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A “RELATIVE ESCAPE”? THE IMPACT OF CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN WHO TRAVEL SOLO

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Abstract: Women in contemporary Western society have increased options, resources, and opportunities to access a greater array of tourism and leisure choices. Yet the freedoms women have to consume these choices, and to access satisfying leisure and travel experiences, may be constrained by their social and gendered location as females. Leisure-based research has shown that women tend to be more highly and intensely constrained in their leisure pursuits, particularly when these activities are undertaken out of the home or in the outdoors. Little research, however, has explored how constraints impact on women’s experiences in a tourism context, especially when they travel “solo.” This article presents results of a qualitative, exploratory study of 40 Australian women’s experiences of solo travel. In-depth interviews with these women reveal that constraints do exist and exert influence on their lives and travel experiences in a myriad of ways. Four interlinking categories of constraint were identified through a grounded approach to data analysis: *sociocultural*, *personal*, *practical*, and *spatial*. Further definition of these categories evolved, depending on where the women were situated in their travel experience (i.e., “pretravel” or “during travel”). The women’s solo travel constraints will be presented and defined in this article, and practical implications for the tourism industry will also be discussed.

Key words: Constraints; Women; Solo travel; Tourist experience; Gender; Leisure; Australia

Introduction

Constraints have been defined as factors that “inhibit people’s ability to participate in leisure activities, to spend more time doing so, to take advantage of leisure services, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction” (Jackson, 1988, p. 203). At the heart of

constraints theory is the notion that people have the freedom and the desire to participate in leisure, but that certain factors may hinder that freedom, desire, and participation (Raymore, 2002). Though much of our understanding of constraints is grounded in the leisure studies field (Jackson & Scott, 1999), this article argues that there is potential in extending and

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applying constraints theory to the study of tourist behavior and the tourist experience, with particular relevance for understanding women's travel.

In this study, travel is situated as a form of leisure behavior, thus it expands leisure constraint theory into a tourism/travel context. The conceptual connection between leisure and tourism is now well recognized. Studies of tourism and leisure tend to reveal similar motivational and behavioral elements, as both travelers and leisure seekers are generally, in search of experiences that provide escape, freedom, and pleasure (Carr, 2002; Fedler, 1987; Hinch & Jackson, 2000; Krippendorf, 1987; Leiper, 2003; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1997; Moore, Cushman & Simmons, 1995; Pearce, 1982; Ryan, 1994; Yiannakis & Gibson, 1992). On this basis, the extension of leisure constraints theory into the field of tourism is a valid transition, and offers the potential to yield further insights into touristic behavior. To date, apart from a few relatively recent studies (e.g., Carr, 2000; Hudson, 2000; Hudson & Gilbert, 1999; Jordan & Gibson, 2000; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002), it appears that there is a dearth of empirical research that has explicitly addressed the influence and impact of constraints on the tourist experience.

Recognizing this gap, Hudson and Gilbert (1999; p. 69) note that constraints is a "neglected dimension" of tourism research. Some theorists, however, are starting to find constraints frameworks useful in their attempt to better understand tourism processes and tourist behavior. As an example of this incipient body of research, leisure constraints theory has been extended to investigate tourist seasonality (Hinch & Jackson, 2000) and general tourist decision-making behavior (Dellaert, Ettema, & Lindh, 1998; Um & Crompton, 1992). Other authors have taken a focused constraints approach to studies of participation or nonparticipation in certain types of tourist activity, such as downhill skiing (Hudson & Gilbert, 1999), nature-based tourism (Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002), and museum visitation (Tian, Crompton, & Witt, 1996). More pertinent to the discussion in this present article, constraints have also been considered as a framework for understanding the tourist behavior and experiences of certain social subgroups or "niche markets," such as seniors (Blazey, 1987; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Zimmer, Brayley & Searle, 1995), adolescents and young

tourists (Carr, 2000, 2001), and people with disabilities (R. Smith, 1987).

The results of these studies reveal that tourist experiences are not equally accessible for all individuals and social subgroups. Despite this realization, constraints remain only a nascent area of study within the field of tourism and thus our current knowledge remains superficial at best. When applied to the experiences of female travelers, as a specific social subgroup, research on constraints has been even less forthcoming. While there is evidence of a growing body of empirical research based on the pleasure holiday and travel experiences of women specifically (Davidson, 1996; Elsrud, 1998, 2001; Hashimoto, 2000; Hillman, 1999; Jordan, 1998; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2001; Small, 1999; Stone & Nichol, 1999; Thomas, 2000), none of these studies has explicitly or empirically examined the nature and impact of constraints on the female travel experience. Furthermore, quantitative approaches have tended to dominate in those few studies that have explored the constrained nature of tourism and travel in which leisure constraints models are tested and "verified" (e.g., Hudson, 2000; Hudson & Gilbert, 1999; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002; Tian et al., 1996). The present study takes an alternative methodological approach, as the authors agree with recent arguments that suggest qualitative methods have better potential to explore the increasing complexities of leisure and travel behavior (Jackson, 2000; Leiper, 2003; Riley & Love, 2000; Samdahl, 1999), particularly dealing with the lives and constraints of women (Henderson, 1991; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Shaw, Bonen, & McCabe, 1991; Weissinger, Henderson, & Bowling, 1997).

Literature Review

Western women have been traveling, and traveling solo, for centuries. Historically, however, travel and pioneering have been construed as the sole preserve of men (Craik, 1997; Hamalian, 1981; Tinling, 1989). Despite their significant contributions and achievements, women have generally been overlooked in the history of travel and exploration (Clarke, 1988; Towner, 1994). As Clarke (1998) notes, "for centuries the oceanic voyage and the journey to the interior were wholly, solely and exclu-

sively men's business" (p. 78). Fueled by a contemporary resurgence in the publication of historical accounts of women's solo travel, it is evident that women have been traveling and exploring alone for many centuries (e.g., Aitken, 1987; Birkett, 1989, Dolan, 2001; Robinson, 1990; Russell, 1986), yet their voices within the history of tourism are only beginning to be heard.

Building on this history, it is apparent that women are still traveling, and in ever-increasing numbers. Women travelers are now recognized as a growing force within the tourism industry (Bartos, 1989; Bond, 1997; Henderson, 2000; King, 1995; Marshman, 1997; Matthews-Sawyer, McCullough, & Myers, 2002; Slavik & Shaw, 1996; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). This trend can be linked to changing social and political circumstances for Western women, which have resulted in changes in opportunity and access. Within Australia, for example, women's opportunities for earning equitable incomes through employment and for education have improved (Bryson, 1994). Furthermore, traditional ideologies of the family have now shifted, so that social expectations of "marriage and children" do not yield as much power as they did for women raised in previous generations (Richards, 1994). Australian-based statistics show that the marriage rate has declined markedly in Australia since the 1960s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998), as has the number of childbirths per woman (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). These demographic changes—increased financial autonomy and decreased societal pressure to get married and have children—suggest perhaps that Western women's social responsibilities have shifted and thus opened up new opportunities for leisure and travel. It appears that one of the many ways that women have been exercising their relatively recent financial and social autonomy over the last few decades is through travel (Bond, 1997; Pesman, 1996; Warner-Smith, 2000).

Tourism researchers have long claimed that women are the primary decision makers regarding family holidays (Bond, 1997; Collins & Tisdell, 2002; Fodness, 1992; McGehee, Loker-Murphy & Uysal, 1996; V. Smith, 1979; Zalatan, 1998), but women are also becoming more prominent in their consumption of other types of travel, including business travel. Women now make up a much higher proportion of business travelers than they did 30

years ago, which is a reflection of expanding numbers of women in the workforce worldwide. In 1970, women represented only 1% of the business travel market (Tunstall, 1989). More recent estimates suggest that in the first years of the new millennium, it is likely that half of all business travelers will be female (Popcorn & Marigold, 2000; Westwood, 1997). Such trends have seen hotels, airlines, and other tourism ventures finding ways to tap the potential of this "new" market of corporate travelers (Bartos, 1989; Harris, 2002; Lutz & Ryan, 1993).

In terms of travel for pleasure, research shows that women are more prominent than men in their participation in adventure travel (Davidson & McKercher, 1993; Swarbrooke et al., 2003) and ecotourism (Weaver, 2001). In the US, North American Adventure Travelers found that in 1996, 63% of its clients taking trips overseas were women (Bond, 1997). Similarly, in 1996, one of Australia's leading adventure travel companies, Intrepid, noted that 74% of their clients were women, and that most of these women were choosing to travel alone (Bond, 1997). In addition, women are more evident on the backpacker circuit, with anecdotal estimates suggesting that females make up half of the backpacker market in regions like Southeast Asia (Westerhausen, 1997) and Australia (Hillman, 1999).

In a study commissioned by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), Bond (1997) heralded a new "growth" travel market that she referred to as "solo women travelers." These women traveled alone, without family, partners, or friends. According to the PATA study, solo women travelers are in search of adventure, social interaction, education, and self-understanding and are confident to go alone. While it appears that the women who are traveling alone are Western, an increase in the number of solo female Japanese tourists is also noteworthy (Hashimoto, 2000).

An Overview of Leisure Constraints Theory

Since the early 1980s, the literature on constraints has unfolded through a progression of ideas and debates, emerging to become a theoretically sophisticated area of academic inquiry within the leisure studies field (Jackson, 1993; Jackson & Scott, 1999). Based on one of the earliest studies of leisure constraints (Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 1985), researchers

suggested an inverse relationship between perceived constraint and the frequency of satisfying leisure experiences. That is, if all other things were equal, the person who perceived fewer constraints would be happier and more satisfied with the leisure aspect of their lives. Since that time, however, constraints theory has developed and a more holistic understanding has emerged.

Early constraints research throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s conceived of constraints almost entirely as "barriers," or as insurmountable obstacles that stood between an individual's leisure preference and his or her ability to participate (Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 1985; Jackson, 1988; Jackson & Searle, 1985; Witt & Goodale, 1981). For this reason, such barriers were often termed "intervening" constraints. Within this earlier literature, there was little mention of intensity or level of constraint, only that constraint existed (Jackson & Rucks, 1995). In this way, early theorists suggested that the presence of constraints equaled nonparticipation. The flipside of this was that the removal of barriers would automatically lead to leisure participation.

Leisure constraints theorists have generally focused on attempts to classify constraints according to their type and nature (Jackson, 1988). Several classification models of leisure constraint type have been proposed, including "internal/external" (Searle & Jackson, 1985), "antecedent/intervening" (Henderson, Stalnaker, & Taylor, 1988; Jackson, 1990), "objective/subjective" (Harrington, Dawson, & Bolla, 1992), "social-personal," "social-cultural," and "physical" (Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 1985), and "proscriptive/prescriptive" (Shogan, 2002).

Perhaps the most widely promulgated constraints classification model is that proposed by Crawford and Godbey (1987), who offered that constraints to leisure participation could be classified into three categories: "structural," "intrapersonal," or "interpersonal." Structural constraints were described as any factor that intervened between leisure preference and participation. Examples of structural constraints given were a lack of time, insufficient funds, or limited access to transportation. Intrapersonal constraints were referred to as psychological states and attitudes that limited a person's participation, such as a lack of self-confidence, reference group attitudes, fear, anxiety, and a lack of perceived skills

or abilities. Interpersonal constraints were described as those that emerge from an individual's social interactions with significant others, such as friends, family members, and work colleagues. A lack of suitable companions with which to undertake leisure activities would also be an example of an interpersonal constraint under Crawford and Godbey's (1987) system.

Expanding on this framework, Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) offered a model which proposed that these three constraints were actually encountered in a hierarchical sequence. Intrapersonal constraints were encountered first, and affected leisure preferences. If these were successfully "negotiated," interpersonal constraints then presented, effecting an "intervening" barrier between preferences and participation. Only when interpersonal constraints were overcome did a person then face structural constraints. In this model, leisure participation occurred only when all three types of constraints were negotiated.

More recently, some authors (e.g., Raymore, 2002; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Shogan, 2002) working within the constraints paradigm have expressed concern that researchers have focused too heavily on what *stops* people from beginning participation in leisure activities. With this mind-set, participation was usually the final point of discussion. The assumption in this line of thinking was that if an individual had been able to participate, then he or she must clearly be satisfied and have dealt "successfully" with all constraints. This focus tends to neglect consideration of how the leisure experience itself can also be constrained. While the hierarchical model offered by Crawford et al. (1991) generally relates to preactivity leisure preferences, the authors did suggest that constraints could impact during participation. Kay and Jackson (1991) confirmed this claim in an empirical study which found that constraints were reported more frequently by participants than nonparticipants, indicating that limiting factors are also present during the leisure experience itself. While the current research focus continues to be on constraints that prevent participation, Jackson (2000) has emphasized the importance of understanding how constraints impact on enjoyment of activity, as well as their role in diminishing an individual's ability to achieve desired or anticipated benefits.

Constraints on Women's Leisure and Travel

In addition to the impact of constraints on leisure activities generally, researchers have also been particularly interested in the influence of constraints on women's leisure experiences. It is evident that Western women in today's society have increased options, which have opened up a range of tourism and recreation choices. Yet the "freedoms" they have to consume those choices and to access satisfying travel experiences may be modified by—and relative to—the social and gendered location of being a woman (Wimbush & Talbot, 1988). Several studies claim that women tend to be more highly and intensely constrained than men in their leisure opportunities (Henderson, 1991; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Searle & Jackson, 1985). Furthermore, constraints such as fear for personal safety and feelings of vulnerability appear to be heightened for women when they partake in leisure and recreation activities out of the home or in the outdoors (Deem, 1996; Gilmartin, 1997; Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990; Little, 2002; Mason, 1988; Virden & Walker, 1999). More relevant to this article, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that these constraints and limitations may be amplified when a woman ventures away from home to travel abroad alone (Carr, 2001; Gibson & Jordan, 1998; Jordan, 1998; Jordan & Gibson, 2000).

Hudson's (2000) work on ski tourists appears to be the first to explore the gendered nature of constraints within a tourism/hospitality context. Using Crawford and Godbey's (1987) classification system as a base, Hudson surveyed male and female skiers and found significant differences between the two groups in terms of their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. Skiing, still perceived by many women as a male-dominated adventure activity, was shown to produce a greater number of intrapersonal constraints for females, particularly those constraints related to fear, danger, and injury. To encourage more women to participate in ski tourism, Hudson (2000) suggested that ski resorts and practitioners needed to pay special attention to the female market, allaying women's fears and devising programs and activities that will help to build their confidence, skills, and abilities.

Constraints for women travelers have also been researched within an Australian context. Market re-

search into women's domestic travel in South Australia (South Australian Tourism Commission, 1996) found that women perceived constraints such as cost, time, lack of information and knowledge about where to go, lack of companions, and home, work, and family commitments. Furthermore, many of these South Australian women shared a concern about a fear of attack or rape, particularly if traveling to remote areas.

To build on incipient findings of these studies and to extend our knowledge of constraints to travel, the present research agenda set out to identify and describe the nature of constraints as they impact on women's solo tourist experiences. As a social subgroup that has hitherto been underresearched in the tourism field, women and their experiences were targeted, and their voices and concerns deliberately emphasized as a study focus (Gibson, 2001; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Swain, 1995; Wall & Norris, 2003). To ensure that this was achieved, in-depth, qualitative interviews were used, as has been suggested as one of the most appropriate methods for seeking greater understanding of the nature and meaning of the leisured travel phenomenon (Haukeland, 1990; Jackson, 2000; Leiper, 2003; Samdahl, 1999), particularly in the lives of women (Henderson, 1991).

Methodology

A qualitative and interpretive paradigm has been adopted to guide this study of constraints faced by solo women travelers, with a gendered approach offering an ideological lens. It has been argued (McIntosh, 1998; Ryan, 1995; Small, 1999; Swain, 1995) that qualitative techniques such as guided conversations and interviews are particularly poignant for allowing the tourist "voice" to be heard. Influenced by interpretive and feminist theory, there was a concerted effort in this study to listen to the women's experiences of solo travel, as they expressed them in their own terms and words (Reinharz, 1992; Wall & Norris, 2003). As a result, qualitative, semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted to allow the women's stories and "lived experiences" of solo travel to emerge (Denzin, 1992; Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; van Manen, 1990).

Interviews were conducted with 40 women who had some level of experience as solo travelers (the

first author was the sole interviewer for all 40 participants), particularly solo travel abroad or overseas. The study focused on women currently residing in Australia as both authors were living and working there at the time and logistics limited the geographic scope of meeting respondents. Moreover, some empirical studies exploring women's solo travel have already been conducted with samples from the UK and America (Gibson & Jordan, 1998; Jordan, 1998), but Australian and New Zealand investigations of this topic are few in number.

Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique (Neuman, 1997), which searched for adult women who had had some experience of traveling solo. From an initial base of women, further solo travelers were identified, using a "snowball" method of data collection (Neuman, 1997). Other women self-selected as they responded to a local newspaper article explaining the research process and intent. Throughout the sampling, efforts were made to look for differences in age, background, ethnic origin, and type and level of travel experience. No particular "type" of traveler was sought, although pleasure rather than business travel was deliberately emphasized. While many of the women carried backpacks for ease of travel, they did not readily identify with the term "backpacker." Thus, during interviews, the women were encouraged to draw from a broad range of trips in a variety of destinations and not restricted to speak of only one experience of solo travel.

The result of these sampling techniques was a relatively varied cohort of 40 women who ranged in age from 19 to 85. The majority of women were born and raised in Australia, although nine were born overseas. No Asian, Aboriginal, or Torres Strait Islander women were represented in the sample despite searching for women of these origins who had solo travel experience. The women who participated in this study were relatively highly educated with almost two thirds of the women (29 participants) having had some form of tertiary education. With regard to employment status, 14 women could be classified as full-time employees, working in a wide range of fields including environmental education, graphic design, marketing, teaching, journalism, psychology, administration, banking and finance, nursing, medical science, and funeral direction. Ten women classified themselves as self-employed,

which meant running their own businesses or consultancies, while another eight women held part-time/casual positions or were students. Two women were technically "unemployed" and identified that they were struggling financially. The remainder identified as retired, yet were busy with multiple roles as mothers, wives, volunteers, teachers, consultants, community workers, writers, domestic carers, and travelers.

The semistructured interview guide covered a broad range of questions related to the women's backgrounds and solo travel, including life histories, travel history and experience, travel preparation techniques, travel motivations, constraints and challenges, negotiation strategies, and outcomes/benefits associated with their solo travel. For the purposes of this article, only the data relating to the women's identification and experience of constraints are reported.

All interviews were audio-tape recorded with the women's consent, and with the assurance that all responses would remain confidential. Participants were made fully aware that certain excerpts from their interviews would be utilized for academic publications and seminars, and were satisfied that their anonymity was ensured through a system of identifying their words by first name initial and age only (e.g., "A, 52"). These interviews were then transcribed verbatim in preparation for coding and analysis.

A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was adopted to provide a framework for data analysis and theory development. At its most basic level, grounded theory is so named because theoretical conceptualization unfolds from, and is literally "grounded" in, the data. Consequently, an inductive approach was undertaken that searched for underlying themes or patterns of meaning based on the data, rather than on concepts determined a priori by the researcher or other authors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Riley, 1995).

Each interview was coded soon after it was transcribed, and chunks of text were allocated to key themes. As very large amounts of qualitative data were coded within these overarching categories, subcategories were identified that achieved a more "fine-grained" analysis and more fully represented the women's meanings (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Using a method of "constant comparison" to analyze the women's stories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967),

these key categories and subcategories were continually compared and contrasted against previous insights and the literature, allowing for new concepts to emerge and for cumulative defining and strengthening. When the researchers reached a point where they felt that subsequent coding and recoding would not lead to any new insights, they assessed their categories and subcategories as “saturated,” and no further coding was conducted (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

A number of techniques were employed to verify the accuracy of the researchers’ analyses and interpretations, and to strengthen the study findings’ credibility. These included methodological triangulation, member checks, and peer examination (Merriam, 1998). While in-depth interviewing was the primary data collection method used in this study, the women were also asked to complete a number of postinterview tasks, such as completing a short survey, drawing up a travel timeline that detailed life events and major solo trips, and writing additional reflections about their solo journeys. These multiple data collection techniques, known as methodological triangulation (Merriam, 1998), supplemented the original interview data and provided additional viewpoints on the same phenomenon. In this way, a one-sided view of the data was avoided. Other techniques were used to verify the researchers’ interpretations of interview data. For example, “peer examination” involved asking academic colleagues involved in tourism research to code a sample of the women’s interview transcripts, with the purpose of cross-checking the “fit” of the researchers’ coding categories. In a further search for verification, key findings from the study were then taken back to a select and available group of study participants. This member checking process, as referred to by Merriam (1998), was employed to check that the researchers’ analysis had adequately captured the essence of the women’s solo travel experiences and constraints.

Results

An inductive, grounded approach to analysis of the women’s words and stories revealed four broad, but interlinking, themes of constraint. These categories, labeled “sociocultural,” “personal,” “practical,” and “spatial,” represented the core nature of con-

straints expressed by the women and have been defined as follows:

1. **Sociocultural:** This category incorporates constraints that stem from the social and cultural contexts within which women live and encounter their solo travel. Such sociocultural constraints relate to the influence of social expectations, women’s roles and responsibilities, others’ perceptions towards their travel, and unwanted attention during the travel experience.
2. **Personal:** Closely linked to the sociocultural arena, this category of constraint revolves around personal and internal limitations related to the women’s self-perceptions, beliefs, and emotions. Examples reflective of this category include self-doubt, fear, vulnerability, and loneliness.
3. **Practical:** This type of constraint incorporates the practical hardships and challenges that confront women who travel alone, such as a lack of time and money, a lack of local knowledge at the destination, and the stress and fatigue of going solo.
4. **Spatial:** Spatial constraints are those that limit and restrict women’s freedoms and movements within tourist destinations, spaces, and places. Within this category are issues such as limitations in destination choice and restricted movement in tourist settings.

While these four categories provide a broad typology of women’s solo travel constraints, it was revealed that the women experienced constraints within each of these categories in different ways depending on their stage of travel. For example, constraints were evident that impacted on the women’s ability to access solo travel. These pretravel, or “precedent,” constraints included any factors that affected the women in their decision to travel and were set in the context of their home environments and everyday lives. Such pretravel constraints cannot be viewed entirely as limitations (although at different times in the women’s lives constraints could indeed create this effect), as clearly this was a sample of women who *were* able to travel solo. Thus, in talking of precedent constraints, we do not necessarily mean *preventatives* to travel, rather we refer to the societal messages, perceptions, and familial com-

mitments that, when combined with difficulties in accessing time and self-space, can conspire to limit women’s ease of access to the travel experience.

Once the women had “negotiated” their precedent constraints and were traveling solo, a new set of constraints was activated. These during-travel, or “in situ,” constraints impacted by reducing or limiting aspects of the travel experience itself. In essence, precedent and in situ constraints reflected similar patterns of sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial impact, but were experienced differently depending on the stage of travel in which the women were located.

At another level, the broad nature of these four constraint categories meant that a substantial amount of qualitative data was coded within each category. The development of subcategories encouraged a more “fine-grained” analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 191), whereby the properties of each category helped to define the complex nature of the women’s stories. Table 1 offers a summary of the four constraints categories, their subcategories, and how these constraints manifested at both the precedent and in situ stages of the solo travel experience.

Each of these emergent categories is defined below and supported with statements using the women’s own words to further clarify their meaning and intent. By using direct and detailed quotes, a “richer” account of the women’s solo travel constraints and experiences is provided (Merriam, 1998), and the reader can better gauge the veracity and intent of each category.

Sociocultural

The sociocultural context, both at home and abroad, was a dominant constraining influence on the women’s lives and solo travel choices, opportunities, and experiences. At a precedent level, many women spoke of being constrained by social expectations. This theme emerged particularly for women raised in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, who faced unique challenges related to growing up in these eras. Several of the middle-aged women interviewed in this study noted constraints in their early years, where they felt solo travel for females was deemed socially inappropriate. One participant, who was 58 at the time of the interview, indicated that women of her generation had been given little opportunity to think that they could participate in travel as their role was already mapped out as wife and mother: “Travel wasn’t the norm for women in my age group when we were younger . . . for so many years you function for other people—someone’s wife, someone’s mother” (A, 58). Another woman raised in a similar era spoke of pushing her “socially unacceptable” travel dreams aside when she married young: “Travel at this time was seldom heard of. Always remembered the dream of going overseas . . . remembering this was not done in the ‘50s” (P, 64).

Strongly tied to social expectation was the life course stage at which women were located. Many women reported that others perceived solo travel to be an acceptable activity only when young. As one middle-aged woman noted: “There is that social

Table 1
“Precedent” and “In Situ” Constraints Impacting on Women’s Solo Travel

Subcategory	Precedent Constraints (Pretravel)	In Situ Constraints (During Travel) Subcategory
Sociocultural	Social expectations Roles and responsibilities Others’ perceptions	Host attitudes Unwanted attention
Personal	Doubts and fears	Fear and vulnerability Loneliness
Practical	Lack of time and money	Lack of local knowledge Traveling with others Stress and fatigue
Spatial	Limited destination choice	Restricted movement Conspicuousness

thing about being with your family, you know, 'what are you doing having the freedom to do that?' " (M, 49). A younger woman pointed out similar reactions from others about the expectations of women at certain ages: "I suppose I'm in an age group where people are more likely to have homes and families and educating children and things like that. So the idea that you can spend your money on travel when you're in your 30s: 'oh, you should have done that in your 20s.' 'You should be married and having babies now' " (S, 32).

Another theme that emerged within the sociocultural arena and that influenced the women's access to solo travel was their roles and responsibilities. In the roles of mother, partner, or wife, some women found that their capacity to access solo travel was significantly reduced. For one woman, the primary care of her ailing mother acted as a constraint, limiting the nature and length of any future travel plans: "I prefer long-term trips so one can give oneself over to the travel experience—but other commitments often make this difficult. . . . I am fairly committed to Sydney [her home city] for the time being, as Mum is elderly and needing more support. For the moment it's a high priority to take the time for these relationships, so I don't see myself doing major travel for a while" (C, 45).

Some women did not take to travel until their commitments to others were complete. For mothers who had raised their children alone, the primary care for children meant that time for travel was not available, as a number of quotes demonstrate: "I knew that I wanted to go, but in the meantime I had a family so things were put on hold" (A, 45); "I thought it's better to wait and let them have their schooling and everything. . . . I would have been probably 45, something like that, when I started [traveling]" (P, 64); "I raised and educated my three girls on my own. . . . When they finished high school was the first time I took off" (D, 57).

Responsibilities associated with significant relationships could also prove constraining, with some women finding that their husbands or partners did not share their desires for travel: "I just wanted to go and my husband would insist that I was mad. He wasn't interested" (M2, 49). Another woman felt similarly restricted by the nature of her marriage and her husband's work commitments, which did not allow the time or space for travel: "One of the rea-

sons we actually got divorced was I wanted to travel. . . . He was always too committed with his work, and we actually never really got away enough" (J, 38).

Several women experienced difficulties surrounding others' perceptions, as family members, work colleagues, and friends expressed disapproving attitudes towards their decisions to travel solo. For a number of the solo women travelers, there was a clear expression of social inappropriateness offered by others which in essence put constraints on their freedom to leave: "I found before I went that friends would try to put their fear on me, saying, 'why are you doing this?' 'Is this wise?' 'Ooh, be careful.' So I think it brought up lots of things for other people in terms of a female traveling on her own" (S, 32).

Women also expressed that people showed their disapproval of a woman going alone without a partner or friend: "They were just shocked you were traveling by yourself. . . . It's just like, you can't go anywhere without a husband or a boyfriend" (A, 30); "A few said, 'oh, I couldn't go on my own . . . actually quite a lot were surprised that I was going on my own, and they'd say 'well aren't you going with a friend?' " (P, 54). Partners and husbands also expressed their disapproval and fear, as one woman found upon telling her new partner of her solo travel plans: "Well, he was absolutely horrified . . . he just thought a woman shouldn't do that; she could get raped and killed and bashed" (E, 62).

Cultural backgrounds could compound these issues surrounding others' fears and perceptions. Two women interviewed who were of Greek and Italian ethnicity, respectively, commented on their families' opinion that "good" Greek and Italian daughters would not betray the family by leaving to travel abroad: "This family friend turned around and said 'oh, Greek girls don't go overseas by themselves for a year,' like 'it's not something you do,' and 'what kind of daughter is she?' " (M, 31); "All the rellies [Australian colloquialism for relatives or family members] were saying, 'oh, you shouldn't be going off, you shouldn't be going.' Like, coming from an Italian family, 'shouldn't be doing this' " (A, 50s). Such reactions conspire to challenge women on why they would want to travel solo. Through both overt and covert ways, this querying reinforces the message that solo travel for women is somehow inappropriate and unsafe.

Elements of the sociocultural context that constrained and limited the women's travel preferences also manifested during the solo travel experience. Once women had left their home society and were located in the social and cultural mores of a destination, the social inappropriateness remained as women reported being constrained by host attitudes to solo women travelers. A number of the women felt that they received an unfavorable reception when traveling alone in certain non-Western nations. This type of response seemed particularly predominant when women traveled in Muslim or Hindu countries, but was also noted in Latin countries such as Spain and Mexico: "I think the fact that I was just a Western woman by myself was really bad" (M, 31); "There are some places you just feel vulnerable and threatened because of the way men react to you, like in the Latin countries and some parts of Spain. . . . You realize you're regarded as a slut or a prostitute, sometimes just 'cause you're Western" (C, 45).

Unwanted attention and harassment were also noted as constraining factors on the women's solo travel experiences. Many women perceived that they were regarded as sexually "available" merely because they were traveling alone without male accompaniment. Details of male harassment were common across the women's stories, evidenced through descriptions of being groped, fondled, catcalled, verbally abused, followed, and subjected to sexual acts such as masturbation. Several quotes from the women support the existence of unwanted male harassment, as well as its consistency throughout their solo journeys: "It was everywhere, really. You just get more unwanted attention 'cause, you know, you're not with anybody" (H, 19); "In Crete, you just couldn't sit down on your own for five seconds . . . you'd just be harassed" (M, 49); "All throughout Indonesia, everywhere I went, I was harassed" (P, 42).

Personal

Closely linked to the sociocultural context, this category of constraint revolves around personal limitations and restrictions based on the women's self-perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. Prior to departure, many of the women spoke of their own doubts and fears as limiting factors as they struggled to find the

self-confidence to be a solo traveler. An anticipation of fear was particularly dominant for women at the beginning of their travel career or when they visited new countries. Several women spoke of a heightened sense of fear close to the time of departure, which almost stopped them leaving: "I was scared because I hadn't done anything like that before . . . I was utterly on my own and I had no idea what I was going to encounter" (P, 64); "I was scared to death—'oh my God, what am I doing?' I'd never been out there on my own before" (L, 44). Even for women with a history of solo travel, a considerable time lag between trips could lead to fear and self-doubt: "I think because I had a big gap between my last big trip and this trip, I actually think I got a bit more scared when I was about to leave" (M, 38).

Similar to the personal fears and doubts that the women reported in their home environments, a sense of fear and vulnerability also surfaced as a prominent limitation on what women perceived during their solo travel experiences. Several women distinctly remembered the first few days or weeks in a new culture as their most fearful time as travelers: "Early in the time, with inexperience, there were problems, like fear of being lost—where am I, what's this society?" (C, 62); "For the first two weeks I was terrified. . . . I used to sit on the bus and think, I don't want the bus to stop, because I'm okay while I'm on the bus" (D, 40).

Harassment, as discussed previously, was a common constraining factor for women while traveling. The fear of harassment and the women's perceptions of lone females as more vulnerable limited travel freedoms: "As a woman traveling alone, the biggest thing is feeling unsafe . . . you are more vulnerable, I think" (M, 38); "I think it is a bit more dangerous for a girl to travel on her own, really" (S, 20). As a result, some reduced their travel experience in terms of time and location by regulating the types of activities they undertook: "There were a couple of times that I drew back from doing a couple of things 'cause I thought it might be wiser if I didn't. . . . I think women do have particular challenges. I think the challenge is you're more vulnerable as a woman, you know. . . . There's more risk of unpleasant experiences . . . and having unpleasant sexual overtures" (C, 45).

Loneliness was also reported as a constraint during the women's solo travel experiences. While many

traveled alone out of preference, they still expressed a strong desire for social interaction along the way. At times, their solo state could lead to feelings of isolation, and loneliness could exacerbate an already existing sense of vulnerability and fear: "I just remember feeling utterly distraught, which were times when I was actually on my own in between traveling with friends" (M, 49). For instance, a woman traveling through Laos for the first time on her own noted that "it was difficult for the first two weeks and a little scary. I did get a bit lonely then" (D, 40).

Practical

This type of constraint relates specifically to the functional and practical challenges that limit women's solo travel experiences. At a precedent level, a lack of time and money could delay women's travel plans and limit their access to solo travel. Women's responsibility for raising children alone could limit the amount of money left over for travel, as one single mother noted: "When you have children there's not the money to do those things that you had always imagined you would do, so you have to do it later, when the children have grown" (A, 58).

For some of the single women interviewed, commitments to buying houses and paying off mortgages limited the time and money available to access travel opportunities: "I had taken on this mortgage for nine years when I separated from my husband, it was a very big mortgage . . . and it occurred to me how fragile life really is and I knew I had all these travel plans and I wanted to do all these goals. It was always gonna be when I'm this, when I'm that, I'll do this" (A, 45).

During the solo travel experience, some women reported feeling constrained and limited by their lack of local knowledge of an area or destination relating to language, cultural mores, and geographical understanding. Being unable to speak the local language was a source of frustration for many women, reducing their interaction with local people: "A bit of frustration with the language barrier . . . there would be other women I would really want to communicate with, and I couldn't" (J, 38). For others, a lack of language ability increased their personal feelings of fear and vulnerability: "You just don't put yourself in any situation on your own where you

might get into difficulties, particularly when you don't have the language" (A, 58); "It was very scary being in countries and not being able to speak the language" (S, 45).

While most of the women interviewed traveled solo out of choice, there was a desire to meet up with other travelers at times to share the experience or to ease the occasional loneliness. Yet traveling with others could sometimes present a hindrance to the women's experience of travel: "They'll push you on to the next spot and sometimes they can hold you back" (S, 40); "You notice when you're with someone else or especially one other person, how you can get lost in that little world, in a bubble of English, and without those people you're just absorbed, you're out there" (N, 20).

Closely related to fear and sociocultural expectations was the women's accounts of stress and fatigue related to their solo female status. While on trips they found that "it's more stressful traveling on your own in lots of ways" (J, 55). Another woman agreed: "I have to admit there are days you do get down, you get very tired. You're out of your comfort zone . . . and it is stressful" (P, 64). For some, there was a belief that their travel would have been less stressful if they were male: "I think it is harder, there are more obstacles when you're a woman alone than there are for men traveling alone" (K, 31). The stress of solo travel could also compound feelings of loneliness and inhibit the women's enjoyment of their journeys: "You feel really alone at times. Like if you've got someone with you, they'd watch things for you. It gets tiring" (M, 38).

Spatial

The fourth and final category of constraint to emerge from inductive analysis of the women's stories revolved around their perceived capacity to move freely and safely within tourist settings. Linked closely to the effects of the previous three categories, spatial constraints refer to those factors that restrict solo women's freedoms and movements within tourist settings, or that modify their decisions about where they can go. Pretravel, spatial constraints could lead to limited destination choice. Due to their status as solo females, women reported being limited in their choice of, and access to, certain destinations and countries. As an example, one

woman described how she had generally ruled out countries in the Middle East and Africa because of her perception that solo women would be looked upon disapprovingly in these regions: "If you're traveling as a woman by yourself, there's probably a lot of places that I wouldn't go. Like, I wouldn't travel through Africa or the Middle East by myself, just because the men consider women as something different" (A, 30).

The traveling tales of other women's experiences could also impact on travel choices: "I was thinking of going to Italy but I'd heard that men were worse there, so I didn't go" (M, 49); "There were places that I didn't go, that I might have gone to if I hadn't been on my own, like Morocco, for instance. Or Turkey . . . I just heard enough other reports from people to make me feel that I'd be really vulnerable and uncomfortable as a woman alone" (C, 45). In some instances, the women's choices were made for them, as one woman found when she was refused entry to Iran because she was a female traveling alone.

During the travel experience, several women noted feeling a degree of restricted movement in certain tourist spaces and places, particularly with regard to dark streets and isolated areas. There appeared to be an intangible "safety sphere" that existed around major tourist centers, and women often felt that they should stay within that sphere of appropriateness for their own safety: "I never, ever go into side streets in strange cities or anything like that. . . . I stuck to the main touristy areas and places like that. I didn't go into any areas where I wasn't meant to be" (A, 50s).

Time of day also served to constrict women's movements with the night being perceived as especially unsafe for women. This meant that many curtailed their activities, choosing to stay close to their accommodation rather than risking harassment: "In places like Mexico where I knew it was a little bit more dangerous, I wouldn't go out at night. I'd actually make sure that I was in the hostel at a decent hour" (J, 38); "Just keep away from dark streets . . . and that I think would be across the board for a male or female, but especially female because you're more vulnerable" (M, 38); "In Madrid . . . I felt unusually unsafe. I didn't like it, and I stayed in my room. It's just such a different reality if you're on your own as a woman" (M, 38).

Some women also spoke of their conspicuousness as a solo female traveler moving physically through tourist spaces and places: "I suppose when I have been on my own, I have felt pretty self-conscious in that you think men are staring at you and wondering about you" (D, 40); "Women don't ever walk on their own so I was again a source of people staring. . . . Just the fact that I was a woman on my own" (S, 45).

This feeling of conspicuousness also related to feeling under surveillance of a male "gaze." This conspicuousness worked to limit the spaces and times of day in which women felt they could move safely and freely, as well as limiting the interaction that the women could have with local people: "I was the only foreign, white woman . . . [and] I couldn't do anything without like, probably half a dozen of them just standing there staring at me" (P, 42); "Sometimes it was quite oppressive. It was an attitude towards women, and towards women alone, so just walking around the streets at night . . . was just asking for trouble—men would regard that as like an open insult. . . . It wasn't proper for a woman to be doing it" (C, 45).

Two women found the harassment and conspicuousness so intrusive that they chose to leave the destinations through which they were traveling: "I thought, I can't handle this, and I actually ended up leaving [Indonesia] and going back into Malaysia" (P, 42); "In Pakistan . . . I was pushed and I was spat on and abused in a language I didn't understand, but you know when it's abuse and I just didn't want to stay" (C, 62).

It must be pointed out that not all women reported constraints associated with harassment and unwanted attention. For example, a few participants clearly wanted to downplay fear and harassment as constraints to solo female travel: "I've never felt threatened being a woman on my own" (D, 57); "In the villages, especially the Adavasi villages in India, [I] didn't have one single problem with men, and they didn't even look sideways—they wanted their own women" (N, 20). Another woman challenged the fear associated with being alone in unfamiliar places at night by stating that she "felt safer overseas at night than being here [at home]" (P, 42). Furthermore, a number of women's stories differed markedly from others' perceptions that Muslim and Hindu societies were the most "challenging" for solo females:

"It's just so safe in Syria. You know, there are no attacks on women . . . it's just very, very safe. I mean, I would go out at ten, eleven o'clock at night . . . walk around on my own (S, 45); "In India I was never hassled at all—hardly ever. On my first trip there I spent two months I think, and it was fine" (M, 31).

This demonstrates that blanket constraints associated with certain societies and religions do not fit the experiences of all of the women interviewed, and that stereotyping must be avoided. That said, such "refuting" evidence does not negate the constraining power of harassment and unwanted male attention, but acknowledges that women have a diversity of experience and opinion, based on their individual attitudes, previous experience, and personality traits.

Discussion

The 40 women interviewed in this study clearly had the choices, freedoms, and circumstances to enable them to travel. Yet the results also revealed both the perceived and actual constraints that permeate the women's lives and solo travel experiences. Specifically, four categories of constraint emerged through analysis of the women's travel stories: 1) the sociocultural context, 2) women's personal beliefs and perceptions, 3) practical challenges, and 4) spatial restrictions. As was shown, these constraints could impact on women's access to travel ("precedent"), as well as emerge during the trip ("in situ").

These constraints reflect a range of different influences. For example, at a precedent, sociocultural level, women found that the requirements to care for their children, maintain their marriages, and fulfill their employment commitments could reduce their capacity to depart for travel. The social and gendered mores of the time in which women lived also had an impact. For some of the older women interviewed, there was evidence that they did not have the opportunity to access solo international travel in their youth, as this leisure activity was not deemed socially appropriate. Subject to others' expectations of the meaning, safety and (the seeming) irresponsibility of such an act, a number of women struggled with justifying the relevance of solo travel to themselves and to others. As the solo travel experience was being lived, other constraints emerged. Remaining with the sociocultural example, the nature of the constraint altered but still incorporated

the expectations of society, both at home and abroad. In addition, the women were confronted with the social and cultural mores of their destinations, which could work to inhibit their behavior, prevent their access and movement, or create fear for personal safety.

The four overarching constraint categories that emerged from this study of solo women's travel resonate with classifications identified in previous research. For instance, the categories of sociocultural, personal, and practical generally concur, respectively, with the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural constraints identified by Crawford and Godbey (1987). Sociocultural constraints faced by the women prior to their travels, such as the influence of social era, others' perceptions, and roles/responsibilities, largely resonate with the "interpersonal" challenges associated with family and society identified by Crawford and Godbey (1987). The "intrapersonal" theme is reflected in the women's precedent personal constraints, such as self-doubt and anticipated fear. Finally, Crawford and Godbey's "structural" category is akin to the women's practical limitations, like lack of time and money. While the aim in the present qualitative study was not to "test" the existence of these categories, the evident commonality between women's leisure constraints and those of other leisure seekers shows that these groupings work at an overall level.

Moving beyond the leisure literature, it is relevant to note that the spatial category that emerged here does not appear as a distinct category in previous leisure or tourism constraints literature. This may be because spatial constraints are so strongly linked to the social, cultural, and practical arenas of women's experience and thus difficult to isolate. For the purposes of this study, however, the spatial category was singled out in an effort to delineate the unique geographical and environmental dimensions of the solo female travel experience, the latter being an area of recent research that offers insight into the experience of these solo women travelers.

The gendered constraints of women in their use of public space have been discussed within the feminist geography literature (Koskela, 1997; Massey, 1994; Mehta & Bondi, 1999; Pain, 1991; Sheffield, 1995; Valentine, 1989; Whyte & Shaw, 1994), yet relatively little research has investigated these concepts in the context of tourism and women's travel

(except for that by Carr, 2000; Gibson & Jordan, 1998; Jordan & Gibson, 2000). Ideas surrounding the "geography of women's fear" (Valentine, 1989) and other feminist geography theories may shed further light on women's travel experience. The geography of women's fear suggests that "the association of male violence with certain environmental contexts has a profound effect on many women's use of space" (p. 385). This was clearly evident in these women's stories of solo international travel, through their expressed lack of self confidence, fear of sexual harassment, and limited willingness to extend their movements outside of the main tourist spheres. Based on the themes revealed in this study, the gender and tourism literature would benefit from further exploration of the geographical constraints and challenges presented to female travelers.

To some extent, the findings of this study also parallel those identified in previous research on women's leisure constraints. For example, Little's (2002) study of women's participation in adventure recreation found that constraints grouped under the categories of "sociocultural," "family and other commitments," "personal," and "technical," highlighting the similar grouping of constraints for women adventurers and solo travelers. Other research has shown that women may be more influenced in their leisure pursuits by constraints such as gender role expectations, fear, primary care for family, and a lack of confidence and skills (Henderson, 1997; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996; Henderson et al., 1988). Such themes of constraint were clearly evident in these 40 women's stories of solo travel.

Empirical studies have revealed that time and money are two of the most prevalent structural constraints that affect women's leisure (Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Shaw et al., 1991). These are factors that no doubt affect a great proportion of potential tourists, male or female. However, feminist leisure research has shown the importance of investigating the "hidden meanings" behind limiting factors for women such as a "lack of time and money" (Harrington et al., 1992; Henderson, 1991; Henderson et al., 1996). For many women, a lack of time or money may be the result of their primary care for others and families. As Henderson (1997) points out in the context of women's leisure constraints: "the real constraint isn't time but something

else that is taking the time" (p. 45). For the women of this study, a lack of time and money indeed limited the degree to which they could access solo travel, as well as affecting the potential length of their travels. This finding reaffirms the need to look beyond the obvious in terms of why women do or do not access leisured travel experiences.

To be sure, all tourists at times will face the constraints of a lack of time, a lack of money, and the practical limitations of traveling in foreign cultures where unfamiliar languages are spoken. Yet what was suggested by the women's stories was that such inhibitors take on a new and unique meaning for *females* traveling alone. This is not because they are female, but because of what their female sex represents in the complex and ever-changing gendered landscapes at both home and abroad. As Shaw et al. (1991) succinctly point out, "it is not the fact of being female . . . *per se* which is the constraint, but rather the way in which this social location is experienced in society" (p. 299, italics in original). For example, it was found that a lack of time or money to engage in solo overseas was often linked to the women's sociocultural roles and responsibilities, such as the primary care for children, other relatives, and the household. Investigation of these less visible "antecedent" constraints is especially important in studies of women's leisure, as it has been shown that women face a greater range of antecedent limitations because of their social, often subjugated, location as females within gendered structures and societies (Henderson, 1991; Henderson et al., 1988).

Also evident from the women's experiences, which supports previous research on leisure constraints (Henderson, 1994; Little, 2000, 2002; Scott, 1991), was the interrelated nature of the four constraints categories. For instance, the catalysts for women's spatial constraints were often embedded in the cultural mores of the destination or in women's own socially constructed perceptions of their roles. Personal constraints were exacerbated by sociocultural expectations, and were enacted in the spatial arena. Furthermore, practical constraints were informed by women's personal feelings of confidence and influenced by the space they access for their travel. The interlinkages among the constraints categories can be seen in one woman's story as she notes her own lack of confidence, her learned doubt about certain tourist spaces, and how she makes conscious

choices about her travel behavior to manage these concerns:

I think it's probably more acceptable for men to travel alone, in general [sociocultural/personal] . . . and men can do a heck of a lot more things, you know [sociocultural/practical]. Go places alone and go places at night alone and cultural things [spatial/practical/sociocultural]. There were times when I didn't do things that I really thought would be dumb if I did, like be invited to somebody's village in the middle of the night [practical/spatial/personal]. (C, 45)

According to feminist leisure researchers, teasing out the interrelated nature of constraints categories is crucial, as we can no longer view constraints as separate and discrete entities (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Little, 2000, 2002). As this study has shown, the different types of constraints were, in fact, interacting elements that have cumulative impact on women's lives. While differentiated for reasons of analysis and in an effort to capture the "essence" of women's solo travel constraints, none of the four categories identified can stand entirely alone.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To date, much of the constraints-based tourism research has been quantitative in nature, aiming to verify or refute other researchers' classifications, like "intrapersonal," "interpersonal," and "structural" (Hudson, 2000; Hudson & Gilbert, 1999; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002). While such empirical research has helped to isolate and quantify our understanding of tourists' constraints, particularly those of a structural and practical nature, it has not contributed much to an in-depth or qualitative understanding of why constraints occur and how they impact on individuals' lives, choices and opportunities.

The results revealed in this article show that the solo women travelers interviewed were confronted with a range of constraining factors, both prior to their travels and during the solo tourist experience itself. In essence, these results support the notion of a "relative freedom" for women in accessing satisfying leisure experiences (Wimbush & Talbot, 1988). This concept purports that women's ability to access and enjoy leisure is always relative to the social, gender, and racial structures and contexts that

dictate appropriate "female" behavior. Taking this concept further, it is suggested here that women solo travelers thus experience a "relative escape." That is, while the women in this study could access multiple locations, had a legislative right to freedom, and were provided with equity of opportunity, they were constrained by the social mores of home and destination. They were also influenced by the personal, practical, and spatial realities of the environments they strove to enter or observe. As a result, their status as women in gendered societies and destinations means that they may never entirely be free to experience feelings of liminality and freedom so readily associated with the tourist experience (Cohen & Taylor, 1976; Krippendorf, 1987; Lett, 1983). Indeed, as some feminist authors have claimed (Ghose, 1998; Massey, 1994; Wearing & Wearing, 1996), solo women travelers can rarely experience the anonymity of the sightseeing voyeur, or the *flâneur*, as they can never fully escape being the object of the (usually male) gaze.

But what do these results mean for travel organizations and hospitality providers? How can they use this knowledge of women's solo travel constraints to better address the needs and wants of the growing independent female travel market? A number of recommendations can be made here. Firstly, it must be recognized that some constraints are socially constructed and therefore not easily or quickly deconstructed. Feminist research has shown, and this study affirms, that it is problematic to separate women's constraints from the sociocultural circumstances in which women are acculturated (Green et al., 1990; Henderson, 1991; Henderson et al., 1996; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Shaw, 1994). Therefore, the sociocultural context should be considered as central to discussions of all other categories. Other constraints, however, are practical and spatial and the industry has at least some capacity to ease their influence.

Many of the women's constraints stemmed from the nature of the interaction between themselves and the local people. This was particularly the case in less developed countries, or in countries where differences in values, perceptions, and religious beliefs were more pronounced. Educational workshops and programs grounded in the cultural and social practices of travel destinations may be one method to inform and prepare potential solo women travelers

about these differences, especially those who are going alone for the first time. These workshops could be run by adult education centers or higher education institutions, in conjunction with independent travel companies, travel agencies, associations, or tourism organizations. As an example, a workshop called "Women Travel the World" is offered twice a year in Sydney through the Youth Hostel Association (YHA), and has proved popular as a venue for women to meet like-minded female travelers, to hear positive testimonials and stories from other experienced soloists, and to learn something of the cultures and societies that may be encountered (S. Kerwick, personal communication, June, 2001). Such interactive programs may boost first-time travelers' confidence especially and lessen the social and cultural divide between "host" and "guest."

Making information about the opportunities and challenges associated for women who travel alone would also be beneficial. This has been already achieved to an extent by websites such as the US-based Journeywoman (journeywoman.com), and the publication of practical solo travel guidebooks aimed at the independent female tourist, such as STA's *Going Solo: The Essential Guide for Solo Women Travellers* (White, 1989), Rough Guides' *Women Travel: Adventures, Advice and Experience* (Davies & Jansz, 1993), and Travelers' Tales' *Gutsy Women: More Travel Tips and Wisdom for the Road* (Bond, 2001). Most Lonely Planet destination guidebooks also include a short segment that details information for the women traveling alone (Turner et al., 1996; Wheeler & Lyon, 1994).

Such advice may serve to lessen some of the difficulties and fears noted by the solo female travelers in this study, particularly those heading to foreign destinations for the first time. With greater foreknowledge and preparation gained through some of the methods outlined above, women may find themselves less subject to the constraints of fear, harassment, and uncertainty about appropriate behavior. As a practical outcome, their experiences will be more enjoyable and rewarding, and their ability to interact with other cultures and peoples improved.

It is not the intention of this article, however, to suggest that the tourism industry should aim to produce or encourage a completely unfettered tourist experience for solo women. On the contrary, these women generally wanted to travel solo, they wanted

to experience dissonance, and wanted to learn about and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. According to the women interviewed in this study, these are chiefly the reasons why they are traveling alone in the first place. As Leiper (2003) has pointed out: "[the tourist experience] should not be too closely managed, for then it loses spontaneity, loses some of its intrinsic value. One of the distinctive arts in tourism management is sensing that boundary" (p. 292). Removing the challenge and difference is thus not the intent, as these are factors that are viewed as an essential part of the independent travel experience. As one woman succinctly summed up: "you can't separate the constraints and challenges from the experience of solo travel" (A, 52). The goal would be to allow women to know what challenges they are taking, and make them aware of the support structures that are available and easily accessible. This would then enable women to seek out the information they need to best manage the potential constraints that may prevent departure or reduce enjoyment of the experience.

This exploratory investigation has filled some of the evident gaps in the tourism literature regarding how and why female travelers are constrained in their tourist experiences. However, this qualitative study of 40 women is relatively limited in its capacity to generalize the identified constraints to all women, or to other tourist types. The sample is not so much representative of women travelers across the board, but is representative of a particular group of women travelers who desire a degree of risk, challenge, and independence in their travel experiences. Additional empirical investigation, based on some of the themes identified in this article, could provide further understanding of the nature and impact of constraints on other types of female travelers (e.g., business travelers, women vacationing with families and children) as well as other tourist subgroups. Furthermore, while certain distinctions were made regarding women's differences of experience and perception based on age, life stage, destination visited, amount of travel experience, and so on, the purpose of the article was to provide a broad description of the constraints faced by solo women travelers going abroad. A fruitful area of the gendered aspects of tourism/leisure would be to tease out in more detail the influence of such factors in terms of the way in which constraints are experienced. As this was a study of

women who did travel, it would also be beneficial to understand more fully the impact of constraints on women who cannot find the access to travel.

It should also be noted that as the aim of this article was to focus on the constraints and perspectives of solo women travelers, this study is limited in that it presents only their viewpoints and perceptions of their experience. Additional research on hosts' perceptions of women who travel alone, or a more detailed deconstruction of the cultural and gendered interaction between "solo female traveler" and "host," may help to provide a more holistic and balanced perspective. Moreover, this study relied on women's retrospective accounts of their solo travel experiences. Future studies that take an ethnographic approach, whereby the researcher herself is participating in solo travel and directly experiencing the constraints associated with it, might provide a more nuanced and "naturalistic" account of the gendered tourist experience (Denzin, 1989; Guba, 1990; Wolcott, 1994).

In any future research it will also be important to understand not only what constrains travelers, but how people who overcome and negotiate their constraints manage to do so (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Little, 2000). Notions of constraints as blanket barriers to participation are no longer sufficient to describe individuals' experiences of or travel. As this study has shown, constraints were experienced, but they were not enough to stop these 40 women from traveling or from going solo. All of the women talked about the strategies and coping mechanisms they utilized to deal with their constraints and limitations, but discussion of these negotiation techniques was outside the scope of the present article. Feminist researchers have been particularly interested in the concept of negotiation as it relates to women's experience of constraint (Henderson, Bedini, Hecht, & Schuler, 1995; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Little, 2000, 2002). While accepting that constraints do exist, these studies show that women are also negotiating their constraints and thus finding access to and enjoying participation in their chosen leisure activities. The continuing investigation of constraints, combined with a better understanding of how these limitations are negotiated, can assist in providing more realistic and satisfying travel experiences for women.

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