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Perceptions of Discrimination Among Women as Managers In Hospitality Organizations

Abstract

Women in hospitality organizations are moving up the corporate ladder at a pace significantly outdistancing their colleagues of a few decades ago, but women managers selectively perceive overt and covert discriminatory resistance, from chauvinism to carefully-contrived covert prejudicial treatment constructed to insure a no-win situation. The authors attempted to determine if these discriminatory practices against equally well-trained, qualified, and experienced hospitality women middle managers do affect their perception of their career growth as compared to male counterparts

Keywords

Joseph B. Gregg, Paulette M. Johnson, Perceptions of Discrimination Among Women as Managers in Hospitality Organizations, Gender Bias, FIU

Perceptions of Discrimination Among Women as Managers in Hospitality Organizations

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Women in hospitality organizations are moving up the corporate ladder at a pace significantly outdistancing their colleagues of a few decades ago, but women managers selectively perceive overt and covert discriminatory resistance, from chauvinism to carefully-contrived covert prejudicial treatment constructed to insure a no-win situation. The authors attempted to determine if these discriminatory practices against equally well-trained, qualified, and experienced hospitality women middle managers do affect their perception of their career growth as compared to male counterparts.

As the number of women moving into historically male-dominated hospitality management positions continues to grow,¹ more research into this role-sharing situation appears to have value for improving women's positions in the industry. Recent studies suggest that the United States work force is still sex-segregated in a "pink collar ghetto," that there is a clearly-established bias in both the selection and treatment of female managers, and that there is, equally, a bias against females in promotion and higher managerial development.²

Results of other studies³ have established that there are few, if any, significant differences manifested in on-the-job behavior or in leadership styles of men and women managers. A report on women entering management in public welfare organizations⁴ cited numerous references establishing the lack of significant differences between the sexes in competition, cooperation, problem-solving, potential, performance, and a number of other management/leadership dimensions.

The purpose of this research was to inquire into the perceptions of hospitality managers in several areas and to examine any reported differences between male and female managers and between female managers in hotels and restaurants. Perceptions were studied in several areas: movement of women into management in hotels, restaurants, and clubs; the perception of women functioning as managers in these environments; and the promotability of women in the management hierarchy.

Historically, the industry has been male-dominated. Even today, in a work force of eight million people, two-thirds of which are females, less than one-third of management positions are filled by women.⁵

Recent literature concerning differing career growth patterns in industry in general suggests that women and men with similar educational backgrounds and producing similar products do have different work-related experiences. A number of negative attitudes toward female business executives suggest a continuing career disadvantage for this cohort due to differing male/female socializations, manifested even during their university days.⁶ One study⁷ indicated that male applicants are almost always favored over equally-qualified female applicants for scholarship grants, while another on-campus study of job recruiters⁸ suggests that males are more likely to be chosen than equally-qualified females. Women who are then employed, and who accept a lower starting salary than males for the same job, are evaluated from the outset, and thereafter, as being less competent than men.⁹

Males and females both tend toward the belief that male applicants not only perform better than females, but possess more career longevity potential than an equally qualified female.¹⁰ Employers of women managers tend to view their career goals differently than men in a short versus long-term construct.¹¹ They also perceive women as poor risks for long-term management because of internal constraints, such as lack of motivation and fear of success.¹²

Females Suffer Discrimination

Thus there appears to be a set of discriminations which lends itself to categorization: employment, wage, occupational, monopoly power, and human-capital.¹³

Females appear to "pay for" sex-role congruence and behavior violating sex-role expectations,¹⁴ and may well suffer work-group isolation, from mild dislike to total ostracism, for higher performance in "male" domains.¹⁵ Women are stereotyped as nurturers; in fact, there exists an ironic list which purports to distinguish a "businessman" from a "businesswoman."¹⁶ Women are separated from male business equivalents in what constitutes a "healthy" person of each sex. Male and female respondents agree on the resulting adjectives which describe acceptable behavior for the two sexes.¹⁷ There is a large body of evidence that non-androgynous females (those who tend to score high on acceptable female traits but low on acceptable male traits) are subject to greater on-the-job discrimination than androgynous females.¹⁸

Women managers may be subject to tokenism, which pressures them to be twice as good to get half as much. This creates a pressure situation which can create a fear of making mistakes, which in turn may prevent a woman from effectively delegating responsibility to subordinates, causing her to give up control over mistakes, and thus power. She is evaluated on these commissions and omissions, and is often resultingly judged less competent. Winsor calls this "Catch 22."¹⁹ "Enlightened" administrative superiors (male and female) tend to apply the "equity theory,"²⁰ which says that persons operating under con-

straints over which they have no control are more deserving of "rewards" than those not so subjected.²¹ As well, the Locus of Control concept²² suggests that women executives, because they are women, ought to receive easier treatment.

Summarily, the literature indeed does support the thesis that there is a distinct difference in gender and executive power perceptions and, thus, career success. As Winsor says:

women . . . are at a disadvantage because the productive interpersonal skills that are part of their socialization are not highly valued in the workplace.²³

Women appear to be disadvantaged in seeking power, promotion, job permanency, and financial growth with respect to talents in management because, quoting Nieva and Gutek, "Evaluation favors men over women when a competent performance is being assessed."²⁴ Male management performance often seems to be judged by a different set of standards than its female counterparts.

FIU Provides Study Sample

The major purpose of this study was to obtain data concerning perceptions of discrimination among female and male hospitality managers, and ascertain in which area(s) and when such discriminatory perceptions appear to impact on females in the industry: upon entering the industry, in the regular performance of one's job, and/or in promotability.

Florida International University's School of Hospitality Management was established in 1973. The sample group was selected from individuals who had graduated between 1978 and 1984 to ensure that there would be a record on promotability. The resulting population for the study numbered 1200, 830 males and 370 females. These names and addresses were numbered on a computer printout and 150 of each were selected using a table of random numbers.

Questionnaires reflecting items related to perceptions of discrimination and influences on women in management were mailed to these managers in hospitality organizations. A total of 116 questionnaires (38.67 percent) were returned; 63 were complete and usable (21 percent). Respondents were 49 percent female and 51 percent male, with a representative spread among ages, geography, organizational levels, and job positions.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire adapted from one developed by Ezell, Odewahn, and Sherman for a study concerning *Women Entering Management: Differences in Perception in Factors Influencing Integration*, a study of 360 subjects in state public welfare organizations.²⁵ Reliability coefficients were established by the researchers for the three scales constructed (coefficient alpha). Current validity was undertaken by submitting the revised questionnaire to four hospitality management professors and a research specialist for review and approval.

In Part One of the results, basic comparisons were made between males and females, and among female groups, of demographic and work history variables. In Part Two, tables of the mean responses to the survey questions were developed by group. In each situation, the null hypothesis was addressed:

- **Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between male and female hospitality managers' perceptions of discrimination toward women in the hospitality industry.

- **Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference between females in hotel management and females in restaurant and club management with regard to perceptions of discrimination toward women in the hospitality industry.

Values were assigned to each response in the questionnaire from 1 to 5 on a "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" spread. The response values were varied to encourage objectivity and better identify between group and within group perception differences. Before analysis, all questions were recoded so that higher scores indicated the respondent perceived more discrimination.

The mean and standard deviations for each perception score for each group were calculated and independent sample t-tests were performed between the two groups on the various perception questions. The level of significance was .05.

The function of this examination was to discover if perceptions of discrimination existed between male and female hospitality managers, as well as to investigate among-female group perceptions, and to determine where any existing perceived discriminations have impact of significance: during the period of time when females first assume management roles, in the functioning of management, and/or with regard to female promotion in the overall management hierarchy.

Difference Exists Between Sexes

The analyses of responses of the first set of variables focused on simple comparisons of demographics and work history of the sample compared across groups. Table 1 shows that 75 percent of all males occupied the top two managerial levels compared to 48.4 percent of females, a better than 2:1 ratio, a figure that is typical of the industry at large. This is put into perspective by noting both Tables 2 and 3, the former indicating male length of tenure of three years or more with their firms at 86.7 percent compared to 43.2 percent for females, while Table 3 shows that 96.3 percent of all females were in their present position two years or fewer, as compared to 48.1 percent of males.

Table 4 reveals no sample males were in the hospitality industry fewer than five years, while 30.3 percent of females had experience in the industry of fewer than five years. Nearly three-quarters of all males had nearly a decade of experience, compared to only a little more than one-fourth (26.1 percent) of all female managers.

Table 1
Frequencies and Percentages of Managers
by Sex and Level of Organization

Level in Organization	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
General Manager	13	40.6	5	6.1	18	28.6
Resident Manager	11	34.4	10	32.3	21	33.3
Department Manager	6	18.8	11	35.5	17	27.0
Assistant Manager	2	6.3	3	9.7	5	7.9
Supervisor	0	0.0	1	3.2	1	1.6
Trainee in Management	0	0.0	1	3.2	1	1.6
Totals	32	50.8	31	49.2	63	100.0

Table 2
Frequencies and Percentages of Managers
by Length of Tenure With the Company and Sex

Years	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	1	3.3	6	20.0	7	11.7
2	3	10.0	11	36.7	14	23.3
3	7	23.3	3	10.0	10	16.7
4	7	23.3	3	10.0	10	16.7
5	2	6.7	4	13.3	6	10.0
6	3	10.0	1	3.3	4	6.7
7	0	0.0	1	3.3	1	1.7
8	2	6.7	1	3.3	3	5.0
9	5	16.7	0	0.0	5	8.3
Totals	30	50.0	30	50.0	60	100.0

Both sexes were located in roughly equal proportions in all geographic areas sampled. There was no discernible difference in choices of types of businesses within the industry by sex. Average ages were 28.5 years for women compared to 31.5 years for males.

Males indeed are further up the management hierarchy, but it would appear to be a factor of length of time in the industry (men averaged 8.1 years while women averaged 5.9 years) and time with their respective organizations (men averaged 4.8 years while women aver-

aged 3.0 years), rather than other causes. Women are moving into higher levels of hospitality management, and, comparing age, time in the industry, and time with their particular companies, they are probably not different than males with like values.

Women Prefer Hotel Management

Women appeared to choose hotel management positions 2:1 over restaurant/club occupations. Over 83 percent of hotel female management respondents were in their first year in their present position, and all had been in that same job for no more than two years. Over 14 percent of female restaurant managers had been in the same position for six or more years. Nearly 53 percent of female hoteliers had been with the same company for two years or fewer; 84 percent of them were under the age of 30, while restaurant/club managers tended to be somewhat older, with only 60 percent under 30. The female hoteliers were located in roughly the same proportions as were the restaurant managers, with about 43 percent in Florida and 17 percent in the Southeast outside of Florida. Both groups are equally mobile and showed indications of moving into upper-level positions in the operational hierarchy. Fewer of the younger hoteliers were in the two levels yet, 32 percent of the former versus 82 percent for restaurant managers.

The data suggest that females with demographic backgrounds similar to males in hospitality management do possess the necessary skills, attributes, and attitudes required of managers and are moving in a path parallel to that of their male counterparts. The sample data suggest that females entered the field later, but are probably progressing at a rate comparable to male managers.

Table 3
Frequencies and Percentages of Managers
by Time in Present Position and Sex

Years	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	9	33.3	19	70.4	28	51.9
2	4	14.8	7	25.9	11	20.4
3	4	14.8	0	0.0	4	7.4
4	5	18.5	0	0.0	5	9.3
5	1	3.7	0	0.0	1	1.9
6	1	3.7	1	3.7	2	3.7
7	2	7.4	0	0.0	2	3.7
9	1	3.7	0	0.0	1	1.9
Totals	27	50.0	27	50.0	54	100.0

Table 4
Frequencies and Percentages of Managers
by Time in the Industry by Sex

Years	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	0	0.0	1	4.3	1	2.0
2	0	0.0	1	4.3	1	2.0
3	0	0.0	2	8.7	2	4.0
4	0	0.0	3	13.3	3	6.0
5	3	11.1	4	17.4	7	14.0
6	4	14.8	2	8.7	6	12.0
7	0	0.0	4	17.4	4	8.0
9	20	74.1	6	26.1	26	52.0
Totals	27	54.0	23	46.0	50	100.0

Perceptions Vary Between Groups

The second set of analyses compared the groups on the following response variables: overall perception of discrimination, discrimination with respect to initial movement of women into managerial positions, discrimination against women functioning as managers, and discrimination in promoting women. Table 5 indicates that there was no significant difference between men and women with respect to overall perception of discrimination ($p > .05$). Between men and women, there was no significant difference in perception of discrimination with regard to women entering hospitality management and with respect to their promotability. In terms of females functioning as managers, there was a marginally significant difference in perceptions ($p < .058$). An analysis of responses to individual statements within Group 2, Women Functioning as Managers, will provide further insight into this area of interest.

Overall, testing of the variables by defined groups indicates no significant differences between males and females as hospitality managers, and Null Hypothesis 1 is not rejected.

Table 6 reflects the same analysis between women managers in hotel and restaurant/club environments. There is somewhat of a feeling of "overall" discrimination among female restaurant managers, a feeling not shared as much by female hotel managers ($p < .043$).

Further analysis of female responses indicated no significant mean differences in perception of discrimination regarding the initial movement of women into management and no perception of discrimination with respect to female promotability. However, the mean scores of perceived discrimination concerning women functioning as managers were highly statistically different for restaurateurs and hotel managers

Table 5
T-Tests On Perception Score Means Between Sexes

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	2-Tailed P-Value
Perception of Discrimination					
Men	32	2.97	0.26	- 1.45	.152
Women	31	3.05	0.37		
Initial Movement of Women Into Management					
Men	32	3.04	0.32	- 1.21	.231
Women	31	3.14	0.33		
Women Functioning As Managers					
Men	32	2.86	0.30	- 1.93	.058
Women	31	3.04	0.46		
Promotion of Women in Management Hierarchy					
Men	32	2.99	0.41	- 0.10	.923
Women	31	3.00	0.46		

($p < .019$). Note that the difference between men and women on this point was marginally significant. This perception is decidedly higher for female restaurant/club managers (mean = 3.31) than it is for women hoteliers (mean = 2.90). Individual statements in this category were analyzed further to attempt to isolate the differences in perception of discrimination between female restaurant/club managers and hoteliers.

Individual Statements Analyzed by Sex

The third set of analyses examined each of the 62 statements which comprised the perception of influence segment of the survey. Statements with roots in stereotypical environments were included in the 16 variables. Group 1 statements, Initial Movement of Women into Managerial Positions, inquired into the recruitment, selection, training, and legislation impacting on female managerial prospects. Group 2 statements, Women Functioning as Managers in Hospitality Organizations, contained 25 statements accenting operating style, personality traits, personal characteristics and tendencies, attitudes, and relevant demographics. Group 3 statements, The Promotion of Women in the Management Hierarchy, contained 19 statements related to age and time demographics, environments of a political and social interactive nature, support systems, quotas, and personal character factors. T-

tests were performed on each question in both male-female and female hotel-restaurant constructs.

Comparisons were made between male and female sample respondents with respect to the 62 survey instrument statements.

On the initial movement of women into management, two statements exhibited differences between mean perception scores between sexes. Men tend to perceive performance as a leading criterion for selection for management, where women tend to agree that potential, rather than performance, is more heavily weighted in the selection process ($p < .006$).

With respect to a statement that federal legislation has resulted in women moving into management positions more than would be the case had there not been such legislation, females' perception of this is uncertain, whereas males more strongly disagree that legislation has been a helping factor in the movement of females into management ($p < .008$).

In the second group of statements, Women Functioning as Managers, there were six statements on which male and female perceptions significantly differed. Women strongly perceive a salary discrepancy favoring males, while sample males were undecided ($p < .005$). This difference was one of the largest discerned between males and females, and if indeed perception is reality, this response speaks loudly for a

Table 6
T-Tests On Perception Score Means
Between Women Hoteliers and Restaurateurs

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	2-Tailed P-Value
Perceptions of Discrimination					
Restaurant	10	3.21	0.33	2.12	.043
Hotel	19	2.95	0.32		
Initial Move of Women Into Management					
Restaurant	10	3.16	0.37	0.54	.593
Hotel	19	3.10	0.25		
Women Functioning As Managers					
Restaurant	10	3.31	0.32	2.50	.019
Hotel	19	2.90	0.46		
Promotion of Women in Management Hierarchy					
Restaurant	10	3.13	0.43	1.57	.129
Hotel	19	2.90	0.37		

salary equity study within the hospitality industry. This may well be answered by the demographic realities of male-female managers, but if perceptions can impact performance, the industry would serve itself to respond to the condition. Females perceive males to be more rigid concerning how things ought to be done; males disagree somewhat ($p < .006$).

There was significant disagreement between males and females with respect to the statement that females react to stress better than males, and therefore can better mitigate conflict. Females agree with this statement; males are undecided ($p < .008$).

Other less significant results include that females see a decrease in managerial problems within operations as numbers of female managers increase, and males are undecided ($p < .021$). Females perceive themselves as being well-suited to developing potential in others, with a bent toward participatory management ($p < .042$); males respondents agreed less with this perception. Males perceive themselves as having more operational expertise than females, and females disagree ($p < .043$).

With respect to statements concerning age, education, affirmative action, professional demeanor and behavior, social interaction, time in grade and in the industry, there were no statistically significant perceived differences with regard to managerial performance between male and female survey respondents.

The final group of statements concerned Promotion of Women in the Management Hierarchy and was comprised of 19 statements. In only two instances were significant differences observed. Males do not perceive women as building a longevity record with a company, thus gaining promotability experience; females are undecided on this position ($p < .032$). Conversely, females perceive that women in management positions have to work twice as hard and do twice as good a job as their male equivalents to prove themselves deserving of promotion, while male respondents were undecided on the statement ($p < .035$).

With regard to all other stated promotion criteria, time in the industry, visibility, accessibility to upper management echelons, affirmative action, characteristics and attitudes, and education, there were no significant perceived differences between male and female respondents.

Female Management Groups Perceive Differences

An analysis of individual statements between females in hospitality management in hotels versus restaurants/clubs was performed. In the initial movement into management, female hotel managers disagree that males plan their management careers more than females, while female restaurateurs are inclined to the perception that females tend to accept positions they are offered ($p < .003$). Restaurant managers are undecided as to whether there is an advantage to males in selection to management training programs, while their hotel management peers disagree with that perception ($p < .006$). Restaurateurs are undecided on a higher turnover rate for women managers leading women to not be

chosen as managers, while hoteliers disagree ($p < .014$). Female restaurateurs are undecided as to whether a general educational background puts females at a disadvantage versus males, while female hotel managers disagree with that perception ($p < .022$).

Women hoteliers strongly disagree that they are held back by "fear of success," while female restaurant/club managers disagree less strongly, ($p < .035$).

In the analysis between restaurant/club and hotel women managers on statements relating to women functioning as managers, three statements were significantly different in mean response. Female restaurateurs were uncertain whether they would have as many opportunities for career advancement as males, while female hotel managers agreed that within five years they would have ($p < .009$).

Female restaurateurs were undecided and female hotel managers somewhat agreed with the statement that because women are not a minority in the organization, they are more readily accepted as managers ($p < .049$).

In the analysis of perceptions of Promotability of Women in the Management Hierarchy between the two female groups, there were two statements which had statistically different mean scores. Female restaurateurs are undecided whether a rigid adherence to affirmative action quotas is a disadvantage to women with regard to promotions once quotas have been reached, a perception with which female hoteliers disagree ($p < .011$); and female restaurant/club managers are undecided if career growth opportunities automatically favor men over women, while this attitude is disagreed with by female hotel managers ($p < .027$). A later statement, although only marginally statistically significant about male automatic promotion over equally-qualified females, reflects this same difference in perception between female restaurateurs and hoteliers ($p < .073$).

There is enough evidence developed through the responses concerning significance in differences of perception between female restaurant/club managers versus female hotel managers that Null Hypothesis 2 is rejected. The evidence does suggest that there is, indeed, a significant difference in the perception of discrimination due to the effect of workplace on female managers.

Survey Shows Higher Level of Agreement

Perceptual differences between sexes were evident, but limited and, conceivably, attributable to causes other than sex. There were far more areas of agreement than disagreement. Overall, variables observed appear to have little negative impact on women entering, working in, or being promoted within the hospitality industry. There is no evidence of selection, training, or placement practices having any significant negative impact on female managers.

The findings are far from complete, but do suggest that any lag in female achievement may be due to time-ordered conditions and not overt negative administration; however, it must be noted that the sample size delimits definite conclusions. Women in hotel management

tend to be younger and believe they will advance based on their own accomplishments and not because of sex. Ezell, Odewahn, and Sherman²⁶ in their excellent study, "Women Entering Management: Perceptions of Factors Influencing Integration," referenced the Jacobson and Effertz study of sex roles and leadership, which suggested that as women enter and occupy managerial positions in greater numbers, there ought to be a reflected reduction in sex role stereotypes. This study 14 years later may have as its greatest contribution a validation of that position.

The study suggests that among defined groups of female managers in the hospitality industry there is, in fact, a perception of discriminatory limitation to female performance and success which is attributable to causes other than those by which male equivalents are evaluated. The study is far too limited to provide conclusions that can be formulated into policies or programs, but the study ought to be replicated using a larger population. The benefits to women as well as to male managers, present and future, and to the industry itself, are obvious to an impartial observer.

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