

Challenges For Male Students in Hospitality Education

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Challenges For Male Students in Hospitality

Education

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Abstract

In recent decades, higher education has witnessed a significant shift in gender enrollment and completion rates, favoring women over men. This transition, observed since the 1980s, signifies a notable reversal from the previous male dominance in enrollment. The disparity is evident across developed nations, with women consistently outperforming men in enrollment, completion, and attainment. This research investigates whether this gender gap extends to hospitality education, utilizing quantitative analysis of enrollment data from a representative institution and qualitative insight from focus groups done with male hospitality students.

Findings reveal a declining trend in hospitality education enrollment, particularly among male students, widening challenges in the industry. Male students express concerns about educational structure and biases, suggesting a need for more engaging classes and equitable treatment. Male students also feel that they have natural disadvantages in focusing and concentrating compared to their female colleagues. Despite facing obstacles, male students exhibit aspirations for leadership roles in the hospitality industry, highlighting the importance of addressing systemic issues to foster inclusivity and support male educational and career endeavors.

Keywords: male, student, hospitality, education, hospitality employment, gender gap.

Introduction

In recent decades there has been a major change in higher education enrollment and completion gap when it comes to gender (Van Bavel et al., 2018). The gap before the 1980s was very significant in favor of men, but after the 1980s there has been a shift in the gap which drastically switched in favor of women (Deppen, 2018). Women are outperforming men in higher education enrollment, completion, and attainment. This is true in developed countries like the US, almost all of Europe and many other Western countries. In fact, during the 1980s this shift began with men underachieving and women overachieving. Currently, in the United States, only 1 in 3 recent graduates of four year and advanced degree programs are male (Kays, 2023).

This research will aim to find out whether this gender gap favoring women in education is also affecting hospitality education specifically, through quantitative analysis of enrollment data from a representative hospitality education institution. This data will be compared to other programs such as international business and information technology throughout the last ten years.

In addition, qualitative research will be performed. This will be done with two focus groups with male hospitality students. One group will be higher performing males, while the other will be low performing males. The aim of the focus group will be to find possible trends in education, are there any problems, and what could be the solution if there are.

Problems men face in today's society

In recent years we can see that men are struggling in life. This concern has especially been established and made known by writer and scholar Richard Reeves, the author of "Of Boys and Men" (Reeves, 2022), Reeves discusses the problems that men are facing and how this directly affects school, work, and even family lives. Reeves mentions that this is due to men's mental health. More specifically that men are feeling like they are worthless. However, Reeves claims how men are not the actual problem, but rather the structure that is in today's world. Reeves also mentions that because of the structure today, men are falling into bad habits that are self-destructing. One of the many reasons that Reeves touches upon is the educational system, and how it is structured in favor of women. Reeves claims that men are at a disadvantage in mental development at the same stage in education with women. One possible solution to this problem could be that men go one year later in school (Reeves, 2022).

When it comes to hospitality education there have been many studies that show a downward trend of enrollment generally. While fewer students seem to be choosing hospitality as a field of study, this trend is much stronger among male students. One study done in Croatia shows that from academic year 2013/14 to 2021/22 there was a drop in enrollment of 25.9% for men and 15.1% for women in high schools when it comes to hospitality industry education (Kesar et al., 2022).

Considering hospitality education as a gateway to hospitality employment, it is not surprising that the hospitality industry is facing a shortage of workers. There are fewer people willing to work in the hospitality industry with one of the major factors being that the hospitality industry

offers relatively low salaries with long hour shifts. Other factors are higher risks, large turnover rates, also other growing industries that open possibilities (Shubham, 2023). With these trends and the trends connected to gender enrollment in hospitality education there can only be one outcome, and that is a continuing downward trend.

Gender differences in hospitality employment

Hospitality employment has traditionally been highly segregated by gender. For example, in the United States, entry level positions are dominated by females. According to Hospitality manager demographics and statistics (2023), the following job positions are filled mostly by females.

- Front desk receptionist 85%
- Housekeeping 85%
- Travel agent 78%
- Food server 62%
- Bartender 60%

There are other entry level positions that are dominated by men:

- Maintenance 96%
- Bellman 96%
- Driver 83%
- Warehouse worker 78%

In mid-level management positions, many positions are also highly segregated by gender.

Most dominated by men

- Chef 75%
- Kitchen managers 72%
- Sales and marketing managers 60%
- Sommeliers 68%

Most dominated by women

- Event planners 58%
- Event managers 64%
- Hospitality managers 58%
- Concierges 61%
- Guest relations managers 61%

Most balanced field would be restaurant managers job with 54% in favor of men, and tour guide 53% in favor of women. There is a visible trend where men are dominating in more back of the house jobs such as maintenance, warehouse, chef. Women on the other hand are more dominating in jobs that require contacts with guests such as guest relations manager, food server, receptionist, tour guide. (Number of Hospitality Managers in the US, 2023).

At the highest executive levels of management, males still dominate in hospitality, although the situation for women has also improved in recent years. From 2019 to 2021 the CEO positions and managing directors increased from 19% to 26% for women globally (Catalyst, 2022).

Top executive jobs with percentages held by men

- Executive chef 88%
- COO 77%
- CFO 72%
- CEO 68%
- General hotel manager 66%
- Food service director 58%
- Travel manager 33%

(Number of Hospitality Managers in the US, 2023).

From 2010 to 2019 there has been a rapid increase of 24% in employment when it comes to women in the hospitality industry across all sectors. (Newsdesk, 2023). With this data it is visible that the growth is continuing and growing greater for women.

According to Silva & Couto (2023) the reason for this segmentation of jobs in the hospitality industry is that the hospitality industry is still seen as traditional, and some job positions are immediately associated with one gender. For example, many people would immediately think of women when mentioning housekeeping, or when mentioning a general hotel manager you think of a man. According to Silva & Couto (2023) one reason behind gender segregation in hospitality employment is how men and women are often assigned tasks in terms of their social roles. Women are more connected to jobs in relation to their domestic tasks, where men are more connected to jobs that are physically demanding (Silva & Couto, 2023). This can then be

one of the reasons why the hospitality industry is experiencing these major differences in job sectors.

Methods

This research was done with two methods. One aimed for quantitative research with data analysis while the other was more qualitative oriented with two semi structured focus groups.

Data Analysis

The aim for quantitative research was to see the gender trends in enrollment in the HTM degree program at a four-year undergraduate college in Dubrovnik. Data analysis for first year enrollment statistics in the HTM, General Business, and Information Technology programs from 2013/14 through 2022/23 with data provided by the RIT Croatia enrollment office. With this data I was able to calculate the percentage of enrollments for males and females to see if they are balanced, and what the drop or rise would be over the years.

Focus groups

The focus groups were more oriented towards diving into deeper understanding of males in education and in their hospitality careers. All of the participants are HTM students with all of them being from the Balkan region with the ages from 18 to 24.

The focus groups were divided into two groups with a total of eight participants. There were also two written responses from male students that were unable to participate.

One group was comprised of four male students (two sophomores and two freshmen) who had consistently attained Dean's List status through high academic grades. Two participants (seniors) submitted responses in written form.

The second group consisted of four male students (one sophomore and three freshmen) who had not achieved Dean's List status.

Focus groups were held at the RIT Croatia campus and lasted approximately one hour each. Anonymity and confidentiality of student responses was ensured.

The focus groups were semi structured questions with some questions like "Why did you enroll in HTM", or "Do you have any experience in working in the HTM industry?" There were 12 total semi structured questions. Six dealing with the students' educational experiences, and six dealing with their hospitality employment experiences and expectations. The questions were open-ended with follow-up questions asked. The focus groups were conducted in English.

The focus groups were recorded and during the focus groups there was a moderator present who oversaw taking notes. With the focus groups the aim was to find trends and new ideas about how are male students feeling, and dive deep into their minds and thought processes about the positive and negative sides about education as a male. With the solutions to any problems that we came across in mind.

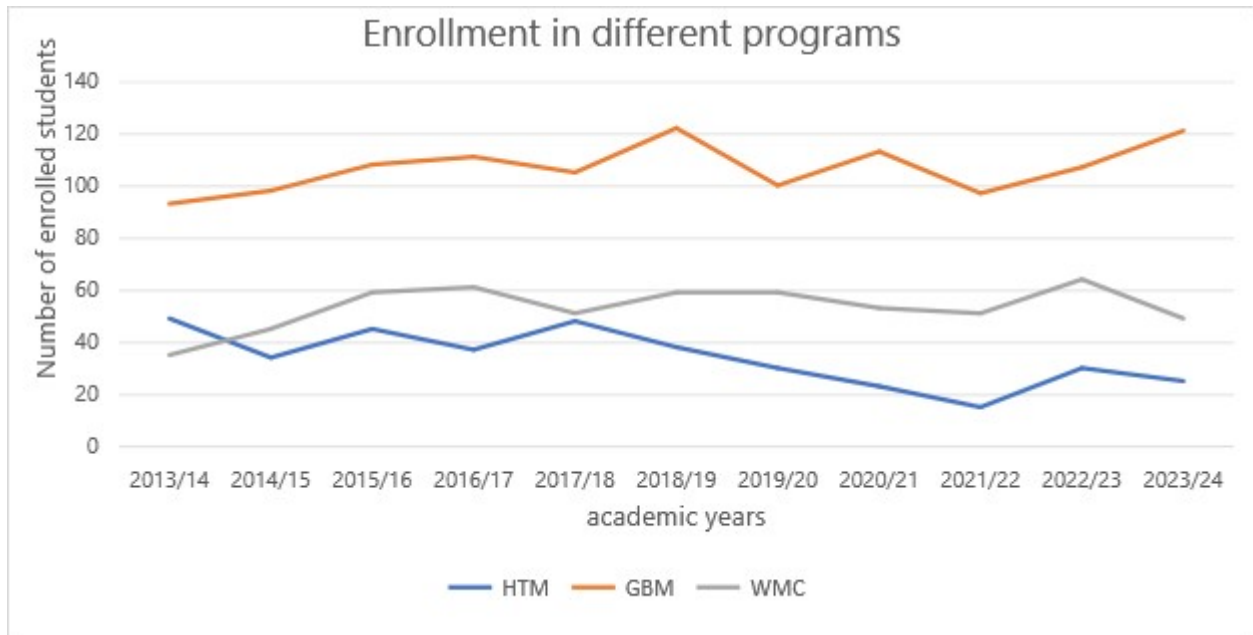
Results

Overall enrollment trends

When looking at the data analysis of enrollment in a Hospitality and Tourism Management program we can see a decline over the years from 2013/14 to 2022/23. We see different programs like General Business Management and Information Technology also, but General Business Management has experienced a rise, while Information Technology has also experienced a rise but less than General Business Management program.

From the graph below it is visible that General Business Management has had an increase of 30%, Information Technology has had an increase of 40%, while Hospitality and Tourism Management program experienced a 49% decrease in enrollment over the years.

Figure 1



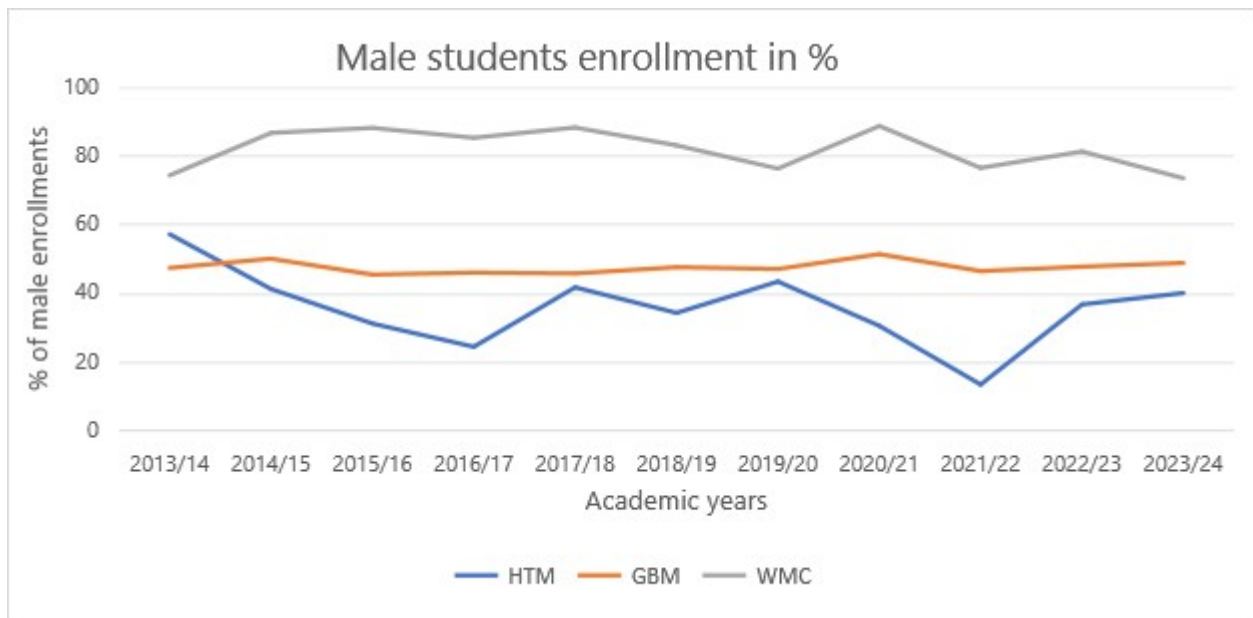
(Source: RIT Croatia enrollment office)

Male students enrollment trends

Since this topic is focused on male students' enrollment in the HTM program there is a visible trend where male students decline is larger than females. Shown above is the whole enrollment from males and females combined, but below it is specific about male enrollment in the different programs.

In the graph below it is visible that General Business Management is relatively the same at about 47-48%, Information Technology program is also relatively the same at about 73-74%, but in the Hospitality and Tourism Management there is again a negative trend with the drop from 57% to 40% with a significant drop starting the same year when COVID-19 hit the world. It is important to mention that these are all statistics of first-year enrollments.

Figure 2



(Source: RIT Croatia enrollment office).

Male Students Perspectives

Hospitality education experience

Participants were asked about their HTM enrollment decision. Most of the students enrolled at an HTM institution because of previous experience. Attending HTM oriented high school or having work experience in HTM industry. They said that they enjoyed working in the HTM industry and that by enrolling in this college they seek additional knowledge. One student mentioned, "I enrolled at this college because of the American education, and I happened to prefer HTM more than other programs that were offered." After this statement the individual also mentioned that he now "fell in love with the HTM industry".

The students from the second group, being the non-achieving Dean's List group mentioned that their parents have businesses in HTM industry and that they quickly got into the industry from a young age. For them that also played a crucial role in the decision making for enrolling at this college and program.

From this question there was no visible difference between the two groups in the answers they provided.

Moving onto the topic of experience in class, and if they had experienced anything negative with being a male they all mentioned that they didn't have anything significant to say, and that they didn't get mistreated because they were male. Although they mentioned that they felt males are better performing in more engaging classes and classes that are focused on problem solving and specific tasks rather than classes focused on listening to lectures. They mentioned

that male students don't care about grades in classes that they don't find interesting or beneficial for them in their own mind. The first group of Dean's List students agreed with this statement, but they mentioned that they at least try mentally to stay focused and perform better even though they don't want to.

When asked about differences between male and female professors, participants generally agreed that male professors were much "harsher" towards them than towards female students. "I find that male professors are harder on us as males" was one of the statements from a non-Dean's List student. One Dean's List student said "Male professors are harsher on us, but I don't find that as an issue and I wouldn't change it." He then also mentioned an example of a professor who hugs and jokes with female students who are late to class but shows roughness towards male students who are late.

In terms of grading, participants mentioned that they believe males do perform better in classes they find interesting or are more problem solving and critical thinking oriented, but in general they said that female students do tend to have better grades than them. This can relate to statements above where if they don't care about a particular class, or they don't find it beneficial for them then they won't try to get good grades, also for males it is much more important to understand the topic rather than getting a good grade on that topic. Dean's List students again agreed with these statements from non-Dean's List students, but mentioned again that they are one if not the best of their generation both from males and females and that is because they simply try even though they don't care about some classes.

When asked about the differences between General Education classes and more career focused HTM classes they mentioned that they find HTM oriented classes much better, because they provide value in their minds and are seen as more beneficial to them. For example, they are motivated in Financial Accounting because they clearly see that they will need the skill in the future whereas reading and writing does not seem as important to them for their careers.

Moving on to stereotypes and biases the male students mentioned that they did feel appearance played a role in some grading aspects like in terms of presentations, because they felt that female students were much more presentable than male students. Other than that, they didn't raise major concerns except some biases towards more high performing students, where they felt high performing students would get a lot more attention than lower performing students. This bias was made known from one Dean's List student, but he mentioned that this is not really gender oriented.

The students were also asked about what they would like to change to help them more in education. They answered that schools and colleges should provide more engaging classes, and really try and engage all students not only high performing ones, realize their problems in studying which are biological and mental problems with focusing on class and try and help them.

This is a major concern because males attention span is shorter than females which is why schools and colleges should aim to provide more engaging classes and include all students. "We just can't focus for the whole class; we start making jokes and wander off somewhere with our mind."

By providing this it will help both male and female students. Also, participants seemed to agree that males are behind in mental advancements from their female counterparts, which again puts them in some disadvantage.

In terms of administrative help there could be changes, especially in the duration of classes. A lot of the students mentioned that some classes are much too long, and even the high performing students said that it is very hard to keep track in those classes. There are classes with a duration of 1 hour and 50 minutes which is way too long, one student mentioned that the best time is 50 minutes of an engaging class.

Hospitality employment experience and expectations

The participants were asked if they see themselves continuing to work in the hospitality industry and if so where do they see themselves. All but one participant wants to continue to work in the hospitality industry. The job positions in which they see themselves are all general manager positions or going the entrepreneurial path in opening something of their own in correlation with the hospitality industry.

After this the participants opened more about the experiences with customers and with the boss, and how it was different from females. There were examples of negative experiences with both customers and with the boss. With customers the students mentioned that they noticed how their female colleagues would receive a lot more tips for doing the same work as them from customers, which can be related to their previous statements of females being more representable, and more “attractive to the eye of customers”, with the boss there wasn't anything major, but one participant from the Dean's List group mentioned how he would be

called up all the time to fill up a double shift if it was needed, whereas his female colleagues wouldn't get that call from the boss. Again, this student mentioned how he necessarily didn't have an issue with that because males are much more physically stronger than females, but it is still not equal behavior towards them.

The students also stated some skills and strengths they believe male are better at and some where females are better at. With this question the students generally confirmed stereotypes in the world and that males are more suited for leadership roles, problem solving, logical and critical thinking, and so on. Whereas they mentioned that females are much better suited with job positions that require human interaction, creativity, emotional knowledge, and so on.

Talking about more soft skills, and emotional skills as mentioned they believe that these skills are very necessary and great to have, but females tend to have these skills more pronounced than males. Because of this they mentioned that males are better suited for leadership and management roles, whereas females are better with people. They gave an example that males think from "point A to point B", and females are kind of "all over the place" and not as direct as them. One student from the Dean's List group mentioned that females bring calmness to the atmosphere at work.

In term of their experience and the domination in different job positions, they again agreed with the stereotype that is males dominate more top-level job position, and females dominate more mid-level and entry-level job positions. With mentioning that the majority of the HTM industry belongs to female employees.

For the last question about what they would change in their workplace to help males more, they said that since they didn't have any major issues at work, they couldn't provide concrete answers to this question.

Discussion

This research supported a lot of stereotypes that were already circulating in the world. HTM enrollment is falling, dominance of different fields in HTM industry. This research shows the thinking of males about what is wrong with the education system, how can we change it, so it is better for them. Also, it captures males thinking about what is important to them in education and career experience, what skills do they possess and what skills do they lack. It shows the mentality of males and their need for change to be better. Their feelings toward college and grades are completely different as we can assume by their answers to that of their female colleagues.

As mentioned, these findings from the primary research results are almost completely the same as the literature review done prior. Some unexpected findings were that male professors are "harsher" than female professors. Other programs remained at the same level of enrollments, whereas HTM program is experiencing a big decline in enrollment overall, especially male students enrolling. Treatment of males from customers and bosses is different than the treatment of females, not majorly but enough to be visible.

With this research information the next steps that need to be taken are that males should firstly be more appreciated and made more presentable. Engage them in more activity and give them a chance to open. By doing these things that will highly contribute to their mental health,

and it will help with better understanding and focusing on future goals. Make them realize that every class is as important as the other, even if they don't think they are.

Finally, to help them the classroom activities should be adjusted. Provide shorter lectures and make them more engaging so the students are constantly working with their mind and body.

Lectures should be transformed from simple talking and reading to more working and engaging.

Limitations and Future Research

It would be great if this research could contain more enrollment statistics from different institutions that provide the same HTM program, or if there were more male HTM student participants to talk about their educational and career experiences, and what the future looks like for them.

Future questions that have risen from this research would be about differences between male and female professors' behavior towards male students.

Even though generally speaking male students have lower grades than female students that doesn't stop them from dreaming big about their future goals. So, is it that they don't care about grades, or they don't see value in grades? Do they not represent the true knowledge of a topic?

Do male students prefer subjects like Financial Accounting to Reading & Writing, because Financial Accounting is much more oriented towards clear answers, whereas Reading & Writing is a bit "fuzzy" to them?

This study captured a more in depth understanding of males thought process about HTM education, and HTM employment. This research shows what can be changed with their mentality, their vision of education, and what can be changed with the educational systems. With this research educational institutions should see the changes that need to be made so we can have more capable and healthy people in the future.

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