An Exploration of Women's Leisure within Heterosexual Romantic Relationships

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The present study explored how ideologies of femininity and romantic love are played out in heterosexual romantic relationships and how they influence and structure women's leisure. A qualitative approach was used to investigate the leisure lives of 13 women who were between the ages of 19 and 24 and who had been involved in heterosexual romantic relationships of at least six months duration. Analysis showed that the women valued their romantic relationships and placed a high priority on leisure with their partners. This emphasis often resulted in satisfying couple leisure for the women. However, it also led to conflicts in their romantic relationships over leisure with friends and family, and constraints to their non-couple leisure. The women typically responded to these conflicts through accommodation of their partners' needs and wishes. Nevertheless, some of the women attempted to resist constraints on their non-couple leisure. The study provides evidence to suggest that while leisure can facilitate meaningful relationships between intimate partners, involvement in romantic relationships can also constrain women's leisure.

KEYWORDS: *Gender, heterosexual romantic relationships, women's leisure.*

Feminist researchers have found that leisure can potentially be a site in which gender relations are reproduced and the hegemonic struggle is reinforced. Although the notion of hegemony was originally applied to class relations, referring to the process by which the dominant classes win consent to their domination (Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1990), this concept is also helpful for understanding gender relations as well (Green et al., 1990). That is, feminist researchers have used this term to help explain the structured imbalance of power between men and women (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw & Freysinger, 1996) and to explain the role that ideologies of gender play in concealing power inequalities and making the hegemonic struggle invisible (Green et al., 1990).

Ideologies of femininity are said to carry over into feminine gender roles which women adopt and play out in their lives and everyday situations. Some

women adhere to these ideologies more strongly than others do; nevertheless all women are exposed to ideologies of femininity to some degree. Stereotypical, dominant, feminine gender roles characterize women as passive, nurturing, caring, submissive, and accommodating, while dominant masculine gender roles characterize men as domineering, controlling, and emotionally restrained (Lipman-Blumen, 1984; Wood, 1996). These dominant ideologies, in turn, are seen to affect attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that often disadvantage women and reinforce and reproduce gender-based inequities.

Applying these ideas of hegemony and ideology to the leisure behavior of women in heterosexual romantic relationships leads to the suggestion that ideologies of femininity and romantic love may affect women's leisure options and choices. For example, women who have traditional views of femininity and gender may be more willing than other women to give up their leisure choices for the sake of their partners' leisure interests. To date, there has been little if any research on the impact of romantic relationships on leisure, although the literatures on women's leisure, as well as on romantic relationships, provide some initial insights.

Leisure researchers have found that dominant gender roles have the potential to constrain women's leisure (Green & Hebron, 1988; Henderson & Allen, 1991; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Shaw, 1994). One prominent component of the feminine ideology is the "ethic of care" that many women experience in their lives. Gilligan (1982) coined this term after conducting research on the psychological development of women. She came to the conclusion that girls and women are socialized to cater to the needs of others at the expense of their own needs. This orientation can lead girls and women to become "other oriented" as they identify themselves in terms of the relationships they have with other people in their lives. While supporting and caring for other people, including an intimate partner, is often rewarding, these activities could perhaps lead to identification with a romantic partner's needs at the expense of a person's own self-fulfillment and happiness.

A number of leisure researchers have investigated the impact that the ethic of care has on women's leisure. They have found that women who internalize this ethic in their familial relationships may experience increased leisure constraints (Harrington, Dawson, & Bolla, 1992; Henderson & Allen, 1991; Lamond, 1992). Women with a strong ethic of care can experience a "lack of sense of entitlement to leisure" in that they may not believe they have the same right to leisure as do men (Green et al., 1990; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Shaw, 1994). Lack of entitlement also refers to women who feel guilty about engaging in autonomous leisure experiences (Green et al., 1990; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Shaw, 1994). In romantic relationships, women who have internalized a lack of sense of entitlement to leisure and an ethic of care may place more importance on their partners' leisure over their own leisure choices and preferences.

The literature on romantic relationships has given scant attention to leisure behavior. However, a number of important concepts have emerged from this literature that may be useful in understanding women's leisure

behavior. One such concept is dependency (Cowan, Bommersbach, & Curtis, 1995). Researchers have found that women who show greater dependency on their romantic partners are more likely to become preoccupied with their relationships and may allow these relationships to become the focus of their lives (Cowan et al., 1995; Langford, 1996). Traditionally, these types of behaviors by girls and women in romantic relationships have been considered the norm because they adhere to ideologies of heterosexual romantic love that have been propagated by our culture and society. Socialization and the internalization of traditional romantic ideologies may still lead girls from Western cultures to believe that one of the most important goals in life is finding a husband (Green & Hebron, 1988). Moreover, as Leahy (1994) notes, feminine gender roles and feminine-related behaviors tend to become emphasized in heterosexual romantic relationships. Langford (1996) suggests that the dominant ideology of romantic love leads women to believe that their lives can be meaningful and significant by devoting themselves to finding and keeping a man. Thus, girls and women who become involved in romantic relationships, and who make these relationships the center of their lives, may be more likely to give up and sacrifice important aspects of their lives, including their leisure, for their romantic relationships and partners.

Romantic relationships may be particularly constraining on women's leisure when such relationships are highly gendered. Gendered relationships occur when the men and women in these types of relationships adhere to stereotypical masculine and feminine gender roles and exhibit stereotypical masculine and feminine behaviors (Rose & Frieze, 1989; Wood, 1996). For example, in some relationships, women are expected to be primarily responsible for making their intimate relationships work, by being the caretakers and the emotional workers in their relationships. Cancian (1986) described this phenomenon as the "feminization of love." Gendered behaviors within romantic relationships have been found to incur disadvantage for women and reduce their freedom and independence (Rose & Freize, 1989; Wood, 1996).

Another way in which gendered intimate relationships may disadvantage women is through the control of women's lives by their male partners. Numerous studies have investigated the effect of power and control in romantic relationships, and it has been found that power in intimate relationships is often related to gender (Felmlee, 1994; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997). Even though many people endorse egalitarian romantic relationships, power inequalities still exist in these relationships, and male dominance is the most common pattern found (Peplau, 1994). In terms of leisure, only a few British studies have addressed this issue. Researchers have found that, in some instances, married men attempted to control and constrain their female partners' leisure and free-time activities (Deem, 1986; Green & Hebron, 1988, Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1987). Many of the married women studied had to negotiate with their husbands or male partners about what they did during their leisure time, especially if leisure activities took them outside the confines of their homes (Deem, 1986; Green et al., 1987). There is a lack of

research on this topic involving young single women and their heterosexual romantic partners.

In sum, a review of the literature shows that most of the research on leisure and gender, including research on gender-based ideologies and power relations, has focused on the leisure of women with family and child-care responsibilities. At the same time, researchers studying romantic relationships have not examined the impact of such relationships on leisure. Nevertheless, these two bodies of literature suggest that involvement in a heterosexual romantic relationship may influence and constrain women's leisure.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the ways in which ideologies of femininity and romantic love are played out in heterosexual romantic relationships, and the extent to which they influence and structure women's leisure. In this study, we explored beliefs about feminine gender roles and ideals of romantic love, as well as young women's willingness or unwillingness to sacrifice their own leisure interests for the sake of their relationships and their partners' leisure interests. Issues related to relationship centrality as well as male control on non-couple leisure activities were also examined.

Method

To understand the extent to which ideologies of femininity and romantic love were reflected in heterosexual romantic relationships, and to explore the relationship between these ideologies and women's leisure, it was important to consider the perspectives of women themselves. A qualitative approach with a focus on women's lived experiences and the contexts in which these experiences occur seemed well suited for this purpose (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In addition, there was little previous research on the influence of heterosexual romantic relationships on the leisure behaviors of women. Therefore, an inductive approach that provided us with the flexibility of discovering explanations for behaviors rather than adopting a priori definitions or concepts was used.

Sample

Following approval from the university research ethics committee, in-depth qualitative interview data were collected to explore a group of young women's personal perspectives on their leisure experiences and heterosexual romantic relationships. Criterion sampling was used to create a pool of young women who would be potential study participants (Patton, 1990). Female students currently involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship of at least six months duration were invited to volunteer for a "Romantic Relationship and Leisure" study. This was done by placing posters at various locations on a Canadian university campus. An e-mail address was provided so that those women who were interested in participating could obtain fur-

ther details about the purpose and nature of the study. The first thirteen women who met the age, student status, sexual orientation and length of time in the relationship criteria were interviewed. The study participants were enrolled in eight different academic programs at the university during the spring of 1999. They were all between 19 and 24 years of age. One woman was Chinese-Canadian and the remaining twelve participants were Anglo-Canadian. All of the women were involved in heterosexual romantic relationships. The length of time participants had been involved in their romantic relationships ranged from six months to eight years with an average of 2.8 years. Eight women were dating their current partners but not living together, three women were in long-distance relationships, and two women were living with their male partners. The number of previous romantic re-lationships of at least six months duration in which the participants had been involved ranged from zero to five with an average of 1.2 partners.

Data Collection

The interviews were one to one and a half hours in length. Open-ended questions were used following an interview guide approach (Patton, 1990). The interview questions were developed from our initial sensitizing concepts based on the literature review. These concepts included femininity, romantic love, personal leisure, couple leisure, decision making in leisure, self-sacrifice, accommodation, dependency, control, and leisure satisfactions. Ex-amples of interview questions included: How do you typically spend your leisure time? How much leisure time do you spend with your partner?, How do the two of you decide how you are going to spend your leisure time together?, How does your partner spend his leisure time?, and How do you feel about how you spend your leisure time? The interview guide was pilot tested for appropriateness of questions and wording with two female partic-ipants not involved in the final study.

The first author conducted all of the interviews. It was easy for her to develop rapport and build a trusting relationship with the women in the study, as she was also a university student of similar age, gender, sexual ori-entation, and social-class. She was also able to identify with some of the issues that arose because of her own prior experiences. However, since some issues were potentially sensitive in nature, the interviewer was also conscious of the need to be empathetic and non-judgmental.

Data Analysis

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, interview transcripts were mailed to the participants for their review and they were invited to clarify any responses they had made if they wished to do so. Seven of the thirteen women mailed additional information back to the authors which expanded on topics that had emerged from the initial interviews. The supplementary data provided

additional descriptive detail to the initial data collected but did not lead to the development of any new categories or themes.

A grounded theory approach was utilized to analyze and interpret the interview data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and to arrive at tentative explanations of the phenomenon. In accordance with this approach, open, axial and selective coding processes were used to develop, define, and redefine categories and themes. The initial step of open coding resulted in identification of numerous descriptive categories such as respect, caring, commitment, acting feminine, priorities, relationship maintenance, leisure differences, discomfort, jealousy, sacrifice, satisfying partner, restrictive, proactive, re-connection, and freedom. The subsequent axial coding involved the grouping, refinement, and clarification of concepts in order to develop higher-order categories. Next, selective coding was undertaken to explore the relationships between existing categories both within and between interviews, and to look for the emergence of major themes. This exercise culminated in the discovery of four main themes that included views of femininity, love and romance, valuation of leisure spheres, leisure conflicts and tensions, and responses to leisure conflicts. The final themes that emerged, the categories that supported them, and the relationships between them are described in more detail below.

Findings

The first theme revealed that the women had fairly traditional views of femininity, love, and romance. The second theme reflected the importance and valuation of two different leisure spheres, namely leisure with partners (couple leisure) and non-couple leisure (leisure with friends, family, and alone). The third theme concerned the conflicts and tensions experienced by the women caused by differences in their partners' and their own leisure views and preferences. This theme revolved around the conflicts and pressures they experienced in coordinating and sharing their couple leisure as well as tensions between couple leisure and non-couple leisure. The nature of the women's responses to these tensions constituted the final theme. The most common response was accommodation of their partners' wishes. However, there was also evidence of a response that could be defined as resistance and involved action on the part of the women to maintain non-couple leisure.

Views of Femininity, Love and Romance

Although not all of the women described themselves as being particularly "feminine," their views of femininity were traditional in that they revolved around appearance, dress, being passive or non-aggressive, and wanting to please others. For example, Lauren noted, "for me being feminine means wanting to look nice and to project myself as a woman," and Leah stated that, "I've always been a tomboy, but I still know that I can put on a

dress and look like a woman." In addition, Cara said, "I used to be more feminine ... y'know, I need a man to make me happy ... I used to consider myself more feminine, and then I was like 'this is just stupid' and then I strived to be more independent ... I tried on purpose to be more like that ... I'm more assertive ... I consider myself more of an androgynous person."

Further analysis showed that many of the women also reported that these "feminine" qualities emerged more strongly in their interactions with their male partners. Several of them described how they "worked" at being feminine for their romantic partners. For example, Cara explained that she felt more feminine in the "intimate" aspects of her relationship and it was a conscious effort for her to be feminine for her partner. "It's more my intimate side of my relationship, I like to act feminine there ... it's like a conscious effort cause I do that on purpose." Sara explained how she liked to accentuate her femaleness for the benefit of her partner. "I like to dress up, show that I am feminine ... when I'm with him it's more sexy clothes, things that will turn him on." Some of the women also described that they liked to play the passive female role of being cared for, pampered and pro-tected by their male partners. Kirsten said, "I like the feeling of being pro-tected by him ... the sort of being taken care of, and being pampered." Kirsten added, "I think I show a little bit more of a tougher front to the world than I do with my boyfriend." In this sense, the interactions between the women and their male partners seemed to set the stage for acting fem-inine or promoting behaviors associated with femininity.

It was evident that women's perceptions of love and romance were re-lated to their views of femininity. For example, the majority of the women associated romance with the act of doing things for their partners to make them happy. A typical comment was Hannah's statement about "taking the time to do things with the other person that they enjoy." "Doing things" for their partners also included caring and nurturing them as well as sacrificing personal interests for their benefit. In addition, the meaning of love for the women was overwhelmingly associated with being able to depend on their partners, suggesting that the women were in need of protection and care.

As we will see, the women's views of femininity, love and romance, and the accentuation of traditional feminine behaviors within their romantic re-lationships helps us understand the role of leisure in the lives and relation-ships of these women. These views also provided a framework for interpret-ing the data on leisure in terms of the reproduction and resistance of dominant ideologies of gender and femininity within the context of the women's heterosexual relationships.

Valuation of Leisure Spheres

The leisure of the women in the study occurred in two main spheres of activity. The first sphere, couple leisure, consisted mostly of leisure time they spent alone with their partners either at home or outside the home. Couple leisure also included time that couples spent with friends or family members

whether this was with the women's or men's friends and family. The second sphere, non-couple leisure, was the leisure time that the women spent with their friends, in the absence of their partners, or time spent alone. All of the women experienced both types of leisure, although for the most part, couple leisure was the predominant form of leisure in their lives.

The women explained that the emergence of the priority that they gave to leisure time spent with their partners at the expense of leisure time spent with others occurred early in their relationship careers and tended to continue. Leah stated, "I spend most of it [leisure time] with him now instead of anybody else." Hannah noted, "Pretty much all my free time goes to seeing him." The integration of the women's leisure with that of their male partners' was a highly valued development in their relationships. Couple leisure was experienced as comforting and relaxing, and it was seen to enhance the relationship. Kirsten described leisure time spent with her male partner as being "completely comfortable, and I never get sick of it because we're so comfortable with each other." Leah believed that mutually enjoyable leisure activities allowed her to develop and strengthen the friendship aspect of her relationship with her boyfriend. "I think it builds a friendship too ... that's what those kind of things help promote because, even though you may be going for a hike, you're still maybe during that hike, y'know talking."

The women also reported valuing non-couple leisure time spent with friends and alone. They enjoyed leisure time with friends as it provided them with the opportunity to connect with others and maintain relationships that were highly valued. Julia noted that, "when I get out with the girls, we just dance and I love dancing." Naomi stated, "It's really good quality time as well as lots of fun." Hannah noted, "With my friends we always have a good time." About half of the women in the study reported experiencing leisure time alone as satisfying as well. They valued this time because it provided them with time to concentrate on themselves and their own needs. Julia noted, "I kind of disappear into my room and stay there ... that's my time ... so I find that time for me." Naomi stated, "I like to write and read ... that's my me time, when no one bothers me." Jenna noted, "I just like being by myself sometimes ... I can just be immersed in my own thoughts." Thus, although the women in the study viewed couple leisure as important in their lives and their predominant form of leisure, they still valued leisure time spent with friends and alone.

Leisure Conflicts and Tensions

Conflict in couple leisure. In couple leisure, problems arose in coordinating differing leisure interests and planning joint leisure pursuits. The majority of the women talked about the problems they faced because they did not share their partners' leisure interests. Cara stated, "There's just certain things that I like doing that he doesn't ... I like swimming, and he can't swim ... he does volleyball, and I'm not very good at it." Kirsten felt that her partner, "likes to show me things he finds interesting with the computer that

I could care less about." Anika noted that, "I like to go rollerblading or go running or swimming; whereas, he doesn't like that stuff."

Other difficulties couples faced related to planning for couple leisure. Many of the women in the study reported that it was usually their responsibility to come up with suggestions for how they and their partners were to spend leisure time together. For example, Leah noted that, "Andrew doesn't make decisions ... it's annoying because I don't want to always make the decision." Naomi reported that, "eighty percent of the time, I think of the things to do, and that would be maybe one of those things that kind of bothers me." This tendency for the female partners to plan for couple leisure is consistent with the ideology of the feminine role in romantic relationships discussed earlier. However, while most of women were responsible for planning couple leisure, they often complained that they wished their male partners were more involved in this aspect of their relationships.

The women in the study also reported that leisure time spent in other social settings with their partners was often experienced as problematic. Some of the participants reported that they did not really like spending leisure time with their partners' family, but continued to do so because they felt their continued involvement was important to their male partners. Kirsten resolved to remain involved in leisure with her partner's family even though she felt uncomfortable doing so, "there's lot's of opportunity for him to see his family and so I go with him to do that, but I'm uncomfortable." Two women described that their male partners also experienced leisure time with their families as unpleasant. Anika reported her boyfriend felt uncomfortable spending leisure time with her family and reported he reacted negatively to her family's suggestion that they spend time together. "They'll say let's all go out ... and I think that's great, and he'll just get frustrated that I think it would be a good idea for us to go hang out with my parents."

It also became apparent that leisure time with other social groups, such as friends, had the potential to create conflicts between the women and their male partners. Some participants reported that they often felt uncomfortable spending leisure time with their partner's friends. Leah stated, "His friends, they're almost rude to me ... sometimes it's beyond anything I'm willing to deal with." Other conflicts were due to the types of activities in which their partners engaged. Hannah reported, "they go on the Internet and they like to go on the chat sites and they do stuff that I just don't enjoy." Thus, for most of the women, leisure activities with their partner's friends were not satisfying. However, evidence suggested female partners would typically sit through these activities even though they did not enjoy them.

Conflicts also emerged when couples spent leisure time with "her" friends. Often boyfriends did not know their partners' friends very well, felt out of place, did not enjoy themselves, and, therefore, wanted to leave social leisure situations early. The presence of male partners during these types of leisure activities with the women's friends appeared to hamper the women's leisure experiences. Megan explains, "The odd time that I go out with people ... he doesn't know them and then I would have to baby-sit ... because he

wouldn't know anybody so I'd have to sit with him ... and if he wasn't having a good time we'd probably have to leave." This reflects the responsibility that the women felt for their male partners' leisure experiences while they engaged in leisure with their friends, and the negative impact this had on the quality of their own leisure experiences. Thus it was evident that, in most cases, attempts to integrate the social worlds of the romantic partners was difficult and often caused friction.

   Conflict over non-couple leisure.   The women also experienced tensions and conflict associated with attaining and maintaining leisure time independent of their romantic relationships. Some of the women reported that their male partners often displayed possessive behaviors with regard to how they spent their leisure time. For example, Kirsten said she thought her partner was very demanding of her time. "He's a little possessive of my time ... he expects me to spend more time with him and less time sort of going out and doing other things that I want to do." Anika reported that her partner often became offended when she wanted to spend leisure time with her family. "He gets offended at the priority that I place on my family ... He'll say hey, I want you alone and doesn't understand why I should be maintaining so much contact with my parents." The possessive behaviors of some male partners led to controls, albeit subtle controls, being placed on the women's leisure. In most instances, this type of behavior did not prevent female participants from engaging in leisure activities that they enjoyed; rather, it hindered their experiences and led to conflict within their romantic relationships.

   Male possessiveness and controlling behaviors were often associated with the women's involvement in particular leisure settings or activities such as going to bars and dance clubs. The women believed their male partners associated these activities with increased opportunities for infidelity and felt that their partners were uncomfortable when they engaged in leisure with friends in such settings. For example, Jenna commented, "He doesn't like thinking about me going around [at a bar] having guys ... It's just like a meat market. Guys will be checking girls out everywhere, and he doesn't like that." In another instance, Julia's partner did not prevent Julia from going out to bars with her friends, but he put some "conditions" on her participation. As Julia said, "He always wants to know who I'm going out with. He's like, well I don't care if you go out, just come back to my place when you're done."

   The women also experienced other types of conflicts as a result of valuing both couple leisure and non-couple leisure and giving greater priority to time with their partners. Many of the women sacrificed time with friends, especially early in their romantic relationships, and, for some women, this resulted in the loss of contact with friends. Julia commented, "I kind of ditched them [friends]. That happens because you're all wrapped up in this new relationship." Sometimes the women experienced direct confrontations with their friends for not spending time with them, which strained their friendships. Kirsten noted, "I've had some conflict with friends before about

how you always spend time with your boyfriend and you never see me sort of thing." Therefore, conflicts and sacrifices in leisure were evident among these women, not only with their partners but also with their friends.

Responses to Conflict and Tensions

The women resorted to two opposing "strategies" or "actions/interventions" when attempting to deal with the various leisure-related tensions and conflicts in their relationships. The first strategy was that of *accommodation* or giving in to demands and pressures from their partners in order to avoid conflict. This type of response resulted in the acceptance of the resultant constraints on their own personal leisure. The second strategy, *resistance*, involved continuing to participate in non-couple leisure and not giving in to the demands and needs of male partners at the expense of personal leisure. The women could be seen to be resisting expectations that they give priority to their romantic relationships and partners at the expense of their own personal wants and needs.

Accommodation. Accommodation was the most common response of the women in this study to conflicts with their partners over leisure; that is, most of the women placed their partners' leisure wishes and needs above their own. For example, the women typically would become involved in leisure activities that they did not like, including leisure time spent with "his" family, in order to please their partners. The women would also forgo or cut leisure time short with their own friends if their male partners were not enjoying themselves. Accommodation was evident when Lauren was willing to leave her friends to go home with her partner if that made him content. She noted, "If he's not having fun, then I won't have fun either so we'll go home ... I'll ask him if he wants to go home." Leah also felt responsible for her partner's happiness even if it meant giving up activities she enjoyed with her friends. Leah was quite willing to sacrifice time with her friends if her partner was uncomfortable in these leisure situations. "We'll go home ... that's fine ... It's never a question that I won't go home with him if he's having a bad time." On the other hand, if the women found themselves engaging in unsatisfying leisure with their male partners and "his" friends, they would often sit through these activities until they were over.

Many women also came to accept the fact that losing contact with friends once becoming "coupled" was just "one of those things that happens" when one becomes involved in a serious romantic relationship. Hannah reported that, "I became one-person focused ... I miss my friends, but, in general, I'm kind of resigned to the way it is, y'know." Lauren seemed to be somewhat uncomfortable with this type of accommodation, but she still responded in this way. She said, "You shouldn't sacrifice time with your friends for your boyfriend but sometimes it happens."

Another way in which accommodation was evident in the women's behaviors was through their self-imposed restriction of their leisure activities, that is, those activities that did not include their partners. For example, Kir-

sten described how she would limit the amount of leisure time spent without her partner because it bothered him when she spent leisure time away from him. "I'll feel bad because I want him to be happy, so sometimes I won't go out just because I don't want him to get sad." Lauren placed restrictions on her social drinking behaviors because her partner worried her drinking might lead to unfaithfulness. "I try not to drink at all ... he says it doesn't bother him when I drink, but I think that it does. He gets really quiet, like whenever we're ready to go out and I've had a couple drinks, it just bothers him." Many of the women perceived that these accommodative, accepting and sacrificial leisure behaviors appeared to satisfy male partners and restore harmony to their romantic relationships. However, these accommodations also constrained the women's personal leisure.

Resistance. In contrast, a few of the women responded to conflicts over leisure by making deliberate attempts to maintain leisure independent of their romantic relationships. For example, they resisted the loss of relationships with friends that had occurred in the past by being proactive and actively planning to have leisure time with their friends. Other women who had lost contact with friends since becoming coupled began to make a conscious effort to re-connect with friends again. Hannah stated, "I've been starting to feel like it's not good to not see anyone else," and Julia noted, "I'm starting to make a conscious effort to go out with other people." In this way, the women instigated reactive strategies to gain back valued leisure connections and friendships that had been lost since becoming coupled.

In addition, leisure time with friends emerged as a strategy the women utilized to resist the constraints associated with a controlling romantic partner. Leisure with friends provided women with the opportunity, time, and space to shed their often restrictive "coupled" status. In these leisure situations, women did not have to be responsible for making sure their partners were having a good time. As Julia said, "I'd not have more fun without him there, but I'd feel less like I was there to entertain him." Another woman described that it felt nice to feel "unattached" and "single" if only for one night. Hannah stated, "When I'm with my friends it's nice to just feel single and not have someone attached to me", and Megan explained, "I probably do stuff that I wouldn't do if he was there." In this sense, leisure with friends appeared to be a container for leisure experienced as freer, despite the conflict that sometimes emerged as a result of this form of resistance.

Discussion and Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that being involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship had a major influence on the leisure experiences of the women interviewed. Many of the women experienced very satisfying leisure with their partners and this was highly valued. However, they also valued their own personal leisure and leisure spent with their families and friends. Because of this tension between couple and non-couple leisure, conflicts with their romantic partners often emerged over the use of

leisure time. In many instances, and consistent with their ideals of femininity and romantic love, the women accommodated their partners' wishes and reduced their personal leisure. However, some of the women attempted at times to resist the expectations of their partners and the idea that their leisure should focus exclusively on their romantic relationships. Thus, the findings of this study indicate that although leisure can facilitate meaningful relationships between intimate partners, involvement in romantic relationships can also constrain women's leisure.

The high priority given to couple leisure by the women in this study demonstrates the benefits of shared leisure for romantic partners, at least as perceived by these women. From their perspectives, couple leisure enhanced the bonding and intimacy between partners and overall relationship satisfaction. These results are similar to the findings of other researchers who have focused on the social-psychological benefits of marital and family leisure. For example, Fowers and Olsen (1989) found that shared leisure activities were one of ten essential areas for developing and maintaining martial relationships. A number of other researchers have found that shared marital leisure time leads to positive relational affect and improved communication between partners (Hill, 1988; Orthner, 1976; Orthner & Mancini, 1990). Shared marital leisure time has also been associated with increased marital satisfaction (Hawks, 1991; Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Orthner, 1975). The present study contributes to this literature by illustrating the relational benefits of shared leisure among young unmarried couples.

At the same time, our findings also add to the literature on women's leisure that has focused on the ways in which gender relations and traditional ideologies of femininity can constrain women's access to leisure. In particular, by examining the role of leisure in the lives of young women involved in heterosexual relationships, this study shows the ways in which ideologies of romantic love encourage women to place their relationships at the center of their lives, potentially constraining their own personal leisure.

Previous research on heterosexual relationships has identified the link between traditional ideals of romantic love and the tendency for women to place their romantic relationships at the center of their lives (Dilorio, 1989; Langford, 1996). Studies have also shown how many women develop a dependency on their partners (Cowen et al., 1995; Levy, 1991). However, researchers have paid little attention to the role of leisure in the lives of people involved in romantic relationships. The present study provides some support for the notions of relationship centrality and dependency among young women and also provides additional information on how these aspects of women's romantic lives can lead to conflict over leisure and to constraints on non-couple leisure.

It was evident from this study that part of the conflict over leisure was related to the desire for togetherness in romantic relationships. Consistent with their beliefs and attitudes toward love and romance, the women valued couple leisure and made this a high priority in their lives. The desire to spend as much leisure time together as possible caused problems when the

women's leisure interests were different from those of their male partners. It also caused difficulties when couples spent leisure time either with his friends or family or with her friends and family. Quite often these situations did not provide the ideal type of couple leisure that was expected or desired because it was not enjoyed by both of the partners.

Conflict over leisure also occurred in relationships where the male partner attempted to control various aspects of the female partner's leisure. Some of the women reported that their partners did not like them spending leisure time with other friends. This attempted control was particularly prevalent for women who wanted to spend time with male friends (in the absence of their male partners) in leisure settings involving alcohol consumption and a party atmosphere, for example, bars or dance clubs. Researchers studying jealousy and possessiveness in dating relationships (Levy, 1991; Sangster, 1990) and husbands' control of their wives' leisure (Deem, 1986; Green et al., 1987) have reported similar findings.

The responses of the women in this study to the conflicts and tensions arising from differences in views about the use of leisure time and the controlling behaviors of their male partners were typically accommodative. For example, many of the women became involved in their partners' leisure even if they did not enjoy these activities themselves. To make their partners happy, they also spent more time with their partners' friends than they desired. In addition, the women curtailed their own non-couple leisure, particularly leisure with their own friends, to accommodate their partners' feelings. When partners were jealous or possessive, the women typically cut back on leisure activities outside of the relationship such as going to bars with friends. Many of the women also reported that they left enjoyable social events involving their own friends on occasions when their partners were not having a good time.

These accommodative behaviors on the part of the women in the study were consistent with their ideals of femininity and romance and the value they placed on looking after their partners' needs. This pattern is not unexpected since previous research has shown that women tend to be more willing than men to compromise and accommodate to preserve their relationships (e.g., Long & Andrews, 1990; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Wood, 1996). However, it was evident that the accommodation mechanisms employed by the women negatively affected their leisure. Not only did it reduce the quality of some of their leisure with their partners (e.g., participating in activities they did not enjoy to please their boyfriends), but these accommodations constrained their participation in personal leisure with their friends.

These findings with respect to accommodation are linked to research on leisure constraints. For example, Crawford and Godbey (1987) found that leisure constraints may arise out of spousal interactions. The findings are also consistent with feminist research that suggests that women's ethic of care and their desire to please others in leisure situations can be a constraint on their personal leisure (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Shaw, Caldwell, & Klei-

ber, 1996) and can lead women to give up their entitlement to leisure (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993) when they adopt predominantly caring roles in their relationships with others.

Despite the dominance of accommodation as a response to leisure-related conflict in relationships, not all of the women in the study conformed to this pattern of behavior. Instead, some of the women resisted the constraints that arose out of conflicts with their partners and, for example, attempted to re-connect with friends whom they had previously neglected. In part, this resistance can be seen to be based on a desire simply to enjoy the companionship and support of friends and/or family through joint leisure participation (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). However, it can also be seen as resistance, conscious or not, to constraining gender roles (Shaw, 2001). That is, through determination to continue their involvement in non-couple leisure, some of the women were resisting the notion that their lives should be centered completely on their romantic relationships. They were also able to experience temporary freedom from the controlling expectations of their male partners (Sangster, 1990), to obtain access to freer and less restrictive leisure (Samdahl, 1988), and to break free from the caring roles they had adopted in their romantic relationships.

In sum, this study demonstrated the importance of leisure in the lives of young women involved in heterosexual relationships. It revealed both the value of couple leisure and the potential for conflict between partners over their couple and non-couple leisure participation. The role of attitudes toward femininity and romantic love and the responses of the women to leisure-related conflict provide further support for the notion that leisure is important in the ongoing hegemonic struggle over gender relations. In particular, and as others have indicated (Shaw, 1994; Wearing, 1992), the findings suggest the ways in which leisure can be a site for women's accommodation and the reproduction of gender, as well as a potential site for resistance.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The analytic story that has been presented here is grounded in the data that were collected for this study. However, a number of limitations should be mentioned that may affect the applicability of the study's findings to other populations and settings. Consideration of these limitations also leads to suggestions for future research.

The women in this study were all young adults and were similar in terms of education and ethnic background. In previous research, the attitudes that women and men hold toward gender role expectations have been found to differ according to social class as well as race and ethnicity. For example, women with higher education and income levels tend to be more egalitarian in their attitudes than other women, and African Americans are less traditional than Caucasians on most dimensions of gender role relations (Hatchett, 1991). Thus, the findings of this study may not be directly applicable to

women in other social or cultural contexts. Moreover, the women who participated in this study were all involved in heterosexual romantic relationships. Whether the same type of conflict and conflict negotiation occurs in lesbian relationships is unknown, and if it does, previous research suggests that the successful negotiation of leisure-related conflicts may be easier to manage for lesbian compared to heterosexual women (Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997).

Aside from the issue of applicability, this study raises other questions that could be addressed in future research studies. First, although an important theme that emerged in this study was the conflict associated with women's leisure once they became involved in a serious heterosexual romantic relationship, it was also found that couple leisure could be a very rewarding component of women's leisure and could increase the quality of their romantic relationships. This finding supports Shaw's (1997) recommendation that a more inclusive approach to theorizing about family and relational leisure be adopted where the positive, negative, and contradictory aspects of leisure are all taken into account.

Second, conflicts over leisure and the responses to these conflicts could be further explored. For example, the extent to which joint leisure with extended family members is a source of conflict was not fully addressed in this study. As well, the potential costs and or benefits of accommodation and resistance to the participants and their relationships require further exploration. The outcomes of these behaviors may be both positive and negative for individuals as well as for the quality of their romantic relationships. It would also be useful to identify the factors that influence accommodation or resistance (Shaw, 2001) and that could enhance our understanding of power relations in romantic relationships following Brehn's (1992) initiative.

Finally, this study focused only on women's perceptions of leisure in their romantic relationships. Clearly additional research needs to be conducted with men to fully understand the effect that romantic relationships have on leisure behavior and the extent to which experiences and perceptions of possible conflicts and conflict negotiations differ between men and women. Understanding men's perspectives on leisure in romantic relationships has the potential to make an important contribution to future theory and research on leisure, intimate relationships, and gender relations.

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