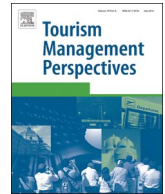




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## Predicting the next decade of tourism gender research

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### ABSTRACT

This article is an opinion piece, which briefly reviews the ways in which tourism is a hugely important sector for women's employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and ultimately for their life, leisure and business experiences. Its main purpose is to speculate on the future of tourism gender research and practice over the next decade. It suggests that, despite a maturing of the field, research utilising qualitative and feminist methods of inquiry continues to struggle for legitimacy in a field dominated by (post)scientific paradigms and approaches. The piece describes the role senior academics must play to shape a vibrant future for gender studies, through mentoring and by holding knowledge structures and hierarchies to account. The piece concludes by highlighting two areas in which tourism gender scholars could lead research on gendered human experiences in the next decade, namely AI and robotics and sexual exploitation and harassment.

### 1. Introduction

Predicting the future is inherently risky and such forecasts are remembered more for their failure than accuracy. Marilyn Loden, who devised the term 'glass ceiling', recently commented, 'having coined the term almost 40 years ago, I'm surprised it's still a problem'. This encapsulates the intractability of many gender inequalities and underlines that predicting the future of gender relations and its study is no easy task. So, where to begin? Perhaps the best place to start, like all good stories, is in the beginning. Gender studies came to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s in response to women's previous lowly regarded value to society. Driven by a commitment to equality, gender studies' rigorous scholarship helped to redefine and transform disciplines and subjects, to generate new knowledge and new, often interdisciplinary, ways of thinking and knowing. Yet today, women's studies departments are threatened with closure and many women reject the term feminism, preferring instead to regard themselves as individuals, neither constrained nor bound by their collective gender.

So, does this mean that feminism is a victim of its own success and its job is now done? Some commentators and scholars have indeed argued that the closure of women's studies departments and courses evidences the success of the feminist movement and its accomplishments mean that we no longer need its study (Bernardo, Lowe, & Kelly, 2014). Such views are underpinned by the belief that sexism is a thing of the past. Yet the worldwide absence of equal pay, equal representation in parliaments and on company boards and at all levels of public life suggests otherwise. Is the struggle for equality over when worldwide just 12% of CEOs are women and men account for three out

of every four senior leadership roles? In Silicon Valley, women hold just one in ten senior positions; casual sexism is on the rise worldwide and sexual harassment in the workplace remains a severe problem. As I write this, the tech industries are beset by accusations of chauvinism, Hollywood is amid a media storm over inherent sexism, the #metoo campaign documents sexual harassment across all walks of life, whilst the UK Parliament is debating statutory maternity leave for its members. Apparently, they haven't had to deal with this 'problem' very often.

There is clearly a pressing need to document and address such inequalities in society and, in our field, in tourism practice and employment. It is also important to scrutinise the impact of gender inequality on the creation of tourism knowledge; something that will challenge academics over the coming decade (Chambers, Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, & Biran, 2017). Academia, so often perceived to be a meritocracy and an engine of social change, remains a highly gendered sector exhibiting what some, such as Rosemary Deem, have described as a glacial pace of change towards gender equality. Men continue to dominate professorial and senior research leadership roles and hugely outnumber women in the ranks of what we commonly refer to as the alpha scholars, a situation that has significant implications for the kinds of knowledge we create. Whilst there is now much greater recognition of the gender inequalities seen in individual disciplines and fields and measures are increasingly being taken to address them, more needs to happen. Reports of high numbers of young female PhDs leaving academia to work in the private sector continue – an outflux created at least in part by the lack of family-friendly work practices, expectations and demands, and perceptions that it is difficult to build a successful academic career and

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maintain family life. Many of those who choose to stay are faced with the choice of having a family or not. These challenges are not solely faced by women, but women's working lives are more likely to be complicated by their domestic responsibilities and by societal perceptions of motherhood, which explicitly and implicitly challenge their suitability for promotion. Unlike fatherhood, which carries a wage bonus, motherhood incurs serious career and salary penalties. Transgender individuals have provided new insights here; for example, the transgender neuroscientist Dr. Vivienne Ming, following her transition from male to female has calculated the economic costs of male advantage at \$250,000. This is the amount of extra work that 'Joan' must do to progress when she and 'Joe' are on the same grade doing the same quality of work. This is in effect, a tax on being female, which is multiplied by the vectors of intersectionality (Ming, 2017).

Tourism is of course a hugely important sector for women's employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and ultimately for their life, leisure and business experiences. Of course, what happens in tourism research and practice over the next decade will be a product of our highly gendered societies and reflecting on the future of gender research in tourism is a challenging task. How can this fragmented and diverse area be discussed within the confines of a brief opinion piece? One could look at a field having four pillars, which girder its development:

- Engagement;
- Scholarship;
- Structures;
- Processes.

These are the pillars, which will underprop the development of tourism gender research and one could ask some leading questions in relation to them. For instance, have we built a rigorous scholarship, which explores the roles, experiences and contributions of women within tourism, which has considered the barriers that prevent women from reaching their potential and which has advanced solutions, policies and processes to redress these? How sufficiently is gender and tourism education entwined in tourism pedagogy? How many PhD researchers are engaged in gender-related research? How many researchers and faculty members engage with the study of gender as a major teaching and research interest? How many researchers utilise feminist research methods? How many women feature amongst the academy's 'leaders', those who set the terms of debate and demarcate key study areas for today's and tomorrow's students?

Tourism undoubtedly has passionate, energised and enthusiastic collectives, which champion gender equity and gender research, notably Women Academics in Tourism (WAIT), the Critical Tourism Studies (CTS) Network, and Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI). Individual scholars - both male and female - have made significant contributions to tourism gender research. However, for many tourism scholars, gender itself remains a minority and marginal research interest - only impinging on the collective conscience of the majority when voices are raised in the academy over the gender imbalance of editorial boards, conference panels, etc. Tourism as a field of study has developed in parallel with feminist and gender studies but those areas too rarely intersect or cross-pollinate each other in any sustained or meaningful engagement. Less than 10% of the studies of tourism and gender appear in gender or feminist studies journals (Figuerola Domecq, Pritchard, Villace, Morgan, & Segovia, 2015) and, if you are a gender scholar, the analysis of the tourism studies/management topography by Hall, Lew, and Williams (2014) makes depressing reading. It seems that very few scholars research this 'tail end' topic, which like areas such as post-colonialism, is totally eclipsed by the ascendancy of industry-oriented development, marketing and ICT research (Lew, Hall, & Williams, 2014). Despite a maturing of the field, research utilising qualitative and feminist methods of inquiry continue to struggle for legitimacy in a field dominated by (post)scientific

paradigms and approaches. As the impetus towards monitoring and evaluation quickens with more and more countries adopting research and teaching quality reviews and scholars increasingly required to demonstrate their value to government funders, the focus on numerically robust, technically-oriented, solution-driven research gather momentum. Moreover, university teaching departments and research centres are under sustained pressure to justify their existence, not only to their 'pay masters' but also to an increasingly sceptical public. It is a genuine concern that these combined external forces will force researchers away from the contentious discussions, which gender research provokes and leave it in an even more precarious, hostile environment than now.

Adding to this pressure are citation metrics, which loom increasingly large in academics' lives. Early career academics are ever more advised to work in highly populated, highly cited research areas, a trend that again disadvantages gender research, which is characterised by low levels of citations, themselves fragmented across the academic publishing landscape. Gender papers tend to attract less citations than the average and in fact over 40% of tourism gender papers are totally uncited (Figuerola Domecq et al., 2015). In such an environment, those considering gender as the focus of their research have even been advised that this is tantamount to career suicide, so removed is it from the major centres of power within the field. Despite all these factors, which impel us to a 'gender-lite' research future, I am however, continually inspired and heartened by the enthusiasm of new, often young researchers who follow their passion and push back against disciplinary and institutional apathy for the gender agenda.

'Senior' academics have a vital role to play in shaping a future for gender studies, through mentoring and supervising researchers, by nurturing them in supportive networks, by creating research structures and spaces, and by holding knowledge structures and hierarchies to account. Research over the last 25 years has shown these to be largely male dominated (men are the majority in professoriates, editorial boards, grant panels, etc.). Arguably, tourism is more male dominated than many other fields and has been disappointingly slow to address this imbalance by comparison with the sciences and the arts and humanities. This may be due to tourism's failure to engage with critical theory and feminism, its inability to consciously recognise the male nature of its networks or to the field's reification of individual (largely white, Anglo/European) alpha male scholars as pioneering, mentors, innovators and 'long wolves' (Ek & Larson, 2017). Some editorial boards are now addressing their gender imbalance, which is to be welcomed and this may gather further impetus in the coming decade. The road to gender equality will not be an easy one, however and it will take more than one academic generation to achieve equality in pay, professorial numbers, etc.

In the next decade I would also like to see tourism's knowledge structures and its academic associations adopt more open policies and procedures to drive forward and cement equality in all its forms. For example, we need transparent processes over editorial appointments so that tourism becomes a leader of good academic governance. I am also acutely conscious that gender is neither a homogenous nor a binary concept and there is an urgent need to consider the various vectors, which intersect to produce multiple inequalities, challenges and oppressions. Race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and dis/ability all combine to produce points of privilege and disadvantage, but thus far intersectionality has been too rarely discussed in tourism research. Concepts and ways of knowing embedded in these intersectionalities remain marginalised in tourism's business-focused academy and yet they are central to understanding this globalised industry, which touches every part of the world and its communities. It is time to bring intersectionality to the centre of who and what we are; it can no longer remain an afterthought.

## 2. Conclusion

Given this research landscape, what does the future hold for gender research in tourism? If we can secure a lasting change to our knowledge structures, then we will be able to create a strong and stable base for gender research, which can then move from the margins to the centre of tourism and social/management science research. Today's doctoral students will shape tomorrow's tourism research agenda. It has been my fortune to meet many inspirational women and men working on hugely important gender-related research and I have been privileged to examine theses on gender issues that have been amongst the very best doctoral work I have seen. If these (and other) individuals choose to make academia their long-term career then there is much hope for gender research within tourism, sustained by networks such as WAIT and CTS, which now has grown to include North American and Asian scholarly collectives. This suggests that tourism gender research can ignite to address the key issues within societies and organisations at an individual, organisational, societal and structural level.

Gender research is an enormous field, encompassing our emotional, embodied, sensory experiences and expectations and I cannot adequately scope it here. I can, however, highlight two areas in which tourism gender scholars could lead inter/cross/multi/post-disciplinary research on gendered human experiences in the next decade, if they can develop the necessary dialogues and blended research approaches. Firstly, survey after survey report high rates of sexual harassment worldwide as our places of work, study and leisure (especially our streets and public transport), become harassment hotspots. This demands serious attention and, yet the tourism voice has rarely registered in these debates, beyond some excellent work with hospitality workers. The spaces of the visitor economy are precarious, sexualised spaces for both employees and guests and there remains an urgent need to scope, scrutinise and offer solutions for this pernicious problem both in these spaces and within our own academic and student collectives.

Secondly, tourism (and hospitality and events) research can provide unique insights into sexual behaviours and its connections with the burgeoning worlds of virtual reality. Tomorrow's societies will be shaped by the digital revolutions of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), which will create new forms of being and living, generating a multitude of ethical and research questions (from digital and material inequalities to guest interactions with service and sexbots). Virtual reality and AI have significant implications for a multitude of 'real world' human relationships, such as the further objectification of female hospitality workers. 'Female' robots are built to care and 'male' robots to repair; the sex-tech industry is already worth \$30bn and set to explode (40% of men are reportedly interested in buying a sexbot) – with all its implications for sexual relations and sexual harassment as

most sex dolls and robots are bought by men. These new worlds of tomorrow, which we are creating today, are products of our highly gendered societies and its norms, biases and prejudices. We know that tourism and the sex industry are highly entwined, so there is much that tourism gender researchers can add to these debates. As these two areas illustrate, tourism gender research in the future will be both excitingly rich and immensely challenging. As we reach out to other fields and disciplines to explore emerging gender agendas over the next decade, we are constantly reminded of the complex, multi-layered worlds we inhabit and of the need to bring the world's fastest growing and most fragmented industry into the mainstream of academic and societal debates.

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