International Journal of Hospitality Management 88 (2020) 102397

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Hospitality Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhm

# Mentoring for gender equality: Supporting female leaders in the hospitality industry

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ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:*
Equality
Gender
Hospitality
Mentoring
Organisations

ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry struggles with problems with staff motivation, commitment and retention, whilst also having an entrenched glass ceiling that limits career opportunities for many women. Mentoring is a useful function to support and develop staff, and may be particularly important for helping women overcome gendered barriers to progression. This paper reports on a year-long qualitative study of a women's mentoring programme in the hospitality industry in the UK. Drawing on data from 71 interviews with a sample of 13 mentors and 14 mentees, the findings illustrate the persistent gendered obstacles women experience as they try and negotiate careers in masculinist hospitality organisations. The mentoring programme offers individual support for the mentees, and also begins to challenge gendered discourses of success in hospitality careers, illustrating that mentoring has an important role to play in both career development and in confronting gender inequality in the hospitality industry.

## 1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is notorious for offering poor working conditions and career outcomes, with jobs characterised by instability, low wages, long and often unsociable hours, and limited opportunities for career progression (Poulston, 2009). Careers in hospitality are frequently perceived to be short-term, while those who do stay for longer periods have to be highly mobile to achieve career success, moving location either with the same employer or across employers (Mooney et al., 2016; Cassel et al., 2018). Hospitality is thus often seen as a poor option for a successful and fulfilling career, and one incompatible with good work-family life balance, leading to problems with recruiting and retaining high quality individuals (Williamson, 2017; Mooney and Jameson, 2018). Not all hospitality jobs can be classed as poor quality, and many do forge successful careers in the sector (Mkono, 2010), but hospitality work has an image problem that is harming the industry in terms of staffing and talent management.

Hospitality work is also highly gendered. Although large numbers of women work in the industry, and women are twice as likely to be employers in hospitality and tourism compared to other industries (UNWTO, 2011), work in the sector remains segregated by gender, both horizontally and vertically, with women concentrated in lower status positions that attract poorer pay and opportunities for progression (Mooney and Ryan, 2009). Women are severely underrepresented at executive levels, and those who are in executive roles are more likely to be in micro-organisations (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). There is a clear and persistent glass ceiling in the hospitality industry. This is a cause for concern for both social justice reasons – it is morally wrong for a certain group of individuals to suffer entrenched obstacles and discrimination in the workplace – and for business reasons – the industry is losing out on the skills, vision and passion of many women who could make successful leaders. The hospitality industry thus needs to act to ensure that it is seen to offer desirable and attractive long-term career opportunities for all potential employees, and for women in particular.

In order to try to ensure that hospitality is seen as a positive career choice, and to retain motivated, talented and committed staff, employers and organisations need to invest in human resource management strategies to support staff development, try and ensure careers are fulfilling and satisfying, and thus appealing to individuals in the long term (Scott and Revis, 2008; Brown et al., 2015). One such intervention that has been shown to yield positive results in terms of increased commitment and satisfaction is mentoring (Kim et al., 2015). Mentoring results in durable benefits for both men and women, with those who have been mentored outperforming those who have not, even long after the mentoring relationship has ended (Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997). While mentoring is beneficial for men and for women, it may be particularly important for women in overcoming some gender-related barriers to advancement (Ragins and Scandura, 1997; Elliott et al., 2007). Mentoring is widely used in hospitality organisations, particularly to help socialise new employees into an organisation's culture

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2019.102397
Received 17 February 2019; Received in revised form 25 September 2019; Accepted 27 September 2019
Available online 09 October 2019

(Chang and Busser, 2017), but there has been less focus on using mentoring to help advance women's careers specifically.

This paper presents research on a UK-based sector-wide mentoring programme for women, which has the stated aim of helping to overcome some of the entrenched barriers that continue to stifle women's careers in events and hospitality. In so doing, the paper begins to address the paucity of research which has been identified in relation to both mentoring and hospitality (Kim et al., 2015; Chang and Busser, 2017) and gender and hospitality and tourism (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). Through applying a lens informed by theories of gendered organisations and work practices (Acker, 1990; Williams et al., 2012), the paper considers if and how mentoring can be used to support women's career aspirations and challenge continuing gender inequality in the hospitality industry. The paper begins by setting out the theoretical framework that guides the study. After introducing the case study of the women's mentoring programme, interview data are used to discuss the ways in which the programme draws attention to gendered barriers women may face in the workplace, and begins to redefine notions of 'success' in relation to hospitality careers. The discussion and conclusion draw out the wider implications related to the benefits and limitations of women's mentoring programmes for both empowering individual women and challenging wider gender inequalities in the hospitality industry.

## 2. Gender, work and leadership

This paper draws on the theory of gendered organisations, originally proposed by Joan Acker (1990), building on previous work of scholars including Cynthia Cockburn (1983, 1988), Kathy Ferguson (1984) and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977). There is now a well-established body of organisational literature that shows that supposedly gender neutral structures, practices and cultures in organisations are in fact gendered, based on implicit, but unstated, norms built around masculine[1] behaviours and attributes (Acker, 1990; Pesonen et al., 2009; Nentwich and Kelan, 2014). To say that an organisation is gendered means "that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation 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: 146). Acker (1990) identified five processes that reproduce gender in organisations: the division of labour, cultural symbols, workplace interactions, individual identities, and organisational logic. Consequently, gendering operates on multiple levels. At the level of culture, we think of certain jobs and organisations, such as housekeeping in hospitality, in gendered ways. Following on from this, the division of labour in organisations is often gendered, with women more likely to be found in positions associated with feminine attributes. At the level of structure, organisational policies and practices, such as those related to recruitment and promotion, reflect and reproduce gender through implicit assumptions about what makes a 'good' worker, as discussed further below. At the level of interaction, workers across roles and hierarchical levels may help reproduce inequality. Finally, at the level of identity, workers bring their gendered identities to work, and help form and perform those identities in gendered ways through their work (Acker, 1990; Britton and Logan, 2008).

Gender is thus an integral element of organisational structure and work, even when we do not recognise it as such, because gender is "present in processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power" (Acker, 1992: 567). The ideal organisational member is fully committed to work above all else, implying no outside domestic or caring responsibilities, or the presence of another individual to take on those roles to free the employee to put work first (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). If this ideal worker is to be considered worthy of management and leadership positions, particularly at executive level, then they also embody many masculine characteristics associated with success in business: things like decisiveness, competitiveness, assertiveness and confidence (Weyer, 2007; García and Welter, 2013; Galloway et al., 2015). While it is possible for both male and female employees to embody these masculine norms, and to commit fully to the workplace, research indicates that it is far harder for women to be perceived as authentic and credible when they perform masculinity in the workplace (Ollilainen and Calasanti, 2007; Kelan, 2008; Liu et al., 2015). Women who do enact masculine leadership behaviours often suffer social sanctions for being perceived to be cold, bitchy and unlikeable, and are far less likely than men to have successes attributed directly to them (Weyer, 2007; Mavin and Grandy, 2012; Kelan, 2013). Wider societal structures and practices also mean that women are much more likely than men to have outside caring responsibilities (children and, increasingly, elderly parents) (Evers and Sieverding, 2014; Friedman, 2015). It is, therefore, likely that the ideal employee is male (not to mention also white, middle class, straight and able-bodied) (Billing, 2011).The rhetoric of success is thus gendered, positioning men and women differently in terms of what it means to be successful in work and leadership contexts (Dashper, 2019).

Whilst critical management scholars acknowledge that work and organisations are gendered masculine, to the detriment of women and men who do not embody normative masculinity, it is the notion of gender neutrality which dominates in business settings. Advances in gender equality have certainly been achieved over the last 40 years, with more women in work and at higher levels and earning more money than ever before. Within business settings the rhetoric of meritocracy is widely accepted and the significance of gender and systematic inequalities in relation to women's and men's careers is downplayed (Lewis, 2006). It is easier to dismiss evidence of persistent gender inequality, such as shortage of women on boards and the well-reported gender pay gap, as historic remnants of previous practices, or individualised decisions that women make to 'choose' to put family before work aspirations (Boone et al., 2013). This results in an ideological dilemma that Kelan (2009) calls gender fatigue: individuals simultaneously acknowledge gender discrimination does exist *and* claim that their own workplaces and experiences are gender neutral. It is seen as more progressive to be gender blind, and so people often fail to see that what is claimed to be gender neutral behaviour and attributes – such as those commonly associated with good leadership – are modelled on stereotypically masculine behaviours. Very often, the status quo in organisations is so strongly masculine that gender becomes invisible: this is just how things are done.

The theory of gendered organisations has been used extensively and developed over the last thirty years, finding widespread support across different types of organisation, geographic context and job roles (Martin and Collinson, 2002; Hart, 2016; Stainback et al., 2016; Thébaud, 2016; Williamson, 2017; Zippel, 2018). Hospitality research has been slow to engage with these ideas from the broader critical management literature, but there is growing acceptance that hospitality careers and organisations are also gendered, and that this contributes to the continued marginalisation of women, especially in leadership positions (Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015; Pizam, 2017). To be perceived as committed and a potential leader in hospitality, individuals need to be highly mobile, prepared to work extremely long hours, and to self-promote and network effectively (Dashper, 2013; Mooney et al., 2017). These markers of success are taken to be gender neutral but, as discussed above, they are implicitly gendered masculine, making it much easier for male workers to embody the desired attributes and

[1] Following West and Zimmerman (2009), the concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine' are understood here to be aspects of the accountability structures of 'doing gender'. That is, masculinity and femininity relate to cultural conceptions of conduct believed appropriate for a man or woman to enact. That is not to say that only men can perform masculinity or women femininity, but because we are all held accountable for the ways in which we 'do' gender, the performance of masculinity and femininity is assessed differently based on who is involved.

behaviours than female workers (Costa et al., 2017a). Managers in hospitality "may be embedded within the masculine norm of managerial discourse to such an extent that they do not realize it" (Costa et al., 2017b: 152), making gender invisible and reinforcing the myth of gender neutrality in hospitality careers and organisations.

However, some jobs within hospitality are clearly gendered. Adib and Guerrier (2003) research showed how some domestic roles, such as housekeeping, continue to be naturalised as 'women's work', and thus accorded less visibility and status within hotels. Alberti (2014) research showed how gender, ethnicity and class affect experiences of hotel work. Kitchen work is also highly gendered. Swinbank (2002) and Neuman and Fjellström (2014) have discussed how cooking and food are gendered; with women associated with low status routine cooking in the home, and men more with haute cuisine and chef positions in public. Harris and Giuffre (2010a, 2010b) research on female professional chefs uses Acker (1990) theory of gendered organisations to consider how women negotiate their position in the masculine environment of the professional kitchen, and the challenges of working in such a gendered context and environment. Druckman (2010) also considers the ways in which ideas about what makes a 'great chef' are inherently masculine, excluding women from access to the highest levels of recognition and celebration. At the interactional level, sexual harassment is another important aspect of gendered jobs and organisations in the hospitality industry. A survey conducted in the UK by the union Unite found that 89% of hospitality workers had experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment at work, committed by both customers and managers (Topping, 2018). Research in this area thus illustrates that hospitality organisations are gendered in ways similar to other organisations. However, context – whether that be the job, organisation, sector, or geographic location – affects the experiences of working within gendered organisations (Britton and Logan, 2008). As Dellinger (2002: 21, italics in original) has shown, "*where* you work matters as much as *what* you do" and so there is need for further research on gendered jobs and organisations in the hospitality industry in order to understand better the experiences of working in these contexts, and to consider strategies for change towards greater gender equality.

Whilst it may still be difficult to recognise the depth of gender inequality in hospitality careers, clear evidence of disparity – such as the gender pay gap – is harder to ignore. Consequently, there is some growing pressure to support women explicitly in their careers and goals towards leadership positions, and a range of practices may be used to enable this. Mentoring is one such function that women may engage with in order to support them in their aspirations to succeed in masculine organisational contexts.

## 3. Mentoring

Mentoring is a "relationship between a person with advanced experience and knowledge and a more junior person who seeks assistance, guidance and support for their career, personal and professional development" (Fowler et al., 2007: 666). Mentoring has been shown to benefit both mentees and mentors in instrumental and psychological ways (Gayle Baugh and Sullivan, 2005). Within hospitality organisations, mentoring is often used as a management tool to transmit organisational values and culture, and to manage stress, support employee commitment and tackle labour turnover (Kim et al., 2015; Chang and Busser, 2017; Eissner and Gannon, 2018; Uen et al., 2018). Mentoring thus has an important role to play in beginning to address some of the persistent problems the hospitality industry faces in terms of motivation, commitment and retention (Sharples and Marcon-Clarke, 2019).

However, mentoring takes place within the context of gendered organisations, as outlined above, and is a practice through which gender is 'done' (West and Zimmerman, 2009). While both men and women benefit from being mentored and are as likely to take up mentoring opportunities, men gain more in terms of career advancement and promotions (Ibarra et al., 2010). However, mentoring may be particularly important for women in helping them overcome some of the gendered barriers to career advancement (Rose Ragins, 1996; O'Brien et al., 2010; Elliott et al., 2007). Mentoring can be both formal and informal, but women often struggle to access powerful and influential mentors informally, and so may be more reliant on formal mentoring programmes to support their career advancement and to access the "levels of power" that senior male figures in organisations can provide (Ramaswami et al., 2010, 390; Ibarra et al., 2010). Mentoring programmes designed to support women specifically can be important for the advancement of individual women's careers (Dashper, 2018), but also carry risk as they mark women out as a 'problem' to be 'fixed' to help them perform better within organisational structures and hierarchies (Acker, 2000; De Vries et al., 2006). That these contexts are (invisibly) built around an implicit masculine norm remains unacknowledged, and it is women who are positioned as deficient in failing to embody these norms and in need of interventions to live up to supposedly gender neutral expectations of good leadership and performance. Women's mentoring programmes can, therefore, be understood as paradoxical: they support women's career advancement by acknowledging a level of systematic underachievement in relation to male employees and putting in some measures to try and address this, but attribute this underperformance to failings on the part of individual women, rather than the gendered structures, practices and norms of organisations. Consequently, formal women's mentoring programmes may both challenge and reinforce gender inequality (Dashper, 2019).

Mentoring can be seen as "an intense personal relationship" (Eby et al., 2000: 2) and there is wide evidence to show that mentoring relationships can be dysfunctional - even outright damaging for mentees – as well as supportive and empowering (Gayle Baugh and Sullivan, 2005; Tolar, 2012). To try to minimise breakdown in mentoring relationships and to maximise positive outcomes, structured programmes and regular overview of individual relationships may be beneficial (Headlam-Wells et al., 2005). The women's mentoring programme in this study provides an example of a structured initiative, based on the explicit aim of supporting and empowering women in their careers in hospitality.

## 4. Case study and methods

The data presented below are drawn from a longitudinal study of a formal women's mentoring programme in the UK which has the stated aim 'to inspire, encourage and empower women in events, hospitality and related industry to be the best they can be'. Lasting for a year, the programme paired 15 women with 15 mentors (male and female) drawn from across the industry. Consequently, unlike most mentoring programmes within hospitality, the programme was not related directly to an organisation or any individual's job role, and so had potential to support mentees in their professional development beyond their current role and/or organisation, looking at their career in the broader sense. Applications were invited from across the industry to become a mentee on this free initiative, and successful individuals were selected on the basis of interview. The programme required mentors and mentees to commit to meeting every month (face to face, by phone or video meeting), for approximately two hours, and to attend a number of group events focused on career development. Mentees also took part in a group fundraising activity, and were required to submit monthly progress reports to the programme founder. Mentors were supported by a mentor coach, and encouraged to offer mentees (their own and others on the programme) access to additional activities to enhance career prospects, such as attending conferences and board meetings. The programme was highly structured and individual mentor-mentee partnerships monitored to try to avoid some of the potential pitfalls identified in the mentoring literature.

The research took place over the full year of the programme. The researcher attended the development days, observed and took notes, and talked informally with mentors and mentees. Interviews were

conducted with participants at three points during the programme in order to track changes and developments; the first interview took place within the first two months of the programme, the second interview around the halfway point, and the third in the final month or immediately after the programme finished. The researcher was provided access to the participants and development days by the programme founder, but all participants voluntarily chose to take part in the research, or not. A total of 71 interviews was conducted, lasting between 20 and 90 min. The majority of interviews (55) lasted over an hour, with the shorter interviews taking place in the middle of the mentoring programme and acting as more of a 'catch-up' on progress. There were 12 women and 3 men acting as mentors within the programme, with ages ranging from 32 to 60. All were in senior positions in the industry, and included roles such as CEO, general manager (GM), and founder/owner of companies. The mentees ranged from recent university graduates, to middle management and those seeking to break through into senior management, and included three business owners, with ages ranging from 22 to 45. Fourteen of the fifteen mentees took part in interviews, as did 13 of the 15 mentors, although all consented to involvement in observations and informal discussions. Ten of the mentees were interviewed three times, and four on two occasions. Nine of the mentors were interviewed three times, and three once. An additional interview was conducted with the mentor coach who designed and oversaw the programme.

The interviews were conducted mainly over the phone, although the researcher had met all participants previously at one of the development days. The first round of interviews covered reasons for being involved in the programme, career histories, expectations and goals, and previous experiences of mentoring. The second round tracked progress, development of goals, mentoring relationships and experiences on the programme. The final interviews covered progress towards goals, views on the programme, and future aspirations. Given that the mentoring programme was set up to explicitly address some of the gendered barriers in the hospitality sector, all participants were aware of this and were asked to what extent they felt such a programme was needed and an effective mechanism for supporting women in their careers in hospitality (see Dashper, 2019). However, beyond that, questions did not ask respondents to explicitly consider their experiences in gendered terms, although many did do so, as discussed below. Interviews were loosely structured and flexible to enable discussion of other relevant points.

All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed in full. The transcripts and field notes from the development days were thematically coded by the author (Braun et al., 2019). Data were openly coded initially, and then themes were developed from this exercise, supported by insights from the literature. In the context of the discussion developed in this paper, relevant themes included gendered barriers and obstacles, motherhood and its influence on careers, and ideas of 'success' in hospitality careers. The following sections present findings drawn from the interviews. Identifying features have been removed to protect anonymity.

## 5. Findings

A number of themes emerged from the analysis of the data, including the benefits accrued to mentees from participation on the programme (Dashper, 2018) and the extent to which mentors and mentees identified with and supported the programme's stated goal to begin to address gender inequality in the hospitality and events industry (Dashper, 2019). The discussion below focuses on two further themes: the gendered barriers mentors and mentees have experienced and/or observed in hospitality careers, and their various ways of defining 'success' in relation to both participation on the programme and individual careers in hospitality. Interviews were conducted at three points over the year so the number presented in brackets after illustrative quotes relates to whether it was taken from interview round one, two or three.

### 5.1. Gendered barriers and obstacles in women's careers

#### 5.1.1. Gendered organisations and practices

Many participants on the programme identified gendered barriers and experiences in their own careers, and in their observations of others, that illustrate the gendered nature of hospitality organisations and careers. Gender neutrality is such a widely accepted practice in business that women, and anyone else who feels they do not really fit into the dominant practices and preferred behaviours, blame this on themselves and not on the exclusionary consequences of the masculine norm of the ideal worker and organisation, as this mentor explained:

> Sometimes you feel like a fake, you're in a boardroom full of people and you think 'oh my god, I'm really not an expert and everyone else here knows about it', but actually no one else does know, in most instances most people are in the same boat, but I think women are much harder on themselves in terms of their abilities. They're much less likely to put themselves forward for things if they don't think they're 110% able to do the job, they wouldn't say 'well look, I'm 90% there so I'll go for it and make up the 10%', whereas men would. (Mentor, 1)

Boardrooms and executive levels of organisations are strongly masculine - even macho - spaces, and women may feel isolated and different, as if they do not really belong. In contrast, many men feel much more comfortable with the masculine norms of dominance and leadership, as they are broadly consistent with normative masculine characteristics, and so can act and feel like they do belong in these spaces, even if their own abilities and achievements are somewhat lacking (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2013). As the gendered nature of management discourse remains invisible and unacknowledged (Costa et al., 2017b), women feel themselves to be inadequate and failing because of their own shortcomings, and not because of the hostile norms and practices that subtly advantage men and disadvantage women. This can make women feel excluded and out-of-place in some organisational contexts, as this mentee explained:

> What I do is very male-driven and there are a lot of very dominant male characters in the industry who sadly still only want to deal with men, I just think it's a very male space. I'm in a very male environment in the sense of the people I work with and I've had to force myself to push on, if you know what I mean, to feel that I can have space there, that my opinions and views are valuable. (Mentee, 1)

Feeling like an outsider and having to fight for credibility contributes to the feeling many women have of being less competent than their male peers, who tend not to feel similar disassociation from the norms of leadership and desired organisational behaviours (Lewis, 2006). Women can often feel excluded and lacking in traditional organisations, although they may struggle to explain this and fail to attribute it to the invisible masculine norms that position women as outsiders (Kelan, 2009). Consequently, many women seek their own spaces where they feel more comfortable, as this mentor explained:

> It's incredible to me how many women I meet who are doing brilliantly in their careers in events and hospitality, but the only ones who are ever at senior positions founded their own companies. I would love to see women succeeding within companies, within traditional structures, and not always having to be pushed out to start their own business. It seems so unfair. (Mentor, female, 1).

Although there are some women in executive positions in the hospitality industry, leading women may be more likely to have founded their own organisations than to be succeeding in traditional masculine structures and cultures. This may create additional issues, as junior women then have few female role models in traditional organisations to

inspire them and show that women can succeed in these contexts:

> All my managers are men and I don't really feel like I've got any female role models or mentors to look up to in the company and, yes, I guess it's a little bit frustrating when you don't see any women ahead of you to kind of inspire and motivate you. (Mentee, 1).

Many of the participants in the study, both mentors and mentees, identified the gendered cultures and practices within traditional hospitality organisations, and the resulting feelings of isolation and exclusion this can produce. The mentoring programme was seen as one way to begin to overcome some of this, by supporting and empowering women to feel that they can be successful, and by providing role models who have already succeeded.

#### 5.1.2. Maternal walls and the motherhood penalty

The concept of the maternal wall has been used to explain the detrimental situation of mothers in the workplace, and the 'motherhood penalty' in terms of lower wages is particularly prominent for highly skilled women (Crosby et al., 2004; England et al., 2016). This is due in part to the necessary career breaks required to have children, and possible subsequent reductions in availability and flexibility of female workers who also have childcare responsibilities. Mothers of young children are often unable to embody the masculine norm of the ideal worker in hospitality, who is able to commit to work above all else and be constantly available to respond to the organisation's needs (Costa et al., 2017b). This mentee felt that since returning to work after maternity leave, and coming back on reduced hours, she had to 'prove' her commitment and worth:

> I do feel a bit lost since coming back, and you kind of lose your confidence and I want to build that back up to where I used to be before I went off. There's been some changes in my role and in my team and I'm just trying to find my place again within the team, and leading that team and showing to the company that I'm back and although I only work 20 h a week I can still do the job. (Mentee, 1).

Women returning to work after maternity leave may feel displaced as the organisation may have moved on and developed without them, and they need to reclaim their position. This may be particularly challenging for women working part time, as less than full time hours is often seen as a lack of commitment, and unsuitability for management positions. Boone et al. (2013) argue that what they call 'self-imposed barriers' (including commitment to domestic responsibilities and childcare) are now more significant than workplace barriers in holding back women's careers in hospitality. However, as the comments of the mentee quoted above illustrate, organisational norms and practices continue to actively exclude those who do not conform to the expected practice of complete commitment, exemplified through full-time working. Women with external caring responsibilities who 'choose' to work part time may be being held back by organisational practices that position them as less committed than full time workers. Mothers remain locked in a double bind when they wish to try and 'have it all' and combine work and motherhood. They are positioned as less committed in their careers, yet feel they have less time and energy to devote to being a 'good' mother:

> There's always the challenge of parenthood: how do you combine a successful career with having children and giving the children everything they deserve? So not being able to be there for sports day and all those things. I think that is a really big challenge for women and a really big guilt trip. (Mentee, 1).

Male workers and fathers express such concerns much less frequently, as gender norms do not position the roles of 'father' and 'career-man' in opposition. Younger women in the hospitality industry are aware of the motherhood penalty that might await them, and are concerned about the consequences should they 'choose' to try and balance motherhood and their careers:

> I applied for the scheme because I want to improve more so I can learn as much as I can in these next few years before I have a child, so I'm in a better place for when I come back. Thinking about my career in the next couple of years I need to be in a position to get maternity pay, and somewhere I might be able to work flexibly, they're all important things that women need to think about if they want to have children. (Mentee, 1).

Women in their late twenties and early thirties are aware of the difficulties of trying to balance career and motherhood, and recognise that they will probably have to make sacrifices to their careers and/or family life. Initiatives like the mentoring programme are one way they can upskill further and try to mitigate any future career penalties they may experience.

### 5.2. (Re)negotiating ideas of 'success' in events and hospitality careers

The mentoring programme in this study was built around the premise of empowering women to 'be the best they can be', and this may mean challenging and broadening traditional ideas of success and leadership in hospitality and events. As the founder explained:

> I think the women and men that are successful are hopefully role models to demonstrate all sorts of different positions, different ways. People with kids, people without kids, older women, younger women, women who have set their own businesses up. I suppose it's just that whatever you are and whatever you want to be then there's someone out there that's done it, so if they can do it, you can, you can make yourself successful, whatever that might be. It might be that you want a family and that's what you want to do, or it might be that you want to get to the top of your business. (Mentor, 1).

This is a potentially radical attitude, as notions of career success are usually tied to rational criteria like salary, position within an organisation's hierarchy and number of promotions (Heslin, 2005). These supposedly objective criteria are related to the masculine norms of work, as discussed above, and reflect the power and influence of an individual's networks and connections, as well as their work performance. Research has consistently shown that networking usually operates to the advantage of men and disadvantage of women (Benschop, 2009; Berger et al., 2015). Consequently normative ideas of 'success' in hospitality organisations may work to side-line women, who may struggle to embody those implicitly masculine norms.

This ethos of redefining success was carried through the mentoring programme. At the end of the year a variety of 'success stories' were reported, illustrating the diversity of achievements and practices that were defined as successful outcomes on the programme. For this mentee 'success' was a new role with management responsibilities:

> My goal was to get a new job, a management position. I think I thought that I couldn't be a manager because I didn't have managerial experience, but through the work that me and my mentor did, she helped me understand that I could and where I want my career to go, and now I'm in an organisation where I'm being a manager for the first time. (Mentee, 3).

For some, it was having the support and guidance of a mentor that helped them through a turning point in their professional lives:

> I've got a lot out of this programme, I came to quite an important crossroads in my lifetime, going from education into employment, and for me, having guidance through that was invaluable, it was brilliant, it helped me maintain direction and focus on my objectives … it's been an opportunity for me to reflect on how I'm getting on in the workplace, think about challenges that I face and make a strategy of how to overcome them and better myself from it. (Mentee, 3).

For others it was about having the confidence to challenge

themselves and stretch into a new role:

> I think it's helped me with prioritising my goals, because I felt a bit lost this time last year, not knowing where I was going. I'd returned from maternity leave and I was at a bit of a crossroads, I'd been doing the same job for about seven years and I wanted a better work-life balance for my family, which I feel this new role will help me to achieve. I just wanted to broaden my skillset really but I think I was quite scared. It was safe to just stay doing what I was doing and I'd done it for seven years, but my mentor helped me, encouraged me to take risks, to step out of my comfort zone. (Mentee, 3).

The broad notion of 'success' adopted through the mentoring programme enabled some participants to recognise that they did not need to conform to traditional, often masculine, norms of business behaviour to be taken seriously, and this is an empowering insight for anyone, especially a young woman at the beginning of her career:

> The mentee I'm involved with is very young and for her it's been about understanding that she can be herself and that she doesn't have to be like other people … I think she presents herself a lot better now, she's developed a lot of confidence, she understands that you've got to be authentic, you don't have to put on a front to get on with people. (Mentor, 3).

Success for some meant a promotion, a new job, or even setting up their own business, but the programme was flexible enough to incorporate more personal goals and outcomes that usually might not be deemed measures of achievement in relation to career. One mentee began the programme running her own small business, but by the end of the year had returned to full time employment in a large organisation to provide her with more stability and predictability, which was what she needed at that point in her life:

> My mentee is in a particular phase in her life where she's getting married and she's starting to think about a family, and she's actually taken the opportunity to get back into a more structured working environment and develop some other skills and be in a position to go and start a family and not worry so much about paying the bills for a little while. So, is it newsworthy? No. But is it really important to her as an individual? Absolutely. (Mentor, 3).

The decision to return to employment and terminate her business could be seen as a regressive step in terms of career success and ambition. However, in the broader context of this individual's life it was recast as a successful outcome and one that would facilitate further goals and aspirations. In such ways the mentoring programme helped reset the parameters around which evaluations of 'success' in relation to individual careers are made.

## 6. Discussion

Hospitality organisations are gendered, built around an implicit masculine norm that defines the ideal employee and sets out expectations for what a successful career and a good leader will be (Costa et al., 2017a). These expectations make it difficult, but not impossible, for women to embody the norms and behaviours required for success, yet those expectations are masked in an aura of gender neutrality which makes it very difficult to identify, let alone challenge, this subtle form of gender discrimination (Kelan, 2009). Research on careers in hospitality has shown the systematic inequality women in leadership face as they struggle to negotiate their identities as credible leaders *and* women (Pizam, 2017). Heilman (2001) notes that women in the workplace suffer from many biased judgements and evaluations in their careers as a result of the deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that lead to a perceived lack of fit between 'leader' and 'woman'.

Hospitality careers in general are beset by a host of difficulties in terms of staff motivation, commitment and retention (Mooney et al., 2016), and mentoring has been identified as an effective mechanism to begin to tackle some of these issues (Chang and Busser, 2017; Uen et al., 2018). Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018) have highlighted absence of mentoring and systematic support as important barriers to women's achievement of leadership positions in the hospitality industry. The mentoring programme discussed in this paper is designed to offer such support to women in hospitality, and to encourage them to aspire to positions of leadership. The participants on the mentoring programme – both mentors and mentees – identified a range of gendered barriers and obstacles that women face in their careers in the sector, and provided strong evidence to support the notion that hospitality organisations and careers are implicitly gendered male and built around masculine managerial discourse (Costa et al., 2017b). Women are thus placed at an immediate disadvantage, as they do not appear to embody the expected attributes and behaviours associated with success. Women may thus feel like they do not fit in the higher echelons of hospitality organisations, and may attribute this sense of being an outsider to their own failings and not to the gendered structures, hierarchies and practices that implicitly exclude them.

Hospitality organisations, as with most contemporary workplaces, assume employees are able and willing to commit to work above all else, and the demand for high levels of temporal flexibility is standard (Costa et al., 2017a). For many individuals – and particularly mothers of young children – this does not reflect the reality of their lives, which involve caring and responsibility for others. Many of the women in this study identified the challenges of balancing motherhood and a career in hospitality, and this was confounded by the sense that to be perceived as a committed worker, they should be able to dedicate themselves to their jobs full time. Young women in Nentwich and Kelan (2014) study recognised that it would be impossible for them to concentrate equally on both family and career and that they would need to make sacrifices in at least one area, and the participants in the current mentoring programme also recognised some of the complexities they would, did or do face in trying to continue with their careers after having children. This represents a problem for the hospitality industry, in that committed and talented women may suffer loss of confidence and motivation in their careers post-maternity, exacerbating their sense of not belonging in the organisation and potentially increasing the likelihood that they will leave the industry. A re-evaluation of what it means to be a committed employee in the hospitality industry is necessary in order to retain and capitalise on the talents of all staff, especially women and those returning to work after having children.

While the mentoring programme discussed in this paper did highlight many of the gendered barriers and obstacles that women in hospitality experience in their careers, it also suggested ways in which small changes could be brought about in order to challenge deep-rooted and often invisible persistent gender inequality. Involvement in the mentoring programme was empowering for the female mentees, and led to tangible outcomes in terms of improved confidence, ability to set goals and plan their careers, and strengthened networks (Dashper, 2018). This is hugely important and beneficial for those individual women, and may have a wider impact in terms of their future behaviours and practices, possibly as leaders within the hospitality industry. However, women's leadership and development programmes have been criticised for doing nothing to challenge wider gender inequality and failing to address the responsibility and actions of organisations more broadly (Adamson et al., 2016). To some extent this is a valid critique of this mentoring programme as well, as it concentrated predominantly on individual careers and achievements, and participants expressed ambiguity about the gender focus of the initiative (Dashper, 2019). However, as reported above, the mentoring programme did pose some subtle, but potentially radical, challenges to wider gender discourses that permeate hospitality management and define careers.

What it means to be 'successful' on the programme and at different points in a hospitality career was continually questioned and re-imagined on this mentoring scheme. In normative managerial

discourse, 'success' means achievement in terms of high salary, hierarchical status and promotions (Heslin, 2005). These measures of success were not discarded on this programme, and promotions and new jobs were celebrated as strong achievements. But so too were other outcomes that are not usually incorporated into concepts of career success. Feeling comfortable with being one's authentic self or deciding to take what could be seen as a backward career step in order to support personal goals and needs were also celebrated as successes, challenging the narrow definition of success that pervades masculine managerial discourse. While this may appear in some ways to be a small challenge it is not insignificant. Gender researchers have demonstrated the intractability of the gender order which positions men and women as complementary and opposite, yet inherently unequal (Schippers, 2007). In all aspects of life, including organisations, gender is 'done' repeatedly through social interaction, in ways that reinforce the binary and hierarchical positions of male and female, masculine and feminine. While some theorists have suggested it may be possible to 'undo' and radically rework and deconstruct gender (Deutsch, 2007), studies have repeatedly shown the persistence of gender hierarchies and discrimination, within and beyond organisations (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014). Consequently, it may be more likely that gender will be 'redone', rather than 'undone', in small yet significant ways that begin to challenge normative ideas, discourses and practices (Connell, 2010; Dashper, 2016). The approach on this mentoring programme of celebrating broad and diverse examples of 'success' can be seen to challenge the dominance of masculine norms of success, which are narrowly defined around supposedly objective and universal standards. Through challenging these masculine norms, and redefining success around more inclusive criteria, the programme begins to subtly 'redo' both gender and success in the context of hospitality organisations and careers.

There are, of course, some limitations to this study. Based on just one case study of a single mentoring programme in the UK the insights presented here cannot be seen to be generalizable, and further research is needed to explore the gendered aspects of hospitality careers and organisations, and the potential of mentoring to begin to tackle these issues. However, in contrast to much of the existing literature on hospitality careers and mentoring, this paper is based on a qualitative approach informed by feminist insights that argue that individual personal experiences, as represented in the interview data here, do have broader explanatory power beyond the specific stories told. More qualitative research in this area will help deepen these insights, and add further complexity to understandings of hospitality careers as gendered practices. Future research could consider these issues in relation to different types of job within hospitality, at different hierarchical levels, and within diverse organisational and national contexts. Mooney et al. (2017) intersectional analysis of hotel careers illustrates the importance of critical and qualitative research into different hospitality practices, and further work will open up new lines for debate and inquiry in order to try to ensure that hospitality offers a satisfying, rewarding and empowering career path for all.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper makes two important contributions to the literature on hospitality careers. First, it demonstrates the potential of mentoring to not only help address some of the well documented challenges faced in terms of staff motivation, commitment and retention in the hospitality industry, but also to empower women specifically in their careers. Mentoring provides focused professional and personal support, and so can help a mentee feel valued and understood, increasing the likelihood of them staying within an organisation, or an industry, and aspiring to leadership positions (Kim et al., 2015). Mentoring also helps women tackle some of the gendered barriers to career progression through providing access to senior and influential figures who can support the mentee, open up new networks and guide the individual woman to aim high in her own career (Ramaswami et al., 2010). The mentoring programme discussed in this paper illustrates the productive potential of mentoring to empower women in hospitality careers, helping with talent management and fighting persistent gender inequality.

Second, the paper demonstrates the importance of gender analysis to understanding hospitality careers and organisations. There is a paucity of research that takes a gender perspective and draws on wider gender theory in order to understand hospitality work, despite strong evidence to show that work in the sector is gendered on multiple levels (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). Taking gender as a central construct through which to understand hospitality organisations and careers, this paper has demonstrated that these structures and practices are implicitly but usually invisibly gendered masculine, and this helps explain the persistent glass ceiling in the hospitality sector. Gender is more than just a variable to be measured and is, rather, a pervasive system that affects what we do, how we do it, why we do it in those ways, and the consequences of our practices and behaviours. Hospitality research would benefit from more engagement with wider theories of gender and gendered organisations, and this paper illustrates some of the potential of such a perspective to open up new and different insights on the hospitality industry and careers.

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