than a legal entitlement that workers should expect of their employers.

The problematic working conditions of hospitality extend beyond issues connected with remuneration. Hospitality work is often degrading, and the behaviour of customers and managers threatens workers' personal dignity. As well as being poorly and often illegally paid, hospitality workers report high levels of disrespect and abuse. Customers expect to be treated with respect, or to be shown deference, but respect is rarely afforded to the hospitality worker.

It's like people don't think a pub manager is a real job. That's just demeaning. (Daisy, Newcastle)

Daisy's statement here is a widespread response: hospitality workers need a wide range of skills and are often working in high pressure conditions, but their work is treated as 'unskilled' and therefore low status. Dealing with routine incivility is therefore a part of hospitality labour, which along with poor pay and limited employee entitlements makes the work a frequently degrading form of employment. Gendered and sexist relations are often apparent in these exchanges:

People seem to disrespect the people who work in cafes and restaurants. They look down on them. Men are like "Oi darlin, give me this and give me that". Like, why don't you shove it up your arse?! (Olivia, Melbourne)

It happens all the time, comments or just physical things, like people taking extra long to take their drinks from your hands, or winking at you or thinking - or calling you darling or sweetheart or just saying like, "oh, you're so hot", or trying gross pickup lines or asking for your number, like all the time. It's just so gross. (Paige, Newcastle)

Sexual harassment at work was routinely described by young women in the study, and would originate from male customers as well as managers and colleagues:

The chefs used to treat me so badly... they would make jokes about me getting raped on my way to my car after a shift. They'd say all these horrible jokes about me and I'm just like, okay. That made me end up getting almost thousands of dollars in parking fines, parking as close to work as possible cos I was too scared to go out on my own and walk to my car at night. (Hannah, Newcastle)

You get called darling and sweetheart, kisses on the cheek. It's awkward... why are you doing that? You shouldn't be doing that. (Anna, Melbourne)

This kind of behaviour was unwelcome but was presented as unsurprising and normalised as something a young woman can expect as part of the job. This is especially significant given the recent #MeToo movement, which has drawn attention to sexual harassment taking place in high-profile settings such as the media industry and in the corporate world more generally. Despite the public visibility of this movement, our participants nevertheless described sexual harassment as routine. In this, our project forms part of a large body of research evidence on the gendered dimensions of interactive service labour, in which women workers are often treated as though they are sexually available, and are under pressure to accept flirting and unwanted sexual advances in the course of their work (Hall 1993; Good & Cooper 2016; Brunner & Dever 2014). Their ability to respond to disrespectful behaviour is dependent on the approach taken by management, which is not necessarily supportive of workers' desire for respect at work. Some venues were described as 'supportive' of their female workers and intolerant of sexual harassment, empowering workers to have disrespectful patrons removed from the venue. Other venues were less supportive and prioritised the potential revenue from customers. Regardless of the position taken, the experience of workers reflected informal approaches at the discretion of supervisors or employers.

Finally, hospitality employees working in bars reported that they sometimes experienced violence at work as a result of the behaviour of customers. Such examples demonstrate that hospitality labour can threaten not just the dignity of workers, but their physical safety as well:

We've had fights; we have a fight every now and then. I generally am not the one to deal with that but it is quite confronting. I just - I'm generally pretty meek and violence kind of...I don't know what to do...That's definitely an uncomfortable situation or if I'm - someone's complaining about something and I - it's out of my control and they'll take it out on me; that's also very uncomfortable. I think that's - part of the job is just - there's going to be uncomfortable things. (Jan, Newcastle)

No participants reported being physically hurt at work, but those working in late night venues described the possibility or outright threat of violence as a regular part of their work. This was felt as something they had to be aware of as they served drinks and interacted with customers. While this is a poorly recognised aspect of hospitality labour, it is also a critical aspect of bar work.

Overall, our participants foregrounded the poor working conditions that contextualised their labour. Working arrangements are often informal and frequently illegal. Breaches of award conditions are regarded as endemic and in some parts of the industry are taken for granted as 'the norm'. Workers feel disempowered in relation to employers and are unable to negotiate better conditions for themselves lest they put themselves 'out of favour' with management and lose shifts, or their jobs. The limited entitlements of their employment are also reflected in the low status that they occupy at work. Incivility and harassment are a frequent part of hospitality labour, and participants report that they frequently feel disrespected at work. For young women, sexual harassment is a common experience, and their capacity to resist this depends on the level of support from employers. As well as harassment and disrespect, bar workers must also be alive to the threat of violence, and threats to their physical safety are a part of the routine dynamics of late night venues.

SECTION THREE: Skills and Labour Practices



SECTION THREE: Skills and Labour Practices

Another important theme in our discussions with workers was their status as 'unskilled' workers, and the wide variety of skills and competencies that workers described as necessary to good hospitality labour. In general, while few of our participants held formal qualifications in hospitality work, workers resented being characterised as 'unskilled'. Instead, hospitality labour is described as placing a wide and complex range of demands on workers, requiring them to develop skills in interaction management, efficient bodily movement, and time-management in high-pressure moments. Our participants described hospitality venues as fast-paced environments due to the pressure placed on staff by employers seeking to minimise wage costs:

It's a high stress job. I've worked across so many venues and the common thread of them all is maximum efficiency with minimum staff and go, go, go. (Chris, Melbourne)

In this context, hospitality labour requires efficiency and time management, as well as the ability to take time with customers in order to provide a positive interaction and an atmosphere of enjoyment within a venue:

There is an art to it. There is an art to customer service. There is an art to essentially having your shit together in a lot of busy situations. (Anna, Melbourne)

I would say it definitely takes a lot of skill. Time management for one is very important in this industry and a lot of people don't realise. Efficiency is definitely key and also multi-tasking. Even like a level of fitness. You need to be reasonably fit to work in hospitality a lot of the time, particularly busy places... (Amanda, Melbourne)

Sociologist of gender and labour Arlie Hochschild coined the term 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) to describe what interactive service work means for workers and for customers. According to Hochschild, the key product of emotional labour is feelings, and emotional labourers must deliberately create positive feelings for customers in order to sell a product or make an exchange pleasurable. Our young hospitality workers' narratives about their work foregrounded the significance of emotional labour, and the toll that this labour can take on workers trying to offer positive interactions amidst the fast pace of service in a venue:

A huge skill to have in hospitality is to really not let the customer know what you're feeling. Say you have all this stuff happening. You're feeling really anxious, feeling very emotional, but you have to be really happy to them and really like just kind of adhering to all their demands in a way. So, I've had a worker crack and yell at people and I've actually first-hand witnessed a lot of people cry on the job. (Amanda, Melbourne)

As Amanda expresses so clearly, emotional labour can take a toll on workers who are unable to express their own feelings authentically within a service interaction, and must appear happy and good-natured despite the stresses imposed on them by the job. Workers also felt under pressure to appear sexually available, or at least present the appearance of being available for flirtatious interactions:

[The managers] love big smiles on customers, a lot of - a bit cheeky, a few jokes. Get them a little bit drunk, have a bit of a flirt and do it like that. Yeah, you've got to do the professionally single attitude, just work the charm a bit. You want your waiter shooting you big smiles and happy faces and maybe being a little bit flirty to someone making you drinks and be knowledgeable and giving you just good service, I guess. I think that's one of the things you have to do. (Chris, Melbourne)

I totally get that the lusty drunk vibe is just a part of working in a bar, and that's cool, that's fine. As long as we're on an equal playing field. But it's when someone says it in a way that makes you feel powerless or uncomfortable in that way that it's like, just fuck off ... there just is a line and sometimes people cross it. I think it's very clear. I think it's as soon as you feel unsafe in a situation, it's like 'don't say to me, anything explicit about what you want to do with me'. That's obviously, deeply inappropriate. (Jan, Newcastle)

Emotional labour is made more taxing on workers when customers or employers behave in ways that are disrespectful, a common occurrence in hospitality labour as discussed above. In this context, workers developed highly sophisticated relational and communicative skills – able to take orders, assess levels of intoxication in order to responsibly serve alcohol, interact with customers and co-workers, and remain composed when performing emotional labour:

I've learnt a new skill of being able to lip read, which I never, ever could do before, but I can read someone's lips from across the bar and know exactly what they want to drink. Memory, like remembering who was at the bar first, what way you've been serving people, a lot of awareness. You need to be in your moment, making the drinks. You need to remember what they are. You need to see if that person's too drunk to order. You need to be looking on the dance floor to make sure that there's nothing happening out there. You're looking at your co-workers to make sure they're okay. There's so much awareness that goes on with this job. Physical, it's hard physical labour, just pouring sometimes 300, 400 drinks a night, doing the same actions all night. So much patience, like people just having no idea whether they're too intoxicated or they've had drugs and they forget what they want to order. Yeah. So a lot of communication style has changed. It's not written or verbal communication as per regular. Yeah, you learn - yeah, so many things I didn't think that you would learn from working behind a bar, and just tolerance, as well. So much tolerance. (Paige, Newcastle)

These competencies are not easily recognised as 'skills'. However, workers must develop the capacity to read the emotions and bodily states of others, perform emotional labour, and work on their feet for hours at a time and often late into the night. Moreover, as mentioned in the quote above, front of house bar workers are often the first to become aware of the possibility of violence or harassment taking place amongst bar patrons, and develop the capacity to constantly monitor the crowd for signs of these undesirable behaviours while they work:

The cocktail bar work you can learn new methods of keeping your eyes on heaps of people. There's like a tonne of responsibility. I came into it unskilled and picked up everything on the job. (Alex, Melbourne)

That is a huge skill in the bar ... Like, yeah. Hugely and club scenes and stuff like that. Oh my goodness, that would be half the night's work is just scoping people out to make sure they're not going to do anything crazy...When people start to sit down and get drunk, things can get really wild, really quick. That kind of intimidates me. I don't really want to be the person who has to try and control it. (Jessica, Newcastle)

Monitoring a crowd, serving drinks and performing emotional labour make for a complex and demanding set of requirements. Indeed, participants described hospitality work as 'taxing' physically, mentally, and emotionally. The fast pace, high intensity and high energy required in hospitality service meant many had 'burnt out' from exhaustion. This kind of work was described as 'taking your all', impacting on physical, mental, and emotional health in ways that made workers feel exploited:

It can be really taxing. It is really taxing on the body. It's really hard to have to be just on all the time and to be talking to people all the time and also, not even to mention the actual requirements of working in the job, like making food and making coffee and being fast and clean. I think that – yeah, it requires a lot of skills. (Jacqui, Melbourne)

You're just a 'yes man' in someone else's business. Just lining their pockets when, at the end of the day, they're not worried about my mental health. I'd end up working long stints, long days, you know, filling in gaps when people suddenly left and stuff like that. Then just burning out and just so unfulfilled... it just made me sad. (Jessica, Newcastle)

Workers also felt that their emotional and physical health was not a concern to employers, and that the demands of the job could become overwhelming especially for full time staff:

There's been plenty of times where I've put my all into something, 150 per cent and it's to a point where I've completely burnt out, where I'm confined to the lounge for an entire day. Or there's been times where I've been hospitalised because I'm low on nutrients in my body, because I haven't eaten for a couple of days because I didn't think about it and it's - at the end of the day, it's the environment they provide you. They don't take the time to even just ask you how it's going. Hey, how is everything? Things aren't followed up on, if you know what I mean? (Hannah, Newcastle)

Hospitality work is also made more taxing by the demands of emotional labour. Workers' capacity to create positive emotions in others is necessary to their work but is draining on their own emotional reserves:

People love that peppy vibe. I don't think people recognise often how hard it is to keep up that pep on a consistent basis. It's...maybe the peppy person is actually trying to get more shifts because there are too many staff. So they're all trying to out pep each other. I've worked in places where that's the case. If you're waiting tables, your personality is everything...They're not paid very much at all. They're probably not getting enough shifts for them to just have one job. So then they've got to sort of transcribe that same energy to probably a different place that requires something slightly different from them as well and that's just draining. It doesn't pay enough. That's just the brass balls of it. It doesn't pay enough for people to give that much of themselves. (Ben, Newcastle)

As Ben emphasises, emotional labour is made more taxing by the precarious and poorly remunerated nature of the work, which means that workers must learn how to provide the right performance to suit the clientele and brand of different venues. This disjuncture – between enormous emotional investment and poor financial returns – is a key contradiction for workers in this industry, who report making substantial personal investments in their labour and receiving little in return. This has negative consequences for workers emotionally:

It's made me angrier, definitely made me angrier and more intolerant of people. I really don't like people. [Laughter] I used to like them. I can't stand them now. (Sam, Newcastle)

Some nights I go home and I want to murder every bastard in town but you've got to be able to let it go. There are some people who can't [let it go]. This environment is not for them. (Felicity, Newcastle)

While hospitality labour is widely regarded as 'unskilled', it requires workers to develop new and unique capacities that make a significant difference to their work. This includes the ability to shape their emotional and interactive styles to the clientele of a venue, to read the comportment and demeanour of others for signs of intoxication or inappropriate behaviour, and to communicate well in physically and mentally demanding environments, all whilst working on their feet for long hours. These may not be recognised as 'skills' in public conversations about the value of hospitality work, but they are nevertheless critical to the value that hospitality workers create in the sector. Producing this value is enormously taxing on workers, whose physical and mental wellbeing can suffer as a result. The working conditions and levels of remuneration do not reflect the highly cultivated skills that workers develop, or the substantial personal investments that workers make in their labour to successfully create the right experience for customers. Why then do workers continue to work in this industry, and what can be done to improve working conditions for these employees, whose labour produces an enormous amount of value to their employers? The answers can also be found in workers' narratives about how they create experiences of belonging and solidarity at work.

SECTION FOUR: Belonging and Solidarity at Work



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Hospitality work is relationally intensive. Workers are interacting with one another and cooperating in close proximity. Hospitality work also involves unsociable hours, and existing research has shown that this makes it difficult for workers to spend time with friends who may have different schedules (Woodman 2013). In our research, we have found that these conditions can produce strong friendships and bonds of intense solidarity amongst workers. These strong working relationships are enormously significant to workers' social lives and are a key factor that keeps workers engaged in the industry over time. Many workers described their friendship circles as composed of workmates and other hospitality workers:

The majority of my mates are hospitality workers or have worked in hospitality, or they're musicians, they work adjacent to the industry. It has caused strain on some friendships. (Felicity, Newcastle)

Whilst this participant foregrounds the unsociable hours, others discussed the significance of working relationships that were produced even under difficult conditions, which could make work enjoyable despite the unsociable hours and conflict with management:

Working at [venue] was fun. The owner was just – I'm just going to put it straight, he was a wanker, he was a prick...He wasn't interested in making any connection, besides the main female workers. So, he was a bit particular about them, especially because they could come and babysit his kids, sort of thing. He had a good relationship with a few females but was a complete wanker to the rest of us...But other than that, the club scene was fun. It was good fun working there, it definitely extended my skills and everyone else that I worked with, it was a like a little family, because we all went through the same shit. (Stan, Newcastle)

Stan desires social connection at work, and while this relationship with his employer was poor he describes his relationships with his workmates as 'like a family', consisting of bonds of solidarity created in the context of a demanding working environment. For many hospitality workers, these solidarities mean that they feel connected to their workplaces in ways that go beyond their limited formal entitlements. Workers sometimes socialised at the venues where they worked, and visited their co-workers when they themselves were not working:

Because I know the people, I know the staff, I know someone who will be on. If I want to go for a drink or whatever, I'll pop in and say g'day. Like even if I'm not going to stay there for a drink...But if I'm on the street or coming by, I'll pop in and say g'day. (Harry, Newcastle)

As well as being important to workers themselves, these relationships also facilitate successful hospitality labour, which requires good communication between workers. In other words, there is a connection between labour processes and forms of solidarity and belonging in the hospitality industry that keep workers attached to their venues.

Beyond the labour process however, hospitality workers may identify with the position that their venue occupies in broader subcultures and scenes in which people who frequent the venue are participants. Some venues were described as inclusive and diverse places that deliberately fostered mutual respect between patrons and between workers and management. This was especially the case when venues deliberately created safe spaces for customers of diverse genders and sexual orientations, and also extended to venues that catered to live music scenes that workers may also identify with. In these instances, workplaces were described as communities that offered a feeling of belonging and self-expression through work:

This place has allowed me to kind of express myself and explore who I am and what my morals and my values are...This place specifically has been extremely welcoming and supportive, both the licensees that I have had here are very lovely, family-oriented people who value the individuality of their staff and their patronage, which has been great... the live music is a huge part of it, but because we're a pub everyone is welcome here. We make sure everyone feels welcome, we're safe. Especially with the queer community, we're an unofficially recognised kind of safe space. The staff are all very lovely and approachable. So it's just kind of like the general ambiance of it all. We're not going to kick somebody out if they're in drag or wearing a dress when they should be wearing pants and stuff like that. (Felicity, Newcastle)

In this quote, Felicity describes the venue in which she works as a place where her work can reflect her values as a young person invested in the value of inclusive communities and non-judgemental spaces. Since hospitality venues are important spaces of social activity for the broader community, they come to signify these values for both workers and customers. This is part of what constitutes a good venue for this worker. As well as relationships between workers, participants also described the interactions that they had with customers as significant for their attachment to their work. When they were able to have friendly and respectful interactions with customers, participants described this as an enjoyable part of the job:

But there is still something about hospitality that brings me back. Because I want that banter back and forth with people. I like to meet people. I'm great with - I'm impartial to all walks of life kind of thing. Anyone can come in, I'm ambidextrous. Like if someone comes in and is like a bogan bloke, I'll be like, "how you going, mate? What are you having?" But if an old lady walks in, I'd be like, "hello love, how are you?" (Harry, Newcastle)

The interactions that constitute the main task of hospitality labour can be rewarding for workers, who bring highly cultivated relational skills to their contact with customers. Workers feel able to carry out and enjoy these interactions when they work in venues that facilitate respectful relationships between staff and patrons, which allows workers to have friendly and mutually enjoyable contact with customers.

Finally, workers felt more attached to venues that operated in such a way as to allow a sense of pride in one's work. Despite their limited autonomy over the labour processes and organisational structures of their venues, workers feel that their own sense of personal identity is implicated in the quality of what they offer to customers. This is the case both for the relational aspects of work and for the material commodities that are bought and sold during hospitality labour. Workers wanted to be able to offer a positive experience to customers and felt that the quality of this experiences reflected on themselves as workers. When this was not the case, their pride in their work suffered:

Especially over at [venue]...it was absolutely getting pumped and front of house would be so short staffed, back of house would be so short staffed. It's like then we get horrendous reviews, people saying I've waited hours for my food or I waited hours for my coffee.

But you took the reviews personally?

Yeah, absolutely. It's like if you're contributing to something and someone says it's bad, it makes you feel really shitty. It makes you feel really upset and not feel good and not feel like you're contributing to something that's positive. It sucks. (Hannah, Newcastle)

In summary, while hospitality labour is precarious and poorly remunerated, it can be a source of solidarity, belonging and pride for workers when basic conditions of dignity and respect are met. Workers are invested in their relationships with one another, and value employers who create respectful, inclusive and diverse venues. Workers are also invested in the quality of their work, and value workplaces that allow them to feel proud of the fruits of their labour, be these friendly and mutually enjoyable interactions or products that offer a good experience to the consumer. Hospitality labour can therefore offer an intense social connection and identification when it is organised in a way that is respectful of workers, whose relationships and labour are critical to the success of the venue.

SECTION FIVE:

Summary of Findings and Recommendations



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This report has demonstrated a gap between the poor working conditions and status of hospitality work versus the complex interpersonal management skills required for the job. These 'skills' are usually a tacit requirement, rather than an overtly acknowledged or appreciated dimension of hospitality work. They are also poorly recognised by employers and by society at large. Discussions about wages and working conditions in the industry take place as though the skills and working practices of young workers are irrelevant to discussions about how they should be treated within the industry. However, these skills and practices are critically important for creating value in this industry. Public policy needs to acknowledge these practices, and the value that they produce, when intervening in the working conditions of hospitality workers.

Qualitative research in hospitality highlights the actual experiences associated with doing hospitality work. Data about the hospitality industry tends to be quantitative, relying on economic indicators or surveys that report on issues in the industry. Expressing the emotional, embodied and material aspects of hospitality labour goes beyond representing workers as numerical figures on a spreadsheet or policy document. Such representation is highly important as the participants in our research described problems such as the disregard of award rates and the experience of abuse at work as widespread in the industry.

Many participants did not receive award wages. This means that the laws are at not being well policed or enforced. But more perniciously, workers are reluctant to come forward to report this issue due to the widespread cultural practices in the industry that place workers in even more precarious positions if they speak up about being underpaid. The same can be said about the endemic nature of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry: there are specific laws against sexual harassment, and for that matter sexist and racist abuse, but often workers are not supported by their management or venues if they speak out or want action taken. There is a general acceptance of sexual harassment, especially for women, as being 'just part of the job'.

Hospitality workers want to be respected at work, and want to be proud of their work. A common narrative portrays hospitality workers as disloyal, causing high turnover rates, that makes it 'hard to get good staff'. Hospitality is a highly casualised workforce, and hospitality work is often done by young people while studying. However what our findings also show is that the high turnover of staff is often due to illegal or unfair wage practices, lack of protection from management or owners when it comes to forms of abuse and harassment, or the result of unsavoury, bullying or harassment activities of owners, managers, other staff or customers themselves. When these poor conditions are mitigated, venues can become important sources of social connection. If venues addressed workers' desire for respect at work, they would likely have less costly staff turnover and have a more engaged workforce, which will add to the conviviality of customer interactions and to the atmosphere of a venue.

Quantitative measures and statistics can shine a light on some of the patterns of these issues, but it is qualitative work which can reveal the details and context of how unequal employment conditions lead to exploitation, including the insidious methods that are used to ensure that action is not taken against underpaying and harassment: feigning ignorance, bullying, telling newcomers 'that's just the way it is'. In the most concerning cases, managers or owners themselves are the ones verbally and sexually harassing their workers. These stories also give clues as to how employment inequalities may be addressed and righted.

The implications of these findings include:

- The enforcement of award conditions in the industry must be stricter. Relying on workers to negotiate with employers and report infringements is insufficient in an industry where workers have few formal entitlements and are afraid of losing their jobs if they speak up.
- Informal employment arrangements also mean that it is difficult for workers to ensure that other legal employment rights are maintained, and are the underlying issue that exacerbates problems such as a lack of respect at work. The use of formal contracts within the industry should be encouraged.
- Employers should encourage respectful relationships at work between staff and customers. Beyond simply a moral and ethical imperative, this will reduce turnover and improve workers' satisfaction with their work and is therefore likely to result in financial benefits for the business.
- Workers should be fully supported by their employers to resist and report sexual harassment and it should be considered unacceptable in all hospitality venues. Employers should take an active role in addressing and responding to sexual harassment in their venues.
- Industry bodies could strive towards changing the reputation of hospitality work as 'unskilled' which may influence public perception of the industry and change customer behaviour.

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