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Introduction

The international attention gender equality and women's empowerment is receiving by institutions and initiatives such as the UNWTO and the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG3) (Ferguson, 2011; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014) emphasizes the importance and expanse of gender issues not only to tourism, but to many internationally-endorsed development goals. In alignment with the third Millennium Development Goal, "To promote gender equality and empower women" (United Nations, 2000), empowerment has become one of the central tenets of sustainable tourism development. Authors such as Choi and Murray (2010, p. 589) assert that "If the government fails to empower residents, the success of tourism development and sustainability cannot be guaranteed." Sofield (2003, p. 7) adds that, "Without empowerment, sustainable tourism development by communities is difficult to attain." Even though empowerment has become a "mantra" within the sustainable tourism literature and is the topic of many research articles recent and old (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Boley et al., 2014; Cole, 2006; Di Castri, 2004; Scheyvens, 1999, 2000, 2002), many important research gaps remain.

One gap of particular importance is empirically assessing perceived differences in levels of resident empowerment between men and women within tourism development. Using tools such as the resident empowerment through tourism scale (RETS) and other constructs can be employed to better understand the precursors to empowerment as well as the associated outcomes like trust and political support or tourism when residents are empowered through tourism (Boley et al., 2014; Nunkoo et al., 2012). The sustainable tourism literature is full of articles investigating the roles of women in tourism and their access to power (Duffy et al., 2015; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Gentry, 2007; Ling et al., 2013; Moswete & Lacey, 2014; Pleno, 2006; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012), but these articles have largely approached the subject from a qualitative perspective, using small sample sizes and single communities as points of reference. This research approach has yielded a rich understanding of gender issues within tourism development of specific communities, but has yet to manifest itself into a more widespread, quantitative evaluation of residents' perceptions of empowerment or disempowerment by tourism and how perceptions might differ by gender. In addition to this gap, the tendency within the literature is to treat empowerment as a unidimensional 'power' construct (e.g. Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Reed, 1997). This exists despite a growing recognition that empowerment is a multi-faceted construct with psychological, social, political, environmental and economic components (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Friedmann, 1992; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Rappaport, 1984; Scheyvens, 1999). Treating empowerment as multi-dimensional allows researchers to delve into not only the overarching power structures within communities (*political empowerment*), but also investigate how tourism affects community pride and self-esteem (*psychological empowerment*), cohesion and collaboration (*social empowerment*), the retention and sharing of economic benefits (*economic empowerment*), and tourism's effect on natural resource conservation (*environmental empowerment*). If empowerment gaps do exist between men and women, this multi-dimensional approach allows them to be identified at the dimensional level and provides tourism officials with a clear picture of where to allocate resources to help remedy any discrepancy in perceived empowerment.

With these gaps in mind, this study's purpose is to examine residents' perceived psychological, social, and political empowerment differences and similarities by gender across five unique sample populations (three rural counties in Virginia, USA, and two distinct cultural groups in Oizumi, Japan) using the recently developed Resident empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) by Boley and McGehee (2014). The multiple samples provide the opportunity not only to examine discrepancies across multiple sites, but also provide to look at perceptions of empowerment in two distinctly different countries with different power relations between men and women. The American and Japanese samples specifically differ across Hofstede's (1980, 1994) cultural dimensions of 1) power distance, 2) individualism, 3) masculinity, 4) uncertainty avoidance, and 5) indulgence with Japan being a more hierarchical society than the U.S., more collectively focused, more masculine, less tolerant of uncertainty, and less indulgent than the United States (see Hofstede 2014 for more specifics). If significant gaps exist between men and women on their perceptions of empowerment, the RETS should be able to identify not only the gaps but also dimensions of empowerment on which the gaps are located, as well as differences across specific items.

Literature Review

The focus on gender disparities and ways to address them have been largely driven by international efforts such as the 1995 United National World Conference on Women in Beijing and the establishment of the third Millennium Development Goal in 2000 that specifically addressed promoting gender equality and empowering women across the world (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; United Nations, 2000). Parallel to these international initiatives aimed at gender equality, has been the popularization of a feminist gender approach in tourism studies which has attempted to understand women's experiences and attitudes irrelevant of the existing androcentric representation of their lives at the time (Deem, 1992; Evans, 1990; Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1987; Henderson, Stalkner & Taylor, 1988). Some of the first gender topics explored in the tourism literature included: perpetuating gendered stereotypes in tourism destinations (Ireland, 1993; McKay, 1993); gendered differences in perceptions of tourism at different stages of development (Harvey, Hunt, & Harris, 1995); power relations contributing to gender disparities (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995); and economic independence for women through tourism (Butler & Connele, 1993; Purcell, 1993). Today, gender tourism scholarship addresses many issues such as gender equity in the tourism planning process (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014); tourism, gender and poverty reduction (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012); the cultural and structural issues determining the roles women play in tourism's service industry (Baum, 2013); women's economic independence through tourism (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013), and the role gender plays into residents' perceptions of control over tourism development and their subsequent political support for tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010).

A common thread within these studies is that gender disparities result from situated notions of power (Gibson, 2001). This understanding of power aligns with the Foucauldian perspective that power is omnipresent and behind all aspects of tourism development (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Foucault, 1982; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). This omnipotent conceptualization of power coupled with the discovery of disparities in the social, political, environmental, economic, and psychological power held specifically by women (Gentry, 2007; Schellhorn, 2010; Vandegrift,

2008) has been part of the impetus on empowerment and the investigation of power structures to become a core area of sustainable tourism research.

Empowerment in its most basic form describes the ability of “people, organizations, and communities to gain mastery over their affairs” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Sofield (2003, p. 79) writes that this generic definition of empowerment has been the impetus behind the “proliferation of usage where different authors define the term in the context of their professional experience or a particular situation.” Relating to the study of gender and empowerment, Moswete and Lacey (2014, p. 6) write: “Empowerment is complex and subjective and can occur in one or more of economic, political, social, or psychological realms. Any exploration of the empowerment of women through tourism needs to examine multiple realms of empowerment if true insight is to be gained into the advantages accruing from the venture.” This perspective of empowerment having psychological, social, political, and economic facets is derived from Scheyvens’ (1999) seminal study that first applied the psychology and development literature’s interpretation of empowerment to ecotourism (Friedmann, 1992; Rappaport, 1984). Ramos and Prideaux (2014) have also recently added an environmental dimension of empowerment. Comprehensively, empowerment, within a tourism development context, concentrates attention on providing residents with the agency to determine the best direction of tourism development for their communities (overarching empowerment), removing any structural barriers that would prohibit the community from having control over development (political empowerment), enabling the community to capture the economic benefits of tourism (economic empowerment), fostering community cohesion through the tourism development process (social empowerment) with a final tourism product that the residents are proud of sharing with visitors (psychological empowerment), and sustaining the community’s unique natural and cultural resources (environmental empowerment). With quantitative scales only developed for the psychological, social, and political dimensions of empowerment, the actually tests for gender discrepancies will focus on these three dimensions and the items within the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) (Boley & McGehee, 2014).

Methodology

Discrepancies in residents’ psychological, social, and political empowerment were examined using the 12-item Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS). The RETS was administered across five unique sample populations (three rural counties in Virginia, USA and two distinct cultural groups in Oizumi, Japan). The three U.S. counties were chosen based upon their similarities in tourism product (all located along the Blue Ridge Parkway), similar per capita tourism expenditures (\$1,400-\$1,600 per resident), and unemployment levels around 6% in 2012. The Oizumi sample was chosen because it provides the ability to test the RETS across two different cultures in Japan (e.g., Brazilians and Japans). Oizumi is located in Gunma prefecture and is approximately 110 km northwest of Tokyo. While the town has traditionally been known as a manufacturing town, more recently it has become recognized as “Little Brazil” for its high concentration of Brazilian residents. According to the Census conducted in 2010, 3,678 Brazilian residents (approximately 15% of the total population) reside in Oizumi, which is the highest concentration in Japan. With the severe decline of manufacturing in 2007, the

chamber of commerce in Oizumi created the tourism bureau and has introduced Brazilian “ethnic enclave tourism” to help revitalize its economy.

The RETS was administered to residents of all five populations using a self-administered, door-to-door, pen and paper questionnaire that implemented a census-guided systematic random sampling scheme (Woosnam & Norman, 2010). For the Virginia samples, questionnaires were distributed in the spring of 2013. Throughout the six-week period of data collection, 1784 households were visited. Out of the 984 eligible residents intercepted, 900 were willing to participate, with 84 declining. Of the 900 survey questionnaires distributed, 703 were returned and used within the study resulting in a 71% response rate. In regards to the Oizumi sample, data concerning the RETS were collected from Brazilian and Japanese residents living in Oizumi between November 2013 and June 2014. In total, 5,566 household were visited by the research team, while no one answered the door at 4,012 homes. At the remaining 1,554 homes, 650 surveys were completed for a response rate of 42%.

No additional tests of the RETS’ reliability and validity were conducted because they have already been assessed and confirmed previously through two different confirmatory factory analyses (see Boley & McGehee, 2014; Boley, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2015 for more specifics). To test for significant empowerment discrepancies between men and women, independent samples *t*-tests were performed for each of the five samples with a significance criteria of 0.05.

Results

Results revealed that gender discrepancies among residents were in fact present, but surprisingly, not in the direction suggested in previous literature (Table 1). In all three U.S. samples, results revealed that women were more likely to perceive themselves empowered through tourism than men. The results from two Japanese samples did not suggest any significant differences, which is of interest given Japan’s traditional patriarchal society.

Within Floyd County, women perceived themselves being more empowered than men on the latent constructs of social (3.35 > 3.04; $t = 2.50$; $p < 0.05$) and political empowerment (2.76 > 2.53; $t = 2.11$; $p < 0.05$) as well as on four individual scale items. Results were different for Botetourt County because the significant differences were centered only on the psychological empowerment dimension. Women’s perceptions of empowerment were significantly higher on the latent construct of psychological empowerment (3.84 > 3.63; $t = 2.52$; $p < 0.05$) as well as its individual items of “Tourism in Botetourt County makes me feel special because people travel to see my area’s unique features” (3.76 > 3.52; $t = 2.23$; $p < 0.05$), “Tourism in Botetourt County reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors” (3.77 > 3.52; $t = 2.55$; $p < 0.05$), and “Tourism in Botetourt County makes me want to work to keep Botetourt County special” (3.98 > 3.66; $t = 3.55$; $p < 0.001$). The results for Franklin County revealed only significant differences on the social empowerment dimension. Women’s perceptions of empowerment were significantly higher on the latent construct of social empowerment (3.51 > 3.25; $t = 2.53$; $p < 0.05$) as well as on its items of “Tourism in Franklin County makes me feel more connected to my community” (3.48 > 3.18; $t = 2.68$; $p < 0.01$) and “Tourism in Franklin County provides ways for me to get involved in my community (3.50 > 3.19; $t = 2.61$; $p < 0.01$).

Conclusion and Discussion

In all three U.S. samples, women residents were more likely to perceive themselves being empowered through tourism than men. This finding is parallel to some previous studies that have indicated women's enhanced empowered status through tourism (Garcia-Ramon et al. 1995; Khatiwada & Silva, 2015; Moswete & Lacey, 2014). The results from the two Japanese samples did not find any significant difference, which is of interest because Japan is traditionally seen a very patriarchal society (Hofstede, 2014). This finding demonstrates the ability of tourism to enter into situated notions of power prevalent within different cultures and possibly flip power structures or at least level the playing field for traditionally marginalized groups. Rather than fighting against the Foucauldian perspective that power is omnipresent and behind all aspects of tourism development (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Foucault, 1982; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012), perhaps the power of tourism can be harnessed as a force for good that works to undermine pervasive power imbalances. This is one of the goals of sustainable tourism (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014) and directed niche forms of tourism such as pro-poor tourism (Akyeampong, 2011; Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000).

For practitioners, the RETS' ability to identify specific perceived discrepancies in empowerment between men and women provides tourism industry managers and other government officials the opportunity to identify problem areas and subsequently modify tourism marketing and management plans and other government-led initiatives such as increasing access to higher education and start-up capital for tourism entrepreneurship to see if their initiatives are working to remedy the problem.

For academics, the study provides the first empirical test of the widely-held view that women are underrepresented and less empowered in tourism development (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Such an imbalance has been demonstrated in existing qualitative research (see Duffy et al., 2015; Ferguson & Alarcon, 2014; Ling et al., 2013; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012), but did not materialize within the five samples of this study. Perhaps, perceptions of gender disempowerment are not as widespread as originally thought and that real success stories exist of communities effectively empowering both men and women within their tourism development strategies as Moswete and Lacey's (2014) and Khatiwada and Silva's (2015) findings from Botswana and Namibia suggest. Empowerment is very much a site-specific phenomenon and more quantitative research is needed to see if empowerment discrepancies exist in other tourism destinations as some qualitative findings suggest.

Table 1. RETS mean comparisons across gender by US (VA) and Japan samples

Factor and Corresponding Item	United States (VA) ^a									Japan (Oizumi) ^b					
	Botetourt Co.			Floyd Co.			Franklin Co.			Japanese			Brazilians		
	<i>M</i>			<i>M</i>			<i>M</i>			<i>M</i>			<i>M</i>		
	Female	Male	<i>t</i>	Female	Male	<i>t</i>	Female	Male	<i>t</i>	Female	Male	<i>t</i>	Female	Male	<i>t</i>
Psychological Empowerment	3.84	3.63	2.52*	3.88	3.71	1.60	3.85	3.71	1.45	3.92	3.92	0.01	5.44	5.69	-1.25
<i>Tourism...</i>															
...makes me proud to be [] ^c resident.	3.83	3.70	1.27	3.92	3.61	2.58*	3.87	3.64	1.87	4.29	4.42	-0.95	5.34	5.68	-1.52
...makes me feel special because people travel to see my area's unique features.	3.76	3.52	2.23*	3.76	3.61	1.11	3.81	3.65	1.40	3.42	3.55	-0.99	5.34	5.57	-0.99
...makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer in [].	3.92	3.76	1.65	3.85	3.72	1.05	3.86	3.70	1.35	3.64	3.86	-1.69	5.59	5.69	-0.46
...reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors.	3.77	3.52	2.55*	3.91	3.80	0.94	3.88	3.78	0.98	4.00	4.09	-0.66	5.30	5.64	-1.53
...makes me want to work to keep [] special.	3.98	3.66	3.55***	3.96	3.86	0.85	3.88	3.78	0.98	4.05	4.05	-0.02	5.46	5.68	-1.04
Social Empowerment	3.50	3.36	1.53	3.35	3.04	2.50*	3.51	3.25	2.53*	4.08	4.02	0.59	5.31	5.54	-1.14
<i>Tourism...</i>															
...makes me feel more connected to my community.	3.47	3.31	1.56	3.31	3.05	1.89	3.48	3.18	2.68**	3.90	4.04	-1.15	5.36	5.43	-0.32
...fosters a sense of 'community spirit' within me.	3.59	3.44	1.47	3.41	3.13	2.11*	3.56	3.38	1.54	3.99	4.10	-0.88	5.28	5.67	-1.79
...provides ways for me to get involved in my community.	3.44	3.34	0.99	3.34	2.93	2.95**	3.50	3.19	2.61**	4.07	4.26	-1.51	5.27	5.60	-1.51
Political Empowerment	2.77	2.83	-0.64	2.76	2.53	2.11*	2.74	2.80	-0.61	3.48	3.37	0.81	3.45	3.37	0.31
I have a voice in [] tourism development decisions.	2.62	2.66	-0.38	2.65	2.48	1.33	2.66	2.68	-0.16	3.36	3.46	-0.64	3.38	3.20	0.58
I have access to the decision making process when it comes to tourism in [] ^d .	2.55	2.68	-1.09	2.62	2.36	1.93	2.57	2.53	0.36	3.42	3.38	0.28	3.45	3.50	0.17
My vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in [] ^e .	3.09	3.06	0.21	2.96	2.74	1.64	2.87	3.09	-1.77	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in [].	2.86	2.92	-0.53	2.87	2.53	2.63*	2.86	2.91	-0.38	3.54	3.41	0.88	3.57	3.52	0.15

^a RETS items rated on 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*

^b RETS items rated on 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*

^c [] represents community name.

^d Worded as "I have the opportunity to participate in the tourism planning process in Oizumi" on Japanese Survey

^e Item not included within Oizumi questionnaire given residents' lack of ability to vote on such matters in Japan.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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