


Introduction to Gender and sexuality in tourism and hospitality

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Introduction

The idea behind this special issue arose from a casual conversation involving one of the editors and revolving around (the rather generic topic of) global politics, social movements and human rights in a ‘post-globalised’ world. The conversation covered a range of subjects, such as Brexit, North Korea, extremism and radicalisation, before eventually focussing on issues of gender and sexuality. It quickly became a consensus among the participants of that conversation (all of whom identified themselves as part of a–sexual and/or ethnic–minority) that the world seemed to have taken a rather unexpectedly ‘dark turn’. The previous decades had signalled a slow yet progressive move towards LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other sexually and gender diverse people) rights and female empowerment, with, for example, the legalisation of same-sex marriage in several countries (ILGA, 2020) and the passing of laws protecting women and girls from violence in many nations (Sakhonchik et al., 2015). Nonetheless, in 2018, when the conversation took place, examples of stigmatisation of, and hostility towards, LGBTQI+ individuals and women appeared rather frequently both on traditional (Lovell, 2017) and social media (Barratt, 2018). Such instances of ‘symbolic annihilation or ‘gentle’ violence’, as put by Venzo and Hess (2013: 1541), were further reinforced and normalised by the sexist and homophobic remarks made by some of the world’s political leaders at the time. Examples include the degrading words used by the (now former) US president Donald Trump to refer to his ‘flirting techniques’ when approaching women (Filipovic, 2017) or by Jair Bolsonaro, the (still in power) Brazilian president, who infamously declared he would rather have a dead son than a gay one (Sobel, 2018). On the other hand, the

past few years have also seen the emergence of important and transformative social movements, like #MeToo, described by Jane Campion as ‘the end of apartheid for women’ (Shoard, 2021), or the affirmation and celebration of trans Pride in many countries (Haynes, 2021).

It is apparent, therefore, that sexuality and gender remain controversial and extremely relevant in today’s global sphere. As phenomena that take place fundamentally in a social context, tourism and hospitality are also permeated by gender and sexuality, which may affect guest–host encounters in several ways (Brownell and Walsh, 2008; Small et al., 2017). Already in 1994, Kinnaird and Hall’s ground-breaking work explained that tourism and hospitality activities can be understood via, and enhanced by, the lens of gender relations. Indeed, tourists’ experiences are imbued with gender connotations and travel motivations are often swayed by gendered wants and desires (Collins and Tisdell, 2002; Lepp and Gibson, 2003; McGuigan, 2003; Ryan, 2002). Likewise, the service encounters that take place in the tourism and hospitality arenas may also reflect the power imbalance of gendered relationships (Hennessey, 1994; Ireland, 1993). Furthermore, labour in tourism and hospitality is often characterised by gender division. For example, in the hotel industry, women are often employed in lower status work, which replicates stereotypically ‘feminine’ roles (Kinnaird and Hall, 1996). In the holiday arena, tourism spaces and practices can also reinforce masculinity and female objectification (Andrews, 2009).

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Sexual identity can also interplay with tourism and hospitality experiences. While it is widely recognised that the travel motivations of individuals with non-heterosexual orientations do not substantially differ from those of their 'straight' counterparts, some LGBTQI+ people may be driven by a desire to escape heteronormativity while on holiday (Waitt and Markwell, 2006). Additionally, they may make holiday choices based on their sexual orientation, avoiding, for example, destinations that are perceived as homophobic (Blichfeldt et al., 2013). Sexuality can also affect LGBTQI+ people's experiences with heteronormative tourism service providers (Usai et al., 2020). This can in turn shape or inhibit these individuals' consumption practices (Poria, 2006) and cause them to experience, for example, 'check-in phobia', namely the anxiety felt by LGBTQI+ couples and families when disclosing their sexuality upon arrival at their accommodation (Hughes, 2006: 81).

Gender- and sexuality-related research in tourism and hospitality gained momentum in the 1990s and early 2000s (Ong et al., 2020). Yet, these topics need to be constantly revisited because, as sociocultural constructs, gender and sexuality have evolved ever since, as have their societal perceptions (Macintyre et al., 2015; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2021). Recognition by legal institutions and media platforms has increased awareness of 'non-conventional' gender and sexual identities, such as non-binary and asexual orientations. This has led many societies to review discourses about sexuality and gender and enabled a shift towards a new (or at least, 'renewed') social paradigm of sexual diversity and fluidity (Pearce et al., 2019).

This special issue, therefore, sits in the multiple intersections between gender and sexuality, on the one hand, and tourism and hospitality, on the other. It advances knowledge of these topics, thereby contributing to the emerging body of literature in tourism and hospitality academia. Despite the relevance of gender and sexuality, research on them remains marginal to tourism and hospitality knowledge. In their review of the literature on gender in tourism, Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2015) suggest that this 'sub-field' of tourism does not enjoy the same level of prestige as other areas of tourism knowledge. Rather pessimistically, the paper concludes that the future of gender research in tourism is either 'stagnation or ignition' (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015: 87). However, as Pritchard and Morgan (2017) point out, there is potential for gender research to disrupt imbalances in the tourism industry and academy. An example of such research can be found in the work of Vizcaino et al. (2020), who, in drawing upon critical discourses of postcolonial feminism, shed light on the complexities of gender-based violence in

the tourism arena. The authors highlight that sexual and gender-based harassment in tourism and hospitality are often invisible, routinised and, thus, normalised (Eger et al., 2020). Such silent harassment, which may entail sexual attention, coercion or hostility (Fitzgerald and Shullman, 1993), may happen not only with female tourists (Yang et al., 2020), but also in the tourism workplace (Alrawadieh and Demiderlen Alrawadieh, 2020; Turkoglu, 2020) and even within tourism academia (Finnear et al., 2020). Such practices may be reinforced by the commoditisation of women's erotic capital in the tourism and hospitality industry, as shown in the study conducted by Basnyat et al., which is part of this special issue. Nonetheless, due to the nature of the hospitality industry, where the contact between customers and service providers can be very close, the line between sexual harassment and flirtation can sometimes be blurred, as Gibbs et al. discuss in their paper in this special issue.

Gender pay gap and gender-based labour exploitation have also received scholarly attention in recent years, particularly after the aforementioned #MeToo movement has brought to the fore the glaring gender-based inequalities that characterise many sectors (Makortoff, 2019). Tourism and hospitality are no exception to this. In an investigation of hotel housekeepers' working conditions in Canada, Thailand and the Dominican Republic, the nonprofit conglomerate Oxfam (2017) found that women in the sector are viewed and treated as commodities. Not only do they earn less than their male counterparts, but they also have less job security: they are often non-unionised, have zero-hour contracts, do not get paid days off and are thus prone to injuries and other labour-related risks (Oxfam, 2017). That many of these workers also belong to ethnic minorities adds another layer of complexity to gender-based exploitation in hospitality (Oxfam, 2017). Gender pay gap in tourism and hospitality is not a one-dimensional phenomenon, with many factors contributing to it, such as, for example, some women gravitating towards non-managerial jobs due to the pressures placed on them to combine work and family/care commitments (Oliver and Sard, 2020). In addition, labour relationships in tourism and, particularly, hospitality are characterised by 'ideal masculine worker' discourses (Costa et al., 2017), which alienate females and prevent them from accessing and holding executive roles (Gebbers et al., 2020; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2018). The moderating effect of gender on job satisfaction and intention to leave a job is further investigated in the contribution by Abou-Shouk et al., which is part of this special issue.

Significant gender inequalities also exist in the tourism academy, as revealed by Munar et al. (2015):

women account for 24% of invited speakers at tourism conferences and 21% of top editorial positions in tourism's top 20 journals. As Porter and Schänzel (2018: 3) highlight, gender may have been placed 'as a fringe component of the research process [...] as potentially impeding the career of the female social scientist'. Therefore, it is crucial to amplify women's opportunities in academia and critique the dominant discourse of 'masculine', neoliberal knowledge production in the Global North (Cai et al., 2021; Tribe, 2009) by reviewing existing scholarly work through feminine and feminist lenses. This endeavour is undertaken by Salvador Almela and Abellan Calvet, whose paper on volunteer tourism is included in this special issue.

It is also important to note that, whilst tourism practices and research are remarkably skewed in favour of men (Pritchard and Morgan, 2017), the study of masculinities from a critical perspective is still scant in tourism and hospitality academy. This, Carr (2021) suggests, happens because the hegemonic male, aware that he is the 'norm', does not always allow himself to reflect on his own positionality, which could also explain why male researchers tend to overlook gender issues in tourism and hospitality enquiries. Yet, an exciting body of research has recently emerged that disrupts hegemonic masculinity and advances male reflexivity in tourism and hospitality encounters, planning and academia (Cassel and Pashkevich, 2018; Despres, 2021; Porter et al., 2021).

Research on LGBTQI+ tourism has also evolved from the platitudinal 'city/beach/sex combo' that marked much of the scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s. Much of it now acknowledges that the LGBTQI+ community is neither uniform nor homogenous (Lucena et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2020), and, thus, adopts intersectional approaches to non-heteronormative experiences in tourism and hospitality. Hence, the shift from the monolithic understanding of the LGBTQI+ 'community' to the more varied and diverse 'communities'. It is no longer enough to understand how sexuality affects tourism and hospitality choices but also how it intersects, overlaps, and juxtaposes with factors such as age, social status and body (dis)abilities when informing those choices (Cai and Southall, 2021). In this sense, research that goes beyond stereotypical representations of LGBTQI+ tourists as affluent and cultivated people, and includes participants from places other than the Global North (Hattingh, 2021; Jarrin and Pitts, 2020) or from non-Caucasian backgrounds (Ro et al., 2017) is very welcomed. However, it should be acknowledged that, despite these efforts, there is still space for research that focuses on all the letters of the LGBTQI+ acronym, particularly 'BTQI'. In this vein,

Monterrubio et al.'s investigation of transgender people's tourism motivations and constraints, which is also part of this special issue, is a much anticipated and needed paper.

The increased visibility of non-heteronormative identities in several countries has fostered the acceptance and assimilation of LGBTQI+ lifestyles and cultures by many heterosexual people (Ghaziani, 2015). For example, in recent years, LGBTQI+ festivals and events such as pride parades have spread beyond the metropolitan cities into regional and remote areas, queering the geographic peripheries (Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy, 2021). This, in turn, has led to the 'mainstreaming' of LGBTQI+ spaces (Monterrubio, 2021), with significant ramifications in the tourism and hospitality arenas. Additionally, an increasing number of members within the LGBTQI+ communities now use virtual spaces, such as dating websites and apps (Vorobjovas-Pinta and Dalla-Fontana, 2019). This raises the question as to whether gay spaces, and, arguably, destinations, have (or will eventually) become obsolete and whether there is a future for LGBTQI+ tourism. This phenomenon may be perceived as a sign of social evolution: if LGBTQI+ spaces are no longer necessary or exclusive to members of the communities, then the expected consequence is the integration of all LGBTQI+ individuals into society. Conversely, as suggested by Robinson (2012), the mainstreaming of LGBTQI+ cultures may also have the pervasive effect of alienating members of the communities, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds or those with transgressive lifestyles, who may feel pushed away from their 'gay enclaves', thereby losing their spaces and voices.

The debates around the future and purpose of LGBTQI+ spaces are inextricably linked to the nature of gay tourism itself. In an enlightening piece, Ooi (2021: 24) questions whether gay tourism is really different from 'mainstream' tourism or whether it is just 'business-as-usual', drawing attention to the issue of authenticity (or lack thereof) within LGBTQI+ tourism. Authenticity has been the focus of academic work in LGBTQI+ tourism, with the phenomenon of 'pinkwashing' often taking centre stage in the discussions. Indeed, in the search for the so-called 'pink dollar' (Hughes, 2006; Wiltshier and Cardow, 2001), tourism and hospitality businesses often promote themselves as 'gay friendly'. This marketing strategy raises ethical issues not only because it uses the LGBTQI+ agenda for commercial purposes but also because it is not always reflected in those businesses' wider practices (Dahl, 2014). Furthermore, Jeffrey and Sposato (2021) point out, the use of the expression 'gay-friendly' is in itself problematic and condescending

because it suggests that LGBTQI+ people are 'allowed in'. Such 'gay-friendly' narratives reflect the heteronormative discourse in tourism and hospitality, and still marginalise LGBTQI+ communities. It is worth noting that a key problem with authenticity is that it is normally construed as the polar opposite of commodification. Such dichotomy, nonetheless, is not always that clear cut, which means that LGBTQI+ tourism and hospitality have the potential to be simultaneously commercial and political. LGBTQI+ tourism and hospitality may not be the solution for homophobia. Yet, in highlighting the visibility of non-heteronormative identities and bringing to the fore LGBTQI+ individuals' needs and wants, they can be instrumental in social change.

It was with these debates in mind that the editors designed this special issue. The first paper of this issue, an exciting study by Monterrubio, Mendoza-Ontiveros, Rodríguez Madera and Pérez, provides insights into the constraints that involve trans people's tourism in Mexico. The in-depth interviews conducted with 15 trans men and women show how diverse their tourism experiences are. Yet, while their travel motivations are fundamentally similar to those of cisgender individuals, the constraints that affect their choices are governed by a fear of trans-based stigmatisation. Intrapersonal constraints are the most significant for all participants, but their experiences vary according to their gender and their ability/possibility to 'pass' as men or women.

The second paper, by Basnyat, Che and Ip, sheds light on the commodification of physical attractiveness among female servers in the restaurant industry. The study, which utilised interviews with 20 females working in various food and beverage businesses in Macao, China, shows how societal stereotypes relating to female beauty help inform restaurant practices (from recruitment to service encounters). Additionally, women's work in restaurants can be influenced by traditional gender roles, with female servers being chosen and performing tasks based on their caring abilities and/or measured and controlled demeanour. A very interesting (and rather worrying) finding from the study is that many of the women interviewed seem to condone, or not oppose to, such practices, which, nevertheless, can considerably reduce the worth of their work.

In the third paper of this special issue, Salvador Almela and Abellan Calvet use a feminist lens to look at volunteer tourism. Their semi-systematic review of the literature unmask the gendered colonial dynamics in this field of tourism. Gender role-based expectations affect not only the work of volunteers but also the local communities and the volunteering organisations. Traditional gender roles are also replicated in the way

the relationships between countries are represented in the literature, with the Global North being associated with masculine figures and the Global South with feminine ones. The paper insightfully sheds light on the stereotypical representation of female volunteers, particularly celebrities, and proposes a feminist agenda to address the gaps found in the literature.

The fourth paper, a collaboration between Gibbs, Haven-Tang and Ritchie, looks into the under-researched impact of flirtation in servicescapes on the co-creation of hospitable experiences. In this comprehensive study, qualitative data were gathered in three phases: interviews with service staff, focus groups with customers and interviews with managers, all from a range of hospitality businesses. Findings reveal that experiences of mutual, appropriate and consensual flirtation between customer and staff, when happening in a safe environment in the hospitality arena, may create a sense of personalised service and even influence tipping behaviour. This study makes a very significant contribution to knowledge of the complex nature of gender-based relationships in the hospitality servicescape.

Finally, the paper by Abou-Shouk, Elbaz and Maher focuses on employee voice (speaking out and speaking up) and the moderating effect of gender on the link between job satisfaction and intention to leave a job in the tourism industry. Using a sample of 551 travel agency employees in Egypt, the study found that employee voice has a higher association with job satisfaction for male employees, who tend to be more vocal when expressing their satisfaction with their jobs. This is important because employee voice is a key indicator for decreasing intention to leave. On the other hand, the association between job satisfaction and intention to leave is almost identical between males and females. The authors acknowledge, however, that the study may have been impacted upon by a possibility of gender bias due to the male-dominant business landscape in Egypt.

To conclude, one last comment is noteworthy. The production of this special issue took place during extremely challenging times in the world's history. The COVID-19 pandemic placed additional pressure on all the people who contributed to the special issue. Therefore, we, from the editorial team, would like to thank all the authors and reviewers for their hard work in engaging with all the processes that made this possible. We consider this special issue to be a celebration not only of the rich knowledge of gender and sexuality in tourism and hospitality but also of the efforts and achievements of this very dedicated group of people.

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