Abstract
This paper enlarges extant research on organizational paradoxes by a multilevel approach to interrelated paradoxes affecting different actors – workers, managers and customers – and their embeddedness in broader societal structures. Paradoxes nested across these levels are particularly evident in service organizations where work practices are likely to induce how customers perceive the organization. For our conceptual analysis we use the example of luxury work, which can be characterized as emotional and aesthetic labor and which, at the same time, regularly involves precarious work arrangements. We identify three paradoxes addressing (1) the back side of luxury work, (2) the potentially paradoxical consumption experience when customers perceive a discrepancy between luxury and its back side and (3) the empirical fact that, despite its back side, luxury work itself can be regarded by workers as a luxury. Implications for future research on organizational paradoxes are discussed.
Introduction

Paradoxes, i.e. the simultaneous presences of opposites, are ever-present in organizations (Cameron & Quinn, 1988; Clegg, da Cunha, & e Cunha, 2002). Existing research on organizational paradoxes covers a variety of aspects but has so far focused on tensions that are related to conflicting management goals in transformation and innovation processes such as the exploitation-exploration tension (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). As Andriopoulos and Lewis have examined, innovation processes are often affected and fuelled by nested paradoxes that are located at different levels: strategic intent (profit vs. breakthroughs), customer orientation (tight vs. loose coupling) and personal drivers (discipline vs. passion). Consequently, they propose a multilevel approach in order to identify paradoxes of innovation and to develop solutions for how these interwoven tensions can be managed (see also Smith & Tushman, 2005). Management, however, has to acknowledge that paradoxes (or dilemmas), by definition, cannot simply be resolved; therefore some authors have stressed that “living with paradox” can be a way for managers of “moving on” (Beech, Burns, de Caestecker, Macintosh, & MacLean, 2004).

Paradoxes have been increasingly studied from the perspective of managers, but organizational research on paradoxes affecting workers and/or customers are rare. In this paper, we therefore seek to broaden the analysis of organizational paradoxes by loosening this self-restriction to the organizational level and by examining tensions perceived by workers, managers and customers. Paradoxes nested across these levels are particularly apparent in service organizations where the way workers are treated is likely to have an impact on how the organization is perceived by its customers – as due to their boundary role, service workers represent “the ‘face’ of the organization” (Adams, 1976, p. 1177).

The central aim of our analysis is to conceptually explore three paradoxes of service work by focussing on the perspectives of workers, management and customers, and to investigate how these paradoxes are interlinked. We will also argue that the three paradoxes are embedded in broader societal structures. We will pursue these aims by looking at a specific area of the service sector: luxury work. With the term “luxury work”, we refer to paid labor in a special area of the service industries: the provision and consumption of high price leisure and similar services – as in hotels and restaurants, in fitness and wellness companies and trade.

There are a whole range of ambivalences and tensions analyzed in the critical literature on service work (e.g. Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996; Sturdy, Grugulis, & Willmott, 2001; Korczynski & MacDonald, 2008) of which the most central ones are:

- tensions between a required service orientation and managerial cost and profitability concerns (e.g. Knights & McCabe, 1997; Korczynski, 2001; Wray-Bliss, 2001),
- tensions between the required personalized services including a genuine dedication to the customer and the standardization of service work (Sturdy, 1998; Finkelstein, 1999),
- related tensions as to the supposed alienation from the “real” emotional experience through surface and deep acting in emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), which has been criticized as building on a misleading real self – fake self dichotomy (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005),
- the myth of the sovereign customer which in its very production may unveil its illusionary character and, in consequence, leads to customer disappointment, cynicism and rage rather than customer enchantment (Korczynski & Ott, 2004),
- the battle for control of emotional scripts and performances, and employees’ resistance to exploitative emotional demands (see contributions in Sturdy et al., 2001; Korczynski & MacDonald, 2008),
- contradictions of managerial interventions which aim at balancing employees’ control and commitment e.g. in highly routinized call centre work (Kinnie, Hutchinson, & Purcell, 2000),
- unmanaged and unmanageable emotional relations in the context of customer care (Gabriel, 2010).

In our analysis, we build on these findings for elaborating on the paradoxes of luxury work, which bear some specific characteristics not treated in the respective literature so far. Extant studies tend to focus on routine and standardized service work (like, for example, in call centres) as well as the worker’s and the organizational perspectives. The customer’s perspective and the relationship between worker and customer are generally neglected in work and organizational studies since the literatures on service work and on consumption are hardly overlapping (see also Korczynski & Ott, 2004).

We seek to broaden existing analyses of service work (i) by taking a closer look at luxury work as a particular form of service work, (ii) by analyzing, from the worker’s perspective, the tension between precarious work conditions and doing luxury work, and (iii) by bringing in the perspective of the customer consuming luxury services. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the literature on organizational paradoxes through enlarging extant approaches by investigating the interrelatedness of paradoxes affecting different actors as well as their societal embeddedness – a view that is particularly nourished by the characteristics of luxury work.

The paper is structured as follows. We will, firstly, explicate some characteristics of luxury work focusing on the emotional and the aesthetic dimensions as well as the precariousness of work arrangements. Against this backdrop we will, secondly, introduce our framework for exploring paradoxes and, thirdly, conceptually explore three paradoxes of luxury work. The first paradox refers to the back side of luxury. This paradox addresses the
phenomenon that luxurious services supplied by the organization and valued by the client contrast with the precariousness of the underlying work arrangements and the forced character of the required emotional work. The second paradox attends to the potentially paradoxical consumption experience when customers perceive a discrepancy between luxury and its back side. The third paradox tackles the empirical fact that, despite its back side, luxury work itself can be regarded by workers as a luxury. In the last section of the paper we further analyze the link between the three paradoxes and seek to show how they are embedded in broader societal structures. Finally, we discuss to what extent the introduced paradoxes and the findings can be generalized for future analyses of organizational paradoxes.

Luxury Work in the Service Sector

The service sector covers a broad range of activities or products such as professional services, research and development, consulting, transport, communication, audiovisual services, retailing, education, financial services, culture, entertainment and sports as well as tourism and travel (incl. hospitality services). Many services are produced through work “on the front line” (Frenkel, Korczynski, Shire, & Tam, 1999) where service workers directly interact with clients. Not all but many such services are based on face-to-face interaction between clients and service workers, albeit trends like e-learning, e-commerce, call centres etc. have changed traditional relational settings between service providers and consumers (Sieben, 2007a). In this paper, however, we are interested in person-related service work that entails a face-to-face interaction and where the service provided cannot be separated from this interaction. Concretely, we look at luxury work, i.e. a special area of the service industries where high price leisure and similar services are provided through paid labor and where consumption is marked by (perceived) extravagance, opulence or comfort. Main examples and empirical accounts we draw upon stem from studies on the production and/or consumption of luxury services in hotels (Adler & Adler, 2004; Davidson, Guildinga, & Timo, 2006; Sherman, 2005, 2007), on cruise ships (Tracy, 2000; Weaver, 2005; Johanson & Näslund, 2009) and in luxury fashion retail (Pettinger, 2004; Godwyn, 2006).

In the remainder of this section we will characterize luxury work by looking at two dimensions: emotional and aesthetic labor as well as precarious work arrangements.

Emotional and Aesthetic Labor

Emotions at work or in organizations have become a field of increasing interest in organization and management studies (Fineman, 2005; Sieben, 2007b). The term emotional labor,
however, is used in a narrower sense to describe work situations or processes in which emotions are part of the product or services an organization provides and where workers are required to purposefully manage and control their emotions in a way expected by their employer and/or their clients (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2005); a process that can be regarded as a form of identity regulation or the production of “appropriate individuals” (Alvesson & Willmott (2002). Especially services that are based on the interaction between a client and a service worker involve the management of emotions. These emotions can comprise, for example, friendliness, care and empathy, but also coolness, smiling or flirting (Sturdy, 1998).

The concept of aesthetic labor lays additional emphasis on the commodification of embodied capacities and attributes (Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). Hotels are a point in case where employees’ dresses, physical appearance, bodily movements, facial expressions and accents are an integral part of the scenographic aesthetics of the service organization – and thus part of the luxury product. The nature of the service culture entails that employees appear as “branded workers” (embodying the service organization’s brand image), as Pettinger (2004) shows compellingly for (luxury) fashion retail, or as a “character for commerce”, as Tracy (2000) puts it for cruise ship attendants.

By emotional and aesthetic labor, service workers are expected to produce the “enchantment” of the customer (Ritzer, 1999) – through, for instance, co-constructing customers’ cruising experience (Johanson & Näslund, 2009): Cruise ship employees engage in “sanitizing” on different levels: by cleaning the physical surrounding, by categorizing the customers and by sanitizing emotions, i.e. displaying appropriate emotions and provoking appropriate emotions in the customers. Thereby, the myth of the sovereign customer (e.g. Sturdy, 1998; Rosenthal, Peccei, & Hill, 2001) plays an integral role: Emotional and aesthetic labor contributes to the creation of this “enchanting myth”, through empathy, dressing, naming – key aspects of the service interaction, which all underscore and reproduce the structural asymmetry between employees and customers (Korczynski & Ott, 2004).

Moreover, several analyses show that it is especially the management and control of emotion that drives the gendering of service work (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1991; Hall, 1993), also in combination with aesthetic dimensions of work (Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007a; Chong, 2009). Accordingly, luxury work belongs to the highly gendered person-related types of service work: Particularly in the hospitality industry, jobs have been shown to be highly segregated by gender, both horizontally (ascribing women e.g. to reception, men e.g. to bell men jobs) and vertically (with clear glass ceilings for women to higher management jobs) (e.g., Purcell, 1996; Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011). Thereby, female suitability for certain service jobs is ascribed on the basis of sexual attractiveness or presumed skills regarding the care for the comfort and welfare of others (Purcell, 1996). Related to such gendered ascriptions are gender norms in interactive
service delivery (like smiling or flirting; e.g. Hall, 1993; Warhurst & Nickson, 2009) that further normalize and naturalize such job market segregation. Gendered relations and gendered service identities arise and are reproduced in interactive service delivery (Rastetter, 2008; Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007a; Pettinger, 2008). Moreover, gender interlocks in many ways with other categories such as class, ethnicity, and nationality (Chong, 2009), e.g. in hotel work (Adler & Adler, 2004; Sherman, 2005, 2007; Adib & Guerrier, 2003). For instance in the Hawaiian luxury resort hotels studied by Adler & Adler (2004) beautiful young Hawaiian women have the task to welcome the guests by slipping sweet-smelling leis over their head and by offering them tropical drinks, (Caucasian) bellmen in British uniforms who remind of old-world butlers are part of the high level service which is monitored by (male) managers in elegant aloha shirts who are obviously Caucasian and perhaps even “real” Europeans. Such stratification along gender, ethnic and further lines expands and relegates to a second important characteristic of the production of luxury services: precarious work.

Precarious Work

Compared to e.g. knowledge intensive services (like in the consulting, financial and communication business), which require highly qualified and salaried work, it is striking that the consumption of luxury services is mainly accomplished by relatively low qualified employees with low wages and often contingent work arrangements. Many luxury workers can therefore be characterized as precarious workers whose income is unlikely to provide a decent basis for their living, who have very limited career prospects and whose social security is low (Fuchs & Böhm, 2006; Vosko, 2006).

For instance employment in the hotel sector may be taken as a prototype for precarious labor relations with high proportions of unskilled labor, low wages, high stress and strain and “poor” HRM practices (Price, 1994; ILO, 2001; Lucas, 2002; EU, 2004). Moreover the labor market is highly segmented along socio-demographic lines, relegating especially women and ethnic minorities or migrant workers to service jobs with lower status, lower earnings and other worse employment conditions (including undeclared work, ILO, 2001; EU, 2004). The persistence of gendered, low waged and segmented labor markets have also been demonstrated for the luxury hotel segment, e.g. in Australia (Davidson et al., 2006). This also applies to the Hawaiian luxury resorts studied by Adler & Adler (2004). It has to be added that the frontline service workers we are focusing on are not the worst off in this type of luxury service production: at the lowest end as regards working conditions and wages are stewards and room cleaners, jobs often done by immigrants (ibid.; see also ILO, 2001; EU, 2004; Liladrie, 2010). These jobs are an integral part of the luxury service and
disclose an obscene disparity between the luxury provided to solvent customers and the hotel staff’s working conditions. Yet, this also applies to frontline service workers, who are more often than not bound to seasonal and contingent contractual arrangements, earn low end wages, depend on tips from benevolent customers, and suffer from long and disagreeable working times, high work pressure and physical strain (EU, 2004; Schmidt, 1985). Even if not all luxury workers are that bad off, there tends to be a remarkable inconsistency between luxury services and the working conditions of luxury workers.

These characteristics of luxury work have multifaceted implications for service workers and the management of their work. As a general connection between luxury and emotional work we may note the following: the higher the expectation towards a luxurious and unique service experience, the more service givers are expected to arouse positive emotions in the clients by producing, managing and controlling positive emotions themselves, i.e. by doing emotion work. The precariousness of many these service jobs should add a further “burden” to service employees, not least by the ubiquitous dependence on tips. However, as has been stated e.g. by Lucas (2002) in her analysis of the “poorer” HRM practices in the hospitality industry (HI) compared to all other industries and services (AIS): “Put crudely, HI employees are kicked harder than their AIS counterparts, but actually enjoy being kicked hard” (ibid., p. 211). Survey data indicate that employees show stronger endorsement of the way their work is managed and they show pride towards their job (ibid.). Explanations might be found in dynamics that have been attributed to “dirty work”, in regard to which occupational members use strategies (like reframing and recalibrating social comparisons) to construct an esteem-enhancing social identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Also, the social bonds to co-workers are an important factor for coping with stress and strains and for strengthening the psychological contract with the service organization (Martin, 2004; Harrison, Simpson, & Kaler, 2005). But there is more to it, as we argue in the following – emanating from the paradoxes of luxury work.

As a first step, in the next section we lay out our analytic framework for identifying related paradoxes.

Exploring Paradoxes

We ground the following analysis in a widely accepted notion of paradox as the simultaneous presence of opposites (Cameron & Quinn, 1988; Clegg et al., 2002, p. 2; Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Putnam, 1986; Smith & Tushman, 2005). Instead of e.g. logical paradoxes (like the self-referential statement “I am lying”) or moral paradoxes (as ethical dilemmas) we are interested in contradictory tensions that occur in organizational practice, in
opposing demands and dilemmas that (intra- and extra-)organizational actors are confronted with, and their mutual interwovenness.

Hence, with this notion of paradox we refer to socially constructed opposites that actors become aware of through reflection and interaction. These opposites potentially denote a broad variety of contradictory, yet interwoven, “elements” such as demands, interests, feelings, or practices (cf. e.g. Lewis, 2000). A paradox in this sense becomes apparent when actors behave against social expectancies, are confronted with conflicting demands or impose contradictory rules and norms to others. A further characteristic is that paradoxes are not ephemeral phenomena, but may be understood as perceived tensions that are perpetuated and reinforced in social interaction. Figure I displays this concept of paradox on which we ground our analysis.

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The tensions that underlie paradoxes are in this sense perceived opposites, distinctions that actors make and that become objectified over time through social interaction (cf. Putnam, 1986; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Tushman, 2005). Contradictory managerial interventions – like those aiming at fun and surveillance in the call centres observed by Kinnie et al. (2000) – are a case in point: Far more than a perceived and socially constructed opposition such tensions connected to conflicting managerial practices become objectified into system contradictions that reside “within the goals, reward systems, resource demands, and division of labor of an organization” (Putnam, 1986, p. 161). However, there is still more to it than a “vicious cycle” of cognitive perception, social construction and interactive perpetuation: What is perceived as a tension in the first place is very much subject to the socio-cultural embedding of organizational incidents, to historically grown and shifting meanings attached to phenomena such as “decent work” or “luxury” as well as to social structures and relations.

Extant literature on management paradoxes is relatively mute on this last aspect. One exception is the relational view on management paradoxes laid out by Clegg et al. (2002) which is based on the dialectical conception of a paradox bearing a structural pole and a (centrifugal) structuring force. Accordingly, actual organizational paradoxes are conceived as tied to the historically grown dialectic between labor and capital and emerging from the basic paradox of organization that it represents “a restraint of free subjectivity by constraining order” (Clegg et al., 2002, p. 484). Another exception is the stream of research on the paradoxes of gender (Lorber, 1994) and gendered organizations (Hearn, 1998; Martin & Collinson, 2002) where e.g. the paradox of an alleged a-sexual organization (Flam, Hearn, & Parkin, 2010) and the (in)visibility of gender (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009) are analyzed with a core focus on socially structured processes and associated power relations. Corre-
spondingly, our analysis on paradoxes of luxury work seeks to highlight the importance of the societal embedding of related paradoxes.

Also in other regard we extend the levels of paradox analysis: Recent work on organizational paradoxes has pointed out the nestedness of paradoxes and the necessity to take into account multiple levels of analysis (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Beech et al., 2004; Ofori-Dankwa & Julian, 2004; Smith & Tushman, 2005). However, although corresponding work integrates the view on paradoxes arising from contradictory needs of different organizational stakeholders and points out their spiralled relation (e.g. of customer orientation and strategic intent; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009), it still concentrates on arising paradoxes affecting management and organization. Some studies elaborate on paradoxes affecting workers and their collaboration, e.g. with regard to expatriates (Osland & Osland, 2005), network collaboration (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010), virtual teams (Dubé & Robey, 2008) and creative workers (Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis, & Ingram, 2010). However, we find no analysis that elaborates on paradoxes affecting different organizational stakeholders (in our case: management, workers and customers, respectively) and their interrelatedness.

Moreover, extant paradox literature is for the most part concentrated on the management of paradoxes, namely the question of how management may respond in order to diminish related tensions or, alternatively, to use the paradoxes’ “energizing potential” for change (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Beech et al., 2004; Eisenhardt, 2000). However, the question remains whether all paradoxes call for managerial interventions: As we will show for the paradoxes of luxury work, there are paradoxical situations that in themselves create stable arrangements. Such stable arrangements—paradoxically enough—do not offer “an invitation to act” and for “moving-on” (Beech et al., 2004, p. 1330), but to accept and capitalize on the self-reinforcing and stabilizing powers of paradox instead of “capitalizing on the inherent pluralism within the duality” in a creative way (Eisenhardt, 2000, p. 703).

As Lewis (2000, p. 761) notes, “exploring paradox is an ongoing and cyclical journey. As researchers learn to comprehend paradox, they may discover other, potentially more intricate, contradictions.” As we propose, the case of luxury work offers a route to explore novel paradoxes in this vein or, to be more precise, novel kinds of relations between paradoxes. Luxury work represents a rich case for pointing out the interrelation of paradoxes affecting different actors as well as their embeddedness in broader societal structures. Methodologically, we follow Lewis’s (2000) proposal to use literature reviews as one fruitful approach to analyze paradoxes. Concretely, we will proceed to identify corresponding paradoxes by re-reading and re-interpreting empirical studies on luxury work against the foil of the framework developed in this section.
The Three Paradoxes of Luxury Work

The Back Side of Luxury Work

The first paradox of luxury work follows directly from the characteristics of luxury work and the underlying work arrangements outlined above. Unfavourable working conditions and low wages constitute the dark back side of luxury work. Hotel employment, for example, has even been characterized as the archetype of precarious work arrangements, encompassing an employer-friendly flexible and exploitative labor use as well as non-participative HR practices (Davidson et al., 2006; see also Guerrier & Lockwood, 1989; Lucas, 1996; Price, 1994; Timo, 1999).

Due to the bright side of the luxurious service, this back side is more or less concealed to customers. It nevertheless seems contradictory that in the luxury industries service workers who are expected to instil positive emotions in demanding customers have to work under such problematic conditions. It is particularly striking that emotional labor, which is so crucial for satisfying customers, is not adequately recompensed in job evaluations. This paradox could be framed as a typical management tension between cost saving and service quality. However, the way this paradox is managed in service organizations is strongly connected with the question how service takers and service workers deal with the two sides of luxury. As we will show now, two other paradoxes show up when broadening the analysis by taking into account the perspectives of customers and service workers.

The Customer Perspective

At first sight, we may assume that consumers of a luxury service expect a certain experience at an acceptable price. The delivery of a luxury service entails to create the bright side of luxury. Hence, the dark side of luxury work which has been outlined above is more or less concealed to the clients; it is not part of the consumption process and should not interfere with it. Previous research has stressed the co-existence of, and the interaction between, (luxury) service work and consumption (see e.g. Pettinger, 2004; Korczynski & Ott, 2004; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007b). Yet, service customers’ own perceptions and attitudes have been neglected so far (see also Pettinger, 2004; as an exception see Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

However, customers might actually be aware of the back side of luxury work; and this might be inconsistent with their attitudes or values regarding fairness, justice or equality. Consequently, a tension arises: as consumers of the luxury service, the clients expect the positive emotional experience they pay for; at the same time, they realize that their positive emotions are the result of emotion work performed under poor working conditions. This ten-
sion constitutes a paradoxical consumption experience – an experience perhaps similar to luxury travellers to countries where they visit or get in touch with slums or favelas.

Clearly, in most cases (e.g. hotel staff or flight attendants) the back side of service work is not entirely transparent to customers. However, it is far from unknown due to public information and debates. Still, it remains an empirical question to what extent consumers recognize or even expect the back side of luxury work and whether they legitimize or rationalize it as a constitutive part of the luxurious service. One legitimization, which certainly has significantly lost societal acceptance, could be to refer to social stratification (the idea, for example, that societal groups belong to the group of masters or servants by birth). Another form of legitimization could be to refer to social status based on previous achievements, efforts or performance (hence the idea that with good cause a societal segmentation emerged dividing between luxury consumers and providers). In both cases, the legitimization would resort to societal values and social structures.

Whether the dark side of luxury work is likely to affect luxury consumers’ self-image and comfort therefore depends on societally defined roles of luxury providers and consumers. The notion of “consumer” itself refers to a societally constructed role which differs from living in luxury as lifestyle of the rich (Veblen, 1899/1994). Nowadays, the luxury adjective is used widely to elevate the (symbolic) value of mundane and everyday goods (Dubois & Laurent, 1994; Featherstone, 2007). Many of today’s luxury consumers are also “excursionists”, who only occasionally access the luxury product domain (Dubois & Laurent, 1996), or are “inconspicuous consumers” who purchase expensive leisure goods but have little time to demonstrate (their) luxury in public (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2004). The particular luxury consumption we look at in our analysis differs from Sullivan and Gershuny’s account in that the consumption of luxury services usually takes place in public. To what extent luxury services and the visibility of their consumption are part of lifestyle choices and self-formation (Featherstone, 2007; Gabriel & Lang, 2006) is subject to collective societal values, as is the acceptance of service workers’ precarious working conditions. In this context, tipping as social practice can be regarded as (patronising) status display but also as a means to salve one’s conscience by compensating poorly paid (emotional) work (see also Holloway, 1985).

**Workers’ Identities**

The third paradox addresses the service workers’ own perception of the luxury work they do, in particular their work identities that are often related to lifestyles. Here we can observe the paradoxical effect that despite the problematic aspects of their work, luxury workers can regard their work as luxury; the mere fact that the service they offer is consumed by certain (interesting, well-off, famous) consumers and/or in a luxurious environment seems to func-
tion as a compensation for the negative sides of work. This effect is enhanced by the relevance of aesthetic norms (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007a) in the provision of a luxury service. As Warhurst and Nickson (2007b) have shown, the fact to have been successfully selected for (often routine) service tasks, but in a sector that serves a specific segment of customers forms a “new labor aristocracy”: service workers who themselves engage with consumer culture (Pettinger, 2008) and even treat “inappropriate” customers dismissively.

As Korczynski and Ott (2004) hint at in their analysis of the promotion of the (fragile) myth of customers’ sovereignty, the “enchantment” of the (luxury) brand will not only affect consumers but also service workers – providing a source for developing a self-satisfying work identity. For instance in luxury clothing stores, employees use emotional labor for a creative control over their work and for, thereby, achieving a status of expert and artisan (Godwyn, 2006). In her extensive ethnographic study of service and inequality in luxury hotels, Sherman (2005) describes that the luxury hotel workers she studied engaged in producing a superior self by drawing (partly contradictory) symbolic boundaries. In strategic comparisons with peers they used their relatedness to the luxury hotel and its clients as a source of prestige. In comparison with their guests they tended to use contradictory strategies (dissentangling at the same time the “myth of the sovereign customer”). Perceiving and constructing the guest as needy and dependent enabled them to soar (empathically) above them. In line with Warhurst and Nickson’s “new labor aristocracy” judging other guests as inferior in terms of morality, intelligence and cultural capital also provided a resource for creating the superior self.

Beyond the social bonds between fellow workers, which can, according to Harrison et al. (2005) and Martin (2004), help low-skilled workers in the hotel and catering industry to develop emotional engagement with and commitment to the organization, working in the luxury sector can therefore in itself represent a feature of distinction and a matter of lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984). Distinction and the self-production of a superior self can, as shown above, be based on the socially constructed value of luxury consumers or the comparatively high job demands in comparison to other service tasks. As Wright (2005) shows, another source of distinction could be workers’ perceived (financial or cultural) value of and feelings towards the product they sell. What he shows for the distinction of bookshop sellers through the cultural value of literature and reading may easily be translated to the emotional and aesthetic attachment to luxury products and services: The production of luxury goods thus appears as a “celebration of distinction, in which workers are actively engaged” (ibid., p. 302).

HR practices and emotion management in luxury service production can, on the one hand, be regarded as a regulation of identities towards employers’ needs (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) to which employees might react with strategies of micro-emancipation, disidentification or self-alienation (Costas & Fleming, 2009). On the other hand, there is clear
empirical evidence for the development of a positive self image of luxury workers - not by employers encouraging their employees to “be themselves” and enforced authenticity (Fleming, 2009), but by distinction.

For luxury workers, this distinction can outweigh strain through emotional labor and low wages and lead to less perceived precariousness (for a similar phenomenon among artists see Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006). In contrast to lifestyle choices and self-formation through consumer acts (Featherstone, 2007; Gabriel & Lang, 2006) or even conspicuous consumption of the leisure class (Veblen, 1899/1994), luxury workers do not distinct themselves from other societal groups by their leisure activities or their material consumption but by the mere fact that they enable such activities for others.

The three paradoxes of luxury work developed in this section are illustrated and summarized in Figure II.

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Conclusion
The central aim of our analysis was to conceptually explore three paradoxes of luxury service work. Our starting point was to identify the back side of luxury work. In this respect, a paradox arises between working conditions on the one side and the expected features of luxury services on the other side. This paradox has, to our knowledge, so far not been analyzed explicitly in the literature. We have then taken this first paradox, which resides on the organizational level of service work and delivery, as the starting point for identifying two other paradoxes, which become evident when taking into account the perspectives of customers and luxury workers. The effect for customers may be a paradoxical consumption experience in view of the back side of luxury work. From the perspective of service workers, the perception of the back side of their work might, paradoxically, be outweighed through distinction mechanisms tied to their participation in the luxury segment.

The societal level is crucial for understanding paradoxes, as particularly the second and the third paradox have revealed. The tensions identified here draw on patterns of consumption and societal stratification. Moreover, service consumers’ legitimization or suppression strategies and service workers’ identity work are decisive for the again paradoxical effect that the back side of luxury loses its actual gravity: Service organizations may afford to offer unfavourable working conditions if these are blended out or legitimized both by the cli-
ents and the service workers themselves. Again, this shows that all three paradoxes identified here are intimately linked and interwoven. Moreover, they are embedded in broader societal structures and all actors – managers, consumers and service workers alike – contribute to reproduce these nested paradoxes. Consequently, not all paradoxes cause problems for organizations nor create in any case a constellation to be used creatively for organizational change or learning. As in the case of luxury work, a situation that reveals paradoxes can nevertheless form a stable arrangement. When luxury workers accept their working conditions as part of their lifestyle and provide a service level that satisfies customers whose satisfaction is not negatively influenced by the back side of luxury work, there are no organizational needs for management measures or change unless coerced by political power.

There are a couple of open questions to be explored in more depth in future analyses. Firstly, empirical studies on how luxury service workers perceive their work conditions and enact distinction from other service workers are rare. Why are they often “kicked harder” than their counterparts in other service industries and even “enjoy being kicked hard” (Lucas, 2002)?

Secondly, we agree with Korczynski and Ott (2004) who claim that “there is a frustrating dearth of a critical research which directly examines consumption within service interactions. Particularly frustrating is the lack of research in which the voices of customers are present, in which customers reflect on their experience of service interactions” (ibid., p. 594). This dearth is surprising because service work is commonly characterized by referring to the importance of interaction between consumer and worker. By looking at potential paradoxical effects from the perspective of customers of luxury work we sought to encourage such empirical and critical research.

Finally, to what extent can the introduced paradoxes and the findings be generalized for future studies of organizational paradoxes? We have chosen the example of luxury work as we posit that it is a new and fruitful case for the examination of nested paradoxes. Luxury work provides a particularly good example for studying such nestedness because the services provided are of high symbolic value and consumers’ as well as workers’ behaviors are strongly influenced by social expectations and processes of self-formation. However, we sought to show that to include the perspectives of customers and workers into the analysis will as well be fruitful for other types of work and organizational arrangements. Our analysis demonstrates the need for a multilevel approach to grasp and understand the range of paradoxes, and that is also to recognize their embeddedness in societal structures and value systems. The example of luxury work clearly reveals that taking into account the societal context is essential for understanding the dynamics of organizational paradoxes.
References


**Figure 1.** Paradoxes as cyclically reinforced tensions (cf. similar illustrations in Lewis et al., 2000, p. 762; Clegg et al., 2002, p. 489; Andriopoulos, & Lewis, 2009, p. 707)

**Figure 2.** Paradoxes of luxury work