Incorporating a gender approach in the hospitality industry: Female executives' perceptions

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A B S T R A C T

Despite the increasing presence of women in the hospitality labour market, empirical evidence shows persistent horizontal and vertical segregation, as well as a pay gap - a situation that perpetuates lost opportunities for the industry. Based on Barbara Risman's model "Gender as a Social Structure" as a leading reference, the paper provides a gender based approach for the hospitality industry. Risman's three levels of analysis (Individual, Interactional and Institutional) are completed with an Intersectional level, conforming the "Gender as a Social Structure in the Hospitality Industry" model. This model aims at identifying factors that cause discrimination among female executives. The methodology is based on thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews with female executives in the Spanish hospitality industry. The results show that the influence of self-imposed barriers, gender roles, problems associated with work-life conciliation and issues related to gendered organizations are the main factors that hinder achieving gender equality.

1. Introduction

Although the number of women on boards of directors and in top management positions in organisations all around the world (e.g. Arfken et al., 2004; Pinar et al., 2011) is increasing, it remains low, and is growing at a very slow pace (e.g. Castaño et al., 2010; Bjørkhaug and Sørensen, 2012; Bugeja et al., 2012).

There have been numerous articles analysing women's representation in employment positions all over the world and focusing on gender discrimination, i.e. treating people differently on the basis of their sex (Cleveland et al., 2005). Research into the reasons for the lack of female representation in higher management positions has attributed it to workplace barriers, insufficient numbers of qualified women further down the career ladder, discriminatory stereotyping of leadership attributes as male attributes, incompatibility between job structures and the demands of raising a family, and self-imposed barriers (e.g. Emslie and Hunt, 2009; Roper and Scott, 2009; Boone et al., 2013). There is evidence of both vertical and horizontal segregation (e.g. Santos and Varejão, 2007; Campos-Soria et al., 2011) and the consequence of gender discrimination include the gender pay gap (e.g. Thrane, 2008; Campos-Soria et al., 2009; Muñoz-Bullón, 2009; Casado-Díaz and Simon, 2016; Baum, 2013; Fleming, 2015; Geiler and Renneboog, 2015; Livingstone et al., 2016).

Although there is a considerable body of empirical and theoretical research on gender issues in the work environment, there is a lack of research applying feminist theories to vertical segregation of women in the tourism sector and hospitality industry (Brandth and Haugen, 2005; Lacher and Oh, 2012; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2014; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015; Pritchard, 2018). The literature on women's under-representation in leadership positions in the private tourism sector (Mooney and Ryan, 2009; Boone et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2017), or in universities and Academia is sparse (Munar et al., 2015; Pritchard and Morgan, 2017; Pritchard, 2018; Chambers et al., 2017). These gaps are the more significant because of the economic importance of tourism and the idiosyncratic features it has as an industrial sector. Employment in the hospitality and tourism industry is associated with notoriously poor wages, low job security, long working hours and shift work (Back et al., 2011) and with lower quality employment opportunities than in other industries (García-Pozo et al., 2012; Lacher and Oh, 2012; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015). In addition, although women make up 55.9% of the tourism workforce in OECD member countries (Stacey, 2015), their working conditions are worse than those of their male counterparts. All this adds up to vertical and horizontal segregation that help to maintain the leadership gap (Kogovsek and Kogovsek, 2015; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015).

This article tackles women's position in the hospitality labour market, specifically their progression up the career ladder. It responds to calls for a broader perspective on the 'glass ceiling' (Pizam, 2017),

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starting with the double-bind factor that addresses discrimination at a gendered socio-cultural level (Pizam, 2017; Boone et al., 2013).

The objective of this article is to understand women's career development from a gender approach, by examining the perceptions of female managers in the hospitality industry and identifying the various factors that hinder or facilitate the promotion of women to management positions. This critical analysis will be based on the development of a specific social gender model for the hospitality industry and will lead to recommendation for strategies and actions to empower women in the hospitality industry.

The Research Questions (RQs) arising from this objective are:

- RQ1. How does a gender approach improve our understanding of women's position in the hospitality industry?
- RQ2. Which individual and social factors influence women's career progression in the hospitality industry?
- RQ3. Which industry-specific factors influence women's career progression in the hospitality industry?

In order to achieve this objective and answer the research questions a qualitative analysis was carried out between 2014 and 2016 from thirty successful women in decision-making positions in the hospitality industry throughout Spain. Spain was chosen as the research subject because it is the third most visited country in the world and the second in terms of revenue from tourism (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, UNWTO, 2017). According to the Spanish Tourism Satellite Account.[1] in 2015 tourism contributed 11.2% of gross domestic product (GDP) and j 11.9% of the workforce in Spain was employed in tourism (11.2% of salaried workers and 16.7% of non-salaried workers). Furthermore, women make up 55.5% of the hospitality industry workforce in Spain (Segovia-Perez and Figueroa-Domecq, 2016) a very similar proportion to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average (Stacey, 2015).

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. First, we review the literature on gender as a social system and discuss the factors that determine gender discrimination, then the methodology is described. After that we present the results of the investigation, followed discussion of the results and then by our conclusions. Lastly, the research and managerial implications are presented.

2. A gender-aware literature review: women in decision-making positions

Gender is a system of beliefs and practices that refers to, deals with, or creates a sense of difference between females and males (Thompson & Armato, 2012:10) and is used to define social roles and coerce men and women down specific individual paths. Consequently, gender is manifested in personality, cultural rules and institutions' management culture. It becomes the basis for stratification, differentiation of opportunities and constraints (Risman, 1998). According to Risman (1998) differentiation on the basis of gender has consequences at three levels, that conform Risman's (1998) "Gender as a Social Structure" theory base.

The first level, the individual level, relates to the development of gendered selves and is linked with construction of gender at the individual level, internalised cognitive images of masculinity and femininity, and socialisation of gender roles and stereotypes. The interactional level, the second level, deals with the reinforcement of gender roles and expected behaviour through relationships. Men and women face different expectations even when they fill identical structural positions, and status differences shape expectations and the ways in which

in-group and out-group membership influence behaviour. Finally, at the institutional level, differentiation is reflected in how rarely women and men are given identical positions. A wide variety of organisational structures reproduce and develop gender differences through labour division, role hierarchies and power structures. The components of the institutional level are related to the maintenance of power and resources mainly by men, which implies the appearance of the wage gap, gender segregation by sectors and occupations, contractual differences, glass ceiling, among other aspects.

Considering the main objective of this article and the demand of approaching this reality from a holistic perspective, Risman's model – which is explained in more detail in the following section – is used as the basis for the development of a theoretical model that describes and explains women's participation in leading positions in the hospitality industry at the individual, interactional and institutional levels.

There are two main gender theoretical reasons to use Risman's model. In first place, gender as a social structure is complex and multifaceted. The discrimination faced by women in work environments and its causes are complex and analysis requires consideration of a wide range of variables (Albrecht et al., 2001; Cohen and Huffman, 2003; Kiaye and Singh, 2013). Other theoretical traditions have focused on individual sex differences, the importance of social structure or on social interaction and accountability expectations (Sinclair, 1997; Wharton, 2009). Risman's model offers an integrative approach that treats gender as a socially constructed stratification system, operating at the three levels mentioned above. The dimensions of the model are independent and change is fluid and reverberates throughout the structure dynamically (Risman, 2004: 435). The model integrates previous gender theoretical traditions giving due weight to the web of interconnection linking gendered selves, the cultural expectations that help explain interaction and institutional regulations. Thus, it offers a multidimensional perspective where each research tradition explores the growth of its own trees while remaining cognisant of the forest (Risman, 2004: 433). A second reason to choose this model is the depth and breadth of its applications to economic and social activities; it has been applied to students' teaching ratings (MacNell et al., 2015); migration (Parrado and Flippen, 2014); social change (Budgeon, 2014) and high-tech firms (Ridgeway, 2009), amongst others.

2.1. Individual level

The individual level deals with the development of individuals' self-conception of belonging to one gender or another and the way in which we configure ourselves as women or men: gender shapes our personality, our internalised masculinity or femininity and defines our behaviours, values, beliefs and pReferences

In this sense gender roles or gender stereotypes are cultural representations of what is expected of a woman or a man (Bravo and Moreno, 2007). People construct their own existence on the basis of them, internalising culturally constructed and agreed codes and signs of identity (Bravo and Moreno, 2007) that are maintained through the admiration or reprobation of others (Eagly et al., 2004). The allocation of domestic and family tasks to women is based on their presumed greater capacity for care, kindness and sensitivity, whilst men are assigned the role of family provider because it is associated with autonomy, domination and power.

Women's devotion to family or housework often goes hand in hand with more limited participation in professional work and women tend to choose occupations or roles where level of education and human capital investment are less important (Hultin, 2003; Reid et al., 2004; Dambrin and Lambert, 2008; Fernandez-Palacín et al., 2010). This tendency is what Boone et al. (2013) identified as a self-imposed barrier to female achievement. Other self-imposed barriers include perceptions of one's capacities, cognitive factors and types of shared understanding among individuals that depend on a shared language, codes and culture (Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2007). Thus women tend to have less

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[1] The most recent data available from the Tourism Satellite Account in 2016 were from 2012 as the complexity of the calculations and evaluations leads to substantial delays in publication.