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Gender, flexibility and the 'ideal tourism worker'

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Introduction

Tourism employment is growing globally at a rate of 2.4% per annum, accounting for 9.4% of 277 million jobs worldwide in 2014 (World Travel, 2015). Despite rapid growth rates in tourism employment and the tourism industry's large labour market share, tourism is characterised by very high employee turnover rates (Kim, 2014). This is partly because work in the tourism industry is a low-paid occupation with challenging working conditions and limited opportunities for growth, especially for women (Baum, 2007; Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, & Torres, 2014; Costa, Carvalho, Caçador, & Breda, 2012). The number of women participating in the tourism industry has increased, for example through tourism development programs that encourage women to become female entrepreneurs (Singh, 2007). Despite this, women in particular continue to encounter a host of barriers which are manifested in gendered vertical and horizontal segregation (Ramos, Rey-Maqueira, & Tugores, 2002).

Apart from the seasonal nature of tourism employment and it being characterized by casual, and short-term employment conditions, low wage levels and decreased job security, one of the most significant issues that people working in tourism face, relates to the hours employees are expected to work (Stacey, 2015). Tourism is notorious for having very long work hours, at unsocial times and days (e.g. the weekend).Besides, shift work is very common, mainly because tourist services are available 24 h a day, seven days a week (Deery & Jago, 2009). Hence, 'flexibility', in terms of the employee being available whenever the employer needs her or him, has become a sought-after or 'ideal' tourism employee characteristic. Tourism's long working hours also mean that the attainment of a work-life balance is increasingly getting harder for tourism employees. Aspirations for a greater balance between work and personal life, is a sentiment felt more acutely by female tourism employees who often have more household responsibilities than male employees (Clegg, 2014; Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014). This calls for an examination of the role of that gender plays within tourism labour.

Theorizing on gender and organizations has become increasingly complex, due to the criticisms of feminist scholars who deconstruct the apparent gender-neutrality of organizations (Acker, 1990; Anna Wahl, 1998). Feminist studies show that organizations actively reinforce gender differences, gendered power relations and the male-dominated gender order, both in paid and non-paid work (Acker, 2012; Kantola, 2008). It is thus essential to question the ways in which gender influences what is perceived as an 'ideal worker' characteristic. One of the ways of doing this is by uncovering the ways in which tourism managers 'do gender' when taking recruitment decisions (Risman & Davis, 2013). But how can we bring to light evidence of how tourism managers and employees are doing gender? One way of doing this is to focus on how tourism workers' social reproductive gender roles influence economic roles.

The social reproduction economy is built of all the acts that people complete in order to maintain life on a daily basis and intergenerationally (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Social reproductive roles, that is, responsibility for completion of these largely unpaid labour acts are highly gendered, with women completing most social reproductive tasks. Consequently, social reproductive gender roles (e.g. carer for an elderly relative) can influence productive roles (e.g. tour guide). Hence, an investigation into how tourism workers' social reproductive roles influence their economic roles offers insight into how gender 'is being done' in tourism labour. Building on recent research that highlights the complex negotiations between social reproductive gender roles and tourism entrepreneurial roles in the context of tourism handicraft entrepreneurs in Greece (Bakas, 2014),

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the present study takes a feminist economics angle to investigate how gender influences 'ideal worker' discourse in tourism, in the context of Portuguese tourism managers. Creating gender analyses of tourism processes is essential for a more holistic representation of today's reality (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014). A recent gender-aware bibliometric analysis of tourism journals (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015) shows that tourism gender research remains marginal to tourism enquiry, which is where the present study fills a gap in tourism knowledge. Past research has largely focused on economic and management approaches to tourism labour discourse, instead of attempting to understand the underlying causes of inequality and how they relate to wider social, cultural, economic and political considerations, with some exceptions (Ladkin, 2011). The present study responds to the call for more critical research that challenges hegemonies and affects social change, by focusing on how gender influences tourism labour (Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010). We scrutinize systems of knowledge production by building upon investigations into the role of gender in tourism (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996) and question 'who controls what' and 'how hierarchies are built and maintained' (Swain, 2004, p. 102).

The critical view of relevant literature and methodological approaches gives rise to a guiding research question which has three supplementary research questions:

'How do gender roles related to flexibility influence tourism managers'/recruiters' conceptualisations of the 'ideal tourism worker"?

- *'How is flexibility, as a tourism worker characteristic, defined?'*
- *'How do gendered perceptions of flexibility influence 'ideal worker discourse' in tourism recruitment?'*
- *'What is the connection between social reproductive gender roles, expected tourism employee flexibility and 'ideal tourism worker' discourse?'*

Building on recent academic progress in the area of gender, flexibility and tourism labor, the research objectives are influenced by feminism and have as their primary goal to interrogate and be critical of dominant economic theories surrounding tourism labor.

Flexibility and gender in tourism labour

Situating the study topic at the intersection of the bodies of literature on feminist economics, gender and tourism labour, gaps in these related literatures are identified.

Feminist economics and social reproduction gender roles

Neoclassical economics theorising is based upon the concept of 'rational man' theory, which is an essentially masculinist conception of an economically active individual being a separate self, unaffected by his surroundings, a type of person that Barker and Kuiper (2003) refer to as "homo economicus" (p. 2). However, the applicability of this economically rational, separate self, active, economic agent model to women who are conceptualized as attached to their families, raises concern (Harkness, 2008). An oxymoronic situation arises from societal representations of women as altruistic care-givers, and neoclassical economic discourses which construct all economically active bodies as self-interested agents. The antithesis between these two opposite constructions of how women who work should act, gives rise to entropic re-formulations of how 'the economy' is experienced by individuals. Feminism encourages conceptualisations of 'the economy' in terms of social actors dynamically influencing interdependent economic processes, which is known as a turn towards a focus on 'social provisioning' (Power, 2013). Feminist economists propose a refashioning in the way we think about society, as they do not take capitalism to be "natural, inevitable and beneficial" (Barker, 2005, p. 2195) and thus question current economic theorizing's universal applicability and apparent ability to transcend gender roles.

Whilst government policies shape many aspects of the economy, it is also shaped by private dynamics. Social reproduction represents these private dynamics and related labour, which are largely carried out by women. In fact, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in 2010, women in member-countries spent at least twice the amount of time on caring, as men did on caring (Veerle, 2011). Social reproduction is gendered by being largely associated with femininity. Investigating social reproductive gender roles can thus help reveal the underlying hierarchy that distinguishes the economic from the "political and cultural superstructure" (Vosko, 2003, p. 331). Since social reproduction is essential to the capitalist process of accumulation as women's unpaid labour allows men to work for longer hours. Hence, changes in social reproductive gender roles can also influence economic roles. In tourism, focusing on social reproductive gender roles can reveal how workers' economic roles are influenced in various complex ways as illustrated in research on tourism workers in Central America (Ferguson, 2010). For example, tourism recruiters' decisions to hire are based on conceptualisations of who constitutes an 'ideal worker'. However, there is limited research on how social reproductive gender roles influence recruitment processes within tourism.

The role of gender in ideal tourism worker discourse

Gender roles can be conceptualised as fluid processes, rooted within a historical context, which inform and sustain the normative, hierarchical subordination that shapes people's life chances (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Research into gendered tourism labour until now has focused on the gender pay gap, sexist work practices, vertical and horizontal segregation, abusive employment practices and sexual harassment (Muñoz-Bullón, 2009; Poulston, 2008; Skalpe, 2007). However, there is limited literature on the underlying reasons why these problematic issues exist, with the focus rather being on measuring the extent to which these issues occur. Even studies that address the gendered workplace barriers, such as the 'glass ceiling effect', are limited in their ability to address *how* gender roles influence economic roles (Boone et al., 2013).

Tourism jobs are feminised, low paid, low status, low-skilled, seasonal and precarious with few development opportunities or employment rights (Parrett, n.d.; Santos & Varejão, 2007). In the OECD area, in 2014, tourism workers were mainly female (55.9%), whereas earnings in hotels and restaurants were 37% lower than average earnings in the economy as a whole (Stacey, 2015). Tourism employment is also characterized by high gendered vertical and horizontal segregation. While men are over-represented in managerial positions, particularly in top-management, women are usually employed in typically female areas (Zhong & Couch, 2007), that are regarded as less skilled, and as a result have worse employment conditions and lower wages (Costa, Carvalho, & Breda, 2011; Jordan, 1997).

Despite the persistence of gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the sector, the main barriers to women's career advancement in tourism are the invisible ones, which are harder to pinpoint. In fact, the existence of a male culture in organizations, coupled with certain organizing practices, is the most relevant obstacle mentioned in the literature on women managers in the tourism field (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). Although Boone et al. (2013) consider that self-imposed barriers and personal priorities have become more important than workplace barriers in explaining the lack of women at the top, Mooney and Ryan (2009) suggest that the idea of 'genuine choice', ignores the existence of visible and invisible organizational and societal barriers that constrain women's options. Similarly, the apparently gender-neutral idea of an 'ideal worker', who is always flexible and able to accommodate work demands, may mask and reinforce gendered stereotypes in the workplace.

Images of the unencumbered worker, who has no care-related responsibilities and is totally dedicated to work, have become stronger over the past decade, and employees are increasingly expected to work around the clock (Acker, 2012). According to organizational logic, jobs and hierarchies are abstract categories filled by disembodied workers who only exist at work and have no priorities outside of work. The type of worker that is closest to this abstract and disembodied worker is the male worker, whose life is centered on a full-time job and whose wife takes care of his personal needs and children. Therefore, the concept of 'work' is implicitly gendered and reinforces the separation between the public and the private sphere. Workers who are more committed to paid employment and have fewer obligations outside of it are seen as 'naturally' more apt for positions of responsibility and authority, because they have more availability-related flexibility (Acker, 1990). This separation of production and reproduction perpetuate traditional images of masculinity and femininity and traditional gender role divisions (Acker, 2012).

Gendered social reproductive roles can influence potential employees' availability and cause what is termed as the 'lack of fit' (Heilman, Manzi, & Braun, 2015, p. 93),i.e. an incongruity between perceptions of employees' abilities and the job requirements. Research shows that recruiters may include or exclude employees based solely on their gender as recruiters adhere to gendered constructions of "who is a risk" (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p. 460). The risk is that the worker will not be available to work whenever the employer requires them to.

Defining flexibility

In tourism, one of the most common reasons for people leaving the tourism industry is the lack of a work-life balance, since it is common that tourism employees are expected to work long and unsocial hours (Blomme, Van Rheede, & Tromp, 2010). Indeed, in hotels, one of the main barriers to women becoming managers is the "long hours culture", which is an embedded norm, modelled on the presumption of 12-hour work days (Mooney & Ryan, 2009, p. 204). The long working hours tradition in tourism is so embedded, that hotel managers interviewed in Australia and New Zealand concluded that one needs to be a 'workaholic to succeed' (Mooney & Ryan, 2009, p. 201). The ability of an employee to be 'flexible' is hence a key concept guiding recruitment decisions in tourism, which is why it has been chosen as a topic of focus in this article.

The term 'flexibility' is an ambiguous and ill-defined concept. Therefore, it is pertinent to establish a working definition for this paper. The concept of 'internal numerical flexibility' relates to working hours and overtime (Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). Bettio, Rubery, and Smith's (2000) suggestion to divide work flexibility into 'employer-friendly flexibility' and 'employee-friendly flexibility' is also useful in conceptualising the definition of flexibility used in this paper. 'Employee-friendly' flexibility is meant to benefit an employee's work-life balance, by providing the employee with the flexibility to have more control over when he/she works. Flexible working times are often suggested as a solution to decrease tourism employee turnover, by increasing employee work-life balance (Deery & Jago, 2009). However, flexible work times may increase gender inequalities in paid employment, as there is a tendency to construct temporal flexibility as inherently different for men and women, and as something that is used by women specifically to balance work and family (Bettio et al., 2013; Brumley, 2014; Sullivan & Smithson, 2007).

'Employer-friendly' flexibility is largely based on notions of profitability through changes to employment relations and the decoupling of operating/opening hours, whilst adhering to legal requirements. Since many tourism businesses operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, sometimes all the year round, employer-friendly flexibility is a particularly common practice. However, only limited literature talks to the gendered implications of how employer-friendly flexibility, manifested within tourism labour recruitment practices influences 'ideal worker' discourse.

Whilst the topic of flexibility has been approached in the literature from many perspectives, the term 'flexibility' has been used with very different meanings. In order to investigate how recruitment practices in tourism are influenced by gender roles, this study will explore how tourism recruiters perceive the 'ideal/flexible worker', using specific methods as described next.

Methods

The study presented in this article reports part of the results of a wider, innovative and unique research project on gender issues in the tourism sector that was conducted in Portugal over a six-year period, in two phases. The findings presented in this study refer to the second phase, which involved top tourism managers (many of whom were also responsible for recruitment within their company), with the primary aim of understanding how gender influences tourism.[1]

The project covers the totality of the Portuguese national territory (mainland and islands) which is constituted of seven administrative regions: North, Centre, Lisbon, Alentejo, Algarve, Madeira and Azores. Whilst much past research has focused on the widely studied sectors of accommodation and food & beverage, this study departs from this trend by investigating other tourism services as well such as transport, travel agencies, cultural services and sports and recreation services. Tourism activity is a complex phenomenon, which means that the tourism sector is a fragmented set of industries, as defined by International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (WTO., 2010). By including a much wider range of businesses related to tourism than usually included, this study reflects the contemporary change in perception of what the supply-side of tourism is defined as. To widen the scope of this innovative approach, both private sector and public tourism organisations are included.

Qualitative

Qualitative data was collected through seven regional focus groups. Participants were tourism managers, selected according to their location, job creation capacity, level of connectivity with other agents (within the regional tourism network) and their role in the definition and implementation of regional and local policies for the tourism sector. The focus groups took place during five months, between November 2013 and March 2014. Each focus group had an average duration of three hours and was conducted in the style of a brainstorming session. Overall, 79 tourism managers participated. Like most focus groups, ours also fall along the continuum between interviews and collective conversations because whilst participants had the opportunity to prepare some discussion topics, other topics were introduced both by participants and by the researchers leading the groups. The focus groups were recorded in Portuguese, in shorthand, and then translated into English with the combined efforts of a native English language speaker and a native Portuguese language speaker. Besides discussing issues related to the selection and recruitment of human resources, which this article concentrates upon, the focus groups covered the discussion of themes such as the role of gender in leadership, gendered horizontal and vertical segregation within the workplace, organisational strategies to promote gender equality and to foster economic growth, and the role of gender in entrepreneurship.

Quantitative

One of the major challenges in tourism statistics is the compilation of robust national and regional statistics (Delaney & MacFeely, 2014). Current research highlights the importance of an inclusive approach towards sampling of tourism businesses to reflect how tourism definitions are evolving, but the majority of studies on tourism labour continue to focus on the hotel and restaurant sectors (Casado-Díaz & Simón, 2016; Riley, 2014). This occurs partly because national tourism databases are fragmented.

In order to select the target population, a single database was compiled out of several databases previously assembled by various official bodies. This database represents the total number of tourism companies registered and operating in Portugal in the period 2011–2013 and contains information such as the companies' legal denominations, brands under which businesses operate, VAT numbers, type of activities, locations (region and municipally) and contacts. By bringing together, for the first time, businesses representing various types of tourism activity, this study represents an important data contribution. This is the first time that a nation-wide study in Portugal has used this approach.

[1] The first phase targeted tourism graduates and students and aimed, primarily, to analyse and identify constraints to women's vertical mobility.

However, the total number of companies was not static, as there was no reliable and updated record of all companies that started or closed their activity within this period, and the most up-to-date and most comprehensive databases reported to different periods of time. It was also observed that several tourism firms were registered under different CAE codes,[2] some of which were not related to tourism (e.g. wellness centres, spas and thermal springs). This hampered the process of identifying companies with a direct contribution to the tourism industry. After eliminating repeated records,[3] a total of around 20,500 businesses were identified. Stratified sampling was used, based on two criteria: region (location) and type of activity (adapted from the Tourism Satellite Account). In order to improve the representativeness of the sample and reduce sampling error, systematic sampling was applied within each stratum. A minimum of 3 subjects was defined per stratum, making the sample size 392 questionnaires minimum.

The questionnaire was directed at people occupying top-management positions in the tourism sector, mainly senior managers and directors, CEOs and Heads of Service/Department/Sector. An online survey platform was used to host the questionnaire and a maximum of three reminders was sent to each participant. This process of data collection proved to be extremely time consuming. Given their inherent characteristics (individuals in positions of great responsibility and extremely busy), there was a high drop-out rate, even though respondents were given the opportunity to pause filling-in the questionnaire and resume later from where they left off. More than 5,700 companies were contacted, and 1,440 partially answered the questionnaire. After an analysis of consistency, 401 questionnaires were duly completed and considered valid. Data collection started in September 2013 and finished in March 2015. The questionnaires were administered in Portuguese and all questions and answers were later translated into English and reviewed in the English language.

In the questionnaires, the respondents were asked to rate a set of criteria that were found to commonly influence companies' recruitment practices.[4] These criteria were associated with candidates' personal characteristics, education and training, professional experience, availability and knowledge about the organisation. The managers' perceptions were categorised based on the level of importance that each criterion held for them, by using a 5-level Likert scale in which 1 means 'not important' and 5 means 'very important'.

Analysis methods

Quantitative and qualitative approaches were designed to complement each other and to bring different perspectives on the role of gender in recruitment and perceptions of flexibility in the tourism sector. Whilst the questionnaire was aimed at unveiling managerial perspectives and patterns regarding gender in tourism labour, the focus groups sought to gather more in-depth and complex information through participants' conflicting opinions and knowledge co-creation between participants and researchers.

Thematic analysis methods were used for a systematic examination of the collected data, using a mix of deductive and inductive approaches in the iterative process. Focus group data was coded into categories, using themes emerging from the transcripts, rather than solely from the initial questions. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, they were number-coded and are represented in this text as *P number* e.g. *P10*. This study's quantitative analysis was computer-assisted by the IBM SPSS Statistics software (v.21). Exploratory and inferential methods were adopted, using several univariate and bivariate statistical techniques (e.g. Chi-square tests).

Findings, analysis and discussion

This section discusses the research findings by drawing on tourism managers' responses to questionnaires and tourism managers' contributions to focus groups.

Current influence of gender in the Portuguese tourism labour market

The questionnaires showed a high predominance of women working within tourism organisations in Portugal. Forty-two percent of respondents reported that there were more women than men in their organisations and only 29.5% of respondents said that there were equal numbers of men and women. This finding is in-line with international research on the gender composition of the tourism labour market (Aguilar & Vargas, n.d.; Hemmati, 2000; Obadić & Marić, 2009; UNWTO, 2011; World Travel, 2013). Similarly, in Portugal, most (57%) tourism workers are female (Eurostat, 2015). Despite the majority of tourism workers being female, male workers occupy most top-level and best-paid positions (Costa et al., 2011). The cur-

[2] Data was retrieved according to the Portuguese classification of economic activities (Statistics Portugal, 2008), as derived from the Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Communities, rev. 2 (NACE).

[3] This selection was based on the VAT number and legal denomination of each company, which are unique. Individual entrepreneurs/self-employed subjects were not considered as the identification of the type of activity is not a clear process as for the other corporate legal forms.

[4] This refers to a section of the questionnaire. The remaining sections, aimed at: (i) profiling the respondents (managers) and their organisations; (ii) diagnosing the representativeness of women at different levels of the organisational structure; (iii) assessing managers' perceptions about gender equality and organisational measures to promote equality; and (iv) investigating how the dynamics of internationalisation, networks and innovation relate with gender equality.

rent study reflects this trend, as the questionnaire sample consisted of 60.8% male managers and only 39.2% female managers (Table 1).

Furthermore, only 18.6% of respondents said that top-level management levels (e.g. Management Boards, General Directors) were occupied by women in their companies (Fig. 1).

Further analysis of questionnaire data indicated statistically significant associations between the sex of tourism managers and the representativeness of men and women in their companies, at the higher management positions ($\chi^2(4) = 46.256$; $p < 0.001$), at the intermediate management positions ($\chi^2(4) = 57.346$; $p < 0.001$), and at the non-management positions ($\chi^2(4) = 30.950$; $p < 0.001$). In female-led companies there was a statistically significant association between the CEOs/Senior Manager/Director/Owner of the company's sex and women's representativeness at top, intermediate and non-management levels: top ($\chi^2(4) = 65.132$; $p < 0.001$), intermediate ($\chi^2(4) = 57.059$; $C = 0.401$, $p < 0.001$) and non-management ($\chi^2(4) = 30.789$; $p < 0.001$). This statistical significance suggests that the senior tourism manager's sex influences women's hierarchical progression in tourism labour, with female-led companies offering more opportunities to women's hierarchical progression than male-led companies do. Previous studies have suggested that increasing the presence of women managers changes gender structures, which may influence constructions of management and masculinity in the organisation (Carvalho, 2017; Wahl, 2010). Therefore, the findings suggest that female senior managers may be more likely to perceive women as potential 'ideal' managers, than male senior managers are. This leads to a questioning of how gender roles influence conceptualisations of who is perceived as an 'ideal worker'.

'Ideal' tourism employee characteristics

Drawing on the focus group data, we see that tourism managers negotiate and recreate images of masculinity/femininity through conceptualisations of the 'ideal' flexible tourism worker. Analysing managers' definitions of 'ideal tourism workers' through a gender lens, it is possible to identify how gender permeates seemingly 'gender-neutral' concepts. Many managers stressed that when recruiting, there was no discrimination as they assessed the candidates' profiles based on their skills, qualifications and attitudes. As one manager said: *'we evaluate the quality of the people, we're not thinking whether they are male or female' (P7)* and another stressed that they never think *'let's get a male worker' (P4)*. This perception of gender's insignificance in recruitment decisions is also confirmed by questionnaire data (Fig. 2). Tourism managers rated being a man (87.0%) or being a woman (86.3%) as bearing little or no importance in recruitment decisions. Past research however, shows that despite managers and employees insisting that gender makes no difference within their organisation, a "generic female parent" is constructed (Smithson & Stokoe 2005, p. 148).

It is common for processes that are gendered, are not perceived as being so. This is because gender roles are so deeply embedded within people's subconscious that they are taken as the 'norm' and hence not questioned. 'Norms' are unquestioned and accepted as unchangeable, as the 'status quo'. However, it is sometimes also through 'silences' that the workings of gender can be identified (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2013). Table 2, shows that the majority of managers discussed what the desirable characteristics of female employees were and what the characteristics of the gender-neutral ideal worker were, but were silent on what constituted desirable male employee characteristics.

Whilst tourism managers directly denied the influence of gender within 'ideal worker' definitions, they constructed gendered versions of what constitute 'ideal worker' characteristics. Hence, by commenting only on the desired characteristics that female employees should have in order to be 'ideal workers', tourism managers perpetuate the masculine norm already present within business discourse. The act of *not* commenting on what the desired characteristics for male workers are, suggests that managers equate male worker characteristics with what is generally accepted as 'ideal worker' characteristics. However, when talking about female employees' 'ideal worker' characteristics, managers did not equate female employees with the gender-neutral norm as they presented various feminised ideal worker characteristics, such as 'sensitivity'. Acting in this way, tourism managers perpetuate masculine hegemony within tourism labour discourse. One reason for this occurring could be that managers struggle to incorporate alternative (feminine) discourses since they are acting within a strong masculine hegemony.

Some managers in the focus groups spoke of characteristics that particularly female workers possess in a positive way. They stated that female workers: *'give more attention to detail' (P18)*, have *'more comprehensive skills' (P18)*; *'fit more in the company spirit than men who focus on the tasks they do rather than on the whole organisation'*; have *'a higher degree of stability' (P64)* and *'a greater degree of resistance'; and* are '*more responsible than men…with better behaviour' (P37)*. Through their narratives tourism managers introduce feminine characteristics into the 'ideal worker' discourse.

However, despite female workers having all these advantageous characteristics in comparison to their male counterparts, they have one main disadvantage according to tourism managers in this study. The lack of flexibility.

'Availability-related flexibility' within tourism recruitment discourse

Being perceived as having the flexibility to be available to work is a significant employee characteristic for recruiters, as vocalised by one participant who says: *'questions on recruitment revolve around availability' (P30)*. Indeed, availability to work outside 'normal' working hours is mentioned by many participants as being very important in the candidate selection process. Whilst flexibility if often described as making workplaces more adaptable to employee needs, in this study, participants define flexibility in terms of employees being available to work whenever the employer needs them to. Hence, this type of

Table 1
Tourism managers' profiles (questionnaire respondents).

	Male	Female
Sex	60.8%	39.2%
Children	65.3%	34.7%
Three or more children	12.2%	5.2%
Region of residence		
North	19.7%	27.4%
Centre	25.0%	17.2%
Lisbon	23.0%	20.4%
Alentejo	7.8%	8.3%
Algarve	9.0%	15.9%
Madeira	7.0%	3.2%
Azores	8.6%	7.6%
Hierarchical positions		
CEO/Senior manager/Director/Owner	69%	31%
Head of service/department/sector	37%	63%
Associate/Assistant director	26%	74%
Other position	11%	89%
Type of tourism activity		
Accommodation	28%	33%
Food and beverage services	37%	24%
Travel agencies and tour operators	7%	9%
Sports and recreational services	14%	18%
Cultural services	7%	15%
Passenger transport	6%	2%

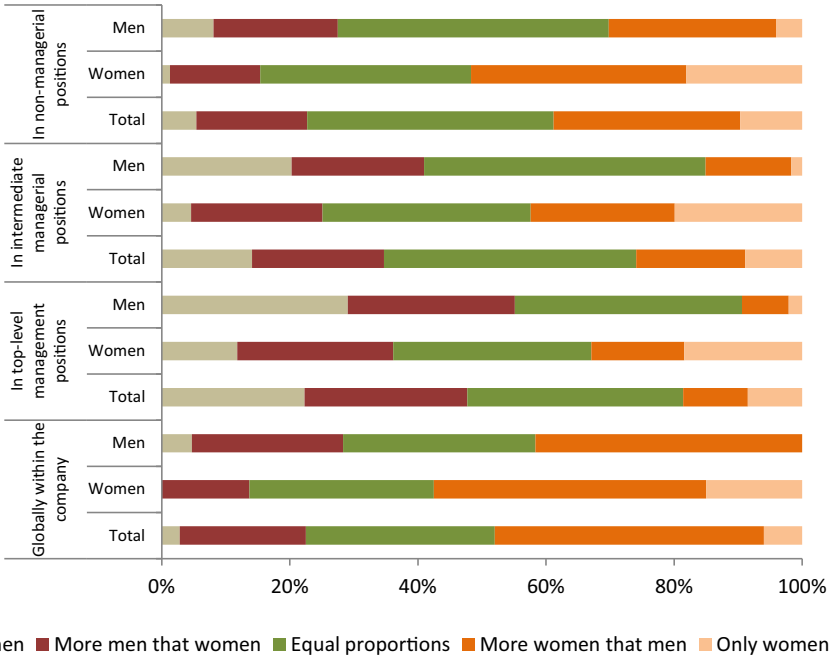

Fig. 1. Gendered hierarchies in Portuguese tourism companies.

flexibility shall be referred to as *availability-related flexibility*. Quantitative data also confirms the significance of having *availability-related flexibility* within the ideal tourism worker discourse. Questionnaire data shows that tourism workers are often required to work outside 'normal' working hours. The majority of questionnaire respondents say that they occasionally or frequently work at night (94.3%), on Saturdays (97.3%) and on Sundays (91.8%). Indeed, willingness to work overtime (92.0%) or to travel on business (70.0%) are considered as important to very important characteristics of potential employees by tourism managers answering the questionnaires (Fig. 3). Both male and female managers have similar opinions on this subject. These findings highlight how having *availability-related flexibility* is a characteristic of 'ideal workers' in the Portuguese tourism labour market.

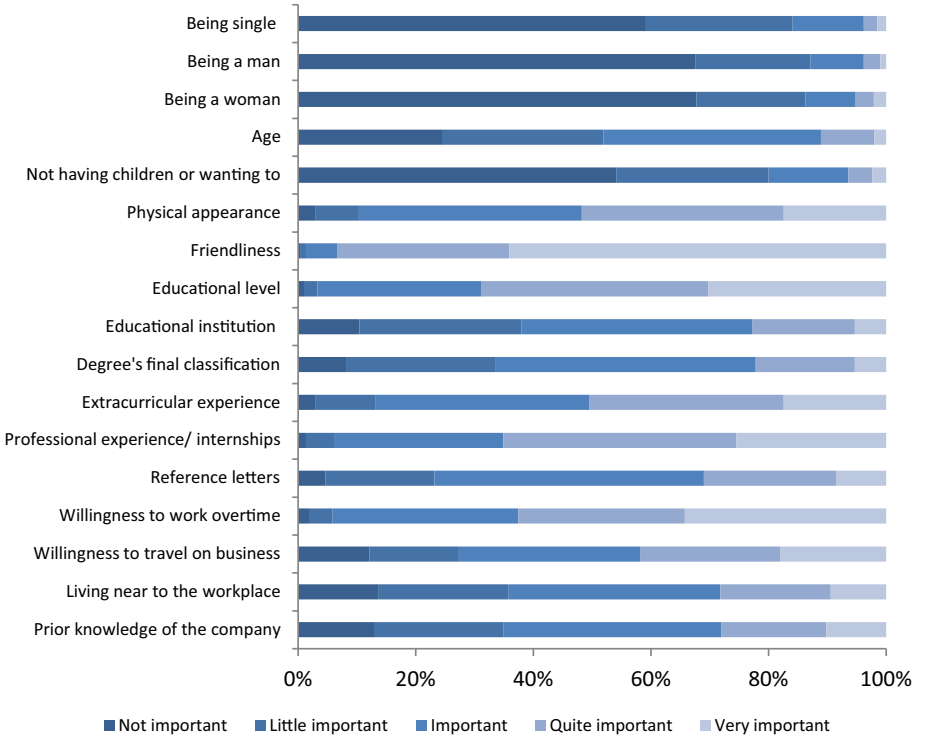

Fig. 2. Relevant criteria in the recruitment process and respective degree of importance.

Table 2
'Ideal worker' characteristics that male/female/gender-neutral workers have, according to focus groups.

Female worker	Male worker	Gender neutral worker
Not having children	Flexibility	Personality profile
Attention to detail	Availability	Relevant training/education
Multitasking abilities		Written and spoken English
Stable behaviour		Maturity and competence
Responsibility		Motivation
Sensitivity		Adaptability
Good physical appearance		Knowledge
		Experience
		Honesty
		Ability to work in a team
		Customer relations skills
		Having transport options
		Professionalism

However, the perception of being flexible is gendered. As one focus group participant said: *'there is an issue that particularly affects women: availability and flexibility for the job' (P75)*. There is a statistically significant ($t(386.778) = -4.735$; $p < 0.001$) difference between the number of hours worked per week by male and female managers. Questionnaire data also shows that female tourism managers work on average up to 10 h less than male tourism managers. These two findings support the idea that gender roles may be preventing female managers from working as many hours as male managers because of having limited availability, which is caused by social reproductive gender roles linked to femininity.

Turning to the focus group data, there are more indications of the role that gender plays in creating perceptions of who possesses availability-related flexibility. One participant said: *'When you think I have two people to choose from, a woman who does not have children yet, and a man who is also very good, I might pick the man because he has the advantage point' (P55)*. In this case, the advantage point is simply that he is a man and, as such, is assumed not to have gendered childcare responsibilities. So, when recruiting, women are at a disadvantage as they are perceived to be primarily responsible for childcare and perceived to prioritise it over working. This employee attitude is reflected in the reasons why 30.9% of the female managers did not have children, since 29.0% postponed this decision in order to focus on their professional careers.

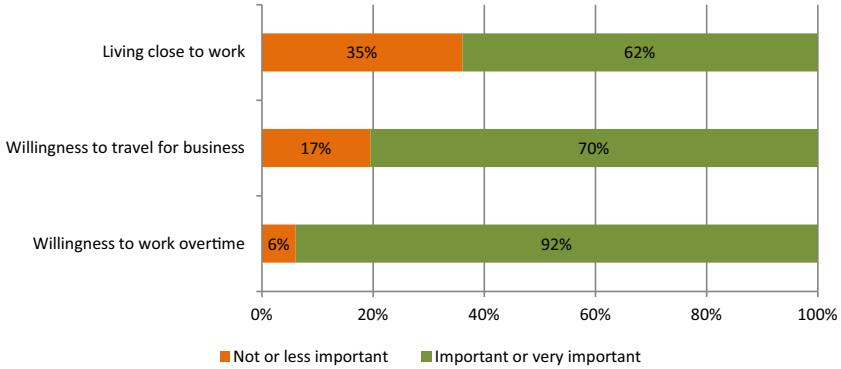

Fig. 3. Important tourism employee characteristics in the recruitment process.

Examining *availability-related flexibility* within the productive economy discourse, women with children are often perceived as having fewer 'ideal employee' characteristics because of their caring priorities. On a global scale, whilst, over the years, women have decreased the time spent on social reproductive activities, they still spend on average 2.5 h a day more than men on these tasks, illustrating how women are still very much held responsible for the majority of social reproductive tasks (Veerle, 2011). Despite this, according to the questionnaire data (Fig. 2), having children is not seen by managers in this study as an important factor in recruitment decisions (potential employees who did not have children or did not want to have children was of little or no importance in recruitment decisions for 80.0% of managers). However, drawing on the qualitative data, managers within the focus groups situate *not having* children as a desired female candidate characteristic. Past research supports the idea that having children may influence workers' ability to progress, as maintaining a work-life balance is not viewed as the choice "high fliers" make (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005, p. 155).

Further investigation of the qualitative data illustrates how the perceived feminine gendered prioritisation of social reproduction can make a female employee less attractive than a male employee. One participant said that: *'the general employer sees in a man less hassle, more working hours, greater flexibility and higher availability than a woman' (P43).* This suggests that social reproductive gender roles influence recruiters' perceptions of who constitutes an 'ideal worker'.

It is evident that many participants adhere to stereotyped gender roles that equate femininity to primary responsibility for social reproduction, as female workers are seen to 'choose' family over work, without taking into consideration the gendered societal pressures that often force women into this choice. One participant expressed this by saying: *'Parenthood is a barrier imposed by the candidate... like for example when a candidate says that she does not have availability to work on the weekend' (P42).* Another participant claims that: *'the issue of availability is due to the clear choice of many women not wanting to give up their domestic and family relationship' (P20).* Free choice, however, is an illusion, as social forms of control govern gendered responsibility for social reproduction. For example, female workers can suffer repercussions such as "bad mum guilt" (Sullivan, 2015, p. 284) if they do not prioritise childcare. The invisibility of this form of social control is evident within another manager's narrative which normalised the connection of femininity to primary responsibility for social reproduction. He said: *'the woman has different needs to men, hence demanding a higher absenteeism index' (P61).* Saying that 'a woman has different needs' refers to the life-long childcare responsibilities that women are socially conditioned to shoulder. It indicates that gender roles that connect femininity with primary childcare responsibility are so embedded within Portuguese society, that they are referred to as 'women's needs' – rather than social reproduction being the 'need' of both men and women.

The significance of *availability-related flexibility* as an 'ideal tourism worker' characteristic is also seen in how focus group participants stress the importance of availability in further career development. One participant said: *'If they [women] choose the family, they are often passed up for promotion as they are away from work. The issue is the availability of time' (P41).* Indeed, these gendered constraints on women progressing within their career, translate into lower quality jobs for women as they do not conform to the 'ideal tourism worker' discourse of being available/flexible. Recent research that creates an index of job quality in the tourism sector taking gender into consideration, shows that women hold lower quality jobs than men do (Santero-Sanchez, Segovia-Pérez, Castro-Nuñez, Figueroa-Domecq, & Talón-Ballestero, 2015).

What is interesting is that tourism managers in this study are also challenging the idea that it is only female tourism workers who have a lack of *availability-related flexibility*, by observing that men too are often 'unavailable'. For example, one participant observed that when he invited staff members to trade-show journeys, more female workers showed availability to attend, than male workers. He said: *'I ask my workers: who wants to join me for a trade show? Normally women want. Men have to be convinced to join us' (P37).* 'Ideal tourism worker' discourse, which excludes female workers based on their perceived lack of *availability-related flexibility,* is further challenged by managers, as they stress that male workers are often less flexible than female workers in terms of schedule. One participant expressed this by saying: *'... schedule flexibility has nothing to do with sex. Men want it more than women: working hours from 9am to 5pm' (P22).*

These insights facilitate a critical evaluation of the ways in which underlying economic processes are discursively constructed and how masculine values are deeply embedded within theoretical and empirical aspects of tourism labour and economics (Barker, 2005).

Conclusion

Contributing to the discussion on gendered discourses within tourism labour, this paper shows how recruitment practices in tourism are influenced by gender roles, through a feminist analysis of 'ideal tourism worker' discourse. Whilst there is an overall impression that attaining 'ideal worker' status *'all has to do with the attitude, availability, professionalism and the willingness to accomplish' (P45)*, this paper uncovers the ways in which social reproductive gender roles influence female workers' ability to adhere to current 'ideal tourism worker' models.

According to the neoclassical economics model of 'rational economic man', all individuals operate rationally, solely with the aim of creating more individual profit. Critique of the 'ideal worker' discourse is rooted in the idea that this theory/ model is flawed. From a feminist economics angle, agency cannot be reduced to a simple case of "individual utility maximisation strategy subject to personal circumstances" (Gammage, Kabeer, & van der Meulen Rodgers, 2016, p. 2). One of the reasons why people are differently situated to make decisions is because of social reproductive gender roles which connect femininity with primary caring responsibilities. Thematic analysis of tourism managers' focus group narratives and questionnaire responses allow for an in-depth investigation into how social reproductive gender roles influence 'ideal worker' discourse and the consequent influence of gender roles on tourism recruitment decisions. Using gender as an analytical category, we tease out 'the unquestioned and unexamined masculinist values' (Barker, 2005, p. 2189) that are deeply embedded within tourism managers' ideals. Managers are focused on as it is them who make final hiring decisions, especially in small to medium enterprises, which tourism is largely made up of.

This study makes an important data contribution by creating a tourism business database comprising of all tourism subsectors based on the Tourism Satellite Account classification. The database created in this project allows for a more comprehensive investigation of the tourism reality, in response to the change in definition of tourism to include more diverse types of activities, and in order to address the increasing complexity of tourism activities as influenced by social and politico-economic factors. One limitation of the study relates to the total population of tourism managers in Portugal. The number of companies in the population represents an estimation of the population, based on the database we built from various available statistical sources, making the total population unknown.

The starting point for this analysis is the confirmation that despite tourism being a feminised industry, the majority of managers are male (60.8%). Furthermore, statistical tests on questionnaire data illustrate that female-led tourism companies are more likely to hire women as managers. This suggests that gender influences perceptions of who is perceived as an 'ideal worker'. Despite female workers being praised as having various positive characteristics, one of the most significant employee characteristics that tourism recruiters look for, according to this study, is flexibility. Willingness to work overtime and ability to travel on business were rated as very important by questionnaire respondents.

Whilst there are various definitions of 'flexibility' in a labour context, many referring to the work practices encouraging employees to maintain a work-family balance (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013), this paper coins the term of 'availability-related flexibility' to frame how tourism managers in this study perceive flexibility. 'Availability-related flexibility' refers to the employee's ability to be available at short notice for over-time, out-of-shift work and to spend multiple days away from home on business. Qualitative data reveals that flexibility is gendered, as women are considered to be less flexible than men are, mainly because of the stereotyped connection between femininity and prioritisation of social reproduction. Just looking at the quantitative data, this nuance is invisible. For example, 'not having children' is of little importance in recruitment decisions for the majority (80%) of questionnaire respondents. However, the connection between social reproductive gender roles and availability is evident in the qualitative data, where managers comment that women workers exhibit less availability because they *choose* to prioritise family over work. The perception of women having a choice, reveals the extent to which gender roles that connect femininity to primary childcare responsibility are embedded in Portuguese society.

In-depth analysis of focus group narratives reveals how the male hegemony within 'ideal tourism worker' discourse is perpetuated. Through silences. Recruiters do not specifically talk about what good male worker characteristics are, but do talk about good female worker characteristics. Underlying the silence concerning other good male workers characteristics may be a tacit assumption that equates men with unencumbered 'ideal worker' characteristics. The only two male employee characteristics that managers do comment upon are availability and flexibility. Therefore, either male workers are presumed not to have any other positive worker characteristics, or they are the only workers who have availability and flexibility. Since neither is the case, what this silence effectively does is to equate male worker characteristics to 'ideal worker' characteristics and perpetuate the invisibility of masculine discourse within economic theories of labour.

Women workers are perceived as less available by recruiters due to their supposed social reproductive responsibilities, irrespective of whether they have them or not. However, some tourism managers in this study challenge 'ideal worker' discourse by pointing out that female employees are often keener to attend trade shows than male employees, and that male employees are often keener than female employees to have a structured work schedule. Tourism managers also challenge the masculinised 'ideal worker' norm, by introducing certain feminine characteristics into the 'ideal worker' discourse. They

do this by saying that female workers are better than male workers in various ways, such as being more responsible and more attentive to detail than men.

Tourism is an industry with specificities, such as working long and unsocial hours, which makes 'availability-related flexibility' an important issue within tourism labour debates. State support to provide reduced working hours to both new mothers *and* fathers can help reduce the stigma women are seen to have regarding lacking *availability-related flexibility*. In some European countries social reproduction is becoming more equally divided between men and women. For example, parental leave schemes in Sweden have been created with mandatory parental leave for fathers to look after their children (Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Wall & Escobedo, 2013). Policies like this, which encourage leave arrangements and flexible working times for both men and women who work in tourism, could potentially weaken the link between femininity and a perceived lack of *availability-related flexibility*. This could also potentially partly decrease the masculine dominance within 'ideal tourism worker' discourse and help promote fairer recruitment practices within tourism.

To conclude, critical evaluations of the dialectics between power and knowledge that construct norms which define economic activities, such as the present one, can contribute to the creation of a more socially just society and economically viable tourism industry.

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