

Let's not just 'talk' about it: reflections on women's career development in hospitality

Abstract

Purpose

This article aims to provide an action-orientated reflection for promoting gender equality in hospitality, based on Bradley's (2013) approach that considers the operation of gender in the "production" and "reproduction" spheres of social life. To that end, it reflects on women's career development in hospitality based on the Western perspective.

Design/methodology/approach

A two-stage thematic analysis of a public research seminar on gender issues in tourism and hospitality were employed to explore issues of women's career development within the intertwining spheres of "production" and "reproduction".

Findings

Three themes, namely culture of an open dialogue, bringing men into the equation, and educating the future workforce emerged from data to propose new insights on "what can be done" about gender equality in tourism and hospitality, including practical suggestions for transformations of gender relations in organisations.

Implications

This paper contributes new knowledge on women's career development in the hospitality industry by proposing recommendations to address gender gaps including fostering a culture of an open dialogue based on an inclusive listening environment, recommending

changes to organisational policies and culture, and integrating the subject of gender into tourism and hospitality curriculum.

Originality/value

By proposing a sociological perspective of gender in hospitality employment informed by Bradley (2013), this study challenges traditional masculinity and the long-standing gender labour division through education, organisational and daily practices thus tackling fundamental gender issues.

Keywords

Career development, Gender, Gender practices, Hospitality, Production, Reproduction

Paper type Research Paper

Introduction

In a time that women account for more than 50% of the labour workforce but earn 14.7% less than men and hold less than one fifth of leadership roles in the tourism industry – particularly the hospitality sector worldwide (UNWTO, 2019), “the recruitment, retention and promotion of talented women for academic and managerial leadership positions have never been more critical if the sector is to meet its future management, skills and productivity requirements” (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019, p. 2).

Whilst remaining marginal in scholarship, tourism gender research has experienced steady growth since the mid-2000s (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2015). One strand of such research is women’s employment in tourism and hospitality with topics including the gender pay gap (Muñoz-Bullón, 2009), sexual exploitation and harassment in the workplace (Kensbock *et al.*, 2015) and women’s entrepreneurship (Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2016). Special efforts have been made to understand the barriers to women reaching senior manager and leader positions (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2018), which resonates the wider research interest in women’s career development (Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017). Whilst this importance to improve women’s status has been raised (Costa *et al.*, 2017; Morgan and Pritchard, 2019), hospitality (and tourism) as a field of study remains reluctant to advance knowledge with gender-aware frameworks (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). In fact, the underrepresentation of women in tourism academia persists, especially in terms of production of knowledge (e.g. Koseoglu *et al.*, 2019), which has led to female/feminist tourism scholars’ voice being inadequately heard (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2015; Tribe, 2010). Therefore, hospitality and tourism research fails to encourage and facilitate

organisational changes within the academia and in the industry despite the growing numbers of studies published in the top hospitality journals over the last 30 years (Ali *et al.*, 2019).

Hospitality continues to be a traditional sector with male values, old-fashioned, paternalistic, resulting in power relations and nepotism (Segovia-Perez *et al.*, 2019).

Characterised by perceived unclear career paths and opportunities, it is also an industry known for high staff turnover recently explained by the concept of the leaving process (Gebbers *et al.*, 2020). Equally, however, it is increasingly noted that women's career advancement in hospitality is often affected by family responsibilities such as housework and caregiving (Boone *et al.*, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2020). In fact, as recognised by Marxist feminists (Luxton, 2014), the exploitation of women manifests both as limited access to productive labour (e.g. paid employment, and, in the contemporary context, unequal opportunities for progression at workplace) and the burden of reproductive labour (domestic responsibilities). Thus, the research question is: *"How to promote gender equality in hospitality and provide an action-oriented reflection through a sociological lens of 'production' and 'reproduction' spheres of social life?"* To that end, it reflects on women's career development in hospitality based on the Western perspective. Therefore, this paper responds to Morgan and Pritchard's (2019) calls for addressing the gap between gender awareness and action through an action-orientated reflection to advance the knowledge of gender practices in hospitality thus challenging traditional masculinity and the long-standing gender labour division in the hospitality industry.

This article follows with a literature review, which firstly sets the scene on women's career

development in hospitality, and secondly proposes a sociological perspective of gender in hospitality employment informed by Bradley (2013). This is proceeded by the research method, which explains and justifies the two-stage thematic analysis of data from a public seminar on gender issues in tourism and hospitality. The discussion of findings is presented, followed by a set of conclusions, including practical and theoretical implications and a future research agenda.

Literature Review

Women's Career Development in Hospitality

The hospitality industry is inclined to recruit female workers due to the nature of the tasks involved, with women accounting for 60% of the total workforce in the UK (People 1st, 2017), and nearly 70% worldwide (Ismail, 2018). Yet, women are still largely misrepresented in senior roles (WiH2020 Review, 2019), including in Southeast Asian countries (Ismail, 2018). In many Western countries gender occupational segregation is notable in the hospitality industry, both horizontal (women and men undertake different types of work) and vertical (women often remain at the lower level positions) (Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2011; Carvalho *et al.*, 2014).

Women are often employed in roles of waitresses, receptionists and housekeeping staff seen as an extension of their domestic role (Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2011). Arguably fundamental to hospitality, these often low-skilled and low-paid service jobs are highly demanded by the industry (Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2009). Women, especially those who want to earn an income whilst maintaining their domestic responsibilities, have been

attracted to such working conditions, as they can be “domesticated” – arranged into the family-friendly format – relatively easily through, for instance, part-time/seasonal contracts (Hakim, 2000, 2006). Thus, horizontal segregation is decidedly indissociable from vertical segregation. As gender stereotypes are reinforced by such working arrangements based on gender, career advancement becomes challenging for those female employees aspiring to managerial and leadership positions.

The “glass ceiling”, an invisible barrier preventing women from reaching the managerial positions, is an important metaphor in understanding women’s concentration in lower positions (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2018). As gender inequality is built into the organisational structure, the seemingly gender-neutral documents and contracts used to construct the organisations often assume the worker to be a man (Acker, 2012). Such an assumption of maleness and masculinity can be seen, especially in managerial positions in hospitality.

The “ideal worker” for such positions is conceived as utterly flexible, being “available at short notice for over-time, out-of-shift work and to spend multiple days away from home on business” (Costa *et al.*, 2017, p. 73). This does not align with the cultural expectations for women, especially as wives and mothers, being family-oriented. This discrepancy between the “ideal worker” and the “ideal woman” also contributes to the “double-bind” confronting female leaders. They are disliked by their male counterparts when they demonstrate (masculine) qualities thought necessary for leadership, and when they behave in the conventionally feminine style they may be liked but not respected as leaders (Segovia-Perez *et al.*, 2019). This ideal for the managerial workers is unlike that for the

operational staff, who are willing to accept part-time/seasonal work and zero-hour contracts as abovementioned.

The situation is worsened by the sexualisation of hospitality work, which seems to have particular unpleasant consequences for female staff as it is often women who are objectified as sexual beings. Adkins' (1995) seminal study, for instance, suggested that 'attractiveness' is often emphasised in recruiting female hotel workers, especially receptionists and waitresses, who are often expected to present themselves and interact with the (male) customers in sexualised ways, thus contributing to the normalisation of sexual harassment in the hospitality sector (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). Importantly, research has also demonstrated that the attractiveness of female service providers (more than male ones) can have impact on the level of customer service satisfaction (Xu *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the performance evaluation of female staff may be biased, which then can potentially affect their career development in the organisations.

Strategies that enabled women to progress to senior positions include work-life balance (Lyness and Judiesch, 2014); mentoring; a range of flexible working policies (Calinaud *et al.*, 2020); a participative leadership style promoting proactive career management initiatives (Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018); a diversity-supportive organisational culture (Sharma, 2016); diversity training (Madera, 2018); proactive and transparent gender equality measures; personal development plans (Calinaud *et al.*, 2020); and open discussions about women's empowerment and gender equality including accountability for gender-equal policies (Segovia-Perez *et al.*, 2019). In addition, support for women returning from career breaks, better use of technology and flexible working (WiH2020

Review, 2019), as well as sharing of child-care responsibilities between partners, when fathers take advantage of parental leave, can help women with job stability and give them equal access to career development (Segovia-Perez *et al.*, 2019). Recently, the UK hospitality industry has witnessed some but limited progress in female representation at senior and executive-level positions, with the fastest rate of change happening at the non-executive director (NED) level. Women make up 39% of NEDs across FTSE 350 hospitality, tourism and leisure (HTL) companies (WiH2020 Review, 2019). Moreover, 84% of HTL businesses have now reached the previously agreed (set by the Hampton-Alexander Review for all FTSE 350 businesses) 33% female representation at senior leadership levels (WiH2020 Review, 2019).

Towards a Sociological Perspective of Gender in Hospitality Employment

Sociological perspectives of gender have been adopted to encourage a shift from treating it as a variable to using it as an analytical framework in investigating women's employment in tourism and hospitality (Carvalho *et al.*, 2019). Carvalho *et al.* (2019), for instance, applied Acker's (2012) gendering process in organisations framework to analyse women managers' careers in tourism organisations. Following this trend, this paper turns to Bradley's (2013) approach that considers the operation of gender in the three spheres of social life: production, reproduction and consumption. The focus in this paper is on the spheres of production and reproduction, as consumption is less relevant in this case.

Production refers broadly to the domain of employment and labour market, whereas

reproduction denotes “the processes by which the ‘conditions of existence’ of a mode of production are recreated” (Bradley, 2013, p. 99). Reproduction includes maintaining and supporting the current labour power and reproducing, or procreating and socialising, new labour force (Heitlinger, 1979). Therefore, it includes a wide range of activities in contexts outside the paid employment (Bradley, 2013).

There are three reasons for turning to Bradley (2013). Firstly, Bradley’s approach follows the Marxist feminist tradition, which continues to be relevant in interrogating gender inequality (Luxton, 2014). Marxist feminists foregrounded the significance of the process of reproduction, suggesting that reproductive labour, including the (unpaid) domestic, procreative and caring activities performed largely by women, is fundamental to capitalist societies (Luxton, 2014). Whilst, as Walby (1990) observed, the public seemed to have gradually replaced the private as the primary domain of women’s oppression due to women’s increasing presence in the public especially through participating in paid employment, Bradley (2013, p. 101) insisted that “it is the pattern of gender relations in the family which continues above all to generate gender inequalities in the workplace”.

Research on women’s employment in hospitality often regards the workplace – the production sphere – as the main “battlefield” where barriers for women’s career advancement are fought against. In imagining a workplace of (gender) diversity and inclusivity, Brownell (1994) envisioned the pursuit for a listening environment as a key hospitality management task which promotes “a free and open exchange of ideas and

information among all organizational members". An organizational culture of listening can become a platform for firstly raising an awareness of personal and professional challenges of its employees, and secondly introducing a gradual change where the need for listening and sharing opinions becomes deeply embedded (Brownell, 2010a). Thus, a listening environment can enhance the effectiveness of many of the abovementioned strategies enabling women to reach managerial positions, as it renders possible open dialogues at and across all levels within the organisations. In fact, listening is one of the key aspects of servant leadership (Brownell, 2010b), which, prioritising the needs and interests of the employees, can benefit in addressing challenging issues confronting the hospitality sector such as the demand for sustainability, intensified competition, and importantly, the recruitment and retention of talented future workforce (Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Tolkach and Tung, 2019), including women.

Yet, with the work-family conflict for female employees being increasingly recognised, Bradley's claim of the centrality of reproduction can potentially further the understanding of women's career development in hospitality. Boone *et al.* (2013) suggested that self-imposed barriers have replaced workplace barriers as the major influence over female employees' opportunities for career advancement. The most prominent self-imposed barrier for women identified by Boone *et al.* (2013) is the prioritisation of family responsibilities over career advancement opportunities. However, such prioritisation cannot simply be seen as "self-imposed". On the one hand, hospitality organisations play an important role in supporting employees to achieved work-family balance, which, as Liu

et al. (2020) demonstrates, can affect female employees' organisational commitment and career advancement, On the other hand, the notion of 'reproduction' should urge us to look into the unequal distribution of domestic tasks between partners (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Investigating in reproductive labour is indispensable for making sense of gender inequality in contemporary capitalist societies as suggested by Marxist feminists (Bryson, 2004; Luxton, 2014). Indeed, Federici (2012) maintains that an analysis of housework remains critical for understanding the exploitation of women.

Besides domestic labour, the notion of "reproduction" should direct the attention to education. As implicated in Bernstein's (1996) understanding of pedagogy, education can contribute to the reproduction of (gender) division of labour. In England, Home Economics was taught to adolescent girls to prepare them for a role of a housewife, setting a precedence for the clearly divided labour duties in the household from a young age (Archer and MacRae, 1991). Tourism and hospitality education (usually in colleges and universities) also plays a vital role "in transmitting competences related to equity and respect and in eliminating stereotypes and gendered positions" (Segovia-Perez *et al.*, 2019, p. 191), especially given the considerable proportion of female students in such programmes (Pritchard and Morgan, 2017). Segovia-Perez *et al.* (2019) advocated to incorporate debates on gender issues in tourism and hospitality education to raise awareness among the potential employees in the industry (also Mooney, 2020). This can be cultivated through increasing emphasis on the liberal aspects in hospitality and tourism curriculum that include various issues, including gender issues, relevant to the wider

tourism world (Airey, 2005). However, the strong practical and vocational core in hospitality and tourism education should not be for that reason undermined (Airey, 2005). Indeed, in the current challenging time for talent management, it is critical to emphasise vocationalism and professionalism in educating the future workforce (especially leaders) for the hospitality industry (Baum, 2019). Thus, hospitality and tourism educational programmes should seek to produce 'philosophical practitioners', who not only are competent in the operational skills indispensable for day to day tasks but also care about the wider issues related to hospitality and tourism (Tribe, 2002).

Secondly, gender is seen by Bradley (2013) as a lived experience. Given the complexity of lived experience, gender experience lived out in daily life often cannot fit neatly in either the production or the reproduction spheres. As such, although Bradley (2013) foregrounded production and reproduction as separate spheres, she conceived production and reproduction as interconnected (a point also raised by Marxist feminists) as informed by Glucksmann's (2005) concept of "total social organisation of labour".

In light of the dynamism between "production" and "reproduction", it is necessary to explore the work-family conflict not only for women but also for men. In the conventional gender labour division, paid employment (production) is ideologically the domain of men, whilst domestic duties (reproduction) is that of women (Acker, 2012). The discourse of the "ideal worker" not only hinders women's pursuit for managerial positions in the workplace but also prevents men from being involved in the home (Costa *et al.*, 2017). A broader

perspective is required to understand the subject of fatherhood and stay-at-home fathers, or the role of men (Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017; Joshi *et al.*, 2015).

Thirdly, Bradley (2013) claimed that gendering processes occurs at multiple levels: macro (the social totality), meso (the institution or group) and micro (individual behaviour and interaction) and drew upon empirical evidences on different levels in her analysis. Some studies of women's employment in hospitality were conducted at a macro level to provide a general understanding of issues such as gender pay gap and gender occupation segregation in regional, national or cross-national contexts (e.g. Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2011; Doherty and Manfredi, 2001). These studies, as Hakim (2006) pointed out, tell little about the social process occurring behind the "big picture". Thus, Hakim (2006) argued for analysis at the micro level, suggesting that women's preferred lifestyles as individuals is the key predictor for their choice between work and family. However, as women's preferred lifestyles cannot be understood independently of the economic, social and cultural conditions that render certain lifestyles preferable, such a theory neglects the structures of constraints within which preferences are formed (Leahy and Doughney, 2006).

In social science the macro-micro link of social reality has been widely discussed, with the meso level proposed as an intermediate level where the macro can be observed and the micro can be contextualised (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Increasing research on women's employment in hospitality performs analysis at the meso level to understand how women

negotiate the structural constraints in their career development (e.g. Carvalho *et al.*, 2019; Mooney and Ryan, 2009). Yet meso-analysis cannot replace analysis at macro and micro levels, as the key is integrating the multiple levels in understanding gender, as reflected in Bradley's (2013) approach. Thus, whilst the contexts of the paper are primarily at meso (hospitality organisations, educational institutions) and micro (family) levels, it also refers to the macro (e.g. laws) where appropriate.

In sum, Bradley's theoretical insights of the operation of gender in both production and reproduction spheres has informed our relational approach to understanding women's career development in hospitality: gendering at the macro, meso and micro levels are interlocked; domestic labour and paid employment are entangled; women and men both play a significant role in each other's gendered experiences, and that gender relations in tourism education and the tourism industry are not independent of each other.

Research Method

The empirical data of this study was collected through a themed public seminar on "gender issues in tourism and hospitality" hosted in May 2018, in the UK. To answer the research question "how to promote gender equality in hospitality and provide an action-oriented reflection through a sociological lens of 'production' and 'reproduction'", the public seminar was primarily designed for the data collection through the theoretical lens of Bradley's "production" and "reproduction" spheres and aimed to provide actionable

recommendations. The session featured four keynote speakers from three nations and a panel discussion; English was used throughout the session. Purposive sampling was applied in the research. Speakers were experts with a proven track record of world-leading research outputs, impactful consultancy projects in relation to gender issues and/or held responsibilities in managerial roles and relevant committees. They were purposively selected to represent voices of female and male and various areas of gender research and practice in tourism and hospitality industry and academia, imperative for an action-oriented reflection for the subject matter that this article aims for. Table I shows each speakers' experience, roles and expertise related to gender issues, as well as the topic of their talks. The ethics application concerning data collection, storage and analysis was approved by the research ethics committee, by the institution of the lead's author. All keynote speakers signed the consent forms and allowed researchers to use the recordings for the research purpose of this study. The topics were discussed with speakers prior to the seminar to ensure they brought in various aspects of these issues based on their expertise. Also, the theoretical pre-conceptions of Bradley's (2013) "production" and "reproduction" informed data analysis and enabled the linking of this theory with the emerging findings.

Following keynote presentations, a panel session discussed the topic of "how can organisations bridge the gap between gender awareness and organisational support". Q&A and interactive discussions were followed by each keynote's talk and throughout the panel discussion. Sharing some similarities with the focus group and group interviews (Hatani, 2015), panellists started by presenting their opinions, followed by discussions

among the panellists moderated by the session chair. In total, three hours of keynote presentations and the panel discussion were audio and video recorded through the software Panopto. The recordings were then downloaded and professionally and anonymously transcribed. Each author went through the transcripts to ensure accuracy. All the recordings, transcriptions, and data analysis notes are kept securely in an access-controlled repository at the lead author’s institution.

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience and Expertise related to Gender Issues	Keynote Topic
Georgina	Female	Research interest; member of diversity and inclusion committee in HE	Gender issues and inclusion in higher education
David	Male	Research interest; managerial role in HE	Gender and social norms
Sue	Female	Knowledge Transfer Partnership, Consultancy projects	Applied gender studies in organisations
Samantha	Female	Consultancy projects	Gender gaps in the hospitality sector

Table I: Participant Information

A two-stage thematic analysis was conducted guided by Bradley’s (2013) “production” and “reproduction” discussed in the literature review. Trustworthiness and rich rigour as quality criteria of qualitative studies (Tracy, 2010) were applied in the data analysis process. Firstly, a coding frame was applied in the provisional coding of the language-based data, a practice informed by Bernstein’s socio-linguistic theory (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999).

The coding frame was generated from Bradley's (2013) spheres of "production" and "reproduction" and the three dimensions of micro, meso and macro. Although the coding frame was applied to index and categorise data, space was set aside for new patterns and themes to be coded. Each author coded the transcript separately, by manually labelling the narratives matching the micro, meso and macro levels of "production" and "reproduction". Three authors then compared, discussed and agreed on the final codes. Secondly, a more inductive approach was applied. The authors searched for recurring themes and repeating patterns from the coded data in stage one. To triangulate and support the theme development, regulations, cases and examples from micro, meso and macro levels of "production" and "reproduction" were introduced to assist establishing practical suggestions for transformations of gender relations in organisations. New patterns were agreed and three themes were generated to develop, elaborate and refine the findings (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). The three themes are *culture of an open dialogue*, *bringing men into the equation* and *educating the future workforce*.

Findings

Culture of an open dialogue

The first theme that emerged from the data is the need for organisations to create and maintain a culture of an open dialogue, primarily located in the sphere of production. It proposes direct changes that capture the dynamism within the setting of hospitality,

leading to an organisational culture that is more inclusive and equal.

Firstly, the culture of an open dialogue is manifested in an inclusive, dialogic listening (Floyd, 2010) environment, where employees can share, listen, inquire, voice their opinions and be listened back to. Research has confirmed that female employees want an open dialogue with all their colleagues, where issues about gender can be addressed and considered openly on a case to case basis (Hulse, 2019). Active listening has become more important due to an increase in global and diverse organisations thus enabling more effective communication that leads to shared meanings (Brownell, 2010a), organisational change (Thoroughgood *et al.*, 2020) and diversity-supportive work environment (Sharma, 2016).

Speakers also agreed that the implicit bias surrounding the subject of gender can be overcome by creating and fostering an inclusive listening environment. Not only will this result in a greater diversity and gender equality at the organisational, meso level, but also can slowly start to eradicate barriers between individual employees at the micro level.

The organisational culture of listening is based on Brownell's (1994) conceptualisation of a listening environment, which promotes an open, judgment-free and safe space where employees feel listened to and able to share their concerns and experiences with each other, as well as the management. As highlighted by Georgina:

"If you do not feel you belong, and if there is no listening, then it doesn't matter (...).

We need to find a way where these voices [public and private] are going to be made public- a trusted environment they can share their more intimate stories with".

The listening environment is manifested by implementing the 360-degree feedback, an

established method of performance appraisal, also known as an evaluation process, which does not adhere to institutional hierarchy. Instead, “the feedback is taken from worker, superior, peers, subordinates and customers” (Mohapatra, 2015, p. 112) and as a result, encourages diversity and inclusivity. As Sue explained: “360 degree - it’s feedback from everyone”. It benefits the organisation which needs to focus on their employees as individuals and as part of a team, and it does not discriminate female leaders against their male colleagues (Millmore *et al.*, 2007):

“I was talking about 360 degrees feedback earlier, there is work out there talking about women losing self-confidence when it comes to getting negative feedback”
(Sue).

However, as explained in the panel discussion, it is not as commonly used in the UK hospitality industry. Since 90% of hospitality business fall within SMEs (UKHospitality, 2020), they are less likely to have the sufficient time and resources to benefit from this method.

Therefore, the panel proposed more innovative, low cost techniques such as the mandala and LEGO Serious Play to facilitate inclusive listening environment. The former is an art form made in reference to drawing a circle during which one can become more self-aware (Potash *et al.*, 2016), and the latter a powerful, playful method to address issues, search for ideas and reach organisational, and other objectives (Wengel, 2020). Practising these methods allows organisations to create an environment where issues about gender stereotypes and biases can be discussed by individual employees collectively, by giving them time to reflect and express their feelings in creative ways to finally arrive at a shared

vision (McCusker, 2019).

Secondly, the culture of an open dialogue should result in an organisational change facilitated by a series of actions, manifested in changes in the “production” sphere to further impact the sphere of “reproduction”. Speakers agreed that hospitality companies need to actively target and recruit women in senior management roles by producing individual career development plans, creating life skills strategies and flexible work arrangements. For example, more hospitality businesses should appoint a lead for the diversity and inclusion agenda (currently only 25% of 120 companies do) and offer an unconscious bias training proven to improve gender and ethnic diversity (WiHTL, 2020). Also, businesses need to engage in information exchange, and learn from examples of best practice, such as employee-led gender networks or other diversity resource groups in companies like Hilton or IHG, set up by and for employees (WiH2020 Review, 2019).

Since some of the greatest obstacles to the career advancement of women are manifested in having to “choose” between career and family (Boone *et al.*, 2013), organisations need to restructure jobs to offer more flexible solutions and stop rewarding working long hours. This can destabilise the gender labour division by not only improving women’s promotion prospects in the workplace but also by promoting the egalitarian family model (Bradley, 2013), eventually leading to equality of earnings between women and men (Goldin, 2014).

Thirdly, the culture of an open dialogue can facilitate organisational change since employees themselves can eradicate the “glass ceiling”. Both women and men need to take advantage of work-life balance programmes. Equally, when making childcare

arrangements, both should consider the reduction of working hours with men using all their parental rights. In turn, the management needs to encourage employees to share such experiences with their colleagues, including the practical aspects of applying for a shared-parental leave. This will also lead to organisations starting to recognise new skills gained by employees gained during a leave of absence:

“Transferrable skills need to be recognised a lot more; just because you're not working it doesn't mean you lose all your time management skills, your motivational energy or your listening skills immediately” (Sue).

The private and professional lives (Risman, 1998), intertwined with a dynamic relationship between the “production” and “reproduction” spheres, signify that changes at the organisational level can lead to changes at the national or regional, macro level, resulting from the culture of an open dialogue. In turn, changes at the level of law may help to eradicate societal beliefs about gender stereotypes which tend to prevent proactive mind-sets from making a difference (Bastounis and Minibas-Poussard, 2012). By implementing voluntary codes of conduct or acting on new policies, such as encouraging the shared parental leave driven by employee demand, businesses can begin to reshape the status quo. At the meso level, to further increase gender diversity and make hospitality businesses more inclusive, various stakeholders such as head-hunters or recruitment companies need to also become involved in facilitating a culture of an open dialogue (Doldor *et al.*, 2016).

Recommendations generated from this section are: 1) Facilitating a culture of an open dialogue based on an inclusive listening environment, where employees can openly

discuss gender-related issues, using methods such as the LEGO Serious Play, the mandala technique or the 360-degree feedback. 2) Appointing a lead for diversity and inclusion agenda and providing an unconscious bias training thus destabilizing a current organizational structure. 3) Organisational change initiated by employees themselves who openly share practical insights after applying for, for instance, shared-parental leave. Hospitality organisations who implement these recommendations can benefit from higher employee retention and engagement, employees contributing a broader set of ideas, better problem-solving and decision, an improved overall team morale, and a better reputation as a company that reflects the state of the diverse local and national population.

Bringing Men into the Equation

The second theme that emerged from the data relates to male involvement. First, discussions about gender should shift away from female-centric to the relational character of genders, highlighting the role of men in the process of gender reform and equality (Bjørnholt, 2011). Acknowledging great support from men in recent solidarity movements such as #HeForShe, David pointed out that male millennials today are less interested in gender discussions: *“a 2014 survey of 2000 US adults found that young men are less open to accepting female leaders than older men are”*. Connell (2005) argued that men’s resistance can be attributed to being treated as a background category of the policy discourse in gender equality, while women being treated as the focal subject. Speakers felt strongly about engaging men in gender reforms and supporting issues of gender inequality:

“it’s not just for women, but also making men aware and thinking about these issues”

(Sue).

“we’re not going to fix some of the problems that we’ve heard unless we get more men onside”. (David)

The gender inequality is deeply embedded in the process of “production” and “reproduction”, where women and men develop various forms of relationships professionally and privately (Risman, 1998; Walby, 1997). A recent survey revealed that during the COVID-19 lockdown the labour division of “production” and “reproduction” has been intensified (Lacey *et al.*, 2020). Female are considered a “default” parent. The gender awareness and relevant debates thus should engage at multiple levels and involve both female and male.

At the meso level, particularly, male allies willing to speak out against prejudice and gender discrimination are significant to advancing women in the workplace (Madsen *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, we urge managers to challenge the patriarchal norms in the HR processes and professional development and provide training for male employees to raise awareness and develop supporting and fair environment that eliminates any sexist behaviours and recognises female colleagues’ achievements.

Secondly, the traditional masculinity at the macro level determining gender norms, gender divisions, social expectations, and everyday practices (McMunn *et al.*, 2020) should be challenged. The change will not only free men from gender stereotypes at the micro level, where they more appropriately belong to the “production” sphere, but also benefit relational dynamics between men and women. The traditional masculinity has largely limited individual growth and awareness for men. *“It’s very difficult for men not to have*

to live up to this 'boys don't cry, boys are boys' (Georgina). On the other hand, men tend to be socially judged if they want to be involved more in childcare:

"what if you really love babies? Then it's perceived as then you don't care for your career" (Georgina).

In the last two decades, the idea of diversifying masculinity (Connell, 2005) and alternative masculinity (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000) have been proposed to sustain gender equality. Therefore, the concept of masculinity needs to be revisited to challenge the predominant view of men as breadwinners belonging to the "production" sphere, especially for men who long for deeper engagement in the "reproduction" sphere, particularly parenting. Thus, we suggest the hospitality sector to critically examine the organisational culture, and to work closely with various initiatives and non-profit organisations to support male employees willing to take on more domestic and childcare duties.

Georgina called for a change at the meso level to tackle implicit bias existing in both "production" and "reproduction" spheres: *"we really have a belief system here that we need to shake"*. It is worth noting that specific groups of men who are acting as gatekeepers still control most needed resources for women's justice. Sue confirmed that stereotypes of leadership are still culturally masculine (Koenig *et al.*, 2011) when setting criteria and traits for leaderships:

"aspects to develop leadership programmes are linked to the masculine scale, ideas around being assertive, self-reliant, willingness to take a stand".

Ibarra *et al.* (2013) argued that when female leaders showed too much femininity in leadership, they were less likely to gain respect from male colleagues. David thus argued:

“I think what we’ve got to actually do is also tackle some of these perceptual issues from the perspective of where men are coming from”.

Therefore, changes of masculine-dominated culture in leadership and traditional gender roles can facilitate new ways of interaction and understanding between genders. Also, encouraging transformational leadership among management can aid in working conditions becoming more conducive to improving the quality of work life (Kara *et al.*, 2018).

For instance, career progress criteria or appraisals should be revisited and include both masculine and feminine leadership traits. Male-dominated executive committees should initiate the change. Alliances between men and women should be formed (Connell, 2005). Furthermore, to fully address this issue, the discussion of gender norms and social expectations should extend to the micro level: *“we’ve got to tackle men...it’s the locker-room conversations that are problematic... we need to confront them”* (David).

Thirdly, there is a need for change in the “reproduction” sphere in terms of legislation for childcare and parental leave. Acknowledging policies of parental leave and flexible hours at the macro-level, Georgina argued: *“We have been going far too much into what organisations can do and far too little into what political systems can do”*. A broader perspective for fathers and mothers (Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017; Joshi *et al.*, 2015) and specific law and regulations should be formulated to ensure both parents have absolute equal responsibility and rights for childcare, including parental leave and flexible working arrangements. The equal responsibility reproduced at home has a much wider impact in other dimensions.

Georgina further explained the importance of legislation in the macro-level, which could trigger various transformations: *“it changes the responsibility equation at home. It changes the culture of home and it also changes the perception of the employer towards the employee”*. These changes affect both, the “production” and “reproduction” spheres. A top-down change in legislation will facilitate fundamental transformations in organisational behaviour, dynamics in the families, and gradually change societal perceptions, norms and stereotypes. Examples of Nordic countries such as Iceland, Norway and Sweden offer some good practices for family-friendly policies (Chzhen *et al.*, 2019) not only providing job-protected leave for mothers, but also reserving non-transferable leaves for fathers. Taking Iceland as an example, the first 6 months is equally divided between both parents and the remaining 3 months are flexibly divided between parents. This revolutionary legislation not only facilitates both parents in actively engaging in childcare, but also challenges the social perception of labour division of gender in “production” and “reproduction”, and supports mothers to return back to workplace quicker and more confidently.

On the meso level, WiHTL (2020) found that 40% of HTL companies offer only the statutory maternity leave. We argue that organisational policies in the hospitality sector should be consistently reviewed by the leadership and HR department taking into account long-working hours, low pay and insecure contracts, and protect employees’ rights when applying for maternity and paternity leaves, and flexible hours for both, male and female. Organisational policies such as remote e-working opportunities and flexible parenting scheme should be normalised and commonly practised to support childcare. Moreover,

from macro, meso to micro levels, actions with sufficient support are required (Sallee, 2012) in the organisational culture and policymaking to encourage and normalise men taking childcare duties. Lessons can be learnt from good practices of PizzaExpress' all-inclusive work-life balance principles with lots of flexibilities in work arrangements that prioritise individual employees' work-life balance without compromising the organisational needs.

The actionable recommendations generated from this section are: 1) The patriarchal norm in organisational practices and culture should be challenged, and policies such as career progression criteria should be re-examined to reflect both masculine and feminine leadership traits. 2) Male allies should be initiated, training to be provided to create a supportive environment for female colleagues. 3) A more family-friendly childcare policy with fathers' involvement should be proposed at the level of law; whilst organisations implementing it should take a step further to cater for employees' needs and encourage male employees to take shared- parental leave.

Educating the Future Workforce

Educating the future workforce emerged from the data as the third main theme. Both David and Samantha suggested that if gender issues in tourism and hospitality organisations are to be addressed, it is necessary that at least some of the next generation of female and male managers and leaders begin to question the status quo. Education is an important element of the reproduction of new workforce. As some of these future

managers and leaders are arguably students in tourism and hospitality courses, transformation needs to happen in education as much as in the industry (David). Thus, to encourage conversation and reflection on the gender norms that safeguard the reproduction of gender inequality in (tourism) educational institution (meso level) is a critical task (Mooney, 2020). As David argued:

“we’ve got to bring these topics and these debates much more into business schools [where tourism courses are often located], because that’s where part of the problem is”.

To achieve this, it is necessary to create a commonplace in the tourism (including hospitality) curriculum where gender issues can be talked about, which, as David claimed, is largely absent. While the keynote speakers did not explicitly discuss how this can be done, such places may become available if the liberal approach is further accentuated in tourism curriculum. As the liberal approach aims at introducing a broad range of issues relevant to tourism and hospitality (Tribe, 2002), gender issues can be brought into serious attention for educators and students as part of those wider issues. Potential practitioners in the tourism and hospitality sector educated as such are arguably what Samantha and David referred to as the new generation of women and men that are indispensable to eradicate gender inequality in the industry.

A shift to a gender-conscious curriculum design that can “protect and promote the interests of women” may be facilitated by a turn to critical feminist theories in hospitality and tourism management studies (Mooney, 2020, p. 1861), especially at a time when research-informed teaching is emphasised in higher education. Jeffrey (2017) reflected on

her experience of gendering the tourism curriculum through “gender mainstreaming” (incorporating gender throughout the module) and “gender specialising” (creating gender-specific modules or topics focused on gender within a module), demonstrating that adaptation of feminist pedagogy have the potential to encourage students to be more gender conscious.

From the vocational perspective, special attention must also be paid to preparing female students for leadership positions in the industry. Leadership positions often emphasise soft skills, such as nonverbal communication and building confidence (Guillet *et al.*, 2019). Whilst such skills are important for both male and female graduates and should be incorporated in hospitality courses (Guillet *et al.*, 2019), the appearing “gender-neutrality” in acquiring them can be misleading. For instance, self-confidence is raised as a significant barrier for women’s career advancement (Segovia-Perez *et al.*, 2019), which is partly resulted from the scarcity of female role models in business and management educations (as opposed to the abundant male role models). Role models as Sue noted, can have a long-term impact for women – including female students (Gretzel and Bowser, 2013) – in tourism and hospitality through inspiring them to become the future leaders.

Furthermore, the integration of gender in tourism and hospitality curriculum may not be effective without the college or the university itself making efforts to address certain gender issues in other aspects, such as administrating and managing the staff and students. David noted that certain values and beliefs might be transmitted to young children in the daily life in schools, especially through interactions with their peers (Keddie, 2003) – a micro-process of gendering: a boy at the age of 7 may already believe that, “*I can’t use a*

pink pen. It's a girls' colour". The socialisation of such gender stereotypes can also occur in tourism higher education. As Thomas (1990) claimed, gender inequality in higher education does not manifest as active discrimination of women but as the acceptance of certain values and beliefs that render success less attainable for women than for men. The underrepresentation of women as senior faculty members persistent in hospitality and tourism education institutions can be seen as insidiously perpetuating such gendered values and beliefs and must be changed (Mooney, 2020; Pritchard and Morgan, 2017).

Some good practices of advancing gender equality in higher education institutions in the UK have been recognised by Athena SWAN charter. For instance, Norwich Medical School (University of East Anglia) reviewed guidelines for the eligibility criteria to improve representation of women on the School's senior committees, which resulted in heightened visibility of senior female academics in these committees (Athena SWAN, 2020). The usefulness of these recognised practices can demonstrate greater and faster growth in gender diversity (Xiao *et al.*, 2020). The publishing and sharing of such proven initiatives can be useful in encouraging universities to cultivate an environment that is free of gender bias. It is in such environments that gender equality becomes normalised for students, who then can carry the understanding of genders as equal on to workplaces as they enter the world of work.

Re-organising the tourism and hospitality curriculum and re-arranging the gendered arrangements within the education institution (meso) can induce transformations in students' (and staff's) individual awareness of gender issues (micro). Such transformations from the reproduction sphere (education) can in turn be carried to the production sphere,

namely the workplaces as the students enter the world of the work, hence potentially provoking changes in the tourism and hospitality businesses and organisations (meso). Recommendations for achieving this include: (1) Experimenting “gender mainstreaming” and “gender specialising” in tourism/hospitality curriculum (2) Integrating real stories about women who have a successful career in hospitality/tourism in teaching as case studies or used to support students’ reflections on their life experiences (Gretzel and Bowser, 2013); (3) Strategically adopting good practices proven to be effective in improving gender equality (such as those published and shared by Athena SWAN) to address gender issues within the education institutions, so that students can immerse themselves in a work environment with minimal gender bias.

Finally, the salience of early schooling experience in ascribing gender roles has been demonstrated by previous studies (e.g. Keddie, 2003; Paechter and Clark, 2007) and was suggested by David in the seminar. Although our focus here is on hospitality and tourism education (often provided at college and university levels), it is crucial to acknowledge that changes also need to happen at much earlier stages of education. The abovementioned recommendations, therefore, may also have implications for building a more gender-conscious and less gender-biased environment for, for instance, primary and secondary school students.

Conclusions

This article formulated an action-orientated reflection to advance the knowledge of

gender practices in hospitality. It outlines actionable recommendations to advance female career development in hospitality using a holistic approach based on Bradley's (2013) understanding of gender through the "production" and "reproduction" spheres.

Firstly, for hospitality organisations to thrive, they need to create and foster a culture of an open dialogue based on an inclusive listening environment, where employees can openly discuss gender-related issues, facilitated by approaches such as the LEGO Serious Play, the mandala technique or the 360-degree feedback. Businesses are recommended to appoint a lead for diversity and inclusion agenda and provide an unconscious bias training thus, destabilising a current organisational structure. Further organisational change can be initiated by employees themselves through openly sharing practical insights after applying for, for instance, shared-parental leave.

Secondly, the patriarchal norm in organisational practices and culture should be challenged, and policies such as career progression criteria should be re-examined to reflect both masculine and feminine leadership traits. Male allies should be initiated, with training provided to create a supportive environment for female colleagues. A more family-friendly childcare policy with father's involvement should be proposed at the level of law; whilst organisations implementing it should take a step further to cater for employees' needs and encourage male employees to take shared-parental leave.

Thirdly, hospitality education institutions are encouraged to experiment with "gender mainstreaming" and "gender specialising" in tourism/hospitality curriculum (Jeffrey, 2017). Integrating real stories about women who have a successful career in hospitality/tourism in teaching as case studies or used to support students' reflections on

their life experiences will also facilitate change (Gretzel and Bowser, 2013). Strategically adopting good practices proven to be effective in improving gender equality will aid in addressing gender issues within the educational institutions, so that students can immerse themselves in a work environment with minimal gender bias.

Theoretical Implications

There are three theoretical contributions of this study. First, this study is the development of a holistic approach from a sociological perspective that calls for the attention and actions to tackle fundamental issues of female career advancement in hospitality from three significant and inseparable dimensions (culture of open dialogue, bringing men into the equation and educating the future workforce). This is instead of identifying and explaining the career progression issues about gender. Therefore, to advance female careers an inclusive, listening and supportive space should be supported/ maintained through consistent reflections on the role of the male colleagues, questioning traditional masculinity and offering family-friendly policies, whilst gender-conscious education should not be overlooked as a key element for the next-generation hospitality workforce. Emerging through the discussion between the production and reproduction spheres, these three dimensions offer systematic recommendations in various levels. These range from micro or individual, home units, meso or organisational policies to macro or societal, cultural, educational and governmental legislations. We argue that to make a fundamental change, these three dimensions should not be considered separately; instead, when proposing any actionable recommendations, other factors from the holistic framework

should be taken into account.

Secondly, this study contributes to a new conceptualisation of Bradley's approach to understanding gender, by furthering its application from identifying the cause of gender gaps to formulating an action-orientated reflection for the transformation of gender relations. It illustrates the often-intertwining nature of the production and reproduction spheres of social life, where the two are not mutually exclusive but always have dynamic interactions.

Relatedly, the third contribution is the equal attention given to gendered experiences in both the production and reproduction spheres in the analysis, which provides an understanding of women's career development in hospitality that engages more systematically with issues that are often obscured by the focus on issues within the workplace, such as domestic labour, generation of the new labour force (e.g. education) and the role of men. This allows a strategic discussion of developing an inclusive career progression action plan.

Practical Implications

In addition to the actionable recommendations and theoretical contributions, this study also provides implications for the society. Whilst focusing on the context of women's career development in hospitality, the issues that we attended to, including the long-standing gender labour division, the hegemonic masculinity and the significance of education, needs to be taken into consideration if gender inequality in the society as a whole is to be tackled. We believe challenges of traditional masculinity and stereotyping

gender labour division through education, organisational and daily practices are essential to tackle fundamental gender issues. Initiatives, social movements and legislations can engage the public to question the patriarchal norms and expedite the process of gender equality in the society.

Limitations and Future Research

The empirical data was collected from a public seminar; some significant issues related to gender might not have been discussed exhaustively due to the limited time. However, we do believe the keynote presentations by the experts from academia and the industry, when situated in the current understanding of women's career development in hospitality, can serve as a valuable reflection on the subject matter.

The reflection this study aims for is action-orientated, with indications for future empirical studies targeting specific suggestions. Yet, the recommendations and implications of this study aim primarily at the Western hospitality context. Future research should advance the knowledge of gender issues in hospitality for other regions, such as the Southeast Asian context. Also, the adaptability of actionable recommendations in other service sectors facing similar issues of gender inequalities can be examined through the lens of "production" and "reproduction".

Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender and race or sexuality have not been explored in this paper. Future research can also employ critical race and queer theorising, echoing

a similar recommendation from Mooney (2020), to analyse gender equality in tourism and hospitality organisations. If gender is considered in relation to other regimes such as race and sexuality, there are more possibilities to achieving equality, diversity and inclusion in hospitality as well as in the entire society.

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