

GENDERED LEISURE: ARE WOMEN MORE CONSTRAINED IN TRAVEL FOR LEISURE?

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The equality of genders has always remained a contentious issue. Every sphere of life is characterized by differential status ascribed to men and women. It has been argued that women have long been the disadvantaged gender in leisure. Taking specifically the case of travel for leisure, this study is an attempt to explore if socio-demographic factors like family responsibilities, dominance of spouse and/or family, employment status, and one's gender are dominant in governing travel decisions and to what extent these are perceived as constraints by male and female tourists. This comparative study of genders arrives at the finding that gender is the detrimental factor for women in participation in travel for leisure. For men, time limitation associated with employment is the major constraint restricting their freedom to travel. Women remain relatively more constrained by familial responsibilities but in today's world women cannot be identified as the disadvantaged gender in leisure.

Keywords: Gender, Leisure Travel, Constraints

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INTRODUCTION

Gender issues have emerged in every facet of our life, primarily concentrating on gender equality in areas like education, status, awareness, and availing of socio-economic opportunities. The domain of Leisure too, has not remained free of gender concerns. It is seen that leisure has for long been divided on the lines of gender, creating a privileged and underprivileged class where women are relegated the disadvantaged status in availing leisure opportunities. It is believed that since long women's leisure has been constrained, as it is intricately woven with family resources, time, obligations, childcare, men's power and control. However, with times the status of genders has undergone a change leading to a blurring of stereotypical gender identities and women empowerment is elevating the status of women. In today's context, it can



be said that though overall, in comparison to men, women remain relatively more constrained by familial responsibilities that hinder their freedom for leisure travel, it cannot be asserted that they are the disadvantaged gender in leisure. Hence it is interesting to take up research that can investigate if the changing status of genders has been in favor of women, especially for allowing personal leisure opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Gender is understood differently across societies. Sociologists, Social Psychologists and Tourism Scholars have coined the concept of gender in different ways. From a socio cultural dimension, the meaning of gender is constructed by society and gender is referred to as socially learned behavior and expectations that are associated with the two sexes (Anderson, 1993:59; Henderson, 1994). Swain (1995) elaborates Gender to be a system of culturally constructed identities that are expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity that interact with socially structured relationships in division of labor and leisure, sexuality and power between women and men. Gender has also been investigated in terms of the individual (how men and women behave, their beliefs and attitudes, gender identity), in terms of social structure (gendered divisions in the social activities or labor of men and women), and in terms of symbolic orders (gender symbolism, how we think about ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’). (Davis, 1991: 65).

Therefore, a common understanding is that Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. It includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviors of both women and men, where conforming to one’s gender role is understood to be ‘doing gender’, which ironically also leads to creation of differences between males and females.

Gender is closely related to power dynamics and brings with it privileges or restrictions. Till now, in all spheres of life it has been understood that men have always enjoyed better position and privileges in society, as compared to women. Lindsey (1994: 68), mentions in her study that as quoted by Miller and Swift (1991), George Orwell might have put it this way, ‘all men are equal but men are more equal than women’. While males are associated with power, females are identified as the ‘fairer or weaker sex.’ Gender then seems to be a hierarchical structure of opportunity and oppression (Ferreer, 1990). ‘Contemporary

sociologists view social life as gendered experiences and state that opportunities and burdens are differently available to males and females because of social views about maleness and femaleness' (Kramer, 2004:5). The characteristics associated with being a male or female are important. Gender polarization approaches tend to define mutually exclusive scripts for being male and female (Bem, 1993). Personality traits such as independence, assertiveness, reason, rationality, competitiveness, and focus on individual goals are considered to be traits associated with masculinity. On the other hand, being understanding, caring, nurturing, responsible, considerate, sensitive, intuitive, passionate, and having the ability to focus on communal goals are traits associated with femininity (Cross and Markus, 1993; Easlea, 1986; Keller, 1983; Weinreich-Haste, 1986; Claveria and Datzira, 2009). On the basis of characteristics, society creates domination and subordination of genders. Lorber (1999) suggests that gender is socially constructed and males and females themselves determine the superior gender in a society.

A gender hierarchy depicting a gender dominance structure exists in leisure as well. It is believed that leisure has always corresponded more to the lives of men than women, where men find more time and freedom to engage in leisure, while women remain constrained.

Gender, privileges and inequities in leisure

Substantial research reveals that in leisure, a privileged and underprivileged gender schema exists. Deem (1986) discusses that the history of culture is characterized by male domination of women, indicating that women are repressed in where they are allowed to go and what they are permitted to do in leisure, and are required to do the work that makes family leisure possible. The leisure of women has always had a 'domestic flavor' and corresponds with the role of women as the 'caregiver' and 'supporter'.

Most studies have concentrated on examining women leisure alone, with a view that female gender is disadvantaged in leisure (Bella, 1989; Gentry and Doering, 1970; Greenberg and Frank, 1983; Henderson et.al., 1988; Henderson and Allen, 1991; Henderson and Bialeschki, 1991; Wearing and Wearing, 1988). Two significant issues related to women's leisure are identified as important, i.e. the concept of 'Ethic of Care' (Gilligan, 1982), and 'Patriarchy and Male Domination'. The view on 'Ethic of Care', states that women have an inborn characteristic of being caring, concerned, loving and bound to the maternal instinct (Shaw, 1994). This ethic indirectly becomes a constraint as it disposes women to

a primary and willing duty of devotion to take care of the family, leading to ignoring their own personal desires and leisure.

‘Patriarchy and Male domination’ is another view presented by sociologists. Most societies are patriarchal. In patriarchal thought it is felt that males dominate the social system and women are subjugated. Male domination in leisure dates back to the time of industrialization, when in almost all leisure contexts, women were considered subservient to men and their time was perceived to be more permeable than men’s, since women continually adjusted their schedules to the needs of their husband and children (Carlos Monterrubio, 2009). Wimbush and Talbot (1988) identify that male power has a strong influence on women’s leisure opportunities, friendships and social networks throughout their lives.

The specific case study of women / female gender in travel is emerging as a new area of interest for researchers (Birkett, 1989; Butler, 1995; Robinson, 1990).

Travel for leisure: the gender schema

In the study of gender based tourism statistics, it is apparent that a gender gap exists. There is a marked difference in the number of male and female tourists, suggesting unequal travel participation. Through ages, taboos have been attached to travel of women. In many societies, being feminine has been defined as ‘sticking close to home’, while masculinity has been the ‘passport for travel’ (Enloe, 1989:21). Richter (1994:147) rightly quotes that Robinson (1990) has mentioned ‘Until the sixteenth century, to be a woman, travel and remain respectable one had to be generally either a queen or a pilgrim.’ The ideology ‘Women’s place is in the home’ reigned supreme in society since time immemorial but only privileged women did not always strictly conform to this norm. In early times, travel was said to ‘augment a man’s prestige but it diminished a woman’s reputation.’ Single women traveling were considered immodest and lacking propriety. Rybczynski (1991) noted that the proper place for women was the home and public leisure was exclusively a male domain.

Richter (1994) suggests that till recently travel has had different contextual meaning for women and men. While men traveled for conquest, wars, crusades, exploration, trading opportunities, etc. the extent to which women participated, they did so, as vital support system for missionary work, immigration, imperial adventures, diplomatic support, or civilizing the frontier. This implies that women have never been completely free to engage in travel for leisure and perhaps this is the reason why lesser number of women are seen traveling compared to men.

Hence the importance of addressing the travel constraints comes into play.

Gendered constraints in travel decisions

Gender can be detrimental in household decision making, and affects leisure decisions too. Risman (1998) suggests that a household is a gender factory that is characterized by gender power dynamics. On male and female dynamics in marital power relations within the family, research documents that each spouse plays a vital role in travel decisions (Barff et al., 1982; Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1990; Kang and Hsu, 2003, 2004; Myers and Moncrief, 1978; Pearce, 1985; Perreault et al., 1977; Van Raaij, W. & Francken, 1984; Henthorne et al., 2010) and decisions depend upon the spouse who wields more marital power. Socio cultural factors like nature of society i.e. patriarchal or matriarchal, age, family life cycle stage, influence of family and children, education, economic position and self-concept also influence decision making.

Constraints in travel decisions are largely related to gender, life cycle and cultural features (Jackson, 1991; Shaw, 1994). It is noted that females experience more limitations than men. Factors like work, family, household obligations, determine the amount and quality of time available for leisure and tourism and act as constraints in some instances for certain individuals. One's gender is coupled with personal and socio economic factors to exacerbate constraints. Though constraining factors operate on both genders, the degree to which they affect either gender is different. It is realized though, that the constraints act upon females more than on males. E.g., relating the economic constraints to gender, females are often identified as more constrained to pursue leisure travel due to low economic status. Apostolopoulos and Sonmez (2001) suggest that though the travel behavior of women reflects their respective societal norms and values, cultural or religious restrictions pertaining to their societal roles and socio economic limitations are likely to determine their travel abilities and styles (Bartos, 1982; Myers and Moncreif, 1978; Schul and Crompton, 1983; Van Raaij & Francken, 1984). Consumer behavior models in tourism (Matheison and Wall, 1982; Mayo and Jarvis, 1981; Middleton, 1988; Moutinho, 1987; Schmoll, 1977; Wahab, Crampton and Rothfiled, 1976) have tried to explain vacation decision-making. A striking observation is that most of decision-making studies have not taken into account constraints governing travel decisions.

It is apparent that lesser the limitations/ constraints operating on an individual more will be the involvement of an individual in travel.

Though previous studies identify female gender as underprivileged in leisure, of late, a completely different picture has started emerging with the changing gender roles in society. It is now being seen that females are less dominated, disadvantaged or oppressed. Outlining the relevance of shifts in gender roles for consumer behavior, Scanzoni (1977) has identified two key demographic and social changes that bear relevance to gender roles: (1) women defining their paid employment in the same terms as men and (thus) (2) a change in relationships between men and women. The education of women and entry of women into workforce is accounted as a vital factor in transforming decision. Though earlier it was only the male or breadwinner taking consumer decisions, now, the female as an earner too has started having more say in decisions.

In view of the changing gender roles and emerging equality structure in society, the assumption that one gender is more disadvantaged in leisure, has become questionable. Constraints operate on both genders, but whether it is the female or male that remains more constrained, needs further research. Taking up the case of either gender in their independent freedom to make a decision to travel, this study proceeds to examine which gender (male or female) is relatively more constrained.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper has been derived from the author's doctoral work on Gender Issues in Tourism that has studied consumer behavior and travel decision making of male and female tourists. Although the scope of the doctoral work was much wider, this paper focuses on examining how factors like family responsibilities, dominance of spouse and/or family and employment status, are perceived by males and females as constraints in making decisions related to travel for leisure.

The main research question addressed in this research is whether Gender affects decision making related to leisure travel.

The related research questions studied in this paper are:

- Whether Family Responsibilities affect travel decision making of males and females?
- Whether Dominance of Spouse and/or Family is perceived as a constraint in decision making for leisure travel?
- Does Employment Status effect independent decision making for leisure travel?

The study has been conducted in the North Western Himalayas of India, in four selected districts of State of Himachal Pradesh that draw the

highest number of tourists. The State is an important tourism destination that receives both Foreign and Indian tourists, making it an ideal selection for the study. Based on both primary and secondary data, the study involves a sample of 400 respondents with an equal number of males and females (200 each), to facilitate comparison between the genders. Stratified Random Sampling has been used for selecting districts within the State. The total sample from each district is selected in proportion to the overall total number of incoming tourists in the 4 selected districts, arriving at 132 tourists from Shimla, 142 from Kullu, 88 from Kangra and 38 from Chamba. In every district, an equal number of male and female sample has been studied. Primary data has been collected using a single set of questionnaire administered on the whole sample (400) i.e. 200 males and females respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of respondents

Of the 400 respondents there is an equal number of male and females i.e. 200 (50%). Maximum number of respondents fall in the age group of 25-40 years i.e. 86, males (43%) and 115 females (57.5%). 103(51.5%) males and 96(48%) females have had at least graduate level education signifying that in the present times education is accorded due importance by both genders. It is interesting to note that more females i.e. 69(34.5%), than males i.e. 60(30%), have post graduate education. This indicates that women tend to continue higher studies while men prefer to take up employment right after achieving a basic standard of education to become economically independent and start earning a living to provide for themselves, and later, their families. As for occupational status, 198 respondents are employed, of which 120 are males and 78 females. A significant 122 (61%) women are not earning. They are dependent upon their parents or are housewives.

Gender as a constraint in making travel decisions

In case of males, taking response to gender as a constraint, all males i.e. 100% (200), reported that they did not perceive their gender as a constraint to taking leisure travel decisions. In comparison, 51.5% (103) females reported their gender as a major limitation.

These results indicate that being born a male is instrumental in strengthening the position of men in society. This confirms the findings of earlier research that male gender is advantaged, privileged, independent and superior to female gender. Being born a male is an advantage. More than half the female respondents feel that their gender is a strong constraining factor. In many societies, being born a female automatically brings association with secondary status, gender stereotypes and taboos. Especially the developing societies ascribe women an inferior status to men. Society considers women to be the 'weaker sex', vulnerable, needing protection, and ideally to remain within the confines of home. Because of societal pressure most women are afraid to break gender stereotypes and prefer to conform to their 'gender roles' accepting subservience to men and constraining their lives within certain 'do's and don'ts, leaving authority for men in a number of spheres of life.

Table 1 Perception of Gender as a Constraint

Males (200)		Females (200)	
Yes	No	Yes	No
0 (0%)	200(100%)	103(51.5%)	97(48.5%)

However, it is also interesting to note in the result that nearly half i.e. 48.5% females do not view their gender as a constraining factor. This suggests that the rapid development changes and societal progress has started transforming the balance between the genders, gradually elevating the status of women and according respect and equality to women at par with men. The equal treatment of genders and gradual shedding of gender stereotypes is strengthening the position of females in societies and especially educated and empowered women no longer see their gender as a constraint. This is the reason that tourism and travel statistics now reveal a large segment of women participating in leisure travel too.

Family responsibilities as constraint

In tourism decision making research DeCrop (2005) has described the family as a Decision Making Unit (DMU) in which important decisions of life, including consumption choices are discussed. In vacation decisions, besides family, close social circles e.g. friends etc. may also represent relevant DMUs. He has also identified the importance of roles played by various family members (husbands, wives, and children) in the DMUs, which determine the nature of decision-making. Therefore the importance of family and the influence of each family

member is vital in deciding the freedom that one member exercises within the family in making independent decisions.

The results indicate that women are more constrained by family responsibilities than men. If men desire to travel for leisure or duty, they leave behind family and care taking responsibilities for females to handle in their absence. Further, males have an independent say in family matters and do not have to compromise with the wishes of other family members. Family responsibilities act as a constraint only in the case of those men on whom elders or other family members are completely dependent.

Table 2 Perception of Family Responsibilities as a Constraint

Males (200)		Females (200)	
Yes	No	Yes	No
74 (37.0%)	126(63.0%)	102(51.0%)	98(49.0%)

For majority of women, family responsibilities and obligations are perceived as a constraint. This is so, because family is usually the pivot in the lives of women. Women accord primary importance to family responsibilities, which in a way, makes their individual independence secondary. Males are considered responsible for providing financial and material security to the family, through their ‘Outside Roles’, while women take up the ‘Inside Roles’ that are instrumental in the smooth functioning within the household i.e. caring, providing, nurturing for the family of orientation (parents), and procreation (children), or else, in-laws and extended family. While men can take off for travel when desired, women cannot, as the daily functioning of the household is disrupted in their absence. Hence it is gathered that family commitments remain dominant in the lives of women and are a major factor constraining leisure travel decisions.

Surprisingly 49% women do not perceive family responsibilities to be a constraint. This reflects upon the changing nature of gender roles in contemporary times, where the trend in families nowadays is shifting more towards equal sharing of responsibilities. Men too have started assuming many care- taking responsibilities within the household and in modern families and it is both genders participating jointly in family tasks, allowing one another equal freedom. Such a trend is removing the schema of advantaged and disadvantaged gender in the families. Shared responsibilities are lessening the burden on the female gender enabling them to have their freedom in leisure.

Dominance of spouse and family as a constraint

McDonald (1980) believes that in marital matters the outcome of decision-making is considered the primary indicator of marital power. Marital power is inevitably linked to domination or subordination. Marital power and spousal dominance is to a great extent affected by nature of society i.e., patriarchal, matriarchal or equalitarian. Patriarchy and male domination determine the marital power balance. Women are oppressed within patriarchal societies and their subordinate status is a hindrance to their decision-making and participation in all forms of leisure. Women's leisure is more vulnerable in ceding to the demands of men's and children's domestic and leisure needs. Men seem to have more degree of independence, freedom and power in the choice of the leisure activity they wish to pursue (Henderson, 1990).

Table 3 Perception of Dominance of Spouse and/or Family as a Constraint

Males (200)		Females (200)	
Yes 93 (46.5)	No 107(53.5%)	Yes 100(50.0%)	No 100(50.0%)

The results show that 93(46.5%) males compared to 100 (50%), females, perceive dominance of spouse and/or family as a constraint and it is generally women who remain subservient to spouse and other family members in choices of leisure travel.

Males retain a strong grip on their dominant and superior status in society. It is usually men who wield more power in family. Some theorists suggest that the power difference between men and women in the family is entirely attributable to men's higher income. In terms of relation between power and income, the power that a male or female holds in the household is also determined by his/her individual economic status. While higher individual earnings tend to allow a more equal say in family decisions, having a lower economic status acts as a limitation for decisions related to spending of discretionary income (underpinning confidence and increasing dependence). Research points out that in vacation decisions, women are likely to be less influential in decisions over the nature, location and timing of a holiday if men consider themselves to be the wage earner paying for it.

In leisure travel decisions, it is usually the male who holds the final decision making authority and the spouse and/or family are required to accept and comply.

In case of women, the results are equally divided with 50% women reporting spousal and family dominance as a constraint and 50% reporting it to not be a constraint. An equal response indicates that half the women often conform to travel decisions made by their spouse and/or family. For women who do not view spousal and/or family dominance as a constraint, it can be argued working women have now changed the balance structure of family decision making authority by virtue of gaining a level of economic independence, that has empowered them to have a significant say in decisions. Advocates of resource theory suggest that when women make substantial economic contribution to the household, power and control in decision-making shifts in their favor (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Green and Cunningham, 1976). Nowadays, out-earning women in the family may have more power. Independent working women have more authority and freedom in making their leisure travel decisions and can even influence their spouse or family in their own favor.

Employment as a constraint

Employment status signifies working or non-working. Being employed or unemployed determines availability of discretionary finances for travel and may also determine whether and how much time may be available for leisure travel. Therefore employment can be directly associated with financial and time constraints.

The results indicate that majority of men i.e. 116(58%), compared to lesser women, i.e. 90(45%) perceive their employment status as the major constraint in making their leisure travel decisions.

Table 4 Perception of Employment Status as a Constraint

Males (200)		Females (200)	
Yes	No	Yes	No
116(58.0%)	84(42.0%)	90 (45.0%)	110(55.0%)

Working men associate time constraint with permanent employment. A majority of men reporting employment status as a constraint suggest, that because most of them are working, they have demands of their profession / occupation, that acts as a limitation of not allowing enough discretionary time to undertake travel for leisure. Men are identified with

the image the breadwinners and it is desired of men to take their employment seriously. For employed men, travel for leisure can be undertaken only during holidays from work. Thus, for men, time constraint due to professional obligations is an influential factor negatively affecting leisure travel.

Relatively lesser women i.e. 90(45%) report employment to be a constraint, as majority of women in the sample are non-working. While working women view the time limitation due to paid employment as a constraint, it is largely the non-working female population that associates lack of finances due to unemployment, as a major constraint to engage in leisure travel. If unemployment is related to financial constraints, especially, low-income employed women, unemployed or single parents are more likely to view employment status as a constraint due to low earning or savings.

Most non-working females travel with their families, (parents or spouse) who finance their leisure travel. Thus, they do not perceive unemployment as a constraint. Unemployment on the other hand, removes the time restrictions on one's life, as women who are not engaged in paid employment feel free to take time off for vacations whenever it suits them, their spouse and/or family.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Of all the constraints studied in this study, the striking difference between men and women is found on perceiving their gender as a constraint to travel for leisure. While more than 50% women report their gender as a constraint, interestingly 100 % men report their gender to not be a constraint. It can be thus concluded gender remains vital in determining the liberty to travel. In leisure, women remain 'relatively' more constrained than men.

Though other socio-demographic constraints operate on both genders, the extent of their influence varies. For men, employment is a major constraint to leisure travel, while for women, family responsibilities and spousal / family dominance exacerbate the gender constraint. The 'doing gender', poses restrictions on the freedom of women.

However, assessing the responses of females, it is noted that there is a near equal division of responses in all other factors being perceived as a constraint or not. This clearly suggests that it can no longer be assumed that women are always the disadvantaged gender. Times have changed and there is modernization of societies. With rapid social changes and

better status being given to females, the trend towards gender equality is on increase in all spheres of life, leading to blurring of gender differences. Nevertheless, it is still the developed industrialized societies that are moving at a faster pace in reducing gender gap biases. In developing societies, it is the more educated, working and urban women who have moved ahead to achieve a status equal to their male counterparts. These women are the ones who do not perceive any gender, familial or social restrictions as constraints. However, the picture of the uneducated, rural and poor women still reflects subjugation.

Over the years, travel for leisure (a sphere considered important by both genders, for individual well-being and existence) has seen a significant increase of female participation. Both as a market segment in their own rights and by providing greater household funds for discretionary spending, women now are a significant force in holiday and business travel (Bhatia, 2001). This is accounted for by a number of factors like, changing and progressive attitude of society towards female education, better jobs, elevated status, growth of independent working women segment, late marriages, changing nature of 'Ethic of Care' and joint sharing of familial responsibilities between the spouses. Tracing such changes, it can be concluded that though men retain their position of the advantaged gender experiencing lesser constraints in leisure travel choices, nonetheless, women are no longer disadvantaged, but remain 'relatively' more constrained. In view of the significant social changes, research needs to further explore changing gender relations in society that can determine whether any one particular gender will remain constrained for long in any sphere of life.

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