The Nature of Customer Entitlement in Fine-Dining Restaurants: A Qualitative Study of Waitstaff Perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of customer entitlement from the perspective of fine-dining waitstaff in South Africa. A power imbalance between customers and waitstaff is especially likely in restaurant environments because of the expectations of customer acquiescence and the notion that "customers are always right" (Fisk & Neville, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven waitstaff who were employed full-time in a fine-dining restaurant. Theoretical thematic analysis yielded five themes: (1) excessive demands, (2) mistreatment of waitstaff, (3) openly and excessive criticism of service quality, (4) entitled behaviour that affects other customers, and (5) aggressive behavioral reactions to unmet expectations. This study contributes to the limited research on customer entitlement in restaurant environments and provides a foundation for further research in this area.

Acknowledgements

This research has caused me to reflect on my own expectations and behaviours, and to realise the many ways that I have demonstrated an entitled mindset in my life. We as students are constantly made aware that the life of an academic is “a calling.” In many faculties (and especially Commerce), academic staff knowingly and willingly accept lower salaries, greater workloads and longer hours than they might have in business because of the deep passion that they feel towards building knowledge in literature, practice, young minds or all three. I have taken this for granted and I am concerned that future generations will continue to do so, too.

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Introduction

Individuals seem to be increasingly subscribing to the belief that they should get what they want, when they want it and often without having to take the well-being of others into account (Fisk, 2010). This an example of someone possessing characteristics of either narcissism or psychological entitlement (i.e. unrealistic expectations and a lack of empathy; Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004; Zboja, Laird & Bouchet, 2016). The concepts of entitlement and narcissism have received increased attention in recent years by both researchers and the popular press. For example, the use of the phrase “sense of entitlement” in newspapers increased by 300 percent between 1996 and 2006 (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008).

Entitlement has been defined as an individual’s belief that they deserve preferential treatment or reward (Campbell et al., 2004; Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Individuals are particularly prone to demanding preferential treatment when they have an inflated self-worth and illegitimate sense of superiority (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Jordan, Ramsay & Westerlaken, 2017). Although individuals rightfully deserve outcomes that are proportional to their inputs in exchange relationships (Feather, 1999), entitled individuals expect outcomes that exceed their inputs and feel little responsibility to earn such preferential treatment or reward (Boyd & Helms, 2005).

It has been suggested that Western society is experiencing a narcissism epidemic and that we are living in the “Age of Entitlement” (e.g. Samuelson, 1995; Twenge & Campbell, 2013). Empirical evidence in the USA is showing a rise in self-focus, especially in people born after 1980 (i.e. Millenials or Generation Y; Twenge, 2013). College students scored higher on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) compared to previous generations (Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). Stinson et al. (2008) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 35,000

Americans and found that nearly three times as many respondents in their 20s (9.4%) experienced symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) compared to respondents over the age of 65 (3.6%).

Apart from American students, signs of entitlement-related attitudes and behaviours seem to be influencing life in multiple domains and countries (Fisk, 2010). Research into employee entitlement in the workplace has increased and shows negative outcomes for individuals and organisations (see Jordan, Ramsay, & Westerlaken, 2017 for a review on employee entitlement). Academic entitlement (i.e. unrealistic expecations of academic success) in higher education institutions has become more prominent (e.g. Blincoe & Garris, 2017; Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Tourism research notes self-interest and excessive demands from tourists visiting Australia (Perkins & Brown, 2012) and China (Martin, Jin, & Trang, 2017). Hospitality employees are encountering demanding, difficult, and oppositional customers more than ever before (Chu, Baker, & Murrmann, 2012).

This trend is of concern to researchers and managers because highly entitled individuals behave more competitively, misappropriate resources, allocate themselves disporportionate levels and types of rewards (Campbell et al., 2004), and exhibit negative interpersonal behaviours such as hostility (Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009) and abuse (Harvey & Harris, 2010). Existing research in the workplace has comprehensively profiled entitlement at an individual level in terms of how entitled individuals think and feel (e.g. Jordan et al., 2017). Few studies have been conducted on the interpersonal outcomes of customer entitlement with regard to how entitled attitudes and behaviours are expressed in hospitality environments (Fisk & Neville, 2011).

The literature on entitlement gives an overall image that entitled individuals have a self-centered and uncaring view of others, and tend to respond negatively when their demands are not met (Fisk, 2010; Moeller et al., 2009). In their study of waitstaff, Fisk and

Neville (2011) found that interactions with entitled customers negatively impacted waitstaff through feelings of dehumanization, burnout, negative affect and physiological arousal. They found that waitstaff responded to entitled individuals by regulating their emotions when meeting demands, and seeking support from managers and co-workers to assist with entitled customers. However, workplace support from co-workers and managers was minimal and often informal.

Emotional labour research has shown that customer interactions can be a major source of stress for employees in the hospitality industry (Choi, Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2014; Chu, Baker, & Murrmann, 2012; Chu & Murrmann, 2006; Karatepe, 2011; Wong & Wang, 2009). Many organisations prescribe certain display rules (i.e. norms regarding how and when emotions are to be expressed), which require employees to maintain a positive demeanour even when they feel negative emotions (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). This "management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7) is referred to as emotional labour, which is a significant job requirement for hospitality service employees (Lucas & Deery, 2004).

Front-line service employees (FLSEs; also known as customer contact employees; e.g. restaurant waitstaff) serve a unique role for businesses because they represent the face and voice of their organisations (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996), and are directly involved in the delivery of services to customers (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Karatepe, 2011; Pienaar & Willemse, 2008; Wong & Wang, 2009). The behaviour and attitudes of FLSEs, particularly positive displays like friendliness and conscientousness, can be considered as having real value (Constanti & Gibbs, 2005; Hochschild, 1983). Waitstaff can have a direct impact on the customer's satisfaction and perception of service quality because the interaction between employees and customers in restaurants is critical to the service encounter (Chu et al., 2012; Danaher & Mattsson, 1994).

The success and competitive advantage of organisations in the restaurant industry is highly dependent on the satisfaction and perceived service quality of their customers (Danaher & Mattsson, 1994). "Although customer satisfaction is undoubtedly critical to organisational success in a consumer-oriented economy, over-emphasis on this principle may evoke a power imbalance between customers and service employees, which may lead to customer abuse of the latter" (Rafaeli et al., 2012; Harris & Daunt, 2013 as cited in Hur, Moon, & Han, 2014, p. 395).

The nature of the service relationship and customer-centric policy of many hospitality service organisations (e.g. "the customer is always right") implies that customers usually expect the employees they interact with to perform a subordinate role (Shamir, 1980; Wong, Newton & Newton, 2014; Yagil & Luria, 2014). This high level of customer orientation is especially the case in the restaurant industry, where acquiescence and customer contact are key requirements of the job for waitstaff (Fisk & Neville, 2011). In fact, waitstaff are encouraged and even required in some cases to meet the demands of customers whether their demands are legitimate or not (Fisk & Neville, 2011). The employee acquiescence and elevation of customer status in restaurants "may serve to fuel perceived entitlement, making it difficult for employees to manage patrons' service-related expectations" (Fisk & Neville, 2011, p. 391). This implies that the restaurant industry may be a fitting context to study how service employees experience entitled individuals.

The fine-dining (i.e. luxury) sector of the restaurant industry may be especially likely to receive entitled customers. A fine-dining restaurant is defined as "a full-service restaurant whose environment (e.g., décor, atmospherics, and services) and products (e.g., food and beverages) are carefully prepared and presented, unique, superior in quality, and conspicuous" (Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015, p. 258). Fine-dining restaurants can be considered

to have high brand prestige (i.e. a relatively high status of product positioning; Hwang & Hyun, 2012).

Certain consumers seek prestigious brands because they provide a signal for status, wealth and/or power (Alden, Steenkamp, & Barra, 1998). Prestigious brands are usually expensive, purchased infrequently, and strongly associated with an individual's social image and self-concept (Alden et al., 1998; Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Lee and Hwang (2011) found that for consumers seeking prestigious brands, being able to afford the high prices of fine-dining restaurants was an indicator of wealth. These authors also found that consumer motivations for materialism (i.e. a desire for high status and wealth-based group membership), uniqueness and hedonism (i.e. a desire for emotional pleasure) were significant predictors of attitudes towards fine-dining restaurants.

The consumer decisions of narcissists (i.e. individuals who have "highly inflated and unrealistically positive self-views and feel entitled;" Cisek et al., 2014, p. 3) are influenced by their desires for status and wealth (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), and a desire to positively distinguish themselves from others (i.e. uniqueness; Lee, Gregg, & Park, 2013). Based on the evidence provided, it is likely that entitled individuals will have positive attitudes towards fine-dining restaurants and make decisions to dine at these restaurants. This implies that fine-dining waitstaff may be relatively prone to interacting with entitled customers compared to employees working in other sectors of the restaurant industry (e.g. casual dining or fast-food).

This dissertation aims to examine how fine-dining waitstaff perceive the behaviours of entitled customers. The literature on customer entitlement in the fine-dining restaurant industry is non-existent. To date, Fisk and Neville (2011) are the only authors to research how waitstaff experience customer entitlement. Their sample consisted mostly of students working part-time in casual restaurants, which means that the experiences of entitlement

expressed by participants may not fully cover the extent to which customers express entitlement or how waitstaff experience entitled attitudes and behaviours. In an industry that employs over 14.7 million people in the USA alone (National Restaurant Association, 2017), the part-time nature of Fisk and Neville's (2011) sample is problematic because it lacks perspectives from full-time waitstaff, which may bring useful insight to the phenomenon of customer entitlement.

The rationale for this study can be summarised in five key arguments. Firstly, the existence of – and research into – narcissism and entitlement appears to be increasing across countries and across domains (Twenge & Campbell, 2013). Secondly, the situationally-activated nature of entitlement suggests that it may be more prolific across countries and domains compared to narcissism (Fisk, 2010). Thirdly, excessive entitlement may lead to negative interpersonal outcomes (Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009; Zboja et al., 2016). Fourthly, the power imbalance between customers and employees in hospitality environments may make it difficult to manage the entitled attitudes and behaviours of customers (Fisk & Neville, 2011). Finally, there was no existing research on customer entitlement in fine-dining restaurants at the time of this research.

This research aims to expand on Fisk and Neville's (2011) research by focusing on fine-dining career waitstaff and by further exploring how these waitstaff perceive the attitudes and behaviours of entitled customers. This research aims to answer the following research question: how do entitled customers behave in fine-dining restaurants?

Literature Review

Four pertinent areas of research were reviewed for the purposes of this dissertation: (a) narcissism (b) psychological entitlement, (c) customer entitlement, and (d) services marketing literature. A review of the literature on narcissism offers a history of the concept of entitlement and how it has evolved into the constructs of psychological and customer entitlement. The review of psychological and customer entitlement provides an understanding of the nature of entitlement from two specific perspectives: (a) how entitled customers think and behave, and (b) how hospitality employees perceive the entitled behaviours of customers. The services marketing literature provides context to the nature of customer entitlement in customer-employee interactions. This review happened continuously throughout the data collection, data analysis, and synthesis stages of the dissertation.

Nature of Entitlement

Lerner (1987) states that (in a broad sense) entitlement represents "an entire family of human events associated with social justice: issues of equity, deserving, rights, fairness, and the justice of procedures, distribution and retributive acts" (p. 108). Jordan et al. (2017) acknowledge the complexity of studying the phenomenon of entitlement because it is associated with cognitive processes and perceptions involved in the issues stated by Lerner (1987), which can unfold differently within specific situations.

This literature review aims to provide an understanding of customer entitlement by discussing how the conceptualisation and study of entitlement has evolved over time, what the nature of entitlement is, how entitled individuals think and behave, and how entitlement differs from narcissism. Although the focus of this dissertation is within the domain of customer-employee interactions, it is necessary to discuss the study of entitlement in other domains (e.g. work) in order to shed light on this complex phenomenon.

History of entitlement. The study of entitlement has only recently emerged in organisational psychology, yet it has long been considered in clinical psychology as an individual trait contributing towards a formal diagnosis of clinical (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) or subclinical (Raskin & Terry, 1988) narcissism. Narcissism is a multi-dimensional construct characterised by self-absorption, a dominant orientation toward others, increased grandiosity, exhibitionism, arrogance and a sense of entitlement (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Twenge et al., 2008). The test revision of the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (i.e. DSM-IV-TR) defines a sense of entitlement as an "unreasonable expectation of especially favourable treatment or automatic compliance with his/her expectations" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Over time, research of entitlement has shifted from it being viewed as a factor of narcissism to being viewed as the individual construct of psychological entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004). Campbell et al. (2004) defined psychological entitlement as "a stable and pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others" (p. 31) and developed a nine-item Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) to measure this construct. The measure shows consistency with the definition in that it captures the notion of distinction (Butori, 2010). The authors found that the PES correlated with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), but only 25% of the variance of the PES was shared with the NPI, which indicates that the constructs of narcissism and entitlement may tap into different psychological processes (Rose & Anastasio, 2014).

This difference in conceptualization shifts the focus of entitlement from unreasonable expectations of special treatment and compliance from others (i.e. importance and control – a subset of narcissism) to a focus on inflated self-perceptions and greater deservingness compared to others (i.e. inflated self-worth; Jordan et al., 2017). Simply, this shift implies that one may have feelings of entitlement without being narcissistic. As mentioned by Jordan

et al. (2017), the change in research interest from entitlement as a factor of narcissism to the stand-alone trait of psychological entitlement is noteworthy because it indicates a shift in focus from the realm of pathology to that of normative expectations.

Psychological entitlement was introduced to the retail context by Boyd and Helms (2005) who defined consumer entitlement (also referred to as customer entitlement; CE) as “the expectation of special treatment and automatic compliance with one's expectations by service personnel in the sales encounter” (p. 277) and developed a nine-item Consumer Entitlement Inventory (CEI) to measure this construct. The content validity of the CEI came into question by Butori (2010) because “it identifies either demanding consumers (consumers who have high expectations in terms of service quality), or uncompromising consumers (consumers who are intransigent in the case of a failure from the firm)” (p. 285), rather than completely capturing an entitled consumer’s tendency to expect special treatment.

Special treatment (in the marketing literature) is defined as the extent to which regular customers are treated and served better than non-regular customers (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998). Butori (2010) emphasized the notion of special treatment, and after investigating the CEI in a combined US and French sample, proposed a three-factor version of the scale: distinction (the expectation of special treatment), demand (entitled expectations of service quality in a successful service encounter) and intransigence (entitled attitudes in the case of service failure by the firm). Although conceptualized within the retail context, CE can be considered as relevant to the domain of service encounters in general (Fisk & Neville, 2011).

In their research of employee entitlement, Harvey and Harris (2010) defined psychological entitlement as “a stable tendency toward highly favorable self-perceptions and a tendency to feel deserving of high levels of praise and reward, regardless of actual performance levels” (p. 1640). Bringing these definitions together, the trait-like view of

entitlement refers to an individual's stable and pervasive belief that they are deserving of and entitled to more resources, rewards or benefits relative to other people, regardless of their inputs or contributions (Boyd & Helms, 2005; Campbell et al., 2004; Harvey & Harris, 2010).

In contrast to this trait-like view, emerging research has considered entitlement to have a latent potential, whereby it is a state that is activated by specific experiences (Fisk, 2010; Lerner, 1987; Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010). This perspective of entitlement having a latent potential is supported by Tett and Guterman's (2000) trait activation theory, which suggests that specific traits may be activated by particular environmental cues. Zitek, et al. (2010) found evidence that entitlement can be activated by specific cues. They found that when individuals feel wronged or remember being treated unfairly, they acted (or intended to act) in more selfish ways. Interestingly, these outcomes occurred in domains unrelated to the original wronging (e.g. refusing to help an experimenter even though no participants reported an unfair life event where someone refused to help them).

According to Lerner (1987), an individual may develop entitled self-perceptions based on the evaluations and rules of association they have developed in relation to their experiences, outcomes and interactions with other people (e.g. between said individual and a waiter during a service encounter). Lerner also claims that these entitled views will be influenced by the rules, values and norms of their culture or society. Major (1994) argues that entitlement is influenced by social comparisons and attributions, which means that individuals may not experience entitlement across all situations, but in different situations.

Although entitlement has been studied as a trait in different domains (e.g. work, retail and hospitality), the above evidence shows that entitlement can be considered as a mindset that is not necessarily domain-specific. Based on Tett and Guterman's (2000) trait activation theory, it is possible that the situation of being a customer in a fine-dining restaurant may

activate perceptions of entitlement due to the elevated status of customers and the expectation of employee acquiescence in the restaurant industry.

Entitled attitudes and beliefs. At a basic level, entitlement consists of a “set of attitudes about what a person feels her or she has a right to, and about what that person feels her or she can expect from others” (Meyer, 1991, p. 223). An individual’s entitled beliefs regarding what they deserve are formed by cognitive processes based on their perceptions of themselves and their context (Major, 1994). Naumann, Minsky and Sturman (2002) explained that these beliefs stem from social contracts in the sense that the individual believes they are entitled to certain outcomes due to their involvement in a social relationship (e.g. customer of a fine-dining restaurant). Entitled individuals are likely to consider their subjective characteristics and experiences as valid inputs, and believe that they deserve certain outcomes because of “who they are or what they have done” (Lerner, 1987, p. 108).

Entitled individuals have a chronic focus on their self-image (i.e. they are egocentric; Moeller et al, 2009) and prefer being viewed as unique (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Campbell et al. (2004) found that psychological entitlement was negatively associated with agreeableness, respect and empathy, as well as a positive association with self-esteem, self-sufficiency and vanity. Entitlement research has generally painted a picture of a self-centered and self-serving individual who cares little for their impact on others.

It is important to note that the majority of the literature has failed to acknowledge that “there is nothing inherently negative about entitlement” (Fisk, 2010, p. 103). Boyd and Helms (2005) argue that it is relatively normal in a developed society to have some level of entitlement. One’s beliefs about what they have a right to receive can be normal (e.g. a right to basic education in most countries), restricted (e.g. instances where women have allocated themselves lower compensation than men for similar work; Hogue & Yoder, 2003) or excessive (e.g. demanding a free glass of wine for no justifiable reason) (Fisk, 2010).

Excessive entitlement is defined as "a trait that reflects an aristocratic rather than ambitious personality profile, one that is fueled by inaccurate perceptions regarding the number or type of outcomes owed to the self (formed in response to distorted views of the validity of one's performance inputs) that exceeds what would be considered normative according to prevailing social allocation rules and that when acted upon, may negatively impact others" (Fisk, 2010, p. 104). The aim of excessively entitled individuals is to not only protect what they legitimately have or will receive, but to gain a surplus of resources that most would consider undeserved (ibid.). It may therefore be concluded that the concept under study is that of excessive entitlement rather than normal or restricted entitlement.

The inclusion of deservingness brings some conceptual complexity to what an individual is entitled to receive because the criterion of deservingness (i.e. what an individual is legitimately entitled to) is a matter of personal opinion (Fisk, 2010). The difference between entitlement and deservingness is that the expectation for reward in a sense of deservingness is based on one's effort or character, whilst the expectation for reward in entitlement is due to a social contract (Campbell et al., 2004). Implicit to these two non-mutually exclusive criterion is the notion of expectations. Excessively entitled individuals (for the rest of this paper, "excessively entitled" will simply be referred to as "entitled") have unrealistically positive self-images that continuously generate unreasonable (and often unmet) expectations (Campbell et al., 2004; Naumann et al., 2002).

Entitled individuals generally have very high expectations (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). CE reflects an asymmetrical relationship of reciprocity between the service provider and the customer whereby entitled customers expect to receive special treatment without having to put in the equivalent effort (Fisk & Neville, 2011). Boyd and Helms (2005) proposed that "entitled customers may be characterized by a heightened proclivity to presume that a service provider will meet their expectations" (p. 276). In other words, the authors state that entitled

customers often have idealized expectations. Ideal expectations "represent enduring wants and needs that remain unaffected by the full range of marketing and competitive factors" (Boulding et al., 1993, p. 9). This characteristic of heightened (or ideal) expectations is in line with the definition and factorial structure of CE (Boyd & Helms, 2005; Butori, 2010). The ideal expectations of entitled individuals may arise in part because they tend to ignore or misperceive information that is not consistent with their entitled beliefs (Harvey & Martinko, 2009).

Outcomes of entitlement. A common theme between psychological entitlement and customer entitlement is that both may lead to negative interpersonal outcomes (Zboja et al., 2016). Entitled customers may become frustrated (i.e. experience a generalised negative emotion in response to undesirable outcomes; Harvey & Harris, 2010) and feel unfairly treated when a service failure (i.e. when a customer's expectations are not met) is not corrected (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). In a customer-employee interaction, when a customer's grandiose self-image is not affirmed or their excessive expectations are not met in the exchange relationship, entitled customers often retaliate to this perceived injustice with maladaptive behaviours, such as aggression and hostility (Moeller et al., 2009).

This retaliation is often targeted at a specific person or persons (Bies & Tripp, 2005). Harvey and Martinko (2009) found that entitled individuals have a self-serving attributional bias, whereby they take credit for desirable outcomes and blame others for negative outcomes. In the context of a service recovery effort (i.e. actions taken to make up for a service failure), Martin, Strong and O'Connor (2018) found that an entitled customer's evaluations related to the employee and not to the organisation. In other words, entitled customers placed blame on the employee rather than the organisation for insufficient service recovery efforts.

Entitled customers behave aggressively in order to redress the perceived inequity they experience when their expectations are not met (cf. Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Aggressive behaviour entails verbal or physical acts that violate social norms and are intended to cause harm (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Harris and Reynolds (2003) found that 70% of hospitality customers admitted to verbally abusing employees with the intent of financial gain. Fisk and Neville (2011) found that the most frequent displays of aggression were verbal. Respondents in this study reported that customers yelled and cursed at waitstaff when they did not get their way.

The behaviour of entitled customers can have a direct impact on service employees. Sliter et al. (2010) found that customer incivility ("low-intensity deviant behaviour, perpetrated by someone in a customer or client role, with ambiguous intent to harm an employee, in violation of social norms of mutual respect and courtesy;" ibid., p. 468) was positively related with emotional exhaustion through the emotional labor of bank tellers (i.e. front-line service employees). Hur et al. (2014) also found that customer incivility was positively associated with emotional exhaustion for department store sales employees.

Research has shown that entitled behaviour can also have an indirect interpersonal outcome. For example, Hackney, Maher, Daniels, Hochwarter and Ferris (2018) argue that perceptions of others' entitled behaviour functions as a work stressor with resource-draining capacities. They found that perceptions of others' entitled behaviour was negatively associated with task performance, citizenship behaviour and personal contentment at work. Similar results were found by Hochwarter, Meurs, Perrewe, Royle and Matherly (2007), who found that perceived entitlement behaviour was associated with increased tension, depressed mood, decreased satisfaction and decreased citizenship behaviour for employees low in attention control.

Method

The challenge for researchers is to appropriately choose and match the research approach to the problem, questions, and purpose of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how fine-dining waitstaff experience their interactions with entitled customers. To respond to the research questions, this study used an exploratory approach with a generic qualitative strategy of inquiry and an interpretive description research design (Kahlke, 2014; Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015; Thorne, Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004). In-depth semi-structured interviews were used as a means for data collection. Theoretical analysis was the chosen thematic analysis technique.

Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003) posit that credible qualitative research reports must address the following: "(1) the theoretical positioning of the researcher; (2) the congruence between methodology and methods; (3) the strategies to establish rigour; and (4) the analytic lens through which the data are examined" (p. 5). This method section consists of six sub-sections that discuss how the researcher addressed these four areas and how the research was conducted, namely: assumptions, research design, participants, procedure, data collection and data analysis.

Assumptions

The aim of this research was not to establish any relationships of attribute distribution, variation or cause-and-effect (as is the case in quantitative research), but to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 18). Although customer entitlement was the key construct of this study, the primary focus was on the perceptions and experiences that fine-dining waitstaff had of this phenomenon. A qualitative research approach was considered to be the most appropriate fit to the purpose and research

questions of this study because it allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences fine-dining waitstaff have with entitled customers (Caelli et al., 2003; Given, 2008).

"Although all research is value driven, few research approaches accord such significance to the clear recognition of the values and assumptions inherent in the theoretical framework as does the qualitative domain" (Caelli et al., 2003, p. 6). It is necessary to discuss the theoretical perspectives, philosophical principles and context of the researcher, as this informs the strategy and logic of inquiry, which in turn forms the foundation for the findings of this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Reflexivity. The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, which provides the advantages of adaptability and flexibility in data collection and analysis, but also includes the shortcomings and biases inherent in the subjectivity of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to the critical and subjective role of the researcher, it is important to demonstrate reflexivity, which means that the researcher reflects "upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research" (Willig, 2001; p. 10).

The researcher (an early-mid twenties White English-speaking South African Male) had worked in casual or part-time customer-contact jobs in the hospitality industry for 5 years at the time of this research. During the conception of this research he had been employed part-time at a fine-dining restaurant for 3 months (averaging 5 6-hour shifts per week) whilst completing a full-time Masters Degree in Organisational Psychology. He believed that his time in fine-dining was the most stressful hospitality job he had experienced so far (the researcher acknowledges the possibility of school-work and work-school conflict at this time; cf. Cinamon, 2015; Wyland, Lester, Mone, & Winkel, 2013). The researcher believed (based

on experience and observation) that full-time employment was common in-fine-dining restaurants and that the job was highly demanding for fine-dining waitstaff.

As an aspiring Industrial Psychologist who values justice, fairness and employee well-being, and who had his own subjective experiences with entitled customers, the researcher was interested in the unique experiences that full-time fine-dining waitstaff had with entitled customers. This experience allowed the researcher to have an understanding of the context and access greater depth in the data because this understanding allowed for greater acceptance of the researcher by the respondents (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Although the researcher's context provided the strengths mentioned above, it is important that the researcher was objective (i.e. relatively neutral and free from researcher biases; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and allowed for unique experiences to emerge in the data in order to demonstrate trustworthiness (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Reflexivity is further demonstrated through methodological discussions in the following sections.

Theoretical and philisophical underpinnings. This study was approached with an orientation of interpretivism. Interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed and that there is no single observable reality, but multiple realities based on multiple interpretations of a single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus of this paradigm is to understand subjective meanings, which "are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interactions with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

This research is inherently socially constructivist because it aims to understand the complex subjective meanings and realities that exist for fine-dining waitstaff when interacting with entitled customers. These subjective realities are created through social interactions and would not exist without customer-employee (i.e. transactional and normative) engagements within a fine-dining (i.e. environmental and normative) context

(Creswell, 2013). When considering the notion that entitlement may be viewed as a situationally-activated trait and that the focus of this research is on the *perceptions* of others' entitlement, this worldview makes sense in this context.

Research Design

An exploratory approach is used when researchers have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, situation, process, or activity under examination (Given, 2008). Exploratory research is defined as "a methodological approach that is primarily concerned with discovery and with generating or building theory" (Jupp, 2006, p. 110). Given (2008) posits that the main goal of exploratory research is to inductively derive generalisations about the group, situation, process, or activity under study to create a foundation for theory development that is based directly in the social phenomena of interest.

An exploratory approach was appropriate for this study because little is known about the experiences that employees have with entitled customers or the social support employees receive from their coworkers and managers when dealing with entitled customers (Fisk & Neville, 2011). This is especially the case for waitstaff working in fine-dining restaurants. According to Jupp (2006) "the exploratory researcher does not approach their project according to any set formula" (p. 110). Exploratory researchers should be flexible, pragmatic and open-minded when collecting data, yet broad and thorough in their research (Given, 2008; Jupp, 2006).

Proponents of generic qualitative research have made many similar arguments and reiterated the point that research questions should drive research methodology rather than methodology driving questions (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). This research prescribes to the "seventh moment" in qualitative research in an attempt to provide a new perspective on the complex phenomenon of customer entitlement through the use of methodological pluralism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For these reasons, a generic qualitative

strategy of inquiry with an interpretive description research design was considered most appropriate for this study.

Generic qualitative research is understood and defined in the opposite, as it is research that “is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies” (Caelli et al., 2003, p. 4). This approach is appropriate when the researcher has a body of knowledge prior to data collection that they want to describe more fully from the participants’ perspective (Percy et al., 2015). This design allows for an in-depth inquiry into the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals. This design is appropriate because this research is looking into the opinions, attitudes and reflections waitstaff had of their experiences with entitled customers rather than an in-depth focus on their “lived experience” or “experiencing,” which would be the case in phenomenological research (Percy et al., 2015, p. 77).

Thorne, Kirkham and MacDonald-Emes (1997) originally developed interpretive description as a pragmatic and contextualized qualitative approach in nursing research in order to bridge the divide between theory and practice, but this design can be applied in other applied disciplines and settings (Hunt, 2009; Kahlke, 2014; Thorne et al., 2004). Researchers who use an interpretive description design seek understandings of “phenomena that illuminate their characteristics, patterns and structure in some theoretically useful manner” (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 3). This design fits with purpose of the study, as well as the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the researcher (cf. Hunt, 2009).

Participants

This study consisted of eleven participants from Cape Town (three participants; one restaurant), Franschhoek (five participants; four restaurants) and Johannesburg (three participants; one restaurant), and was limited to the provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape because of time and cost constraints. All participants worked as full-time waitstaff in

fine-dining restaurants where the dominant language was English, and all participants intended to continue their careers in the hospitality industry. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 43 years (*M* = 33.55 years; *SD* = 5.87) and 73% of participants were male. With regard to the race of participants, 46% were Black, 36% were Coloured and 18% were White. Participant demographics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Sample

Participant	Gender	Race	Age	Hospitality Tenure		City/Town	Home Language
				Total	Fine-Dining		
1	Female	White	36	20 years	10 years	Cape Town	English
2	Male	White	35	17 years	15 years	Cape Town	English
3	Male	Coloured	35	11 years	3 years	Cape Town	English
4	Male	Black	23	3 years	3 years	Johannesburg	Zulu
5	Male	Black	37	–	2 years	Johannesburg	Sipedi
6	Male	Black	37	17 years	9 years	Johannesburg	Zulu/English
7	Female	Coloured	43	–	17 years	Franschhoek	Afrikaans
8	Female	Coloured	36	18 years	13 years	Franschhoek	Afrikaans
9	Male	Coloured	28	8 years	–	Franschhoek	Afrikaans/English
10	Male	Black	25	6 years	1 year	Franschhoek	Shona
11	Male	Black	34	–	–	Franschhoek	Ingonde

Procedure

Ethical approval for this study was acquired from the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee before data collection began. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. Pilot studies are a useful way to pre-test a research instrument to detect any possible flaws (Dikko, 2016; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The purposes of a pilot study when using interviews as the data collection method are to practice interviewing techniques, determine if there are enough questions to measure all concepts, and to check if responses can be adequately interpreted in relation to the information required (Dikko, 2016; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

The initial interview schedule (see Appendix A) was piloted with a friend of the researcher who worked as a waiter in a Cape Town restaurant (i.e. convenience sampling). The pilot participant was a 22-year old White male who was studying Organisational Psychology and had worked part-time as a waiter for one year and six months. Although the pilot participant did not meet the main criterion of the intended sample (i.e. full-time waitstaff in fine-dining restaurants), he was still considered adequate for the purposes of the pilot because of his knowledge of psychology and experience in being a waiter. The pilot interview was conducted at the participant's residence and lasted one hour twenty minutes. Based on the interpretation of the replies and feedback from the participant, the interview schedule was amended (see Appendix B).

Non-probability sampling was employed because the purpose of this research was to study the subjective perspectives of a specific group (i.e. fine-dining waitstaff), rather than to generalise the findings from the sample to the population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Saumure & Given, 2008). Purposeful and convenience sampling were employed to select participants. "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great

deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry… Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Purposeful sampling selects participants based on specific characteristics they possess (Etikan et al., 2015). In order to be included in this study, participants had to be full-time waitstaff working in fine-dining restaurants. A goal of generic qualitative research is to gain a broad understanding of the topic under study (Percy et al., 2015), which is why the researcher decided that there could not be more than three participants from the same restaurant.

Convenience sampling (i.e. participants are selected based on their readiness, willingness and ability to participate; Saumure & Given, 2008) was employed due to time and cost constraints. All participants were sourced directly or indirectly through the researcher's network and consent was received from the restaurant managers before the waitstaff were contacted by the researcher. Prior to inclusion, all potential participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, that all information would be treated confidentially, and that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time. All participants read and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C) before participating.

Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommend that the interview setting should be one that is most comfortable and convenient for the participant, but has minimal background noise and is conducted at a time when interruptions are unlikely to ensure clarity in the data recordings. All participants were given the option to choose the interview setting and once there, the researcher asked the participants if they were sure that they were comfortable to continue, which they all agreed to. All interviews were recorded at the consent of the participants in order to accurately capture their perspectives in their own words (Jacob & Fergurson, 2012). Interviews lasted between 37 and 65 minutes, and concluded when the participants had nothing left to say.

The researcher first approached waitstaff at the fine-dining restaurant where he had previously worked. The researcher contacted a total of five potential participants from this restaurant (two of which declined) and stopped sampling from this restaurant once the third participant was interviewed. The first participant was interviewed at their residence, the second was interviewed at the researcher's residence and the third participant was interviewed at a quiet restaurant. Whilst on a trip to Johannesburg, the researcher's mother put the researcher into contact with a restaurant manager. The manager asked the waitstaff if they would like to participate and three volunteered. All three of these participants were individually interviewed in a quiet room separate to the restaurant before their shift began.

Three restaurants in the Western Cape (contact details were provided by a friend of the researcher) were contacted and provided consent for their waitstaff to participate, but none of those waitstaff showed willingness. The researcher then contacted an acquaintance that was the owner and executive chef of a fine-dining restaurant in Franschhoek. This acquaintance agreed to let their employees participate, of which one did (participant 11). This acquaintance referred four executive chefs from four separate restaurants for the researcher to contact, three of which put the researcher in contact with their restaurant managers who then agreed to let their waitstaff participate. The remaining four voluntary participants came from these three restaurants. All five interviews in Franschhoek occurred at the participants' place of work outside of opening hours.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method because the researcher wanted to gain a rich understanding of the participants' perspectives through a conversational narrative (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are flexible in terms of order and wording to allow the researcher to adapt to the situation, the worldview of the participant and to any new ideas that may arise (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An important

aspect of interpretive research is that each participant's reality is unique and subjective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which is why flexible semi-structured interviews were chosen over structured interviews. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were chosen over unstructured interviews because specific information (e.g. responding to entitled customer behaviour) was desired from all participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This method is appropriate in generic qualitative studies when the researcher can structure the interview schedule based on their pre-knowledge of the topic (Percy et al., 2015). All questions in the interview schedule were descriptive questions because the researcher wanted the participants to provide a narrative answer in their own words that would address the research questions of the study, but also allow for new insights or new areas for query that the researcher had not considered (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The interview schedule (see Appendix B) was structured in a way that allowed the key topics of interest to be explored through open-ended questions (the numbered questions), but offered more specific questions or statements (the lettered questions) as potential probes for the researcher to use if more information was required (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

Each interview began by asking participants a grand tour question (i.e. "please tell me about your career so far as a waiter") in order to get them comfortable in the interview setting and encourage them to speak freely (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Once rapport had been developed and the researcher had an understanding of the participant's context, example (e.g. "can you think of some examples when a customer acted in an entitled way?") and experience (e.g. "how have your colleagues supported you in dealing with an entitled customer?") questions were used to shed light on actual experiences the participant had with entitled customers (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Mini tour questions were used spontaneously when the researcher wanted to probe into specific elements of a participant's narrative (e.g. "I

mean was it also from some of the other waiters, the runners, like how were you supported?").

Other probing questions, such as "and then what happened?" and "how did that make you feel?" were used to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and to explore unanticipated topics (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The researcher welcomed pauses for thought to allow the participants time to think and add more information, but the researcher continued with the interview schedule if they believed that the participant was becoming uncomfortable with the silence (e.g. fidgeting or averting their gaze). Each interview continued until the researcher believed that all questions/statements in the interview schedule had been covered and the participant had nothing left to say. This was confirmed by asking participants if they had anything else to add or if they had any questions for the researcher.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (i.e. identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting repeated patterns of meaning across a data set; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen because of its flexibility across qualitative research approaches, which allows for common understanding between researchers using different research methods (Nowell et al., 2017; Percy et al., 2015). Although concurrent constant comparison is the proposed technique of thematic analysis for interpretive description (Thorne et al., 2004), theoretical analysis was chosen because this research built on the theoretical foundation laid by Fisk and Neville (2011).

Theoretical analysis is used when the researcher has an understanding of the topic and has some pre-determined categories (e.g. aggression) to be examined during the data analysis (Percy et al., 2015). In this situation, the pre-determined themes are often located in the research questions, but the researcher remains open to any new themes that may emerge during the thematic analysis (Percy et al., 2015).

The thirteen-step process explained by Percy et al. (2015) was followed for the data analysis. ATLAS.ti was used to support the data analysis, specifically in organizing codes and grouping them into patterns. In the first four steps of the analysis, the researcher prepared and familiarized themselves with the data. Each interview was transcribed into a verbatim transcript in the order that the interviews occurred. Each transcript was read and then re-read. During the second reading, the researcher intuitively highlighted any sentences, phrases or paragraphs that appeared to be meaningful, whether or not they were related to the predetermined categories or research questions. Each participant's highlighted data was then read to see if it was related to the research question. All highlighted data that was not relevant to the research questions was eliminated and stored separately. Each item of data was coded by giving it a descriptor that was a characteristic word found in the data (e.g. rude behaviour). This continued until all data had been coded.

Steps five to eleven consisted of two phases – analyzing data relevant to the research questions and then analyzing data that was not relevant to the research questions. In phase one, any related codes were clustered together to form code groups (i.e. patterns). All patterns related to a pre-existing theme were clustered together with direct quotes. Any patterns not related to pre-existing themes, but considered relevant to the overall topic were kept separately for future evaluation. Overarching themes were then established using the remaining patterns and pre-existing themes. All patterns not related to pre-existing themes were then considered for inclusion in the overarching themes or as new themes. The themes were then refined, defined and named so that they accurately portrayed the overall story found in the analysis.

In phase two, steps five to eleven were repeated for all data that had been eliminated in steps one to four. Any patterns that were relevant to the defined themes were analyzed and included if they were considered to bring new information to the topic. Where relevant, the

themes were then updated and finalized. The final steps (i.e. twelve and thirteen) were followed in the final write-up of this dissertation.

Findings and Discussion

All participants expressed instances where they had experienced excessive customer entitlement (Fisk, 2010). Entitled customers demonstrated unrealistic expectations and demands (Boyd & Helms, 2005; Butori, 2010), and negative interpersonal outcomes that seemed to stem either from a response to unmet expectations or demands (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Moeller et al., 2009), or from a sense of superiority (Campbell et al., 2004). These behaviours are discussed below and are consistent with entitlement literature.

Theme One: Excessive Demands

All eleven participants spoke about customer demands that were excessive, unfair, or that deviated from set procedure. From the participants' responses, it seems that entitled customers not only expect special treatment, but demand it too. Customers took little consideration for the needs of the waitstaff or the other customers because they were focused on what they wanted. They would request items that were not on the menu or change existing items to suit what they wanted. In an extreme case, a customer told a waiter: "*I need a bottle of wine for free; go talk to your boss*" (participant 11). Customers expected their demands to be met immediately, and demanded extra time and attention from employees to the point that waitstaff "*should constantly be at the table"* (participant 9). Participants reported that regular customers were especially unreasonable in their demands and that "*it's quite difficult to treat them the way you want to treat other people"* (participant 8).

Customers expected the waitstaff to go beyond the requirements of their role and deviate from the procedures of the restaurant. The below quote provides an example of a situation that was so extreme that the customer demanded that their server also drive them from the restaurant to their next location:

> *Well she doesn't want to wait 20 minutes, half an hour and I said to her: "well unfortunately there's nothing I can do about it." And she was like "well don't*

you own a car?' And I was like 'yes I do.' And she was like 'why can't you take us through to town?' [Participant 2]

These findings are consistent with the literature on customer entitlement. Without effort on their own behalf, these customers demanded rewards and special treatment that were considered by the waitstaff to be undeserved (i.e. a surplus; Fisk, 2010). The examples of regular customers and the customer who demanded a free bottle of wine demonstrate entitled beliefs because their expectation of reward is based on "who they are or what they have done" (e.g. having dined at the restaurant in the past; Lerner, 1987, p. 108). These findings fit well with Boyd and Helm's (2005) definition of customer entitlement because these customers had a clear expectation of special treatment and automatic compliance from their servers.

Theme Two: Mistreatment of Waitstaff

All eleven participants described certain customers as being rude, discourteous and impolite. Participants claimed that it was common for customers to disregard waitstaff. These customers showed little to no interest in who was serving them, made little to no effort in paying attention to what they were saying and frequently ignored their waiter. These customers would interrupt their waitstaff and seldom provide a "*please*" or a "*thank you*" throughout their interactions. Participant eleven reported that a customer interrupted them by saying: "*just get to the point. What do you want?"*

Six participants spoke about customers being discriminatory towards them or towards their colleagues because of their language or race. Customers would tell the manager or other waitstaff that they preferred to be served by a Coloured or Afrikaans employee. Even if the waitstaff could speak English or Afrikaans, they reported that customers would mock their accents or speak unnecessarily slowly (e.g. "*I've. Been. Neglected. Here.*" – participant 8). All six of these participants said that discrimination was almost always directed at Black

employees. Participant nine (a Coloured male) said that "*most of the time it's about race*" and one customer told him: "*you're going to be my only waiter. I don't want anyone else at my table.*"

These patterns emerged from the data analysis and can best be described as customer incivility. Customer incivility is defined as "low-intensity deviant behaviour, perpetrated by someone in a customer or client role, with ambiguous intent to harm an employee, in violation of social norms of mutual respect and courtesy" (Sliter et al., 2010). These findings reinforce the notion that entitled customers believe that they deserve special treatment and that service employees should serve a subordinate role (Boyd & Helms; 2005; Shamir, 1980). These customers expected a high-quality service, but showed less respect and courtesy (i.e. equivalent effort) than what would normally be expected according to social norms (Sliter et al., 2010).

Research into workplace incivility has found that employees are more likely to be treated uncivilly by those with high levels of power compared to those with comparable or lower levels of power (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Harris and Daunt (2013) suggested that customers often take advantage of their position and abuse their power. The same may be true in hospitality contexts where customers hold more power than employees (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Sliter et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2014). This implies that customers in fine-dining restaurants could be expected to behave uncivilly, especially if they are entitled and have a greater sense of superiority, which has been shown in this study.

Perceived racial discrimination emerged as a pattern from the data analysis. These uncivil behaviours displayed by customers could be interpreted as microaggressions (i.e. covert and subtle forms of interpersonal mistreatment; Cortina, 2008; Sue et al., 2007). Fisk and Neville (2011) suggest that customer entitlement can be considered as a form of microaggression, as many of the ways that it is expressed are covert and subtle. However,

these findings indicate that these microaggressions seem to be targeted more at Black waitstaff than waitstaff from other racial groups. This may be the case because entitled individuals are likely to hold negative views towards out-groups (i.e. people with a different group identity to that of the self; Anastasio & Rose, 2014). These microaggressions and negative views of out-groups are likely to be salient in the context of South Africa, where the socio-political consequences of racial discrimination during the Apartheid regime are still being felt.

Theme Three: Openly and Excessive Criticism of Service Quality

Seven of the eleven participants spoke about customer expectations that were so high or ambiguous that it was difficult or impossible to meet those expectations. All seven of these participants said that customer expectations were naturally high in fine-dining restaurants, which was an aspect of the job that provided a consistent challenge. Fine-dining customers expect a "*perfect service"* (participant 4). Compared to other customers, respondents claimed that entitled customers had even higher expectations from the beginning of the service encounter. This was especially common when the customers had a "*special occasion,*" such as a birthday or anniversary, which "*for them played a big role*" (participant 3).

These respondents described customers as being highly critical during their interactions with the waitstaff. Customers would "*look for all the details*" (participant 6) and complain about small intricacies. For example, respondents mentioned that it was common to have two tables having the same meal at the same time, and when asked about the food or drink, the one table would offer highly positive evaluations, whilst the other would say "*it's ok*" (participant 3) or "*it's not good*" (participant 8). The waitstaff could tell from early on in the interaction how "*difficult*" the customer would be based on the customer's body language and responses to their seating, table and menu. For example, "*everyone wants* [to be seated by] *the window*" (participant 1) and when certain customers do not have their seating

expectations met, then it becomes challenging to satisfy them for the rest of the encounter because "*it's basically a build up*" (participant 3). The following quote provides an example that expresses many elements of what the other six respondents mentioned:

> *Don't go too far because a guest is like too observant. Most guests like look at everything that you do. From the cutlery you put on the table, how you put it, in what manner, how do you respond to them, eye contact, everything.* [Participant 4]

These ideal expectations fit with the description provided by Boulding et al. (1993) because customers do not update their expectations based on their environmental cues. When customers' elevated expectations are not met, they seem to display forms of judgemental communication, which are verbal or non-verbal signs that a customer is overly critical of service quality (Choi et al., 2014; De-Cheng & Li-Ying, 2013). This may be partly due to their self-serving bias as a way of maintaining their positive self-image or sense of superiority (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Instead of re-evaluating their expectations (e.g. "I should have booked earlier if I wanted that table"), entitled customers avoid responsibility for the service failure because they believe that the customer is always right (Albrecht, Walsh, & Beatty; 2017; Boyd & Helms, 2005).

When an entitled customer attributes blame to the service provider for a failure, their self-serving bias makes them more likely to disregard information that is inconsistent with their view and seek information that reinforces their existing view (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). For example, when an entitled customer does not get the table they want (i.e. a service failure) and blames the server/restaurant for their dissatisfaction (i.e. a self-serving attributional bias), they will become more critical of service quality (i.e. seeking information to support their self-serving view) instead of acknowledging that they should have made a

booking further in advance (i.e. information that contradicts their self-serving view). This line of reasoning is consistent with recent research (cf. Martin et al., 2018).

Theme Four: Entitled Behaviour That Affects Other Customers

Seven participants spoke about how the behaviour and attitudes of entitled customers had a direct or indirect impact on other customers. This happened with customers at other tables, as well as at their own table. The most commonly reported indirect effect on other customers was the inconsistency in service that entitled customers caused. They would require more time and attention, which sometimes led to other customers feeling neglected and asking "*why didn't you do that to me?*" (participant 4). In addition to the inconsistent service that waitstaff were able to provide, they also reported that interactions with entitled customers would affect their mood, which in turn affected how they behaved towards other customers. One participant expressed what this might be like from the customer's perspective, which was echoed by four other participants:

> *…this guy was friendly and talkative now all of a sudden he's quiet, he's just like dropping the stuff pouring wine, water, then he leaves. Ah, what's wrong with this guy? And I don't want my other guests to see but this guy keeps on checking on that table, so he's actually neglecting us.* [Participant 9]

With regard to direct effects at the same table, other customers would become embarrassed and apologetic for their entitled companion's behaviour, and in other situations "*because he wasn't having a good time, his missus wasn't having a good time*" (participant 3). Two participants mentioned extreme cases where entitled customers directly impacted customers at another table. In the one case, the entitled customers approached another table to ask: "*why are you guys even smiling? Like, did you actually enjoy that?*" (participant 1). In the other case, a customer from another table got up to tell the entitled customer: "*please don't do that. Respect this place and respect your family and your child*" (participant 8).

In a third case, other customers showed pity towards one participant by saying "*don't worry, we can see you are busy… …we will do everything ourselves… …focus on that other table*" and then gave the participant an extra tip because they did not think that the participant had "*received anything on that table*" (participant 10).

These findings show that when certain customers compared the service they received to that of entitled customers, they felt neglected (i.e. wronged or unfairly treated; Zitek et al., 2010) and that they should receive special treatment, too. Trait activation theory may explain this increase in entitlement because the perception of other customers receiving special treatment led to a social comparison (i.e. "*why didn't you do that to me?*"), which may have been the environmental cue that activated a more entitled mindset (Major, 1994; Tett & Guterman, 2000; Zitek et al., 2010).

In comparison, the customers in the example provided by participant ten took the perspective of the participant and showed greater altruistic rather than entitled behaviour. Strong and Martin (2014) posit that entitled people do not engage in perspective-taking (i.e. imagining the situation from another person's vantage point; Galinksy, Wang, & Ku, 2008). Epley and Caruso (2008) argue that overcoming one's own egocentric perspective is a key barrier to perspective-taking. Based on this reasoning, customers who have a greater latent potential for entitlement may be less likely to take the perspective of the waitstaff and see entitled customers as a source of increased demands for the employee, and more likely to view this situation from their egocentric perspective and perceive the waiter to be withholding resources from them (Fisk, 2010; Major, 1994; Moeller et al., 2009; Zitek et al., 2010).

This lack of perspective-taking did not only apply to the waitstaff, but to other customers as well. The entitled customer who behaved in a way so inappropriate that it caused another customer to feel the need to correct them provides evidence that they either

did not consider or did not care how their behaviour would impact others. In the example provided by participant one, the entitled customer seemed surprised that the other customers did not share their perspective and condescendingly asked if they "*actually enjoyed that.*" The fact that the other customers seemed to be enjoying their experience was not consistent with the entitled customer's beliefs. Given that entitled individuals are likely to hold a self-serving bias (Harvey & Martinko, 2009), this entitled customer preferred to misperceive this information and condescend the other customers in order to protect their beliefs and self-image (Moeller et al., 2009).

Theme Five: Aggressive Behavioural Reactions to Unmet Expections

Six participants described experiences where customers had been verbally aggressive towards the waitstaff or manager when their demands or expectations had not been met. These aggressive behaviours included: sarcasm, condescending remarks, yelling, swearing and threats. Participants reported that customers had raised their voices when they did not get their way. Customers had been condescending or sarcastic by showing disgust towards characteristics or procedures of the restaurant (e.g. "*it's an insult… …what kind of a restaurant can tell you that you can't do this or you can't do that?!"* – participant 1; "*in the top 20 for what?!*" – participant 11).

Customers had sworn whilst speaking condescendingly to their waitron by describing the food or beverages they had received as "*shit*" (participants 5 and 10). One such customer also showed physical aggression by picking up and throwing their food back on the plate. Threats from customers involved leaving the restaurant, employees losing their jobs, and in one extreme case, the physical safety of the waitron and their manager: "*If you don't, I'm going to have to pick you up and use you as a stick to beat your boss"* (participant 11).

These findings are consistent with previous research (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Harris & Reynolds, 2004; Moeller et al., 2009). In all these examples, the aggressive behaviour

enacted by entitled customers was in retaliation to not having (or potentially not having) their ideal expectations or unreasonable demands met (Moeller et al., 2009). The threats and condescending remarks towards the food and beverages appear to be attempts to have the waitstaff correct the perceived injustice of their expectations not being met (Baumeister et al., 1996; Moeller et al., 2009), or to gain a surplus of resources (e.g. a free bottle of wine; Fisk, 2010).

Entitled customers appeared to quickly take offence to perceived injustices (e.g. "*it's an insult*;" McCollough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Mooney, 2003). When entitled customers did not get what they expected because of the characteristics and procedures of the restaurant, the yelling, sarcasm, swearing and condescending remarks seem to be in retaliation to ego-threat due to an attachment to their entitled beliefs (cf. De Dreu & Van Knippenberg, 2005). These retaliations of belittling remarks may be interpreted as self-enhancement strategies to increase feedback that affirms their grandiose self-image (i.e. superiority and deservingness; De Dreu & Van Knippenberg, 2005).

General Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how entitled customers behave in fine-dining restaurants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven full-time fine-dining waitstaff to elicit rich data on the experience of entitled customer behaviour. This approach was considered appropriate because there is limited research on the nature of customer entitlement in the restaurant industry, especially in fine-dining restaurants. Furthermore, issues of self-serving bias and deservingness "being in the eye of the beholder" make it difficult to form an accurate picture of entitled behaviour from the entitled customer's perspective (Fisk, 2010; Harvey & Martinko, 2009).

Theoretical thematic analysis yielded five themes: (1) excessive demands, (2) mistreatment of waitstaff, (3) openly and excessive criticism of service quality, (4) entitled behaviour that affects other customers, and (5) aggressive behavioral reactions to unmet expectations. This concluding section of the dissertation presents the theoretical contribution of this study, managerial implications, limitations of the research and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

This study has contributed to the limited body of knowledge in the field of customer entitlement by exploring the experiences of a high customer-contact sub-group, namely full-time fine-dining waitstaff. At the time of writing, the researcher had found no other studies on the experiences of customer entitlement for fine-dining employees. Apart from Fisk and Neville's (2011) study, the majority of customer entitlement research in the restaurant industry has quantitative. This study has offered a methodological contribution by adding more qualitative research to the literature, and by using a data collection method (i.e. semi-structured interviews) that provided rich data, which provided meaning to the experience of customer entitlement for waitstaff.

This study explored customer entitlement, and in doing so, found evidence for the subtle and covert nature of entitlement in the form of customer incivility (Sliter et al., 2010). When taking into consideration the study by Anastasio and Rose (2014), this research may provide evidence that entitled customers do hold negative views towards out-groups, and express microaggressions when these negative views are acted upon. Overall, this research has reinforced much of the customer entitlement literature by finding similar patterns of results in a new sample, context and methodological approach.

Managerial Implications

This research has sought to provide fine-dining restaurant managers with a profile of highly entitled customers. The findings of this study indicate that high expectations, a self-serving bias and a sense of superiority are key characteristics of entitled customers. Managers should consider primary and secondary interventions to prepare for and manage these characteristics.

Primary interventions could involve marketing and communication strategies to potentially moderate the expectations of customers. Firstly, a loyalty or rewards programme may be effective in clarifying and aligning the expectations of regular customers and waitstaff. Regular customers seem to be more entitled than less regular or first-time customers (Boyd & Helms, 2005), so a clear input-to-output ratio may assist in making the expectations of regular customers more realistic. For example, customers who purchase their third meal in a specified period of time will be entitled to a single food or beverage item up to a certain monetary value. Secondly, the restaurant's menu, processes, policies and procedures could be succinctly communicated to the customer at the time of booking so that they are not solely reliant on reviews, word-of-mouth communication or personal assumptions to generate their expectations. This may include minimum customer and employee behaviour

expectations in an attempt to moderate the power imbalance between customers and waitstaff (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Harris & Daunt, 2013; Shamir, 1980).

Secondary interventions could include customer assessment and management training for waitstaff. Waitstaff could be educated on the nature of entitlement so that they are equipped to use their powers of observation in order to know when they might be interacting with entitled customers. Managers and waitstaff should be aware that entitled customers are quick to take offence and respond negatively to service failures (McCollough et al., 2003). In service recovery situations, waitstaff could be trained to provide entitled customers with empathy (i.e. acknowledging the inconvenience that the customer has experienced) or relative superiority (i.e. that they are valued more than other customers) apologies in order to contribute to the entitled customers' attempts to re-affirm their grandiose self-image (De Dreu & Van Knippenberg, 2005; Martin et al., 2018). These strategies may moderate the potential negative interpersonal consequences of a perceived service failure (Martin et al., 2018).

Limitations and Future Research

One of the primary limitations of this study was the lack of triangulation or crystallization (Tracy, 2010). Although this research employed two theoretical perspectives (i.e. interpretive and critical research), only one type of data (i.e. semi-structured interviews) was collected from one data source (i.e. waitstaff), which was analyzed by one researcher. Future research should consider employing multiple researchers and using multiple data collection methods (e.g. observations, interviews and focus groups) from multiple sources (e.g. customers, waitstaff and managers) to generate a deeper understanding of the nature of customer entitlement and/or to enhance the credibility of their research (Tracy, 2010).

Another limitation was the convenience sampling strategy and the nature of the sample. The study was only conducted in South Africa, which has a unique cultural context.

Any use of these findings outside of the context of fine-dining restaurants in South Africa should be approached with caution. Research replicating this study in other restaurant settings (e.g. casual dining), other hospitality sectors (e.g. hotels), other industries where customer-employee interactions are common (e.g. retail), and other countries will help to enhance our understanding of the nature of customer entitlement.

The lack of female participants (27%) means that the findings may be biased towards male perspectives and may not encompass the full scope of the nature of customer entitlement in fine-dining restaurants. Interactions between entitled customers and female waitstaff may be different to interactions between entitled customers and male waitstaff (cf. Yagil, 2008). Future research should consider using a stricter purposive sampling strategy to ensure greater representation from females.

As is the case with all qualitative research, any relations between customer entitlement and interpersonal or behavioural outcomes cannot be interpreted as causal without future quantitative studies that measure the direction of these relationships (Given, 2008). For example, it cannot be concluded whether it was entitlement or racism that led to customers mistreating black waitstaff. Although there is evidence that entitled individuals hold negative attitudes towards out-groups (Anastasio & Rose, 2014), future quantitative studies should consider measuring the relationships between racism, customer entitlement and customer incivility.

The results of this study demonstrate how entitled customers behave negatively, but the impact that this behaviour has on others was not investigated. A recommendation for future research would be to investigate how fine-dining waitstaff are affected by the attitudes and behaviours of entitled customers. More specifically within the fine-dining restaurant environment, research could be added to the body of literature surrounding emotional labour

(e.g. emotion regulation, deep acting and surface acting; Choi et al., 2014; Chu & Murrmann, 2006; Grandey, 2000).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to add to the limited body of research on the nature of customer entitlement in restaurant environments. The findings of this research revealed five dominant themes relating to the perspectives fine-dining waitstaff had of entitled customers, which were analyzed and interpreted in line with existing research and theories. These findings show a need for fine-dining restaurants to acknowledge the unreasonable expectations of entitled customers and the possible negative interpersonal outcomes that may occur if these expectations are not met. Based on these findings, South African fine-dining restaurants should include expectation management in their marketing and communications strategy, and entitlement awareness in their employee training plans. This study contributes to the growing field of customer entitlement research and lays a foundation for further research in this area.

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Appendix A

Pilot Study Interview Schedule

1. Please tell me about your career so far as a waiter.
    a. How long have you been working at your current restaurant?
    b. What are your roles and responsibilities?
    c. Where do you intend on going with your career?
2. Have you met a customer that has expected extra special treatment?
    a. How often does this happen? Is it rare or frequent? Every night? Once a month? How many people?
    b. Can you recall a recent incident where this happened?
    c. Some customers believe they are better than others, even when they are not. Sometimes, these customers expect special treatment, and want service employees to meet their demands without questioning or complaining.
3. Can you think of some examples when a customer acted in an entitled way?
    a. What did they do?
    b. How did you respond?
    c. Did this affect anyone around you? Customers and employees?
    d. Did you try to take revenge or think about taking revenge in any way?
    e. How did their behaviour make you feel?
    f. What did your manager do in this situation?
    g. What did your colleagues do in this situation?
    h. How did this affect you after the interaction?
    i. What was your immediate reaction? During shift? What did you do?
    j. Did it trouble you longer than that? Even the next day?

k. What did you do after the shift? Did you go home and have a drink? Did it still affect you?
l. Did you feel any physical responses after the interaction (e.g. shaking, headache etc…)?

4. How do you respond to entitled customers in general?
5. Does your restaurant have any formal or informal rules or policies towards dealing with entitled customers?
6. How have your colleagues supported you in dealing with an entitled customer?
7. When this happened, what do you think your manager could have done and what do you think your colleagues could have done?
8. If you could, what would you do to make sure that customers acted in less entitled ways?
   a. What could your supervisor do?
   b. What could your colleagues do?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your home language?

Appendix B

Main Study Interview Schedule

1. Please tell me about your career so far as a waiter.
    a. How long have you been working at your current restaurant?
    b. What are your roles and responsibilities?
    c. Where do you intend on going with your career?
2. Please tell me what you understand about the term "customer entitlement."
    a. Some customers believe they are better than others, even when they are not. Sometimes, these customers expect special treatment, and want service employees to meet their demands without questioning or complaining.
3. Can you think of some examples when a customer acted in an entitled way?
    a. What did they do?
    b. How did you respond?
    c. Did you try to take revenge or think about taking revenge in any way?
    d. How did their behaviour make you feel?
    e. What did your manager do in this situation?
    f. What did your colleagues do in this situation?
    g. How did this affect you after the interaction?
    h. Did you feel any physical responses after the interaction (e.g. shaking, headache etc…)?
4. How do you respond to entitled customers in general?
5. Does your restaurant have any formal or informal rules or policies towards dealing with entitled customers?
6. How have your colleagues supported you in dealing with an entitled customer?

7. If you could, what would you do to make sure that customers acted in less entitled ways?
    a. What could your supervisor do?
    b. What could your colleagues do?
    c. What could the customer do?
8. Do you have any questions for me?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your home language?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

The experience of customer entitlement for fine-dining waitstaff

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding into your experiences of dealing with customer entitlement and how these experiences affected you.

- This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.
- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from the research at any time.
- The interview will take approximately 30-90 minutes to complete.
- The interview will be recorded.
- Due to the nature of the study you will need to provide the researchers with some form of identifiable information however, all responses will be confidential and used for the purposes of this research only.
- All data will be discarded after use.
- Should you have any questions regarding the research please feel free to contact the researcher (cameron.coutts5@gmail.com; 072 610 1726).

There are no known risks or dangers to you associated with this study. The researchers will not attempt to identify you with the responses to your interview, or to name you as a participant in the study, nor will they facilitate anyone else's doing so.

I acknowledge that I am participating in this study of my own free will. I understand that I may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. If I wish, I will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature: Date: