The role of hospitality & tourism schools in promoting gender equity

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A B S T R A C T

Hospitality and tourism (H&T) schools worldwide play a prominent role in promoting gender equity both in education and in the H&T sector, because they set the foundation for future H&T leaders on how they perceive, approach, and address gender inequalities. This article looks broadly at gendered roles in the global H&T sector and gender equity in H&T schools. It then identifies actionable ways that H&T schools can promote greater gender equity to pave the way for a diverse and blanced workforce that meets the needs of a rapidly expanding sector worldwide.

Despite making up approximately 70% of the global hospitality & tourism (H&T) workforce, women are still significantly underrepresented in managerial roles and earn up to 15% less than their male colleagues (Basurto-Barcia & Ricaurte-Quijano, 2017). This demographic landscape is also reflected in H&T school undergraduate programs worldwide, where although H&T school student bodies are on average 72% women, female faculty and academic staff only represent 38% and also earn less than their male colleagues (Basurto-Barcia & Ricaurte-Quijano, 2017). With global tourism making up approximately 6% of all service global exports and being the fourth biggest export sector, increased female participation and representation in leadership roles, and achieving gender equity in the sector are critical for advancing the entire sector and reaching maximum productivity (Vettori & Nicolaides, 2019). Typically, equity in the workforce begins with the efforts of education systems to promote and advance these equity agendas. Although H&T schools on average have equitable student gender ratios, there are a number of additional steps these schools should take to promote equity in the H&T sector, specifically with regards to faculty structures, mentorship, and research.

1. Gendered roles in the H&T sector

There are several factors contributing to the existing gender inequities in the H&T sector, particularly in managerial positions. However, these factors are grounded in the overarching view of gender as a social structure within the sector, where role perceptions are often gendered and traditional, and particular roles are oftentimes stigmatized as a result (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). For example, women are more traditionally seen as cleaners or housekeepers, rather than hotel managers or safari driver guides. This leads to what Sturman (2015) calls "occupational crowding," where women are heavily concentrated in particular roles, which are often devalued as a result, and are thereby socially closed off from moving into other roles within the sector. Given this, it comes as no surprise that one global study found that 80% of the male workforce and 90% of the female workforce agree that gender discrimination is commonplace in the sector, particularly with regards to salary and professional rank (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). These deeply embedded gendered perceptions and "occupational crowding" within the sector lead to a number of factors that inhibit women from earning promotions and taking on leadership positions. For example, studies have shown that women lack mentorship and networking opportunities, professional development opportunities, and are upheld by inequitable policies and systems regarding promotions, work life balance, and maintaining family responsibilities (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018).

2. Gender equity in H&T schools

H&T schools, or higher education institutions that offer certificate or degree programs specifically in the H&T field, stand at the frontlines of promoting gender equity as the future workforce prepares for and enters the job market. Although H&T schools admit a majority of female students on average, there are gaps between student and faculty gender ratios, as well as student to workforce gender ratios, both of which need to be addressed in order to achieve gender equality in the sector (Basurto-Barcia & Ricaurte-Quijano, 2017). Furthermore, H&T schools need to instill values of equity and inclusion in students so that they develop into inclusive leaders upon entering the workforce. H&T schools can fill these gaps and instill these foundational values by promoting gender equality in its faculty body, developing female mentorship structures for students, and promoting H&T research with diverse research teams and female representation. Not only do these initiatives promote gender equality both in educational systems and the workforce, but it shifts the sector's overarching epistemological positioning on who can hold particular roles and what a successful career for women in the industry looks like (Chambers et al., 2017).

3. Faculty representation

Women are significantly underrepresented in faculty positions across H&T schools worldwide, particularly in leadership and senior faculty positions (Xu et al., 2017). One study, for example, found that women only represent 19% of full professorships in the top H&T schools worldwide, and women academics on average earn 20% less than their male counterparts (Pritchard & Morgan, 2017). Despite a number of worldwide initiatives and organizations to promote gender equality and inclusion in academia (e.g. Women Academics in Tourism; Equality in Tourism, etc.), not only do women remain underrepresented in these positions, but these positions are so masculinized that there leaves little room for critical analysis regarding gender (Pritchard & Morgan, 2017). The result of this significant gender imbalance is the deepening of these gendered views in the sector regarding who can hold which positions and why. Furthermore, female students, who make up the majority of H&T student bodies, are not provided with examples of gender equality from their schools in practice while building their skills and knowledge prior to entering the workforce. Given this, H&T schools need to be more proactive and intentional when it comes to creating diverse teams with equal female representation, particularly in top leadership and faculty positions. In doing so, schools will contribute to breaking down gendered norms regarding senior positions and allow students to see what this looks like in practice before entering the workforce.

4. Mentorship and networking opportunities

One key barrier that women face both in H&T academia and in the workforce is a lack of female mentorship and networking opportunities either formally or informally. As a result, women struggle to cross the bridge to higher level positions, because they lack these support and advocacy systems that their male counterparts are able to find both formally and informally (Dashper, 2019). However, schools that build mentorship opportunities for their junior faculty and female students typically see increased confidence, career empowerment, and the ability to visualize high powered female professionals who are "like me" both in academia and in the H&T professional workforce (Dashper, 2019; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015). Furthermore, mentorship opportunities have proven not only to benefit students and junior faculty, but they have also shown to impact entire organizations in a positive way (Block, 2016). For example, mentorship programs can serve as recruitment platforms for organizations, where mentees become future employees upon graduation, thereby promoting gender equity in the workforce. Additionally, organizations typically see increased creativity and knowledge sharing opportunities when women network with other high-powered professional women, which ultimately benefits everyone across the organization (O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015). Therefore, when schools create mentorship opportunities for female students and junior faculty, they are not just benefitting the mentees but are benefitting entire organizations.

5. Diverse research teams

Given the lack of female representation in senior academic positions across H&T schools, it comes as no surprise that research output also lacks female representation in the sector. Worldwide, women only represent 28% of researchers, and this gap is reflected in the H&T sector, where one study found that only one-third of researchers publishing in leading H&T journals were women (Elsevier, 2017; Koseoglu et al., 2020). Reasons behind this lack of representation are far ranging, but a few of these reasons include (1) women being approximately eight times less likely to win academic awards than men; (2) a lack of senior academics in H&T schools; and (3) the majority of journal editors being male (Koseoglu et al., 2020; Lincoln et al., 2012). This lack of female representation further exacerbates gendered perceptions regarding high-powered roles in the sector and also creates gaps in the type of knowledge and topics of study that are pursued. H&T schools need to accept more responsibility for promoting gender equity in their research output, and this can be done through calls for papers from female researchers, policies that require research teams to have female representation, or awarding research grants to female-led research proposals (Koseoglu et al., 2020). In doing so, H&T schools are modeling the behavior and representation they wish to see both from its students and from the professional workforce.

6. Conclusion

H&T schools play a prominent role in promoting gender equality both in education and in the H&T sector, because they set the foundation for future H&T leaders on how they perceive, approach, and address gender inequalities. H&T schools can proactively

address these inequalities through female faculty representation, mentorship opportunities for junior faculty and students, and by requiring diversity in collaborative research teams. Furthermore, there is also a lack of existing research regarding gender inequities in the sector, and further research in the areas of gender equality and the role of H&T schools in breaking down these gender barriers is needed (Pritchard & Morgan, 2017). By proactively addressing existing gender inequalities, H&T schools are paving the way for a diverse and balanced workforce that meets the needs of the rapidly expanding sector worldwide.

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