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Articles

Women's Leisure as Resistance to Pronatalist Ideology

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Pronatalist ideology embodies the belief that a woman's worth is tied to conceiving and bearing children (Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000). Despite the broadening roles available to women within North America, ideologically, motherhood is still emphasized as their *primary* social role (Jordan & Revenson, 1999). Given leisure's link with resistance to ideologies, it may be a context for women to resist pronatalist ideology (Shaw, 2001). Little research so far has explored how active creation of leisure spaces, times, and activities may empower or otherwise support women to resist pronatalist ideology. This study, therefore, explored leisure's role as resistance to pronatalist ideology by examining the leisure of women who encountered infertility.

KEYWORDS: *Infertility, pronatalism, resistance, women's leisure.*

Dominant cultural ideologies play a powerful role in the lives of women. While it is important to understand how such ideologies are reproduced, it is equally important to understand how they are resisted. Previous research has illustrated that leisure is an important context for women to resist ideologies. The notion of women's leisure as resistance, Shaw (2001) explained, is based on the idea that certain leisure practices, experiences, satisfactions, choices, and activities are linked to power and power relations in the social world. In such instances, women's leisure becomes a political practice. Given the apolitical nature of most leisure research (Coalter, 1999; Shaw, 2001), when conceptualized as resistance, women's leisure facilitates a deeper examination of societal structures. In this sense, leisure has the ability to shed light on ideological structures of society.

There are a number of cultural ideologies in which leisure's role as resistance might come into play. Pronatalism, for instance, embodies the

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belief that a woman's social value is linked to conceiving and bearing children (Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000). While pronatalist ideology is thought to impact upon all adults, women, in particular, are targeted by its assertions. Despite the broadening roles available to women in North America over the past three decades, motherhood is still emphasized as their *primary* social role (Jordan & Revenson, 1999). In short, a pronatalist ideology perpetuates the belief that a woman's worth and social role is tied to motherhood. "Evidence of this pronatalism abounds in popular US culture," Morell (2000) wrote. "Babies, children, and motherhood hold center stage in movies, magazines, advertisements, and news reports" (p. 315). Accordingly, within a pronatalist ideological context, women unable to achieve motherhood or who struggle to achieve motherhood are considered deficient, incomplete, or unfilled, thus furthering a constrictive and narrow view of women's social roles and worth.

While ideologies, such as pronatalism, operate at the superstructure of society (Smith, 1990), they do not go uncontested. Indeed, previous research has shown leisure opportunities enable women to challenge ideologies. Shaw (2001) explained, women use their leisure to "challenge their own lack of power or their dissatisfaction with societal views about women's expected roles and behaviors" (p. 187). Thus, leisure, broadly defined, may be a context for women to resist pronatalist ideology. As of yet, however, little or no research has explored how active creation of leisure spaces, times, and activities may empower or otherwise support women who resist being labeled as incomplete if they do not have children or that their worth is linked with the achievement of motherhood. This study, therefore, explores leisure's role as resistance to pronatalist ideology by examining the leisure of women who struggled with infertility. The paper begins with an overview of the conceptualization of ideology, which is followed by a detailed exploration of pronatalistm and its link to women with infertility.

Defining Ideology and Exploring Pronatalism

Ideology is defined as "a set of social, political, and moral values, attitudes, outlooks, and beliefs that shape a social group's interpretation of its behavior and its world" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 123). People utilize ideologies to help clarify, organize, and make sense of their world (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990). Ideologies "play a powerful role in the struggle for hegemony in that they conceal contradictions and antagonisms, and function to make power inequities seem 'natural' or 'normal'" (Shaw, 2001, p. 188). In other words, ideologies can be harmful because they mask or hide unequal power relations or make such relations seem so natural that people do not question their presence, their impact, or the perpetuation of oppression they foster. Because ideologies mask unequal power relations, Smith (1990) urged social scientists to think ideologically to shed light on hidden determinants of our everyday world and critique and make problematic the social superstructure of our experiences.

One ideology that is often hidden is pronatalism. Pronatalist ideology reflects the social, political, and moral values, attitudes, outlooks, and beliefs that shape society's interpretation of women and men's social roles regarding parenthood. It is particularly harmful to women because it perpetuates the belief that women's *primary* social role is motherhood. As Ulrich and Weatherall (2000) noted, pronatalist ideology has served to "reinforce dominant social beliefs about motherhood as necessary to womanhood by endorsing beliefs about women needing a child to develop as healthy individuals" (p. 324). Accordingly, within a pronatalist ideological context, women without children are labeled as pathological or incomplete. For example, Morrell (2000) studied heterosexual women who intentionally did not seek to reproduce or pursue parenthood and found they were labeled as insufficient, inadequate, or unfulfilled. A pronatalist ideology perpetuates the belief that biological motherhood is central to true womanhood so even those who follow alternative paths towards motherhood (e.g., medical assistance, adoption, or foster parenting) are considered somewhat lacking (Wolf, 2001). Moreover, choosing to pursue motherhood is very different from an ideology that perpetuates the belief that a woman *needs* motherhood to be complete, healthy, adequate, happy, or recognized for fulfilling a social role.

Even though pronatalist ideology impacts upon females in general, there is one group of women that is particularly targeted by it assertions: women who struggle with infertility. Defined as the inability to conceive after one year of timely, unprotected intercourse or the inability to carry a live pregnancy to birth (Aronson, 2000), infertility affects approximately five million Americans (Our Bodies, Ourselves, 1998). By 1995, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 9.3 million women were utilizing infertility services and 2.1 million couples identified themselves as infertile (Horvath, 1999). A large number of American women, therefore, must negotiate experiences with infertility in a pronatalist society.

Infertility is a value laden experience within a pronatalist society because it makes women's ability to reproduce and therefore fulfill their primary social role problematic. Ulrich and Weatherall (2000) suggest this notion is reflected in the medical terms used to describe physiological causes for women's infertility, including "hostile mucus" or "incompetent cervix." Terms such as "barren" or "sterile" are also used to convey the inadequacy of women who encounter infertility problems, which in turn reinforces the value of motherhood to "true womanhood". Furthermore, discourses surrounding motherhood label women with infertility problems as disempowered, bereft, depressed, and even suicidal because of their struggle to achieve motherhood. For example, Melamedoff (1998) associated women's experiences with infertility with feelings of anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, loss, role failure, damaged self-esteem, envy, jealousy, isolation, hopelessness, helplessness, anger and, frustration. As further evidence of how pronatalist ideology targets females in particular, infertility continues to be considered a woman's health issue despite research that clearly indicates the physiological cause of infertility is split equally between men and women. Clearly,

pronatalist ideology negatively constructs women struggling with infertility for their challenge to meet a social role determined as natural, inevitable, and most importantly necessary for womanhood (Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000).

Despite an ideological context that suggests otherwise, not all women who want children, yet encounter infertility, are disempowered and distraught. In studying the link between motherhood and infertility, Ulrich and Weatherall (2000) found women with infertility problems illustrated personal agency in their decision making processes and challenged the idea that women's only contribution to society is as a mother. Their finding suggests women's struggles with infertility provide a context for examining the ways in which women resist pronatalist ideology. More specifically, "infertility provides a lens for viewing motherhood and the disciplinary power of discourses about motherhood" (Ulrich & Weatherall, p. 334). Given previous research on leisure's role as resistance, there is a need for research that examines the ways that leisure may be an important context for women with infertility to resist pronatalist ideology.

Leisure as Resistance

Leisure, when conceptualized as resistance, is seen as a site for women, either individually or in groups, to challenge ideologies that perpetuate unequal power distributions or the ways power is implemented within patriarchal society (Shaw, 2001). Under this premise, leisure becomes one arena where women's power is gained, maintained, reinforced, diminished or lost. Thus, women's leisure becomes a political practice. For Shaw (2001) the link between leisure, resistance to cultural ideologies, and power relations are clear. She explained:

> An important aspect of resistance. . .is resistance to dominant ideologies, associated with factors as gender, race, the family or sexuality. Challenging ideologies are thus a challenge to underlying power relations. Since ideologies are perpetuated through cultural activities, and especially through representational activities such as the media, the importance of leisure is evident. Because of its representational nature, through such activities as sports, social activities and celebrations, as well as media activities, such as television, movies, videos, and magazines, leisure practice. . . .[can be used] to resist dominant ideologies. (p. 189)

To fully appreciate women's leisure as a site for resistance the notion of resistance itself must be conceptualized (Shaw, 2001).

Conceptualizing Resistance

Conceptualizing resistance is challenging because when approached from different theoretical standpoints, it takes on different meanings. First, from a structuralist position, Shaw (2001) noted that resistance is conceptualized as "acts that challenge the structured power relations of class, race,

disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of societal stratifications" (p. 188). Resistance in this instance focuses on challenging ideologies that perpetuate inequality. Yet a structuralist approach also appreciates leisure as a site to potentially reinforce or reproduce inequalities (Deem, 1988), which makes leisure a context in which to examine the "cultural contestation between dominant and subordinate groups" (Clark & Critchener, 1985, p. 227 as quoted in Shaw, 2001). According to Shaw (2001) leisure researchers who adopt a structuralist perspective view the outcomes of resistance as both individual and collective. She commented, "individual empowerment, arising out of resistance to constraining material and ideological conditions, has the potential to empower others in similar situations, and to reduce systemic inequities" (p. 189) thus, initiating broader societal change.

Second, from a poststructuralist or postmodern approach feminist leisure researchers conceptualize resistance as linked "to the personal deployment of power, and the freedom to develop new identities and new freedoms that are not subject to someone else's control" (Shaw, 2001, p. 190). As a result, poststructuralist or postmodern leisure researchers focus more on personal empowerment and thus, individual resistance. While this approach is appreciated for respecting diversity amongst individual women (such as those based on age, race, sexual orientation, social class etc.), it is criticized for failing to address "whether the forms of power being resisted are in any way structured, common, or shared beyond the individual experience" (Shaw, 2001, p. 191).

A third approach used to conceptualize resistance within feminist leisure research is an interactionist perspective. Shaw (2001) wrote,

> Researchers who bring this perspective to the study of women's leisure tend to focus on the subjective experiences of leisure in different social and interactional contexts. Linkages are then drawn between leisure experiences and women's experiences of oppression or constraint arising out of their relationship to societal power relations and ideological factors. (p. 191)

Thus, an interactionist approach to contextualizing resistance attempts to combine aspects of the structuralist and poststructuralist or postmodern perspectives and reflects both individual and collective outcomes of resistance. That is, leisure reflects resistance from the interactionist perspective when women make choices that provide them with personal empowerment while simultaneously challenging traditional and constrictive views of femininity, sexuality or motherhood. Moreover, if women choose nontraditional activities, such as riding motorcycles (Auster, 2001), they, too, are considered to engage in individual acts of resistance that may also have broader implications for their ability to create social change.

Whether approached from a structuralist, poststructuralist/postmodernist or interactionist perspective, the notion of resistance emerged in leisure research where women were found to gain a sense of empowerment from their leisure (Shaw, 2001). In particular, leisure was found to have the po-

tential to improve women's power by challenging dominant patriarchal power structures in society and the resultant gendered relations (Deem, 1999). In this sense, women's leisure as resistance is based on two theoretical assumptions; "first, the idea of agency. . .which allows for the view that women are social actors who perceive and interpret social situations and actively determine, in each setting, how they will respond" (Shaw, 1994, p. 15); and second, the notion that leisure experiences are relatively freely chosen.

More specifically, two key characteristics of leisure, personal choice and self-determination, have been associated with resistance to traditionally prescribed gender identities, stereotypes, and roles propagated through dominant patriarchal culture by enabling women to exert personal control and power (Freysinger & Flannary, 1992; Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1990; Wearing, 1995; Wearing, Wearing & Kelly, 1994). First time mothers, for example, use leisure as a form of resistance to socialized gender roles by seeking experiences based on a need for increased sense of autonomy and self-value unexpected of mothers in a patriarchal society (Wearing, 1990). Henderson and Bialeschki (1991) determined women gained a sense of empowerment by feeling entitled to leisure of their own as opposed to facilitating it for others. Similarly, a study conducted by Harrington, Dawson and Bolla (1992) found women who resisted an ethic of care (which encouraged them to put the leisure needs of others before their own) felt empowered as a result of their decision making process. Auster (2001), who studied women motorcycle operators, illustrated partaking in this stereotypical masculine leisure pursuit allowed women to transcend leisure constraints, providing them with the opportunity to feel empowered through leisure. Moreover, Green (1998) explored women's friendships in relationship to resistance. She stated women-only leisure pursuits facilitated feelings of empowerment and resistance to stereotyped gender roles. In particular, Green found in their friendship groups, women used humor as "spaces for re-working gender identities via resistance to stereotyped gender roles" (p. 181). Thus, through leisure, women were able to resist stereotypical gender roles and participate in liberating experiences.

Leisure's link with resistance to hegemonic forces (Shaw, 2001) suggests its potential to help women with infertility resist pronatalist ideology. This study, therefore, examined the leisure lifestyles of women who struggled with infertility to explore if leisure was a context in which they were able to resist a pronatalist ideology. Specific questions that were addressed included: Was pronatalist ideology an issue for these women? Did the women talk about societal pressure to achieve motherhood or did they discuss being labeled as incomplete, inadequate, or disempowered? If so, what roles did leisure play in their experiences with a pronatalist ideology? For example, did the women actively seek out, start up, or create leisure from which they gained a sense of personal empowerment or demonstrated their self worth despite an ideological context which suggested they should feel and act otherwise? Or did the women deliberately not participate in other leisure pursuits in which

they encountered a pronatalist ideology despite feeling social pressure to do so? In short, did the women use their leisure to resist dominant views and beliefs about women with infertility in a pronatalist society?

Methods

Feminism provided the guiding epistemological framework to answer the above research questions. The feminist epistemology I embraced placed emphasis on emotions, values, personal beliefs, empathy, multiple realities and voices, politics, personal and lived experiences, and motivations as source of knowledge. Consistent with this feminist epistemology, the study was based on active interviews, which Dupuis (1998) described as:

> Much more conversational in style and capitalizes on the dynamic interplay between the researcher and respondents. In active interviews the interview guide is just that, a guide. . . . Most importantly, active interviews involve mutual disclosure, a sharing of information and insight in the meaning-making process. (p. 57)

Together, the research participants and I examined the various meanings they made regarding their leisure, the constructions they developed regarding pronatalism, infertility and leisure, and the experiences the women encountered (Olesen, 2000). Thus, the active interview created a space where the women could share their own narratives and explain their own experiences (Kaufman, 1992). In this sense, "knowledge was generated through dialogue, listening, and talking" (Thompson, 1992, p. 10).

Data Collection

Participants were initially sought through snowball sampling. To ensure women felt comfortable to decline participation in the study, friends or family members were asked to contact women who had experienced infertility, share the purpose of my study, and, if interested request permission for follow-up contact. In all cases, the first contact I made with participants was via email. Seven women agreed to participate. In addition to the snowball sampling, an advertisement appeared in an online newsletter, a weekly email sent out to all faculty and staff at a large Midwestern American university. The newsletter was staffed by a faculty member who reviewed requests for research announcements. If a request was thought to interest fifty or more faculty or staff on campus it was included in the newsletter. An additional 25 women were contacted through the online newsletter.

Because I appreciated and valued the effort these women made to reach out and contact me about such a personal and private issue, I chose to interview every woman who expressed her willingness to participate. In total, 32 interviews were conducted; each interview lasted roughly 50 minutes to two hours. I explained to each participant that my interest in the topic stemmed from my sister's description of her experiences with infertility and the subsequent changes she faced, including changes in her leisure lifestyle.

During the interviews, I encouraged the women to talk about their experiences with infertility, their perception of the impact of infertility on their lives, the relationship between infertility and other life situations, and their perceptions of the influence of leisure on their experiences with infertility. In addition, I asked participants about their leisure pursuits and encouraged them to talk in specific ways, either positive or negative, about how leisure affected their experiences with infertility. All but one of the interviews were audio tape recorded and later transcribed. To keep the data confidential, each woman was assigned a pseudonym and all other identifying information (names of partners, friends, family members, nurses, doctors, place of employment, etc.) was changed.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I reread each transcript a number of times. Guided by my research questions, as I read, I underlined comments, questions, quotes, experiences, emotions, and stories that addressed issues connected to negotiating infertility in a pronatalist society and the role of leisure in the women's experiences. Each transcript was analyzed individually immediately after the interview, but the group of transcripts was also analyzed as a whole upon the completion of the data collection. That is, once the interviews were complete the individual analysis from each interview was compared and contrasted to develop patterns of relationships among the women's comments, experiences, and stories. In this regard, the themes are inclusive of data across the interviews.

Consistent with my feminist epistemology and research questions, the analysis of data focused on the women's lived experiences with infertility in a pronatalist society. In particular, I focused my analysis on the women's experiences with pronatalist ideology and their use of leisure as resistance. I conceptualized resistance from an interactionist approach. Leisure reflects resistance from an interactionist perspective when women make choices that provide them with personal empowerment while simultaneously challenging traditional and constrictive views of femininity, sexuality or motherhood (Shaw, 2001). In a very general sense, empowerment is defined as "one's capacity to acquire understanding and control over personal, social, and political forces in order to improve life situations" (Braithwaite, 2000, p. 193). With respect to women's empowerment, in particular, Bunch and Frost (2000) posit a traditional notion of power that embodies "power over" is replaced by a "power to." More specifically, Bunch and Frost (2000) state, "power is not used as a mode of domination over others but as (a) a sense of internal strength and confidence to face life and (b) the right to determine our own choices in life" (p. 555).

Applying this conceptualization to the current study, I focused on subjective experiences of leisure by drawing linkages between the women's leisure choices arising out of their encounters with a pronatalist ideology (Shaw, 2001). That is, I identified leisure pursuits the women stated they

initiated or sought out for a sense of empowerment, pride in their accomplishments, or from which they gained or demonstrated self worth beyond motherhood. I also focused on leisure pursuits the women intentionally stopped. These pursuits were relevant to a discussion of resistance because the women ceased attending certain social gatherings, such as baby showers, where they encountered a prontalist ideology despite feeling intense pressure to attend. The women's intentional choice to not participate in certain leisure pursuits demonstrates their personal agency and response to encountering pronatalist ideology.

The analysis of data occurred with the help of the women who participated in the study. Each participant was sent her individual transcript, along with my analysis, for review and comment. In addition, all the participants were sent the findings of the research. All but a few women provided feedback to both their individual transcript and the findings. For example, Tammy commented:

> Thanks for sharing this with me. I loved my section and it was very accurate. The only change would be in the part where you talk about how children can be taken until the adoption process is complete. It's probably more accurate to say until they are eligible for adoption they can be taken. I read some of the other stories and can relate to some of their feelings. However, I obviously didn't go to the medical lengths that some of the other women had. Thanks for letting me be a part of your work.

As the above comment illustrates, some of the women brought to my attention inaccuracies about their experiences, which I corrected. In addition, some of the women identified gaps or a lack of emphasis on important aspects of their experiences. For example, one participant notified me that she responded to infertility not only through her leisure, but also her work. These types of comments were incorporated into the findings and sent back to the women for their approval.

Profile of the Participants

The women interviewed represented diverse experiences and outcomes with infertility. At the time of the interview, the women ranged in age from 30 to 53 years with most in their late 30s to mid 40s. Two of the women were involved in lesbian relationships, while the remainder were married to men. All of the women were Caucasian. With respect to employment status, three of the women were stay-at-home parents, while the rest were employed outside the home in a wide variety of careers including lawyer, dental hygienist, secretary, graphic designer, journalist, professor, teacher, computer specialist, dancer, librarian, student, and manager. The age at which these women first tried to conceive ranged from 17 to 41, with most having started trying in their late 20s to mid 30s. The length of time they tried to conceive ranged from a couple of months to seventeen years. Most women had tried to conceive for two to eight years. The treatments they pursued ranged from nothing through to in-vitro fertilization. Most used infertility drugs plus artificial

insemination. At the time of the interviews, 2 were undergoing a final round of in-vitro fertilization, 4 had conceived with the aid of in-vitro fertilization, 14 had conceived with assistance other than in-vitro fertilization, 8 had either adopted or were in the process of adopting, and 4 had decided to remain childfree.

Findings

Overall the findings indicated many of the research participants were aware that, as women, their social status and worth was linked to their ability to achieve biological motherhood. To resist pronatalist ideology, many women actively initiated or sought out leisure from which they gained a sense of empowerment or demonstrated their social worth beyond motherhood. Other women deliberately chose not to participate in certain leisure pursuits, such as baby showers, where they encountered pronatalist ideology. In short, through their leisure choices, the women demonstrated personal agency, gained a sense of empowerment, or illustrated their social contributions beyond motherhood. Given the narrow and constrictive view of womanhood and women's worth as perpetuated by a pronatalist ideology, the women's leisure choices reflected resistance to being labeled incomplete, unhappy, or socially devalued as a result of infertility problems. Each of these responses is discussed in more detail beginning with comments connected to the women's awareness or experiences with pronatalist ideology.

"We're Just Socialized To Always Want a Child:" An Awareness of Pronatalist Ideology

Comments connected to a pronatalist ideology centered on the women's awareness of motherhood as an expectation. In short, women are socialized to believe that motherhood is a valuable social role for them to fulfill. Most of the participants believed motherhood was assumed to be natural, inevitable, easy to achieve, and anticipated of women involved in heterosexual relationships. These sentiments were revealed by many participants through remarks such Lilly's: "When you were four years and played family, didn't you always have a child? We're just socialized to always have a child. All the literature I've read [supports that] as well." Sheryl made similar comments about pronatalist ideology and womanhood, albeit based on her experience as an adult. While discussing the connection of infertility with other life situations, she commented "We assume that motherhood is the key to womanhood, and therefore, lack of it has everything to do with every other aspect of your womanhood." Sheryl was not only aware that motherhood is an expected role for women, but she connected it to the achievement of true womanhood, too. She, along with other interview participants, emphasized how experiences with infertility impacted upon all other aspects of her sense of womanhood.

Not all women experience the same type of social pressure to conceive and bear children, however. One of the lesbian participants, Mindy, noted the pressure was somewhat limited to women involved in heterosexual relationships. She explained "We didn't have our extended family having any influence on us as a lesbian couple." Evidently, pronatalist ideology reproduces a subsequent value about who ought to mother.

"Little Nagging Voices Saying There's Something Wrong With You": Pronatalism & Infertility

Tied to the recognition of pronatalist ideology, many women discussed how pronatalism perpetuated the belief that women without children are lacking, incomplete or inadequate. When offering advice to other women who encounter infertility, Lilly suggested "Something along the lines of don't let being a mother overshadow who you are. That is not a personal experience per se but I've seen other people do that. They kind of think they are less of a woman if they can't conceive." While Lilly did not experience the pressure herself, her comments reflected the impact of pronatalist ideology upon other women she knew struggling with infertility. Mindy provided a similar point of view. When discussing why some women feel disempowered by infertility, she said,

> I've heard that some women see it as a total failure as a person. I think for them there's a real stereotype that you're not a real woman if you can't have a kid. For women there's a big identity involved in that you can have a kid and be a mother and everything involved so it might be an embarrassment or seen as a failure if you can't do it.

In Mindy's view, stereotypes exist that perpetuate women's worth as tied to motherhood. Experiences with infertility, therefore, can leave women feeling like failures if they cannot achieve motherhood, as socially prescribed.

Many participants commented that women with infertility are particularly targeted by the messages perpetuated by pronatalism. For example, during her interview, Holly articulated,

> As women dealing with infertility there are little nagging voices that say there's something wrong with you and conjure up the word "barren" to scare you. I think it must be socialized in at some point because there's a real sense that you don't have to have children to be a real woman but you have to be able to. There's a sense that somehow your body has betrayed you. Some how there's something deeply wrong with you if you can't [have children]. There is a real sense that you are somehow less of a woman and less of a person. . . . These things so relate to your sexuality and gender status for not functioning the way they are suppose to.

In addition to drawing attention to the impact of pronatalist ideology on women with infertility Holly highlighted how these issues connected to women's gender roles, status and notions of femininity. Ostensibly, to be

considered a "real woman," one has to be able to conceive and bear children, an issue for those who encounter infertility.

Empowerment by Seeking Out Leisure Pursuits

When asked how they responded to the messages perpetuated by a pronatalist ideology, many of the women in the study mentioned seeking out leisure pursuits from which they gained a sense of empowerment, satisfaction, pride in their accomplishments and demonstrated their worth beyond motherhood. Others deliberately did not participate in other pursuits wherein they encountered a pronatalist ideology.

Beginning first with pursuits the women initiated while dealing with infertility, Heidi started teaching self defense, purchased a motorcycle, and started horseback riding while dealing with infertility. About her leisure choices, Heidi commented,

> I'm pretty proud of the fact that there was this area in my life that was out of control but the rest of it was moving along. There was lots of other things that I did; lots of other facets of my life that didn't get put on hold and I really got a sense of, okay, here's this thing I can't do, but here's all these other things that I *can* do. I can't get moving in this part of my life but I can get moving in this other part.

Similar to many other women in the current study, Heidi responded to her infertility problems not with grief, but rather with determination to show her worth in areas outside of motherhood. Through her active creation of leisure, Heidi demonstrated her sense of control, confidence to face life, and a pride in her accomplishments.

Sally, another participant, articulated how the leisure choices she made while encountering infertility provided her with a sense of self worth and self esteem. She stated,

> I found them [reading, walking, volunteer job] helpful just in making me feel stronger both emotionally and physically, better prepared to deal with what might be coming, feeling that I was helping myself as a person. . . I feel like those things helped by making me feel better about myself as a person and increased my feeling of self worth and self-esteem and also by just making me stronger physically.

Sally responded to negotiating infertility within a pronatalist society by seeking out particular pursuits she recognized made her feel good about herself and provided her with a sense of self worth.

Other participants discussed initiating leisure that enabled them to focus on themselves in a positive manner. In her interview, for example, Tina commented,

> I needed something to give some structure. . .and focus and give me something for myself. . .to really spend some time on me so that I'm not so consumed by the process, or the treatment, or the cycle or whatever. I looked around and I

> just decided that I was going to find something positive, physical to put energy into. . . And so I started lifting weights and running, and eating better. So that's what I've been doing. One of the other things that I did decide to do was a Bible study. . . . In addition to the physical, I decided to do something spiritual to kind of get the whole mind/body thing going. So basically, I had to beef up my life.

Tina responded to her encounters with infertility in a pronatalist society by critically examining her life. In doing so, she made leisure choices that enabled her to focus on herself in a positive manner, were an outlet for her negative energy, and gave her life structure. Her leisure choices, therefore, demonstrated self determination and confidence.

Some of the participants used their leisure to demonstrate social value outside of motherhood. Such a response was evident in Maddy's comments and she offered this advice to women struggling with infertility:

> Continue to engage in things that have meaning and value to you. Meaningful to you in such a way that—the whole identity thing or presentation of self. Demonstrating your worth and your value other than being a mom. [You] need to keep track of those things and not let them go and give up everything to do this all-consuming thing.

Linda seemed to take Maddy's advice. When asked how she handled her infertility problems and encounters with pronatalist ideology, she responded "I took advantage of being an older, mentally and financial stable, happily married person without children, we traveled all over the world, we went away on weekends, you know we lived sort of the life."

In sum, for many women in the current study, their leisure choices enabled them to demonstrate personal control, self worth, and social contributions beyond motherhood.

Empowerment by Not Participating in Leisure Pursuits

In the same way that women sought out leisure pursuit for personal empowerment, others *deliberately* chose not to participate in certain activities. A few women discussed how certain leisure pursuits, most often baby showers, were a context in which they were confronted with pronatalist ideology. Instead of going to the showers and putting up with the pronatalist messages they encountered, some women deliberately chose not to attend and subject themselves to pronatalist messages, thereby demonstrating personal agency. Interestingly, some of the women sought out pursuits from which they gained a sense of empowerment during the time the shower was being held. Cindy commented,

> Oh yeah, all my girlfriends that I hung around with in high school all had kids. They started having kids pretty much right after they got married, so they'd have baby showers and I wouldn't go. I'd send a gift with somebody but I wouldn't go myself. I'd avoid it completely because people would ask when we were having kids and when I told them we couldn't they just looked so sorry

> for me. So instead of having all these people feeling sorry for me when I didn't feel sorry for me, I would go workout. I would go to the gym. Kind of like I'm in my own little world for an hour. So, it was an outlet for me and I felt so good after it, both physically and emotionally.

Despite her infertility problems, Cindy did not feel sorry for herself or consider herself lacking or incomplete. Cindy was fully aware that others did feel sorry for her, but she was not going to let them bring her down. As a result, Cindy stopped attending baby showers wherein she felt mislabeled as unhappy. Instead, she chose to participate in a leisure pursuit from which she gained both emotional and physical satisfaction and personal empowerment. In this sense, Cindy's leisure choice illustrated personal agency and self determination two theoretical assumptions upon which resistance is founded.

While some women stopped attending baby showers, one woman deliberately ended friendships. Sheryl discussed her feelings, thoughts and impressions of negotiating infertility in a pronatalist society with her friends and family. Sheryl went out of her way to detail with friends and family how the messages perpetuated by pronatalist ideology (which she referred to as a mind/body connection) made her feel in hopes of changing or influencing dominant views about women and their bodies within her social networks. She stated,

> And then there were other people that I literally did share every aspect of it with and felt disappointed, even when I would share very articulately what I just shared with you which is here's the history of my bias against thinking that body/mind has as much power as you give it, and I outlined that carefully and I said "these are the things that make me sensitive", this is the kind of conversation I want you to avoid, even when I went out of my way with one particularly good friend, it was impossible for her to redirect her belief system. The power of that myth was strong in her culture and in her family and it was impossible for her not to bring that with her in all of our interactions and that's why I couldn't be around her any more. I think some of it is personal to each person but some of it is in society. These aspects of our unconscious, these assumed notions about women and women's bodies. The lack of it [the ability to conceive] has everything to do with every other aspect of your womanhood. It's like people can't compartmentalize and say she's infertile because of this reason and this reason. . .it's got to do with her leisure activities, her attitude, her past. As a result I am no longer friends with certain people and there was one woman I considered to be one of my very best friends. Instead I choose to spend time with others who respect issues that make me sensitive.

Sheryl's comments reflect an intentional attempt to influence or change discourses surrounding the impact of pronatalist ideology on women who encounter infertility. In this sense, Sheryl stood up for her beliefs and asked others to respect her point of view. When they were unable to do so, she deliberately ended her friendship thereby demonstrating her personal agency.

Thus, some women in the current study deliberately choose not to participate in certain leisure pursuits or continue leisure friendships, thereby demonstrating personal control and agency.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore if leisure contexts enabled women who encountered infertility to resist pronatalist ideology. Using Shaw's (2001) interactionist conceptualization, leisure was seen as resistance when it enabled women to make choices that provided them with personal empowerment while simultaneously challenging traditional and constrictive views of femininity, sexuality, or motherhood. In this study, the women's leisure choices directly related to their encounters with a pronatalist ideology and demonstrated personal agency and empowerment. In doing so, the women challenged narrow and constrictive views of women with infertility. As a result, leisure was a context for the women to resist pronatalist ideology. These findings have implications for understanding women's leisure as political practice.

The responses of the women in this study to pronatalist ideology provide some initial insight into the process of resistance. That is, the women viewed pronatalist ideology as a form of oppression. They disagreed with its message, and responded in one of two ways. First, to counteract the pronatalist message that portrayed them as incomplete or unhappy, many women sought out leisure from which they gained empowerment or demonstrated their worth beyond motherhood. Second, other women responded by standing up for themselves when they encountered pronatalist pressures and refused to participate in certain events or with particular people who perpetuated a pronatalist ideology. Either way, the response of the women in this study provides some initial insight into the process of resistance; an aspect of resistance that has yet to be fully explored and warrants future attention.

Many women in the current study deliberately sought out pursuits that made them feel better about themselves. Others purposely chose not to participate in other undesirable leisure activities thereby demonstrating their personal agency, self determination and confidence. In this sense, their actions reflected a key concept of women's empowerment. That is, most of the women viewed themselves as "self-conscious actor who could work. . .to change and shape the world in which [she] lived" (Bunch & Frost, 2000, p. 555). Empowerment is a key component of women's use of leisure as resistance (Shaw, 2001). In this study, the women's demonstration of personal control seems consistent with previous research on leisure and resistance. For example, McRobbie's (1991) studied adolescent girls and found they used their bedrooms to gain a personal control over at least one aspect of lives while being unable to control others. In doing so, adolescent girls resisted how they "ought" to behave.

The findings of the study have implications for understanding the intentionality of resistance. The leisure choices made by the women in this

study reflected a deliberate or conscious choice, which sheds light on intentions—an aspect of resistance that has yet to be adequately explored or understood. As Shaw (2001) stated, "Since empowerment and resistance are seen to be associated with self-expression and self-determination, this would seem to be imply that resistance is a deliberate or conscious choice made by the participant or actor. This idea, though, has not been fully explored" (p. 192). The findings of this study illustrate that for some women, using their leisure to resist dominant ideologies was indeed a deliberate and conscious choice—an important step in exploring this interesting component of resistance.

While intentions are one important conceptual issue related to leisure as resistance, so too is whether resistance is an individual or collective act (Shaw, 2001). In the current study, it seems resistance was both individual and collective. More specifically, the women engaged in individual acts of resistance. At the same time, the individual acts of the women in the study also seemed to affect other women in similar situations. More specifically, women experiencing infertility often informally helped other women with the same problems, either through their involvement with support groups, mutual friends, or infertility treatment clinics. In the interviews women made reference to how they shared their strategies for seeking out some pursuits and not participating in others with friends who were facing similar issues. In this sense, other women benefit from the insights and thoughtful reflections generated by those involved in the current study. Given that the notion of resistance respects each woman's agency, but also recognizes the existence of oppression, inequities and constraints, individual and collective outcomes of resistance are an important outcome (Shaw, 2001).

Given that pronatalist ideology negatively constructs women struggling with infertility for their challenge to meet a social role determined as natural, inevitable, and necessary for true womanhood, many of the women's responses to these ideologies are consistent with other studies of the ways women use leisure to resist constricting societal ideologies (e.g., Wearing, 1990). Wearing found first time mothers used their leisure choices to resist socialized gender roles by seeking out leisure from which they gained autonomy and self value, which is unexpected of mothers in patriarchal society. Similarly the women in this current study sought out pursuits from which they gained self value beyond motherhood, which is unexpected of women with infertility in a pronatalist society. Green (1998) noted, the importance of women's leisure experiences "should not be underestimated, especially in terms of their potential for resistance and renewal for women enmeshed in patriarchal cultures that continue to define them primarily as (heterosexual) wives and mothers" (p. 172). Thus, other ideologies warrant future attention by leisure researchers.

Finally, one way several of the women resisted pronatalist ideology was to choose not to participate in certain leisure activities in which they were most likely to confront these messages. In particular, many women discussed how certain leisure pursuits, most often baby showers, were a context in which they were confronted with pronatalist ideology. This finding is consis-

tent with other research on infertility (Sandelowski, 1990). While studying the experiences of women with infertility, Sandelowski reported, "The baby shower is the female ceremony which infertile women. . .feel compelled to participated because they are female and in relationships with sisters, sisters-in-laws, and friends" (p. 34). Whereas lack of participation is typically framed in terms of leisure constraints in the leisure studies literature, this study provides evidence not of constraint but empowerment through a conscious choice not to participate.

The focus of this article was on women resisting pronatalist ideology, but not all the participants responded solely in this manner. Several women discussed using their leisure, not only to resist, but also to cope. That is, some of the women in the current study coped with their infertility by using leisure to maintain their mental and physical health or wellbeing. These women did not use their leisure to take a stand against a pronatalist ideology, but rather to maintain their health and well-being during a stressful life event. Other participants used their leisure to direct their attention away from their feelings and experiences with infertility. In short, leisure was a diversion or an escape from changes they experienced connected to infertility. While some women used leisure as a distraction from their feelings and experiences related to infertility, others deliberately sought out and immersed themselves in already familiar activities. Participation in familiar activities helped the women to gain a sense of stability in their lives based on the security of familiar routines. In this sense, leisure provided some continuity that was deemed important because of the many challenges and changes they were facing in other aspects of their lives connected to the experience of infertility (Parry & Shaw, 1999). In particular, leisure was able to provide some women with a sense of control, normality, and influence over their lives. Leisure's role as a distraction or its ability to provide a sense of familiarity for women who encounter infertility are reflective of recent literature about leisure's role in coping and adjustment (Kleiber, Hutchinson, Williams, 2002; Hutchinson, Loy, Kleiber, & Dattilo, 2003). Looking more closely at this literature and leisure's ability to help women cope with the negative impacts of infertility warrant future attention.

The findings of this study should be interpreted along side the limitations of the research. One such limitation is the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the group of participants. The racial and ethnic profiles of the participants were major limitations of the study because it is likely minority women would provide a different perspective given differences in culture, religion, and access to health care. Clearly, research is needed to see if leisure plays the same role for women in different life circumstances. Along a similar line, the current study focused on the presence of a pronatalist ideology within the United States. Pronatalist ideology may be considered more or less prevalent in other countries and thus cross cultural research would shed light on women's experiences in different parts of the world.

In closing, examining women's experiences with infertility sheds light on leisure role as resistance to a new ideology, namely pronatalism. Taking up and exploring women's use of leisure as resistance to pronatalist ideology

furthers our understanding of leisure as political practice. That is, the current study further illustrates how leisure is a site for women, either individually or in groups, to challenge ideologies such as pronatalism. In doing so, this research provides additional support for women's leisure as an arena where power is gained, maintained, reinforced, diminished or lost. Since challenging ideologies ultimately results in a challenge to underlying power relations, women's leisure becomes a political practice. Because there is little doubt "the context in which women become mothers in Western societies is changing, reshaping, and sharpening issues of power and control over women's reproductive agency" (Woliver, 2002, p. 1), perspectives from feminist, leisure researchers are needed now, more than ever.

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