

# **Finding womens' happiness in Hospitality: Case Study on how women feel at the beginning of their careers**

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Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

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## **Affidavit**

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

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## **Abstract**

Despite the increasing number of women working in the hospitality industry there is a lack of research about factors which influence their job satisfaction. The aim of this paper is to explore how young women feel at the beginning of their careers using a feminist perspective. Employing a qualitative research it investigates the experiences of women at the beginning of their career in hospitality. The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand how young women feel at the beginning of their careers in hospitality. The methodology is based on four semi-structured in-depth interviews with young women in the Austrian hospitality industry. Following a guide by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) for interpretative phenomenology analysis the main themes are identified: guest encounters, support from colleagues and superiors, recognition and appraisal, wage, working hours, responsibility, career expectations and invisible barriers. The findings show that the influence of perceived responsibility, self-imposed barriers, emotional exhaustion resulting from guest encounters and support from the superiors are the main factors which influence womens' job satisfaction at the beginning of their careers. Useful management implications and suggestions for future research provided are also provided.

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# 1 Introduction

Women are an increasing workforce in the hospitality industry. For this reason, they have been studied from various perspectives such as wage inequality (Campos-Soria et al., 2015), workplace gender diversity (Haile, 2008; Saxena et al., 2009), women in executive positions (Gröschl & Arcot, 2014; Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999; Segovia-Perez et al. 2018), while others have focused on the gender differences in the industry and the importance of it (Petrovic et al., 2014). Even though, research on women has been gaining momentum in the hospitality industry, there is a wide array in inconsistent findings in the literature regarding women's happiness and job-related well-being. Therefore, this study helps to understand in more depth how they feel about their career in hospitality and what makes them satisfied with their job. Moreover, my research is intended to understand how it feels like to be a woman in the hospitality industry from a feminist approach, by examining the perceptions of young women in the Industry and identifying the factors which hinder or enhance their job satisfaction. By researching how women feel about their work in the hospitality industry, this paper aims to support feminist scholars in the empirical research by connecting theoretic principles with pragmatic recommendations. This analysis will lead to recommendations and strategies for the hospitality industry in order to increase the satisfaction of women in the beginning of their careers in hospitality. The following three research questions have been developed for this research:

- What does it feel like working as a young woman at the beginning of her career in a hotel (in Vienna)?
- Which factors influence women's job satisfaction?
- How do young women feel like working in a hotel?

In order to achieve this objective and answer the research questions I conducted four interviews from four young women in supervisor positions in the hospitality Industry. The reasons why I chose Vienna are not only because

I finished my first internship here, but also because according to data from the chamber of labor in Vienna, tourism and hospitality is one of the most significant contributor to the economy for Vienna. Between the period 2009-2014 Vienna has experienced a steadily growth in the overnights, with 6.6% each year, this in comparison to other European cities is noteworthy (Biel & Schmee, 2017, p. 5). Moreover, statistics shows that women are the predominant workforce in the Austrian hospitality industry.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, I review the literature on job satisfaction and discuss the factors that influence the well-being of the employee in the hospitality industry, then the methodology is described. After that I present the results of my research, followed by discussion and my conclusions. Lastly, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are presented.

## 2 Literature review

The presence of women in the labor force has undeniably increased in the last decades, which intrigued a number of researchers to study their behavior, perceptions and condition in a hotel environment (Haile, 2008; Saxena et al., 2009; Gröschl & Arcot, 2014; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015). In most industrialized countries, female employees represent the majority workforce in the lodging industry (Campos-Soria et al., 2015; Gröschl & Arcot, 2014). This is also the case for Vienna. Managers need to be aware of these shifts in diversity especially in hospitality in order to respond appropriately. They must understand that people feel differently about their jobs, hence creating a harmonious work environment becomes vital (Lee & Lee, 2012, p. 49). In a versatile industry such as tourism and hospitality there are many challenges for which many researchers have blamed its complex characteristics such as: long working hours, low wages, over-hours, working conditions, low retention, high level of females and shortages in skilled employees (Bahcelerli & Sucuoglu, 2015; Brien, 2004; Campos-Soria et al., 2015; Santa Cruz et al., 2014, Richardson, 2008). One solution is the retention of the employees, which is one of the most important aspects that has been discussed because it is a continuous challenge to attract and retain employees for a longer period of time. Therefore, identifying ways to satisfy the employees in the industry plays an essential role. Not only, for the bad image of the industry but also because it affects how employees feel in the work environment which further affects how they perform at work. As many researchers have mentioned, the higher the guest satisfaction and loyalty, the higher the profit for such service-oriented industry (Bahcelerli & Sucuoglu, 2015; Brien, 2004; Santa Cruz et al., 2014; Lee & Way, 2010; Richardson, 2008; Petrovic et al., 2014; Lee & Ok, 2015). The focus in various papers has been on gender gap in job quality, wage differences in hospitality, females role in firms performance, gendered behaviour (Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015; Gröschl & Arcot, 2014; Saxena et al.,

2009) rather than exploring a deeper level of the employee's perceptions and beliefs (Haile, 2012; Manroharan & Singal, 2017). However, there is a scarcity in studies focusing on women's workplace well-being, specifically few of them take account the gender perspective in tourism and hospitality industry (Manroharan & Singal, 2017; Campos-Soria et al., 2015; Pastor, 2013). Despite this, gender remains the most studied diversity theme in such manner that the term gender is viewed as a synonym to female (Manroharan & Singal, 2017, p. 79).

### **Job satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry**

Job satisfaction is one of the most important elements in the job-related well-being (Haile, 2012, p. 329). It is determined by "wages, job security, task or job contents, work environment, personal development, and communication or human relations" (Kara et al., 2012, p. 1051). The multidimensional nature of job satisfaction is surely the reason why it is so difficult to agree on one universal definition for it and many researchers still find it challenging to grasp. One of these definitions is the negative or positive state of feeling regarding the job as Petrovic et al. (2014) suggested. Yet, there are still difficulties for scholars to measure it in the right manner which might differ from an industry to another (Lee & Way, 2010; Santa Cruz et al., 2014). Santa Cruz et al. (2014) suggested to analyze job satisfaction from two different perspectives; the emotional state and the comparison between benefits and expectations of the job. First approach explores the positive well-being attitude of the individual, a pleasant and enjoyable state whereas the second approach deals with satisfaction after balancing "the actual outcomes of the position and the benefits of the job" (Santa Cruz et al., 2014). Other researchers explored how to measure the satisfaction in the hotel industry work environment depending on the individual's characteristics such as "associated department, type of job, hours of working, years of experience and working shifts"(Lee & Way, 2010, p.346). They discussed how significant the relationship between the overall job satisfaction and the job factors is. Furthermore, how this relationship influences the willingness of the employees

to stay at the current hotel. In the front office department was shown that there is a strong correlation between work environment and personal status and overall job satisfaction. The strong correlation between employee turnover and the organization's commitment suggests that identifying individual employment characteristics plays an important role in the hotel industry (Lee & Way, 2010). Others have discussed the importance of service orientation for frontline employees from an emotional labour perspective (Karatepe et al., 2009). Service orientation is defined from two different dimensions, first one views the concept from an organization point and the second one from an individual point. The study took place in Northern Cyprus and one of the key findings was that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and service orientation. Moreover, the employees who showed a high level of emotional intelligence were more customer-oriented. Another important finding was that employees who feel that they contributed to the customer's satisfaction generate a higher level of sense accomplishment, they feel that they achieved something valuable for the company. Their engagement and motivation to satisfy the guests increased as well. Nonetheless, employees need psychological support from the managers when they are emotionally exhausted (Karatepe et al., 2009). Happiness is identified as a positive consequence of a person's well-being, and other positive outcomes of well-being are satisfaction and engagement. These two ramifications are discussed more frequently by researchers, moreover, they are identified as types of well-being, the former taking a hedonic approach, and the latter takes an eudemonic approach (Cifre et al., 2013, p. 161).

### **Job factors in Hospitality Industry**

These job factors are described as 'one's effective appraisal of various job dimensions and they comprise of characteristics such as wage, supervision, promotion opportunities and the relationship with co-workers. It is important to identify these factors not only for better employment policies but also to increase the engagement and the commitment of the employees from a

personal level (Lee & Way, 2010, p. 345). Other factors such as “motivation, professional environment” are important for one’s state of feeling regarding the job (Petrovic et al., 2014, p.802); moreover, it is suggested that it influences the quality of the hotel services thus determining these factors should be a priority to the managers.

### **Women in Hospitality**

The number of women in the labor force has significantly increased, however their presence is noticed more in the lower positions of the industry. These jobs are characterized by long working hours, low level of responsibility and low wages (Campos-Soria et al., 2015; Cifre et al., 2013; Gröschl & Arcot, 2014; Kara et al., 2012; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2018; Petrovic et al., 2014). Despite this, some researchers found out that women in hospitality are happier than men even though their work-environment is worse than theirs. Kara et al. (2012) suggested that this can be explained by the fact that women have different values regarding their job-related well-being. A study in Spain was conducted between 2014 and 2016 which have explored women’s position in hospitality and the individual and social factors determining their career expectations and perceptions. They interviewed thirty women to understand their perceptions and barriers behind the decisions-making processes regarding their career. The results showed that one of these determinants was stereotyping which is still a challenge from a gender-role perspective. These traditional gender-role challenge are the so-called “self-perceptions and self-imposed barriers” which are considered to be invisible but significant (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2018, p. 190). These invisible barriers for women were also discussed by researchers who investigated with the purpose to find effective ways for them to attain leadership and executive positions (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999). Petrovic et al. (2014) explored in Serbia for instance the gender differences in the service orientation specifically how gender affects the behavior of people working in Hospitality. They examined three parts of service orientation and job satisfaction, support from the organization, the

focus on customer and ‘service under pressure’. Results showed that women tend to not be satisfied with their job if they do not meet the expectation of the guest and this is because they value their relationships with guests more than their male counterpart. On the other hand, men value organizational support more than women and their job satisfaction is not affected by any pressure from work (Petrovic et al., 2014). Not only organizational support, but also the relationship with co-workers influences the well-being of women in the hotel. Harris (2009) examined how important it is to build strong, trustworthy relationships between colleagues for an Industry in which the emotional labor plays such a vital part. While others have explored how important mutual help between colleagues means in the service Industry (Corsun & Enz, 1999). Women perceive also job responsibility different than men, this was showed by Valentine (2001) who suggested that in the role of a supervisor women feel that they are not assigned enough responsibility. Challenges such as stereotyping and career frustrations are affecting their overall satisfaction at the work-place. Being a service-oriented employee is more valuable in this industry than in any other one. Lee and Ok (2015) pointed out delivering service at certain standards to make the customers more satisfied becomes essential. They explored how important emotions are and how these influence the service orientation of employees. Moreover, their findings suggested that employees who feel accomplished and successful at their job are more happy and committed to their work. This is an important result because in hospitality the employees engage in emotional labour which means that they have to control their emotions (Lee & Ok, 2015). Thus, exploring how young women feel and behave in this challenging industry is essential.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **Exploring Womens' Happiness from a Feminist Lens**

In this paper I am exploring how it is like to begin a career as a woman in hospitality. Employing a feminist approach, I study their lived experiences and how they feel like to work in the Industry for the first time after their studies. Thus, one of the goals of this feminist research is to give women a voice and to highlight their struggles (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). In order to understand the phenomenon, I will listen to their stories and their personal lived experience. Hence 'Everyday lived experience is the beginning and ending point of understanding existential phenomenological thought and research '(Garko, 1999, p. 168). Phenomenology is a method to capture how individuals see and experience a phenomenon. The uniqueness of the phenomenon should be eidetic, which means that the description has to be as vivid as the real event (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This will grasp the uniqueness of the phenomena, specifically how the participants make sense of the world. For the sake of this purpose, the feminist approach is used with my role to translate the message of the young women in this study.

#### **How everything started with four young women**

The purposefully chosen participants of this study are four young women with the age between 22 and 27 years old. They all agreed to participate in the interviews and to be audio recorded about how they felt like working in the beginning of their careers. As DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) have suggested, the participants share a homogeneous set of demographic characteristics such as age, nationality, employment and education. Nevertheless, it is important to analyze each case from an inductive approach, which means that the lived experience of the individual will be in the center (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). The participants are all Austrian and are

currently working at Le Meridien Hotel. They have previously studied or went to a tourism school. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 35 and 50 minutes. The interviews took place in local cafes and perhaps encouraged the interviewees to be less official and to engage more in the conversation.

### **The Interview Guide**

The purpose of in-depth semi-structured interviews is to allow the individuals to share their understanding about the shared experienced. Moreover, this live encounters with the participants enables me to explore each case when they make sense of their living (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). In order to do this a script of the interview is prepared, which contains both thematic and dynamic questions which allowed flexibility but also covered some of the main topics. These research questions attempt to lead the participant to remember the details of the experience, not only this but this method to collect the data will help me to understand how they feel and perceive the phenomenon (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this case, my attempt is to gather valuable data of what they experienced in the beginning of their careers. This will include questions regarding their background, education, their first internship, wage and other factors of job satisfaction. But most importantly is to capture how they felt like being a woman in this Industry. In conducting an interview there are some obstacles, which can hinder the conversation. For instance, one limitation might be the fact that the research questions have a personal nature that can make the interviewees to be hesitant in sharing their stories. Therefore, trust and confidentiality from my side will be essential (Hermanns, 2004).

The topics covered during the interview:

- Interviewee's professional development (background, history of the education, first internships, past work experience, future expectations)

- Interviewee's satisfaction factors (wage, working hours, work-life balance, support, training, recognition and appraisal)

The thematic questions are chosen in relation to the research questions, whereas the dynamic questions are asked to identify opportunities for new insights. An important first goal was to capture how they experienced their first internship and I asked discovery-oriented questions such as 'How would you describe your first internship experience' or 'How did you choose Hospitality Industry?' Other questions in the interview involved: 'How did you balance personal life and work life in the beginning?' and 'what was your best/worst experience in your first internship?' or 'what would you have done differently in your first internship?'. This one-on-one interviews goal was to achieve rich details about the phenomenon, not only this but to also engage the participant in an active conversation. After the conduction of the interviews, they were all transcribed.

### **Making sense of the data**

Interpretative Phenomenology is used to understand the everyday world of these women's experiences. This method is appropriate because it is flexible and focuses on how people view and feel things. All of the four transcripts were analyzed following a guide for Interpretative Phenomenology in qualitative research by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). As suggested each case needs to be analyzed in-depth in order to make sense of the interviewees' experience. This is the idiographic perspective of the IPA. Furthermore, in this process the so called "double hermeneutics" will be used which means that in the beginning the participants make sense of their own world after which the researcher interprets it. The analytical process thus started with re-reading the transcripts several times and reflect on the content. The next stage was to seek themes in the transcripts, which appear more than several times. After that I will group them in categories with the same meaning. Finally, the final list with the main themes will be compiled with its following sub-ordinated themes. These themes are described with extracts from the interviews followed by reflective comments. The reader gets the chance to analyze the study from

the participants own words and at the same time it enables an emic perspective over the study. In the final section of this synthetization, the main identified themes in the interviews are connected with concepts existing in the literature. For the sake of confidentiality, I assigned names for each participant: Interviewee 1 is Anna, Interviewee 2 is Mara, Interviewee 3 is Sophie and lastly, Interviewee 4 is Julia.

## 4 Findings and discussion of the findings

After the transcription of the interviews, the analysis of the four interviewees follows according to the guide suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). The analytical process involves identifying the most mentioned concepts by the participants in the transcripts. The aim is to interpret them and give them a meaning in the context of the research question. The main themes such as support, barriers and responsibility are grouped together followed by the emerged subthemes. The following themes have been identified described the experiences: support... My role here is to decode and interpret the meaning of their experience. Each main identified theme was exemplified with extracts from the original transcripts followed by my comments and theory.

### **The Beginnings**

One study about career longevity in the hospitality industry examined why students want to have a 'quick exit' from the industry in which most of the respondents blamed the long hours and the low pay for it (Altman & Brothers, 1995, p. 81). Having this in mind, the first part of the interview was designed to know the participants' reasons to stay in the industry after the studies. Before their first experience in the industry all of the interviewed women have previously studied in the field of tourism and hospitality industry. Two of them attended a Tourism School in Vienna and the other two have a Bachelor in Hospitality Management. After a short introduction of each of them, I asked them to tell me the reason why they chose the hospitality industry. The reasons were quite different for each participant, from growing up in the hospitality to travelling and family wise, they all chose hospitality from an early age.

Anna stated that she never thought to do something else with her life and she can't think of something else that would suit her. This shows how devoted and engaged she is to pursue a career in hospitality.

So I always liked that and then when I had to decide what I want to be when I am older, I was just thinking about hospitality so there was nothing, there has never been something else for me. It was always about hospitality (Anna).

With the same passion, Mara told me how interesting it all seemed when she was a kid whenever she went on holidays with her family, always absorbed in the hotel operations and how important for her was to find out the secret behind the back office of the hotel. Mara highlighted on a serious note the fact that hospitality is her world.

For me it was always clear, already when I was a kid ... I was wondering how they do it, everything was so clean, so this was my world, I decided to work in a hotel one day (Mara).

On the other hand, Sophie seemed to have a different story to tell me how she began her journey. She started going at an early age to a tourism school and it was interesting how she joked about the fact that it was the worst idea. After finishing the school she did not want to go directly like the other interviewees because she was undecided what to do next. She changed her field for a while and started studying architecture, however it didn't take her too long to start working at a hotel as a front desk agent. While she was telling me this story, I could feel that she was a bit irritated by my question, not only this but she answered me on a slightly ironic tone. I started to notice that she felt pressured to choose a path for her career, so she started to work in a hotel because of her indecisiveness.

So when I was 14 I decided to go to a tourism school which was the worst idea. Just kidding, this was one of the best idea and after school I wanted to not work in tourism so I decided to study architecture which did not go so well because it turned out that it wasn't for me and then I just decided to go somewhere to work half a year and see what I want to do, so I started at Fleming hotel as a receptionist and I don t know how it came but I stayed there for two years (Sophie).

Julia answered that her passion was the reason why she chose this industry, however after years of working in hospitality she found out that it doesn't necessarily imply travelling.

I did it because I love travelling and I was thinking that if I work for Tourism then I would be able to switch jobs within the world...' (Julia)

At the front desk it is required to stand for eight to nine hours, this can not only get physically tiring but together with the constant contact with guests

this can lead to total exhaustion or burnout, which in the beginning all of the participants have suffered from. As Richardson (2008) argued, the majority found working hours too long, however their attitude toward the work is essential. Anna mentioned that not only she had to learn a lot about the hotel and the operation system but also the part of standing for eight hours was hard for her. As for Sophie, the unusual working hours of hospitality put a strain on her; moreover, she felt exhausted from the long hours of standing at the reception.

I think that was something so intense for me at the beginning, to work that much, to stand that long, there were so many things that were new to me and that I had to learn (Sophie).

In the beginning, it is hard, you have weird shifts, you have to stand everyday 8-10 hours and this makes you really tired in the beginning (Sophie).

The level of commitment is determined by how satisfied a person is with the job (Petrovic et al., 2014). Not only commitment, but showing enthusiasm in a service oriented industry such as hospitality are indicators that the person is enjoying their job, therefore providing a better service to the customers (Richardson, 2008). Three out of four showed a great amount of enthusiasm and commitment to the industry. I asked them to describe me if they enjoyed working there for the first time. Engagement is the positive attitude towards the work environment, it is the act of the employees ‘to actively invest themselves emotionally, cognitively and physically’ (Lee, 2015, p. 84). For example, Anna pointed out that for her it doesn’t feel like working, that is how much she enjoys working in this Industry. Also Mara showed excitement when she finally began her first internship at the hotel.

Well, that I enjoy working there, that it doesn’t feel like I work, that I am just doing my hours over there. That I have pleasure in what I am doing (Anna).

I was very excited to start there because all I wanted was to work at the Front Office and I was very happy that I got the chance (Sophie).

For all of the four women the dedication and devotion to the job outweigh the everyday stressful work environment. Therefore, as Richardson (2008) explored, they are satisfied with their job.

I did not want to do anything wrong and all that also when somebody called I did not want to pick up the phone, what if I am doing something wrong but after one and a half month I was much more easy going, I knew that I was doing my job good, I could talk to people (Julia).

## **The Love and Hate Relationship with Guests**

A good relationship with guests is something meaningful for women, for this reason they like to connect with them on a personal level. Their job satisfaction depends on the interaction with the guests; moreover, this influences how they perceive themselves and feel regarding their job (Petrovic et al, 2014, p.801). On the other hand, employees who are constantly dealing with difficult guests are predisposed to be unhappy and unsatisfied, moreover it was suggested that the employees who work at the front desk have a lower engagement level. Moreover, these negative encounters emotionally exhaust the front desk employees (Karatepe et al., 2009). Therefore, understanding how to hinder and diminish them should play an important role for hotel managers.

Because for me it's always very important that our guests are happy that they enjoy staying here and this is also my goal. Mr. Müller is super happy here, happy with my service and he just made me feel very comfortable, also if I would be very good at my job (Anna).

(..) was different but also like it came fluently, many guests were from Germany, so they were happy and then you got the connection right from the start (Julia).

I think what I discovered now at Le Meridien that also guest satisfaction it's important (Sophie).

When I questioned them regarding their relationships with the guests, it was interesting to notice that even though they value these encounters very much, most of their negative feelings regarding the job come from an interaction with the guests. They shared with me some enjoyable and not so enjoyable stories with guests. Anna experienced a verbal customer aggression which drained her emotionally. Karatepe et al. (2009) suggested that this kind of negative

encounters with guests decreases job satisfaction; furthermore, thoughts to quit their job arise as well. In this situation, Anna had to calm herself down.

He was saying that I am nothing so then he left and then I was super depressed. I went to the back office and I had to calm my tears (Anna).

There was a guest and was really shouting at me (Mara).

It is part of the everyday life of a frontline employee to deal with irritated or aggressive guests. This contacts might have detrimental effects on their work well-being. Employees who experience aggressive contacts with guest are predisposed to think more often about quitting their jobs due to the emotional exhaustion caused by these altercations (Karatepe et al., 2009). Sophie experienced a similar event, was even insulted by the guest unfortunately she did not get any support from her superior. She regarded this as the very first bad thing that happened to her.

And of course he was screaming at me why am I so stupid to call him again, that communication in the hotel sucks and nothing works here., he was insulting me, the first very bad thing that happened to me (Sophie).

Julia has described her first Christmas season as one of her most stressful and hard periods of the year, she had to regulate and surpress her emotions in front of the guest, even if it was hard for her to do that it is still part of the service-oriented Industry. As Lee and Ok (2015) mentioned, the front-line employees have to maintain a friendly attitude even they deal with aggressive and demanding guests. As mentioned above, Julia had a difficult time during her first Christmas working at the hotel.

My first Christmas season, people were screaming at you that you ruined their whole life, I think that was a time, when I knew that people will scream at me but it's fine it's not against you it's the situation and you could still try to help them if not then that sit and you have to accept it, after that I was more relaxed (Julia).

The mix of emotions and feelings displayed by the interviewees when they described to me the different situations with guests was overwhelming and interesting at the same time. From disappointment to acceptance, they all showed how different one perceives and feels regarding their multi-faced relationships with guests. It is challenging to have face-to-face contacts with

guests and even more challenging to meet their changing needs. Even though it is suggested that they should display whichever emotion their supervisor is requesting (Petrovic et al., 2014), the “emotional labour” was a challenge in the beginning for them. They began to feel unhappy and exhausted because of this. Karatepe (2010) for instance, showed that constant restraint from the emotions decreases the job satisfaction and leads to exhaustion, even to a burnout. So, when I finally asked them how it is like to always be there for the guests and to make sure to satisfy their needs, they all had a similar experience. Mara found hard to provide quality service in accordance with their expectations.

How to provide the best service in accordance with their wants and needs (Mara).

On one hand, Anna acknowledged how important it is to always be friendly and polite, this suggests that the emotional intelligence as Lee and Ok (2015) mentioned, is really important for them in order to tune with the different emotional states.

I think what’s super tiring is at this work that you always need to smile, you can never show a guest when you are in a bad mood or sad or angry (Anna).

Specifically, when they empathize with the customers, their level of engagement is also increasing. This aspect of the emotional intelligence is important because to some extent the employees achieve a certain level of satisfaction when they help the customers. When I asked Julia why she chose hospitality, one reason was that she genuinely enjoys helping people. She showed a high level of commitment and engagement in this service delivery which means that she has a high level of empathic concern (Lee & Ok, 2015, p. 9).

That’s why I chose it and because I love helping people (Julia).

Moreover, she mentioned that there are hard times in this job but getting a sense of accomplishment such as reviews from the guest is something that motivated her to perform a better service. Emotional effort has a positive effect on job satisfaction and personal accomplishment, because it makes “the

job more enjoyable'' (Lee & Ok, 2015, p. 12). Especially when the employees feel like they contributed or helped to the guest satisfaction, their own sense of accomplishment increases which further motivates them.

I love it when some guests recognize me and write my name on the reviews... There are hard time in this job, when you think that people don't like you and all that but then there is one guest who says that you do it good and that is why I am doing it (Julia).

Julia felt rewarded when a guest mentioned her name, which supports the positive relationship between service-oriented attitude and sense of accomplishment.

### **Support from supervisor and colleagues**

In the battle to overcome the emotional stress and exhaustion from the direct interactions with guests it is essential to have your supervisor by your side which have the power to ameliorate the negative effects (Karatepe, 2010, p. 50). The nature of the relationship with the supervisors and co-workers influence how one performs and committed is to the job (Harris, 2009). Therefore, it is important to develop strong and supportive relationships with each other in order to reduce negative outcomes of the emotional labor. During the internship and even after the internship all of the four participants had a supervisor or a superior who trained and guided them from the beginning. The strong relationship between them had a great influence on how they felt in different situations. This can be explained by the fact that all of the supervisors were women and they share a common experience. Nonetheless, they found support and guidance extremely important for their personal and career development. When I had my first verbal aggression, I still remember that I felt completely ashamed and guilty for not being able to satisfy the guest's needs even though it was not my fault. In the end, I approached my supervisor and asked for help. He definitely gave me the support that I needed and was by

my side which at that time was more important for me than getting a good review.

I was standing alone at the Front Desk and somebody wanted to check in and nobody was there at the moment who could have helped me out but I figured out how to help myself. So Roby was always helping me, and he believed in me from the beginning (Anna).

As Petrovic et al. (2014) mentioned, women do perceive greater support from the superiors, the interviewed women felt that the support and guidance from their managers helped them through difficult times when they either had to deal with guests or managing the tasks. For Anna, for instance, job training along with good communication between her and the manager helped her to go through the problems. Mara emphasized the fact that training from her supervisors helped her to perform the daily tasks. This finding is in accordance with previous research of Petrovic et al. (2014) who suggested that employees will feel incompetent without proper training.

And then support should also be on the job training, you have a difficult situation you should have your manager by your side to help you deal with the situation with a solution, and discuss possible solutions for the problem (Mara).

But I had a really great team and front office manager and they really trained me on the job, they showed me everything and I was there for three months (Mara).

Women view mentorship as a source of guidance and inspiration. They believe that having a strong relationship with a mentor helps them to find out their career path. Not only this, but they also seek encouragement and support from them (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999). In Sophie's case, she developed from the beginning a very close relationship with her superior which helped her in her career development, once again proving what that when women have other women as supervisors they are motivated to aspire to a bigger position.

When I started working at Fleming, I had an assistant front office manager and front office manager and the assistant was a very good friend of mine so we developed a good friendship and she always supported me and later when I became a supervisor she became front office manager so I was her assistant and everything she needed I did it (Sophie).

Julia also mentioned that she enjoyed being treated by her superior on the same level, an aspect which she is looking for in a superior, making her more satisfied at work.

was really good, the front desk staff my boss she was a dream boss because she was not somebody that I was working under, we were on the same level which I liked and was looking forward to that in a superior, so that was something that I really liked (Julia).

Even though women have more positive interactions with guests than men do, it was interesting to analyze how they felt after a negative interaction. I identified my first negative interaction with the one from Anna, because as she mentioned in the end you cannot make everyone happy and you have to learn to accept this fact in Hospitality if you want to avoid a burnout.

They expect that you should do the best, sometimes you cannot make everybody happy. I think that's something I had to learn myself, sometimes there just nothing you can do to make the guest happy (Anna).

### **Support from colleagues**

Another valuable support for the interviewees was the one from their co-workers. Researchers have suggested that if you have an abusive supervisor, the support from your colleagues can reduce the negative outcomes (Xu et al., 2018). None of the participants had an abusive supervisor in the beginning yet, they had aggressive contacts with guests. The close relationship that they had with their colleagues had a positive impact on their well-being because they felt relieved to talk to somebody who understands what they were going through. Not only this, but helping each other out and finding solutions together was really important and fun for them. For example, Mara mentioned that the fact that her co-workers were giving her attention when she was only a trainee made her experience much more enjoyable.

We worked together, we helped each other and when somebody was screwing up, the other one came and solved the issue. We helped each other a lot, we went out together and I think that's the most important (Anna).

They are understandable, and then you also make friends with your co-workers and after work you just go for a drink and you meet on your off days because they understand.... did not have so many friends there but it was fun, and they treated me nice and took me to all of the events and took care of me, that was fun, to work with them (Mara).

On the other hand, Sophie explained me how important trust and commitment in her relationship with superiors and colleagues are for her. She told me the reason why she left the hotel in the end. It all started when her superiors did not trust one of her colleagues in one bad incident with a guest. This shows that not only an abusive relationship with the supervisor leads to turnover intentions as Xu et al. (2018) suggested, but also a lack of trust and support between them. Moreover, for her it was meaningful to have a supportive relationship between colleagues which influenced her behavior positively as Corsun and Enz (1999) have argued in their study behaviors between peers.

It is the most important thing that you can rely on your colleagues and on your boss (Sophie).

For me it was disappointing because I need support and I thought that they would be a team and that was the reason why I left Flemings (Sophie)

## **Recognition and appraisal from the superiors**

Turnover is one of the biggest negative outcome of job dissatisfaction in hospitality industry, therefore researchers are exploring factors such as recognition and different methods for appraisals to decrease these outcomes (AlBattat et al., 2014; Valentine, 2001). When asked if they enjoy being praised and recognized by their superiors they all shared the same opinion, which is that recognition is the most important for them. For instance, Mara told me that after she received three reviews in a row from guests, her manager put on a poster those reviews, got her chocolate and named her the trainee of the month. Furthermore, she finds that indirect recognition is as much as important for her as the direct one. For example, she told me about one of her colleagues who was really good at upselling was assigned to train the new intern which means that the manager thought that she would be the best one to teach the trainee.

The most important thing for me was recognition, for me it's super important that from time to time my manager and other colleagues of mine comes and say well done... really well job well done (Anna).

There were three guests and they wrote down how friendly I was and helpful and that they would come back to me. That was really nice to hear and my manager took the cards where the guest wrote and put it on a poster and bought chocolate and I was the trainee of the month (Mara).

Recognition is definitely something very very important and a lot of people think that recognition is coming directly but I think that also indirect recognitions are important you know..?. (Mara).

Moreover, she also mentioned that she enjoyed getting feedback and appraisal from her superior after she got more responsibilities. Therefore, the trust between her and the supervisor is valuable to her.

I think it was in the middle of the internship, telling me that I did a really good job and that she would leave me in charge everything the hotel, that she could trust me this was a big step for me, that she trusts me, the other (Julia).

Appreciation and communication were two important elements for Sophie and Julia. Both described how accomplished they felt when they got to be appraised by their supervisors. They pointed out how much they need appreciation and reward for their personal fulfillment. Julia also mentioned the monthly meetings between her and the management team. The scope of these meetings is to discuss with her possible career developments; furthermore, during these meetings they assisted they gave her feedback and advice about her performance in the hotel. She found this as a great opportunity for further improvements.

Every time I was doing something good.... I did a lot of good things, they appreciated and I think that I was the only one getting an appreciation (Sophie).

We do get appraisals all the time, but when we do something good they say it. They say that we good at this, we have a personal talk when they tell you what you do good and what they should improve (Julia).

## **Wage and working hours**

There is no surprise that the working conditions in Hospitality Industry such as working on holidays, often long underpaid hours and changes in shifts influence the overall satisfaction and engagement of the hoteliers (Lee, 2015). The gender-based disparity still exists in the industry moreover, women accept to be paid lower than their male counterpart. The reason why they do this is because they want to prove that they are better, they want to show their worthiness (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999). Having this in mind, one of my curiosity was to find out how these young women coped during their first months with these changes in their lives, specifically if they think that it was worth it for how much they worked. Even though it was suggested that the salary level does influence if the graduates with a major in hospitality choose to remain or leave the industry (Altman & Brothers, 1995), Anna wanted to make it clear from the beginning that she did not choose hospitality because of the earnings, she knew right from the beginning that it won't be worth it.

Because I am not working in Hospitality cause of the money cause the money is shit. You don't get much, you would earn so much more money for the kind of work that you would do in other departments or industry (Anna).

On one hand, Mara also believes that money isn't everything in the hospitality industry and that in case you want to get rich it's easier if you change the industry. On the other hand, she is looking for fairness when it comes to wage, this is mainly because she has to work longer than usually. For this reason, she is expecting to be fairly paid. Nonetheless, enjoyment and commitment are more important for her than for her overall satisfaction.

Here's the thing you have to understand that if you want to work in the hospitality you'll never get rich. But if it's a job that you really like and if you are happy then wage is not everything so, I mean it's not nothing but it's not everything, it's should be fair. So if you say that you work every week 80 hours, I earn less than any technical engineer. That is not fair, wages are not high, but you need to be fair (Mara).

Characteristics of the hospitality industry such as the working hours and the schedule are known to be reasons why employees are unsatisfied in the field or even think about turnover (Altman & Brothers, 1995). When asked if they have any problems with their schedule or working hours three of them have no issue with it. Both of them suggest that they actually enjoy it and that it is worth their time, especially in the beginning of their careers. They also highlighted how important it is to have your family and friends by your side.

I do not have any problems at all with over hours, I think that right now we are at an age where we should do over-hours we have our entire time to focus on our career (Anna).

No, not really, ten two six and then later I had months with only late shift and then months of only early shift, not too hard for me (Sophie).

As mentioned before, the fact that most of them have friends in the Industry made it easier for them to balance the work-life. According to Mara, she knew from the beginning that she will not have a normal schedule like everyone else but the fact that she could still meet up with her friends made it much easier for her.

For me it was never hard because I really grew up working in the Hospitality so I knew in the beginning when I was fifteen years old that my working time will never be the same as anybody else's working schedule, I had a lot of friends who also work in the Hospitality, so it was no problem and they are really cool with it (Mara).

It was hard for me, I didn't know my schedule beforehand and when I would work, if I had late or early shift, so that was hard, it's hospitality sometimes I had Mondays, and Tuesdays off, it was just hard to have seven days in a row or ten days but you have to get used to it (Julia).

On the other hand, Julia had difficulties to adapt to the unusual working schedule. She acknowledged the fact that in this industry you don't have convenient working hours and that sometimes you even have to work for seven or ten days in a row. I think that is aspect of the industry is considered enough, especially for human resource practitioners. In my case for instance, my first ten days working in a row exhausted me physically and emotionally, it was a challenge for me and made me question my choice to work in this industry.

Yes, that was my toughest day. We also did not go on break, we worked from seven until 4 a clock. No break, no time to drink no time to go to the toilet, you always were standing at the front desk, talking to people, checking them in tough and intense (Anna).

When she first started working at the hotel, Anna did not expect to have such so many demands from the guests as she told me. This happened especially around Christmas and New Year Eve when the hotel was fully booked. She remembered one day in January when most of the guests were about to check out and the day started in a hectic way. The working conditions were extreme, she mentioned the fact that they did not have breaks or even time to go to the toilet.

### **Career expectations and the Invisible Barriers**

Employees are motivated through ‘power sharing and increased responsibility’ this results in a higher job satisfaction. In addition, giving them the opportunity to prove themselves in decision making processes for the company encourages their participation in the work activities (Valentine, 2001, p.183). In contrast with men, women perceive greater career barriers and for them it is more important to perform well on the job (Valentine, 2001, p.181). Julia made sure to highlight how empowered and worthy she felt when she did a great job by herself.

I liked it, at first it was intimidating but it felt good to know that I can handle the business, so at the time she was gone I could just do the reservations, welcome the guests, the breakfast so it was really nice, I liked it, once you feel confident and you know that you can do it then it's nice (Julia).

On the other hand, she admitted that she was afraid to take a bigger responsibility, especially in the beginning. From her perspective, the fear of doing something wrong would be one of the reasons to not take a higher

responsibility. However, this self-imposed barrier determined her to take the next step in her career and advance to a supervisor.

I was really nervous to do something wrong and you have a lot of responsibility, you are the first person (Julia).

For Sophie, having the sense of success and personal achievement after those nine months was a feeling which she vividly remembered. Her superior gave her a good feedback which she did not expect to receive. As Altman and Brothers suggested (1995), one of the reasons why graduates choose to stay in the industry are the increased job responsibility and the success. Even though she was the youngest one in her team and the one who started most recently she was the one who got promoted. Moreover, she was reluctant in the beginning to tell me about this, suggesting that she was embarrassed to share her success because she did not feel worthy enough. Another engaging reflection of hers is that she thinks that it is her right to make mistakes in the beginning, especially if the supervisors do not tell her how to do it before. She admits that she is often facing stressful situations at work; however, she points out how valuable it is for her to learn something new or to have a new challenge.

I think after nine months my front office manager we had a talk about how work is going and he told me he wants to promote me as a supervisor because somehow I was the best in our team even though I just started and everybody else has some experience and at that hotel as a supervisor I was just like an assistant front office manager so was not like only leading a shift it was also doing back office stuff, having bigger responsibility and taking care of everything (Sophie).

For me it's fine if I get a lot of responsibility, if they give me a lot of it and they don't tell me how to do it then it should be fine if I make mistakes and I should not be screamed out if I make mistakes, for me it is quite okay, it is stressing situation but in the end, you had something to do, to think about something new (Sophie).

But I like taking responsibilities for things, I like to be in charge and I like to think about things for me it's important to use my brain (Sophie).

Approaching the end of the interview, this last part was designed to capture their self-perceptions and self-evaluations of their first experience as women in the industry. After they told me their future plans and goals regarding their careers I wanted to know their opinion on their performance in the last years. In order to do that, I asked them about their past expectations and disappointments. Moreover, I wanted to find out if they remember any past mistakes. All of them showed insecurities when asked if they recall doing something wrong, either because of stereotyping or embarrassment. They all have their own sense of judgement and at the same time a lack of confidence in their actions. However, as the months passed by these insecurities faded away after they got to understand and control their daily tasks. Anna's insecurity started from the very first day when she felt incapable to perform the normal tasks.

I remember that on the first day I thought like "shit" how will I be able to do this, to check-in and check-out how should I ever be able to talk to the guests normally you know that it is everyday life for me (Anna).

On the other hand, Mara emphasized the fact that starting so early in the industry made her very emotional. Despite this, she does not regret showing too much sensibility at that early stage of her career. From one perspective, this helped her learn more about herself. Moreover, she got to be more self-disciplined and self-organized. Every stage of her career contributed to the path of becoming a manager one day. Therefore, as Segovia-Pérez et al. (2019, p. 189) emphasized, it takes a great deal of "devotion to the organization, flexibility, sacrifice and passion" to succeed in this industry.

I have to organize myself to work with the time schedule and this is very important to have self-management in place but all the things that I have done more in balance, I was very emotional when I was younger. And now I am like okay this happened I am just growing to a manager (Mara).

The higher you get in your career the more tasks and more projects and then of course work load is bigger and then you have to organize yourself (Mara).

As Richardson (2008) argued the first experience for an intern does influence the future decisions regarding their careers. The interviewees had different experiences which were influenced by the same factors to a certain level.

When I questioned them if they would ever consider to change the industry all of the four interviewees had different views on this matter. One of them said that because of the working hours she would consider to change it. However, she could not imagine herself working in another industry which she would enjoy as much as this one. This suggests that she is willing to give up normal working hours for the sake of doing what she really enjoys which is hospitality.

So the working hours are something, big reasons why I am sometimes still considering to change, to different department or different job. But then I think about what kind of job I could change to and nothing really comes to my mind. There is nothing else that I would enjoy as much as this industry (Anna).

For Mara, her first experience at the reception especially as a Night Audit has shaped her path in different ways. On one hand, it gave her a bigger sense of responsibility and confidence in her own abilities. Moreover, for her working during the night was a chance to learn another side of the industry which helped her develop and grow as an empowered capable woman. Lee (2015) mentioned that this self-evaluation has a positive effect on the employee engagement.

But there were many days that I was really tired but working in the night is a very interesting experience, you learn a lot in terms of confidence but also taking responsibilities, because you are alone in the hotel and it helped me a lot to grow and if I wouldn't have stayed so much in the night then I would've have not be here today (Mara).

The four women have created their own barriers in the beginning of their careers. However, the well-known stereotyping factor was not a relevant one in how they perceive their professional career. Despite this, they still have ‘‘internalized negative beliefs about their own capability’’ as Segovia-Pérez et al. (2019) suggested. They did not feel confident or believed in themselves enough to perform their jobs. Two of the interviewees have blamed this on the lack of proper training from the management team. Nonetheless, they regarded the support from the supervisors as one of the most important factors in the career development. For instance, Anna has recently applied for a supervisor position after two years of working at the front desk as an agent. The only

barrier in her development was the self-imposed one as Segovia-Pérez et al. (2019) emphasized in their research.

I was so super angry cause I knew that I was good enough already and I knew that she knows that I was good enough (Anna).

Nevertheless, when asked how she reacted after her first big mistake she answered that right from the beginning she put too much pressure on herself and on how to behave. She wanted to exceed the invisible expectations, which she set for herself. In the end Julia admitted that was she once believed that it is impossible in this Industry. Moreover, after she achieved to overcome these self-imposed barriers, her confidence increased showing how important sense of accomplishment and success are for her.

So I am that kind of person who wants to do everything right so I wanted to be perfect right from the start basically which is impossible (Julia).

### The three magic words

In the last part of the interview, the purpose was to get a description of their first experience in a hotel. The answers were on one hand surprising, three of them described it as a fun experience. This can be explained by the fact that they were all at a young age when they started and they all had a good relationship with their co-workers and superiors, which has a positive influence on their positive attitude about the job. Anna’s first word to describe her experience was ‘tough’, she said that hospitality is a tough industry, especially for beginners. For Mara, it was an instructive time with many interesting things to learn. Sophie mentioned that it was very tiring in the beginning especially because of the working hours and standing for eight to nine hours. She also mentioned that it felt complicated but after three months everything was much easier with the help and support from her colleagues. Lastly, Julia pointed out how versatile and challenging the industry can be, not only with guests but also with finding the work-life balance. Despite this, her last magic word was ‘happy’, showing that even after challenges, she feels positive about her experience. Lastly, two main themes are identified: fun and challenging, which shows how diverse the industry is.

Anna	tough, fun, but intense
Mara	educational, interesting and fun
Sophie	fun, very tiring, it felt complicated
Julia	versatile, challenging and happy

## 5 Conclusions and managerial implications

The purpose of this study was to explore how women in hospitality feel in the beginning of their careers. The key identified themes following the analysis are as follows: support from superiors and colleagues, pleasant and unpleasant guest encounters, perceived responsibility, recognition, wage, working hours, career expectations and lastly, the invisible barriers. There are useful management implications which arise from the findings of my qualitative research and as Lee (2015) suggested, it should be a great concern for the managers to find effective ways to enhance engagement at the work-place. In general, all the four women had a rich and pleasant first experience; however, the women also reported unfavourable aspects of the job. One of them was the unpleasant guest encounters. These findings are in accordance with previous research which suggests that unpleasant encounters with guests negatively influence work satisfaction (see Karatepe et al., 2009; Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Karatepe, 2010). However, there are some contradictions with this finding. The participants also emphasized how good they felt when they received positive feedback from the guests, which is what Petrovic et al. (2014) have concluded in their research. Therefore, further studies should explore this contradictory relationship which may assist hotel managers. A further unfavorable aspect was the intensive working hours which are also in line with previous studies to preceding studies (see Altman & Brothers, 1995; Richardson, 2008). Another key finding suggests how essential the supervisory support is for all four women. Specifically, the support from their managers helped them progress further; moreover, it diminished the negative outcomes from aggressive guest encounters which have a negative impact on their emotional state (see Karatepe et al., 2009). However, working in a cooperative team also played an important role. All of the four interviewees have received support and help from friends and family, which is fundamental for women to achieve their career goals (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). This also corresponds to previous studies which address the importance of supportive colleagues at work (see Harris, 2009; Petrovic et al., 2014; Corsun and Enz, 1999). On the other hand, I also discovered that trust is essential between a

manager and employee. One of the interviewee even decided to quit her job because of mistrust. Managers should also take employees feelings into account which can be achieved through frequent meetings. Therefore, further studies should investigate the effects of mistrust between employees and their superiors. A further finding which corresponds to previous studies (see Altman & Brothers, 1995) is the perceived responsibility by the four women. The more responsibility they got the more capable and confident they felt in their abilities. Moreover, the relationship with their supervisors got closer as suggested by Valetine (2001). For this reason, hotel managers should consider to construct jobs to enhance the employees' experience. The unusual working hours and low wage are also two important identified themes. However, there was no significant influence on their job satisfaction, which contradicts the findings of Altman and Brothers' (2015) research. One reason that there is no negative influence is the fact that they enjoy their job. This is in accordance with previous studies, which suggest that the more engaged the employee is, the more satisfied she is (see Lee & Ok, 2015; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019, Yeh, 2013). Recognition is also a significant factor for young women on the job satisfaction; for this reason, hotel managers should find more effective ways to praise and recognize the employee. Lastly, the invisible barriers of the four women have a great impact on their satisfaction. Self-imposed barriers and self-perception are essential factors which determine how they feel about their job. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Segovia-Pérez et al., (2019). Therefore, I believe that hotel managers and human resource practitioners' should assist women in breaking this "glass ceiling" (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999). On a final note, womens' happiness in hospitality is influenced by many factors: support, recognition, working hours and responsibility; however, it is only in their power to overcome the invisible barriers in order to become happy women in the hospitality industry.

## Limitations for Future Research

As in every empirical study there are several limitations to my research. The primary limitation is that I collected data in an Austrian context. All of the four participants are of Austrian nationality and work in the same hotel. Therefore, the findings of this study may not relate to other cultures or hotels. I recommend that future research about how women perceive support from the supervisors should be done in other hotel contexts in Europe or in other types of hotels such as boutique hotels and three to four stars hotels. Moreover, the findings of this research were based on a small sample of four participants; therefore, another recommendation would be to collect data from a bigger sample which would be beneficial to further investigate the condition of women in hospitality. I recommend in this case future research in order to understand the contradictory relationship between employees and guests at the front desk. Lastly, the length of the interviews was another limitation of my research. The four interviews had different durations ranging between thirty-five to fifty minutes which implies that more detailed data was collected from those which had a longer duration. I propose a study with a longer duration in order to capture rich detailed data.

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