

Holiday Experiences of Women and Girls over the Life-Course

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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in writing this thesis, and all sources used have, to the best of my knowledge, been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Abstract

This thesis focusses on the lived experiences of women and girls as tourists. While scholarly interest in gender and tourism has developed in recent years, a gendered analysis of the central element of tourism – the tourist – is rare. The study examines the tourist experiences of women of different ages: ages 12, 20, 40 and 65+ years. The conceptual framework for the study is social constructionism, the premises being that the holiday experience is gendered and that there is no *one* woman's experience. To understand how the experience has been constructed, the women have reported their memories of contemporary holidays and memories of holiday experiences at previous ages of their life-course. This thesis examines how the intersection of gender, age/family life stage and historical time produces the tourist/holiday experience. To hear female voices in first person narration and to identify any patterns in their experiences were intentions of the research.

The feminist, social constructionist method “memory-work” developed by Haug and Others (1987) was employed. The method assumes that women's memories of their life experiences are the basis of their knowledge. The aim of memory-work is consciousness raising and empowerment for women. In the present study I was interested in understanding differences amongst women and whether patriarchal structures were more oppressive for some groups than others. As a form of leisure with the implied notion of choice, tourism can be a site of contestation and resistance to existing stereotypes of gender.

That there are many women's tourist experiences was evident in the findings. Differences between age groups/family life stages and historical times suggest women's subjectivity is both contextual and multiple. Holidays could be characterised as: “The Physical Me” at age 12; “The Social Us” at age 20; “Freedom from Them” at age 40 and; “Beyond Me, Us and Them” at age 65+. Nonetheless, there were themes which were common to women's and girls' holiday experiences and which cut across age groups. The primary theme concerned the girls' and women's relationships to others: social connectedness, attentiveness to others and freedom from others. Another theme was the embodiment of the tourist experience.

Power relations were evident through the various discourses. The holiday could be seen as a site for resistance of discourse, for reinforcement of discourse or a tension between the two. Of particular significance are the historical differences suggesting cultural shifts in both gender and age discourses. The concluding chapter proposes directions for research and suggests actions that the tourism industry might consider to provide for women and girls of different ages in order that they experience fully the benefits that can accrue, and which modern-day society has come to expect from holidays.

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