



FIGHT the POWER

Though we've made strides for equality in the hospitality industry, women still face major obstacles to progression. It's time, says KATE MALCZEWSKI, to address the inflexibility, discrimination and even abuse that still hold them back

‘We need to start thinking about how we model bartending as a career path for everybody’

SAM FISH

In April 2019, trade body UKHospitality released its commentary on recent gender pay gap figures. The hospitality industry’s gap was just 2.8% – a marked improvement from last year’s 4%, and the fifth-closest to parity out of 85 industries surveyed.

‘The continued shrinking of the gender pay gap in the hospitality sector is incredibly positive news,’ commented Kate Nicholls, UKHospitality’s chief executive. ‘The figures confirm our message that, within hospitality, there are no barriers to progression.’

Nicholls has reason to be optimistic. Campaigns such as Women in Hospitality 2020 (WiH2020) are making strides to improve women’s representation in the hospitality, travel and leisure (HTL) sectors. There are women behind the bars and on the floors of many of the world’s top dining and drinking establishments.

But ‘no barriers to progression’? Hardly.

The 2019 edition of the WiH2020 Review notes ‘a severe lack of women in key leadership roles across HTL’, which certainly indicates obstacles for women.

And I know more than a few female members of the on-trade who could point out some neon-lit barriers they have to stare down every day.

When it comes down to it, it’s misleading to read a relatively narrow pay gap as being

conclusive proof of all being rosy for women in the hospitality industry.

True, there aren’t many figures we can refer to relating specifically to gender equality in our liquid-oriented pocket of hospitality. We can’t, for instance, pull up statistics reflecting the number of women working behind bars and in restaurants, much less the number of women in management or ownership roles.

However, the empirical evidence is strong. The turnover of female employees is noticeable, even without solid figures.

‘I find it hard to think of more than a few women who are actually behind the bar in a service aspect [as career bartenders],’ says Hannah Lanfear, spirits educator and founder of The Mixing Class consultancy.

In the world of wine and restaurants, Diana Rollan, beverage group category manager for restaurant group D&D London, agrees: ‘I still struggle to see females in bigger management roles and as operational directors,’ she notes.

The dearth of women making long-term careers in bars, pubs and restaurants indicates a glaring discrepancy between what the on-trade promises and what it delivers: we pride ourselves on our industry’s flexibility, its potential for career

development and its welcoming, accessible nature.

But how flexible is it if a significant number of people can’t sustain the working hours?

How much potential is there if many women can’t see a professional path for themselves 10 or 15 years down the line? How welcoming is it if we tolerate a culture that allows for disrespect and harassment?

FAMILY MATTERS

Earlier this year, *Imbibe* conducted an anonymous survey to learn more about the issues women face in the industry. ‘Do you view working in the on-trade as a lifelong career?’ we asked.

For a significant number of respondents, thankfully, the answer was yes. But for those who couldn’t see a long-term path for themselves in the on-trade, one of the factors most often cited was the inability to make the profession work with family life.

‘Having children massively reduces opportunity,’ said a female restaurant manager. ‘The hours are problematic if you want to have a family,’ wrote another respondent, a female bar manager with 15 years’ experience in hospitality.

And my conversations with women in the industry support these statements. ‘In

some cases, promotions just stop because you've shared your intentions of having a family,' says Rollan. 'And the majority of women still working in restaurants with family are forced to go part-time for a more flexible schedule, otherwise the hours required aren't feasible.'

COMEBACK (WITH) KIDS

Mojo Bars' operations manager Sam Fish elaborates on how this issue plays out for female bartenders. 'I can't think of many women who come back from maternity leave to work behind bars,' she says. 'They have to go on to other positions, things that suit a more family-friendly sort of lifestyle.'

In her 12 years at Mojo, Fish has progressed from junior bartender to her current role as operations manager, which no longer sees her behind the bar. When she returned to work after nearly a year off on maternity leave, she was able to maintain her career due to this operational position, as it lets her 'push [her] hours around'.

'If I was still working behind the bar and I had to adhere to a rota that would change constantly, I'd have to get a different job,' she explains. 'I couldn't expect the employer to adjust the rota to create a standardised working pattern for me.'

But perhaps if we want people – particularly women – to be able to have both families and careers in bars, restaurants and pubs, we do need to expect more from employers. And maybe it is reasonable to expect venues to accommodate more consistent schedules for people who need them.

'Bartending has started being taken seriously as a long-term career in the UK only in the last 15 years or so,' says Fish. 'Now that it's starting to be seen as not just a short-term job, we need to model it as a career path for everybody.'

And scheduling is just part of the story for women who decide to have families. Even if the hours of the on-trade were ideal, returning to work from maternity leave would still be daunting for many women.

'For me it was a difficult thing, coming back to work after having a kid,' Fish says. 'It felt like everything could've changed.'

Larger companies are waking up to this. In an effort to combat the difficulties of returning to work after maternity leave on a wider scale, WiH2o2o has founded

Comeback to HTL. The programme sees WiH2o2o partnering with companies such as Mitchells & Butlers and Revolution Bars to provide jobs to bring women back to the industry after they've taken a career break.

Comeback to HTL doesn't just drop returners into roles – it offers a support system, pairs them with mentors and gives them ongoing coaching, including monthly development workshops on confidence building and skills specific to their jobs. The organisation sees it as 'a resource and template for companies across the sector to use time and time again'.

On the surface, this appears to be a step in the right direction, but in many venues – particularly independent small businesses with fewer resources – it's an issue that still isn't being addressed.

Fish suggests that, at the very least, employers carry out a re-entry interview to open up communication. She explains how returning to a supportive environment can make all the difference: 'Mojo was behind me coming back to work and took time to reintroduce me to what was going on.'

GOING FOR IT

One oft-quoted statistic from an internal report at tech company Hewlett Packard states that women apply for jobs only when they are 100% qualified, while men will apply when they're only 60% qualified.

As dubious as this statement may be – weren't we taught never to trust a statistic that claims 100% certainty? – the idea behind it is one that plays out frequently.

Rollan noticed it in her own career. Before moving to D&D, she spent over 10 years as a sommelier at Hakkasan, moving up the ranks to become the company's UK head of wine. But she faced significant moments of self-doubt along the way.

'When I moved to London and started at Hakkasan, there was an opportunity to work in the head office,' she says. 'I wasn't sure of my capabilities, and I initially said, "Oh, I don't think I'm good enough, I don't think I'm ready for this yet".'

Rollan sees the initial hesitation she experienced as a barrier that many women

'Why is it that so few cocktails known as classics are from women?'

HANNAH LANFEAR

face. 'We tend to question our capabilities and whether we're good enough for certain roles, while men would say, "Yes, what a great opportunity, why not?" They would never question themselves.'

For bartenders, says Fish, this is particularly apparent in the realm of cocktail competitions. She notes that most competitions typically have few, if any, female contestants.

'A lot of raising your personal profile in the [bar] industry comes with things like cocktail competitions, and I don't think that wanting to put yourself out there in that way is usually a female trait,' Fish says, though she's careful to highlight bartenders like Clare Morrow and Chelsie Bailey who are actively – and successfully – competing.

Lanfear, herself a veteran of the competition circuit, spent 10 years tending bar at institutions such as Milk & Honey before moving into spirits education. She wonders if there's a similar pattern playing out in the realm of classic cocktails.





SPEAKING FREELY

Your answers to our survey provided a range of perspectives on the state of the industry for women

'Working in a cocktail bar as the only female bartender, I am constantly told that my male colleagues know more or better'

'The men in the industry have come a long way towards accepting women as part of the team. Educating the customer will hopefully be the next step'

'I was asked when I planned to start a family at an interview. At the time I wasn't anywhere close and I got the job. I think I would not have got the position if I had said differently'

'I have had to fight to get paid the same rate as men who worked the same position within my company'

'Why is it that so few cocktails known as classics are from women?' she asks. 'It's not that we don't make great drinks, because women are making astounding drinks almost constantly. Is it that we're not putting ourselves out there?'

A SYMPTOM AND A TREATMENT

The hesitation to go for a promotion, enter a competition or show off a new drink can easily be written off as self-doubt, something to be remedied by a good pep talk. But if there's a lack of confidence, it's a symptom of a larger problem regarding how women are perceived and treated.

Imbibe's survey responses revealed as much: 'In my experience women are not treated with the same seriousness as men, both within the industry and by customers,' wrote one bar manager. 'I have worked hard and spent god knows how much money and time to earn certifications in this field but I have a difficult time convincing customers and

sometimes co-workers that I have any level of expertise, yet I see my male co-workers given [the] benefit of the doubt.'

For Imie Augier, former general manager at London's Merchant House, the experience of having her authority questioned by customers was compounded by the colour of her skin. 'Some customers saw me, a woman, a black woman, and assumed that I couldn't be the manager,' she says.

Throughout the survey and the interviews I conducted for this article, this idea came up again and again. A woman's knowledge, whether it's in wine, spirits, cocktails, beer or management, is often questioned or invalidated by guests and

on-trade peers alike. When that happens time after time, is it any wonder that hesitation sets in – and that eventually, some women become frustrated enough to leave the industry altogether?

When Rollan was questioning whether she should apply for the head office job, it was only through the support of Christine Parkinson, Hakkasan's group head of wine, that she ultimately decided to go for it. 'Having female mentors really gave me a sense of direction and a role model to follow,' Rollan remarks.

In many ways, mentorship directly combats the invalidation that women – as well as people of colour, and queer people – experience on a daily basis. Yes, part of mentorship's power comes from encouragement. But much of it is also the positive impact of representation.

'Diversity is so important. It's important to see women working, on panels, in public to give examples for others,' Augier says. Lanfear agrees: 'If you don't see someone like yourself behind the bar, you might not know you're welcome in that space.'

For more women to realise a path in the industry, female mentorship must be a key part of every business – and the responsibility to make this happen falls on everyone in an organisation. Employers, no matter their gender, should equip female employees with resources to connect with other women in the trade.

'Having female mentors really gave me a sense of direction and a role model to follow'

DIANA ROLLAN

'WOMEN ARE STILL SEXUALISED'

Of course, the advent of the #MeToo movement has made it abundantly clear that disrespect towards women working in restaurants, bars and pubs goes beyond doubting expertise. In the US, women have come

forward to call out big-name chefs and restaurateurs such as Mario Batali and Ken Friedman for sexual harassment; more recently in the UK, chef Dan Doherty was found guilty of sexual misconduct – asking a female colleague for oral sex – and was forced to leave his restaurant, Marylebone's The Royal Oak. >>

The UK on-trade hasn't yet been rocked by such a high-profile case, but this doesn't mean that abuse isn't happening.

Indeed, the question 'Have you ever experienced gender-related harassment working in the on-trade?' in *Imbibe's* survey produced far too many assenting answers.

'Yes – I worked with men who would grab my face and try to kiss me or bosses who would make me sit on their lap,' commented a bar manager. 'A manager suggesting we discuss the raise I asked for in his bedroom was [a] particular gem,' a sommelier said. '[I] resigned from my last job due to sexual harassment from the area manager,' responded a pub GM.

These aren't just memories from the on-trade's sordid past. 'Women are still sexualised and treated differently to male bartenders,' a female bartender wrote. 'Things are changing, but I believe we still have a lot of work to do,' explained a somm.

For Fish, harassment at work has come not from colleagues, but from customers.

'I was grabbed between my legs [by a customer]. It takes a lot of guts to talk

about it, but it's an important thing to do, because if it happens to anybody else they can have the courage to go, "No, this isn't okay," whether it's a colleague or a guest.'

She highlights the importance of staff training when it comes to handling harassment. 'Managers must be trained to have zero tolerance for those kinds of things. [At Mojo] we train the team – not just women, but the team in general – to make sure they know how to temper inappropriate behaviour [at work].'

Lily Waite, founder of the Queer Brewing Project, points out that this inappropriate behaviour is also frequently targeted at LGBTQ+ employees and people of colour. 'If you're a queer person or a person of colour or a woman working in a bar, it can be a really uncomfortable experience. You can have a lot of unpleasantness directed your way.' (She's putting it mildly.)

But, Waite says, there are a number of initiatives gaining traction, with the goal of fostering environments that have zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination. She directs me to Everyone



Welcome, a framework for venues created by beer writer Melissa Cole. The Equality in Pubs Accreditation, founded by drinks writer Jessica Mason, also seeks to rid bars and pubs of abusive behaviour.

ONE FOR ALL

Like WiH2020's Comeback to HTL programme, these initiatives provide a basis for change – but alone, they're not enough.

When I followed up with UKHospitality to ask if women do, in fact, face barriers to progression in the industry, the organisation's response recognised only the issue of balancing work and family. 'The current focus of industry activity is to provide a route back to senior-level work, equipping senior women to make the step up to C-suite and board,' Nicholls said.

This is a commendable aim. However, it overlooks the women who aren't part of a company with a board, or who don't want an operational role. What of the women who seek careers in venues themselves, but face harassment, unworkable schedules and discrimination on a regular basis?

If the on-trade is to prove itself an accessible long-term profession for anyone willing to put in the work, it's clear we can't just leave changemaking to organisations.

Individual responsibility is key if we're to address the issues of equality still present in our industry. It will require self-reflection. It may necessitate a change in business structure. It certainly involves trading blind optimism for a recognition of the very real barriers that women face every day.

Because, as Lanfear puts it, 'If this isn't a job for life, what are we all doing here?' 🗨

COLLECTIVE CHANGE

Seeking a support network? Looking for resources? These programmes are here to help



COMEBACK TO HTL

WiH2020 is partnering with big-name companies across the hospitality, travel and leisure sectors to provide women returning to work after a break with jobs – and the resources they need to succeed. comebacktohtl.com

LADIES OF RESTAURANTS

A support network for women in the hospitality industry that hosts monthly events. 'Maybe I'm not too sensitive, maybe you're just a dickhead.' ladiesofrestaurants.com

THE MIXING CLASS COLLECTIVE

Hannah Lanfear's forthcoming social enterprise will run as a coffee roastery, café and bar, providing vocational training and promoting diversity in the industry. themixingclass.com

THE EVERYONE WELCOME INITIATIVE

With a manifesto for change that includes a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination of all kinds, this programme aims to make beer venues welcome to – you guessed it – everyone. everyonewelcomeinitiative.com

COCKTAIL QT'S

This group, also the brainchild of Hannah Lanfear, seeks to foster a community for LGBTQ+ people within the bar industry. hannah@themixingclass.com

HOSPITALITY SPEAKS

A non-profit platform publishing anonymous stories of harassment within the hospitality industry to call out inappropriate behaviour. hospitality-speaks.com