

## Gender and the body in leisure and tourism

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### Abstract

This chapter provides a review of research and theory related to gender relations in the fields of leisure and tourism. It examines initial feminist theoretical reactions to the predominantly male theorising of the 1970s and explores poststructuralist ideas of multiple, gendered subjectivities and access to alternative gender discourses which allow for the re-writing of masculine and feminine scripts. It examines sites of leisure and tourism as culturally gendered enclaves which can offer opportunity for struggle and resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Structural constraints on women's leisure are placed in tension with women's leisure and tourism opportunities. The chapter reviews key authors and ideas in the development of our understanding of gender, body and space and identifies the possibilities for change that arise from theorising bodies as *becoming* rather than as *static*.

### Introduction

The history of leisure and gendered relations is as long as the history of humankind itself. However, it was not until the 1970s that increasing political and academic interest in leisure and gender relations emerged in Western discourse with the intersection of the advent of leisure as a field of academic study and a 'second wave' of feminism. This trend is also reflected in tourism studies (see Kinnaird and Hall 1994; Swain and Momsen 2002). However, tourism's later emergence as a field of academic study and its industry focus on business profitability as opposed to a social interest in the people of tourism meant that it was not until the 1990s that a feminist interest in gender relations was distinctly apparent. There was now growing recognition that "tourism processes are gendered in their construction, presentation and consumption, ... the form of this gendering is configured in different and diverse ways which are both temporally and spatially specific" (Kinnaird, Kothari & Hall 1994, p.2) and that processes which are socially constructed "inevitably embody power, inequality and control" (Kinnaird et al. 1994, p.8).

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In this chapter we provide an overview of feminist research and theory in the broad field of leisure in which we position tourism. We begin with early feminist theoretical reactions to the predominantly male leisure theorists of the 1970s and the ways in which critical theorists of the 1980s advanced our understanding of class and gender divisions in leisure. From this largely macro approach we move to a micro-social approach with a discussion of interactionist and post-structural theory; an approach that examines the subjective experiences of individual women, recognises agency and acknowledges the possibility of resistance. We examine ways in which our understanding of gender relations in leisure and tourism has been enriched by contextualizing these relations in the spaces in which they occur and by considering the gendered body in that space. We also pay tribute to postcolonial theory that assigns subjectivity and a valid view of colonisation to the *other*, a view which has the potential to destabilise and transform dominant knowledges.

### **A developing feminist critique of leisure**

With the development of feminist leisure theory from the 1970s onwards there was a recognition that if society is gendered so too are the lifestyles that we lead which include leisure and tourism experiences. With this acknowledgement came the rejection of the assumption of the universality of male leisure experience and a critique of functionalist approaches to leisure studies that emphasise harmony and stability, reinforce the status quo, and obscure gender power differentials, conflicts of interest, and inequalities in access to leisure resources. A feminist approach inspired the examination of mechanisms to move beyond masculine accepted norms. Similar critiques were made of tourism literature which remained stranded in a functionalist perspective for about a decade longer than leisure. In an examination of tourism literature Norris and Wall (1994, p.58) concluded:

where differences in participation between women and men are identified, they tend to be noted rather than explained. Such research is seldom undertaken from a feminist perspective and indirectly may promote the status quo in that it usually ignores the different constraints and opportunities to which women and men are exposed.

Most commonly, tourism scholars had treated gender (or sex) as a demographic variable, an independent variable at the end of a questionnaire, “ordinal and timeless categories” (Richter 1995, p.71), as opposed to gender as a cultural construct. Johnston (2000) concluded that tourism scholarship had been “built on Western hierarchical dualisms and tends to produce hegemonic, disembodied and masculinist knowledge” (p.181).

Since the 1970s, reactions to hegemonic, masculinist knowledge of leisure have traversed a spectrum. The structurally-based gender and class inequalities in access to leisure have been the focus of critical (including Marxist and socialist) feminists (see for example, McRobbie, 1978; Deem, 1986; Wimbush & Talbot 1988; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). They brought to light the structures of power in patriarchal capitalism that impose inequalities and constraints upon women’s experiences of leisure and tourism as producers and consumers, and exposed the ideologies and cultural hegemony that safeguard the broad acceptance of these gender disparities. A more microsocial approach to gender relations examining the subjective experiences of individual women has been taken by feminist interactionists who, rather than viewing power as top-down and necessarily oppressive, have called for an approach which accounts for agency and the possibility of resistance and which recognises the possibilities for the use of leisure to break out of oppressive relationships of power. The possibility of resistance and feminist redefinitions of female subjectivity (Wearing, 1998) is a key concern of post-structural leisure feminists who have drawn on the work of Foucault (1980; 1983) in their study of gender relations. The productive as well as the repressive aspects of power relations have been examined (see McRobbie & Nava, 1984; Foley, Holzman & Wearing, 2007) where leisure and tourism are regarded as sites where gendered relations can be both reinforced and resisted.

Within the context of leisure and tourism, feminists have gone on to explore poststructuralist ideas of multiple, gendered subjectivities and access to alternative gender discourses which allow for the re-writing of masculine and feminine scripts (Wearing, 1998; see also Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2013; Bryce & Rutter, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2003; Gibson & Jordan, 1998; Gibson & Poria, 2014). These studies continue to recognise the structural constraints on women’s leisure identified by Marxist-based and other critical theory feminists, but also recognise women’s agency, autonomy and ability to enact purposeful choices, to challenge the power structures inherent in hegemonic

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masculinity. They document the transgression of boundaries where the culturally gendered enclaves of leisure and tourism have offered sites for struggle and resistance to hegemonic masculinity (see Shaw, 2001; Foley, 2005a, 2005b; Noad & James, 2003; Berdychevsky, Gibson and Bell, 2013). While earlier understandings of gender have been somewhat 'disembodied', in more recent times feminist scholars have acknowledged that the body is ever present in leisure and tourism; all leisure and tourism experiences are distinctly embodied.

### **Gender, body and space**

Our understanding of gender relations in leisure and tourism has been enriched by contextualizing these relations in the spaces in which they occur and by considering the gendered body in that space. As Haldrup (2004) says, space is not "ontologically given", not something "out there" but "produced through discursive and embodied practices of corporeal movement" (p. 435). Spaces are animated and co-produced through the practice of mobility (Cresswell & Merriman, 2011). Leisure participants are not passive beings gazing on space; rather they are "embodied, differentiated, socially contextualized and performative" (Germann Molz 2010, p. 332). Gender relations cannot be understood without recognition of the body (and bodies) participating in the leisure and tourism space. In turn, space cannot be understood without an appreciation of gender relations. As Löw (2006, p. 119) says "gender may be seen as inscribed, via body practices, in the production of spaces".

Wearing and Wearing's (1996) writing on the nineteenth-century *flâneur* has contributed here to our understanding of the male tourist space and gaze and confirmed that the position of the *flâneur* is not readily available to women. Gibson and Jordan (1998) found: "solo women travellers find it very difficult to wander around unobserved. Their very singleness, as well as their gender, serves to draw attention to them rather than rendering them free to roam unnoticed" (p.17). Critiquing the male bias in the conceptualisation of the tourist as *flâneur* and the tourist destination as *image* for the tourist gaze, Wearing and Wearing (1996) proposed the destination as *chora* or interactive space and the tourist as *choraster*. Through the tourist's interactions with the touristic space, "the space becomes imbued with meanings

constructed by the actor which become part of the self" (Wearing & Wearing 1996, p.230).

Researchers examining the gendered representation, production and consumption of tourism landscapes, have highlighted the social construction and thus cultural and historical specificity of space (Aitchison et al. 2000; Craik 1997). Pritchard and Morgan (2000) explained the privileging of the male gaze in terms of tourism destination promotion. That landscapes are gendered as masculine adventure, corresponding to the powerful north and west, and as feminine seduction, associated with the less privileged, powerless and vulnerable south and east, highlighted that the tourism discourse remains not only gendered but also colonial and racial (Morgan and Pritchard 1998). Bodies appearing in representations of leisure and tourism spaces are gendered focusing on the singular image of the ideal body. Analyses of leisure and tourism media, for example, in-flight magazines (Small, Harris & Wilson, 2008) and holiday brochures (Jordan, 1998; Pritchard, 2001), reveal that tourism promotional material reinforces this message with a significant amount of advertising centred on representations of attractive, young, white women and their objectification as sexual beings. Studies of the social messages of women's lifestyle magazines directed at tourists' bodily preparation for a holiday (Jordan 2007, Small 2017) found there was a uniform beach-holiday body to which women should aspire: slim, toned, tanned and well-groomed. The message of the magazines is that one should work to achieve this body and "that without such a body women should not be happy to be unclothed in the public spaces of tourism" (Jordan, 2007, p. 16). The image of the young, tanned, beautiful body, rather than inviting a woman to imagine herself as such, can, through undermining a woman's confidence, deter her from participation (Jordan, 1998). In other words, media representations reinforce normative 'ideals' of the gendered body.

Leisure spaces such as attractions have also been subject to a gendered reading (Edensor & Kothari, 1994; Richter 1991, 1994; Aitchison, 1996). Aitchison et al. (2000) have observed that museums, galleries, statues and other attractions reflect "masculinist myth-making" (p.134) rather than women's history or current activities. As Richter (1994) notes, "the impact of tourism continues to socialise generations to the importance of what men have done while women are ignored or immortalized on

postcards, nutcrackers and T-shirts" (p.154). The masculine tourist gaze is stimulated while women are constructed as *other* (Aitchison 1996).

Bodies are social constructions but they also are physical corporeal entities. While representations are relevant to an understanding of embodied gender relations so too are "non-representational" approaches with an interest "in the subject and in what people themselves make of their lives" (Crouch, 2000, p. 63). Obrador-Pons (2003) refers to the centrality of the body in our engagement with the world. Women and men *perform* and *do* leisure and tourism. Shilling (2003) notes that the body is "a corporeal phenomenon which is not only affected by social systems, but which forms a basis for and shapes social relations" (p. 88). So while the body is "a text of culture", it is also "a practical, direct locus of social control" (Bordo, 1989, p. 13).

Leisure is of course experienced psychologically as well as physically and neither experience is privileged over the other. Rather, both are experienced as an integrative whole, fluid and temporal, "constantly in the making" (Weiss cited in Swain 2004, p. 104). According to Foucault (1980), while social systems or "dominant discourses" render our bodies "docile" and "normalized" through bodily discipline and social and self-surveillance whereby each individual exercises surveillance "over, and against himself" (Foucault 1980, p. 155), we are also capable of resisting these discourses (Foucault, 1980). Felski (2006) identifies this as a shift in rhetoric from one of victimisation to one of empowerment. Coffey (2013) argues that this "new, more positive approach to bodies as intensities exerting force, rather than femininity, for example, being seen as effect of patriarchal culture, moves beyond the binary, static opposition of feminine/masculine identities" (p.13).

Löw (2006, p. 120) suggests, "spaces are, first, an expression of the possibility of pluralities; second, they point to the possibility of overlapping and reciprocal relations; and third, and for this very reason, they are always open and indefinite with respect to future formations".

### **Leisure, the body, resistance and complexity**

Leisure and tourism contexts are often conceived as *heterotopia* (Foucault, 1984), sites of empowerment where one can transgress gendered prescriptions (see Wearing, 1998). Specific types of leisure may also provide opportunities for women to learn about their bodies and gain an expanded sense of their body's potential (Yarnal, Hutchison & Chow, 2006). In all-female *girlfriend getaways*, for example, Berdevchsky, Gibson and Bell (2013) found a way for women of all ages to create a space for existential authenticity, an opportunity to be oneself, "not having to pay attention to their make-up and clothing as they were free from the male gaze" (p. 619). Wilson and Little (2003) and Gibson and Jordan (op.cit.) have examined the leisure constraints and negotiations of solo women travellers as they resist the male gaze. In other studies, leisure space, such as girls' bedrooms, has allowed girls to resist the male gaze, through the control of personal/private space (James, 2001). Foley, Holzman & Wearing (2007) explored ways in which adolescent women used mobile phones in public spaces to impart a sense of self-confidence, sexuality and autonomy which defied the male gaze and allowed them to reject traditional images of femininity at a formative stage in the life course. On the other hand, leisure researchers have found that body image and feelings about appearance can constrain leisure activities through reduced participation or reduced enjoyment in the activity (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; James, 2000; Liechty, Freeman & Zabriskie, 2006). While on the one hand, Berdevchsky, Gibson and Poria (2014) found the tourist space to be an arena for self-exploration, resistance and self-transformation in terms of the counter discourse to social stereotypes associated with women's sexual behaviour, it would be misleading to see these spaces as fully open to resistance. While a holiday was a site for resistance to the dominant discourse of women's sexual passiveness and subordination through inversion of sexual roles, the dominant discourse on appearance persisted: "women's confidence to transgress sexual roles in tourism was reliant on their perceptions of their bodies as abiding by the beauty/femininity standards dictated by these same roles" (2014, p. 11). In other words, "sexual confidence was contingent upon their self-perception as sexy/feminine/attractive, while their bodies had to be in the best shape for holidays." (Berdevchsky, Gibson and Poria, 2014, p.11).

In a study of young women's experience of their physical appearance on holiday, Small (2016) found that there were some spaces in which the normative body ideal could be

resisted. Trekking and camping holidays, for example, provided a space in which the rules about the normative body ideal are less rigid. In some cases the resistance was supported by the company of family or close friends (Small, 2016). Nonetheless, there were many leisure spaces in which gendered norms were reinforced. Spaces, such as the beach or public swimming pool, were found to be sexualised and gendered (also see Jordan & Aitchison 2008) making resistance particularly difficult. As noted by Richards, "The surveillant gaze may become even more crucial on holiday, as bare flesh is exposed to the view of strangers on the beach" (2002, p. 4). Certainly, James (2000) found that some girls at public swimming pools could resist the perceived male gaze while others could not. Löw (2006) in her study of the genderisation of spaces, reports that while women might choose to go topless at the beach, thus potentially resisting the societal prescription, the moral code is that their breasts do not wobble. "The price paid for the naked bosom in our cultural context is the body's immobility (Löw, 2006, p. 130). Foucault's "normalized" and "docile", "disciplined bodies" are evident in many women's accounts.

### **Leisure and poststructural feminism**

Since it is at the point of visitation through our embodied experiences, that we construct and consume spaces (Rakić & Chambers 2012, it is possible to see the body as *becoming*; a process rather than a project (Coffey, 2013). This is a hopeful outcome for leisure and tourism. At the same time the idea that leisure and tourism are discretionary activities means participants have choices, and in the case of tourism, one might say that its temporary condition allows for risks to be taken.

Post-structural leisure feminists have extended the project of leisure feminist theory, opening our eyes to the possibilities of resistance. However, as evident above, it is important to note that there remain many leisure spaces in which gendered norms are reinforced and in which it is still difficult for women to resist or rewrite these norms. It is also important to note that there is a gap in the post-structuralist literature in respect of the subjective experiences of women who do not occupy central positions in Western societies. We need to look to Postcolonial feminist theory to understand the lived experiences of women – other bodies - the 'Other' (Bhabha, 1983) who cannot be fitted



into Eurocentric, Western middle-class white theorisation, as formulated by male theorists and their feminist counterparts.

The concept of *otherness* enables postcolonial theorists to attribute subjectivity and a valid view of colonisation to the *other*, a view which has the potential to destabilise and transform dominant knowledges concerning "degenerate types on the basis of racial origin" (Bhabha, 1983, p. 23). For example, McDonald, Abbott and Jenkins (2012) explored perspectives on physical activity as a lifestyle choice through the voices of women and girls living in remote indigenous communities in Australia and brought to light deeply embedded ways of thinking about the body, familial obligations, and the provision of and access to being active that destabilise the relevance of Western health policies predicated upon individuals shouldering responsibility for taking exercise. Studies of Muslim women in Australia have revealed the systematic constraints that have to be negotiated by these women in the context of their participation in community sport (Maxwell, Foley, Taylor & Burton, 2013; Taylor & Toohey, 2001).

In a similar vein, the voices of women are being used in studies of leisure and disability to disrupt ableism (Jessup, Bundy & Cornell, 2013; Irving & Giles, 2011; Apeldoorn, 2012). Van Amsterdam, Knoppers and Jongman (2012) employed a feminist postcolonial perspective to give voice to the alternative discourses of young women with disabilities who are resisting the implicit assumptions of ableism: that the world should be tailored to those without disabilities.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have provided an overview of research and theory in the area of gender relations in the context of leisure and tourism. The chapter has reviewed a number of the key authors who have contributed to the discussion and ideas in the development of this area with a particular focus on those using a feminist analysis. We acknowledge that there are many more who have contributed in this field which space has prevented us from mentioning.

Significant contributions to research and theory have been made in both leisure and tourism. Marxist, socialist and other critical feminists of the 1970s and 1980s brought to light the structures of power in patriarchal capitalism that impose inequalities and

constraints upon women's experiences of leisure and tourism as producers and consumers, and exposed the ideologies and cultural hegemony that safeguard the broad acceptance of these gender disparities. Drawing on the work of Foucault, the interactionist and post-cultural feminists have focused on the lived experiences of women and men, accounted for agency and the possibilities for resistance, and recognised the relative freedoms of leisure and tourism spaces that provide opportunities for people to break out of oppressive relationships of power. Our understanding of gender relations in leisure and tourism has been enriched by contextualizing these relations in the spaces in which they occur and by considering the gendered body in that space. The body is shaped by and shapes social relations, and is in the process of becoming, affected and affecting (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014). Seeing bodies not as a *static* but rather as *becoming* with the focus on "what a body can do" (Coffey 2013, p. 6) provides possibilities for change. As Coffey says, if one moves beyond the body ideal to affirm bodily differences and positive styles of life, the greater the body's force, "the more it can do" (2012, p. 14).

However, the project for feminist research and theory in the context of leisure and tourism is far from complete. A recent analysis of 20 years of tourism scholarship (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan and Villacé-Molinero, 2014, p. 87) concluded that "tourism gender research remains marginal to tourism enquiry, disarticulated from wider feminist and gender-aware initiatives and lacks the critical mass of research leaders, publications, citations and multi-institutional networks, which characterise other tourism sub-fields". Small, Harris & Wilson (2017) confirmed these findings with a bibliometric analysis of articles from 2005 to 2014 from five prestigious tourism and hospitality journals. They found that less than 4% of the articles were gender related and only 1% featured gender from a critical tourism perspective. Further, reviews of feminist leisure literature have found a decline in the volume of peer-reviewed articles devoted to this topic area, perhaps in response to a perceived crisis in the socio-political project initiated by the Marxist leisure feminists. Some believe the project has been undermined by the move to post-structuralism and the inclination to repudiate male control of the structures of society in favour of a postmodernism obsession with specificity of context (Aitchison 2000).

In our view structural constraints on women's leisure should not be ignored; they are placed in tension with women's leisure and tourism opportunities. However, women should not be portrayed as passive victims of structured inequalities which favour males. Rather they should be acknowledged as active thinking beings who can and do transgress boundaries and challenge aspects of male domination through leisure. The challenge for the future is to maintain a balance between recognising the power of structures such as class, gender, race and ethnicity and institutions such as the media to constrain individual leisure experience, and the power of the individual and the group to see, resist and move beyond these constraints through leisure.

Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2014) propose two scenarios for gender-aware tourism research: stagnation or ignition. Ignition would require the opening up of new research questions, theories and methods, the expansion of gender research leaders and networks, the growth in the number of papers and citations as a proportion of the tourism field, expansion of citations outside the tourism field, recognition of gender as a research leadership issue, the mainstreaming of gender-aware approaches in all tourism enquiry, the expansion of gender research capacity and leadership in less economically developed countries and the expansion of collaborations across institutions, disciplines and countries.

Twenty years on, Wearing's (1996) advice is still pertinent: the project for feminist leisure theory needs to draw upon a broad range of theories that allow the development of perspectives that honour difference and "open up spaces for women and men to move beyond rigid gender, class, race, age and ethnic definitions of the self which are limiting and oppressive, and to envisage spaces which extend people's horizons and provide the potential for personal and political growth (p.188).

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