

Recommendations for Promoting Gender Equity and Balance in Tourism Conferences

The Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) seeks to be the leading, forward-looking network that inspires, informs and supports tourism educators to drive progressive change. The network takes a constructive action-oriented approach to supporting tourism educators in translating research into action through education.

TEFI recognises that gender equity and balance is one set of issues within a broader agenda for a just society. The network recognises the importance of addressing a wider range of inequalities based on sex, race, disability status, age, sexual orientation, marital status, nationality and social class. However, in response to increasing concerns over the lack of gender equity and balance in conferences, and research that demonstrates gender balance and equity to be a persistent problem in academic work environments, TEFI has chosen to address gender equity and balance in the first instance.

Background

At the 2014 TEFI Conference (known as TEFI8), an inclusive gender workshop was held wherein preliminary research on gender in the Tourism Academy was presented. The project is known as “While waiting for the dawn”. A facilitated workshop session explored themes including access to opportunities (glass ceilings, vertical segregation and gatekeepers), traditional academic practices and values that reinforce gender roles, and action and initiatives that can be taken as an inclusive community committed to equity. It is from this workshop, a series of debates on the online forum TRINET, a review of literature and other initiatives, that the following principles and recommendations have been formulated and are directed, in particular, to the selection of conference speakers and conference organising committees.

Principles

1. *Gender equity is everybody's concern.* Gender equity is not simply a matter of securing equal numbers of men and women. It is not only about addressing women's needs or securing equal access to leadership. It concerns the long-term creativity and vibrancy of the whole tourism academy not just half of it. Gender balance and equity is about applying constructive and creative approaches to achieve a more just and inclusive academy.
2. *Challenge habits of mind and practice.* Patriarchal sociocultural practices and sexism is not necessarily overt, but can be a habit of mind and embedded in familiar practices and taken-for-granted approaches to routine tasks. Guidelines are needed to break down these habits and to challenge us to try harder, look further and not be satisfied until equity and balance are achieved.
3. *Encourage access and open doors.* Equitable representation is important in providing women with access to role models, mentoring and leadership opportunities, especially for young scholars. It is about promoting intergenerational solidarity and alternative opportunities to the well-trodden academic gendered paths that currently typify academia.
4. *Avoid gendered roles and perpetuating stereotypes.* There is a need to avoid distributing leadership positions along gendered roles, e.g. women take organising secretariat roles in conferences and men taking keynote roles, or they take administrative/secretarial roles in collaborative publications and are invited less often to write editorials and prefaces. Such practices perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce embedded ideas that downplay women's expertise and intellectual competencies.

5. *Look beyond established power structures/badges of recognition.* In order to secure gender equity and balance it is important to look beyond taken-for-granted representations of expertise and recognition. Research demonstrates that women often have to achieve more to be recognised; they are often at less prestigious institutions; they are less likely to be given research-only roles; and are less likely to be found in senior academic positions. Women take often informal leadership roles such as teaching co-ordination, and carry important responsibilities while lacking formal recognition. Looking beyond traditional symbols of power, prestige and recognition is therefore essential in identifying talented female academic faculty.

Recommendations for Gender Equity and Balance in Tourism Conferences

The following recommendations for gender equity and gender balance are adopted by TEFI:

1. *Committee/board structure.* All individuals, committees/boards involved in planning and convening conferences, symposia and workshops should adopt the basic principle of gender balance and gender equity; they should commit to monitor gender balance and equity, raise awareness and implement clear actions to achieve change.
2. *Gender balance.* All conference organisers should keep gender balance at the forefront of their deliberations when considering the programme content, composition of sessions and social programme committee. Due to path dependency and the implicit bias in our thinking, when we consider who possesses expertise the first names will usually be men'. There is a need to think harder, more creatively, and more inclusively.
3. *Keynote or plenary speakers.* There is a persistent lack of recognition of female talent in selecting keynote or invited speakers. Apply proactive choices to overcome this implicit gender bias and raise awareness about prejudices that impact decision-making processes. Research suggests that women generally have to have achieved more to be recognised as experts. They are often at lower tier institutions and in lower positions, so give particular consideration to emerging women scholars.
4. *Bursaries.* Where applicable, bursaries to attend conferences should be allocated in a gender equitable fashion. Organising committees should actively encourage applications from all scholars, but particularly females, especially those who carry teaching duties as these individuals will be less likely to apply and their talent may be overlooked.
5. *Leadership and network development.* In selecting the conference organising and scientific papers committees every effort should be made to include emerging women scholars so as to open up networks and develop leadership potential.
6. *Recognition of family values.* In organising conferences, collaborate with participants who are parents in order to facilitate appropriate arrangements for participants attending with families and implement measures that help to achieve work-life balance. In inviting keynote speakers, if they are unavailable due to family commitments, 'hold the space' and re-offer the following year.
7. *Social Events.* Ensure that all social activities offered as part of the conference program are respectful of the gender, national origin, and ethnicity of participants and their guests, and that sexist humour or events, and/or demeaning comments are avoided.
8. *Corporate sponsorship and marketing.* Ensure that external sponsors are made aware of the organiser's commitment to gender issues, and that every effort is made to restrict imagery or products that objectify women and/or reproduce negative gender stereotypes.

9. *Encourage women to participate and apply for leadership roles.* Raise awareness of the need to achieve gender equity and balance in the tourism academy. Conference committees should actively encourage women to apply for conference committee roles.

ⁱ Wylie, A., Jakobsen, J.R., and Fosado, G. (2007). *Women, Work and the Academy: Strategies for responding to 'Post-Civil rights era' gender discrimination.* Barnard Center for Research on Women, New York. Available: www.barnard.edu/bcrw