

Chapter 11

Gender Awareness and Women Managers in Tourism: Perceptions of Inequality and What Could Be Done

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal women top-level managers' gender awareness in relation to two aspects: 1) perceptions of discrimination and 2) views of what could be done towards gender equality (by the state, organizations, and women themselves), so that more women can advance their careers. Women top-level managers in the Portuguese tourism sector were interviewed. The interview data suggests that discrimination might still be pervasive in the Portuguese tourism industry. However, many women do not perceive it as "real" discrimination and have contradictory discourses about it. Informants were also asked what could be done so that more women advance in their careers. They place the solution to the problem of gender equality mostly in women's hands. While some of the strategies proposed by women confront the gender order, others align with the status quo by ensuring that women "fit in" without challenging existing structures.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in employment was the most radical change in the labor market over the last century. Although female employment was initially the result of a need to complement family earnings, it slowly became a crucial part of women's identity (Goldin, 2006). Nowadays, women's involvement in the labor market seems to be irreversible (Casaca, 2010).

Although a lot has been accomplished in the field of gender equality, the pace of change has been slow and equality *de facto* is still far from being achieved. This reflects the gender order which permeates all spheres of society including labor. Several inequalities remain in this field. Work is still horizontally and vertically segregated, the gender pay gap remains and women's jobs tend to hold lower quality (Collinson & Hearn, 2005; García-Pozo, Campos-Soria, & Sánchez-Ollero, 2015; Santero-Sanchez, Segovia-Pérez, Castro-Núñez, Figueroa-Domecq, & Talón-Ballester, 2015; Scott, Crompton, & Lyonette, 2010). The traditional ideology of domesticity persists, and women are normatively assigned the work of caring and nurturing (Scott et al., 2010a).

Such gender stereotypes and cultural barriers work particularly against women with management aspirations. They are frequently stereotyped as weaker and less committed to long-term careers than their male counterparts (Brownell & Walsh, 2008; Li & Leung, 2001). As a result, they often feel that they have to work harder than men in order to prove themselves and avoid being sidelined. Several studies have revealed that despite the centrality of male practices and behaviors that lie at the core of most organizations, management is often perceived as 'gender neutral' (Acker, 1998; Mavin, Bryans, & Waring, 2014).

Management and organizations are often perceived as 'gender neutral' by women themselves. Several studies have revealed that women managers may downplay the role of discrimination (Clark, Caffarella, & Ingram, 1999; Kantola, 2008; Wahl, 1992). When carrying out a broader study on gender, discrimination and the tourism sector (Anonymized), the authors of the present study observed the same pattern, since their respondents – women managers – also tended to downplay the role of discrimination. This aspect revealed a certain lack of gender awareness, which was also noticeable in women's suggestions of how to make the tourism sector more gender equal. Hence, the present article not only analyzes women managers' discourses on discrimination, as previous studies did, but it goes beyond that, by analyzing with a gender lens women's suggestions of how gender equality could be achieved.

On a global scale, tourism is a highly gendered sector (S Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Muñoz-Mazón, 2018). However, it is frequently conceived as an industry that "opens doors to women", since women comprise the majority of its workers in most countries (UNWTO, 2011; WTTC, 2013). Therefore, it is relevant to study gender awareness in the tourism sector.

Portugal was chosen as the setting for this study, partly due to the importance of tourism for the Portuguese economy. Besides, Portugal is a country whose high levels of female participation in paid employment (which are among the highest in the European Union) can be largely explained by an economic rationality, rather than by an effective change in traditional gender beliefs (Sackmann, 2002). Moreover, previous studies have revealed the genderedness of the tourism sector in Portugal (Carvalho, 2017; Costa et al., 2017). Therefore, it is of interest to investigate women managers' gender awareness in this context.

Hence, this study analyzes women top-level managers in tourism (hotels, travel agencies and tour operators) and their gender awareness. Women's gender awareness was analyzed in relation to two

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