

Girlfriend Getaways and Women's Well-Being

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Abstract

This study explored girlfriend getaways (all-women leisure-based travel), focusing on the importance and meaning of such experiences and their potential contribution to women's overall well-being. Data collection involved 11 focus groups and 15 individual interviews, resulting in a sample of 83 women from diverse backgrounds. The data were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory. The threads evident in the link between girlfriend getaways and well-being can be classified into four interrelated domains: escapism, different gender dynamics, existential authenticity, and empowerment. The women particularly noted a sense of freedom from social structures and gendered expectations. Links are made to feminist scholarship in leisure and tourism studies, and attention is drawn to the importance of all-women localized leisure spaces for empowerment and well-being.

Keywords: *Girlfriend getaways, tourism and well-being, constructivist grounded theory, women and leisure*

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Introduction

Girlfriend getaways (GGA) are a type of pleasure travel that is growing in popularity (Bailey, 2009). This type of travel is characterized by women taking trips with female friends or relatives, largely to enjoy reconnecting with their friends and themselves (Kasanicky, 2009). GGA fulfill various psychological needs throughout the life course and offer women a number of opportunities, including an escape from everyday stressors, resistance to social stereotypes and the ethic of care, a space to create and revive friendships, a chance to cope with negative life events and adapt to life stage transitions, and a chance to construct new ways of self-understanding (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012).

While there are many definitions of tourism, one of the earliest academic conceptualizations was to conceive of tourism as a special form of leisure (Cohen, 1974). Underpinning this idea is that pleasure travel often has many of the characteristics associated with leisure, in that it is voluntarily chosen, noninstrumental, and a temporary time out from everyday life. In this paper, we view GGA from the “travel as leisure” perspective and as such conceptualize them as a special form of leisure. GGA encompass many of the elements and benefits associated with leisure, as well as the gendered nature of leisure and tourism (Swain, 1995). Popular guides to GGA claim that women’s bonding experiences associated with this type of leisure-travel have a number of benefits, including positive impacts on health, helping to manage stress, and cumulative effects that may contribute to longer lives (Bailey, 2009; Bond, 2008). The potential therapeutic effect of bonding with friends stems from friendship’s intimate, egalitarian, and voluntary nature, which facilitates trust and disclosure (Fehr, 1996). Research on friendship in leisure contexts suggests that such interactions have potential health outcomes (Glover & Parry, 2008; Green, 1998; Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002).

While the academic literature on friendship provides a foundation for exploring the role of GGA in women’s lives, the uniqueness of tourism environments should not be ignored. Tourist experiences are frequently understood in terms of liminoid time-spaces characterized by transition, anonymity, equality, and absence of status distinctions, in other words, a sense of *communitas* (Lett, 1983; Turner, 1974). In addition, the touristic state of mind described as being “out of space” and “out of time” (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006) may affect women’s getaway experiences. Considering potential experiential outcomes underpinned by bonding with friends, an all-women context, and the attributes of the tourist environments, GGA can be intricately intertwined with existential authenticity—a state of being that enables people to express their preferred identities instead of forcing themselves into accepted social roles (Berger, 1973). Indeed, Wang (1999) claims that the role of tourist may match the ideals of existential authenticity because of its liminoid nature. Wang suggests four dimensions of existential authenticity: (1) intrapersonal authenticity related to bodily feelings; (2) intrapersonal authenticity associated with self-making; (3) interpersonal authenticity bound with reinforcing family ties; and (4) interpersonal authenticity associated with touristic *communitas*, characterized by liminality, egalitarian relationships, and absence of statuses. For instance, female backpackers engage in existential authenticity related to self-making and emancipation throughout their “journeys of independence” (Obenour, 2005). Potential benefits of existentially authentic tourist experiences require further exploration. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore girlfriend getaways with a focus on the importance of such travel in women’s lives and the potential link of GGA to well-being.

Literature Review

Well-Being and Women's Leisure

Throughout the literature, the terms *well-being*, *quality of life*, and *happiness* have been used interchangeably, generally referring to people's levels of satisfaction and fulfillment in their lives (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Moscardo, 2009). Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being suggests that positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (also called PERMA) are the elements that comprise well-being. In the contemporary work on well-being, two perspectives are evident: (1) the hedonic approach, or subjective well-being, and (2) the eudaimonic approach, or psychological well-being (Carruthers & Hood, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The hedonic approach treats well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. The eudaimonic approach treats well-being in terms of fulfilling individual potential and the level of individual functioning, with a focus on self-realization, self-determination, and self-actualization (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Carruthers and Hood developed these dimensions further to include autonomy, sense of control, and resistance to social pressure; personal growth; feelings of competence; sense of direction, purpose, and meaning; positive relations with others and sense of belongingness; and self-acceptance with positive attitude toward the self.

Leisure and recreation play an essential role in developing positive health capacity and contributing to well-being and life satisfaction (Lloyd & Auld, 2002). Wankel (1994) suggested that key aspects of leisure, such as choice, perceived freedom, enjoyment, involvement, and supportive social networks, have significant implications for people's well-being. Ryan and Deci (2001) noted increased recognition among psychologists of the crucial role sense of relatedness has for well-being. Most leisure is inherently social and fosters the development and maintenance of friendships that not only offer social support, but decrease loneliness (Kleiber et al., 2002) and are central to people's well-being (Fullagar & Brown, 2003). Yet, Nawijn and Veenhoven (2011) highlighted the lack of knowledge about the specific contributions to well-being associated with various leisure activities.

Gendered realities permeate most, if not all aspects of social life (Fullagar & Brown, 2003), and as such, gender cannot be ignored in exploring the link between leisure and well-being. For instance, Green (1998), investigating leisure as a site of gendered identity construction, suggested that in all-women leisure contexts, women can secure their feminine subjectivities or, alternatively, resist gender stereotypes. She found that women's leisure talk was a particularly important part of women's friendship and a source of autonomy and empowerment. Recently, researchers have focused on women's social groups, such as the Red Hat Society®, and their impacts on women's well-being. Son, Kerstetter, Yarnal, and Baker (2007) found that participation in the Red Hats contributes to the well-being of older women by enhancing the self, being a source of happy moments, and helping with life transitions. Hutchinson, Yarnal, Staffordson, and Kerstetter (2008) examined the role of the Red Hats as a coping resource for dealing with negative life events. They found that the Red Hats provided social support, positive emotions, and a sense of purpose, and as such contributed to women's health and well-being. Additionally, Yarnal (2006) investigated the Red Hat Society® as a liminal context that allowed women opportunities for freedom from obligations, playing with social norms of femininity and age, as well as maintaining and establishing friendships with other women.

The social and emotional support emanating from women's leisure-based friendships can also be instrumental in dealing with negative life events. Glover and Parry (2008) found that social support from friendships helped women cope with stress from infertility. Janke, Nimrod,

and Kleiber (2008) investigated links between leisure and well-being for women during their transition into widowhood and found that widows who decreased their leisure involvement reported lower levels of well-being compared to those who increased or maintained it. Finally, Fullagar (2008) suggested that leisure practices contribute to women's well-being and facilitate their recovery from depression by allowing women to transcend stereotypical gender roles and the ethic of care, as well as to construct new relationships with the self and others.

Well-Being and Women's Leisure Travel

Tourism is related to happiness and well-being (Filep & Deery, 2010; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004). In comparing a number of leisure activities, Nawijn and Veenhoven (2011) found that only vacations had a statistically significant effect on boosting happiness. Indeed, Neal, Sirgy, and Uysal (2004) found that tourist experiences have a positive effect on people's overall life satisfaction, but the effect is often short-lived (Nawijn, 2011; Nawijn & Veenhoven, 2011). However, Filep (2012) criticized the existing literature on the link between tourism and well-being for an uncritical adoption of subjective well-being theory focusing on hedonistic pleasure, and as such, having limited potential for explaining aspects of tourist experiences such as empowerment, self-exploration, transformations of identity, and emancipation, as well as their contribution to eudaimonic/psychological well-being. Thus, if the potential outcomes of GGA go beyond hedonism, it may be particularly important to explore them with a gendered focus on psychological/eudaimonic well-being. Furthermore, while the topic of tourism's impact on well-being has recently drawn research attention, there are still gaps in our understanding of the link between tourist experiences and well-being (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Moscardo, 2009), including the gendered nature of this link.

While the intersection among well-being, tourism, and gender is virtually unexplored, the more general literature on women and leisure-travel offers meaningful insights for this study. For instance, Deem (1996) and Davidson (1996) focused on family vacations and found that for mothers of young children these trips are regarded as a continuation of the caring routine, just in a different environment. Yet, Small (2005) found that women regarded freedom from the care of children as a characteristic of good vacation experiences. She found that the women in her study challenged the ethic of care as they perceived caring responsibilities as a constraint and sought to be free from them during their tourist experiences. Indeed, throughout the feminist literature on leisure and tourism, the ethic of care, a concept developed by Gilligan (1982), is a consistent gender-specific constraint affecting women's leisure and tourist experiences (Davidson, 1996; Henderson, 1991).

While women are faced with a number of gender specific constraints to travel, including gendered ideologies concerning the use of public spaces, what Valentine (1989) called the geography of women's fear, and perceptions about the inappropriateness and danger of travelling solo (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2008), the ability to resist these constraints and the feelings of empowerment accrued through travel (Harris & Wilson, 2007) should not be underestimated. Tourism for women has been found to add meaning to their lives as well as to boost their perceived quality of life (Anderson & Littrell, 1995). Certainly, tourism may be a sphere for self-expression and self-exploration facilitated by the liminoid quality of travel spaces that foster a sense of escape and freedom from the strictures of everyday life and a sense of *communitas* characterized by a strong sense of belonging and absence of everyday social statuses (Lett, 1983; Turner, 1974).

Tourist spaces are not only about escape. Wearing and Wearing (1996) advocate for the use of the feminist concept of "chora"—site of identity (re)creation—in which tourists as "chorasters"

construct their own meanings in relation to the self, develop multiple subjectivities, and move beyond everyday categories and gender roles. Indeed, researchers have found that women's solo travel, in particular, is associated with various outcomes including exercising agency and resistance, experiencing self-transformation, existential authenticity, independence, emancipation, and empowerment (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Obenour, 2005). Likewise, certain women's tourist experiences can be understood drawing upon Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia—"other space"—a counter-site where every day social order is contested and inverted. Wearing (1998) suggested that leisure-travel construed as heterotopia offers women opportunities for liberation through rewriting the socially appropriate script for women.

As a juxtaposition to studies focusing on the benefits and rewards of women's tourist experiences, Heimtun and Jordan (2011) drew attention to the potential for tensions, contestations, and interpersonal conflicts among women during such trips. They argued that conflicts among women travelling together may interfere with their ability "to achieve a liminoid state of mind where feelings of freedom and well-being predominate" (p. 285). Such conflicts seem to negatively affect not only the current vacations for these women, but also to alter future travelling preferences and patterns, as well as to destroy friendships in certain scenarios. Thus, mindful of the potential for both positive and negative outcomes accruing from women's leisure-travel, the purpose of this study was to explore the link between GGA and the contribution of such travel experiences to the well-being of the women participants.

Method

In gender analyses and feminist research, it appears that some research questions can only be addressed by drawing upon qualitative methodology, particularly when the purpose is to grasp a kaleidoscope of constructed social meanings (Järviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkkö, 2003). Being part of the qualitative toolbox, grounded theory (GT) is an inductive approach aimed at developing a theory about the studied phenomenon from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the classic versions of GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a theory is described as being discovered, derived, and emergent from the data. As such, classical GT can be characterized as objectivist GT with roots in positivism (Charmaz, 2006). Conversely, constructivist GT has roots in the interpretative tradition and it "sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants" (Charmaz, p. 130). Within the constructivist GT adopted for this study, as Charmaz explains, data analysis and interpretations are social constructions contextualized in time, place, and cultural values. As such, in constructivist GT, the analysis is always conditional, ambiguous, partial, and contingent.

Constructivist GT recognizes ever-changing multiple realities, diverse local worlds, and a multiplicity of perspectives, encouraging researchers to consider reflexively their own positionality in interpretations and theory building (Charmaz, 2006). Moreover, the necessity of reflexive positioning cannot be overstated in gender analysis and feminist research, as both researcher and participants collectively maintain, negotiate, and/or resist various social categorizations in the gendered world (Järviluoma et al., 2003). This study was conducted by an all-woman, middle class, Caucasian research team, ranging in age across early and mid-adulthood, with a record of continued engagement in feminist research in leisure and tourism, and various GGA experiences.

Data Collection

Data were collected from 11 focus groups and 15 individual interviews between spring 2010 and fall 2011 in eight Canadian cities and one southern U.S. state. In some focus groups, the age makeup of the participants varied dramatically, while in others, women were from similar age groups. The rationale behind geographical selection is bound with convenience, reflecting the location of the researchers during the data collection stage. Recruitment included snowball and theoretical sampling through newsletters, word of mouth, flyers, and e-mails. The initial sampling purpose was to achieve diversity in terms of age and sociodemographic characteristics of the women. Following saturation of certain themes in the analysis, the participants were invited based on their potential to provide additional insights to the constructed theory. The conversations during the data collection sessions developed freely and were prompted by a set of questions from an interview guide as well as intrinsic probes. The interview guide included questions such as: tell us about your most memorable travel experience/s with your female friend/s; how would you describe travelling with your female friend/s in comparison to other types of travel?; how does the travel experience with your female friend/s make you feel about yourself/your friendship/women's role/s in society in general?; etc. The flexibility of qualitative data collection tools allowed for establishing rapport, as well as collecting rich and in-depth data on the unique topic of GGA. Data collection occurred in a variety of locations mutually agreed upon by participants, and the sessions were between 40 minutes and two hours in duration. In two focus group settings, background noise precluded positive identification of speakers. To enable inclusion of their insights they are referred to as "unidentified woman." Women are identified in this paper by pseudonyms they chose for themselves. When the interviewee is quoted for the first time, some personal information is provided (e.g., age, marital status, and children). The audio recorded data collection sessions were transcribed verbatim.

Participants

Of the 83 participants in this study, there were four Black women, three multiracial participants, one Asian and one Hispanic, with White/Caucasians comprising the remainder. The average age was 53, with ages ranging between 21 and 87. Specifically, 25 participants were aged 21 to 40, 23 were 41 to 60 years old, 24 were 61 to 70 years old, and 11 participants were between 71 and 87 years old. Most of the women were married or partnered ($n=34$), followed by single ($n=23$). Thirteen women self-identified as widowed, 11 as divorced, and two did not disclose their marital status. The women were not asked directly about their sexuality and, with two exceptions, they did not volunteer this information during the discussion. Fifty-one of the participants had at least one child. Regarding education level, 18 women had attended some or completed high school, eight had some college, 31 had completed a college degree, and 26 women had completed or were currently working toward a postgraduate degree. There was some overlap between the employment and student categories, with 17 women identifying as current students, and 42 participants indicated that they were employed. In addition, 27 participants classified themselves as retired, two were semiretired, and two described their occupation as housewives.

Data Analysis

Following the procedures suggested by Charmaz (2006), data analysis progressed through initial/open, focused, and theoretical coding phases. Incident-by-incident open coding enabled classification of the data into initial themes. At this point, in-vivo labeling (i.e., using participants' actual words) was implemented extensively. This process entailed defining what the data are about, with the goal of remaining open to various interpretational directions. During the focused coding phase, the most significant, meaningful, and frequent open codes (e.g., well-be-

ing, escape, self-transformation and transformation of the relationships, social dynamics in all-women travelling contexts, authenticity, and empowerment) were used as lenses to organize and explain the remaining codes. This phase was more directed and selective, with the purpose of synthesizing and establishing an analytical direction. Finally, theoretical coding focused on semantic relationships among the core codes and intertwined the empirical story line with relevant theoretical concepts. Among the semantic relations, symmetric (e.g., A is associated with B; A contradicts B), asymmetric (e.g., A is property of B), and transitive (e.g., A is part of B; A is cause of B) relations were constructed. The purpose of this phase was to move beyond description and to develop conceptualization of the experiential benefits associated with GGA. Charmaz (2006) argued that coding phases generate the bones of the analysis, while theoretical integration is instrumental in assembling “these bones into a working skeleton” (p. 45). The entire process of data analysis was facilitated with extensive analytical memo-writing and aided by ATLAS.ti5 qualitative data analysis software. The trustworthiness of the analysis and interpretations was fostered in this study by adhering to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Therapeutic Nature of Girlfriend Getaways

The analysis of the data reveals a diversity of GGA, varying in terms of purpose, duration, spatial proximity to home, and travelling companions. GGA appear to be a multifaceted phenomenon as participants described a variety of tourist experiences such as rest and relaxation trips to the beach and/or spa resorts, sightseeing city breaks, nature-based trips, sport-related trips, etc. The women described both domestic and international travel, ranging in length from weekends to weeks. There also appears to be diversity in potential companions for GGA, including one or a couple of female friends, daughter/s, sister/s, mother, gay friend/s, teammate/s, and leisure-based women's groups (e.g., Red Hats). GGA was often described as the primary purpose of a trip, yet it was also frequently combined with business trips, studies, celebrations, and bachelorettes (pre-wedding trips).

Overwhelmingly, the participants emphasized the importance of GGA in their lives. Some women even claimed that these experiences have a therapeutic effect. For example, Anna, a 38-year-old, married participant stated that GGA are “therapeutic and relaxing in a way that travelling with children or a spouse is not.” Enzian, a 63-year-old, single mother of three children, added that “it's almost therapeutic sometimes to be with a [female] friend” and “to stay in touch through travelling.” The therapeutic nature of girlfriend getaways is also reflected in women's perceptions of it as a “mental break” and a way to maintain their “mental sanity” which is “rejuvenating, it helps you keep in touch with yourself” according to Raider, a 38-year-old, married mother of two children.

Some participants described the interpersonal interaction on GGA as cathartic. Joan, a 67-year-old, divorced participant, discussed being able to have a “purely girl talk... Say things that you wouldn't say to your husband, or the usual whining, and once you get it off your chest, you feel better.” In general, when women were asked about how GGA make them feel, five women just responded “happy.” For instance, Tinkerbelle, a 38-year-old, married mother of one child, explained that, “even though the experiences are different, it's the same feeling... I feel happy.” Similarly, Maryanne, a 59-year-old, married mother of two children, claimed, “I just think it [GGA] makes such a nice happy balance in your life.”

The therapeutic nature of GGA is also reflected in women's descriptions of these experiences as recharging, relaxing, venting, exhilarating, bonding, enriching, and rejuvenating. For instance, Summer, a 52-year-old, married mother of two children, explained that she travels with her female friends "to recharge our personal batteries, and combine it with our connections with each other." Likewise, Alina, a 39-year-old, married mother of two children, participates because "you need to vent... to share things, just to relax and let loose, and be yourself, but also gain from...with my relationships, I feed off of my friends." Indeed, Ava, a 56-year-old married mother of one child, stated that during these trips, "we're going to push the envelope," which also "keeps us young... It's a mindset." Similarly, Summer indicated that GGA constitute "a connection to the past that gets lost at other times... We were all 17 again... when we get together, that's how we feel."

Another therapeutic feature discussed by the participants was the ability to "live the moment and enjoy the moment," as reflected upon by Valerie, a 64-year-old widowed mother of three children. Elizabeth, a 78-year-old widow, also a mother of three children, further elaborated that living in the present is crucial because "life's too short. You've got to get on and do what you can while you can... to make the most of this life." Additionally, Gloria, a 37-year-old married participant, clarified that, "really living in the moment" means that "everything can be discussed in the moment, everything has space, and time, and it's really amazing."

An ability to focus on the moment during GGA was also regarded as a chance for reappraisal. As Alina stated, "To me, it [GGA] is almost a jolt of adrenaline... it's rejuvenating. Your sense of self is being enhanced... being with my friends, it sort of reaffirms who I am." Furthermore, Bertha, a 57-year-old mother of one child, compared GGA to pilgrimages, stating, "We don't have those pilgrimages today...but I think that travel in a group like this [with female friends] is filling that void. It's travelling together with a common goal in mind, and possibly a common outcome." She elaborated further that there "is the part of us that is really called to make a journey. And some people can't do an inward journey unless they do an outward journey," illustrating how GGA "is so expansive... I have bigger thoughts when I travel... you know when you're feeling creative and you just enjoy the whole process of breaking past something in your own head."

The therapeutic capacity is also embedded in participants' perceptions of them as a way of coping with negative life events. For example, Marilyn, a 63-year-old widowed mother of three children, said, "[GGA] was planned as a healing time and it's like a person taking another by the hand and saying, 'Sorry your husband died... but there's life beyond all this... and there are good things you can do.'" In this respect, Zena, a 36-year-old, single mother of one child, argued that "when something that tragic happens, you have to fill your time and go and travel." Whitney, a 69-year-old widowed mother of two children, discussing the value of GGA during her transition into widowhood stated that, "otherwise, I'd be sitting at home, just being a vegetable." Likewise, Elizabeth concluded that, "if I didn't have friendships, I wouldn't be travelling. If I didn't have friends, I would be a stick in the mud."

These women's accounts indicate that the therapeutic link between girlfriend getaways and women's well-being is complex and multifaceted. In this respect, four interrelated and overlapping domains of escapism, different gender dynamics, authenticity, and empowerment appear to characterize the relationship between GGA and well-being for these women (Figure 1).

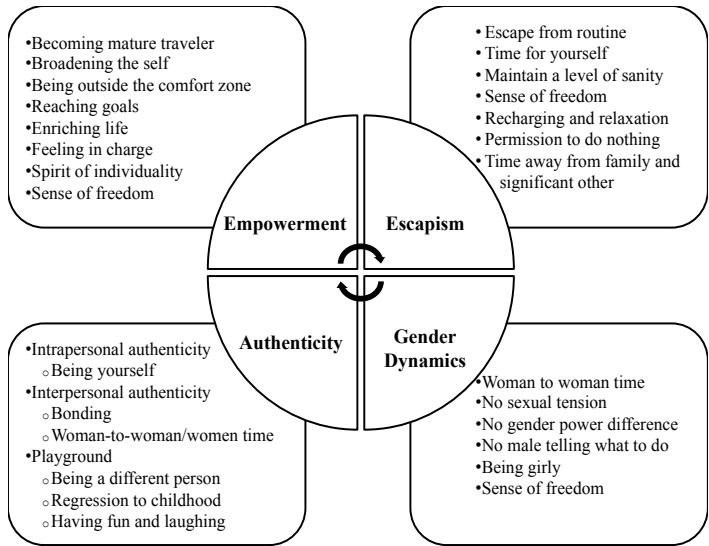


Figure 1. Domains of the Nexus between Girlfriend Getaways and Women's Well-Being

Escapism and Girlfriend Getaways

The first domain, escapism, refers to various breaks from “the routine and everyday stress” (Carson, a 67-year-old single participant), as well as the everyday professional and familial responsibilities for the sake of gaining “time for yourself” (Gloria) and/or “time away from significant other” (Raider). As Kate, a 28-year-old, married participant put it, “It was awesome... Just being able to get away, getting out and being somewhere different with my friends.” Likewise, when Jordan, a 27-year-old, single participant, was asked about the benefits of GGA, she stated, “First thought that comes to mind for me is escapism.” In this respect, Gloria concluded that “tourism really has a role, because it takes you away... nothing bothers you, you don’t need to go back to anything... You don’t have your daily life, you don’t have your [significant] others, you don’t have anything on your brain.” Summer summarized:

Isn’t that what tourism and recreation is really all about? Putting you in a different world, taking you away from the mundane and the normal, the normal sea of life and putting you in a different place where you can really be who you are, or create relationships that you wouldn’t do [*sic*] in other places?

Some participants, like Nicole, a 38-year-old, divorced business owner, focused on escaping the work environment, “If I stay in town, I’m going to feel obligated to be on call for emergencies... I’m just not going to really fully detach and get the rest that I need... I need to leave the country to fully step away and feel ‘Ok, I’m gone.’” Additionally, Gloria described the liberating feeling of detachment from her laptop and phone. Other participants discussed enjoying the escape from familial obligations and the ethic of care on girlfriend getaways. For example, Raider said, “We are all getting away from our homes, our kids our husbands, and just letting loose and having fun ... it’s just that you relax. As soon as you’re away from the house, it’s just ‘Ahhhh!’” Similarly, Anna stated, “Definitely when you travel with girls it’s an escape from real life. ... In real life you are the mom. You are responsible. ... You take care of everything” but “When you go with

girlfriends you are on equal footing ... girlfriends can take care of themselves because they spend their life doing the same thing you spend your life doing ... you're just there to enjoy yourself, travelling without an agenda." Alina even claimed that "with the kids, you never leave behind your responsibilities ... always being the responsible mother and wife, and getting people on schedule ... when you're travelling with your friends, you're just a completely different person." Likewise, Whitney explained that when "you go with women, you can bitch about the men, and just have a good time, you don't have to stop and fix them dinner. ... It is a holiday," but "When you go on a vacation with your husband, it's not a holiday, you're still doing all the same things, only you're doing them on the road." Furthermore, Sarah, a 61-year-old, married mother of two children, emphasized the ability to "escape from your husband. ... I think you appreciate each other better that way ... you have to have balance. You know, and if you don't have balance, you're going to be unbalanced [laughs]."

The women elaborated that it "doesn't mean that you don't care about your husband or children... but you have that window [GGA] where you can actually do something that you really want to do" (unidentified later life woman). The participants discussed a sense of entitlement for their own time and needs while on GGA, and even described it sometimes as a selfish experience. Tinkerbell explained that she does not "have to do those things [household and familial needs], and if you do them, it's for yourself, not for anybody else. ... If I didn't have those breaks, I don't think I could do it, I'd be a lot more grumpy." Further, Alina indicated that travelling with female friends is "a little selfish, you care about when YOU go to sleep and when YOU eat, and not that you have to feed your friends... it feels good... you kind of have to get away, or you'll go crazy." Jordan stated, "I think most of my trips with female friends have been purely selfish, for my own reason, getting away."

Thus, escapes with girlfriends were highlighted by some women as strategies for relaxing mentally and/or physically, as well as experiencing a sense of entitlement to their own leisure and freedom. Dixie, a 21-year-old, single participant, explained that a GGA "gives a sense of freedom." Likewise, Bea, a 48-year-old, divorced mother of three children stated, "For me, it's a freedom, it's just, I love it!" Ava said that a GGA is "a more freeing holiday than travelling with a spouse. ... This is our time away from husbands and kids, and animals, and it's our girls' weekend." Similarly, Dolly, a 58-year-old divorced mother of two children, explained, "I do like the little bubble, being in the friendship bubble, like I don't get to see those women very often." In this respect, Raider argued, "I don't think women get enough girl time, they worry so much about not being good mothers ... and they don't really realize the importance of taking a break or stepping away for a day, it makes a huge difference." The importance of girl time appears to link the narrative to the next thread of gender dynamics.

Gender Dynamics on Girlfriend Getaways

As part of the second domain, participants described how divergent the gender dynamics are compared to everyday life. The women perceived the difference as being underpinned by gender specific ways of thinking and interacting. For instance, Enzian stated, "You know we have a whole different way of thinking. My husband used to say women are spaghetti and men are waffles. Well, because they [men] are compartmentalized, and we are like thinking our thoughts." Similarly, Hannah, a 65-year-old, married mother of two children, explained, "Women's brains, theoretically, are like a tangle of wire where everything is interconnected, which is why they multitask ... and their conversation probably never ends." Jordan noted that men's talk "is very much more black and white... [while] with my girlfriend trips, we dive into each other's feelings, and it's just very different, very different." Valerie concluded that in the group of women

"it seems like you're more relaxed because you're all in the same vein. Guys, sometimes they're not on the same vein."

Participants regarded the all-women context of GGA as rewarding, even though spats and compromises were frequently described. As Emmy, a 65-year-old, married mother of one child put it, "Getting eight women together. ... It's like herding cats." Calliope, a 29-year-old married woman, also mentioned that they happened to "be at each other's throats ... it's almost like living with someone." Yet, women were encouraged to take part in GGA by the opportunity to "have some woman-to-woman time. Talking about what we have to talk about from morning till night," as Zoe, a 33-year-old, single participant explained. In this respect, Jane, a 30-year-old, married participant, mentioned an arrangement with her husband, "we agreed even before we were married, a healthy balance. I need my girl time, you need your boy time, couple time." Likewise, Ava described GGA as "quality time" and explained that, "I need my 'Teasettes' [pseudonym of her group of female friends] time ... that's almost a call to arms."

Further, Becky, a 53-year-old, married mother of three children, elaborated that her GGA differ from other types of travel as they involve "so much talking and listening, as opposed to doing ... lots of sharing and laughing ... you get laughing so hard ... I've laughed till I've cried sometimes." Similarly, Jeanine, a 38-year-old involved in a committed relationship, explained that the key component of the all-women context is sharing of "how you got to be who you are... the good stuff, the bad stuff, all the stuff in between, the 'Oh my god, are you kidding me?' stuff." Jeanine also described the GGA atmosphere as "pretty special ... the long weekend gave us 48 hours together without any filter ... no kids, no husbands, no men ... just treating ourselves and not feeling guilty about it."

Specifically, participants explained that the context of the all-women sisterhood of GGA diminishes power differentials embedded in gender roles. For instance, Marilyn argued, "There is always a difference between men and women. Maybe there is a power difference." An unidentified later life woman indicated that "with men, you cater to them more and you hold back." Calliope also explained that, "I fear that my ability to decide where we go, and kind of take some control of it will disappear with the map-wielding man-like behaviours." Additionally, Gloria complained about travelling with men since she found them to be overly protective and having issues with the "take charge nature" in her character, even confronting her with questions like, "You're so dominant! What's wrong with you?" She felt that her male travelling companions' entitlement to leadership made her "feel kind of weak ... not feel myself," but "with women I get to lead because women are used to being led more ... I enjoy this dynamic better."

Summer speculated that this tendency might be coming from the "innate gender roles ... they [men] are the protectors, the hunters ... and you [women] will follow ... there is a dominance when they're around, whether they are conscious of it or not, it's there." Conversely, Summer explained that women-only travel "takes it all away, it just removes it and we are all on the same playing field." Similarly, Claire, a 44-year-old involved in a common-law relationship, perceived that, "men are used to dominating ... [but] when it's just women, it feels more egalitarian." Margaret, a 62-year-old, married stepmother of three children, stated that on GGA, "there's no man telling you how to do it, what to do, why did you do it. We just do it." Likewise, Whitney claimed that the all-women trips "are more fun, you can do things that you want to do, and you're not trying to please a man, a husband ... there's nobody to cater to [laughs]." Also, Dolly felt "a bit more entitlement. Like I'm entitled to do this." Additionally, Bertha described attitudinal change while travelling with girlfriends, indicating that she felt "braver with my girlfriends than with my partner. I can be a flake with him ... I can wimp out with my partner ... you don't necessarily do the same with your girlfriends. You carry along."

Another important characteristic of the all-women dynamic described by the participants was the absence of sexual tension. Kate stated that girlfriend “trips feel different ... like there’s no sexual tension ... you can’t be as free I think in some ways with a guy as you can with a girl ... because of some sort of unnamed sexual tension ... or maybe gender dynamics.” Marilyn argued that because “there is no sexual tension, it’s just easy” and Enzian explained that with “no sexual tension, you just have fun. You can relax with each other. ... You don’t think anything of hugging your girlfriend ... you can walk hand-in-hand ... you’re a lot more open with your friend even physically without anybody thinking anything.” Finally, Anna said that “there’s less stress when you plan a trip with your female friend because it eliminates a whole component of sexual tension, or sexual dichotomy.”

In light of all the described characteristics of the all-women context of GGA, the women established rules about not allowing men on a trip. The goal was to preserve the woman-to-woman dynamic. In this respect, Summer exclaimed, “no men on the trip!!!! ... It’s our venting... I think we’re different people around our husbands.” Sarah also revealed that for their GGA, “the rules were: no men, no cameras, and no agenda [laughs].” Whitney, for example, illustrated that with a group of female friends, “we just had more fun, but as soon as the guy was there, it just sort of pfft... it wrecked everything.” Likewise, Claire stated that:

Men change the dynamic when you’re with a group of women. A lot of women worry about how the men perceive them, so that changes their behaviour in a group... It feels like people are more genuine when it’s just a group of women... I feel we have more power in that situation. I feel the power of women, you know, and I think women are great, and I think when men are around that gets lost because we’re all trying to make the men think we’re great... We get into women discussions [on GGA]... You would never have that with men around.

In a similar vein, Jeanine claimed that, “you have a different conversation with your female friends... than you do when there is (sic.) men around” because “it’s like there’s a sense of being able to be your complete self, and just say what you need to say, and feel what you feel, and express it, without any hesitation.” Furthermore, Carson described the feeling of “just comfort. Comfort of being myself. Not being so self-conscious. Feeling more secure. Being able to laugh more.” She elaborated that, “women feel comfortable sharing among women” in a way that they cannot share “in mixed groups with men around... there’s just levels of being yourself... there are different levels of revelation of who you are... and I’m least revealing when men are around.” These quotes direct the discussion to the third domain, that of existential authenticity.

Existential Authenticity and Girlfriend Getaways

The gender dynamics domain is closely related to the third domain of intra-personal and inter-personal existential authenticity, meaning that participants were able to experience an authentic woman-to-woman time and to take a break from performing the gendered aspects of their identities when in the company of women. In terms of intra-personal authenticity, the participants referred to notions of self-making and bodily concerns. With respect to self-making, or self-identity, Summer stated that GGA “gives me an opportunity just to be me.” Similarly, Tinkerbell said that GGA “just made me more comfortable with who I am, actually.” Likewise, Gloria indicated that on GGA, “I feel more myself... it’s very important when I travel, especially, to be myself, because it’s my trip... You need to feel that you can really be yourself for some time, because we always have to be other selves.” She further illustrated that, “I didn’t mind being crazy... Who cares! I can really be mean... you can be yourself thoroughly even when it comes to

like 'I really want to yell right now' ... Things that are normally not so ok, are ok" on GGA. Zena also perceived GGA as a self-learning experience, "I learn more about myself and my personality, and my quirks, and my levels of having to control certain things."

The women of various ages described two aspects of bodily concerns: the symbolic aspect where the body is a display of personal identity, and the sensual aspect that refers to bodily feelings and expressions. For instance, Bea explained, "I think being around everybody hanging out and you put your jammies on, take your bra off, you don't care if your boobs hang down, nobody cares if they don't, if they do, whatever." Thus, she said that GGA "made me seem more self-assured, more comfortable with myself, more at ease. ... You just, you are who you are, and they [female friends] accept you for who you are." Further, Carson described how "you wake up and you see nothing but women. It's great. ... How safe you felt from the outside world, as well as safe within ... people were very free with their body ... and you think, 'well, my body's not so bad.'" Additionally, Sarah clarified that, "we were not allowed cameras ... we are older ladies, and we like to wear as minimal as possible to get a tan ... so a lot of things hanging out that we wouldn't show in public." Sarah found these experiences rewarding because "this enabled us to really relax. No make-up, no jewelry, just wear what you want. ... Just to be yourself and not worry about what do I have to wear today, or who do I have to impress. ... We don't care."

Authentic bodily feelings and expressions were also prominent in women's stories of GGA. Stephanie, a 28-year-old, engaged participant explained that with women "there's other sort of, all the little unwritten stuff that you would never think of that makes it easier ... like that kind of thing that guys pretend doesn't exist." Upon further probing, Stephanie exemplified, like, "I'm PMS-ing [premenstrual syndrome] today, I don't want to do anything," or "We really have to find a bathroom now!" or "Hey, do you have a tampon? I need to borrow one." Additionally, the participants explained that performing bodily functions on GGA brought them closer. For example, Tinkerbell said, "If I didn't travel with these girls, I don't think I'd be as close to them. It's just as simple as like sharing a bathroom. Like going in after somebody just [defecated], and dealing with it..." or "sleeping with them, getting ready with them, just living with them. ... Like how can you not get closer to that person?" Likewise, Enzian indicated that, "We had to share the same bed," and Gloria stated that, "We used to do everything together, like literally eat from the same plate ... because we were so close, it's [the friendship] not breakable."

The participants also spoke about how physical expressions of their feelings differed from the ways they would express themselves at home. Summer described how "we were venting or sharing and we thought someone was wrong ... you're thinking about having an affair with your boss?... I reached out and slapped her, and said, 'What are you thinking?'" She explained that this behavior was possible because "you have that strong bond, but it's also because of the place ... you are far away ... I wouldn't have done that at home." Additionally, Tinkerbell described hugging her friends on GGA, but in general, "we never hug each other."

Intrapersonal authenticity was also closely related to the components of interpersonal authenticity expressed by these women. With respect to interpersonal authenticity, two dimensions, reinforcing family ties and touristic *communitas*, can be distinguished. In the context of family ties, the participants discussed developing different and/or stronger bonds with their female family members. For example, Carson indicated that, "on these trips she [her mother] felt more free, I think, to be herself, and she sort of lost that role of being a mother, I wasn't so much the daughter." Likewise, Stephanie stated that, "We [Stephanie and her sister] had never travelled alone together before ... and we had a riot. It was awesome. We realized that we are very compatible travellers ... that's really important in our relationship."

Additionally, some participants perceived their relations with close female friends as family ties that can be reinforced through travelling together. To put it in Dixie's words, "My girlfriends really are the family I have chosen" and "the girls that I have traveled with I'm much closer to than the ones that I haven't ... you share those experiences which can be life changing... definitely relationship changing." For Ava and her female friends, GGA "is a chance to get together and just recharge, and reconnect, and revitalize ... celebrate our togetherness. ... It just kind of builds you up and fills you up." Hannah also characterized her trips as a time "of intense togetherness." Anna elaborated that, "travelling together deepened our friendship because you spend a lot of time isolated with that one person, because it's you and them moving through time and space together ... isolated in a bubble."

Claire and Carson also argued that GGA "deepens the friendship." Bea and Hannah agreed, claiming that GGA has "cemented the friendship." Joan said that it "reinforces the friendship" and Bertha suggested that, "the friendships are solidified by the common experience." Similarly, Fatima, a 25-year-old, married participant indicated that, "travel can be one of a list of experiences of shared pains or shared joys ... and it helps your friendship." Like Ashley, a 22-year-old, single participant said, "when you travel with them [female friends], you are able to build a stronger bond, a stronger connection, and probably lasting relationships for the future." However, GGA were perceived by the participants not only as a means for building relationships, but also as a way of validating them. For example, Alina explained that such trips are "almost like a validation for me of the friendship" because "being with my friends sort of reaffirms who I am, and the relationships that I have with them. That yes, the relationship is valid, and what I bring to it is valid, and what I get out of it is."

One of the crucial prerequisites for this kind of bonding and validation on GGA is the absence of judgement. For instance, Ava explained that "it's a matter of confiding in someone, no holds barred, no judgment. It's a renewal, it's a freeing experience ... it's a sisterhood ... it's a code of honour, an unwritten agreement, one of the rules ... we never judge." Enzian stated that, "You don't have to pretend," and Tinkerbell suggested that, "It builds confidence ... I actually can hang out with girls and be myself." Bea explained, "When you're on those trips [GGA], like I said, anything goes ... we let our guard down, and just let it all hang out ... the more you let go, I think the more trust there is." Like Hannah said, "There's no judgement. ... It's a safe environment ... if you say something, it's not going to get repeated somewhere, it's not going to get judged," and "All you're going to get is ... do you just need me to listen [or] do you want comments? It's a very non-judgemental environment." To put it in Summer's words, there is such "a depth to friendships with women that there aren't restrictions on why I love you."

Further, the women emphasized the egalitarian nature of the GGA that also could be interpreted in terms of touristic *communitas*. Women described enjoying letting go of the social statuses acquired in everyday life. For example, Nicole said, "I don't have to be Dr. [...] when I'm away, I'm just, you know, me ... she's [her friend] not going to be worried about seeing her students, and I don't have to worry about seeing patients," which enables "the freedom to both be ourselves and truly just relax and recharge." Likewise, Jane stated with respect to GGA that, "I envision a release from all your other labels, whether it's mother, wife, sister, whatever. I feel it's a release from that... so you can just be yourself." Jordan agreed, saying, "I feel like you lose a lot of your roles," and Sarah added that, "People care about you, rather than your role." Carson explained that a GGA "relaxes you to a point where you can actually open up easier to other people and say things that's [*sic*] not so self-conscious. ... There's no dos and don'ts."

Another aspect contributing to the interpretation of touristic *communitas* are women's references to the camaraderie, mutual understanding, shared mentality, and the playful aspects of these experiences. When asked about the benefits of GGA, Raider claimed, "Mostly camaraderie, that's the big one ... you share this experience and you come out feeling closer because you've shared this experience that nobody else has and will never be able to have." Similarly, Anna suggested that "it was the same kind of mentality" and Denison, a 78-year-old, married mother of two children, explained, "we could both read our [each other's] minds of what we were thinking of at the time ... it's a neat feeling."

Furthermore, some participants described playfulness as an essential feature of their GGA leading to somewhat altered norms compared to everyday life. Emmy explained that the philosophy on their GGA was, "Well, it is easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission." Ava described how "we get silly in public, we don't care," and "you laugh until you cry, you know, your stomach hurts from just being silly ... we laugh until we get the hiccups. You get up the next morning and it feels like you've been doing sit-ups." Likewise, Bea said that with "the girls, it's just fun, silliness. ... It just gets sillier and sillier as the night goes on" and described food fights with chocolate, whipped cream, and alcohol. Finally, Whitney, reminiscing about her GGA, stated, "We'd shop and go out for dinner, drinks in our room, pillow fights, jump on the beds, all the stupid things that we weren't allowed to do when we were kids." Many women found these attitudinal and behavioural changes to be liberating and even empowering.

Empowerment on Girlfriend Getaways

The fourth domain is a result of the other domains, in that a sense of empowerment is derived from the escapism, gender dynamics, and existential authenticity experienced on GGA. For example, Jeanine explained, "You feel more empowered, or at least I do, in groups of women ... we're together, we're women, and we can do anything." She believed that the tourist experience enhanced this feeling "because you're away from your comfort zone, away from home that's safe, and you experience something together and you're like, 'Oh yeah, we can do this, we can do anything.'" Likewise, Claire elaborated:

I think women travelling alone, it makes them feel powerful, because there's a lot of messages in society that we shouldn't go out alone, that we should be afraid in cities, that we need men with us to be safe. So I think when women travel alone or with other women they realize that that's all a bunch of bunk, women can enjoy a city, can go out at night and not feel afraid. So it's like you are speaking against those messages, or contradicting those messages you hear all the time.

Carson also believed that her GGA "was empowering, I think it's probably the biggest thing. It was totally empowering ... we can do anything we want ... there are constraints and sort of situations, but ... women are stronger than I think we are perceived to be," and "there's a lot of depth, we aren't just gossipy, we enjoy the world, and we're deeper than most people might give us credit for. We have lots of interests and just are great." Likewise, Calliope talking about her GGA in Cambodia stated, "You get a thrill when you successfully navigate whatever situation you're in," and "This was one of the bravest biking experiences I've ever had ... it was hard to even rent a bike, we were two girls ... it was pretty wild, there were people cat calling." Yet due to overcoming these hardships, Calliope felt "the sense of pride. ... I'm still proud that we actually navigated our way out there on bikes, and it made that whole experience that much richer because we'd done something a little bit out of the ordinary and totally brave." Moreover, Bea delineated GGA as contributing to maturity and developing assertiveness, "along with the matu-

urity thing ... myself personally, is learning how to say 'No, that's not right, I won't accept that' ... because they [female friends] pump you up, they love you, they accept you." Gloria, describing a challenging hike with girlfriend in Nepal, explained:

It really enhances me as a woman ... it's doing things which I cannot do in normal life. I do things which make me feel really strong and powerful ... like what are my limits as a person, and travelling with a girlfriend contributes because other women are the same. ... I hate height, I'm afraid, but when I needed to climb, I climbed. ... How did I do that? I still don't understand. I had this guide who helped me. She [friend] did it all by herself and carried the bag. For me, it's empowering [and] I got empowered seeing her do it. ... Like travelling with one woman-girlfriend, or a bunch of women-girlfriends, it's just empowering for me as a woman. And this is a big difference, I don't get any of this empowerment when I travel with any other group with guys.

The rewarding feeling of empowerment was woven into sentiments such as reaching goals, broadening the self, feeling in charge, and becoming mature travellers. For instance, Marilyn said, "We go to broaden ourselves to see the world." Bertha and Elizabeth characterized their GGA as "expanding" and "mind expanding," respectively. Likewise, Bobbi, a 67-year-old, married mother of three children stated, "It widens all our horizons when we get out. We are a little freer. We're not dependent on somebody." The women also discussed becoming mature travelers as a growing and empowering experience. For example, Calliope described her experience in India, saying, "We got lost, we got duped, and we fell for every scam ... and the whole thing was just completely nuts ... but it was cool, because through the experience we grew." Furthermore, Zena explained that through travelling "you see that women are still really struggling in other countries" and, thus, "I realize how independent I am, self-sufficient, career oriented, and how far we've come." Finally, one unidentified later life woman concluded that, "It's just feeling of the spirit of individuality and freedom."

Discussion

In the course of this study, constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2006) enabled an inductive, in-depth, and transformative exploration and construction of GGA through the social interaction between the researchers and the participants. Drawing upon Butler's (2003) concept of transformative encounters, whereby actors need "not only to learn from the voices of others, but to experience those voices in their embodiment, their life, the context of their struggle, and to have my own voice transformed by virtue of 'you' being the ones I address" (p. 82), we suggest that research encounters using constructivist GT are also dialogical, as there is a possibility for each party to be transformed through the process of phenomenon construction.

The research encounters in this study turned out to be transformative at least for some participants and definitely for all the research team members. Some participants indicated that they started thinking about the meanings of GGA in terms and depth that they had never previously used. For the research team members, the encounters were transformative due to learning about the diversity of meanings women attached to the impact of GGA on their relations with self and other women, bodily self-perceptions, gender roles and transformations in society, as well as individual well-being. Our findings appear to indicate that GGA are multifaceted contexts where women can practice existential authenticity, feel empowered, perform gender roles differently, and enhance their sense of well-being. As such, GGA may encourage women's individual self-transformation. In turn, self-transformation as a practice of the self is intricately bound with

feminist consciousness-raising and the potential for wider feminist social and political transformation (McLaren, 2002). To further elucidate these ideas, our findings show that the potential outcomes for women's well-being from GGA can be summarized in terms of four closely interrelated and overlapping domains: escapism, intragender dynamics, intra- and interpersonal aspects of existential authenticity, and empowerment (Figure 1).

The liminoid nature (Turner, 1974) of GGA, characterized by playfulness, freedom from gender roles and caring responsibilities, *communitas* and existential authenticity, is reflected in the experiential outcomes. In line with Lett's (1983) suggestion that liminoid tourist experiences are a source of catharsis, GGA seem to have the potential for various therapeutic outcomes for women, providing expression, escape, tension release, and bonding in an all-women tourist context (Son et al., 2007; Yarnal, 2006). The concept of liminoid seems to underpin the various types of escape described by women in this study, notably, escape from routine, everyday strictures and social norms, social statuses, and the ethic of care (Henderson, 1991; Small, 2005). Indeed, GGA were even described as selfish experiences where women interpreted their sense of entitlement to leisure and freedom as selfishness. Inherent in these interpretations is the ethic care, whereby the ideal of the selfless woman prioritizing the needs of others over her own (Gilligan, 1982) appears evident. A perceived lack of entitlement and the ethic of care are leisure constraints that are particularly relevant for women (Henderson, 1991). Yet, in the context of GGA, selfishness was viewed as legitimate as the women voiced a sense of entitlement to these experiences and this seems to be an important quality of the woman-to-woman/women time experienced through GGA vis-à-vis everyday life. This sense of entitlement may also be facilitated by the liminoid nature of the vacation space, a space outside of the everyday realm (Graburn, 1989), and as such, contrasts with the pervasive influence of the ethic of care in daily life, especially among women responsible for primary childcare (Henderson, 1991).

The participants also emphasized the uniqueness of their interaction with no man/men around, describing it as being focused on emotional talking-listening-sharing-laughing-bonding as opposed to doing (Green, 1998). They stated that men are more focused on doing rather than talking. The different styles of interaction noted on GGA and the feelings of freedom and entitlement that enabled the women to (re)construct their subjectivities, including relationships with self and others, support the suggestion that GGA might be understood as *chora* (Wearing & Wearing, 1996). The findings reveal that women can take a break and play with their identities and/or reveal existentially authentic facets suppressed by everyday life (Wang, 1999; Yarnal, 2006).

Wang conceptualized existential authenticity as comprised of intrapersonal and interpersonal facets where the former includes engaging in self-making and bodily aspects, while the latter involves reinforcing family ties and touristic *communitas*. The self-making aspect of intrapersonal authenticity in this study refers to women's accounts of feeling a "complete self" or "genuine self," learning about themselves, feeling less self-conscious and more comfortable. As for the existentially authentic body, the women discussed it as a display of personal identity where the body was released from gendered and sexualized surveillance and was not disciplined to abide by socially accepted standards of attractiveness and femininity. While in other situations, women often feel obliged to conform to socially constructed standards of femininity derived from repetitive performative acts (de Beauvoir, 1953; Butler, 1990), on GGA, they tend not to do so. Participants explained that woman-to-woman/women time without man/men as a filter excludes perceived power differentials as well as the necessity to impress. In turn, this allows them to be less guarded and to enjoy themselves. Certainly, de Beauvoir argued that women have

to constantly play in front of men, to abide by the canons of attractiveness and femininity. In this study, women of various ages explained that on GGA they enjoyed not having to pay attention to their make-up and clothing as they were free from the male gaze.

Interestingly, Small (2010), in her study of young women's bodily perceptions and concerns on vacation, found that much intragender comparison in terms of physical appearance, as well as self-surveillance exercised to discipline the body, went on among women in their early twenties. Yet, in contrast to Small's work, the age span of the participants in this study was very wide, and we focused on an all-women vacation context where the heterosexual sexualized gaze was diminished due to the "no men" and "no judgment" rules. Small also found that women's body work on vacation is contingent upon the destination, the type of the tourist experience, and the travelling companions, suggesting that under certain travelling circumstances self-surveillance is less pressing and the female body can relax. Our findings suggest that some GGA are just such contexts.

Bodily feelings and expressions were also described as more authentic on GGA compared to home or during other types of tourist experiences that involve men. The women explained that engaging in embodied practices or even just performing together basic hygiene procedures brought them closer. Moreover, bodily contact was stripped of sexual connotations, which, in turn, was perceived as authentic, bonding, and rewarding, as well as allowing the women to hug, touch, and even jokingly wrestle with each other, physical expressions that were not typical at home. Interestingly, Wang (1999) conceptualized the authentic body as an intrapersonal aspect of existential authenticity, while for women in this study the body was intertwined with both intra- and interpersonal existential authenticity.

Within interpersonal authenticity, the women explained that close female friends are perceived as chosen family and GGA have a role in reinforcing, building, validating, cementing, and rejuvenating these relationships. GGA facilitate this by providing meaningful memories, a bubble of intense togetherness, shared pains and joys, reaffirmation of group identity, and a non-judgmental environment with unconditional acceptance and love. That is not to say that there were no problems reported by the women on these trips. Indeed, a few participants mentioned spats, being mean to each other, yelling, and even slapping each other, as well as marking some female friends as "not-for-travel" friends. Yet, just like in Heimtun and Jordan's (2011) study of interpersonal conflicts during women's tourist experiences, the participants developed various strategies to compromise, navigate, and avoid hidden and open conflicts. Lastly, touristic *communitas* (Turner, 1974; Wang, 1999) is also a prominent concept for explaining the authentic interpersonal dynamics on GGA. In most cases, women felt stripped of everyday statuses, roles, labels, familial and professional responsibilities, while their relationships were characterized by camaraderie, egalitarian qualities, mutual understanding, shared mentality, playfulness, and altered norms compared to everyday life.

Some GGA experiences can also be understood as heterotopias (Foucault, 1986) in a sense that they provide women with opportunities for resistance to gendered ideologies, liberation, emancipation, and empowerment (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Obenour, 2005). In general, the women-only context was described as facilitating freedom, autonomy, and empowerment (Green, 1998). More specifically, participants reported that in the all-women context of GGA they learned how to navigate the geography of fear (Valentine, 1989; Wilson & Little, 2008), to deal with the situations outside of their comfort zones, to negotiate gender appropriate scripts, and to practice resistance to social messages. All these practices prompted feelings of pride and maturity, facilitated developing assertiveness and reaching goals, encouraged testing personal

limits and broadening horizons. In turn, such practices helped women reappraise relationships with themselves, others and social norms. Interestingly, some women claimed that GGA are the only type of vacation that offers the potential for empowerment due to the women-only social context.

The findings also situate GGA in the context of the underresearched nexus between well-being and travel (e.g., Filep, 2012; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Moscardo, 2009). The findings contain accounts where the women attributed feelings of happiness, sense of well-being, quality of life, balance in life, and mental sanity to GGA. These sentiments relate back to the growing understanding that tourist experiences can contribute to people's sense of well-being and quality of life in general (Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn & Veenhoven, 2011) and women's quality of life in particular (Anderson & Littrell, 1995). In this study, GGA were described as meaningful therapeutic experiences, cathartic mental breaks, opportunities for reappraisal, as well as resources for emotional uplifting, coping with life transitions and negative life events (Fullagar, 2011).

The findings reveal that GGA correspond with both hedonic/subjective and eudaimonic/psychological aspects of well-being (Filep, 2012; Moscardo, 2009). Among the hedonic well-being features, aspects such as enhancing positive and minimizing negative emotions, as well as contributing to life satisfaction, were described by the GGA participants. However, the findings indicate that GGA outcomes for these women surpass the hedonic well-being framework and are more in line with Seligman's (2011) latest PERMA theory of well-being and the eudaimonic/psychological approach to well-being (Carruthers & Hood, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Indeed, GGA offer women the potential for positive emotions, sense of autonomy and control, active engagement in the experience, enhanced relationships, sense of purpose and meaning, personal growth and transformation, and feelings of accomplishment and self-acceptance. All of the above contribute to transformative power, that is 'power to' not 'power over,' or a feminist sense, as empowerment (Wartenberg, 1991).

In terms of limitations, the findings and interpretations may have been adversely affected by the participants' denial of unpleasant memories, memory decay, and social desirability. However, by providing a friendly and enjoyable context during the interview process we hopefully minimized these effects as much as possible. In terms of delimitations, the sample is predominantly white, heterosexual, and all the participants live in North America. Therefore, the findings and interpretations might not be reflective of the populations that do not fit into this profile. However, generalization was not the purpose of this study. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of GGA via constructivist GT. The interpretations in this paper drew upon gender as a main axis for understanding the link between tourism and well-being. Our sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of race, class, ethnicity and sexuality and so harnessing the potential of intersectionality and incorporating multiple axes of power relations in the analysis was not possible, however, we recommend such an approach for future research in this area. We have addressed the issue of age, generation, and gender in another paper from our data, which provided some interesting insights (Gibson et al., 2012). We would recommend future studies to look at life stage and cohort again. Among other directions for future research, attention could be paid to trip purpose, length, destination, and travelling companions, as well as how these shape women's experiences. Additionally, studies could focus on particular types of girlfriend getaways such as sport-related trips.

To conclude, understanding the importance of leisure experiences in women's lives and their potential contribution to well-being is essential as we seek ways for leisure studies to be socially relevant (Shaw, 2000). While the collective feminist movements of the 1960s seem to be

largely avoided by today's women in the developed world, small localized sites of women-centered leisure experiences, such as GGA, may provide women of all ages with a chance to explore their subjectivities and develop a sense of empowerment that may transfer to their everyday lives. Our findings shed light on the value of GGA for women and allowed them to share their experiences in their own voices. As such, the context of all-women travel groups may give rise to a fresh line of research about women's tourist experiences and links to women's well-being in particular. Much of the existing feminist work on women's tourist experiences has focused on travelling solo (Jordan & Gibson 2005; Wilson & Little, 2008) and family travel (Davidson, 1996; Deem, 1996; Small, 2005). This is the first line of academic feminist work to investigate the diversity of GGA types among women of all ages. We also adopted the perspective that tourism is a special form of leisure (Cohen, 1974), which helped us to work across the artificial leisure-tourism divide and draw from the literature in both fields to help us interpret the experiences of our women participants. Finally, in line with our women-centered study, we adopted a constructivist approach to GT (Charmaz, 2006), which enabled us to draw upon our experiences as women-travelers, as well as those of our participants, to paint a richer picture of GGA.

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