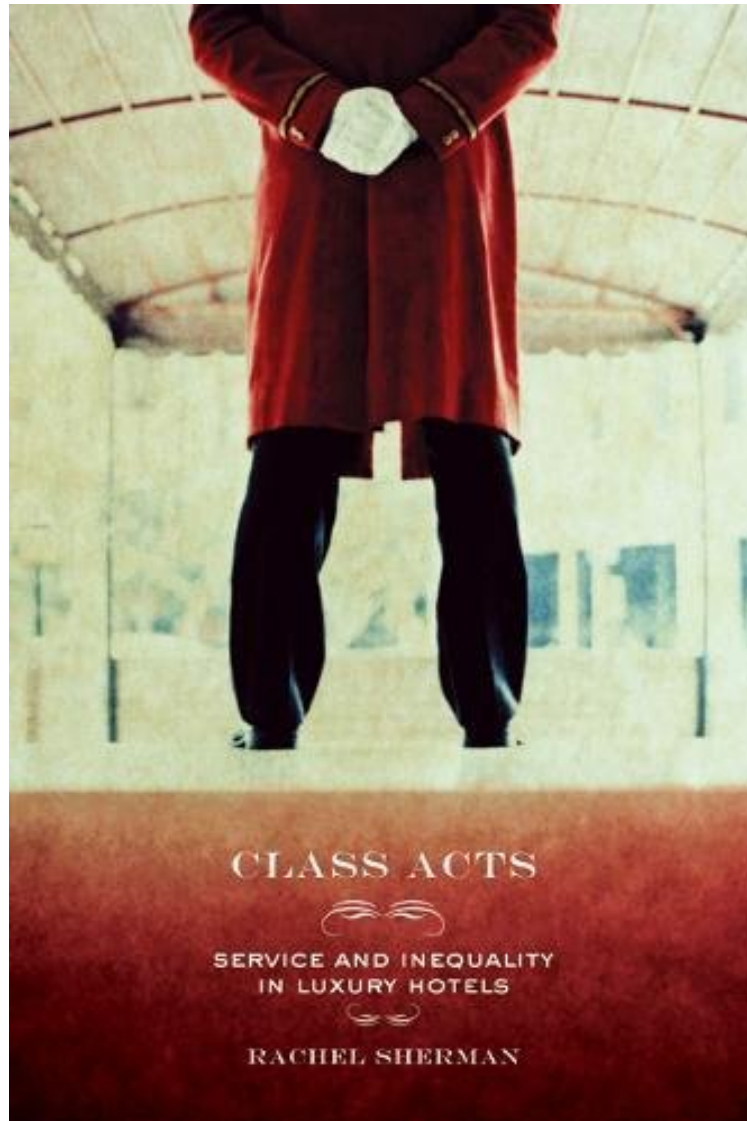


(Mobile ebook) Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels

## Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels

*Rachel Sherman*

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**Rachel Sherman : Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. A great book on how we "perform" our social class...By Zachary Carr"Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels" is a captivating look at how class gets played out in a particular setting -- and yet it has a lot to say about how we all relate to our social and economic class (whether or not we work or stay at luxury hotels). It's a sociological study, and though I'm not a sociologist, I found it accessible, not

too academic, and packed with interesting anecdotes. The author, Rachel Sherman, talks about the luxury hotel as a kind of "theater" where guests and workers act out class relations and fill their own needs. For their part, workers strive to protect their dignity, even as they are subservient on the job to very wealthy guests. To accomplish this, workers may take pride in their skills, criticize guests behind their backs, or--as discussed in an especially fascinating section of the book--turn their jobs into a kind of strategic game. Meanwhile, guests rationalize the lavish service they enjoy by, for example, treating workers as equals or even friends--in the process "erasing" class differences or acting as if they don't exist. The book could have stopped there and been really interesting; but it goes further, and shows how workers and guests come to depend on each other to perform (or even become) their roles. I once stayed in a luxury hotel for a few nights on work. The book grabbed me because of the backstage look it provides at this dramatic setting, and held onto me for another reason. We all play strategic "games" on the job and elsewhere, we all play roles in relation to people of various classes, we all rationalize our choices and tell ourselves stories to make sense of things. That's why "Class Acts" is pertinent to everyday life and politics in America.

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A Classy Act  
By M. Rose  
I just finished reading *Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels*, and I mean reading it: Acknowledgments, Introduction, Chapters 1-6, Conclusion, Appendices A, B, C, and Notes. Okay, I did not read References and Index, but close enough. What a great ethnography! What a great voice! The writer, Rachel Sherman, manages to be impressively objective and fair as she observes and participates in the service economy of the luxury hotel. Since I am an arm chair-bleeding heart liberal, I wanted there to be a clear demarcation between "good guys" and "bad guys," but Sherman paints a far more complicated and nuanced picture of the social dynamics at work in the luxury service sector. As a result, the Conclusion provides a satisfying critique, since it is in this section that Sherman lets her views be known. I find this admirable because it indicates this researcher's ability to distinguish between observation, analysis, and critique. *Class Acts* is a scholarly work, yet the writing style is extremely lucid. Yes, the author uses jargon -- intersubjectivity, habitus, interpellated -- but what is really cool is how Sherman uses language to mirror some of the class distinctions she is writing about, at times conveying theory and abstraction and at others conveying terms like "ripped off" and "pissed." The contrast is refreshing. Sherman also does an excellent job of sign postng. In a straightforward way, she reminds the reader of who is who, foreshadows ideas to come, and acknowledges ideas previously introduced. I found all these textual reminders to be helpful. Not only that, but Sherman offers advice on how to tip in the Notes. Finally, the author does a great job weaving the motif of movies and image making throughout the text -- from *Pretty Woman* to *My Dinner with Andre* -- to underscore both the transformative power of the luxury hotel setting and the nature of work and class distinctions.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars  
By Daisy  
good condition. needed it for a class. interesting book to read

In this lively study, Rachel Sherman goes behind the scenes in two urban luxury hotels to give a nuanced picture of the workers who care for and cater to wealthy guests by providing seemingly unlimited personal attention. Drawing on in-depth interviews and extended ethnographic research in a range of hotel jobs, including concierge, bellperson, and housekeeper, Sherman gives an insightful analysis of what exactly luxury service consists of, how managers organize its production, and how workers and guests negotiate the inequality between them. She finds that workers employ a variety of practices to assert a powerful sense of self, including playing games, comparing themselves to other workers and guests, and forming meaningful and reciprocal relations with guests. Through their contact with hotel staff, guests learn how to behave in the luxury environment and come to see themselves as deserving of luxury consumption. These practices, Sherman argues, help make class inequality seem normal, something to be taken for granted. Throughout, *Class Acts* sheds new light on the complex relationship between class and service work, an increasingly relevant topic in light of the growing economic inequality in the United States that underlies luxury consumption.

From the Inside Flap "Sherman's insightful ethnography sheds light on the interactional dimension of symbolic boundaries and class relations as they are lived by luxury hotel clients and the workers who serve them. We learn how both groups perform class through emotion work and deepen our understanding of the role played by "niceness" in constituting equality and reversing hierarchies. As such, *Class Acts* is a signal contribution to a growing literature on the place of the self concept in class boundaries. It will gain a significant place in a body of work that broadens our understanding of class by moving beyond structural determinants and taking into consideration the performative, emotional, cognitive, and expressive dimensions of inequality." Michele Lamont, author of *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* "Eye-opening, amusing, and appalling, Rachel Sherman's *Class Acts* explains how class inequality is normalized in the refined atmosphere of luxury hotels. This beautifully observed and engagingly written ethnography describes what kinds of deference and personal recognition money can buy. Moreover, it shows how workers who provide luxury service avoid seeing themselves as subordinate and how those whose whims are catered to are made comfortable with their privilege. *Class Acts* is a sobering and timely account of the legitimation of extreme inequality in a culture that prizes egalitarianism." Robin Leidner, University of Pennsylvania "Rachel Sherman provides a penetrating and engrossing study of workers and guests in luxury hotels. Do workers resent the guests? Do guests disdain the workers? Sherman argues neither is true--and

explains why." Julia Wrigley, author of *Other People's Children*