Leisure and Tourism:
International Perspectives
on Cultural Practice

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FREEDOM TO BE: FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY AT HOLIDAY PARKS

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Introduction and background

This chapter presents the findings of a research project that explored the experiences of caravan park holidays for repeat visitors (who have holidayed annually at same park for a minimum of three years). The study was conducted using in-depth interviews with 60 visitors at two caravan parks on the east coast of Australia in 2006 and 2007. In particular, the study examined the notion of 'community' in the context of regular annual holidays in caravan parks. While not previously associated with the tourism and leisure literature, theories concerned with social capital (Arai and Pedlar, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Rojek, 2005), social engagement (Larsen *et al.*, 2006; Urry, 2002) and community attachment (Kyle and Chick, 2004) are beginning to be discussed as significant aspects of leisure and tourism involvement. We explore some of these emerging ideas through the use of stories and reminiscences from visitors to the caravan parks.

Caravan parks have long been a popular holiday choice for domestic travellers in Australia (Prideaux and McClymont, 2005). Many Australians (ourselves included) have enduring memories of family holidays in caravan parks. Indeed, one industry report estimates that 87% of Australians have stayed in a caravan park (Baillie 2008). Family groups continue to be the major users of caravan parks (Ipalawatte *et al.*, 2005); however recent growth in the sector has been attributed to the increasing popularity of caravanning and camping among the over-55s. New caravan registrations increased by 40% in the period 2000 to 2003 (Prideaux and McClymont, 2005: p. 371) and caravan park holidays are currently one of the fastest-growing niche markets in the Australian tourism sector (Ipalawatte *et al.*, 2005). Baby-boomers are driving the demand for new caravans and motorhomes (Ipalawatte *et al.*, 2005), and industry

research estimates that there are around 70,000 to 80,000 caravanners travelling on an extended tour around Australia at any one time (Baillie, 2008).

Despite the long term popularity of caravan park tourism in Australia, related literature is quite limited. A number of industry reports and academic papers have identified growth trends and management issues in the caravan and camping sector (see Hayllar *et al.*, 2006; Ipalawatte *et al.*, 2005; Prideaux and McClymont, 2005), but there is less coverage of the socio-cultural aspects of these holidays.

Marles (2002; 2003) documents a quantitative relationship between place attachment and years of visitation for visitors to caravan parks, and found that as the number of visits increased over time, a sense of community within the caravan park becomes an attraction. Her call for more focus on the sociable aspects of the caravan park holiday experience (Marles, 2002) is particularly noteworthy in light of recent theoretical developments in the tourism literature. Larsen *et al.* (2006) argue that the field of tourist studies has been marooned on a narrow theoretical reef resulting in a fixation upon place and a neglect of issues surrounding ideas of sociality. Earlier literature, it is argued, theorised tourism as sightseer activity (for example, MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990). From this perspective the tourist is a consumer, visually consuming places through gazing, photographing and collecting signs (Larsen, 2008; Larsen *et al.*, 2006). More recent literature has embraced the concepts of embodiment and performance (Larsen, 2008; Larsen *et al.*, 2006; Urry, 2002). Using these concepts, tourists are theorised as consuming through their bodily encounters with landscapes and townscapes or special events. Whether tourists were theorised as 'gazing' or 'performing', the researchers were fixated with place (Larsen *et al.*, 2006).

The continuing focus on place has arguably resulted in researchers overlooking the extent to which much tourist behaviour is concerned with (re)producing social networks. Evidence of convivial sociality, such as the sense of community enjoyed by repeat visitors to caravan parks that was found in Marles' (2002) study, has been largely neglected. Larsen *et al.* (2006) argue that tourist travel, even to typical tourist places, is as much (or more) about catching up with people than about visiting a place.

The importance of interpersonal relationships and a sense of community or community attachment in relation to tourism and leisure experiences is beginning to emerge in the contemporary literature (Byrne, 2004; Kyle and Chick, 2004; Larsen, 2008; Larsen *et al.*, 2006; Marles, 2002). Kyle and Chick's study (2004) provides a fascinating ethnographic insight into the importance of interpersonal relationships to repeat visitation from the perspective of campers who regularly attend an agricultural fair in the United States. They found that the fair was primarily seen by the campers as an opportunity to build and maintain relation-

ships with family and friends. The ten days of the fair were regarded as a sort of 'utopia' where the campers were able to relax and unwind and spend meaningful time with friends and family. It was also regarded as a social space in which it was easy to make new friends, due to a perceived sense of safety that the campers felt in the environment of the fair, and to a belief that other campers attending the fair shared similar beliefs and values.

Leisure theorists including Arai and Pedlar (2003) and Rojek (2005) have begun to explore the notion of social capital in the context of those leisure practices that contribute to a sense of community. Social capital is defined as the communal networks and the sense of trust that help to bind people together, transforming individuals from "self seeking and egocentric calculators, with little social conscience or sense of mutual obligation", into members of a community with shared interests and a sense of common good (Arai and Pedlar, 2003: p. 192). Further, they argue that focal leisure activities or communities of celebration help to build social capital — networks of trust and reciprocity — bringing benefits for both communities and individuals. These benefits range from a renewed sense of social and personal identity to those associated with a well networked, trusting and caring communal group — friendship and protection. Social capital is a conceptual cousin to the concept of community (Putnam, 2000: p. 21). Rojek (2005) explains:

> Working and playing together is the basis for developing bonds of mutuality and sharing (Hemingway 1999). Reciprocity, mutuality and companionship generally score highly in quality of life valuations (Rapley, 2003). Through these means the individual's concept of self esteem is enhanced and community solidarity strengthened. Serious leisure is a significant investment channel in the accumulation of social capital. Reciprocity, mutuality and companionship are frequently the by-product of making music together, playing sports and eating and drinking together. (p. 182)

Theoretically then, focal leisure activities that draw people together have the potential to contribute to an emergent sense of community (Arai and Pedlar, 2003; Rojek, 2005).

However, working in opposition to the community-building opportunities of leisure are self interest and possessive individualis — so characteristic of western societies post World War II — which have eroded the sense of trust and intimacy required for social capital to 'accumulate' and flourish (Arai and Pedlar, 2003). Group leisure practice has diminished as consumption and individualism have come to dominate — computer games of combat and chance, or listening to music on personalised mini devices (Arai and Pedlar, 2003; Rojek, 2005). The challenge is to identify,

develop and support those forms of communal leisure, such as caravan and camping holiday experiences, that contribute to reciprocity, mutuality and companionship, and therefore to a sense of community. Arai and Pedlar (2003) argue that people coming together in sports, festivals, hobbies, volunteering and the arts can create space for the production of shared meaning and communities of celebration.

Literature on the psychological concept of a sense of community is quite well developed (McMillan, 1996; McMillan and Chavis, 1986). McMillan's (1996) theory and definition which developed from his earlier work with Chavis, proposes that sense of community is composed of four defining elements: spirit; trust; trade; and art. For McMillan, these elements are linked in a self-reinforcing circle. The spirit of friendship that forms the basis of a sense of community is reinforced by a sense of belonging and a trust in the order of the community, the knowledge and ability to benefit one another and the community, and the celebration of a shared history that becomes the community's story symbolised in art (stories that represent a people's tradition). Art supports the spirit that is the first element of a sense of community and so the circle is complete (McMillan 1996). McMillan's (1996) conceptualisation of sense of community proved very useful for analysing the holiday experiences of the study participants and is discussed further in the methodology and discussion sections that follow.

Contexts

The study took place at two Australian caravan parks located in popular tourist destinations. The first park is on the south coast of New South Wales, situated at the mouth of a river that provides caravan park patrons with direct access to the water. Boat launching ramps and swimming areas on the lagoon and the nearby beaches provide substantial opportunities for water-based recreation including swimming, enclosed water and deep-sea fishing, SCUBA diving and surfing. The park's locality also provides relatively easy access to national parks, state forests and smaller towns and villages in the coastal hinterland. In addition to these natural attributes, the caravan park is adjacent to a commercial area containing a range of tourist related services and infrastructure including local fast food outlets, restaurants and cafes, a small cinema, a bowling and returned servicemen's club, and a branch of a national supermarket chain. At peak periods, typically during the school holidays, up to seven hundred and fifty people will reside in the park.

While the management has changed many times, the site itself has been used for camping holidays for more than 80 years. (Indeed, one of the participants in the study has been visiting the park for that length of time.) The park has evolved from a local government controlled

camping ground to a modern 'resort style' establishment with a mixture of camping and caravan sites, cabins and 'villas', a recreation hall, swimming pool, children's play equipment and programmed children's activities. It is clean, clearly laid-out and appears to be well maintained. Peak season for this park is the southern hemisphere summer, particularly the December–January school holiday period.

The second park is in far north Queensland. Somewhat larger, holding over one thousand visitors during peak holiday periods, it has been in operation under the same manager for about 20 years. It is also a well maintained, modern 'resort style' establishment with three swimming pools, two jumping pillows, and a variety of other recreational facilities including a tennis court, mini golf course, adventure playground for toddlers to teens, pool tables, bicycle paths, basketball court and outdoor movie facilities. A series of 'free' social events are facilitated/provided by the park management each week including pancake breakfasts, outdoor movies, dance performances, aquarobics classes and *bocce* games. This park is located on the fringes of an international tourist destination city. It is surrounded by a high fence and patrolled by security each night. Entry to the park is restricted to residents and registered visitors. The park's locality provides easy access to a plethora of tourist activities including reef and rainforest tours, markets, beaches and day trips to tropical islands. Peak season for this park is the southern hemisphere winter, referred to in this tropical climate as the 'dry' season, where maximum daily temperatures remain fairly constant at a comfortable 25 degrees celsius.

Consistent with similar caravan park developments along both the north and south coast of eastern Australia, the cost of hiring a caravan or camping site has increased significantly in both parks over the past decade. However, despite price rises, demand remains strong, particularly in seasonal peak periods. The park managers allow hirers of cabins and sites the first option on booking their cabin or site for the same period the following year. All of the participants in this study had taken advantage of that option. The managers of both parks enjoy high levels of peak period business from a stable and loyal base of repeat visitors.

Method

In order to explore the experience of the caravan park holiday with long term participants, we sought to elicit rich information in the form of stories, descriptions and personal analysis from a total of 60 informants. All were repeat visitors (i.e., they had returned to the same site on an annual basis for at least three years in succession) and participated in the on-site interviews during January 2006, January 2007 and July 2007. They ranged in age from 30–82 years with men and women

represented in roughly equal numbers. About one third of participants were retired. The remainder were employed in what could be described as a middle income range of occupations (in retail, community service, trades and professions). All but one of the participants were of Anglo-Celtic background.

The primary technique for data collection employed in this study was the in-depth interview. The purpose of the interviews was to identify the 'attraction' of a caravan park holiday that kept people coming back to the same holiday park year after year. To this extent, the interview process was open-ended. However, given the objective of the study, the overall framework sought responses to the following general themes:

• personal histories of caravanning and camping and memories of these earlier experiences;
• benefits derived from the contemporary experience, the reasons they return to the same location on a sustained basis; and
• the impact of the holiday on relationships with family and fellow caravan park users, changes in gender roles, parent-child relationships.

At least one of the researchers stayed on-site for the duration of the interviewing periods. The managers of the caravan parks assisted with access, introducing the researchers and the purpose of the study to the participants. The interviews took place in the caravans, tents and cabins of the participants and were recorded with their permission. The research project was guided by one overall objective: to identify the ways in which caravan park holidays can contribute to the production of sense of community.

Following the interviews, each of the tapes was transcribed, and the data were analysed with the assistance of NVIVO qualitative analysis software. In the sections that follow pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants.

The first level of analysis was thematic and shaped by the interview data. One of the most significant themes to emerge was the sense of community and friendships experienced by the participants at the caravan park. Given the strength of the response in this regard, our analysis turned toward an exploration of the notion of community in the context of McMillan's (1996) conceptualisation. This exploration arose in a grounded way from the narrative of participants in the study who reported that a sense of community was a special and attractive feature of caravan park holidays — a feature they believed to be missing in other types of holidays. We attempt below to describe ways in which a sense of community was manifested for the participants in this study and to determine the factors that contribute to the experience of community. Through this analysis we hope to provide some insight into the ways in

which this form of tourist experience contributes to the production of social capital.

The second level of analysis utilised McMillan's (1996) four contributing elements — spirit, trust, trade and art — as the principal textual (or thematic) groupings. As with any qualitative study, thematic analysis helps to give a degree of order and control to the task. This process also established some broad groupings of experience beyond those emerging within McMillan's (1996) framework. Precise definitions of each theme were then established and the data once again examined. At this stage codes were applied to the data and further reviewed. In order to enhance reliability, each of the coded themes (with data attached) was then reviewed independently and then jointly by the research team. Recoding and multiple coding was undertaken to ensure that the nuances of the language and the context of the data were not lost. Where points of difference arose, the original text was reviewed and 'worked' until there was agreement on its thematic placement. Throughout the process, categories (sub-themes or elements) were also developed to reflect the nuances of language inherent within the more 'global' themes.

The development of themes inevitably involves data reduction — the thematic construct is filtered, disconnected and then reconstructed from the text. The processes of data reduction notwithstanding, the themes as developed are interpretive mechanisms, not mutually exclusive pieces of data. Reflecting on themes and 'working' the text is a dialectical process between the text, the researcher and the act of writing.

Findings and discussion

The following discussion first establishes the sense of community which exists among the repeat visitors to the caravan parks. Organised around the coming together of McMillan's (1996) four critical elements (spirit of community, trust, trade and art), it examines the experiences of the repeat holiday participants. Second, the discussion then explores social conditions which we argue have enabled this sense of community to develop and flourish.

McMillan (1996) contends that the first element, *spirit of community*, is built around a number of important and interrelated characteristics — friendship, emotional safety, boundaries and a sense of belonging. The first of these, friendship, evolves in situations where we have a "setting and an audience to express unique aspects of our personality" (p. 315).

Friendship was particularly important to Hunter when he commented that he'd been "coming here for 12 years and have probably got some of the best mates here. Yep, I talk to locals as well as people that camp in the park [and] apart from family [they are] some of the closest people to me". Barry echoed these sentiments and those of his wife for

whom their holiday was about "friendship. 100 per cent friendship. I believe once you've made a friend you've always got a friend and this is what its all about, coming, the friendships".

Within this context a number of the participants expressed a belief that a caravan park style of holiday is more conducive to the spirit of friendship than other types of holidays because it attracts friendly people. They expressed a sense of faith that other holiday makers at the caravan park would be interested in their friendship.

Emotional safety is concerned with the ability of group members to be themselves, to speak 'the truth'. If "community members are willing to look inside themselves and honestly represent their feelings to others, then they are speaking The Truth as they know it" (McMillan, 1996: p. 316). This 'truth speaking' environment evolves through mutual feelings of empathy, understanding and caring. The truth is also about being yourself, without feeling bound to convention.

There is also a sense that within the interactions, people are free to be themselves — this is an environment with limited 'pressure'. Arai and Pedlar (2003: p. 194) argue that 'communities of choice', like caravan parks, allow individuals to develop their "social and political identity beyond the confines of traditional structures of gender, race, class and age" (p. 195).

Peggy, in her sixties and from a farming background, identifies both freedom from pressure and every lifestyle constraints and responsibilities. She and her husband are staying in their caravan and she has a television with the tennis on in the background as the interview is being conducted. In the following extract, Peggy comments upon her social freedom to watch videos and tennis while holidaying at the caravan park — activities that might be considered 'time-wasting' in other contexts.

> This is still the best way to have a holiday. This is what we call our holiday. The others are trips, you're going places to see things. We've seen things we wanted to see, well not everything, there's always something new to see if you want to but we're not seeking to find new things when we come here. We can relax, and I love watching the tennis. I watch a lot of tennis and I watch a lot of videos 'cause I never watch videos at home. I don't think I've ever been to the video shop at home, so it's just a different lifestyle you have here. When you're home you feel you've got to be doing things, you haven't got time to be sitting around watching videos. All right, that's me anyway. Down here I don't feel I owe anybody anything, I'm not responsible for anything.

Boundaries make emotional safety possible. Caravan parks are 'bounded' communities' — bound by time, space and history. The boundaries are both defined and labile. Colleen comments that:

> The people who intend to camp and who are prepared to live close to each other are friendly. You're outside cooking and eating and you don't have a phobia of being close to a whole lot of people. I guess it's not as private as it would be in an apartment. [Caravan parks] attract those sort of people; friendly people who like other people.

The feeling of a sense of belonging or sharing some sense of personal relatedness within a community is the fourth aspect. In the context of the caravan park, a sense of belonging to a community is integral to the holiday. For Richard, a long term visitor,

> it's almost for us now after this many years like a sense of homecoming when you pull in the gate. And that's the part I was saying about its being easy. You don't have to learn the ropes all the time. It's knowing how things go. And it's that sense of homecoming.

When we believe that we will be welcome, that we fit or belong in a community, we have a stronger attraction to that community (McMillan, 1996). This resonates with Marles' (2002) finding that repeat visitation elicits a positive emotional response to the community within the caravan park. The participants in this study chose to revisit the caravan park each year for a holiday and one of the main reasons that brought them back year after year was the community of friendship they found there.

> You meet people here that you've met all the years. When you come here it's like old home week. You arrive here and walk around and catch up with all the people that you see from year to year and they're all on holidays. (Nancy)

The sense of belonging also extended outside the boundaries of the caravan park into the local community. Again, Bev noted that

> People recognise you, the locals you know. The guy at the butchers, soon as you arrive, "Hi, how are you going?" It's like you just saw him yesterday. Sometimes you get a better reception here than at home where you do your shopping every week.

The evidence indicates that the spirit of friendship, emotional safety and sense of belonging are strong among the community of caravan park visitors interviewed for this study. The social space allows them to relax, to let go of some of the demands of their usual lives, to be themselves, and to forge important friendships (we will return to the theme of relaxing

social space in the 'social conditions' section). They also perceive that other people staying in the park are likely to be interested in making friends and consequently the participants are comfortable about approaching their "neighbours" with friendly overtures.

If the spirit of community is the foundation on which the sense of community is built, *trust* is an important building block and is the second of McMillan's (1996) critical elements. It is about the informal and formal rules that guide and bind a community. This idea also resonates with those of Putnam (2000) who contends that a sense of community is closely related to that of social capital, and Arai and Pedlar (2003), who claim that social capital predisposes people to trust each other, and to treat each other as friends, "rather than as strangers, competitors or potential enemies" (p. 193). The following extract suggests that caravan parks engender a sense of trust in ways that other types of holidays fail to:

> If you're in a unit you don't know whether [your neighbour] is a banker or plumber or labourer … There's a lack of trust there … You think oh no he might just want to be left alone. You've got to shut your door whereas the caravans and the cabins are always open. (Rod)

Trust is also concerned with the 'formal' authority that exists within the community. In the context of the caravan park experience, it is both the trust that exists between close and near neighbours and also the relationship with management who act as the formal authority. The holiday-makers trust that management will enforce the 'rules'. The interviewees felt that the rules were fair, appropriately enforced, and that they were well served by management staff.

> It seems to me all the staff are really friendly. They drive past and they know our names and all that, and that's really nice. That sort of relational stuff is really nice and it's all part of the service and everything. They look after us really well and all our friends so we're really thankful for that because that's part of helping us to have this community within a community and that's allowed to happen, and they really do look after long-termers. (Alice)

The participants also expressed a sense of mutual care and responsibility for each other. Kirk and Angela commented:

> I feel safe with the kids here. It may be a false sense of security but I think while I'm here I've never had any trouble. You feel safe; we've been coming here a long time. (Kirk)

> It's great for the kids. It's all safety and just really there's so much to do. They've got the trampoline. They've got the rec room now.

They have the movies; they can ride their bikes up and down. You've got the lake here. They go fishing in there or they just go play in the water in there and you know it's safe, there's not any tides coming in or out. They can go for walks up and down. They just have a whole big range of freedom and they can just do a lot of things. (Angela)

The third of McMillan's (1996) critical elements is *trade* and refers to the development of a social economy where positive feelings are shared between members of the community. Feelings and behaviour are 'traded' in the circumstances of building a sense of community. While many of the participants talked about community, the following examples typify the developing social economy of the caravan park:

It's friendly, relaxed, co-operative — everyone helps each other. It's a community with lots of community meals and all that sort of thing, its really good. (Colin)

And they look out for you and its nice to know if something goes wrong with the car or whatever, everyone pitches in to help out or if someone gets flooded out everyone goes to help with drying out their bedding. So that kind of sense of community. If we catch heaps of fish we give it away. That's the kind of community thing that builds up. (Sally)

It's just the community atmosphere, and the kids, when they were little, they always had someone to play with. A community game of cricket, or fishing, or golfing, and we'd often go to the beach and we'd take kids from 4 or 5 different families, that was really good too. (Colin)

A final example is related by Michael, whose experience captures the essence of the trading relationship that exists within the park. He was away from the site when his son, Tim, broke his arm. His wife Denise sought help from "the next door neighbour":

… who took Tim and Denise to the ambulance — the ambulance took them to Moruya. By the time I come back they've gone to Moruya, worked out they can't fix his arm there so they've gone to Bega. On the way past I've come back and told everyone what's happened, and I kept on following the ambulance. After we come back the whole thing was all packed up 'cause I knew I was going the next day, so everyone's come, packed up all our clothes, pulled everything apart, dropped the tent and packed it all into the trailer. They didn't have to do that — I just said 'yep we'll be going tomorrow, I'll have to come back tonight and start packing

up'. Twenty people did it. They just come, pulled it all apart and packed it up. It happens here. There's a good community of people here. You do look after each other.

The final element of McMillan's (1996) conceptualisation is *art* — in this sense, the combination of stories and history that shape a community. It is not necessarily a history that each one must have participated in, but one whose ideas they embrace as a group. The historicity of their experience in the caravan park comes from the annual recasting of community engagement.

It's primarily the people that we've met and have remained friends with [that keeps us coming back to this caravan park]. The kids my boys used to play with when they were small are still here, they're still coming. Even if I can only get down here for a week or a weekend they've still got to come here in January. We know people from all over Australia, from Newcastle, from Wollongong, Melbourne, Goulburn — it's one of the key things — we know people from all those areas from this. It's very important to the kids. They get invited to each other's 21sts, weddings and all that sort of stuff. (Colin)

Indeed, the sense of long-lasting and valued relationships was the theme of many stories. There was more than one mention of couples who met at the caravan park as children and went on to marry.

She was saying she used to come down here when they were children and then she met her husband here and so you hear the stories about one's who have come on holidays, grown, and then their children have come and they've met the ones who live next door, because you see all the young ones get together, and then they come back every year and they become friends, then they become girlfriends and boyfriends. (Nancy)

A poignant story was told of one elderly man's final visit to the caravan park. The theme of this story seemed to be a celebration of a life full of rich holidays at this particular caravan park.

When we first arrived there was an old couple in the caravan up the back. He came from The Entrance up near Newcastle to here every year for about 45 years. The last time he come he said "I don't think you'll see me again because the son's coming to drive me back", but he said "I've enjoyed every minute I've ever come here". (Rod)

The present study, like others before it, has established the potential for focal leisure activities (including regular repeat holidays) to draw

people together and contribute to an emergent sense of community (Arai and Pedlar, 2003; Foley and Hayllar 2007; Kyle and Chick, 2004; Rojek, 2005). But while the potential is there for friendship, trust and mutuality to develop among groups of people sharing leisure experiences, the outcome is not always as positive as it was for the people in this study. In this section we explore the social conditions that have allowed the friendships, trust and reciprocity to flourish in these particular communities.

The picture of community that emerges using the lens of McMillan's theory demonstrates that friendship, trust, belonging, trade and art are all factors that are animating. However, the evidence presented by the study participants suggests there is another factor, significant to the mix, that wasn't addressed in McMillan's theory. The word 'relaxation' was used by the vast majority of participants to describe their holiday experience. Further prompting elicited many examples, including the following, of what relaxation meant in the context of their holiday.

[In normal everyday life] you've got to behave in a particular way and when you come on holidays you don't have to do all of those things. You can not wash your hair for 4 days or, you know, you don't have to have … you're your own person you do things because you want to do them. You're not doing them for other people which is what happens at work I think. (Denise)

We're on the foreshore right at the water and the kids can just swim there you can watch them just sit in front of our tent we don't have to move, don't have to go anywhere, just sit still. For our family in particular that's really good because we're really busy. (Louise)

Relaxing, happy times I suppose and really good memories after you finish. When you go home you're thinking about this holiday for the whole year and that's what makes you want to come back. It's the memory of it all at the end of it all, yes. That's a bit hard to put into words I suppose. The memories of the whole thing. It's a bit of a struggle to come at Christmas just to get here.'… Once you're here for 4 weeks you're that relaxed you don't have a care in the world to be honest. *[Q: How does that relaxation come about. What contributes to that?]* Sleep, a lot of that. I think it's not having a commitment to anyone, bar your family. There's no work pressures, nothing… You get up, you get out and you've got nothing scheduled to do. I might go for a surf but if I don't, no big deal. You might have breakfast, after breakfast you do lunch and next thing dinner's come along and

you've done nothing. You don't worry about it because tomorrow comes and you go surfing and you go fishing and yes, there's no commitment side I suppose. (Michael)

These comments bring to mind two well-established and significant themes in leisure studies literature: time sense and rational recreation. Historians (Bailey, 1978; de Grazia, 1962; Thompson, 1967) have argued that our ability to be at leisure has been impaired, not just by consumerism and individualism (Arai and Pedlar 2003), but by a change in time sense. That is to say, from time as cyclical to time as linear, scarce and ruled by the clock, and by the infiltration of the work ethic into the leisure sphere. Thompson (1967) argues that a combination of the puritan work ethic and the introduction of clocks has brought about a fundamental change in our way of being — a change in time sense. To illustrate this point he paints a picture of an older way of being when "one-handed clocks sufficiently subdivided the day" (Hardy cited in Thompson 1967: p. 56) and people were prone to, "for an hour, or for hours together … sit on a bench, or lie down on a hillock … or collected in groups by the roadside, [find] occasions for … jocularity" (Foster cited in Thompson 1967: p. 90). However, we lost the ability to undertake leisure unpurposively when Puritanism, in its marriage of convenience with industrial capitalism, converted us to new valuations of time "which taught children even in their infancy to improve each shining hour" and saturated our minds with a new time discipline — time is currency, not to be wasted (Thompson 1967: p. 95).

Rational recreation — purposeful, non-wasteful, self-improving leisure activity — has its roots in the new time sense and Puritanism (Bailey, 1978). In eighteenth century England, moral reformers were horrified by the time-wasting habits of the working classes. The Rev. J. Clayton's *Friendly Advice to the Poor* (written and published in Manchester 1755; cited in Thompson, 1967: p. 83) advises that "the Churches and streets [are] crowded with Numbers of Spectators" at weddings and funerals, "who in spite of the Miseries of their Starving Condition … make no Scruple of wasting the best Hours of the Day, for the sake of gazing …". The tea-table is "this shameful devourer of Time and Money". So also are wakes and holidays and the annual feast of friendly societies. So also is "that slothful spending the Morning in Bed". The rational recreation movement was concerned to replace these idle habits with self improving activity.

In the nineteenth century the rational recreation movement was mobilised among middle class reformers who were concerned to uplift the leisure habits of the working classes in the United Kingdom. The movement soon spread to the colonies. There was some support from within Australian working-class culture for the middle-class ethic of

improving lifestyles through morally uplifting activity. By mid-century there was great hope among working-class Australian men that the increased leisure opportunities resulting from the successful campaign for "Eight hours labour, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest" (Clark, 1978: pp. 93–4) would provide the opportunity to become healthy, wealthy and wise. Such sentiments were embodied in the philosophy behind the Mechanics Institutes (Lynch and Veal, 1996: p. 66), first developed in Hobart (1827), Sydney (1833), Newcastle (1835), Adelaide (1838) and Melbourne (1839) (Waterhouse, 1995: p. 100). When a new library opened in Sydney it was heralded as:

> a temple of science … [which would allow] the youth of this rising empire … to emulate those sources of distinction upon which so large a share of the glory of the country from whence they are derived depends … some future Shakespeare, some unborn Milton, some Byron, or some Scott, is to be awakened and sustained, and led to the consummation of those intellectual triumphs, of which it is our hope and belief Australia will one day boast. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1843)

While laying the foundation stone for the Melbourne Public Library, the Governor of Victoria offered the following encouragement:

> Here you working men will find comfort and society. You will find refuge here, you who frequent public-houses and indulge in strong drinks, a refuge where you will meet a better society. (Hotham, 1854)

There is evidence that working-class Australian women were also interested in uplifting their lifestyles. However, the new institutions of rational recreation were primarily for men. Women were being encouraged to improve themselves in different ways. Eliza Darling, wife of the New South Wales Governor, wrote in a letter to her brother:

> It is a woman's duty, in every station, however wealthy or however exalted to 'look well to the ways of her household — and see that her maidens eat not the bread of idleness'. (Darling, 1830)

In addition to paid work, working-class women were taking on increased domestic workloads. Separate spheres of ideology and the cult of domesticity kept women safe from the dangers of "idleness". Rather than movement toward more opportunity for morally uplifting leisure activities, the new role for working-class women was to uplift the family status through domestic improvements. For aspiring working-class women, adherence to middle-class respectability was evidenced by a clean and beautiful home.

By the end of the nineteenth century, it is argued, the rational recreation movement had taken a firm hold in Australia (Waterhouse, 1995). Australian men and women had internalised the new time sense which brings with it a restless urgency to consume time purposively (Thompson, 1967).

The ancient Greek ideal of leisure highlights what has been lost to western societies since the impact of the industrial revolution (de Grazia, 1962). Leisure in this classical sense is not an activity, nor a period of time free from work obligations, but a state of being. It requires that we stop watching the clock, drop our stressful and busy schedules, sit back, preferably in a rural setting, and contemplate life. One of the comments from a young mother at the Queensland caravan park is illustrative:

> My boys do swimming, I see the same parents when I drop them off but I'd only have a 2–3 minute conversation, maximum, with any of them. I've made better friends in two days at a caravan park which is kind of sad. I heard someone say we're not human 'beings' any more, we're human 'doings'. And I agree. This place helps you connect. (Jill)

Many of us might be less than enthusiastic at the thought of returning to the same caravan park year after year for a holiday. Marketeers categorise repeat visitors to caravan parks as "non-aspirational". However, the people in this study appear to have achieved something that others may not have. Thompson (1967: p. 95) finishes his paper with the observation that "Puritanism was a necessary part of the work-ethos" that allowed us to "break out of the poverty stricken economies of the past", and the hope that as the pressures of poverty relax we might "relearn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of [our] days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations". The following comments suggest that repeat visitors to caravan parks may have aspired to, and achieved, just that:

> No TV, no phones, no lights, we eat outside, sit outside and we get back to being a family. Up there my teenagers are out every day, my husband's working, I'm working. Family reconnecting, you can't get that in Sydney. (Giselle)

> When you come to a place like this you're out there in the evenings and talking to everyone, but they're all in bed by 9 o'clock. It's very relaxing. You can leave all your cares behind. (Ron)

> The number one thing why we come up here and spend so long up here is the little fellas, the kids. We spend 4 weeks up here and the whole time we've got our kids with us. That's probably

the best part of it You're so flat out during the whole year that you don't spend a great deal of time with them, so that's the beauty. We kind of sit back and watch the kids grow up a bit. You've got the chance to sit down and do it. (Michael)

These friends only live one suburb away and we really mainly only see them down here. We know we'll see them and we know we can be relaxed and spend time with them for this time that we're here. (Louise)

The relaxing social space of the caravan park holiday evidently allows the space for relationships to develop and strengthen among family and friends.

Conclusion

I actually used to scoff at people who came back to the same place all the time … I couldn't understand what the attraction was. But now I do … It's a community of friendship. (Richard)

Understanding the factors that contribute to a sense of community is of importance both practically and theoretically in the light of Arai and Pedlar's (2003) study. The current study has explored the experiences of 60 repeat visitors to two caravan parks from the perspective of the literature on sense of community and the historical perspectives of time sense and rational recreation. While the overall sample is relatively small (and we therefore make no claims for its generalisability) it is very clear that a community of friendship is something of significant value to our study participants. The sense of community that exists among regular visitors to caravan parks appears to be a major source of the parks' attraction and arguably keeps people coming back to the same site, at the same time each year, for their annual holiday experience.

The findings of this study are in accord with two similar studies located in the tourism literature. Marles' (2002) study found that the sense of community increases as an attraction as the number of visits increases over time. Kyle and Chick (2004) concluded that relationships with family and friends were the most important and meaningful elements of the experience for annual repeat visitors to an agricultural fair and encampment in the United States.

A sense of community and social capital can be considered public goods. They offer members a full social existence of intimate, close connections to others — social nurture (Arai and Pedlar, 2003). Social capital enables members to act together more effectively to pursue shared

objectives (Putnam, 2000). A sense of community mitigates against feelings of alienation. A sense of community and social capital are, arguably, elements of social life that have been eroded over recent decades in urban communities. Arguably a domicile-based community in an urban environment is something more substantial to people's lives in general than a community with the kind of time horizon of a holiday community. However, a holiday community seems to fit under the banner of communities based around "focal leisure activities" referred to by Arai and Pedlar (2003). It is clear the people interviewed for this study gain a great deal of pleasure, sense of identity and ongoing benefit from their membership of the holiday community.

Arai and Pedlar (2003) are interested in the exploration of the role of focal leisure activities in providing spaces for the social self and civic engagement to occur — spaces where community structures and their potential contribution to social cohesion, trust, mutuality, co-operation and openness can emerge and thrive. They argue that tourism and leisure studies can reaffirm their practical and theoretical roots by focusing on the community building aspects of focal leisure activities. Leisure studies has neglected the concept of community and the common good in recent decades where the focus of both research and practice has been on leisure as consumption and individualism (Arai and Pedlar, 2003).

For many decades caravan park holidays have been providing a sense of community and important avenues of friendship for the people interviewed for this study. McMillan's (1996) conceptualisation of the four critical elements — spirit, trust, trade and art — for creating a sense of community have proved useful for understanding these experiences, as have Thompson's (1967) understandings of time-sense and de Grazia's (1962) insights into classical leisure. These theories may offer insights for tourism and leisure theorists and practitioners. It is the purpose of theory to help us think clearly and to make connections across particular cases. This purpose accomplished, clearer pathways of personal and professional action should emerge. Theory that is adequate in explaining something also suggests effective pathways of action.

There are many questions that still need to be answered. For example, to what extent is it possible for leisure practitioners to 'manipulate' conditions that support the creation of a sense of community? Are the benefits accrued through being part of a community in a holiday setting only temporary or are they substantial enough to permeate aspects of people's lives once the holiday is over? Are the integral elements for creating a sense of community in holiday communities transferable to other leisure settings? Further research into the needs and motivations of repeat visitors to caravan parks may provide marketing and service delivery insights to practitioners in the field and, hence, improve the economic and social sustainability of their enterprises. Further research

into holiday communities may also contribute to theoretical understandings about sociality and social capital in the context of focal leisure activities. Such research could contribute to a fledgling body of literature in the area of leisure and social capital that offers potential for reframing the social relevance of leisure experiences.

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