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Women in Ecotourism

Abstract:

Ecotourism is one of Costa Rica's main industries, and while it brings huge economic capital into the country, these new opportunities are not equally distributed among all genders. Women are slowly gaining social equality, but currently women are limited by only getting specific domestic jobs in the ecotourism industry. Many argue that ecotourism in Monteverde is empowering women and it is true that more women are getting jobs outside the home, however, they are generally still confined to domestic types of jobs like cleaning and cooking. A survey of 12 businesses in Monteverde revealed that out of 22 outdoor educational ecotourism guides, only 2 of them were women. The women who are working in ecotourism are not being active members of the experiential process.

Resumen:

Introduction:

Women are fighting all over the world for gender equality, and the prevalence of sexism can especially be found in specific parts of the world, including Central America. In Costa Rica, machismo is often prevalent in the street, in the family structure, and in the job force.

Ecotourism brings in the vast majority of Costa Rica's overall revenue and bolsters their economy and provides many more new jobs (Horton 2009). Within ecotourism though, there are many different classifications of jobs, ranging from janitorial staff, guides, gardeners,

receptionists, accounts, managers and administrators. According to *Gender and Tourism* (2014), “women make up the majority of the tourism workforce, but they tend to be in the lowest paid, sometimes even un-paid, and lowest status jobs”. (For my project, I looked at women’s employment in “active” and educational job positions within Ecotourism in Monteverde. I hypothesize that in the Ecotourism business, less than 20% of all guides, activity leaders, and educational persons will be women. I also think that the vast majority of the women will be working in kitchens and be cleaning help. I hypothesize that more than 75% of all people working as janitorial staff and in the kitchen are women. While ecotourism opens up job positions, this fact alone does not guarantee that there will be equal opportunities for men and women, especially in less developed areas in Central American such as Costa Rica.

The ecotourism in Costa Rica does provide some benefits and positively influences the local economy. Tourism provides many jobs, which opens up positions for women. Koens (2009) argues that ecotourism empowers women because it provides new job openings outside of domestic work for women. The tourism industry pours 1,200 million dollars into Costa Rica every year which creates thousands of new opportunities and jobs and significantly bolsters their economy (Koens 2009). This fact does not however mean that these new jobs are providing equal opportunities throughout the country. Chant (2000) shows how socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity in the household retain significant importance in the way that people act in response to women moving into the workforce. Especially when traditional gender roles are overturned, men, who hold most social power, are highly reactive when their power is seemingly threatened by women stepping out of the traditional gender roles. Chant shows how strong these roles are in everyday situations. Women, especially of older generations, feel like they belong at home and are kept in the household by these invisible, yet very strong, pressures.

A great example of gender roles at play is a woman in Monteverde who opened a jam shop with other women in the town. At first, she had a lot of push-back from their families, and even today she struggles with feelings of guilt for leaving her family to work outside the home (name pers. comm.). Part of the reason why the jam company succeeded is because of the strong tourist industry in Monteverde. Women all over the world are fighting for their right to be independent and self-sufficient, but even in the United States, women still only make 77 cents to every dollar that a man makes in the same position (Hayriye 2006). With the economic support of ecotourism, these women are able to expand their job opportunities and step outside the home. As this expansion is empowering for many Costa Rican women, we will see that there is still a strong trend in the types of domestic jobs are actually available to women.

Materials and Methods:

I developed a questionnaire in Spanish that asked the various businesses in Monteverde and Santa Elena about their employees, the different job positions available, how many applicants they received, and the salary of their employees (Appendix I). To collect the survey data, I went to 12 eco-tourism related businesses and talked to the main person at reception (or whoever they then directed me to). I conducted all of the interviews in Spanish, unless the employee initiated English with me first (2 interviews). For each interview, I first explained that I was a student at the Monteverde Institute and that I was doing a project for my class and then I asked them if they would not mind answering a few questions. I found out that a few very small businesses I had interviewed were run and managed by only one person so I excluded them from my sample.

Results:

Like my hypothesis, I found only women workers doing domestic cleaning jobs (Figures 1 and 2). I also found only males working as gardeners or with animals (Figure 2). The exception to this is El Establo because I was unable to gather exactly how many cleaning men they had because they have approximately 200 workers. I also found that the overwhelming majority of guides are men. Out of 22 guides, there were only 2 women. The guides are interesting because they do not make a set salary. The guide's income is based on how many tours they give, so in the high tourist season they can make more a lot more money than in the low tourist season. They are also one of the only ecotourist occupations that have the potential to make extra money on tips.

Even though my data sample is small, some of the most interesting information came from people's perspectives when I was out performing interviews. The very first place that I went to, the women receptionist working at the Serpentario justified the male guides getting paid more than the women because she thought that the men had harder jobs and more to do than the women. I personally do not know if this is true or not, but her statement is one that can easily perpetuate sexism. When I was talking to another woman at El Establo, she said that there are, "obviously more women on the cleaning staff than men" which again tells us that she is not challenging the way traditional gender roles currently are. The last observation that I made was when I knocked at a small hotel and a woman answered, but then immediately called her male co-worker over to interview me. These things that I noted are all micro-aggressions that occur hundreds of times every day that reinforce gender roles (Ref?). Most of the time, gender roles are not being held in place by overt sexists, but instead by everyone in society with hundreds of

subtle micro-aggressions. Women are also oppressing themselves by taking these micro-aggressions to heart, internalizing them, and not challenging the norms.

Discussion

Like I anticipated, my findings conclude that the overall trend is that many more women are performing indoor domestic jobs such as cleaning, while many more men have education related or outdoor jobs. My original hypothesis of less than 20% of all guides and education related jobs leaders in ecotourism would be women was supported as I found that women only make up 9.1% of all guide positions. I was unable to make a conclusive statement about what percentage of men are doing domestic cleaning jobs because many ecotourism businesses could not tell me exactly how many cleaning employees they had, and could just tell me that there were more women than men. Horton (2009) explains how “ecotourism has not necessarily challenged or subverted traditional gender roles, but rather has been viewed as a ‘natural’ extension of women’s household roles of cleaning, cooking, and serving others”. My findings also support Horton’s ideas of ecotourism being positive in that it provides more economic opportunities for women, but negative in the sense that women are not getting positions that challenge gender roles. The overwhelming majority of women who I gathered data about were still bound to specific domestic jobs.

The likely causes behind my findings may come from very long and complex roots in gender inequality. To start, there is the general sense that women are not as mentally and physically strong as men (Ref?). This is a stereotype that is slowly being unwound, but still clearly has roots in almost all societies around the globe. This belief would both cause others to view women as not as capable as men, thus providing women a disadvantage from the very beginning in their household and school opportunities, to friendships and career paths.

Employers in a sexist (or machista) society will hire men over women because statistically men are likely to stay at a company for a longer duration of time, and women are more likely to choose jobs that have less “labor market experience” (Blau and Kahn 2000). Societies ideas of unequal gender values will be reflected in women too, so women will apply and work towards more domestic jobs because those are the things that they have been told they are good at, or have seen other women role models doing. This will prevent women from standing up for themselves, and thus companies get fewer women applications to certain jobs, such as being a guide. This is just the tip of unraveling the full string of understanding sexism.

Acknowledgements:

I want to thank all the businesses that participated in my survey, including Serpentario, Choco Café, Hidden Valley Night Tour, El Establo, Monteverde Conservation League, Ranario, Art House, El Viandante Hotel, and Monteverde Community Fund. I would also like to thank Carlos for helping me figure out my project and being very supportive.

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Figures:

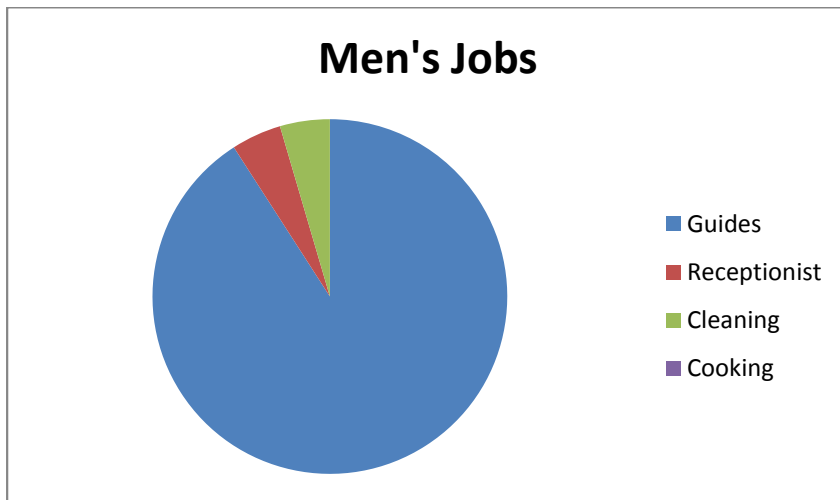


Figure 2. Occupation of males at 12 ecotourist related businesses in Monteverde, Costa Rica.

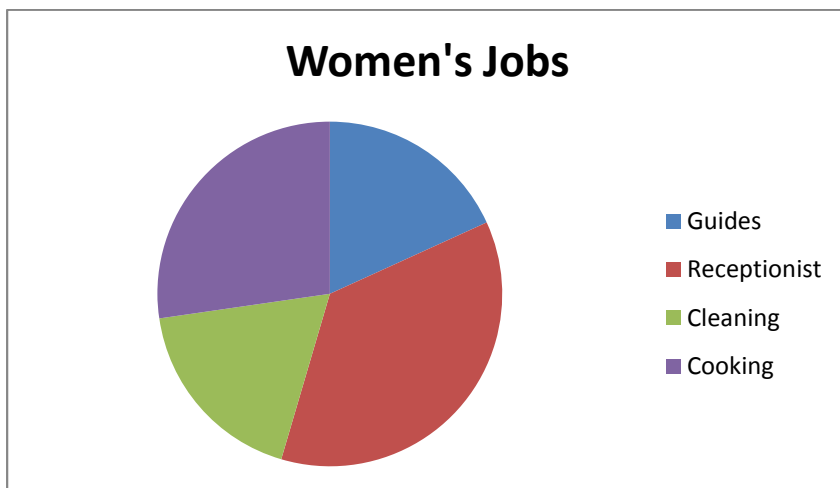


Figure 1. Female occupations at 12 ecotourist related businesses in Monteverde, Costa Rica

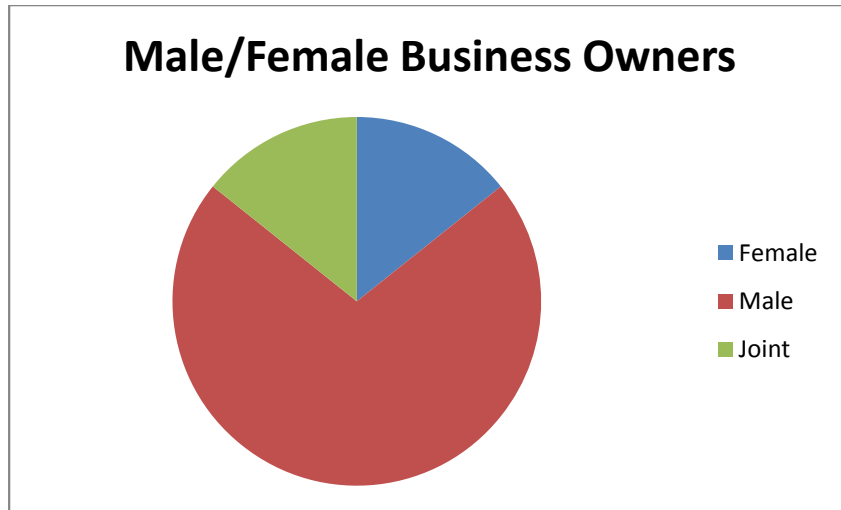


Figure 3. Breakdown of genders in regards to the ownership of 12 ecotourist related businesses in Monteverde, Costa Rica. (Did not find this figure referred to in the document)

Appendix I: Questions used during interviews with personnel at ecotourist related businesses in Monteverde, Costa Rica.

1. ¿Cuántos empleados trabajan en este negocio?
2. ¿Cuántos puestos de trabajo diferentes tienen en este negocio?
3. ¿Cuántos mujeres y hombres empleados trabajan acá?
4. ¿Usted sabe cuántas solicitudes ha recibido en el último año?
5. ¿Es posible que yo pueda saber el salario de los empleados?
 - ¿Para cada puesto de trabajo diferente?

Appendix II: Table showing the results from all of the businesses in the Monteverde region where interviews were conducted. Number 13 was excluded from the overall summary because there was inconclusive data (there were not enough employees for the questions to be applicable).

Name	Total Workers	Women	Men	Guides	Receptionist	Cleaning	Cooking	Salary	Other
1. Serpentario	4	2	2	2men guides/animal care	2women			300 men 270 women	“the men have harder jobs”
2. Choco Cafe	5	4	1				2 women cooks	1 woman cook 230 all others 280	1 male +1 female barista
3. Hidden Valley Night Tour	4	0	4	4 men				\$30 per tour	
4. Hotel next to El Establo	20	10	10		All men	Only women		Refused	
5. El Establo	200	More women	?	7 men		More women than men		Refused	“obviously more women cleaners”
6. Bajo del Tigre	24	9	13	1 woman/4 men/ no women rangers				Reception: \$1000 Guides: \$500-1500	
7. Childrens Eternal Rainforest (Sales office)	10	3	7	1 woman/3 men				Male Receptionist= minimum wage	
8. Ranario	10	2	8		1 woman			Refused	1 W accountant
9. Art House	2	1	1		1 owner woman	1 gardener man		300 women owner 260 male gardener	
10. Restaurant/Hotel	2	1	1		1 man	1 women	1 (same)woman		Woman directed me to man

