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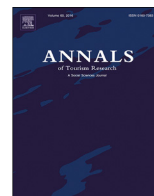

Beyond the glass ceiling: Gendering tourism management

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This article considers how Acker's (1990, 2012) framework of gendering processes can be a tool for the analysis of women managers' careers in tourism organisations. Twenty-four women top-level managers in hotels and travel businesses were interviewed. The analysis of gendering processes in the organisations where these women work revealed that hidden discrimination is more pervasive than overt discrimination. Three main gender subtexts underlie these gendering processes: the notion of the 'ideal' unencumbered worker and assumptions of women's greater family-orientation; the expectation that women are less competent than men; and male homosocial ties and exclusionary practices. It is concluded that Acker's framework can be a good tool for de-legitimising subtle and normalised forms of discrimination in tourism organisations.

Introduction

Although tourism employs more women than men, it is renowned for providing low pay, low status, low-skilled, precarious and seasonal work in typically female occupations with few development opportunities (Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011; Santos & Varejão, 2007). Horizontal segregation is also pervasive. Whereas women prevail in cleaning jobs, customer service and jobs with less responsibility, men prevail in jobs with a high level of responsibility in the areas of kitchen, restoration, and administration (Campos-Soria et al., 2011). A marked gender pay gap in tourism was also reported in several studies (e.g. Guimarães & Silva, 2016). Santero-Sanchez, Segovia-Pérez, Castro-Nuñez, Figueroa-Domecq, & Talón-Ballestero (2015) concluded that on average women hold lower quality jobs than men in hospitality, and that this quality gap widens with age. Moreover, tourism tends to exploit perceived 'feminine' characteristics and skills in jobs such as cooking and cleaning (Purcell, 1997). Several theories have been put forward to explain such patterns of inequality in organisations. Most studies have explained women's subordination in organisations with basis on their sameness and difference in relation to men (Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Powell, 1993), while others have identified 'glass ceilings' (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001).

However, recent theories have started to regard gender as a product of power relations. Such theories address the apparent gender

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neutrality of organisations, which allows for masculinity to be tacitly reproduced as the norm, particularly in management (Calás & Smircich, 2006). Acker's (1990) conceptualisation of gendering processes is a cornerstone in such theorising. She highlighted how gender inequalities are embedded in organisations and reproduced through often-invisible and seemingly 'gender-neutral' gendering processes. Despite the importance of her theorising, it has not been used in studies on gendered labour and management in tourism.

The article attempts to fill a gap in the tourism literature by using Acker's (1990, 2012) conceptualisation of gendering processes to analyse gender inequality and hidden discrimination in tourism organisations from the perspective of female top-level managers. Portugal was chosen as the setting for this study. Portugal has one of the highest female employment rates in the European Union, particularly in full-time employment. It is the country where motherhood increases the most women's likelihood of being employed (European Commission, 2017). However, gender inequalities persist, and the tourism sector is no exception (Carvalho, 2017). An 'economic rationality' seems to be the main motor for Portuguese women's integration in the workforce (Sackmann, 2002). On the one hand, women need to work to overcome poverty; on the other hand, there is an underlying idea of emancipation through economic integration. However, it is open to question as to the extent to which the previously prevailing machismo ideology in Portugal (Oliveira, Batel, & Amâncio, 2010) still persists. Hence, Portugal makes a good case study context for this research on gendering processes and hidden discriminations in tourism organisations.

The following research question is addressed: How can the identification of gendering processes contribute to a better understanding of women managers' careers in tourism? Three specific research objectives were set: firstly, to unveil the genderedness of the women managers' organisations and their experiences in top management; secondly, to understand the nature of the gender inequalities; and thirdly, to expand on Acker's framework of gendering processes.

Theorising gendering processes in tourism

Although 'gender' is a term still in the making, it has been mostly used to establish a distinction with the term 'sex'. 'Sex' concerns the biological differences between men and women. 'Gender' highlights that many of the differences between men and women are not strictly biological, but are also influenced by social, historical and political processes (Hearn, Metcalfe, & Piekkari, 2012). Gender is not a 'natural' property or a possession of individuals, but a product of 'social doings', constructed and accomplished in everyday interactions with others (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 129). Although gender differences are constructed, they are used to reinforce the idea of 'essential' differences between women and men. This legitimates hierarchical arrangements and 'naturalises' the gender order (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Hence, the conceptual distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' is crucial for the analysis of gender inequalities as a product of power relations.

Theorising gender inequality

Three main explanations for gender inequality in organisations have been provided by scholarly literature: some studies explain inequalities with basis on women's 'sameness'/'difference' in relation to men; others point to the existence of a 'glass ceiling'; recent studies have underlined the role of power relations in shaping gender inequalities in organisations. The first strand of literature has aimed to determine whether men and women are the same or different (Calás & Smircich, 2006). Some of these studies have not found any significant differences between them in terms of leadership styles (Powell, 1993). Other studies have assumed that male and female leaders are different and that women are inadequate. For example, Hennig and Jardim (1977) suggested that women should change their behaviour to become 'more like men'. Such essentialist approaches have been criticised. On the one hand, the idea of 'sameness' has been charged with 'essentialism', as it fails to examine the gender norms behind what is considered 'equal'. On the other hand, attributing differences to essence ignores the role of prejudice and discrimination (Benschop, 2006).

The 'glass ceiling' metaphor has been widely used in literature on gender and management. It refers to invisible barriers that not only women but also minorities are faced with, which hamper their progression to senior and executive management positions. It captures most illustrations of discrimination in the workplace (Bendl & Schmidt, 2010). Despite its focus on structural rather than individual explanations for gender inequality in top management, it has been criticised for being too simplistic. Firstly, it implies obstruction to upward progression by a single invisible barrier right before reaching the top, while ignoring existing barriers along the path to top management (Eagly & Carli, 2007), including horizontal segregation. Secondly, it fails to problematise systemic and subtle forms of discrimination (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Thirdly, it is linked to the notion of stable careers in modern hierarchical organisations, and is unsuitable for analysing flexible types of careers marked by fast job rotation, and co-operation-oriented organisational relationships (Bendl & Schmidt, 2010).

Other concepts are more useful for capturing the practices and processes that produce and reinforce inequalities in organisations. A growing number of studies have regarded gender as a product of power relations, and questioned the apparent gender neutrality of organisations. They have highlighted how organisational progress, namely since the Industrial Revolution, has been shaped by men, whether as entrepreneurs, leaders, or workers (Collinson & Hearn, 2005). The male norm and the male hegemony are tacitly reproduced under the 'neutrality' cover, thus contributing to the crystallisation of norms and values (Acker, 2012).

According to Collinson and Hearn (2005), organisations are places where male power is produced and reproduced, and where the construction of men's identity, status and power take place. Organisational hierarchy reflects traditional gender power relations, i.e. men as more powerful and women as more submissive (Collinson & Hearn, 2005). It usually implies a disproportionate number of women at the bottom and men at the top. While male managers are constructed as the norm, women managers are constructed as 'the other' and as less fit for management due to the persistence of traditional gender roles, which emphasise women's primary role as mothers (Acker, 1998; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Patterson, Mavin, & Turner, 2012). The separation of production and

reproduction perpetuates such divisions (Acker, 2012). Although some studies suggest that management discourse is becoming increasingly disassociated from masculinity (Costa, Bakas, Breda, & Durão, 2017), 'hegemonic masculinity' still tends to prevail in management. It is defined in opposition to women and other masculinities, which are subordinated in the gender order. It is reinforced by male homosociality, i.e. non-sexual attractions between men. Male homosociality is about emotional detachment, being very competitive, homophobia, subordinating other kinds of masculinities and regarding women as sexual objects (Collinson & Hearn, 2005). Sexuality may also contribute to reinforce male power in organisations in many ways. Wahl (1998) considered that while male leadership confirms male gender identity, women cannot get any confirmation for their gender identity from being leaders. For Hearn (2011), sexuality is fundamental in the reproduction of patriarchy in organisations, since heterosexuality institutionalises male dominance and female submission.

Hence, gender is implicated in organisations in many forms and at many levels. It can be said that organisations are 'gendered', since 'advantage and disadvantage, and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine' (Acker, 1990, p. 146). Organisations also have a 'gendering' character, since they reinforce gendered differences. They influence how workers perceive themselves as gendered, and shape images and beliefs about men and women, masculine and feminine in the society. Therefore, focusing on gender structures and gender power relations in organisations seems a more productive path for gender and leadership scholarship, rather than the focus on similarities and differences between male and female leadership styles, or the simplistic analysis of glass ceilings.

Gendering processes and discrimination

Acker completely changed the way gender is understood in organisations. She developed a theory for examining how gender inequality is institutionalised (Acker, 1990). She explained the perpetuation of gender inequality in organisations through gendering processes. These can be defined as often-invisible processes in organisations which may seem to have nothing to do with gender, but which reflect embedded gendered assumptions about women and men, masculinities and femininities. The fact that they are often concealed prevents gender inequality from being perceived as such. Therefore, a dominant perception of gender equality may occur simultaneously with the persistence of inequality (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Acker (1990) initially identified five sets of gendering processes in organisations (Fig. 1). In 1992 she removed the fifth set 'organisational logic'. In 2012, Acker referred to 'organisational logic' as 'common understandings about how organizations are put together, the constituent parts, how the whole thing works' (p. 217), but she did not include it as a component of the gendered substructure. There were also other changes, such as adding organising processes that produce gendered divisions to the first set. This leads us not only to identify segregation, but also the practices that reproduce it.

The value of Acker's work lies in recognising how gender differences are constructed through processes rather than static phenomena (Dye & Mills, 2006), and how organisations play a role in gender/sex structuring through practices such as recruitment and selection. Acker emphasised subjectivity and identity, without neglecting the materiality of the social and economic systems, and power relations: gendered images of masculinity and femininity matter in the symbolic construction of desirable workers. However, these images have material consequences, since they constantly reproduce gender, class and race (Calás & Smircich, 2006).

Dye and Mills (2006) praised but also pointed criticisms to Acker's framework, which they described as 'an unfinished tapestry'. Firstly, Acker mentioned the interaction of all gendering processes, but never described the nature of this interaction. However, these processes may be more interdependent than it is usually recognised. For example, job segregation and gendered interactions may influence internal constructions of gender identity (fourth set). Secondly, Acker underlined the importance of sexuality, but did not clarify how it fits her framework. For Dye (2006), sexuality may be a determinant of sex-segregated jobs (first set), in jobs where sexuality is implied (e.g. flight attendants or jobs that require attractive and young female workers). Sexuality may also reinforce gender power relations in interactions (third set), since it is 'imbued with notions of power' (Dye, 2006, p. 211). Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) also included the analysis of sexuality and sexual harassment in 'interactions'.

Although Acker's framework has often been cited in the literature, it has not often been fully applied. The works of Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) and Kantola (2008) are some of the few empirical studies that included the complete framework. These works revealed the potential of Acker's framework to study hidden discrimination. The analysis of gendering processes brings such processes to light, thus contributing to a better understanding of gender in organisations.

Studies on women managers in tourism

Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero (2015) denoted how tourism gender enquiry is markedly disarticulated from wider feminist and gender-aware investigation. After some notable works in the 1990s (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Sinclair, 1997; Swain's special issue on *Annals of Tourism Research* in 1995), it appears that few empirical studies related to gender and tourism were published in the proceeding decade. However, Figueroa-Domecq, Palomo, Flecha, Segovia-Perez, & Vico (2017) noted that this situation appears to be changing and there is now a renewed interested in this subject area. The influence of feminist and gender-aware theorising has been particularly visible in certain research strands, such as 'women's empowerment through tourism work'. For example, Movono and Dahles (2017) observed how participation in tourism contributed not only to the economic empowerment of indigenous Fijian women, but also to their psychological, social and political empowerment. Tucker (2007) explored the dynamics of women's participation in tourism in the context of a Turkish village where tourism work is considered 'inappropriate' for women. The desire to participate in tourism labour led these women to negotiate such spatial and moral boundaries. However, studies on women managers in tourism have been comparatively slower in adopting a gender-aware

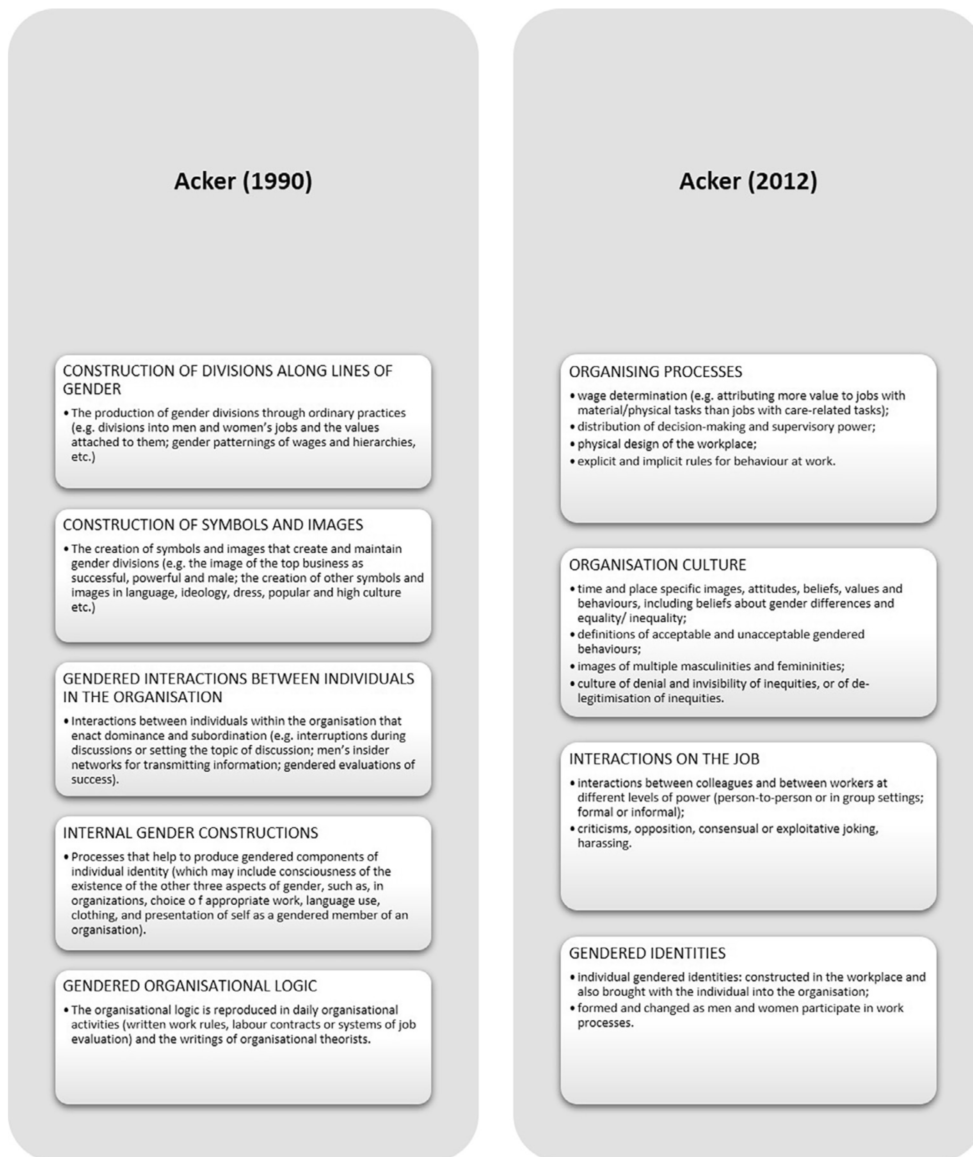

Fig. 1. Acker's gendering processes.
Source: based on Acker (1990, 2012).

framework. Most of these studies have fallen into the category of 'women-in-management' studies, where gender is a variable instead of an analytical framework (Calás & Smircich, 2006).

The influence of feminist theory has become more visible in the most recent studies. For example, Costa, Bakas, Breda, Durão, Carvalho, et al. (2017), concluded that the genderedness of 'ideal worker' characteristics, e.g. in flexibility requirements, perpetuates the invisibility of the masculine norm. Mooney and Ryan (2009) analysed how women at distinct career stages in hotels are affected by the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon. They questioned the notion of 'genuine' choice, since individual choice is constrained in gendered organisations. Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Muñoz-Mazón (2018) identified factors that caused discrimination among female executives in the hospitality industry in Spain. They concluded that the main barriers affecting women are their self-perceptions (individual), stereotyping (interactional) and factors specific to the sector (institutional), e.g. long working hours and the need for constant availability. They added an intersectional level of analysis to underline the importance of gender roles and work-life balance. Although these studies built to some extent on Acker's work, the potential of her theorising remains untapped in tourism literature.

Feminist post-constructionism

Feminist postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms have prevailed in feminist research. They contend that reality is socially constructed and question the existence of a reality that is independent of thinking. However, this political/moral relativism collides with the explicit political positioning of feminism, and with feminist ideas of liberation, emancipation and justice (Lykke, 2010a). Some contemporary feminist theorising has simultaneously embraced and transgressed postmodern philosophy by focusing on more material analyses. Lykke (2010b) suggested 'post-constructionism' as a 'temporarily useful framework' (p. 134) to bring together these converging trends in feminist thought. Such trends reclaim the concept of objectivity – albeit a partial objectivity that results in embodied and 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1991). They also advocate a focus on specific local contexts, instead of the construction of grand narratives, such as the narrative of 'women's path to emancipation' (Lykke, 2010a). Besides, such trends have as a common denominator the transgression of postmodern (anti-)epistemologies, a strong commitment to ethics and a belief that there is a link between ontology, epistemology and ethics (Lykke, 2010b). Hence, feminist post-constructionism can be a tool for the exploration of social inequalities in tourism. While it acknowledges the limitations of knowledge production and 'objective reality', it avoids the pitfall of absolute relativism by not disregarding materialities.

Study methods

The data here presented are the result of the qualitative part of a broader mixed-methods study (Carvalho, 2017). The main research aim of that study was to investigate how women reach top-level management positions in tourism, and how they are affected by multiple gendered contexts in their lives. The feminist post-constructionist approach used allowed for the integration of quantitative data in a study with overarching feminist goals. While the qualitative approach gave voice to informants and contributed to a deeper understanding of their experiences, the quantitative approach indicated the extent and pattern of the inequalities.

Hence, the first phase of the study involved quantitative analysis of a matched employer-employee dataset (*Relatório Único*), concerning all businesses and workers in the Portuguese private sector. This data revealed the gender pay gap and the gender segregation in the industry. The second phase of this investigation had a qualitative nature and used primary data. The data used in this article pertain to the qualitative part of the research. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with 24 female top-level managers in hotels and travel businesses (encompassing travel agencies and tour operators) in Portugal to capture women's discourses about gender issues in their previous and current organisations. Informants were selected based on stratified purposeful sampling combined with snowball sampling. The purpose was to select information-rich cases and to capture major variations in the population. This sampling method sets limits to the generalisation of the results to a broader population. The sample reflected the

Table 1
Sample.
Source: developed by the authors.

	Hotels	Travel businesses
Business size (workers)		
Micro (0–9)	3	6
Small (10–49)	3	2
Medium (50–249)	2	1
Large (250 +)	5	2
Situation in employment		
Entrepreneurs	4	8
Employees	9	3
Age		
25–34	2	1
35–44	7	4
45–54	2	2
55–64	2	4
Marital status		
Single	3	1
Cohabitation	3	1
Married	4	6
Divorced	3	3
Children		
Adult children	2	3
Young children	6	6
None	3	2
No, but would like	2	0
Higher education		
Tourism	9	4
Outside tourism	2	5
None	2	2

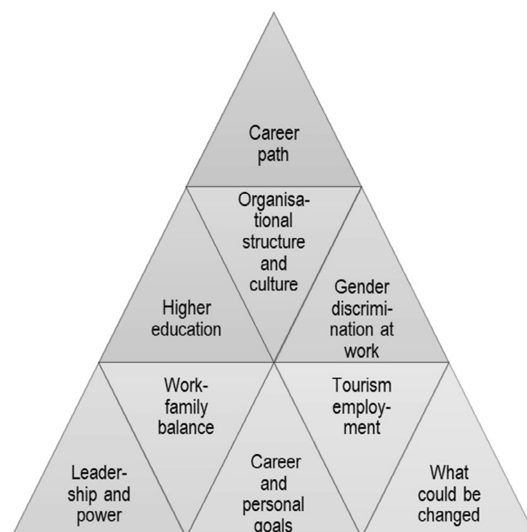

Fig. 2. Interview guide – topics.
Source: developed by the authors.

distribution of women managers across several categories of business dimensions according to the database used in the quantitative part (Table 1). In this study, 'being at the top' is conceived as a heterogeneous concept, and it is not restricted to women climbing the corporate ladder in larger companies, but encompasses women in leading positions in SMEs, both in family-owned businesses and as entrepreneurs. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, by phone or Skype. The interview guide did not have standard structured questions, but rather a list of topics to be approached (Fig. 2).

Thematic analysis was combined with elements of narrative analysis. While thematic analysis searches for themes across the whole dataset, narrative analysis searches for themes within each individual interview. With narrative analysis it is easier to follow each individual's life story. However, this could jeopardise women's anonymity. Hence, thematic analysis was used. Yet, consistencies and contradictions in women's discourses could not be fully grasped with thematic analysis alone. A sense of continuity across individual accounts is not retained with this method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, some elements of narrative analysis were introduced to capture the fluidity of individual experiences. NVivo was used to organise the themes for subsequent analysis. Regarding research ethics, the researcher established a compromise with the informants not to compromise their identity. They were informed about the purpose of the research and were given access to the parts of the study that reported their stories. The individual preferences and concerns of each woman were considered.

Findings, analysis and discussion

We used Acker's framework to interpret women's experiences in organisations from a gender-aware perspective. Acker (2012) identified four sets of gendering processes that continually recreate gender inequalities: organising processes; organisation culture; interactions on the job; and gendered identities. The aspects analysed for each set of gendering processes are summarised in Fig. 3. We focused mostly on the aspects identified by Acker (2012). However, we also included other factors mentioned by the author, but not explicitly included in her framework. Although Acker did not include sexuality within her framework, we decided to include it within 'interactions on the job' (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Dye, 2006). Finally, we discuss the gender subtexts revealed by these gendering processes.

Organising processes

Firstly, organising processes were analysed. Women were the majority of workers in interviewees' organisations. However, gender-segregation persisted. The hierarchically higher the positions were, the fewer women were found, particularly in larger companies. This might justify why informants filling high-level positions in such companies perceived top management in large businesses as a 'male world'. In interviewees' organisations, positions leading to line management, e.g. operations manager, were male-dominated, while positions such as sales manager were female-dominated. Besides, male managers were preferred for male-dominated areas such as transportation, because they *'have to deal with bus drivers'*. However, the opposite situation did not seem to be problematic, i.e. a man being a manager in a typically female area, since men dealing with women in subordinate positions corresponds to the norm (Mavin, 2006). Some interviewees were the first women to reach the board of directors. In the meantime, some of them highlighted that the increase in the number of women top managers in their companies made their lives 'easier':

> *Fortunately, I'm not the only female manager any longer. This makes it easier for me, even when there are meetings in the administration…*

Interviewees who worked at hotels were more likely to report horizontal segregation than those who worked in travel businesses.

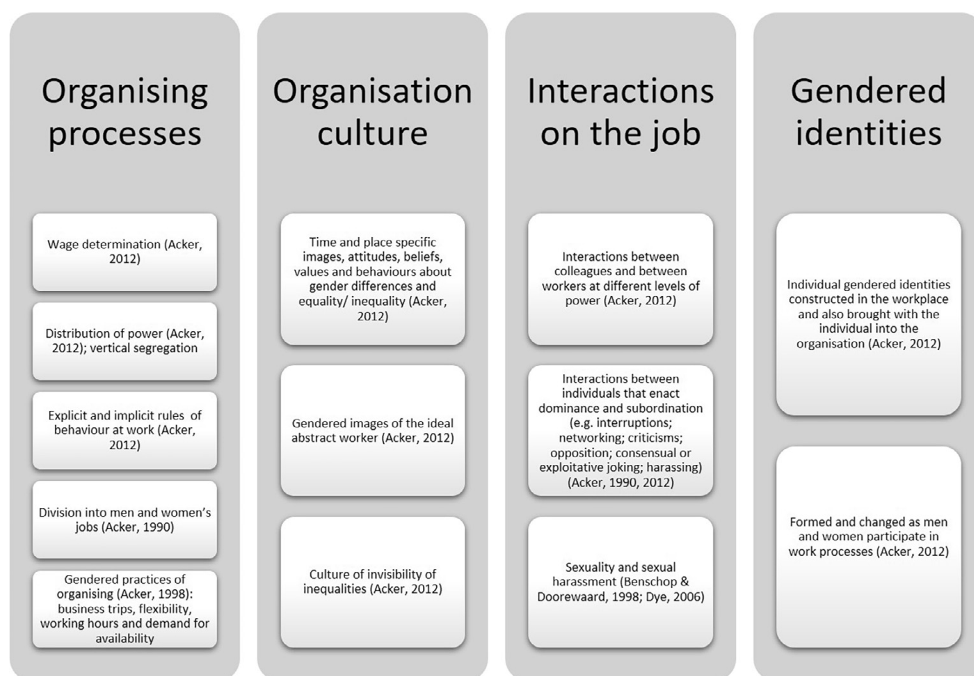

Fig. 3. Gendering processes analysed.
Source: developed by the authors.

The fact that hotels were more gender-mixed and larger made it easier to identify segregation patterns. In these hotels, there was a gendered division of labour into men and women's jobs, particularly in maintenance and housekeeping departments. Both were almost exclusively male and female areas, respectively. In the other departments, horizontal segregation was less evident. In most travel businesses analysed, horizontal segregation was not visible. Firstly, the travel businesses analysed were smaller than the hotels. Secondly, the number of men in most of these companies was too low or inexistent for a segregation pattern to be noticeable. Finally, the interviewees did not pinpoint any differences in the way tasks were divided between women and men. The only exception was a large tour operator. This company's transportation department was almost exclusively male, from the bus drivers up to senior management.

Some informants justified horizontal segregation in their companies with basis on supposedly innate masculine and feminine traits that determine men and women's suitability for certain tasks. Horizontal segregation was not only regarded as unproblematic by participants, but some even reinforced it, by specifically recruiting men or women for certain sex-typed jobs: women were construed as talented for cleaning and men for maintenance (*'when you choose someone to work in maintenance, you obviously choose a man'; 'there are tasks that are adequate for men, others are not'*). Some interviewees also preferred men for positions that required greater availability. Therefore, informants were co-producers of the gendered organisation, and not only its 'victims'. They revealed a lack of gender awareness, and deep-seated gendered beliefs present in the society at large.

Women's accounts suggested that pay discrimination may still be widespread practice in Portugal. This is in line with our quantitative findings (Carvalho, 2017). Informants identified situations of pay discrimination, particularly due to individual salary negotiation in management. This may be the result of a chauvinist 'cultural' tradition to pay women less:

> *I'm perfectly aware that women are paid less. I know of one or two hotel units… that had a male general manager earning a lot. When that opportunity was given to a much more experienced female general manager, she was paid, I won't say half, but at least 40% less.*
>
> *If a woman holds the same position as a man, she tends to earn a bit less, I think it's cultural, it's not with an explicit intention of discrimination.*

Although most informants recognised this reality in Portugal, they did not observe it in their current organisations, except in one case:

> *They want women because they know that they are more dedicated, more hard-working… but there are several conditions that don't match their demands… it's clear, in the company I work for, that men earn more than women.*

Concerning the existence of explicit and implicit rules of behaviour at work, most informants explained that there were the same rules for men and women in the company; however, as interviews unfolded, two informants stated that whenever it was necessary to take a client for drinks or dinners, there were male workers at the office who were expected to do that. Organising practices that may contribute to reinforce gendered divisions were also analysed: business trips, flexibility, working hours and demand for availability. Only half of the informants had frequent business trips, and all of them found the necessary availability. Some of these women had no

children. Others had supportive spouses, and/or found ways of leaving everything organised and negotiating family constraints. However, some of these women mentioned internal conflicts. Childless interviewees and interviewees with adult children mentioned much less strain concerning these travels.

Although some interviewees attempted to work a fixed schedule in order not to spend an excessive number of hours at work, the majority had a flexible schedule. For some, flexibility effectively improved their work-family balance. However, for most women, a trade-off between flexibility and availability was implied. This flexibility hardly resulted in more time for family life. It was rather a flexibility that primarily allowed them to fulfil their heavy work demands. In the most extreme cases, flexibility was offered so that 'total availability' was possible. Many interviewees reported working almost 'endless' hours (*'but the "flexibility" is never less than ten hours at work'*). The same pattern of 'availability-related flexibility' was observed by Costa, Bakas, Breda, Durão, Carvalho, et al. (2017).

Availability was required in four different forms: overtime availability (for staying longer hours at work); constant availability (to respond to work demands under any circumstance, e.g. answering calls in the middle of the night); availability to travel (including spending nights away from home); and emotional availability (not letting family-related stress spill over into their work). While 'overtime' and 'emotional' availability seem to be required from tourism workers in all hierarchical levels, the other two types of availability seem to be more required from workers in hierarchically higher positions. While the communication technologies implied in 'constant availability' enable individuals not to be physically present at work, they keep them constantly 'on call' and heighten expectations of their uninterrupted availability for work. Both flexibility and communication technologies can be a double-edged sword:

I have to be on call 24 hours a day. I have two days off a week and during those days I'm not really off duty. I have to be contactable and to understand via e-mail what's going on, because there might be a problem, and I have to give the necessary support to the team.
You have no fixed timetable in this job, because if there's a client in China, and you have six/seven time-zones difference, you're sleeping and they call you, they want answers, they want everything organised for them.

The availability requirement is particularly intense in tourism. It is a sector that never stops: hotels must be open 24/7 and, in some businesses, one has to be available for people who are in different time zones. The type of availability required in hotels and travel businesses seems to be different. 'Constant availability' was more required from informants in travel businesses. When off duty, hotel managers were frequently contacted by their team. However, managers in travel businesses were not only contacted by their team, but also by clients/suppliers from different time zones. In contrast, the requirement for physical presence was greater among hotel managers ('overtime availability').

Although only a few informants experienced overt discrimination in recruitment, hiring or promotions, several interviewees revealed that preferring men for positions requiring availability, such as management, is not uncommon in the Portuguese tourism sector. Given the pervasiveness of this theme, it will be further analysed in relation to organisational culture.

Organisation culture

Organisational culture is one of the areas where the links between the organisation and the society are most visible. Although some informants described tourism as favourable for women, others described it as a 'male world'. However, almost all interviewees explicitly claimed that they felt well in their organisations. Most positive aspects related with organisational culture identified concerned the 'inexistence of discrimination', respect for employees' rights during pregnancy, informal flexibility, existence of opportunities for career development, and a 'good environment'. However, it is important to analyse informants' discourses with a critical lens. Many of these 'positive aspects' were the result of mere compliance with the law, e.g. non-discrimination of pregnant workers, 'letting them' enjoy their parental leaves, or inexistence of pay discrimination. The underlying assumption of this argument seems to be that the informants' companies were an exception for respecting the law. Only one woman experienced a situation of pregnancy discrimination related with organisational culture:

I was the first women in the group taking maternity leave… they didn't take it well. They were demanding me to return to work and I said no.

Interviewees' perception was that women might still be afraid of getting pregnant and enjoying their maternity leaves. Despite being forbidden by law, it seems that losing a job for being pregnant is not uncommon in Portugal, although not in interviewees' organisations. A situation that illustrates this is the fact that an informant had one of her employees asking her for permission to get pregnant. Besides, as in Mooney and Ryan (2009), some women postponed or were postponing their pregnancies since they believed it to be crucial to attain recognition for one's skills and excellence before motherhood. Except for pregnancy-related discrimination, most discrimination related with organisational culture was hidden and subtle, such as the assumption that employees should be totally available for work:

Hospitality demands very long days, 24 hours, especially in positions with greater responsibility… It's hard for women in hospitality.
Work stifles your personal life a lot. And often destroys it.
My home is to sleep and not much more, and to play a bit with my daughter.

Availability was a pervasive theme in almost all informants' discourses. Some women considered that the demand for availability was one of the greatest obstacles for women in tourism. It clashes with family responsibilities traditionally ascribed to women, and for which women are still mostly held responsible. Despite recognising the importance of availability in the tourism industry, some interviewees were somewhat critical of the 'total availability' work culture and the exaggerated requirement for physical presence:

Men think that those positions should be filled by someone with immense availability, and they underestimate our skills.

This is a gendered obstacle, since it does not equally affect men and women. Women do not correspond to Acker's (1990) notion of the 'ideal' worker who has no imperatives outside the organisation. One interviewee pointed out that in her company male managers were more available, even those who had children, since their wives or ex-wives provided them with 'invisible support'. Women's biology was often regarded as a threat for the company; it was feared that they *might* get pregnant and become less available or leave the organisation. Hence, men were preferred:

The hotel business is hard for women in Portugal… because there are no conditions. The majority of those in direction are men and they don't want women. They don't want women when they are single, when they're young, beautiful, brilliant, because they may get married and get pregnant. And they don't want them when they are already married, because they have to pick the children from school. And when I ask my [male] colleagues, who are very chauvinist in Portugal, what's the advantage of having a woman and of having a man, 'oh, you can't compare, women are annoying, and then they must have children… And we're in the middle of a project, they get pregnant, have problems with the pregnancy, then they're not here' and all those conflicts, so there isn't much respect for women in this sense.

However, it was not only women's incompatibility with the notion of an ideal worker, unencumbered of family responsibilities, that placed women in a disadvantaged position in their organisations. In some organisations, there was also a lingering assumption that men were more competent than women:

The effort that you have to make to prove that you know what you're doing, that you're professional…it's completely different whether you're a man or a woman… because a man arrives and rules. A woman has to show availability and competence…

The existence of an entrenched male culture in some organisations also posed obstacles to women. Some interviewees, particularly in organisations where top management was more male-dominated, felt that there was resistance to women managers. Other women described their organisations as places where, despite no intentions of discrimination, it was easier to be a man than a woman ('*A woman does not know the tacit rules, the rules of a man's world, which are: "don't bother me and I won't bother you"*'). Women entrepreneurs did not report any negative aspect related with organisational culture.

Interactions on the job

The macho mentality that pervaded some organisations reinforced and was reinforced by gendered interactions. Some interviewees mentioned situations of overt discrimination. A woman mentioned a situation of pregnancy discrimination. Although her company supported her with during this stage (a positive organisational culture), one of her bosses bullied her '*because he saw a chance to take out an element that might be against him in the future*' (gendered interactions). Overt discrimination occurred both within and outside organisations, with workers from different hierarchical levels. For example, an informant had suppliers refusing to seal contracts with her because she was a woman, and another informant had male employees refusing to follow her orders.

Hidden discrimination was more frequent than overt discrimination. Microaggressions are brief statements or behaviours that are often automatic and unconscious, but which transmit a negative message about a non-dominant group (Nadal, 2010). For example, one interviewee told that she was frequently assumed to be the secretary in important meetings outside her organisation. Microaggressions also entailed sexist humour and jokes, which carried hidden messages filled with stereotypes, prejudice, sexual remarks or expectations of traditional gender roles:

Only I know what I've been through to get here… The jokes are always like 'Maria wears trousers' or 'you don't even seem like a woman… 'Availability for this? Are you sure?' If I were a man, they wouldn't even question it. Or 'I think it's better if you talk to your husband first'… These expressions show all too well what they think, even when they try to disguise it. The oldest [men]… still have that prejudice… 'is she competent?'… Some never said this to me very clearly, but indirectly… 'You, young lady, should be at home enjoying your son', like, go to the kitchen, pots, pans and stuff. Many wouldn't do this openly anymore, but in an unconscious way I felt this.

Most people are at such a level that they're careful not to make [sexist] jokes in front of us, but they clearly did it behind our backs. But they were careful … their language use was completely different depending on whether there was a woman in the room or not.

The prevalence of male homosocial ties and a hegemonic masculinity was also reflected in certain language patterns (e.g. coarse language and 'men talk') and in exclusionary behaviour, particularly in informal events associated with meetings with only men:

When I was the only [woman], when the meetings were over, they would all go out together and forget that there was a woman in the group. When you start having a lot of these meetings [with only men] it's good that you can talk with confidence about politics, mobile phones, or light alloy wheels, mostly football, football results, otherwise you won't open your mouth during the first half-hour, forty minutes. And when you're in a position of strategic negotiation, this leaves you, from the beginning, in a weak bargaining position.

Although networking was vital for these women's careers, the genderedness of networking frequently had a negative effect. Some informal networking outside normal working hours excluded women. The reasons for this exclusion were fourfold: women's lack of availability for family reasons; men's preference for other men (homosocial ties); sexualised interactions; and husbands' jealousy. Heterosexualised interactions during dinners seemed to be at least as problematic for women as the demand for availability: they triggered husbands' jealousy at home:

It's very complicated for you to be married and say 'Look honey, I'm going to have dinner with a client and I'll be right back'. Men aren't formatted to accept that part of women's lives.

Sometimes it's unpleasant when I tell him 'tonight I won't have dinner at home because I'm going to have dinner with a client or supplier', it doesn't go down well, but since we've been together for many years, he got used to dealing with jealousy.

Some women mentioned that sexualised interactions had either neutral or positive consequences for women. However, most described negative consequences. Sexuality was related with gender power relations in organisations. While it seemed to reinforce hegemonic masculinity, it was not a source of power for women, because it had to be 'under control' through the right attitude and clothing, so as not to damage women's reputation:

You have to take care with the way you dress, because if you don't… there's prejudice, taboo and distraction. If I show a bit more cleavage or something more provoking in some situations, like tougher negotiations, it's complicated. Because he won't be listening to what I'm telling him, it gives rise to other types of conversation. Or it leads to certain looks and it bothers you (…) When you're in strategic negotiations, you have to cut out all these distractions, you need to be fully focused. And it's not that they don't respect you, because they're gentlemanly, but you can notice the looks, the jokes… showing their socks to the young lady, the Hermesse tie, the Paco Rabanne socks.
Having a ring on your finger still instils some respect for some [men] (…)there's always a graceful way of throwing into the conversation how happy you are in your relationship with your husband.
Sometimes there are situations that are not very pleasant, and you have to know how to manage them with tact. If you're with a client or a supplier you can't be unpleasant, you can't react the same way you'd react in your personal life. You have to know how take it smoothly so as not to offend, but at the same time say that we'e here working, we're not here having drinks because we're friends.

The influence of sexuality on work relations seems to decrease the better women are represented in top management. Such interactions also occurred outside organisational boundaries, with clients, negotiation partners, or suppliers. Although women did not report situations where they felt vulnerable to violent sexual harassment, one interviewee reported the rape of a chambermaid by a male client in a hotel where she worked outside Portugal. Yet, the offender was left unpunished.

Although some gendered interactions corresponded to situations of overt discrimination (bullying or impolite treatment), they mostly entailed hidden discrimination. The analysis of gendered interactions also revealed how discrimination spans across organisational borders. Gendered prejudice and exclusion were not only felt within the organisation, but also in interactions with suppliers or CEOs from other companies. The negative gendered interactions reported were mostly related with the assumption of women's inferiority, e.g. not taking women seriously, regarding them as less credible or assigning them minor tasks.

Gender identities

This set of gendering processes is related to how individuals' navigation of gender identities is influenced by expectations of how one ought to look and behave (Dye, 2006). Assumptions about women's lack of competences, credibility and availability affected women's own internal gender constructions. Due to such gendered beliefs, many interviewees were not assumed as competent professionals from the beginning. They felt they had to prove themselves by showing their competence and availability, investing in education, asserting themselves and working 'twice as hard':

I know what I've been through to get here. Only when they saw you'd earned your stripes and your hard work would they respect you a lot. It can still be seen that women need to work more to reach the same positions. Women are also guilty of this. We're very keen, we spend a lot of hours at work.

Interviewees' long working hours were the result not only of explicit organisational demands, but also of their response to internalised organisational gendered beliefs. Informants were aware of their position in the gender order. Their internal gender constructions influenced how they perceived themselves as fit/unfit for certain occupations. One interviewee felt unmotivated to advance in her previous company because of the entrenched male culture at the hierarchical level above hers. The existence of a male culture may discourage women from applying to jobs in certain areas or advancing to senior positions. The analysis of gendering processes brings to light these aspects that pertain to hidden discrimination.

According to Wahl (1998), women managers may need to balance feminine and masculine expressions in their clothing, language and behaviour, to maintain their credibility as managers. It may look 'wrong' when women are too masculine. Interviewees' discourses on clothing revealed the importance of maintaining a delicate balance between feminine and masculine enactments, and of controlling just what *kind* of femininity they want to embody:

[My mother] has never tried to dress like a man, or to look like a man to get anywhere. And she never had to use short skirts or pronounced cleavages. She has always been feminine and elegant.

Understanding the nature of gender inequalities: gender subtexts

In the previous sections we identified gendering processes in organisations. Gendering processes can be conceptualised as the result of often-invisible processes that reproduce gender inequality in organisations by embedding patterns of female submission and male dominance (Acker, 1990). The analysis of gendering processes revealed that discrimination in the context analysed, particularly hidden discrimination, is related with three types of concealed and power-based processes, which we will call 'gender subtexts' (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998): (i) the gendered notion of the 'ideal' worker that lives for the job and has no additional commitments; (ii) the assumption that women are less competent and less suitable than men for management; (iii) male homosocial ties and exclusionary practices.

The first subtext implies that women cannot correspond to the notion of the 'ideal' worker who has no imperatives outside the

organisation, and who is totally unencumbered by family responsibilities (Acker, 1990). This notion is a gendered aspect of organisation culture, since it affects men and women differently. As one interviewee emphasised, men 'don't get pregnant' and are more available, or assumed to be more available, for work commitments. This is one of the reasons why they are preferred for management. This gender subtext was visible in the way some organisations expected 'total availability', and some important decisions were made outside normal working hours in informal events. This poses barriers to workers with family responsibilities. This subtext perpetuates images about masculinity and femininity, reinforcing the divide between paid work in the organisation and unpaid work at home. Hence, women are less likely to hold management positions, and more likely to hold peripheral positions (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998) and jobs that reinforce their association with 'feminine' skills. Interviewees felt the need to prove themselves to be regarded as professional individuals.

The second subtext is related with the assumption that men are more competent and suitable for certain jobs, particularly for management. Our findings suggested that, women were still regarded with condescension and not taken seriously in some companies. Some informants revealed situations where men were reluctant to deal with women in more powerful positions.

Finally, the prejudice that women are not fit for management was reinforced by male homosocial ties and hegemonic masculinity in several organisations (third subtext). This occurs through male exclusionary practices (e.g. informal networking, sexist jokes). Many women described their organisations as places where, despite no intentions of discrimination, it is easier to be a man than a woman. Some informants' discourses revealed the existence of tacit knowledge shared among men, whereas women were not perceived as benefitting from homosocial ties in organisations. Therefore, masculinity becomes the norm.

Our results suggest that women's possibilities in tourism may be constrained by traditional gender roles reflected in organisations, and by the assumptions of men's superior competence for management. Male homosocial ties and hegemonic masculinity may contribute to strengthen such gendered prejudice. In our study, these three gender subtexts operate silently in organisations through gendering processes. While some of these processes are malicious, most are unintentional. Yet, they reproduce the genderedness of the society in organisations and constrain women's possibilities in the sector. They reinforce gender power relations, gendered divisions in the society and the gender order.

Conclusion

This study followed a feminist post-constructionist approach. It sought partial objectivity through embodied and 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1991) about women and their experiences in the tourism sector, in order to raise awareness about persisting gender inequalities and inspire political action. Inspired by Acker's (1990, 2012) conceptualisation of gendering processes, we put forward this research question: How can the identification of gendering processes contribute to a better understanding of women managers' careers in tourism?

In order to answer this research question, it is important first to unveil the genderedness of the women managers' organisations and their experiences in top management (first objective). Gendering processes were identified in women's discourses about their current and previous organisations. This analysis suggested that these organisations were not gender neutral, since assumptions about gender underlay their daily practices. Genderedness was visible in the structures, divisions and practices of many organisations, for example through gendered occupational segregation, recruitment, promotion and wage setting practices. This genderedness was also ingrained in organisational culture, through the 'total availability' work culture, the resistance from male top managers towards women, and the prevalence of a macho mentality at work. This was reflected in gendered interactions, such as exclusion, jokes, sexualised interactions, or women not being taken as seriously as men. The gendering of organisations even affected women's internal gender constructions: they felt the need to prove their competence/availability to counteract negative expectations held in relation to them.

The identification of gendering processes helped unveil discrimination processes and practices. Overt discrimination was most visible in organising processes related with recruitment, promotions and salaries, organisational culture (discrimination of pregnant women), and gendered interactions (bullying). Hidden discrimination was more subtly ingrained in organisational beliefs and gendered interactions, where inequalities were less visible and harder to pinpoint. The identification of gendering processes was useful to make hidden discrimination more visible, and to conclude that it was more pervasive than overt discrimination. In a time when sexism is increasingly expressed in more subtle ways, the invisibility and legitimacy of inequalities constitute impediments to change (Acker, 2009). Hidden discrimination may be regarded as harmless and normal behaviour. In fact, most women were reluctant to label such situations as 'discrimination'. However, the identification of gendering processes made these processes more visible, thus contributing to their future de-legitimisation.

Gendering processes also contributed to understanding the nature of the gender inequalities (second objective). Three main subtexts underlay the gendering processes identified: the notion of the 'abstract'/'bodiless' worker, who has no additional responsibilities besides work; assumptions of women as inferior/less competent than men; male culture/hegemonic masculinity reified in male homosocial ties. These subtexts are strengthened through gendering processes. Hence, identifying gendering processes can contribute to better understand gender in the tourism sector.

Our last objective was to expand on Acker's framework. Acker did not analyse in-depth the interdependence of gendering processes. Considering how gendering processes are interrelated enables the analysis of certain themes from different angles and sheds light on their multidimensional nature. For example, the theme 'availability' was pervasive in all four gendering processes: in the gendered division of jobs into those that require availability in exchange for rewards/status, and those that do not; in the 'total availability' work culture that presupposes an ideal worker unencumbered from family responsibilities; in the exclusion of less available workers from networking activities at night; and in the way gender identities are influenced by the prejudice that women

are less available, since women feel the need to prove their availability in order to be regarded as competent individuals. The percentage and distribution of men and women in the organisation (first set) may also influence the remaining gendering processes. In our study, companies where top management was male-dominated seemed to pose obstacles to women. There seemed to be more 'resistance' to women managers and a higher frequency of micro-aggressions. Wahl (2010) observed that increasing the presence of women managers may influence constructions of management and masculinity in the organisation by confronting the male norm.

It was not clear how sexuality fits Acker's framework. Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) included it within the third set, interactions. Dye (2006) highlighted that sexuality may be implied in the first or the third set. While sexuality may be a determinant of gender segregated sex-typed jobs (first set), this occurs mostly with jobs that require workers with gendered attributes (e.g. air stewardesses). However, in our study, sexuality was most visible in gendered interactions (third set). This might be because the interviewees were managers, and sexuality is not usually a determinant of women's assignment to management positions. Although women managers are not likely to be chosen as managers because of their gendered attributes, it is visible in the analysis of gendered interactions that sexuality does play a role in organisational life. Some women avoided dinners with clients or had to be more careful with their attitudes and clothing so as not to convey a 'wrong message'. Hence, in studies of women managers sexuality may fit better in the analysis of gendered interactions.

Finally, Acker's analysis of gendering processes does not shed much light on gendering processes spanning across organisations. Our analysis revealed that gendering processes expanded beyond organisational boundaries. Organisations are not isolated but exposed to exogenous environmental pressures in the society and in their interdependence with other organisations. This influences the way gender inequalities are reproduced in the organisation (Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Skaggs, 2010). For example, although women employees mentioned twice as many more situations of gender-related conflicts within their organisations, entrepreneurs were slightly more likely to be affected by gender prejudice from suppliers or CEOs outside their organisations. Although some organisations may have positive environments, their potential is limited. They are embedded in relations of interdependence with other organisations where a gendered culture is more ingrained.

To conclude, this study has shown the importance of articulating tourism research with feminist theories to expose the lack of gender-neutrality of tourism organisations. This study proposed gendering processes as a more appropriate tool than the 'glass ceiling' metaphor to analyse gender in organisations. The 'glass ceiling' leaves the situation of women who are above the 'glass ceiling' or at low hierarchical levels unproblematised (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and neglects non-intentional forms of discrimination (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Through the concept of 'gender subtexts', this study also shed light on the nature of gendering processes.

Although tourism is frequently said to open doors to women, gender divisions and gendered images of women and men are still embedded in the sector. However, such gendering processes are not 'monolithic'. Their reproduction can be resisted and challenged (Hearn & Parkin, 2003). Some of the organisations led by the interviewees seem to have some potential to counteract such dynamics. Nonetheless, at the macro-level, the tourism sector still seems to be reinforcing gender inequalities, more than challenging them. Future studies should give more emphasis to the analysis of gender power relations, particularly from an intersectional perspective, by analysing how multiple inequalities intersect to create different patterns of inequality. Longitudinal studies are also needed, to capture the evolution of gender equality. Studies on gender and tourism should encompass other sectors besides hospitality, due to the different nature of gendering patterns in each of these sectors.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.12.022.

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