

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN TRANSIENT SPACES: HOSPITALITY WORK ON-BOARD CRUISE SHIPS

ADAM DENNETT

Department of Logistics, Operations & Hospitality Management,
University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK

Despite a growing interest in the well-being of cruise ship labor, very little is known in this area. This exploratory study seeks to investigate the strategies that front-line hospitality workers are able to negotiate and attach meaning to in this consumptive work experience. Twenty in-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken with front-line hospitality staff (waiters and pursers). The cruise ship, being a unique working environment—intense, restricted, and encapsulated—requires workers to adjust, adopt, and sacrifice to the sociospatial conditions. Therefore, through the transitory and active nature of identity salience, a ship-based identity was created. Five themes emerged from the data. Ship space, the system of the ship, and time were themes considered unique to the cruise ship industry, primarily acting as a binding mechanism, promoting a shared experience of belonging, and attachment. These themes were thought to provide the conditions to develop a ship-based identity. The two final themes, relationships and occupation, were the mediators in the context-specific factors with how the participants made sense of themselves and others. The exploratory findings provided in this study are potentially useful for practitioners seeking to further understand the development of harmonious communities in a transient workplace setting.

Key words: Cruise ship labor; Work spaces; Identity; Hospitality work

Introduction

Identity construction is recognized as “complex” and “multidimensional” (Chase, 1992, p. 121), and depends on the context in which it is placed (Lawler, 2008). Researchers have conceptualized identity in numerous ways, although mainstream theories suggest that identity encapsulates cognitive

and motivational components, within individual and social processes, suggesting that identity is a dynamic rather than a static entity (e.g., Tajfel, 1978). Identity is therefore a reflection and reaction to external stimuli, premised on the interaction between an individual (self-identity) and the social structures in which the individual resides at a given time. An individual or a group of individuals make

sense of themselves and others within the interactions and conditions of an occupied physical and social environment/space. Identity construction within the workplace has a long history of research, yet little is known of the identity construction of those individuals in workplaces that have extended responsibilities for employees (i.e., providing on-site accommodation).

There is limited research regarding the work and life of cruise workers (Bolt & Lashley, 2015; Dennett, Cameron, Bamford, & Jenkins, 2014; Gibson & Perkins, 2015; Lee-Ross, 2008). Knowledge in this area can provide employers, recruiting agencies, and potential seafarers with valuable insights into one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry (Clancy, 2017). De Grosbois (2016) highlighted how working conditions are often discussed from a recruitment perspective and are focused on the potential benefits to the seafarer, rather than offering a realistic account of working life. This suggests a basis for Matuszewski and Blenkinsopp's (2011) claim of the mismatch between the work/life expectations and reality for workers on-board cruise ships. Due to stark differences between employment on ship and shore, comparisons between such are flawed and likely not to grasp the realities faced by cruise ship workers (Gibson, Lim, & Holmes, 2016). Therefore, it is beneficial that the physical and sociocultural conditions and their impact be recognized in research investigating cruise ship labor. These conditions impact on their experiences, well-being, and identity construction. Interest in the workforce and working conditions on-board has grown proportionally with the growth of the cruise ship industry (De Grosbois, 2016). Recent research published in this area has included the focus on "sustainable cruise ship employment" (Adams, 2017), "crew work experience" (Bolt & Lashley, 2015), "employee behavior" (Dennett et al., 2014), "employee engagement" (Gibson & Perkins, 2015; Radic, 2018), "organizational commitment and job satisfaction" (Larsen, Marnburg, & Øgaard, 2012), and "organizational socialization" (Matuszewski & Blenkinsopp, 2011). Although such recent research has contributed significantly in an underrepresented area, little effort has examined how individuals construct their identity while on-board.

Ship-Based Identity and On-Board Space

Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) referred to a cruise ship as a "floating piece of space" (p. 27) containing its own society embedded with specific norms and values, from which an individual derives a sense of identity. This situation is only thought as temporary, as Matuszewski and Blenkinsopp (2011) discussed; employees embrace the work on cruise ships as a "different world," being aware that once they leave the ship they would return to "their own world." A cruise ship has been considered what Goffman (1961) called a "total institution," controlling the time and space of employees while demanding excessive degrees of personal involvement (e.g., Aubert and Arner, 1958; Tracy, 2000; Zurcher, 1965). The ship is a system with a high degree of social (Antonsen, 2009) and hierarchical control. Stemming from historic naval practices there are many spoken and unspoken rules, formal and informal systems that are highly developed, strongly affecting the conventions of language, behavior, and social interaction. The social structure of employees, for example, is one dominating factor of such control mechanisms. The industry, unable to shake its naval past, relies on a three class social structure of officers, staff, and crew (e.g., Lee-Ross, 2008). One's position in this structure can influence many living arrangements while on-board (e.g., living quarters, dining access, leisure time, visitation to guest areas, and so on).

The cruise ship is a unique space for workers, which can involve elongated physical and social separation from mainland society while being captive in a transient vessel (Dennett et al., 2014). This is coupled with labor practices that may conflict with those recognized as ethical or "normal" on land. The fixed physical and unique social boundaries are both a home and workplace for individuals, fostering a cultural atmosphere that is shared with others (Weeden, Woolley, & Lester, 2010). Previous research looking at employment conditions in the cruise ship industry (see Bolt & Lashley, 2015; Clancy, 2017; Klein, 2002; Terry, 2011, 2014) have studied: level of pay, contract length, hours worked, recruitment practices, hierarchical systems, etc. The research suggests work on a ship is in part sacrificial, yet within the secure and restrictive

confines of the ship there is a sense of freedom (Bennett, 2016; Matuszewski & Blenkinsopp, 2011). Betwixt captivity and freedom, individuals are able to create a ship-based identity. This assumes, therefore, once in the society of the ship, individuals will derive their identities from the social categories in which they belong. Social categories are communal characteristics that bind groups of individuals within a given space. This is often complex, whereby individuals can be a member of several social categories—for example, nationality (Terry, 2014) and/or an occupational community (Lee-Ross, 2008)—that can act as a positive (i.e., group confirmation) or negative (i.e., discrimination/isolation) force. Therefore, identity is a fundamental concept that can help to explain what people think about their environment, the way they do things, and why people do what they do in those environments (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

A concept that could provide some assistance for understanding cruise ship workers is “liminality.” Although previous research has linked liminality to the industry (i.e., Matuszewski & Blenkinsopp, 2011), none have taken this further to explore identity and space. By definition, Beech (2011) understood liminality “to be a temporary transition through which identity is reconstructed” (p. 288). Relative to this study would be to recognize the key components that affect the transformations of employee identity construction on-board. van Gennep’s (1909/1960) writing on *rites of passage* has been fundamental in the understanding and development of liminality. This seminal work, developed further by V. Turner (1982), describes three phases of identity reconstruction: separation (divestiture), transition (liminality), incorporation (investiture). Applied to the cruise industry, the first phase is the physical movement of employment on the ship. As noted earlier, the nature of working on-board is to be semi-isolated from “normality” and home (at least for the length of the contract). The transition phase is described as a “social limbo” (V. Turner, 1982, p. 24), which could be inferred to as individuals trying to make sense of their new environment and where they fit within it. The final phase is an employee’s enhanced understanding of themselves and their position within the ship-board society. This is the interest of this article—the exploration

of how individuals move through these phases to (re)construct their identity within the space of a cruise ship.

Research Approach

This qualitative study utilized semistructured in-depth interviews. The collection of primary data focusing on cruise ship employees is a difficult task. Industry cooperation in this research area is unlikely, mainly as a consequence of some questionable labor practices the industry engages with. Equally, the logistical nature of the cruise ship industry makes contacting employees directly challenging. Due to such difficulties the researcher advertised for participation via online social media networks/groups for the use of cruise ship employees. This was further complemented with the strategy of snowball sampling. A total of 20 interviews (see Table 1) were conducted, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The sample of respondents fit three criteria: (1) employed as a waiter or purser (similar to front desk); (2) completed at least one full contract on a cruise ship; and (3) either currently employed on a cruise ship or have worked in the industry within the previous year of the interview taken place. The sample included 11 females and 9 males representing 15 different nationalities. There were 8 waiters and 13 pursers (one participant had worked as both waiter and purser); they had an average 3+ years working in the industry. The contract length of the participants in this study varied from 4 to 9 months, although the majority were on a 6-month contract (both waiters and pursers). The participants worked for a range of cruise ship companies, which meant that findings based on a singular company was limited as much as possible. The geographical spread of the sample made it impossible to undertake the interviews face-to-face; instead telephone interviews were conducted with all participants but one who preferred a Skype interview (Christine). The average interview lasted just over 40 min, with the shortest lasting 17 min and the longest over 2 hr. All individuals were given fictional names.

The interview design was semistructured and the main purpose was to allow participants to “tell their story,” so questions remained relatively open.

Table 1
Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Occupation(s)	Sex	Nationality	Length in Industry	Cruise Ship Employment Status
Angela	<i>Waiter and Purser</i>	F	Italy	6 years	Left 6 months prior to interview
Barbara	<i>Purser</i>	F	Hungary	2 years	Employed
Charles	<i>Waiter</i>	M	Philippines	8 years	Left 3 months prior to interview
Christine	<i>Purser</i>	F	Argentina	6 years	Left 7 months prior to interview
Craig	<i>Purser</i>	M	USA	1 contract (8 months)	Left 2 months prior to interview
David	<i>Waiter</i>	M	UK	1 contract (6 months)	Left 2 months prior to interview
Hannah	<i>Purser</i>	F	Australia	2.5 years	Left 6 months prior to interview
Joanne	<i>Purser</i>	F	Canada	4 years	Left 7 months prior to interview
Joseph	Messenger, Dish washer, <i>Waiter</i>	M	India	10 years	Left 6 months prior to interview
Karen	<i>Waiter</i>	F	Russia	3 years	Left 3 months prior to interview
Kim	Merchandise, <i>Purser</i>	F	UK	2 years	Employed
Mandy	<i>Purser</i> , Selling vacation packages	F	Canada	2 years	Left 7 months prior to interview
Neil	<i>Purser</i>	M	Macedonia	2 years	Left 3 months prior to interview
Norah	<i>Purser</i>	F	UK	2 years	Employed
Norris	<i>Waiter</i>	M	Cuba	2 years	Left 2 months prior to interview
Peter	<i>Waiter</i>	M	Trinidad and Tobago	2 years	Employed
Sam	<i>Purser</i>	M	South Africa	2 years	Left 2 months prior to interview
Sarah	Beauty, Youth staff, <i>Purser</i>	F	UK	4 years	Left 3 months prior to interview
Wendy	Lifeguard, Hotel operations, <i>Purser</i>	F	UK	2.5 years	Employed
Zack	<i>Waiter</i>	M	Slovakia	2 years	Left 4 months prior to interview

Note. Role of interest shown in italics.

Initial questions asked participants about their background, length of time within the industry, and their motivations of undertaking such work. Further open-ended questions provoked participants to think about their specific job role and the formation of the on-board community. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and followed the guidance given by Braun and Clarke (2006). Familiarization came through repeated readings of the transcripts, which were conducted on a “line by line” basis and informed the coding and interpretation of the data to discover main themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This analytical approach allowed the researcher to

be open to new information, rather than restrictive to the search of predetermined criteria, allowing themes to evolve.

Thematic Analysis

Five themes emerged from the data. Three were associated directly with the ship: ship space, the system of the ship, and time. These themes were unique to the cruise ship industry, primarily acting as a binding mechanism, promoting a shared experience of belonging and attachment. The remaining two themes were identity building: relationships

and occupation. Individuals in this study largely made sense of themselves and others based on their occupational role. However, this could only be fully realized within the sociospatial conditions of the cruise ship.

Theme One: Ship Space

The physical layout of the ship and the position of being transient in motion in the middle of the ocean were important in how participants evaluated their careers, their work, their identity, and community, but also how they came to understand their world. Bitner (1992) explored how physical spaces and environments influence behavior, and leading from this research, Kworntnik (2008) developed the notion of “shipscape” to describe a cruise ship’s space, which encapsulates a “man-made physical and social environment” (p. 292) surrounded by the sea. Consistent with this previous research on space, it was clear that there was a strong, and often affective, response from participants about the cruise ship, which was both negative and positive in construction. This interest of space for this research was not necessarily the physical presence of these spaces, but the reactions and adjustments individuals encountered when understanding what these spaces represent in their journey of creating a ship-based identity.

Subtheme: Adjustment to Ship Space. The adjustment to ship space was a prominent finding. Interviewees discussed the immediate physical presence of being at sea—the “rocking” and noises from the engine for example is a constant reminder of their environment. Some individuals discussed how this was a “massive shock” (Joseph, waiter) or a “culture shock” (Sam, purser). The findings suggest that adjustment to the demands of the ship is a key factor in the construction of the ship-based identity. Having to adjust to the physical and social aspects of the ship forced individuals to think and make sense of themselves within that circumstance, which is in contrast to their previous employment and living situation. This sentiment was captured further by some of the more experienced employees who commented on the psychological struggles of leaving the ship-based identity:

These guys they can’t live on land anymore. . . . They’re just too used to certain things only and they are nobody. . . . On-board they know exactly what to do . . . I can, I never actually really adapt back on the land, land, land life. I’m struggling. (Angela, waiter and purser)

Vogel and Oschmann (2012) suggest that life on-board offers a degree of “reliability, predictability, structure and routine” (p. 16) from which workers can arguably gain a clearer sense of self. Although work and life are, at times, hard, it is shared with colleagues, and it is something that brings a community together with communal experiences and hardships. The adjustment to spaces on-board was both a source of frustration, but also convenience. Some individuals were complimentary about the preparation of food and locality of their cabins, stating that “everything was ready for you” (Zack, waiter). Yet, equally some battled with how the ship nullified elements of personal freedom and control.

Two spaces were mentioned more than others in this study—the mess (staff canteen) and cabins. Thompson (2004), when exploring the mess area on cruise ships, suggested that social identity boundaries are reaffirmed in such places due to the different mess areas of officers, staff, and crew. This is also similar to the allocation of cabins. Cabins are a small space granting some personal, but shared, space. Single cabins are only given to high officers or officers with special privileges, although generally staff and crew will share two to three people per cabin. In this study, participants discussed how cabins were coordinated depending on hierarchy, department, occupation, and gender. Although not highlighted in this study, nationality could also act as a segregator (i.e., Terry, 2014). It was evident from the findings that space was often politically charged, restrictive by necessity, while simultaneously reaffirming status and identity.

Theme Two: The Ship as a System (Hierarchy and Rules)

Within the space of the cruise ship each participant made note of the cruise formality, the hierarchical system, or the chain of command and the connotations for individuals. This was a system that workers could not escape and one’s hierarchical

position transcended to almost all aspects of life on-board:

the ranking is, is definitely, ah . . . something that they, erm, (laughs), you know, on depending on if you are a crew member, a staff member, or an officer it makes a big difference on where you eat, where you can go on-board, so that was probably the biggest difference I would say. (Mandy, purser)

There are constant reminders to an individual's occupation, their rank, and what they can and cannot do as a result. Given the mix of people, both passengers and staff, from different backgrounds with diverse cultural beliefs, it is important for clear rules to be in place. This type of system, although a cause of frustration and sometimes confusion, was generally accepted as "the way it is" (Charles, waiter). Although important for safety and efficiency, from a worker point of view this also restricted freedom, personally, and professionally. From a professional aspect, there seemed to be anxiety about getting into trouble or losing one's job:

"I didn't like that . . . for small things you would get in to a lot of trouble or you'd get written up, or they would threaten to, you know, that you would lose your job" (Joanne, purser)

but it can be very strict on the ship, I mean, a lot of people are terrified for their jobs, some days, sometimes they go out and have little bit too much fun, and the next day, there's sometimes there a threat, you know, like, oh we will be breathalysing people today. (Kim, purser)

Exploring emotional behavior on cruise ships Johansson and Naslund (2009) stated that losing one's job on-board "is not just loss of income, but also an attack on part of your identity" (p. 51). To lose a job on a ship would be in part losing a sense of self. Being context specific, an on-board identity would make little sense when out of that context. The threat of losing one's job was not only judged on occupational performance, but also on the behavior while not working. Rules referred to by participants generally centered on alcohol consumption and the requirement to speak English on-board. Talking in a language other than English, especially in the presence of a passenger, was not permitted. This was one of the several social control mechanisms evident from the findings in this study.

Theme Three: Time

Time on-board was reported to be a precious commodity and one that was heavily consumed by work. Time that is usually taken up by the demands of one's family, paying bills, shopping, and so on is partially relinquished or irrelevant, albeit for only a temporary period. Therefore, there is arguably more time that is dedicated to one's work and one's way of life on the ship. Even so, participants talked of time as being limited, illusive, and intense, and it was often a source of conflict or frustration, and particularly between the division of work and life (social time).

Subtheme: Work Time. Participants often discussed how having a day off was unheard of; there were no holiday entitlements and even getting time off due to illness was a difficult task:

It's a lot more intense, erm, you work a lot more hours, you work, erm, 70 hours a week minimum (.) maybe working overtime, erm, its full on like, you work 7 days a week, erm, you don't get a single day off. . . . I worked 6 months for a whole straight without one day off. (Sarah, purser)

All participants worked a shift-based system. For waiters, in particular, this was a necessary system to meet demand. For example, a common work day for waiters in this study was based on two shifts a day for breakfast and dinner. Lunch was often less busy on the ship as customers are generally exploring new destinations. There were two occasions (Joseph and Zack, both waiters) in this study in which participants discussed paying another cruise ship worker to work their shift, either to get some time off or just to help them with their occupational demands:

Oh, we used to pay someone if we were really tired, we used to pay someone to cover us. (Joseph, waiter)

Although working hours were long for every occupation, the time spent on the job varied between the two positions in this study. It was accepted that waiters had the longer hours and that their work was more physically and mentally demanding:

yeah I was working from 5.30 in the morning until erm . . . sometimes 12 o'clock at night. I have to

say that not all of the roles were like that but the average job on the ship averaged about 60 hours a week. . . . Sometimes I'd catch myself falling asleep, falling asleep you know and I'd go for a toilet break or something you know I'd go there just to get away for some time. (David, waiter)

Subtheme: Social Time. It was clear that what participants were able to do, to what extent, and at what time was heavily influenced by the nature of their work. This was particularly more notable for waiters than pursers because of the longer hours and more physical demands. A waiter's employment responsibilities were generally spread out over the course of a day, whereas a purser's shift system were usually more compact, giving them more time outside of work. This is not to suggest pursers were not frustrated with a lack of social time. Christine (purser) talked about how workers were not really the "owner" of their time. Their time was predetermined by the demands of their role. The frustration was "not having time for a social life" (Christine, purser) and when there was time, it was often a "sacrifice" (Joseph, waiter), which was usually rest. Generally, participants would feel they were working all of the time, or at least found it difficult to get away from their work:

but we do have a limit on the amount we can drink, coz . . . according to the marine law, like we are all still technically working it doesn't matter even if we are not clocked in. (Kim, purser)

even when you had off time, it wasn't like you really *had* time off (Joanne, purser)

on the ship there is no Monday, no Saturday or no Sunday, its everyday Monday there, you work minimum 11 hours a day, no, no day off or whatever. (Charles, waiter)

Theme Four: Occupation

It was clear that one's occupation on-board was a major contributor to one's identity. As Sarah (purser) states, "everyone knew you for the type of job that you did". Who they were before being on the cruise ship did not seem to have much relevance; it was who they were on the ship, what occupation they had that held significance to self and social definition.

The occupations of purser and waiter differed in many ways, including level of hierarchy, pay, time spent on the job, and the physical nature of the role. This noted, there was one common factor, besides being on a ship, and that was the significance of the role to their identity formation. Only three participants (Craig, purser; Mandy, purser; and, Zack, waiter) viewed their occupation as a way to experience cruise ship life and to travel. Although these were important considerations for the majority of participants, for most their occupational role took on an affective and central importance. They would reflect upon how they "love their job," "love what they do," and how this has changed them:

it really forged me into a different person. (Angela, waiter and purser)

"Yeah, it's a, it's strange because I mean it's technically just . . . erm, it's just what I would be basically doing at home, its, you know working at front desk, but it just seems, coz it's like on a cruise ship, and they've got such amazing kind of customer service, such an amazing reputation, it does make me feel kind of proud of my work. (Norah, purser)

The general feeling amongst participants was that "outsiders" have little idea about what it is really like to work on cruise ships:

a lot of people just tell me you are wasting your time. Why don't you get serious, you know? My god this was the most serious job I've ever had, very organised and precise. (Angela, waiter and purser)

Participants would often become quite vocal or emotional when discussing this, which would suggest that participants did feel somewhat attached to their occupational role and being on a cruise ship. Participants, consistent with social identity theory (e.g., Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliff, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), often felt that they had to defend their occupation and that they were working on a cruise ship.

A common factor in the discussions regarding both occupations was the professional and specialized service offered. This was heightened by the level of service that the cruise ship offers. However, the difference in hierarchy between the

two occupations was well documented during the participant's discussions and justifications of their roles. The hierarchical position of waiters is crew, while pursers are often considered as officers. Pursers, in particular, would often reflect on the hierarchy as an important aspect to their occupation and life on-board the cruise ship:

"Yeah, this is, I really like this job, I think this is the greatest job on the ship to do. . . . Coz you know everyone it's not, you don't have that much of, erm, of pressure, also because, we, we don't work that many hours, and I really like talking with people . . . our rank is like officers, so we are also allowed to go everywhere on the ship, not like working on the lowest deck all the time, and not seeing anyone for hours, it's a really great job. (Barbara, purser)

Waiters in this study tended to be much more creative regarding the justification and defense of their roles. While acknowledging elements of "dirty work" (e.g., Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006) within their role, the waiters reflected on a range of factors such as the high level of training, expertise, and the importance of their role for guest satisfaction. As David (waiter), discussed:

at the end of the day I was serving them food but it's so much more, you have to entertain them, you have to do tricks, you have to play with the kids, it's not just giving them food on their table, you know, there's so many standards that are needed following and the training is actually so intense. (David, waiter)

It was further evident that the occupation of a waiter was generally motivated by financial gains. Typically, waiters are only paid a very small amount by the cruise ship company. There is a reliance on guests to compensate waiters with tips. Most of the waiters would not talk about the exact amount of money they earned, although Angela (waiter and purser) stated that she was given "50 dollars a month as a salary and 3,000 dollars in tips." David (waiter) also explained that:

I was assigned 24 guests, erm averaged on maybe, on a cruise of say 5 days we'd have 24 dollars per person and I had 24 guests. (David, waiter)

According to David the earning potential was considerable, although the price of this was that

it was a very hard and time-consuming role. Furthermore, with the potential of earning and losing money in the restaurant, it was a competitive and occupationally deviant arena (e.g., Raelin, 1984). Several waiters discussed how they would compete for the best tables that were closest to the kitchen and that there was also evidence of "sabotage" through the practice of stealing cutlery and glassware from rival tables. Such acts are a direct consequence of the reliance on tips as an income. Equally, it could be argued that this encourages waiters to provide their best service at all times.

Theme Five: Relationships

Relationships made on-board are central to the happiness and longevity of workers. The majority of workers come to work on-board cruise ships as strangers, and therefore the relationships formed on-board engendered belonging and support structures. The constant transition of people (passengers and workers) means that relationships may be temporary, yet intense, and also very easy to make. This is somewhat similar to what Sampson (2003) termed "transnational communities" that extend beyond nationality and form due to occupational similarities in an international arena. While the key relationships discussed in this research were with work colleagues, participants also acknowledged the importance of management and also guests.

Subtheme: Relationship With Work Colleagues. When describing their relationship with work colleagues, participants were more likely to use more emotive language. It was evident that this relationship was very important for all the participants:

I will tell this was one part of the job that was perfect, because err . . . you are there for seven months, you do not have your real family. (Zack, waiter)

Being "stuck" and isolated on the cruise ship is a factor that intensifies such relationships. The majority of participants compared the relationships on-board as being a "family." It seemed that this is something that the organization would also strongly replicate. The use of this type of language is more likely a strategy that offers a form of psychological safety and belonging to a community. The more

comfortable or at home workers feel on the cruise ship, the happier and more secure they will be. Although relationships were typified as being strong, they were also transitory and often portrayed as being superficial in that “you never get to know people on-board” (Hannah, purser) and “I wasn’t really having friends, or what I would say friends” (Christine, purser). Some participants discuss that it is difficult to really get to know people on-board; this is not who they are and that “people have like different lives at home, and this is not their life, on the ship” (Kim, purser). The relationships generated on-board are formed under context specific variables, and in some instances, relationships are pushed together “with friends you wouldn’t expect to have” (Wendy, purser).

Subtheme: Relationship With Management. Unsurprisingly, the findings in this study suggest that the relationship with managers differed in the two occupational positions. On the one hand, pursers spoke very highly of the management, suggesting they were fair and supportive. Norah (purser) compared her manager to a “father figure” and that they were “head of the family.” On the other hand, waiters were more likely to describe their relationship with managers as being difficult. It was very much more autocratic. When discussing management, the general consensus from waiters would be that they didn’t feel “supported” or “appreciated.” Charles (waiter) had particularly strong views upon this relationship and discussed how he felt management was always “against” the workers and they didn’t really understand their role as a waiter. This may be because the dining room has more staff than in the purser division and this management style was in place to keep control and maintain efficiency of operations. In both positions it was accepted that “you cannot really treat them like friends” (Angela, waiter and purser). The line of authority was still there in social situations, and although they may be more relaxed, levels of hierarchy would generally socialize together.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study has taken steps to capture some of the complexities and richness of the professional and

social experiences of front-line hospitality staff (waiters and pursers) working on-board cruise ships as they negotiate, create, and justify their identities and community formations within a transient, encapsulated, and fast-paced environment. The usefulness of this exploratory study is with the further understanding of cruise ship workers and how they make sense of this world, and in particular from the perspective of two specific occupational roles (rather than combining all cruise ship workers). The physical space on-board a cruise ship has a clear impact upon how workers make sense of themselves, yet it is the intricacies of “ship space” that has shed further light on an underresearched area. Ship space is the interactional and consequential factors of the physical spaces and bureaucratic systems on-board a cruise ship, coupled with the transience of time (liminality). These three elements create the unique conditions whereby individuals create a ship-based identity, which is often central to their occupational role and the on-board community in place.

What is clear from this study is that all participants created a ship-based identity, which was different from how they perceived themselves on land. Being an environment that is unique, workers have to adapt, adopt, and sacrifice—their previous identity has to be reshaped to meet the criteria of the place and system of the ship. Individuals coming onto the ship become reliant upon the ready-made community on the ship (Matuszewski & Blenkinsopp, 2011), and a community that often encircles one’s occupation, department, or hierarchical level. This socialization process in turn has implications upon the formation of identity and an individual’s “sensemaking” (Weick, 1995). V. Turner (1982) highlights how individuals are induced through such liminal spaces in response to factors such as “shock” and the guidance from “elders” (p. 42). In a liminal society such as in the case of the cruise ship, it is seen to be important that the collective, guided by the bureaucratic systems, is encouraged, if not enforced. Arguably, cruise ship organizations are able to do this much more effectively due to the monopoly of time and space. A result of this is the creation of a perceptual strong membership (i.e., “family”). The affiliation of this membership, bound by the physical boundaries and “strict” governance on-board, is manipulated by

the occupational hierarchy. During such transience, away from “normality,” the occupation becomes a stabilizer for identity (re)construction. This is evidenced in this research between the roles of waiter and purser. Within the confines of the cruise ship an occupation is a key means whereby individuals can accomplish meaning and purpose. An occupation is a dominator of time and a regulator of space, something that individuals are being constantly reminded of. Through instrumental cues (e.g., hierarchy and access of space) an individual’s occupational identity can be more salient (e.g., LeBoeuf, Shafir, & Bayuk, 2010; J. C. Turner, 1984).

Evidence from this research is indicative that individuals form affective responses (positive and negative) towards the space and system of the ship. As liminality is a temporary state, this can cause situations of uncertainty and disruption, yet also encourage freedom and creativity (Bamber, Allen-Collinson, & McCormack, 2017; V. Turner, 1982; van Gennep, 1909/1960). This is demonstrated in the metaphor analysis of Dennett et al. (2014) whereby individuals associated the experiences of working on-board with a broad and often conflicting range of metaphors (i.e., home vs. prison). As individual’s progress through their contract(s) (i.e., time), the ship becomes more meaningful to their identity (re)construction, and rather than being a liminal space, there is indication that the ship becomes a “transitory dwelling place” (Shortt, 2015).

The findings from this study are by no means concrete, but do offer areas of interest for future research. First, the concept of identity could be further explored theoretically to consider the specific factors which affect the shift in identity (re)construction, particularly as the contract progresses. The shift in identity could also consider the previous experience of the individual (e.g., the completed number of contracts). Second, while the notion of “ship space” is of interest, it is also simplistic in design. Further research could consider other elements of the on-board culture, such as the impact of specific microspaces, a consideration of nationality as a factor, and a thorough exploration of the on-board hierarchy. Third, research could consider a range of other occupations, other than hospital-ity natured, to explore whether the concept of “ship space transfers to other individuals on the ship.

Biographical Note

Dr. Adam Dennett is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Events Management in the Business School at the University of Huddersfield. His research interests include the area of cruise ship employment, through the exploration of occupational identity and community behavior.

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