

# **“Wish YOU weren’t here!” Interpersonal conflicts and the touristic experiences of Norwegian and British women travelling with friends**

## ***Abstract***

Tourism is often portrayed by the tourism industry, tourists themselves and tourism scholars as a liminoid site of escape, happiness and freedom from constraint. For many, however, holidays do not live up to this expectation. This paper challenges the dominant tourism discourse of holidays as sites of unproblematic pleasure in examining contestation, conflicts and negotiations between women and their travelling companions. Drawing on conceptualisations of in-group interpersonal conflicts and theorisation of the mobile social identities of women travellers, we explore the impact of holiday conflicts on women’s holiday experiences and friendships. The findings of this qualitative study of female tourists from Norway and the UK suggest that women adopt various strategies to deal with open and hidden conflicts that may threaten their friendships and holiday experiences. Such strategies include avoidance of conflict through compromise, negotiation of appropriate holiday behaviours prior to travel or ultimately choosing to travel solo.

Key words: female tourists; interpersonal conflicts; women’s friendships; gender; tourism

## ***Introduction***

Although tourism is more often associated with place than with identity construction and sociality (Bærenholdt et al., 2004), Larsen et al. (2006) suggest that the holiday experience is actually about (re)producing social relations. Trauer and Ryan (2005: 490) thus argue that the holiday is not the purchase of a place but of 'time for togetherness with significant others'. Common perceptions of such tourist experiences are linked to positive feelings such as happiness, joy, freedom and flow (Filep, 2008). The tourist industry packages and promotes these emotions, offering fantasylands and vacationscapes full of joyful fantasies, daydreams, images and memories (Löfgren, 1999). Such idealized feelings are (re)inforced and reproduced by tourists themselves in their photographic portrayals of blissful family holidays (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003). These photographs are 'enacted to eradicate ambivalent memories' and to represent 'the perfect family and the perfect holiday' within which 'unhappiness and frictions are nowhere to be seen' (Bærenholdt et al., 2004: 115). In doing so, they serve to perpetuate the myth of tourism as escape from everyday pressures through 'rehearsed and sanitized narratives' freed from 'conflicts, disappointments, difficulties or power struggles' (Deem, 1996: 115). In contrast to many papers on the tourist experience we do not seek to sweep negative holiday feelings and experiences under the carpet, but to place interpersonal conflicts at the centre of the discussion. This paper thus challenges the dominant tourism discourse of holidays as sites of unproblematic pleasure and total freedom in examining contestation, conflicts and negotiations between female tourists and their travel companions. In doing so, we seek to contribute to theorising the significant, but often neglected, flipside of tourist life – the frictions and bad experiences (Löfgren, 2008).

The discourse of the holiday as a place of unremitting happiness is unsurprisingly one which the tourism industry embraces and promotes. The construction of the holiday as a special site

of leisure which transports people (literally and emotionally) away from their everyday environments underpins its experience economy. Anthropologically oriented tourism scholars too (for instance Graburn, 1989; Thomas, 2005; White and White, 2007) often advocate the notion of tourism as a *'rite de passage'*, holiday spaces as 'liminoid' and tourists as in a 'liminoid' state of mind (Turner, 1977 Turner and Turner, 1978). According to Selänniemi (2002) tourists' transgressions into this limionid state of mind are spatiotemporal, mental and sensual. This, for instance, entails that tourists are able to free themselves from everyday norms and relationships. In this state and in this place/space of normlessness, self-change and identity formation is triggered (Curtis and Pajaczkowska, 1998; Neumann, 1993). Furthermore, this liminoid state of mind can be linked to play and the ludic (Lett, 1983), notions adapted in the conceptualising of 'tourism mobilities' (Sheller and Urry, 2004). Here destinations are created as environments for the tourist's pleasure.

Whilst previous studies have shown that tourists, male and female, can indeed experience this liminoid state of freedom whilst travelling, research, common sense, and the experiences of many tourists suggest that in reality holidays may not simply be about fun away from home, they may also be sites of conflict (Chesworth, 2003). Political conflicts between tourists and local people, ethical issues and damaging power relations in tourism have all been the subject of growing research interest (see for instance Clift and Carter, 2000; Cole, 2008; Fennell, 2006; Hall et al., 2003; Hall and Brown, 2006). The tendency in such studies is to emphasize the importance of interactions between tourists, local people and tourism providers rather than interactions between tourists and their travelling companions. In this paper we extend discussion of holiday conflicts to explore the powerful influence that travel companions can exert over the success or otherwise of the holiday experience.

Feminist tourism researchers have problematised the notion of the holiday as a site of freedom for all, highlighting the gender power relations inherent in the creation and consumption of tourism (Aitchison, 2001; Swain and Momsen, 2002). Issues such as body image and concerns about the social stigma of solo travel have been shown to cause discomfort and self-consciousness on the part of women travelling alone – although many women engage in resistance strategies to counter this (Berdychevsky et al., 2010; Jordan, 2008; Jordan and Aitchison, 2008; Jordan and Gibson, 2005; Obenour, 2005; Wilson and Little, 2005; 2008). The data presented here were gathered in two separate post-structuralist feminist studies, one that researched the travel experiences of midlife single Norwegian women, and one that researched the travel experiences of British women who self-identified as solo travellers but not all of whom were single at the time of their travels. Although the ages of women in these studies ranged from 30-70 they self-identified as midlife at the time of their travels and the samples included women who were single, married, divorced and widowed.

Heimtun (2011) examines how sociality and interaction with others can affect midlife single women's holiday experiences. In her research, three mobile social identities that these women may assume when travelling are identified: 'the friend' (when midlife single women travel with close friends and adjust to the needs of the group), 'the loner' (when midlife single women are reluctantly alone on holiday and loneliness and social exclusion are the predominant feelings) and 'the independent traveller' (when midlife single women embrace solo travelling and enjoy interacting with new people and the destination). Many of the women in Heimtun's study experienced empowerment on holiday when adopting the social identity of 'the friend', but by contrast feared travelling alone and experiencing the social identity of 'the loner'. Previous studies of women's leisure also highlight the significance of friendship networks in shaping other aspects of their leisure time (Henderson et al., 1996;

Green, 1998), but few studies examine the impact on women's leisure and tourism if friendship networks break down.

In this paper we explore in-group interpersonal conflicts amongst groups of female friends holidaying together and examine how these can affect women's experiences of travel. Unlike previous work on holiday conflicts in familial groups and couples, we focus on the significant influence of friendships in the context of holidays. In doing this we analyse the holiday experiences of women travelling with others and those who have chosen to travel alone. The notion of 'in-group' refers to tourists holidaying together (Vaske et al., 2000) and 'interpersonal conflicts' to disagreements, negative emotions and interference (Barki and Hartwick, 2001). Our aim is to highlight the significant impacts that friendships can have on the tourist experience and that the tourist experience can have on friendships.

### ***In-group interpersonal conflicts***

The social reality of holidays does not always match the idyll sold. Many people are not used to engaging in leisure activities with family and friends at all hours of the day. Time together may highlight that interests are too diverse or that people have different values and attitudes regarding being a tourist. Crompton (1981) was one of the first tourism researchers to identify the potential 'disparity of interests' among family members travelling as groups. Sometimes this was resolved through compromise and at other times it resulted in separate vacations being taken. In the context of planning family holidays, Gram (2005) argues that children's and parents' different ideas on how to spend the time are perceived as stressful and troublesome, particularly by the parents. Decrop (2005) identifies three conflict situations that can arise when the family or a party of friends decide where and how to holiday; firstly, structural conflicts are those based on different values, goals and statuses; secondly, organizational conflicts are those linked to the process of choosing a destination; and finally

distributional conflicts arise when one or more people in the family/group feel that they have to compromise and do not have much say over holiday decisions (see also Decrop et al., 2004). Research by Jang et al., (2007) found that couples planning a honeymoon argued and negotiated when deciding where to go and Kang and Hsu (2004) showed that even long married couples and experienced travellers still disagreed on where to holiday.

Interpersonal conflicts have also been examined by leisure scholars (Schneider, 2000; Schuster et al., 2003; Vaske and Donnelly, 2002; Vaske et al., 2004). Early feminist studies of women's leisure (see for instance Deem, 1986; Green et al., 1990; Henderson et al., 1996; Wimbush and Talbot, 1988) identified a variety of structural and interpersonal constraints which circumscribed their leisure choices. In examining barriers to leisure participation Crawford et al. (1991) and Crawford and Godbey (1987) also highlighted the significance of interpersonal relations in determining leisure choices. More recently, the distinction of in-group and out-group interpersonal conflicts was used by Vaske et al. (2000) in a study of recreational conflicts among skiers and snowboarders. The people of the in-group did not necessarily know each other; they just shared the same activity and conflict arose around the activity of the recreationalists.

Leisure researchers, however, have yet to fully agree on a definition of interpersonal conflicts (Vaske et al., 2007; Vittersø et al., 2004). In this paper we therefore turn to organisational research for an understanding. Here 'interpersonal conflict' is defined as 'a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals' (Barki and Hartwick, 2001: 234). According to Barki and Hartwick (2001) there are three inter-related aspects of interpersonal conflicts. Firstly, they highlight a cognitive dimension in such

conflicts. Disagreements of this nature revolve around conflicting values, needs, interests, opinions, goals and objectives. Secondly, interpersonal conflicts are affective and based on negative emotions such as fear, jealousy, tension, frustration, anger, friction and hostility. Thirdly, they are behavioural and about interference. Interference refers to how one person makes the behaviour of the other person less effective, for instance by arguing, debating, competing, back-stabbing, and by being aggressive and hostile.

From this definition Barki and Hartwick (2001) have developed a typology of interpersonal conflicts; task-based conflicts and interpersonal relationship-based conflicts. A task-based conflict refers to disagreement amongst group members about how to deal with chores, the means by which they prevent each another from undertaking such chores and how they use negative emotions to influence the carrying out of chores. A relationship-based interpersonal conflict is about disagreement with another person's values or preferences, for instance disagreement about how to spend time together (see also Carothers et al., 2001).

Barki and Hartwick (2001) also suggest that there can be a combination of task and relationship-related interpersonal conflicts, which may influence group dynamics and decision-making. This may be particularly apposite in the context of groups travelling together. Contrary to work, the holiday is often considered to be a site of freedom from daily duties and time for significant others (Selännemi, 2002). Still, duties also exist, in particular for mothers who often also have to organise the family life (Davidson, 1996; Small, 2002). Moreover, many tourists invent tasks by making plans for what to do on holiday, such as visiting museums, sightseeing, shopping and so on. These tasks, however, are often grounded in personal values and preferences, and not in duty. Contrary to work, most (invented) tasks and relationships on holiday are voluntary. Families, for instance, have chosen to spend time

with each other, and consider doing things together to be a very important goal (Lehto et al., 2009).

Modern families as well as modern friendships can thus be characterised as 'pure relationships' (Giddens, 1991: 89, 1992: 58). Pure relationships are mainly entered and maintained for their own sake and, in particular, friendships are upheld by reciprocity, loyalty, intimacy and trust (Vries, 1996; Brehm et al., 2002; Weber and Carter, 2003). As interpersonal conflicts potentially destroy such relationships they are often avoided or kept hidden. This aspect of friendship does not mean that in-group tourists do not disagree with, dislike and interfere with each other's goals. But it does mean that friends do not always act upon interpersonal conflicts. Given that maintaining the pure relationship is one of the primary goals of spending a holiday together, instead of interfering when they disagree with each other, friends may rather seek to agree, adjust and comply (Jensen-Campbell and Graziano, 2001), negotiate, delegate or accept dictatorship (Decrop, 2005).

Contrary to the family unit which may be pragmatic in deciding where and when to holiday and what facilities are required to meet the needs of all family members, the party of friends may focus more on bonding with each other than on location. The latter type of in-group is therefore perhaps a bit more willing to adjust and agree, although they often spend more time on making the decisions (Decrop, 2005). This makes it important to distinguish between potential in-group interpersonal conflicts in which disagreements and negative emotions do not necessarily result in 'open' interference, and real conflicts which do result in open conflict (Carothers et al., 2001). We examine both types of conflict in the context of women's experiences of travelling with groups of friends.



## ***Methodology and data collection***

The findings presented here are based on two separate post-structural feminist studies which examined women's holiday experiences using qualitative research methods. Feminist post-structuralism encourages us to recognize social and cultural constraints, as well as women's power to reshape such structures (Aitchison, 2003). Heimtun's study was based on data from focus groups and solicited diaries, involving 32 midlife single Norwegian women (see Heimtun, 2011). Jordan's study drew on data from semi-structured interviews with 39 British women who self-identified as midlife solo travellers but who were not all single (see Jordan, 2008). The ages of the participants across both studies ranged from 30-70. The participants were from a variety of backgrounds and socio-economic groups, although most were educated to degree level and were in paid employment.

The women in the Norwegian study were recruited by three phases of snowball sampling (Schutt, 1999); close friends; friends and co-workers, and articles in two local newspapers. The participants in the UK study responded to fliers, distributed to as many different types of venues as possible, soliciting solo female travellers to volunteer for interview. Full voluntary informed consent was obtained from all participants in both studies and to protect their identities pseudonyms have been used when analysing comparatively the findings.

In the Norwegian study, participants were invited to attend two focus group meetings, one before the summer holiday and one after this holiday period. In total 16 mini focus group interviews took place, with between three and six women in each. With the exception of four women, all women participated in all three phases. Each meeting lasted around two hours and all were taped and transcribed verbatim. At the end of the first focus group interview each participant was given a 'structured' diary (DeLongis et al., 1992) in which to complete short 'questionnaires' and answer open-ended questions. In these solicited diaries women were

asked to provide details of the holiday and their travel group and to give a daily account of their positive and negative holiday experiences. The diaries were copied and returned to the women.

The UK study was based on interviews which were conducted face to face, consisted of semi-structured questions and lasted between one and three hours. All were taped and transcribed verbatim. As themes developed from the earlier interviews, the interview questions were adapted to accommodate these emerging ideas. Once the interviews were completed, the themes were identified and analysed. Whilst not all of the women in this study were single at the time of interview, they all self-identified as solo female travellers or tourists. Some of the women described themselves as solo travellers even though some of their holidays were taken with others, for instance as part of a tour group or as part of a couple who undertook separate activities during their holiday.

In analysing the data, both studies used 'constant comparison' of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1977; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). We approached the analysis in two stages; using open coding and the emergence of as many categories as possible; and axial coding for the making of connection between categories. Within each general theme, sub-themes emerged and were allocated their own codes. Through this process patterns emerging in the data were incorporated into later interviews and further explored (also from the diary in the Norwegian study).

In the Norwegian study, the focus group discussions often revolved around positive and negative experiences and perceptions. In the diary they were also asked to describe one positive and one negative experience each day. The single women were thus challenged to

both talk and write about the joy and the flip-sides of tourism. The data on conflicts, however, were more apparent in the focus group discussions than in the diaries. When reflecting back on their completion of the diaries, several of the participants stated that they had not wanted to dwell on problems and difficult situations during the holiday itself. Similarly, in the UK study women were asked to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of solo travel. All of the British women highlighted positive aspects of solo travel such as freedom, flexibility and empowerment but most also pointed to disadvantages such as loneliness and lack of security. What became apparent during analysis of the interview data was that many of the British women had been motivated to travel alone because of problems they had experienced whilst travelling in groups or the difficulty of finding compatible travelling companions. Separately, therefore, from both Norwegian and British women's narratives of travel, we identified strong themes about problems and conflicts. We interrogated the data from both studies to explore how these had affected women's holiday experiences, their social identities as tourists and also in some cases their friendships in the longer term.

We did not set out to research conflicts in the context of the holiday. Indeed this was not conceived of as a comparative study at all. Our interest in this topic was generated by the stories of conflict told to us during our separate studies. Despite there being significant differences in the nationalities, travel experiences, and social characteristics of the women, we were struck by the similarities in their accounts of the difficulties they had encountered when holidaying with friends. This is not a topic that either of us have written about separately, but is one that we think has the potential for further exploration. The findings discussed in the following sections are thus derived from both studies and draw on illustrative data to explore ways in which interpersonal conflicts can arise, shape and reshape both holiday experiences and longer term friendships.

Before we continue, it is important to note that the holidays discussed in both studies range from weekend trips visiting second homes to long lasting backpacking travels. Some of the reported conflicts are thus related to resort holidays, city breaks, hikes with friends, group package tours, and so on. In neither study did the length or type of the holiday seem to determine the level or nature of the conflicts to any great extent. Similarly, conflicts were reported by women who were very experienced travellers as well as those whose travel careers were more limited.

## ***Findings***

In this section we present in-group interpersonal conflicts experienced by women in both studies through examining a variety of real and potential conflicts. We go on to discuss how the women sought to avoid conflicts through their pre-holiday planning and by travelling solo. Firstly we examine real interpersonal conflicts in groups of friends on holiday together and the effects they have on the holidays and the relationships.

### **‘...we are still friends. But we will probably never go on holiday together again’**

Real interpersonal conflicts were experienced by a number of the women in both studies whilst holidaying with friends. These conflicts evoked negative emotions and often involved disagreements about how to approach tasks, duties and chores. The different values of group members sometimes resulted in interference with each other’s goals. One example of a task-based conflict revolved around different opinions on the task of showing gratitude for hospitality offered to friends. In separate focus groups, June and Linda referred to a holiday which they took with a third friend. One of these three women made the other two feel pressurised into spending far more on gifts, drinks and food than they initially wanted to or

could afford, just because this woman's goal was to reduce her fear of being a financial burden to the hostess:

June: One incident was a bit difficult – has to do with money. Customarily we (the three guests) wanted to bring a gift to the hostess; we had therefore bought a mug from Porsgrunn Porselen. Additionally, we of course brought a lot of wine, gin, Campari. The problem arose when one of the three guests insisted that we need to shop even more.

Linda: ... Then there were a few situations on that trip ... we had agreed on going Dutch [this expression refers to an agreement for all members of a party to pay equally], but some of us were terrified about not doing this enough, so it became a very expensive trip ... it was the anxiety not being the proper guest. I found this very uncomfortable, and we had not talked about it in advance.

In-group conflicts centring on money issues were related to interpersonal relationships as well as tasks. This was also the case with daily activities and personal preferences for how to spend time during the holiday. Although many friends shared the same interest they did not always agree on what to do each day. Mundane activities such as eating and drinking could become the focus of real conflicts. In particular, women who lived alone acknowledged that their routines were possibly more set than others who were more used to sharing daily experiences. Liz encountered such a conflict when travelling with a friend. The two women disagreed on the morning routines regarding the number of cigarettes to be smoked and cups of coffee to be

drunk, and the friend was not very empathetic with Liz's struggle with giving up smoking. In the focus group interview Liz discussed this with the group:

Liz: I had just stopped smoking and she still smoked, oh, there you have the morning routines ... I wanted out before it was too hot. And she had to smoke at least five cigarettes on the patio before we could move towards the shower. Now I am a bit overdoing it (laughter).

Clare: It felt like it ...

Liz: I wanted out, it became a conflict.

Interviewer: Had you talked about it in advance?

Liz: No, I did not realise it was going to be like this. Did not have a clue.

Interviewer: Have you talked about it afterwards?

Liz: Yes, uhm, well we have rather not. But we are still friends. But we will probably never go on holiday together again. For that we have become too different. And, in particular this smoking routine ... It was a half year after I had quit, I couldn't even be close to a cigarette without wanting one. I just had to be clean. She spent so much time, she wasted so much time. I never realised this when I was a smoker. A strange experience.

What is evident here is the clash of values between one friend trying to resist smoking and another feeling that it was her right to indulge her habit on holiday. A number of women also described how differing opinions on how to organise their days could become flashpoints. In one of the individual interviews Alison described the impact that such real conflicts over holiday routines could have on the holiday experiences of group members:

Allison: Well the thing is if you travel on your own you can choose who you're with. Whereas if you go on holiday with a friend or something like that the chances are you haven't been stuck with them for that long before and you might not get on quite as well as you thought you did. I've just been to the [name of place] with two of my friends and we had a nice time. ... Well in the process of being there one of them suddenly threw a wobbly [tantrum] because there was a disagreement as to which way was the quickest way to get to the cathedral. And she sulked and she went off and tossed her head in the air, I thought 'You silly person.' So the other one said to me: 'What shall we do?' I said: 'Oh leave her to it, because I'd been away with her before and she wouldn't go in shops, she didn't like it. She'd go in, stick her nose in and then walk off, so you never got a chance to browse or anything, but I know she's like that so if she wants to do that I just leave her alone and let her get on with it. You can still have a nice holiday as long as you make allowances. So it depends if you are feeling tolerant or not. There are people you don't know and if you don't want to mix with them, ignore them. They'll go away.'

In another individual interview it became apparent that the consequences of such conflicts could be far-reaching. The disagreements that Elizabeth and her friend had about their daily holiday routine ultimately led to the destruction of the friendship:

Elizabeth: I've travelled with a friend when I just came out of college and we could never make up our mind where we were going, what we were going to do and it caused animosity between us. As a consequence we're not friends anymore.

Unlike Liz and Alison, who retained the social identity of being 'the friend' (Heimtun, 2011) when faced with such conflicts, Elizabeth dealt with them by assuming the identity of 'the

independent traveller' for subsequent holidays. Amongst the women in the UK study, such real holiday conflicts had often influenced their decisions to become solo female travellers rather than risk such negative holiday experiences causing longer term damage to friendships. The women in the Norwegian study tended more to either compromise or to adopt the identity of 'the independent traveller' within the holiday, avoiding conflict by eschewing time with their companions in favour of spending time alone, as Tina's story in one of the focus group meetings illustrates:

Tina: I think I've become more like that as a person today. That if I want to do something and the others are going to do something I don't particularly want to, then I do what I want. I think I've become more like that with age. That you don't go along just to be with the crowd, that you dare do something by yourself, you know.

The real conflicts discussed above tended to conform to Barki and Hartwick's (2001) notion of task-based interpersonal conflicts, particularly in relation to personal values and preferences. The ways in which different group members construct and reinforce their ideas of 'appropriate' holiday activities and behaviour (to smoke or not; how much money to spend on gifts) can contrast significantly with the desire of other group members to experience the holiday as a site free from constraints, leading to conflict.

One common trait of these conflicts is their potential for destroying the friendship. In dealing with these conflicts therefore women often reflexively and subconsciously revisited their social identities of 'the friend' and whether they would be better to resist or negotiate the conflicts by adapting their behaviour rather than risk possible damage to the friendship. It is worth remembering that where such conflicts occur within the confines of a holiday it not



easy to escape the consequences either emotionally or geographically. This can exert an extra pressure to avoid conflicts or interference with the behaviour of other group members and render the conflicts hidden, an issue which we explore in more detail in the next section.

### **'I think some friendships last longer if you don't holiday together'**

In contrast to the potentially destructive real conflicts discussed above, women's need for social bonding with friends whilst on holiday can render in-group interpersonal conflicts more hidden. This implies that they do not always seek to prevent their friends from attaining a goal even though they disagree with or dislike it. Instead they adjust, agree and comply. Some such goals are related to individual characteristics and habits. When recalling a holiday with a good friend, Linda, for instance, realised that their individual characteristics were so different that by the end of the holiday she felt the friend's criticism as bodily pain. She did not bring this up, just adjusted her behaviour. Silently, she reflected that the friendship might survive for longer if they did not holiday together again. In one of the focus group she addressed this:

Linda: I think some friendships last longer if you don't holiday together. Actually, a few years back I had an experience with one, 'til then good friend. And we really didn't get along on holiday. It was painful ... when I was curious and philosophical and observing people, we were in Barcelona together ... then she commented – 'you are so nosy – like all the time' (laughter) and it kind of killed all I ... after a while I was deeply hurt. ... I felt that she was annoyed by everything I did. And everything I said – so I put all my things to the side, right, then ...

This experience made Linda sceptical about travelling with just one close friend and she chose to holiday with small groups of friends instead. She believed that in such groups individual differences would become less important. However, in the second focus group

meeting Linda revisited the summer holiday in Italy which she spent with four friends. On this holiday she disliked the fact that they preferred to spend time drinking rather than exploring the destination. Again she adjusted instead of arguing. She went to bed earlier in the evening and waited for them to wake up in the morning. During this holiday she wrote in the diary:

Linda: They went boozing half the night and next day we didn't go out till late in the day. I think that's a waste of time. I haven't paid for this holiday just to hang round waiting. ... Got started late. The others had been out late and got up late and took things at their leisure. I think a lot.

Similarly, Sandra, in an individual interview, described how her 'ideal holiday' felt quite different from that of her friend and this put pressure on their relationship:

Sandra: ... The year before I'd been to Cornwall with a friend of mine from [country] who has a family and who needed a break and well she, the epitome for her was to visit one National Trust place after another, and my ideal holiday is to just walk along the coastal path and be at one with nature. So even though we got on quite well I felt I couldn't enter discussions about how the day was going to be spent. I just wanted to be. Then I decided the only way I could just be was to go by myself.

At the time of the holiday Sandra felt that she did not want to risk longer term problems in the friendship by causing real conflict so she avoided entering into discussions. Afterwards, however, she decided that the best way to have the holiday experience she really wanted would be to assume the social identity of 'the independent traveller' – thereby avoiding the

possibility of conflicts altogether. The personality of her travelling companion was the foundation for the potential conflict experienced by Petra. On a holiday in Tenerife Petra was shocked when she realised that her best friend for the last five years was a control freak who needed to take charge of every aspect of their holiday. Petra did not confront her friend on this, but reflected afterwards, in the focus group discussion, on the impact of this behaviour both on her holiday experience and potentially on their friendship:

Petra: It was actually a one week holiday in Tenerife with my best girl friend. It was totally bad. Never again, never again. It was terrible. The reason was that she had to control everything to the tiniest detail. Nothing was accidental. If we were at the beach, in the shop, it was well directed to the tiniest detail. It was a shock. We had been friends for five years. I did not know. It was terrible. I was sure this was the end of the friendship, but I endured it.

The potential interpersonal conflicts discussed here are often related to differences in the characters and personalities of women travelling with friends, leading to conflicting ideas of what constituted a good use of holiday time together. In this respect they are akin to the relationship-based interpersonal conflicts identified by Barki and Hartwick (2001). The women often compromised their own needs and desires for the benefit of the friendship. This exemplifies the types of negotiation and acceptance that may be used to protect and maintain the 'pure relationship' (Jensen-Campbell and Graziano, 2001; Decrop, 2005) rather than risk longer term damage through real conflict. It could be argued that unlike families which may be more bound by obligations, ultimately it is only the social bonds of a friendship that hold it together and if those are threatened by open conflict on holiday the friendship may be irreparably damaged. With such high stakes women sometimes chose not to risk it either

though rendering conflict hidden or through avoiding it altogether as discussed in the following section.

**'I think it's silly to go on holiday together when one wants to camp and the other wants to stay at the most expensive hotel'**

Although sometimes unavoidable, in-group interpersonal conflicts were clearly not something the women wished for in their holidays. In line with the discourses of tourism discussed earlier, they generally associated travelling with happiness, freedom and new experiences and they often wanted to enjoy holiday time with significant others. To avoid the potential for in-group interpersonal conflicts some of the women had therefore developed certain criteria which possible travel companions had to fulfil. This was particularly the case where women had experienced holiday conflicts on previous trips. 'The rule of similarity' (Fehr, 1996: 57) was one such criterion. It was thus very important that the party of friends shared the same interests, had the same view of partying, alcohol and smoking, that they knew about each other's good and bad habits, and that they shared the same life situation. For instance, in one focus group meeting, sharing the same interests was very important to Eve and Emma:

Emma: And it's rather important that you want to do the same things.

Eve: Yes...

Emma: That you...

Eve: That you have some of the same interests because I know I have many friends who are single really, but either they're people who I can't imagine going on holiday with because OK, we get on very well together, but I'm not sure how it would be living in close contact with them in a hotel room or something for a fortnight. Or, er, there are other reasons why I don't want to travel with them. Perhaps we don't have the same attitude to a holiday. I have my interests, what I like doing on holiday, while others perhaps like doing other things.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate a bit about this, it's a bit cryptic?

Eve: OK. Well, I'm not the sort who can lie on the beach every day for a fortnight, I would die of boredom after a week. So I have to have some activity at least once a day. When you're on holiday with somebody it's nice to do something together as well. Not just go on a guided tour with a bunch of other tourists. So, um, you decide pretty quickly who to go on holiday with. Because my friends who enjoy just lying on the beach, well, I don't go with them. It wouldn't work.

Another way of avoiding interpersonal conflicts was to initiate pre-holiday discussions with the party of friends on how to relate to each other. Some of the women therefore developed 'rules of behaviour' (Thomas, 2005: 576) related to partying and spending, and they talked about how to deal with the need for dependency/independence and different interests in how, what, and when to do things. This meant that they prepared for the trip by discussing how to deal with disagreements and emotional conflicts. For some women the travel companion's preferences for partying, for instance, would mean exclusion. Others were more moderate and agreed to party some nights, whereas others planned to party every night as normal. In a focus group meeting, Daisy revisited how important it was to discuss the amount of partying before the holiday. She was not against drinking alcohol but preferred holiday companions that, like her, were moderate drinkers:

Daisy: About partying at night, that you agree, okay – we can party a bit, but perhaps not every night. This, yes, to find similarities, that is very important.

In another focus group meeting, Emily talked about how she and her friends developed rules about accommodation before they went on bike trips in order to prevent struggles over money:

Emily: And then we have rules, like we don't camp in tents if it rains.

Interviewer: OK.

Emily: So, we all agree.

Interviewer: You've agreed on that in advance?

Emily: On things like that (laughter). I think it's silly to go on holiday together when one wants to camp and the other wants to stay at the most expensive hotel. Because then it gets, I'm always particular about things like that, at any rate my friends and I always agree in advance so we don't have to discuss things.

For a number of the women in the Norwegian study, agreeing the holiday rules in advance became a positive part of the social bonding that created and reinforced their tourist identities as friends. In contrast, many of the women in the UK study had decided that the best way for them to avoid conflict and compromise was simply to avoid taking holidays with their friends. Monica, for instance, in an individual interview, articulated why she felt that solo travel was preferable to taking holidays with friends:

Monica: For me one of the main advantages is I can do exactly what I want to do when I want to do it. I don't have to sit down with somebody and say, 'do you fancy doing that?' or 'I don't mind'. 'Oh, shall we do this then?' And no compromise!

Monica had found that in previous holidays the constant need to maintain the social identity of ‘the friend’ had compromised her ability to relax and enjoy the experience. In assuming the identity of ‘the independent traveller’ she regained a sense of freedom and empowerment.

In this section we have demonstrated how women may actively adopt strategies to prevent in-group interpersonal conflicts from ruining their holidays. Some women negotiate the group rules for the holidays prior to travel. In these situations all of the travelling companions are not simply assuming the social identity of ‘the friend’ but are overtly prioritising it within the context of shared travel experience. Such setting of shared social rules for the holiday does however contrast with the conventional notion of the holiday as a site of freedom from such constraints. As an alternative to this negotiation therefore, a number of women, who had previously experienced real and potential conflicts when travelling with friends, were motivated to travel solo instead.

### ***Conclusion***

The data gathered in both studies provided clear evidence of both real and potential conflicts experienced by women travelling with friends. The women’s narratives articulated a mix of task- and relationship-based conflicts grounded in habits such as smoking and drinking; personality traits such as respect, stubbornness, addictions, the need to be in control and independence; and differing views on money and holiday activities. Some of these real interpersonal conflicts relating to chores, money, activities and personal habits resulted from friends’ different goals and values. For these women conflicts had a cognitive dimension and evoked strong emotions (Barki and Hartwick, 2001). The confines of the holiday meant that such interpersonal conflicts could be more difficult to ignore and to escape from.

Consequently, they could arise from relatively small differences in attitude and centre on the routine and the mundane.

Many of the women in these studies were independent and often free from the daily obligations of the nuclear family (Baumbusch, 2004; Byrne, 2000; Gordon, 1994; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). They admitted that this could make them less tolerant of the need to constantly compromise with travel companions. Still, they also acknowledged that spending holidays with friends played an important role in preserving their friendships as pure relationships (Giddens, 1991; 1992) and that conflicts whilst on holiday had the potential ultimately to destroy the friendship. Friendships are part of women's 'bonding social capital' and perhaps their strongest social tie (Putnam, 2001: 22). As has been identified in previous research (see for instance Gordon, 1994; Green, 1998; Heimtun, 2007; Segraves, 2004; Trimberger, 2005), such friendships can be very important to women in terms of maintaining their sense of community, social integration and well-being in a society (including tourism spaces) marked by familism and couples, so the stakes are very high if friendships are threatened by conflict.

Given such high stakes, the women often sought to render potential interpersonal conflicts hidden although they both disliked and disagreed with their friend(s) during the holiday. They often compromised their own needs and desires for the benefit of the friendship. These strategies concurred with Decrop et al.'s (2004) findings on the adoption of avoidance and negotiation decision-making tactics among friends. Such compromises constitute friendships (Fehr, 1996; Pahl, 2000; Rawlins, 1992). Friends are supposed to be there in time of need and to give each other space when necessary. The social expectation is that they should tolerate each other's bad habits and negative personality traits to ensure the success of the holiday and



maintain the friendship. However, in doing so the women are potentially compromising their own enjoyment of the holiday experience. One reason women apply this strategy is that they believe travelling as part of a group, instead of solo, may protect them from experiencing exclusion and isolation in holiday spaces that are often socially and culturally constructed for couples and families (Heimtun, 2010; Jordan, 2008). In the Norwegian study, many of the women felt that adopting the social identity of 'the friend' and compromising was preferable to the alternative of travelling alone.

The majority of the women in the UK study, however, felt that the benefits of adopting the social identity of the 'independent traveller' and taking solo holidays outweighed the potential risk of such marginalisation. These women identified empowering benefits of travelling solo such as flexibility, spontaneity, pride in achievement, the opportunity for self-reflection and self-development and gaining confidence. A number of these related directly to not having to compromise in fitting around the schedules and interests of travel companions. This flexibility and opportunity for self-direction in travel is similar to that sought by independent travellers such as back-packers (see for instance Richards and Wilson, 2004; Laesser et al, 2009). The ability to take charge and make the most of travelling was considered to be empowering in helping the women to gain confidence both in the context of their holidays and also on their return to everyday life. To these women, and those in studies of female travellers in the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand, solo travel meant 'meaningful travel' (Jordan and Gibson, 2005; Wilson and Harris, 2006: 168), providing them with opportunity to explore and develop themselves.

Many of the women in both studies recognised the potential for conflicts to have a negative impact on their experiences (often through their previous holiday experiences of travelling in

different groups) and in planning their holidays adopted strategies to reduce interpersonal conflicts (see also Decrop et al., 2004). This was achieved through careful selection of who to travel with and/or by developing rules for behaviour in relation to issues such as spending money. Such strategies could help to minimise both task-based conflicts (through agreement about approaches to holiday activities prior to the holiday) and relationship-based interpersonal conflicts (through choosing travel companions with similar personalities and shared values and goals).

Whilst one might expect there to be a temporal dimension to the real conflicts; for instance, that they would increase with days of being together and having to adjust to each others needs, this is not evident in the data from either study. Conflicts could occur at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the holiday, either because travel companions argued over activities at the start of the holiday or because a series of incidents ultimately lead to conflict later in the holiday. Previous research suggests that geographical spaces may significantly influence women's holiday experiences (Jordan and Aitchison, 2008; Heimtun, 2010), however, when it came to interpersonal conflicts this did not seem to be the case. The women in both studies described such conflicts taking place in resorts, cities, coastal and rural areas and also when travelling on package tours, visiting friends, or where groups have made their own travel arrangements.

We believe that the women's experiences may well be similar to those of other tourists travelling with family and friends (see Crompton, 1981; Decrop et al., 2004). In-group interpersonal conflicts are therefore not necessarily related to gender, but to the fact that being a tourist often means spending a lot more time with friends and family than on an everyday basis. It would be interesting to develop this research further by comparing real and potential

interpersonal conflicts between women holidaying with friends and women holidaying with partners or families. It would also be of interest to examine how men handle interpersonal conflicts on holiday with friends and to explore different holiday situations in which conflicts may occur. Our findings highlight the significance of in-group social relations in shaping individual holiday experiences. They also show that conflicts within groups of travelling companions can have long-term impacts on important relationships such as friendships and as such are potentially significant beyond the holiday.

In this study we have demonstrated that disagreement, animosity, exploitation, manipulation, domination, irritation, anger, frustration and disappointment between friends travelling together may make it difficult to achieve a liminoid state of mind where feelings of freedom and well-being predominate. Within tourism such negative notions of emotional geographies have not yet been extensively researched (Davidson et al., 2005) and we believe that exploration of these ideas could provide rich potential to enhance our understanding of tourist experience and holiday behaviour.

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