

Researcher contribution to Gender and Diversity in Tourism



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My research career began later than most. My first profession was as a hotel manager across different locations in Europe. It provided fertile ground for the research problems that animated my second, academic, career. I state this fact in the mode of a recovering addict, because for 25 years, I worked, travelled, slept (not so much of the sleeping compared to the others) and talked tourism and hospitality experiences. After moving steadily through the ranks, my final position was as Executive Assistant Manager at the Mayfair Intercontinental London. As a senior woman executive, I was a rarity in my work world. My executive peers were mainly men and I wondered how, and why, that was. My second career as an academic has been a passionate, frustrating, intellectually challenging quest to explore women and men's career patterns in hospitality and tourism. On reflection, my contribution to knowledge on gender in hospitality and tourism organisations can be viewed as a succession of theoretical and philosophic advances in why we should investigate gender and other diverse identities in multi-level studies in a meaningful and robust gender way. What distinguishes my research approach from many other gender studies in our field is that I take the feminist lens of centering the study on the participants' experiences, positioning myself reflexively in the research, with the study's ultimate aim to achieve social justice, in whatever small measure.

Career barriers for women managers in hospitality

My first research project investigated potential career barriers that might prevent women advancing to the top. It found that roadblocks for women were composed of visible and invisible aspects. A significant finding was that (youthful) age and gender (perceptions) intertwined to undermine women's ability to be positioned as flexible professionals, which reduced their perceptions of being - or considered to be talented employees and thus worthy of promotion. The study was empirically valuable as it consisted of a survey of *all* supervisory, trainee managers and senior women leaders across one specific geographical region, New Zealand, and Australia, one of five regional divisions in a leading international hotel chain. Due to enduring close industry connections, I had unparalleled access to the women employed by the different group brands. It was a revelation to me how hungry these women were motivated to share their career stories. In the survey open ended questions and in interviews, they enlarged upon painful experiences of being marginalised, side-lined, belittled and in some cases, having redundancy thrust upon them, when they had children or were considered 'too old'. Ultimately, I collected 320 valid surveys (more than 50% of the sample) and conducted 19 follow up interviews, being reluctantly forced by time constraint to refuse at least another 30 interview volunteers.

Workplace employment norms and processes

The internal conflict between my loyalty to the workplace norms I had been socialised into for so long, and the new understandings gained from using Joan Acker's (2006a, 2006b) theorising on gender(ed), class(ed) and race(d) organisational processes embedded in the employment practices of the hospitality and tourism sector is reflected in my methodological leap from the "women in management" (for example, Brownell, 1994) research approach, which focused on women as 'different to men' in a presumed meritocratic organisation at the beginning of the study, to my study's conclusion that hotel employment practices are an inequality regime. The regime is characterised by the discriminatory hiring, promotional and transfer processes that penalise women and privilege men encapsulated by one male General Manager's comment that women hires provided 'less bang for their buck; they were a poor return on investment because they would inevitably go off and have children (Mooney, 2009), thus excluding the swathes of women, who did not fit this prototype, from the rewarding careers enjoyed by their male peers. The way that work was arranged and the lack of any aspirational women role managers in senior operational roles confirmed the view that management was for men, whose family life would not interfere with their work-not least because their wives assumed the subordinate societal and career role of 'junior partners' (Acker, 2006a).

Intersections of age, gender, ethnicity, and class

The next pivotal leap in my theoretical understanding was built on experimenting with different ways to track the intersections between age, gender, ethnicity, and class in organisations. Occupational class was tricky to theorise and Scully and Blake Beard's (2006) view of class as providing an window into organisational processes, with organisational hierarchies signifying visible expressions of reward and penalty provided a useful introduction. But how to track varying expressions of individual and combined identities, and their intersectional effects? I began by absorbing Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) landmark conceptualisation of intersectionality and her later reflections on how intersectionality could be used (Crenshaw, 2017). Yuval-Davis's (2006) theorising on the challenges of researching intersections at the individual level was helpful, then I then drew from Evelina Holvino's (2010) view of intersections as a matrix of simultaneous intersections of diverse identities. It was a serendipitous indeed to meet Evangelina and discuss her concepts at an intersectional track at a Gender, Work and Organisation Conference. Cho and Ferree's (2010) advice to focus on process levels rather than individual levels, allied with Winker and Degele's (2011) example of a multi-level model for exploring intersecting differences enabled me to devise my own way of analysing the two central important data collected through memory-work and interviews, what factors enable people to enjoy long hospitality careers and how age, gender, ethnicity and class influences motivations to stay.

The study found four dimensions underpinning career longevity: 1. The recognition of employees' identity as a skilled professional, 2. The strength of warm social bonds, 3. The opportunities for change and further growth across different roles and 4. The variety and challenge involved in their job routines, regardless of their position. The study also yielded rich perspectives on how gendered intersections influenced the specific entry positions, such as housekeeping, which were readily available to women, however, did not have a career path to the most senior leadership ranks (Mooney et al., 2017). Additionally, the privileges and penalties attached to individuals with a variety of intersecting identity markers, for example, older male managers, influenced their individual career decisions and outcomes. The conclusion, however, showed that while participants -men and women -showed agency on work and personal life decisions, gender (for women) combined with youth, and the perception they would have children, was a considerable career limiter. Further, the

experience of being passed over for promotion in favour of younger men eroding women's sense of professional ability and career confidence (Ryan & Mooney, 2020).

Nimble intersectionality

The experience of carrying out and justifying a two-phase intersectional study centred on organisational processes felt like freefalling intellectual and methodological risk taking. There was many varying perspectives on how a study should be operationalised depending on the critical race and feminist perspective. Intersectional researchers, for example, Bilge (2013), in a series of polemic articles demonstrated the depths of dissent and debate on the many thorny theoretical positions associated with a specific approach. However, practical interpretations were few. Therefore, following the conclusion of my study, I was compelled to write a guide to enable the uninitiated to circumvent the unforeseen dilemmas that could potentially derail an intersectional study, if not considered carefully in advance. The 'nimble intersectionality' approach (Mooney, 2016) that I developed consisted of a series of detailed steps responding to four pivotal questions on how to 'overlay' other theoretical framings such as career theory on the intersectional research design, and within the specific tourism context (Mooney, 2018). Intersectionality theory continues to evolve (Crenshaw, 2017; Dillard & Osama, 2021, 2021; Ferree, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2016), however, too few tourism studies take an intersectional lens. Sadly, Cole's (2017) intersectional study on the group of poorest women and girls living in areas of tourism development who now have difficulty accessing fresh water is a rarity.

Memory-work and autoethnography

Clarifying the different ways to resolve research dilemmas remains a highlight for me when I adopt new and evolving feminist methodologies. For instance, my article on power imbalances and contradictions when incorporating memory-work in an intersectional study (Mooney, 2017) received helpful insights from Jennie Small (Small et al., 2007). Likewise, Irene Ryan and I compared the different approaches we used in our two different autoethnographical intersectional studies (Ryan & Mooney, 2018). While the contributions of my methodology articles may appear to be highly abstract, in practice, they stem from a problem-solving mindset, honed by my previous management career. My mission is to guide future gender and diversity researchers by demystifying and deconstructing complex, and sometimes opposing, theories into discrete guidelines. One *raison d'être* for publishing and writing is to indicate the exciting possibilities for researchers who engage with evolving diversity paradigms and tread a path less reassuringly familiar.

The exploration of gendered intersections remains my guiding lodestar and I agree with gender scholars who believe that gender intersecting with other dimensions of difference must remain the central core of gender studies, otherwise, gender runs the risk of being lost among other aspects of demographic identity. In this vein, I submitted a polemic conference contribution to the 2018 CHME conference which took issue with a conference track entitled "female leadership in hospitality management". Here, I rhetorically posed, then responded to the question of whether any conference would field a track on 'men's leadership' and if not, why not? Two years later, the full paper on how gender is researched in hospitality and tourism (Mooney, 2020) discussed how overdue and imperative it was to adopt contemporary paradigms and methodologies. The field and many journals remain ruled by stereotypical dogmas. I agree with Donna Chambers (see for example, Chambers, 2018) that we must change the promotion and reproduction of positivist quantitative studies in tourism studies, especially in employment, management, career, and leadership research, to contest the prevailing practice that gender be noted as a demographic

attribute, suggesting it is of no real consequence. My article provides evidence on why change is required and what alternative exciting approaches should be considered.

Times change and researchers change with time. In international writing collaborations now, I seek to embed gender in such a way that gender and ethnicity-based privileges and penalties under consideration are brought into the light and supported by empirical evidence. The less overt inclusion of gender perspectives could be viewed as a Trojan horse approach; however, more hopefully, my aim is to lead a new generation of researchers to research how gender effects intersecting with other categories of identity can influence the outcomes for different groups. Frequently the effects are profound, for example, women in hospitality and tourism were significantly more disadvantaged than men when Covid struck (Baum et al., 2020). More recently, when conceptualising how to develop a sustainable tourism workforce, it is clear that gender and ethnicity make a significant difference to individuals in tourism enterprises (LaPan et al., 2021), which decision makers at macro and meso levels need to recognise in their tourism development strategies (LaPan et al., 2021; Mooney et al., 2022).

In conclusion, gender and diversity matters now more than ever, because of the impression that equal opportunity legislation has wiped the slate clean of gender inequality in most countries. It is, of course, a fallacy. We rely on the next generation of gender researchers to move beyond recording disadvantage, to design new studies that can provide realistic strategies and solutions (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019) and combat the inequities that inevitably arise when equity initiatives are not included as an integral part of tourism development plans, or when retrofitting organisational processes across the sector.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to share my research with you, it is a privilege to serve the academy's gender and diversity researchers.

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