

## Article

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### "Cultural Diversity and Leisure: Experiences of Women in Australia"

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*Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure*, vol. 24, n° 2, 2001, p. 535-555.

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# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND LEISURE: EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA

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This paper follows and builds on the research findings of a recent article in this journal which reported on the impact of immigration policy on the leisure of South Asian teens in Canada (Tirone and Pedlar, 2000). Tirone and Pedlar (2000, p. 146) argued that a 'distinctively Canadian' cultural pluralist approach to immigration differentiated the role of leisure in the lives of young adults from visible minority groups. In this paper, I suggest that the conclusions drawn by Tirone and Pedlar are not only applicable to Canada. The challenges that were identified by the young participants in their study, namely seeking a balance between cultural expectations of family and the larger community, are correspondingly present in other settler nations that have significant levels of cultural diversity.

Leisure has assumed a continuum of roles in relation to cultural diversity ranging from suppression to celebration of difference. Leisure is associated with behaviours outside of work such as sport, recreation, cultural pursuits, play and social activities. Many settler nations have explicitly used leisure activities to socially assimilate ethnically diverse groups into dominant cultural practices. Australia is classified as a *settler nation*, where 'Europeans have settled, where their descendants have remained politically dominant over indigenous people, and where a diverse, gendered society has developed in class, ethnic and 'racial' terms' (Stasiulus and Yuval-Davis, 1995, p.3). This use of leisure was based on the premise that newly arrived migrants should adopt the host country's cultural values and language. Expectations were that cultural differences would simply and seamlessly diffuse, the American 'melting pot' vision was an example of this approach to diversity. In the period of assimilation and integration practices, many migrant groups found that their freedom in leisure choice was constrained by opportunity, equity, access and exclusion issues based on cultural and linguistic

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Loisir et société / *Society and Leisure*

Volume 24, numéro 2, automne 2001, p. 535-555 • © Presses de l'Université du Québec

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Tiré de : *Loisir et société / Society and Leisure*, vol. 24, n° 2, Gaétan Ouellet et André Thibault (dir.).

difference (Sherington, 1990). Leisure and recreation participation was also routinely used to foster the cultural reproduction of dominant ideologies and power relations (Taylor and Toohey, 1999).

At the other end of the continuum is the use of leisure activities and participation to celebrate, rather than suppress, cultural difference. In these instances, leisure has provided people the space for emancipation, opportunities to challenge stereotypes and pathways to resist social construction of marginalised ethnic identities. Lynch and Veal (1996, p. 328) suggested, 'dance, song, cuisine, games and dress are all forms of leisure which ethnic minority groups use for pleasure in addition to the serious business of cultural maintenance, demarcation and expression.' Involvement in leisure activities has also played a part in transforming dominant power relations by confronting the traditional hierarchy in the particular society. Individual, collective and societal forces have combined to determine the form or outcome of leisure involvement.

In this paper, the focus is on the dynamic of cultural diversity and leisure, as experienced by women from culturally diverse backgrounds. The paper will draw comparisons with the aforementioned study of South Asian Canadian young adults (Tirone and Pedlar, 2000), noting both the parallels and differences in leisure experiences of minority ethnic groups in the two countries.

### **Background on immigration policy**

Similar to Canada, Australia is a multiethnic country. The 1996 Census reported 3.9 million overseas born people from 224 countries, with a further 2.2 million persons that had one or both parents born overseas. Over two million people indicated that they spoke one of 68 languages other than English in the home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). The national identity of contemporary Australian has been noticeably forged by the substantive migration that has populated the country with a majority of non-indigenous people. Over the past two hundred years, White settlement has dominated migration. The composition of migrant intake was initially dictated by the penal colony status of the country. Arrivals were primarily from the United Kingdom in the form of convicts, military and government officials and landed gentry. After the deportation of criminals ceased, people from other countries began migrating, however, preference was always given to those of British origins (Sherington, 1990).

Australia's immigration policy unfolded in three distinctive phases. Assimilationist views shaped the first and longest phase, influencing policy development from the first days of White settlement until the mid-1960s. Policy directives favoured British migrants and the government provided numerous assistance schemes to encourage more people from the British Isles to immigrate (Mosley, 1994). These initiatives were underpinned by the so-called 'White

Australia' policy that effectively excluded most non-European immigration and was based on the premise that non-British migrants would be less likely to culturally assimilate. The second phase extended from the mid-1960s to 1973 and was intended to address equity considerations associated with the highly discriminatory 'White Australia' Policy period (Jupp, 1992). People from a diverse range of cultures were encouraged to immigrate but the federal government still expected that new arrivals would strive to quickly integrate into the host culture. The third and final phase was marked by the adoption of multiculturalism in 1973, a move that followed the passing of a federal multicultural policy in Canada in 1971 (Freeman and Jupp, 1992). In the 1990s, Australian multicultural policy was reoriented to acknowledge issues of cultural inclusion (Smolicz, 1995). Both Australia and Canada currently have immigration policies that encourage residents to value diverse languages and cultural heritage in all aspects of life, including leisure.

### **Ethnicity and leisure research**

Research on ethnicity and leisure is still grappling with definitional and conceptual aspects. While much of the already published literature has used ethnicity as a study variable, many contemporary authors have argued that categories such as ethnicity should not be isolated as a variable in leisure participation (Hall, 1996; Kilic, 1994). Such classification is viewed as reductionist and categoric, and therefore limiting. Merely reporting on variations in leisure and participation is irrelevant unless broader issues of underlying power structures are examined. The relationships between leisure and ethnicity must recognise broader structural dimensions of inequality and in particular those perpetuated and maintained by leisure providers. As one of the most prominent investigators in the field lamented ... "the most critical issue facing the race and ethnic studies literature is the absence of viable theoretical frameworks" (Floyd, 1998, p. 4).

Existing literature has largely explored the issue of ethnicity and leisure within two primary theories. The first is labelled *marginality*, and proposes that certain ethnic groups are limited in their leisure choices by class-based indicators such as income and level of education (Floyd, and Gramann, 1993). The second is *ethnicity*, which suggests that ethnic groups choose to participate in certain activities due to cultural traditions, practices and group characteristics such as language or religion (Allison, 1979). Most research in the area has focussed on testing these two theories; seeking to identify differences in participation patterns between ethnic groups; examining specific activities and their ethnic composition, with plenty written about the dominance of certain ethnic races in sport (e.g. African Americans in basketball); and on exploring why these differences occur. The latter work has largely concentrated on identifying constraints to participation and often employed 'cultural deficit' frameworks whereby the ethnic group being studied is compared to the mainstream population and their differences are targeted for investigation (*cf.* Floyd, 1998).

Marginality perspectives have suffered from the lack of clarity of definition and the subsequent ambiguity about precise meaning. Most research conducted under the auspice of this theoretical framework has focused on race based stratification and discrimination, and been measured in terms of outcomes rather than process. Furthermore, marginality based research has largely assumed common traits within racial groups and failed to adequately explain intergroup variance. Another major complaint about marginality is that it does not account for a wide range of behavioural and affective outcomes beyond participation and preferences (Floyd, 1998).

The ethnicity perspective has also been routinely criticised and many of the problems raised are similar. Race and ethnicity have been used as categorical measurements, often without adequate definition. The research using this theoretical framework has tended to measure participation or non-participation against membership in a particular ethnic or race grouping and does not examine what specific aspects of the culture influence choice. This lack of confidence in existing theoretical perspectives is further exacerbated by the fact that the actual findings of much of the research on this topic are far from conclusive, and indeed much contradictory evidence is apparent. While several studies have found significant differences in participation of ethnic groups (Dew, 1992; Philipp, 1995), others challenge that the variation is not significant (Floyd *et al.*, 1994). Differences in levels and types of participation as per the marginality thesis have been attributed to socioeconomic circumstance (Smith, 1992), and to inappropriate programs and facilities (Lindsay and Ogle, 1977). The ethnicity approach has resulted in relating aspects such as discrimination, racism, cultural identity, assimilation, and acculturation to participation (Carr and Williams, 1993; Floyd and Gramann, 1993; MacClancy, 1996). Findings of other studies have suggested that participation may be shaped by the desire of a group to avoid contact with other ethnic groups whom they do not wish to associate with or is linked religious requirements (Fleming, 1994).

The current research is framed outside these existing theories and explores the intersections of culture identity and leisure. Cultural identities are comprised of shared language, symbols, customs, values, attitudes, and expectations (DeSensi, 1994). As noted earlier, leisure can be an important purveyor of cultural identity. At one end of the continuum, leisure can be used to strengthen and maintain cultural identities and to express a distinctive identity, and at the other end, it can be used to suppress and disperse cultural identity. At the individual level, the place of leisure is difficult to assess because personal cultural identities vary dramatically; everyone assumes their own selective aspects of cultural values and customs (Cox, 1993). Group cultural identity can be equally amorphous and peripatetic. For example, the expression of a 'group' cultural identity in leisure might be the annual South American Music Festival in Sydney with traditional dances, costumes and displays of traditional art and crafts. Some participants would identify with

their South American heritage on the day but not engage in any culturally specific leisure activities during the rest of the year. Other individuals might frame all of their leisure participation around cultural identity considerations. Given the complexities associated with collective cultural identities, the present research seeks to explore leisure and cultural diversity primarily from an individual perspective.

### Leisure Participation in Australia

Precise data on the national leisure participation patterns and preferences of culturally diverse Australian populations are extremely limited. National Recreation Participation Survey (NRPS) 1991 data provided some figures on specific sport and recreation involvement by Australian adults. Although now somewhat dated, its findings indicated that people born in non-English speaking countries had a significantly lower rate of leisure participation than their Australian-born counterparts, with women from non-English speaking backgrounds indicating the lowest levels of participation (DASETT, 1991). Furthermore, a 1993 study showed that Australian-born individuals were twice as likely to play sport than those born in other countries, and that women from culturally diverse backgrounds participated in sport at half the rate of men from non-English speaking backgrounds (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994). Australia wide 1998/9 data indicated that Australian-born persons were more likely to participate in sport and physical activity (62.5%) than persons born overseas (51.6%) [ABS, 1999b, 1999c]. Unfortunately there is no recent comparable data on broader leisure activities. The data on cultural activities for persons born overseas, reveal that the rates of attendance at cultural venues in 1998/9 were significantly higher for those born in main English speaking countries than in other countries (ABS, 1999a). While the data indicate that cultural diversity impacts on participation the figures do not explain why these differences occur, or if they are related to opportunity, access, equity or preference.

The explicit data available on sport and exercise indicate that people from non-English speaking backgrounds participate in sport and exercise at a significantly lower rate than other Australians. In a study of physical activity in New South Wales, almost half of the surveyed adults did not “attain levels of physical activity considered adequate to maintain or improve their health” (Bauman *et al.*, 1996, p. 61). Women were more likely (by 58%) to be inactive, and people who did not have English as their first language were 42% less likely to be adequately active than those people who spoke English at home. These figures are of concern when considering that “there is a strong association between physical activity and all-cause mortality... those who are inactive are *almost twice as likely* to die from CHD<sup>1</sup> compared to those who are physically active” (Bauman *et al.*, 1996, p. 18). In research with migrant women, Lee and Brown (1998) found that women from non-English speaking backgrounds have poorer cardiovascular health than other Australian women and are less likely to exercise.

In research undertaken for the Australian Sports Commission, over 1800 women from Chinese, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Serbian and Vietnamese backgrounds were questioned about their sport and recreation involvement (Taylor and Toohey, 1998). Organisations responded that *cultural limitations* and *women's belief that sport is an activity only for males*, were the main reasons that women from non-English speaking backgrounds were not accessing their programs and facilities. This contrasted with the responses of the women themselves, who indicated the most common constraints to their participation were (in order): *time constraints; nobody to go with; family responsibilities; lack of information; lack of skills; and inappropriate facilities and programs*. Cultural constraints were much further down the women's list. The study results highlight the need for providers to better understand the multifaceted implications associated with sustaining cultural diversity and to initiate action which minimises constraints and maximises opportunities for participation of this section of the population (Taylor and Toohey, 1998).

Two Queensland based studies found that non-English speaking groups experience major barriers to participation including communication and language difficulties (Hibbins, 1998). Moreover, in their research on Chinese immigrants, Tsai and Coleman (1999) found that the most significant constraints to involvement were resource-based and interpersonal constraints. The former pertained to a lack of time and money, and the latter was particularly salient in terms of a lack of available partners. Both these factors were identified as key barriers in the Taylor and Toohey (1998) study. Tsai and Coleman (1999) similarly pointed to the need for leisure service providers and professionals to obtain a clearer understanding of the leisure constraints facing immigrants.

## Methods

Providing a space for women from culturally diverse backgrounds to express their own interpretations of leisure women experiences was key to the selection of appropriate research techniques. Individual interview narratives were chosen as the best method to achieve this aim. Using a snowball sampling technique, sixteen women who were born outside of Australia in countries where English is not the first language were selected for interviews.

Exploring the heterogeneity between diverse cultural groups is not possible when only interviewing such a limited number of women. Therefore, the findings of this study will be reported as a collection of individual stories from migrant women. The experiences of the women are used to provide insights and understandings into the nexus of leisure and cultural diversity. Simply put, people who have been under-researched generally want their story told in a way that avoids stereotypes and gives them dignity (Henderson and Bialeschki, 1994).

There is no claim to universalism of the results, however, common patterns and experiences emerge for discussion. Grand narratives are not drawn from these

findings in acknowledgment of the limitations of “single overarching ontological and epistemological paradigms” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 575). Caution is warranted in relation to generalist claims about ethnic groups, as abundant differences exist within each and every cultural grouping. Likewise, it is not appropriate to compare the experiences of ethnic group members with the incredibly diverse mainstream population.

The interviews were conducted in late 1999 and early 2000. All participants lived in the state of New South Wales and were referred by community, ethnic and women’s centre workers. Each woman was approached to gain permission for the interview and if she was agreeable she were then asked to nominate a venue for the interview. The women chose be interviewed in community facilities, work places and community settings. A female interviewer facilitated all the sessions, as it was felt that this was a vital consideration for the female participants. The author and a research assistant shared these duties. Reinhartz (1992, p. 23) suggested, “that for a woman to be understood by a woman in a social research project, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by a woman”. While gender itself is not sufficient to establish rapport, it is a factor, and contributed to the establishment of trust between the parties involved. The interviews used a conversational style format drawn from Franklin’s (1997) conceptualisation of the shared understanding model of interviewing. The interview is seen as a situation in which the interviewer attempts to gain understanding of how the interviewee experiences aspects of her own life as well as the world of objects and other persons. The interviews covered issues surrounding leisure experiences and exploration of issues related to cultural background. All of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

## Findings

Tirone and Pedlar (2000, p. 151) reported two central themes, *the best of both worlds* and *dissonance in leisure*, and three patterns emerging from their study. For comparative purposes, the present study analysed the data collected using these three preexisting patterns, *centrality of family and friends in the ‘small community’*, *seeking social relationships*, and *sustentation of cultural traditions*. However, two subsequent patterns also emerged in the analysis phase, these were *myths and stereotypes* and *perceptions of difference*. The research imperative to compare Australia and Canada is an acknowledged limitation on the analytical interpretation.

### Pattern One: Centrality of family and friends in the ‘small community’

Similar to the Tirone and Pedlar (2000) study, the importance of family, friends, ethnic and church groups was highlighted in the interviews. All of the sixteen women interviewed spoke about the value they attached to activities undertaken

in a familiar and supportive environment. In the words of an ethnic Chinese woman born in Hong Kong, “I know the language, I know the routine, I know what is expected so I feel at home playing Mah Jong at the [Chinese] community centre. Why should I go any other place?”

Other women expressed similar sentiments about the benefits of participating in leisure activities with family and friends. “We can share problems, and people from the same community can understand how we feel because they have had the same experience” (Filipino-born woman). The other benefits identified included sharing similar religious beliefs, cultural values and even celebrations. “Name day is a big one for us Greeks and it’s fun to get together and have a party, eat ice cream and bring the whole family. My grandmother comes too and she doesn’t speak any English but she feels okay because most everyone speaks Greek” (Young Greek-born woman).

Leisure within the ‘small community’ was often characterised by informality and relative low cost. The financial issue was frequently mentioned in the interviews. “When we first came to Australia, our family was very poor and work was the priority. Work to survive, to put food on the table. Leisure came second and only if there was no cost” (Italian-born woman). Religious based groups were commonly mentioned as important leisure providers. “I’m part of the Muslim women’s group and we organise leisure activities for women in our community. There is a discussion group we formed and we even put on a play about cultural transition problems last year” (Lebanese-born woman). The social component of such activities was apparent, “My sister and I were not allowed to go out on our own with Australian girls but we were allowed to go to church. Actually, we did a lot with the church group when we were younger and I even met my husband there!” (Croatian-born woman).

However, several of the women interviewed expressed disappointment about the attitudes of their family and ‘smaller community’ to their leisure needs. Many of these comments reflected a sense of frustration at being treated differently to their male counterparts; “my brother always got bought the gear for his sport or whatever ... I had to help at home with the housework and the like, while he was out playing and having a good time” (Italian-born woman); “father wouldn’t let me go out to the movies or dances. I really felt like I was being treated unfairly but looking back I suppose they were just scared” (Serbian-born woman); “the men, they go out and do what they want, to the club for hours. My husband thinks it’s all right for him to be out with the others but he likes me to have my leisure at home” (Polish-born woman).

Some of the newer migrants felt that their cultural community was living in the past and needed to appreciate that lifestyles and expectations had changed since they migrated. “I couldn’t believe how backward the Greeks are here. It’s like they are still caught up with it as it was thirty years ago. They don’t realise how much

it's changed in Greece and that women are free" (Greek-born woman). "My cousin isn't to go to dances because her parents think dance is for bad girls. This is how they remember from when they leave Vietnam and not what is it like now" (Vietnamese-born woman).

A few of the younger women spoke about the family conflict that arose when they wished to engage in leisure activities outside the 'small community'. The issues appeared to be centred on how to manage the nexus of cultural differences. "They [her parents] are very strict and that means I miss out on things that my girlfriends do, like going to parties and the like" (Japanese-born woman); "Sometimes I wish that my parents fit in better. My mother does not have a clue how about netball so she doesn't come to the games like the other mothers which is disappointing, especially when we win" (Young Chinese-born woman).

Cultural integrity was not just an issue for older migrants. As a young Muslim woman explained:

My parents came to Australia when I was a baby. They tried to assimilate and fit into Australian culture. My mother wore western dress and did not practice her religion. They even changed their food and friends. When I reached high school, I shocked everyone in my family when I adopted the *hajib*. My parents thought I would be a misfit but it makes me happy and I like myself. They still feel like outsiders in this country after all this time.

The women interviewed also spoke about the necessity to negotiate the delicate balance between their cultural requirements and leisure opportunities. The pressures of family and community to do 'the right thing' often weighted on their minds. "I feel that it is up to me to uphold our traditions, our values, to pass these on to my children. I don't think my husband feels the same responsibility, it is a female thing" (Filipino-born woman).

### **Pattern Two: Seeking social relationships outside the 'small community'**

The woman interviewed also had a range of stories about their leisure experiences in relation to the broader Australian community. These experiences included feelings of exclusion, alienation and discrimination through to complete acceptance. However, only a minority (3) of the women felt that they had experienced direct racism. Most of the other interview participants spoke about how formal leisure activities were not welcoming or did not meet their cultural requirements and therefore made participation difficult.

School-based experiences were particularly alienating for many of the women. Some because of discrimination, "I was called a *wog* at school and because I was Italian I was not asked to join in the sport teams" (Italian-born woman); and others due to the different cultural expectations, "since I didn't want to swim with

the boys present I missed out on the swimming lessons at school. Teachers did nothing to try and find some way around my needs” (Indonesian-born woman).

I remember wanting to be in the school group that was putting on a big performance. My parents thought it would take away from my studies and did not see it as a good use of my time. Then there were the problems of the practices being held until late at night. I wasn't supposed to go out on my own and they were suspicious of the others involved, thinking they would get me into trouble. It was hard as my brother got to go out all the time. I really felt mad and didn't take part in the group. All these sort of things made school not very pleasant and as a result I wasn't invited to other stuff like parties or sleepovers. (Singapore-born woman)

Many of the more recently arrived women did not feel as constrained by cultural expectations or family. They appeared to easily deal with the transition between cultures and readily engaged in leisure activities outside the ‘smaller community.’ As one woman explained:

When I came to Australia I wanted to explore the Aussie way of life. I didn't want to be locked into only being with other Asians. I have some Asian friends but mainly I socialise with people who I find interesting and that means no one cultural group in particular. I went on holidays with a group of friends from university and we were a really mixed lot [culturally] and we just had a good time. I don't find any pressure to only be with Asians, I am comfortable with all sorts. (Singapore-born woman).

Participation in leisure was also linked to lifecycle stage. The women with families spoke about how their children's friends often took them outside of their own communities.

My daughter goes to dance four times a week and Saturdays so I'm always taking her there. All the mothers often get together and go somewhere together as a break from all the driving and rehearsals. Last month we went to the theatre and before that it was a brunch down at the beach on a Sunday morning. We have our daughter's dancing in common and that's enough. (South African-born woman)

While some of the woman initially found these activities intimidating, continued involvement did lead to change.

When I first was asked to help with the school canteen I thought ‘oh no’ I did not have any notion of what I had to do. It was actually quite frightening as I also felt my English would not be good. After a few times, the other women there were so nice and friendly, I looked forward to going. Now I see it not as a hard job but as a fun way to talk with other mothers and it has led on us going doing other things together. It is good. (Japanese-born woman)

The extent to which the women were comfortable engaging in leisure activities outside their small community' was obviously variable. Some of the women were reluctant and hesitant participants while others actively sought out such experiences. Opportunities were sometimes constrained by internal feelings and at other times predicated by the responses of others.

### **Pattern Three: Sustentation of cultural traditions**

Similar to the Tirone and Pedlar (2000) study, most of the women interviewed in the present study were committed to maintaining cultural traditions, language and customs, albeit in varying degrees. In most instances, the sustentation of cultural traditions contributed to the woman's sense of cultural identity and enriched leisure opportunities. As one of the Filipino-born women explained, "we have these classes on Saturday mornings, we teach our children about their cultural origins and do fun activities as a group. It helps us keep our traditions alive."

Other women spoke about the importance of cultural and language maintenance, and how various leisure pursuits assisted with this process. Both formal and informal means were used to sustain cultural traditions. The activities ranged from segregated activities, where only members of the small community were present such as religious ceremonies, to forums where outside involvement was encouraged to facilitate the sharing of cultural aspects, such as food and music festivals.

We [Italian community association] hold a yearly festival to show off our Italian heritage. We have food stalls, music, dancing, movies, crafts etc. and the whole community gets involved in the event. People come from incredible distances and not only those with Italian backgrounds. In fact we try to get non-Italians to come and see what we have and understand about our background. I think it is important for us to proudly show our culture and for others to realise what richness we add to Australia. (Italian-born woman)

Other women felt that some members of their community were too focussed on keeping traditions alive and did not assimilate into the broader community. "I know some other Vietnamese women that did not learn English and only go with other Vietnamese. This is not good as it means that we look like we are different and many Australians do not like difference" (Vietnamese-born woman). A Maltese-born woman conveyed an even stronger message:

You come to Australia for a better life. If you want to get along you need to at least try to fit in. They should learn to speak English and not carry on with beliefs that are not welcome here. I have seen how some girls are treated in male dominated cultures and I think they should leave that behind. I am proud to be Maltese but I am also proud to be Australian.

Leisure experiences that provided avenues for retention of cultural mores and traditions were highly valued. Equally significant to women were opportunities where their culture was shared with others and instances where a better understanding was fostered. The freedom to engage in such activities, without facing constraints from either inside or outside the 'small community' was of the utmost importance to the women interviewed.

### **Pattern Four: Myths and stereotypes**

This pattern was not identified in the Tirone and Pedlar (2000) study but was clearly of import in the present study. The interview participants felt that the perpetuation of unsubstantiated myths about particular cultures and how women from those cultures were expected to behave impacted on their leisure opportunities. The women spoke about constant subjugation of their individual identity into a broader cultural classification that ascribed stereotyped attributes. The majority of cultural and religious stereotyping acted to constrain or limit leisure opportunity, however in some instances the process was an enabling experience.

An example of the former situation was a Hong Kong-born young woman who believed that her virtual exclusion from school sports reflected her teachers' and classmates' perceptions of Asian students. "I felt that people didn't expect that I would want to play, they thought all I wanted to do was study, but I would've loved to at least be asked." She felt the teachers at her school thought that they were doing her a favour by exempting her from sports and letting her have extra study time instead. In his seminal work on ethnic identity, Cohen (1969) suggested that people do not just self-choose an ethnic identity, it can also be attributed to them by others. Long, Carrington and Spracklen (1997) further concluded that contemporary stereotypes of Asians are likely to portray them as physically weak and timid and not sports-minded.

A South African-born Muslim woman said that some of the most common and frustrating myths that she had encountered were that Muslim women are oppressed, they are subservient to their husbands, and they do not think for themselves. She was adamant that each woman should be seen as an individual not as a veiled or hooded clone, she said: "don't patronise and don't underestimate the women. Just take them as women ... Muslim women come from different backgrounds, Indian, Asian, Arab, you've got different cultural practices that they adhere to."

There were also women who sensed that stereotypes had enabled easier participation. A German-born woman felt that as a woman from East Germany it was almost assumed that she would not only be good at sports but aggressively competitive as well.

Funny, I thought that people expected me to be better at sport than I really was. It might have been because I arrived here when all the East Germans were winning gold medals like mad in swimming, beating the Aussies ... I didn't hang out with other Germans. I wanted to be an Aussie. I lived by the beach, I also joined a Surf Lifesaving club and learned to surf and really got into the whole beach way of life where everyone was good and very welcoming.

The range of stories told by the women interviewed indicated that stereotypes do impact on leisure opportunities but the resulting outcomes are extremely diverse.

### Pattern Five: Perceptions of difference

Feeling different or embarrassed in leisure experiences was another prevalent pattern that arose out of the interview information. A Chinese-born woman who had lived in Australia for eight years said that ‘looking different’ made her stand out which in turn made her feel uncomfortable. “As a Chinese woman, I was treated differently and not made to feel very good. One woman at the swim pool I took my children to said that Chinese around here were always demanding this and that and we should be happy just to be able to live here ... I changed pools.”

One of the Hong Kong-born interviewees explained that she felt uncomfortable when she engaged in activities if she was the only Asian participant. A Vietnamese-born woman explained that, “when I went to do aerobics, I feel embarrassed because my sister and I were the only Asian people. We felt like everyone was looking at us!” She thought that many Vietnamese women felt the same way she did when she first arrived in Australia. “If they have to go themselves, they may have some sort of fear. I think everyone has fear when they are in a new environment.” It takes time for many women to adjust to a new culture and feel comfortable participating in activities.

A Turkish-born woman spoke passionately about the stigma of difference and the embarrassment that it caused her especially at school.

I remember in PE [physical education] all the other girls wore short skirts, we just wore a tracksuit. I suppose I knew it was different and I didn't feel comfortable back in those times so whenever I could avoid it I avoided it [PE] ... You've got to wear those short little dresses, it's against our practices, so what do they do? They can't wear that so they opt out. They pretend they can't run, they pretend they can't play softball ... it becomes a chain reaction.

As an adult she was not as concerned about standing out as different but as a teenager it was important to fit in, thus avoiding a situation where your difference was accentuated, as happened in sports classes.

However, this sense of difference was not universal. A Singapore-born woman felt that being Asian had not restricted her participation in leisure activities. She felt that racial difference influenced the behaviour of other Asian women. “I know people who think of going to the local swimming pool but they are all locals there and maybe they would be the only Asian during the day, that day, and not feel comfortable. To me it doesn't really make a difference ... it doesn't really bother me when I am the only Asian person there.”

### Discussion

The research sought to locate women's leisure in a wider sociocultural context and concurrently provide an examination of intersecting statuses held by women of various marginalised groups (Lenskyj, 1990). Listening to women from culturally

diverse backgrounds in Australia speak about their leisure experiences, suggests that the conclusion drawn by Tirone and Pedlar (2000) from their Canadian study has resonance in other countries. Namely, the challenges individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds face in trying to balance cultural expectations of family and the larger community are similarly present in Canada and Australia.

The theory of *marginality*, which proposed that certain ethnic groups are limited in their leisure choices by class-based indicators such as income and level of education was not found to be of singular relevance in this study. While class was certainly important in shaping leisure opportunities, the interview participants indicated that it was cultural aspects that impacted, shaped and created opportunities. Race based stratification and discrimination was not evident in the interview participants' stories, common traits were not found within racial groups and there was substantial intergroup variance.

As discussed earlier in the paper, the theory of *ethnicity* suggests that ethnic groups choose to participate in certain activities due to cultural traditions, practices and group characteristics such as language or religion. The experiences outlined in the course of the interviews for this research indicate that this model of leisure decision-making only partially explains a woman's situation and does not acknowledge the competing, conflicting and coalescing factors that shape leisure choice.

For many of the women interviewed, leisure involvement appeared to occur primarily within predetermined boundaries and in uncontested territories. This suggests that these women were operating within what Wimbush and Talbot (1988) termed 'relative freedoms', that is, these women chose to engage in activities that were allowed within a framework of patriarchal, ideological, hegemonic and structural limitations. The women's leisure choices were not only constrained by opportunities and equity, but also in many instances framed by inclusion issues related to cultural and linguistic difference. While Australia purports to be a country that supports and encourages cultural diversity, the stories told by the interviewees clearly indicated that many cultural practices are still viewed as 'foreign' and are not readily accommodated and, even more strikingly, are not highly valued. Likewise, many institutions still structure their services within an integration paradigm, and numerous employees still deliver programs from an assimilationist perspective.

Given this finding, it was not surprising to note that the women who felt least constrained in their leisure behaviour were those who participated in experiences that were not culturally distinctive. These women spoke about how their experiences provided an avenue to freely express their identity without cultural constraint and indicated that, for them, leisure participation was intertwined with assimilation into the Australian culture and environment. This is also similar to the Tirone and Pedlar (2000) theme of 'the best of two worlds'. The women negotiated a leisure space that best met their needs. For some this meant a large

part of their leisure was with family, friends and in the 'small community'. The women's leisure choices were more closely related to what Shaull and Gramann (1998) have termed, 'selective-acculturation'. This refers to the choice to participate in activities that occur in the context of family and friendship groups. Such groups have few social limitations and provide a supportive environment for the expression and transmission of subcultural identity, that is, the retention of certain core cultural or religious traits. For others, the best outcome was to primarily engage in leisure within the broader community but retain loose links with the 'smaller community'. For these women, the expression of their cultural heritage was not a priority; they did not perceive their 'ethnic' identity as core to their everyday social life.

The importance of participating in leisure in non-formal settings with family, friends and other women was highlighted. This finding tallies with other research which has revealed that certain cultural groups' beliefs, for example, Greek, Italian, Spanish cultures, are more likely to have collectivist oriented values. Other groups, by contrast, American, Australian, German, are more individualist in their outlook (Nishida, Hammer and Wiseman, 1998). The older women interviewed appeared more collectivistic, that is, focused on their culture group and identifying more with social and ascribed attitudes as these related to their specific cultural background and traditions. Such feelings and expressions of belonging are exactly what Bottomley (1979) found in her work on Greek Australians, namely, that respectful and positive interactions based on cultural understandings can be attained when participating in 'community-type networks'. Hughson (1997) added that this occurs when group members are less mobile therefore maintaining their ethnic allegiance through community networks.

Although school-based activities may not be typically classed as 'leisure' experiences, many of the women interviewed noted that school-based experiences had a significant impact on their leisure choices. The stereotypes and traits attributed by teachers and/or classmates to some interview participants not only shaped the types of activities they engaged in during school time but had a flow on effect on out of school opportunities. For example, one woman said that her exclusion from school swimming lessons meant that she could not go to the beach with her family as often as she would like, as she is not confident about her swimming ability and consequently her children's safety.

The second theme identified by Tirone and Pedlar (2000) was 'dissonance in leisure', where leisure participation created tensions between family and participants. The participants in the present study also discussed leisure dissonance. Conflicts were of particular relevance for women during their adolescent years. Additionally, women felt that they were expected to adhere to cultural tradition to a greater extent than their male counterparts. The negative experiences were most pronounced for women who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s when cultural

assimilation was expected and cultural diversity was not encouraged within the broader community. These women commented that while times had changed and leisure activities could now be used to celebrate, rather than suppress cultural difference, there were still many limits on socially acceptable cultural behaviour. Difference is tolerated only to a certain extent and within a limited range of non-threatening activities such as music, dance and food. The use of leisure for more powerful political expressions of emancipation, challenging stereotypes or in resistance to cultural assimilation has had widespread application.

Other patterns identified in the study centred on creating 'myths and stereotypes' and 'perceptions of difference'. These patterns were not identified in the Tirone and Pedlar (2000) findings. The impact of stereotyping and creating feelings of difference and alienation were significant influences on the leisure experiences of the women interviewed. Other research has likewise concluded that stereotypes about lifestyle, beliefs, customs and traditions influence the way in which ethnic minority women are perceived and treated (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994). A UK based study of the impact of stereotypes found that the vicious cycle of myth development and perpetuation can lead to significant disadvantage and constraint in opportunities (Fleming, 1994). The wide-ranging interpretations of the effects of cultural stereotypes on leisure experiences and perspectives described in the interviews have illustrated the subjectivities associated with interpreting culturally diverse narratives.

## Conclusion

Stories of exclusionary incidents were embedded in the narratives of most of the women interviewed for this study. These experiences ranged from explicit racial discrimination to subjection to subtle forms of culturally based alienation and are illustrative of Philipps' (1995) contention that leisure activities are inherently constrained by intersections of marginality and discrimination. Levels of perceived exclusion were strongly related to length of time in the country, proficiency in English and degree to which the person's expectations varied from the cultural norm.

Previous studies have also indicated that the relationship between first generation migrants and the cultural dimensions of their country of origin is much stronger than for subsequent generations. For example, a study of Chinese adolescents from Australia and the United States found that the tendency to self-identify as Chinese, to engage in cultural specific behaviour and activities, and to have social networks of only Chinese friends, declined from first to second generation (Rosenthal and Feldman, 1992). Correspondingly, in the present research the younger interview participants expressed a strong sense of self-determination and were less concerned about cultural dissonance and incidents of discrimination. Such data also support arguments that suggest that new migrant arrivals undergo an acculturation process with subsequent generations more likely to adopt the host

culture's institutional practices and activities (Allison, 1979). That women and girls from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds revealed that they faced limitations to their sports participation is consistent with Bottomley's (1991) assertion that ethnicity and gender based constraints; limitations and possibilities are created by social structures.

While in other instances minority youth have been known to generate cultural practices of resistance because of their social marginalisation (see Wearing, 1998), the manifestation of such resistance was not identified in the interview narratives. The potential for resistance was an undercurrent in the stories of some of the younger women. As peer acceptance is of paramount importance in girls' culture, a real subversion of dominant norms could potentially be located in a peer group structure where the group identity was linked to leisure activities. However, this is pure conjecture as no interview participant explicitly said that she used leisure as a space for resistance of dominant cultural oppression. Leisure activities were often loosely associated with socialising and maintaining contact with others from the 'small community'.

As Australia becomes more multiethnic, cultural diversity considerations in policymaking and everyday living will become more prominent and the pressure to recognise the needs of different diverse cultural groups will intensify. Leisure opportunities can provide a space for an inclusive society to embrace and better understand cultural diversity, identify conflict and promote better social relations.

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## NOTE

1. CHD- Coronary heart disease.
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Tracy TAYLOR

*Diversité culturelle et loisir : expériences de femmes en Australie*

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans un corpus littéraire grandissant, on cherche à mieux comprendre la relation entre loisirs et diversité culturelle. La présente étude porte sur les loisirs de femmes issues de milieux culturels variés, dans un pays multiculturel, l’Australie. L’étude permet d’établir des comparaisons avec une étude semblable menée au Canada (Tirone et Pedlar, 2000) et de commenter les similitudes entre les deux pays en ce qui a trait aux politiques d’immigration et aux effets subséquents de celles-ci sur les loisirs des migrants. On a constaté que plusieurs rapprochements étaient possibles entre les deux pays, mais qu’il existait des différences marquées dans la façon dont les migrants occupaient leur temps de loisir. Dans les deux études, on arrive à la même conclusion: la participation aux loisirs s’insère dans un continuum, et bien qu’elle puisse contribuer à mettre en valeur la diversité, elle peut aussi constituer une expérience marginalisante. Dans les pays multiethniques, il est nécessaire de prendre conscience de la façon dont les attitudes, les systèmes et les programmes contribuent à de tels résultats et, aussi, de mettre tout en œuvre pour mieux accueillir les autres cultures.

Tracy TAYLOR

*Cultural diversity and leisure: Experiences of women in Australia*

#### ABSTRACT

There is a growing body of literature that seeks to better understand the relationships between leisure and cultural diversity. This study explored the leisure experiences of women from culturally diverse backgrounds in the multicultural country of Australia. The research draws comparisons with a similar study in Canada (Tirone and Pedlar, 2000) and comments on the similarities between the two countries in terms of immigration policies and their subsequent impact on the leisure experiences of migrants. It was found that many parallels can be drawn but that there are also apparent differences in the ways which migrants experience leisure. The ultimate conclusion of both studies is the same, leisure participation falls on a continuum and while it can facilitate the valuing diversity, it can also be an alienating experience. Multiethnic countries need to be aware of how attitudes, systems and programs facilitate such outcomes and strive to be more culturally inclusive.

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Tracy TAYLOR

*Diversidad cultural y ocio : experiencia de las mujeres en Australia*

#### RESUMEN

En un corpus literario que cada vez es más grande, se intenta de comprender mejor la relación entre ocio y diversidad cultural. El presente estudio versa sobre los tiempos libres de mujeres provenientes de medios culturales variados, en un país multicultural, Australia. El estudio permite de establecer comparaciones con un estudio parecido realizado en Canadá (Tirone y Pedlar, 2000) y de comentar las similitudes entre los dos países en lo que respecta a las políticas de inmigración y a los efectos subsecuentes de éstas sobre las actividades de ocio de los migrantes. Se ha constatado que muchos acercamientos son posibles entre los dos países, pero que existen diferencias marcadas en la manera en que los migrantes ocupan su tiempo libre. En los dos estudios, se llega a la misma conclusión: la participación a las diversiones se inserta en un continuum, y aunque ésta pueda contribuir a meter en valor la diversidad, ella puede también constituir una experiencia marginalizante. En los países multiétnicos, es necesario de tomar conciencia de la manera de como las actitudes, los sistemas y los programas contribuyen a tales resultados y, también, de poner todo en práctica para acoger mejor las otras culturas.