

Performing Femininity: Women at the Top (Doing and Undoing Gender)

Abstract

Tourism research has primarily treated gender as a male-female dichotomy and has been constrained by a heterosexual matrix for empirical inquiries. Such research, however, has failed to acknowledge the fluidity and multiplicity in theorizing gender. To redress this overlook, this study moves away from the conventional binary thinking and views gender as a performativity which is resulted from repetitive social performance. By conducting multiple field observations and interviews with 17 hotel female general managers working in Mainland China and Taiwan, this research presents the ways of doing and undoing gender by tourism female leaders and the extent to which the everlasting gender logic can be questioned.

Keywords: Gender Performativity, Tourism Female Leaders, Doing Gender, Undoing Gender

1 **1. Introduction**

2 As a set of ideologies, feminist strand offers critical and transformative epistemologies in
3 challenging the masculine traditions to tourism scholarship wherein gender-aware studies still
4 remain embryonic (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, & Morgan, 2015). Although
5 feminist theorizing embraces manifold research perspectives, it is commonly agreed upon the
6 differentiations amongst three basic concepts. The term *sex* is not equivalent to *gender*, as *sex*
7 depicts the physiological distinctions between males and females whilst *gender* refers to
8 individuals' psychological, cultural and sociological tendency. Gender, as a social-constructed
9 concept, is therefore not wholly determined by *sex*. Further, being a female is not the
10 precondition of being a feminist. *Feminism* is held by people who believe the existence of
11 unequal conditions for women and espouse the goal to reduce the inequities (Bristor & Fischer,
12 1993).

13
14 An increasing number of gender studies in organization research (e.g., Bowring, 2004; Kelan,
15 2010) have responded to the above ideas by moving beyond the traditional binary thinking in
16 gender prescribed by sexual identity, whilst centering on the fluidity, multiplicity and becoming
17 of gender. That is, gender is no longer a label of individuals, but in a constant doing/becoming
18 molded by social performance and positioning of discourses (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). As
19 remarked by Alcoff (1988, p. 406), women are often appropriated as the object of research, but
20 seldom the “free-willed subject who can transcend nature’s mandates”. Yet, merely looking at
21 doing gender is not enough to discard the binary thinking, as the representation of differences
22 still operates on a dualism basis and such dualism remains unquestioned. In this respect, Kelan
23 (2009, 2010) calls for a new epistemological change which not only addresses doing gender,
24 but also conceptualizes how gender is undone. Such studies touch the very intricate negotiations
25 women are facing when the static gender schema limits the way to make sense of certain
26 subversive performances by female executives in patriarchal organizations (e.g., female
27 workers perform male-like roles in IT company). These attempts further push for the enacting
28 of multiple gender identities and illuminate the underlying causes of poor representation of
29 women leaders in organizations (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018).

30
31 The relative absence of female achievers in upper management positions has also attracted
32 considerable attention in tourism and hospitality field (Costa et al., 2017). However, most
33 gender studies in the area insofar are trying to ascertain gender comparative analysis in payment,

1 career paths and job segregation (e.g., Campos-Soria, García-Pozo, & Sánchez-Ollero, 2015),
2 with a focus on organizational efficiency and human resource management whose
3 epistemological stances reside in functionalist orientation. Although recently in the field,
4 women-in-workplace studies have been rectifying some of the omissions and involving broader
5 and more sensitive perspectives including lost female leaders (e.g., Pritchard & Morgan, 2017),
6 sexual misconduct (e.g., Cheung, Baum, & Hsueh, 2018), life quality (e.g., Morgan & Pritchard,
7 2019) and etc., gender by and large still appears as a binary variable constrained by male/female
8 dualism, rather than an analytical framework capturing the fluidity of women who might
9 construct their genders differently in a wider picture including not only organization but also
10 society.

11
12 Over the years, men versus women serves as a binary opposition associated with bifurcate
13 discourses. Fatherhood was often clearly connected with public sphere whilst motherhood was
14 normally coded in domestic domain (Kimmel, 1997). Yet the separation of gender status quo
15 is becoming increasingly blurred in the process of modern social changes (Coskuner-balli &
16 Thompson, 2012). However, a social inertia of assigning different levels of gender autonomy
17 to different social fields is still prevalent (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). It is therefore not
18 surprising to see the hierarchical gender norms at domestic sphere continue to shape the overall
19 gender identity of contemporary working mothers (Giele, 2008). In tourism, women have been
20 playing a stimulative role given that they are the taste-makers in travel decision-making at home
21 (Smith, 1979) and they occupy more tourism jobs than men in workplace (Campos-Soria et al.,
22 2011). However, there is a lack of ontological quest in the field to challenge the stability of
23 gendered identity and ask the very first question about what constitutes the gender. Perspectives
24 on how the patriarchal discourse determines gender performance -- process of doing gender,
25 prevail in extant tourism research; whilst the emancipatory possibility of undoing the prior
26 gendered social status at both home sphere and workplace field is less prominent.

27
28 To respond to this call, the present study aims to take hotel female General Manager (GM) as
29 an example to critically enquire how gender is done for a female leader juggling workplace,
30 home and socialization. Specifically, the study builds upon Butler's gender performativity to
31 address the following questions: how female GMs make sense of gender in a work context
32 given that leadership role (usually masculine) and gendered expectations (being a woman in
33 nature) are often conflicting? To what extent do female GMs challenge the existing gender

1 hierarchy within managerial discourse? How female GMs make sense of gender at household
2 sphere and the extent to which undoing gender at work influences gendered relations at home.

4 **2. Conceptual Background**

6 **2.1 Feminism and Gender Performativity**

7 It is generally held that feminism can be classified into three theoretical phases: the first wave
8 of liberal feminism was concerned with women's basic rights in the public domains including
9 the right of voting, education and employment. However, liberal feminism is questioned by its
10 singular focus on middle class and white women (Calás & Smircich, 1999). Increasing attention
11 has been paid to the marginal female groups in the second wave feminism. The movement of
12 women's rights began emphasizing in the private areas such as sexual orientations and
13 contraception (Delamont, 2003). Since 1968, the third wave feminism has been developing into
14 a much broader scope involving most spheres of life including church, family, academy and
15 language (Daly, 1978). It therefore links public domains and private issues addressed by former
16 two waves (Delamont, 2003).

18 Rooted in the third wave of feminism, the poststructuralist feminist approach aims at
19 deconstructing and rewriting the discourse and symbolic domains wherein masculine thoughts
20 of binary oppositions prevailed, such as man versus woman and work versus leisure (Fullagar,
21 2002). In Butler's (1990) theoretical lens of gender performativity, gender is not predetermined
22 by any existing identities or prior subjects. Gender is rather performatively constructed through
23 individuals' own repetition of practices or mimicking of the hegemonic norms of gender held
24 by given society. Butler (1988: 520) suggested that gender is "a stylized repetition of acts...a
25 performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors
26 themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief". In accord with poststructural
27 agenda which de-centers the gendered identity imposed by discourse and unconscious mind,
28 Butler's conception of gender is twofold: doing—an acting which considers the heterosexual
29 conventions into the possible play (gender reiterations); and undoing—a transformative position
30 towards the presupposed legitimate classification (gender resignifying practices) (Butler, 2004).
31 To differentiate performativity from performance, Butler (1993: 313) further summarizes
32 gender performativity as below: "Gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do,

1 but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears
2 to express”.

3
4 Performativity stems from Austin’s (1962) notion of ‘performative utterance’ which describes
5 the reiterations of orthodox words and acts in doing gender. These reiterations or doing gender
6 are believed as social facts that naturalize the differences between male and female in
7 institutional and ideological levels (Hodgson, 2005). For example, when the doctor declared
8 “it’s a girl” at the birth of a child, it is the beginning of a performative to classify the child into
9 a set of heteronormative norms (Butler, 1993). However, the performative act is not intact until
10 the girl reacts to the label ‘girl’ by conforming to the practices which are deemed appropriate
11 for doing a girl. For example, while growing up, the way in which the girl should dress herself,
12 which language should use and what emotions should express can be the reiterations reinforcing
13 the normative expectations of being a woman (Lester, 2008).

14
15 While the girl may need to constantly cite the gendered positions of the overall social milieu,
16 there exists sub-fields that subversive performance might happen as different fields exhibit
17 different levels of autonomy (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Butler (1997) termed the subversion
18 of conventional gender norms as gender resignifications or undoing gender. Unlike reiterations,
19 resignifying practices challenge the orthodox gender constraints and arouse individuals’
20 reflexive awareness of the roles that society has imposed on themselves (Bell, 2006). That is,
21 there are social agents in certain fields might raise transformative attitudes for undoing
22 supposedly gender binary and take on new gendered meanings (Butler, 2004). As illustrations,
23 Thompson and Üstüner (2015) found that woman participated in roller derby field exhibit
24 different degree of reflexive awareness of gender tendency that has been naturalized in
25 everyday life. The gender resignifying practices in roller derby field such as physically
26 aggressive personas and risk-taking demeanor enable the derby girls enact new dimensions of
27 femininity. Kelan (2010) showed that gender can be undone through two approaches: females
28 in leadership roles might not register femininity anymore for performing androcentric script;
29 and females working in man-dominated company might enact multiple constructions of gender
30 and redefine what it means to be a woman.

31 32 **2.2 Gender Reiterations within Tourism Labor Discourse**

1 Studies into gendered labor within tourism context have revolved around the following themes:
2 disparate levels of payment (e.g., Bakas, Costa, Breda, & Durão, 2018); horizontal and vertical
3 gender segregation (e.g., Campos-Soria et al., 2011); gender job satisfaction (e.g., Kara, Uysal,
4 & Magnini, 2012); glass ceiling (e.g., Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, &
5 Muñoz-Mazón, 2019); female working style and business performance (e.g., Marco, 2012);
6 sexual harassment and employment misconduct (e.g., Poulston, 2008). In certain ways, the
7 body of current gendered research in tourism is reminiscent of the three-wave feminism
8 trajectory, though majority of female-in-tourism literature still remains at its first two phases.

9
10 Despite the above dearth, extant research has served to offer informative reference on the
11 reiterations of orthodox practices in doing gender in workplace of the tourism field. An ideal
12 worker is projected as having high availability to work overtime and on shifts (Costa et al.,
13 2017); high flexibility to be on call constantly to accommodate work needs (Mooney & Ryan,
14 2009); and less domestic duties (Mulvaney, O’neill, Cleveland, & Crouter, 2007), all of which
15 disfavor female being a perfect candidate since women carry out most of the social reproduction
16 responsibilities at home. Especially for senior management roles, masculine norms dominate
17 the structures of workplace. Despite organizations’ proclamation of being gender-neutral, the
18 expectation of leadership mirrors masculine styles, which is typified by result-orientation,
19 combativeness, power and toughness (Ellemers, Rink, Derks, & Ryan, 2012). To conform to
20 the expected signs of leadership, female managers have to balance between being woman and
21 being business-like (Wahl, 1998). Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, Torres and Wahl (2018) found in
22 their study that in order to increase credibility, top female managers of tourism organizations
23 perform in a gender neutrality way embedded with male identities. They exhibit male leadership
24 characteristics of being ambitious, rigorous and high mobility. Moreover, careful clothing
25 choice and determined tones in negotiations are also adopted by women managers to weaken
26 the heterosexual gaze.

27
28 Whilst female executives exhibit masculine traits at workplace, doing gender for women is
29 more likely to be complicated by society expectation of motherhood and household
30 responsibilities. Social reproduction roles decide women to be the primary family caregiver
31 (Morgan & Pritchard, 2019). The presumed codes for women in assuming family tasks are their
32 great potential of kindness, mildness and sensitivity, whereas men are constructed as financial
33 provider connected with domination and power at home (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). For

1 example, hotel general managers are expected to be highly visible in property and presented at
2 a wide range of social events, which blurs the divisions between work and personal life
3 (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). The unencumbered male managers who have full support from wife
4 and have no priority out of work seem to be the best fit for organizational logic (Costa et al.,
5 2017). It is therefore common to notice that many wives of male executives choose to be full-
6 time housewife and move together with their husbands to meet the needs of work motilities. In
7 the case of female executives, they tend to travel between cities or countries as they may have
8 family and husband back to home city (Hearn, Jyrkinen, Piekkari, & Oinonen, 2008).

9
10 The discontinuities between workplace and household raise a question about how female
11 executives manage the disparities in constructing their gender between the work field wherein
12 being business-like contests the traditional masculine–feminine binaries, and the family field
13 wherein social pressures still exist that impels female to abide by dominant gender assumptions.
14 In this sense, poststructuralist feminist approach offers additional conceptual lens with which
15 to view conventional gender-power codes in a disruptive, transformative and contested way.
16 Poststructuralist perspective is concerned with the studies looking on the immanent structures
17 and interrelationships which shape the legitimated norms in different social spaces. It renders
18 the knowing of causes rather than the effects of gendered issues within tourism and hospitality
19 management research (Aitchison, 2005). Under this epistemological tenet, gender
20 performativity is well-situated as the guiding framework of present study in analyzing: to what
21 extent do female executives raise reflexive awareness and enact resignifying practices of work
22 field into household field; and to what extent do naturalized gender norms held sway in
23 household field influence their gender practices in workplace.

24 25 26 **3. Methodology**

27 Following Butler's (1990)'s theoretical root in poststructuralist feminist approach, this study
28 adopts a post-structuralism research lens. Post-structuralism arises from the process of
29 decolonization, whereby critiques of colonialism that centers upon Western discourse were put
30 forward (Gikandi, 2004). The old overarching systems have generated unbalanced binaries
31 upholding the European paternalistic order (Korstanje, 2012, 2019), such as the Western versus
32 non-Western otherness (Edward, 1978), white men versus black/Asian women
33 (Bandyopadhyay, 2013), to name a few. Responding to such entrenched hierarchy, post-

1 structuralism calls for a detachment from the centralized and singular structures whilst
2 embracing the multiplicity and intersectionality of the reality and knowledge. A seminal scholar
3 to post-structuralism is Jacques Derrida (1981) who addressed discourse analysis and
4 deconstruction of the hierarchy of dual oppositions. Yet, the overturn of extant opposing binary
5 doesn't mean the disappearance of male/female classification. Rather, "there is a perpetual
6 double movement within the oppositions so that the positively-valued term is defined only by
7 contrast to the negatively-valued second term which continually threatens the former's
8 sovereignty" (Cooper, 1989, p. 483).

9

10 To implicate such deconstruction process, current research intends to explore the contested
11 gendered practices and women's negotiations/reflexivity happened in various social spheres.
12 Operationally, the key tenets of post-structuralism are multiplicity and intersectionality, thereby
13 opening up space for the data collection and data analysis in current research. By
14 intersectionality, the interdependence of experiences of being a female at family and workplace
15 is acknowledged. Women's ongoing negotiations at different discourses with varying degrees
16 of power relationships are foregrounded (Pillay, 2015). By multiplicity, women's resistance to
17 their marginalization and possibilities of constructing multiple identities (undoing gender) are
18 also emphasized in the method of present study (Butler, 1990).

19

20 In line with the research lens above, this study employs multiple qualitative methods to dig into
21 the negotiations female leaders in tourism field are facing, and the interrelationships between
22 their resignifying practices in workplace and the gender conventions rooted in daily life. The
23 methods combine participant observations and semi-structured interviews, to partake of female
24 executives' life and work, and to get in-depth insights into how female executives make sense
25 of the role changes in relation to diverse social fields with different gender constraints.

26 Data collection comprised two phases: pre-test ethnographic studies and formal interviews. In
27 phase I, ethnographic approach was conducted from August 2016 to February 2017 to
28 illuminate the formal interviews and develop the aspects of main interview protocol. The pre-
29 test revolved around three female GMs in Taiwan (see Table 1 Informant1 to Informant3) with
30 methods of participant observations and in-depth interviews applied. Specifically, the third
31 author of present research used personal social connections for finding three female GMs
32 consent to participation. She was invited by two hotel live-in GMs (Informant1 and Informant3)
33 to live together in their hotels for a couple of days and partake of their daily routines as a

1 complete observer. A four-day field observation with Informant1 and a three-day field
2 observation with Informant3 were finally made, shadowing their work, family life, and
3 interaction with employees, guests and family members. During the observation, observation
4 memo and researcher's reflection memo were made, and in-depth interviews were conducted
5 for several times with two GMs as well as with their employees and family members (see Table
6 2). Additionally, three phone interviews were made with another GM (Informant2) considering
7 her busy schedule of mobility over that time. Intrinsically, the researcher at the fieldwork
8 positioned herself as a participant who is actively involved in the context and reflexively
9 engaged with the researched subjects. This participant observation is suitable for studying the
10 value-laden phenomenon (Goulding, Saren, & Pressey, 2018). Moreover, it helps the
11 researchers to gain early insights into how participants make sense of their gendered positions
12 in various fields before the formulation of the protocol for the subsequent formal interviews.

13

14

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 here

15

16 Three authors of current research analyzed the data generated from pre-test (observation memo,
17 reflexivity memo and interview transcripts) separately and discussed the possible aspects
18 wherein female GM's struggles and negotiations may happen. Three aspects were finally
19 recognized: workplace, family life and socialization & personal wellbeing. According to these
20 three dimensions, the main interview protocol was fine-tuned and finalized. The pilot
21 interviews with three female GMs (Informant1 to Informant3) were also included in the final
22 data analysis. In phase II, formal interviews were conducted between December 2017 to August
23 2018, using snowball sampling technique with two female GMs in mainland as gatekeepers
24 introducing further informants among their acquaintances. The recruitment of interviewees
25 finished when the information and data patterns had demonstrated saturation (Charmaz, 2006).
26 In the case of present research, an attempt to invite female GMs with diverse family
27 backgrounds (e.g., marital status and child rearing) was made to elicit a thickness of the data.
28 Data was considered saturated when additional interviews were unlikely to change the final
29 presentation of data analysis. Phase II resulted in 14 formal interviews lasting from 63 minutes
30 to 119 minutes via Skype, which constitute over 18 hours of recorded conversations. In total,
31 17 GM interviews (see Table 1) were conducted with over 26 hours of recordings, together with
32 the three pilot GMs.

33

1 The definition of gender is not immutable but rather fluid in this study. Female GMs’
2 questioning and challenging had led them to negotiate and define their own gender boundaries
3 in different social fields. Thus, the analysis aimed to privilege female GM’s own interpretations
4 of ‘gender’ and narratives of gender performative practices. As such, data analysis follows an
5 interpretive approach guided by philosophical hermeneutics within which “there is never a final
6 or correct interpretation and meaning is not simply constructed, created, or assembled, it is
7 negotiated...” (Pocock & McIntosh, 2013, p. 409). During the analysis, an iterative process of
8 hermeneutic circle between the meaning unites and the whole comprehensive understanding
9 was essentially emphasized (Ricoeur, 1981). This study followed Mkono (2016)’s two steps to
10 analyze data. First, open reading of all the transcripts was conducted back and forth along with
11 the memo making to highlight GM’s narrative structures (meaning instances) in which
12 discontinuities between work and life occurs. Second, inductive thematic analysis was carried
13 out on the highlighted meaning instances while marking the interrelationships among the
14 emergent themes. These circular steps continued until the meaning patterns grasp the essence
15 of each but also link back to the sense of the entire text.

16

17 The role and subjectivity of researchers during hermeneutic data interpretation should also be
18 disclosed (Ricoeur, 1981). The first author is a single young Chinese and had experiences in
19 five-star hotel as management trainee working closely with her female GM and directors. From
20 an observer’s perspective, the first author has been reflecting on her female superiors’
21 working/life values and developed feminism into academic interest during postgraduate studies.
22 Both the second and third authors are Chinese moms with two children, undertaking certain
23 managerial roles in hospitality industry and academic. They are juggling different social fields
24 themselves and have a long-standing focus in tourism female leadership. The best feminist
25 approach is to place the scholar as the active research subject within the overall framework that
26 she/he intends to draw (Harding, 1987). Notably, authors’ subjectivities in current research
27 were not left out but acknowledged in the data analysis. For instance, researchers’ own
28 reflexivity memos taken during the observation were made as the raw data in pretest data
29 analysis, thereby seeking for critical and in-depth analysis brought by researchers’ backgrounds.

30

31 **4. Findings**

32 4.1 Negotiating about gender binary across social fields

1 Disparities between genders in various social spheres including work field, socialization and
2 household are oftentimes mentioned by our female GMs. These discontinuities usually manifest
3 themselves in implicit and subtle ways that require informants to take extra efforts to negotiate
4 but not necessarily to raise reflexive awareness in challenging the existing gender logics. In
5 organizations, ideological dilemma of fulfilling a gender-neutral position whilst recognizing
6 gender discriminations is prevalent in our GM's narratives. Almost all informants expressed
7 that hotel GM is a job without any particular gender as prefix. In the eyes of a professional,
8 there should not be classification of female GM or male GM since the requirements and
9 performance assessments of being a GM are the same to both men and women. Although our
10 GMs perceive their occupation as gender neutral, covert gender discriminations and stereotypes
11 are still commonplace when female GMs are trying to balance personal leadership image.

12

13 After undertook her very first GM project in a third-tier city in mainland China for eight months,
14 Michelle was transferred to a bigger property in first-tier city with almost 400 rooms and more
15 than 200 employees. Since she is relatively new to GM position, her memory of negotiating
16 about feminine-masculine traits in developing a personalized leadership style is still fresh:

17

18 *“Personally, from the training I received and working experiences I had, I regard myself as a*
19 *business person without gender. But several occasions will always remind me of my identity as*
20 *a woman, such as a citywide GM dinner gathering where the whole table was full of males*
21 *except me...For most staff, it is fairly normal to see a male GM loses temper. However, if a*
22 *Chinese female leader loses temper, employees tend to take you as a tigress. It is especially the*
23 *case for a female GM who is single or childless. People assume that female GMs might easily*
24 *vent out their suffering from personal life in workplace. But if a male GM is single, people tend*
25 *to label him as a Golden Bachelor. An androcentric construction of leadership doesn't always*
26 *work out for women. But being too feminine makes you lose leader authority.”*

27

28 The conventional normative labels of gendered leadership evoke tensions for female GMs to
29 re-map themselves onto alternative gender categories although majority proclaimed that hotel
30 work is merit-based instead of gender-based. In accord with leadership dilemma occurred in
31 work field, socialization is also an organizational domain that heightens informants'
32 negotiations of gender boundary. Socialization in our interviews refers to two aspects:
33 socializing with staff and owners internally; and socializing with customers, governmental

1 officials and media externally. Except two GMs who rented nearby apartments, the rest of
2 interviewees all live in hotels - the places they work, which blurs the line between public and
3 private lives. This poses a question for GMs about mastering an appropriate distance with
4 directors who largely live in the same building. Many female GMs brought up the differences
5 of male GM and female GM on this issue:

6
7 *“There are more ways for male GMs to relax such as inviting departmental heads to go*
8 *clubbing and drinking after work. But as a female leader, I need to take more factors into*
9 *considerations. First, I seldom join gatherings with male colleagues in informal situations.*
10 *Second, casual colleague gathering might be a relaxation for GM, but what if it is a potential*
11 *pressure for subordinates who regard it as part of work? People always say women are*
12 *emotional animals, I try to avoid stepping into this analogy and being too close to co-workers*
13 *after work. Last month, I always came across sales director in hotel gym at night. We*
14 *subconsciously talked many topics related to work. After several times, I felt that I shouldn’t*
15 *have shared some words. So this is one risk of being too close to particular colleague.”*

16
17 The above passages by Ella shared some narrative characteristics that are typical among the
18 female GMs we interviewed. Male GMs tend to be more heedless of subtle interpersonal
19 relationships since majority industry peers are men and it is convenient for them to host frequent
20 gatherings as a pastime. Interestingly, all the three interviewees from Taiwan used a term to
21 describe the dominated male GMs as “old boys’ club” wherein male friendship is well-
22 established amongst Taiwan hotel executives. They have regular parties of just-for-men
23 activities such as cigar smoking and wine tasting.

24
25 Besides internal socialization, external socialization with big client and officials, as a major
26 task of being a hotel GM, also creates gendered discontinuities between a resourceful leader
27 who can please all sides and women’s habituated discomfort in drinking and coping with
28 possible harassment. This is particularly notable in mainland GM’s interviews wherein table
29 dining is the place that Guanxi (business relationships) grows. Majority respondents mentioned
30 that they normally bring several male directors with them to attend dinners. Hiring a male EAM
31 who can drink in the team is also a means of compensating for respondents’ weakness. Sandy
32 unfolded in details about her experiences of negotiating and overcoming this
33 feminine weakness:

1 *“When my current hotel was under pre-opening, we need to apply for various licenses granted*
2 *by governmental institutions. At that time, I had to attend almost two dining events everyday...I*
3 *am not a social person but being forthright and unrestrained at the dinner table is a must. My*
4 *practice is making a toast to the most senior and drinking Moutai (Chinese liquor) in one gulp,*
5 *without a tremor. People would be impressed by your momentum and you do create a strong*
6 *character...In addition, being strong and sober is important for female to protect themselves at*
7 *the dinner table...I mean...surrounded by men, you may face some sexist humors occasionally.*
8 *If you react to it frivolously, then possible harassment may happen.”*

9
10 Despite the constraints posed by the preceding public spheres, household lives appear to be the
11 key site that raises a point about the gender inconsistency of enforcing socially exposed norms
12 including reproductive and childcare duties domestically whilst performing businessman
13 scripts to chase after career dreams independently in public. Seven informants revealed that due
14 to childcare duties, they chose to remain at the position of EAM for a long time rather than
15 accepting earlier GM offers that organizations sent to them. For instance, Claire left her home
16 city since her son was three years old. Working from restaurant supervisor all the way up to
17 EAM at four cities, she wasn't able to be assigned back to properties in her home city:

18
19 *“My position is more promising than my husband, thus we reached agreement at the beginning*
20 *that I can accept job offers from other city and he stays in town to take care of our child. I do*
21 *appreciate the autonomy he gives to me, but it is still not realistic to have husband take care of*
22 *the kid...Most of the time, my son stayed with my parents and I gave remote control like*
23 *registering extracurricular activities for him. It is until 2015 when my son's teacher called me*
24 *and said that the child behaved oddly at school. Then I figured out that my boy hadn't*
25 *communicated too much with his father and grandparents for half year. But my husband never*
26 *noticed that and thought it was not a problem! Intensive guilty coming over me...I turned down*
27 *two out-of-town GM offers and went back to the property in my home city by accepting a*
28 *demotion in title.”*

29
30 Claire now becomes a GM in her city and she said she will only leave the city when her son
31 finishes high school. Her narrative is one epitome of female GMs' interpretative repertoire. But
32 not all informants are as lucky as Claire and majority still work out of town and outside the
33 family. As what Sandy commented: *“It is a paradox that I need to have two scripts to perform:*

1 *working like a man independently whilst fulfilling maternal tasks at home.*” Rather, pinpointed
2 by informants frequently, male GMs are usually free from family burdens since many of their
3 wives are full-time mothers and more likely to move the whole family to the city where
4 husbands work. Whilst prior findings highlight domains wherein the negotiations of gender
5 boundaries occur, they haven’t addressed the possible reflexive awareness female GMs can
6 raise from those negotiations. The following parts will explicate how far the long-standing
7 gender logics can ever be challenged.

8

9 **4.2 Undoing Gender**

10 There are two pathways that gender might be undone from the interviews. First, female GMs
11 enact resignifying practices in workplace, that is, female GMs act in a stereotypically-masculine
12 tendency at work. Second, resignifying practices at work enable female GMs to raise reflections
13 about normative gendered practices at home and question the entrenched gendered expectations
14 in private spheres. It is commonplace to see the first pathway in interviews but Debby’s case
15 reflects an evolvment from an introverted girl to a forceful boss at work. Unlike most hoteliers,
16 Debby studied in chemistry and entered into hotel jobs twenty years ago by accident. She
17 recounted changes along her career path:

18

19 *“I was too shy to talk to people at the beginning. I thought of doing reservation all my whole*
20 *life since reservation doesn’t require interpersonal communications. That’s why I was so*
21 *terrified when hotel assigned me to sales team. I even didn’t know how to greet people in*
22 *elevator, let alone completing sales call! But life can lead you to the roles you would never*
23 *imagine. I am a GM now, trained by this industry for twenty years. My team now defines me as*
24 *a big woman with hot blood. Even I myself start to wonder if there is a man in my bones which*
25 *has only been discovered recently...When my female staff told me that she was just bullied in*
26 *lobby by a gangland customer who owed money to hotel, I headed directly to lobby with security*
27 *team to beat up the guy. Even my employees were shocked by my reaction, but a woman can be*
28 *violent too.”*

29

30 Echoing to the sentiments expressed above, Debby has re-constructed a strong self-portrayal
31 different from her original character, such as she no longer takes fright at giving a speech to a
32 crowd. Likewise, Flora has coded her personality shifts toward more male gender ideals in the
33 realm of work as *“trained masculinity”*. She remarked that gendered tendencies are learned,

1 some female leaders can be even more masculine than males. The learned masculinity not only
2 resides in GM position itself, but in the process of taking more responsibilities. When Flora
3 was still an EAM, her management of a hotel crisis with serene and courage makes it an
4 exemplary case of learned masculinity:

5
6 *“There was a young staff suicide in dormitory due to depression. The staff’s family sent more
7 than thirty men to raise a riot in hotel lobby. Our owner belongs to government agencies, so
8 we tried to solve the problem quickly rather than create disturbances...But communicating to
9 thirty men in anger is not easy. At that time, our GM may become the target of attack due to his
10 foreigner identity. Inside heart I was fearful, but I asked GM to stay in office and I went out to
11 be the person in charge...Those men cannot believe that a woman (I only took one security
12 manager with me) came out for negotiations and they threw cups and plates at me. I didn’t get
13 intimated and stated the disadvantages for them if they kept making the turmoil instead of
14 communication, being logical and formidable...”*

15
16 Flora finally managed this crisis by several further meetings when the thirty men calmed down.
17 She summarized that: *“this sort of crisis did offer me the chance to rethink my potential and
18 gendered possibilities. I mean what men can do, I can do as well. That’s why when I became a
19 GM for a pre-opening property, I was quite confident to work with and supervise the progress
20 of construction team where only burly men exist.”*

21
22 If the reflexive awareness of gendered identity is easily to occur at workplace, a spillover effect
23 of involving resignifying practices from workplace to domestic realm is less common. However,
24 there are still cases that our female GMs strive to forge an equal gender awareness across fields
25 and engage in radical changes in private spheres. When reflecting on at-home gendered
26 practices, Leila shared her so-called *“family revolution”* last year:

27
28 *“I worked out of home city since my daughter was only eight-month old. I did feel anxiety over
29 not accompanying the kid. Last year, my hotel promoted me to GM and secured a seat for my
30 daughter at the best school of my working city. I called my husband, hoping that he could send
31 our daughter to my city. But he refused and persuaded me to return family for fulfilling a mom’s
32 role...I understood his request since he had a company at home and earned far more than I do.
33 But what I don’t understand is why woman should be the person who gives up job opportunities?”*

1 *I have been enjoying my job and performed even better than man, why can't I have the equal*
2 *rights at personal life? After careful considerations, I asked for a divorce with the custody of*
3 *the child...To my surprise, my husband ceased his company and moved our family to my city.*
4 *Now my family lives together with me and my husband performs at-home fatherhood."*

5
6 Whilst Leila's undoing gender is grounded in the support from her husband, there are cases that
7 some informants decided to remain unmarried and childless. In such situations, skeptical
8 accounts from parents and friends are the major pressures for participants to balance traditional
9 women demeanor. Importantly, these participants legitimize their nonconformities though
10 deliberately distancing themselves from other females. They embrace the idea that they are
11 exceptional exemplars in industry so they should enjoy certain exceptions in normal life. For
12 instance, Lynn said that she frequently received judgments from her friends:

13
14 *"Almost all my girlfriends have at least two children. They keep reminding me about my*
15 *personal life. I admitted that I missed out the best time for marriage due to busy work, but it is*
16 *my choice. I have a successful career and enjoy my current life status...People always have*
17 *trade-offs in life...Not all women can be leaders in career, but I did it! why should I change*
18 *then?"*

19

20 **4.3 Doing Gender**

21 Whilst aforesaid participants incorporated ready grounds to justify their discordances of daily
22 mundane, the informants' deep-rooted natures of femininity are not easy to abdicate. Especially
23 in Asian contexts, it is unsurprising to see many participants went through a period of career
24 stagnation for the goods of families as addressed in negotiation session. Additionally, a more
25 interesting finding of doing gender is that informants' naturalized gender norms held sway in
26 daily life influence their working practices. When recounting gender differences between male
27 GMs and female GMs in running a hotel, all informants identified the advantages of exhibiting
28 certain feminine traits. Becoming a female GM at hotels, the awareness of leveraging females'
29 habituated specialties instead of completely restraining them is not developed until our
30 participants reach a mature stage of leadership:

31

32 *"At the outset of being a GM, I was trying to avoid the fact that I am a woman. Few women in*
33 *my hotel chain become GM, so I was not comfortable to behave in a feminine way...But after*

1 *several years, I realized that being feminine is an advantage! For example, I am not a good*
2 *driver and most women are not. I do feel that our parking lots in hotel were too small. Therefore,*
3 *I designed several women-only parking lots which are big enough for female guests.*
4 *Additionally, I ask the team for setting up some female-friendly guestrooms, fitted with cozy*
5 *amenities including tea ware, jewelry box, masks and gorgeous bathrobes...There are even*
6 *smart toilets which can inspect body weight and offer hygiene bidet water wash.” (Claire)*

7

8 It is no wonder that Claire’s hotel has gained the highest market share of female business
9 travelers. Being feminine doesn’t only address women guests’ consumption needs, but also
10 facilitates team communication as well as strengthens the details of management. Respondents
11 pinpointed that:

12

13 *“Hospitality is a service industry that needs leaders who are detail-driven and communication-*
14 *efficient. Women’s innate abilities of being caring, warm and sensitive are the very traits*
15 *wanted by hotels in China wherein competition has been going deeper. When increasing people*
16 *accept the idea that GM can be women, I think more female peers will join us since it is really*
17 *a job for women.” (Teresa)*

18

19 **5. Discussions and Conclusions**

20 What does it mean to be a female leader working within hospitality labor discourse? Findings
21 suggest that gendered identity work for Asian women executives, who are still minorities at
22 leadership roles, is a confluence of multiple social fields and interlinked negotiation pathways.
23 These negotiation pathways involve women’s recurrent quest in doing and undoing the
24 normative gendered conceptions (Figure 1). Per Butler’s (2004) theoretical vernacular, gender
25 is contextualized practice or lived identity in a constant state of becoming including repetitions
26 of normalized acts and resignifying performances. Most gender studies in organization research
27 tend to partition gender reiterations and gender resignifications as two separated themes and
28 focus on only one of them at a single organizational site. Instead, our study corroborates
29 Thompson and Üstüner’s (2015) findings that gender repetitions and resignifications are
30 integrated as a dialectical orientation with shifting relations being mapped onto not only
31 workplace but also everyday life.

32

33

Insert Figure 1 here

1 The whole dialectical loop depicts in Figure 1 broadens our ideas about the process of being a
2 woman above glass ceiling in hotels. Firstly, echoing to the literature of undoing gender in
3 organizational research (e.g., Bowring, 2004; Kelan, 2010), our study reveals that majority
4 female GMs need to undo feminine norms in a certain degree and enact hegemonic masculinity
5 to win the trust from different stakeholders and manage emergencies at work. Secondly, beyond
6 the above, undoing gender in current paper also involves women's reflexive negotiations of
7 enacting resignifying practices from workplace to everyday life, suggesting that increasing
8 businesswomen in Asia are transmitting their independent spirits garnered from work into daily
9 life. However, this spillover effect is still marginal since most female GMs are still struggling
10 to manage domestic duties and their gender resignifications at work do not override the overall
11 status quo of gender order (see performativity as reinforcing performance in figure 1). As
12 explained by Butler in an interview that gender resignification doesn't mean a temporary and
13 impromptu act such as "I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender
14 I want to be today" (Kotz, 1992, p. 83). Only through the repetition of desires and acts of
15 subversive performance towards prevailing gender norms, can the social agents finally develop
16 a new approach to doing gender.

17
18 Lastly, this study unfolds that female GMs' negotiation of bringing gender norms in daily life
19 into workplace adds value to the good leadership in the context of hospitality. Different from
20 findings in other organization studies that female workers in typical patriarchal organization
21 seek for transgressive performance to avoid potential discriminations (Holland, 2006; Kelan,
22 2009), females GMs working in hotels instead outperform their counterparts if innate feminism
23 traits are well leveraged. This merits additional attention to the existing body of studies
24 regarding undoing gender and also illuminates tourism research for moving forward on the
25 fluidity in theorizing both gender and leadership.

26
27 In tourism research, queer heterosexuality has been largely applied into LGBT group (e.g.,
28 Johnston, 2001; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018), however, the construction of gender as multiplicity
29 doesn't only exists in a radical change such as for transgender, but also in a gradual becoming
30 for normal person such as for females in leadership positions. In hospitality research, studies
31 tend to study the organization efficiency and career development at the site of single
32 organization to account for poor representation female leaders, whilst overlooking a gendered
33 lens of moving away from dualism thinking to a logic of difference arisen not only in

1 organization, but in multiple social fields. This study is the first attempt in conceptualizing
2 gender as performativity and opens up possibilities for future tourism research to probe what
3 happens to gender doing/undoing over time and its relations to frame the way in which people
4 think about gender. From the standpoint of performativity, this study further challenges
5 Goffman's (1974) theory of social performance: social agents are strategically performing and
6 acting as they move along different theatrical scenes. By performativity, there is no prior
7 identity and central script to determine what it means to be a woman. Female GMs are not
8 performing and their doing and undoing gender are both the ongoing-realities of being a woman.
9 As Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 8) suggested that, being a novel orientation in modern sociology,
10 performativity approach may "open fresh and unconventional vistas for tourism research."

11
12 There are several limitations in current research. This study is positioned within the
13 organizational research of female leadership and is therefore insufficient in addressing the
14 intersection effect among gender and other dimensions. Future studies are encouraged to
15 understand gender asymmetries by linking gender with other issues such as race, class and
16 production. Due to a tiny population of female GMs working in mainland and Taiwan, sample
17 size in current study is relatively small. Moreover, Skype interviews used in the second phase
18 of data collection did not allow for an in-depth information that as rich as that of face-to-face
19 interactions. Whilst this study brings up some context-specific characteristics in its findings,
20 the distinct Asian context is not fully unfolded given that limited research has explored doing
21 and undoing gender in other cultural settings. This opens up new avenues for future research to
22 conduct cross-cultural comparisons.

23

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