Trans women in tourism: Motivations, constraints and experiences

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ABSTRACT

As gender dissident individuals, trans people are often subject to stigma, discrimination and violence. Despite the potential benefits travel and tourism can offer to these individuals, their experiences have been widely ignored by researchers and mistakenly included under the same umbrella as lesbian, gay and bisexual tourism. This study sought to explore trans women's tourism motivations and experiences in a Mexican context. The research was grounded in social stigma theory and recently developed transgender travel and tourism theory. Based on qualitative interviews, the results reveal that trans women's motives are similar to those of cisgender tourists and that a fear of discrimination or even murder is a significant tourism constraint. Mistreatment of trans tourists can range from being misgendered to sexual harassment and verbal and physical violence. A significant issue arising in this context is the need to distinguish between pre- and post-transition travel to understand trans tourism experiences more fully. This study's findings expand the current theory on – and offer practical implications for those involved in – transgender travel.

1. Introduction

Individuals who embody gender dissidence (i.e. those who are beyond conventional gender norms such as transgender women) usually face multiple challenges in their everyday lives. Many studies have investigated how these difficulties are manifested in family, educational, work and healthcare contexts (Chang & Chung, 2015; Dispenza, Watson, Chung, & Brack, 2012; Rodríguez Madera, Ramos Pibernus, Padilla, & Varas Díaz, 2015; Socías et al., 2014). However, other important dimensions related to transgender people's experiences have been overlooked, as is the case with tourism-associated practices. Within tourism, little is known about transgender individuals' motivations and experiences, which has contributed to a limited theoretical understanding of tourists from this specific population.

Transgender people's travel motivations and tourism experiences have been largely included under the umbrella of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) tourism. Most of what is currently known about this internally undifferentiated market segment has been drawn from empirical studies of gay and lesbian travellers (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 1997, 2002; Monterrubio & Barrios-Ayala, 2015; Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgley, Khan, & Jenkins, 2000; Waitt & Markwell, 2006). Thus, conclusions about LGBT tourism have been based on analyses of sexuality rather than gender issues. Unlike sexuality, gender manifestations are often and intensely exposed to social gazes, so gender is more likely to have an impact on tourism-related social interactions. Nonetheless, transgender individuals' travel motivations and tourism experiences have been virtually ignored.

This paper presents findings obtained through a study of transgender women in Mexico, which sought to document their tourism-related motives and experiences. The results on the participants' travel motivations and experiences of social stigma contribute to expanding recently developed transgender travel and tourism theory.

2. General conceptions of gender and gender dissidence

The current conceptualisation of gender, according to Lamas (2000), 'refers to the set of practices, beliefs, representations and social prescriptions that arise among the members of a human group based on a symbolisation of the anatomical difference between men and women' (p. 3). As such, gender is socially constructed and its specific expressions, including masculinity and femininity, depend on the social group and culture in which they develop. To understand gender constructs, the particular cultural context in which they are developed must be understood. Like all social constructs, gender can be modified, but certain gender transformations may be perceived as transgressing social norms.

In most cultures worldwide, people are assigned to the male or female gender based on their genitals at birth. Rodríguez Madera (2009)

observes that 'the gender category has been designed to be seen in black and white' (p. 35). Individuals born with a penis are assigned to the male gender, while those born with a vulva are grouped as the female gender. However, this dichotomy is sometimes discarded since gender categories such as *hijra* in India, *kathoey* in Thailand or *muxes* in Mexico show that a third gender (Herdt, 1996) or at least gender constructions that do not respond to a binary gender (i.e. male or female) are acknowledged.

In societies defined by two genders, people who maintain a gender identity and expression corresponding to the biological sex they were born with are referred to as 'cisgender', which can be abbreviated to 'cis' (Aultman, 2014). In contrast, 'transgender' or 'trans' refers to individuals whose gender presentation or identity differs from the normative ideals regarding biological sex. Thus, being trans defies these societies' traditional notions of what being male or female means. In this cultural context, people born with male genitalia who go through transitioning processes to express a female gender are called 'trans women', while those born with female sexual organs that transition to a male gender are referred to as 'trans men'.

In this context, the binary view of gender can be understood as a fictitious cultural construction that becomes a straitjacket for those with engendered bodies. The latter approach to gender represents it as a spectrum that includes a multiplicity of representations that are still strongly influenced by social standards but are manifestations of individuals' subjectivity. People who are out of alignment with the traditionally imposed binary perspective can be described as gender dissidents because they claim the right to a form of being in the world different from those imposed by their culture (González Ortuño, 2017). A consequence experienced by trans individuals as gender dissidents is social stigma.

3. Conceptual framework

3.1. Social stigma

This theory refers to the disapproval of or discrimination against individuals based on perceivable social characteristics that distinguish them from other members of society (Kleinman & Hall-Clifford, 2009). Social stigma places trans people in vulnerable situations in their everyday lives, resulting in a high risk of health problems, under- and unemployment, poverty and reduced access to healthcare services. Social stigma is a complex, dynamic process, so it can best be operationalised according to the levels at – and means through which – it is experienced (i.e. structural, interpersonal and individual) (White Hughto, Reisner, & Pachankis, 2015). More specifically, the current study's focus on tourism made interpersonal stigma (e.g. being a victim of insults and violence while travelling) of particular importance.

Social stigma is inextricable linked to transphobia (i.e. negative attitudes and beliefs about, derogatory language applied to and violence towards trans individuals). This, in turn, is connected to cisgenderism (i.e. a systemic cultural ideology that denies, denigrates or pathologises gender identities that do not conform with assigned gender at birth) (Lennon & Mistler, 2014). Empirical studies have revealed that many trans people experience forms of social stigmatisation, transphobia and cisgenderism in their lives due to their gender identity (Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013; Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Brennan et al., 2012; Padilla, Rodríguez-Madera, Varas-Díaz, & Ramos-Pibernus, 2016; Reisner, White, Bradford, & Mimiaga, 2014; Rodríguez-Madera et al., 2017; Socías et al., 2014). According to Rodríguez Madera et al. (2015), a large part of the research on trans individuals has focused on describing the challenges generated by social stigma and discrimination in multiple contexts, including family, school, work and clinical settings. Trans communities are often characterised by members' high levels of mobility, which is commonly motivated by the desire to find friendly spaces for living, working or receiving adequate healthcare (Howe,

Zaraysky, & Lorentzen, 2008; Lubitow, Carathers, Kelly, & Abelson, 2017; Padilla et al., 2016). However, the literature reveals that more research is still needed on tourism's implications for trans individuals.

3.2. Trans travel

Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) argue that travelling as a trans individual can be complex and require additional considerations, behavioural changes and emotional labour. The cited authors' developed their theory of trans travel based on three major postulations. The first is that trans people feel afraid of and anxious about being discriminated against, mistreated, harassed or even murdered and that part of this fear centres around showing identification documents. Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) also suggest that gender dissidents adopt specific strategies to cope with anxiety. These may include switching to a cis expression when in transit or avoiding tourism or leisure activities or certain geographic locations that openly discriminate against the LGBT community.

This theory's second postulation states that trans individuals who hide their gender identity may travel freely but feel internally that they have had a negative experience. The last postulation asserts that cis people's acceptance and affirming behaviours can affect trans travel experiences in positive ways. Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) further argue that trans individuals may have positive interactions with others and affirm their gender identity while travelling. Analyses of the present study's data provided empirical evidence that variously confirms, rejects or complements the above postulations.

4. Trans tourism: Silenced particularities of trans people's experiences

This research focused on trans tourists' motivations and experiences. Travel motivations have impacts on tourism experiences. Gnoth (1997) argues that, from tourists' perspective, tourism is a response to felt needs. Once these needs have been activated, the resulting motivations lead to expectations that, in turn, determine these individuals' perceptions of experiences. Thus, examining tourists' motivations offers valuable insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of travel and tourism experiences. By studying travel motivations and experiences, the current study sought to identify more specific tourist typologies and market segments and contribute to a better understanding of trans tourists' decision-making processes, such as destination choice and tourism behaviours (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008).

Tourism experiences can have a positive effect on travellers' quality of life (Dolnicar & Cliff, 2012) and bring transformative outcomes in terms of personal knowledge, realities and identity (Pung, Yung, Khoo-Lattimore, & Del Chiappa, 2019). However, cis men and women produce and consume tourism in different ways due to variations in their gender construction and socialisation (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015). Trans women's specific experiences have been widely ignored in tourism studies and mistakenly included under the umbrella of LGBT tourism despite the particular social conditions under which these women live and travel and tourism's potential beneficial impacts on their lives. This research gap exists mainly because, according to Zimman (2009), queer organisations and scholars often treat sexual orientation and gender identity as analogous, thereby conflating the experiences of gay, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people.

Southhall and Fallon (2011) observe that LGBT tourism represents a more inclusive term being applied in general and by associated tourism industry organisations. In addition, the cited authors suggest that '[g]ay tourism is in fact often used in a wider, more generic sense as a surrogate for LGBT tourism' (p. 218). As a result, researchers have failed to differentiate between gay and/or lesbian tourism experiences and those of trans individuals, mistakenly reporting all three groups' holiday experiences as defined by sexual issues. Thus, what is currently known

about LGBT tourism has been drawn from research primarily on gay male and lesbian tourism.

Research on gay tourism has found that a search for sexual identity (Hughes, 1997, 2002; Monterrubio, 2009; Waitt & Markwell, 2006), gay social life and sex (Clift & Forrest, 1999) are major travel motivations for men going on holiday. The need to feel safe, socialise with other gay people, escape from heterosexism and search for gay spaces have also been found to be quite important motivations for gay and lesbian leisure travel (Pritchard et al., 2000). More recent research in non-developed countries, however, has found evidence that sexuality does not necessarily play a significant role in lesbians' tourism experiences (Monterrubio & Barrios-Ayala, 2015).

Due to this erroneous equation of gay and lesbian tourism experiences with those of trans individuals, various ideas have been widely acknowledged and uncritically established. One such generalisation is that the LGBT population is a lucrative and growing market (Melián-González, Moreno-Gil, & Araña, 2011) with specific travel motivations, needs and consumption patterns (Guaracino & Salvato, 2017; Prat Forga, 2015; Riaño Rodríguez, 2013). Assumptions about the alleged LGBT tourism market have derived largely from research on gay and lesbian tourism rather than on an accurate representation of diverse LGBT communities. Thus, trans individuals' experiences have been misrepresented because of the dominant interest in gay-lesbian tourism. Fiani and Han (2018) recently asserted that the 'T' in 'LGBTQ' (i.e. LGBT and queer or questioning) has often been rendered silent. Attributing gay and lesbian behavioural patterns to trans people has caused many scholars and practitioners to overlook how actual tourism and travel experiences can be shaped by gender rather than sexuality alone.

This failure to differentiate trans individuals from gay men and lesbians is also present outside tourism studies. Gender identity has often been conflated with sexual orientation, so trans people tend to be lumped with other populations under the LGBT umbrella. Lombardi (2009) observes that previous studies have confounded sexuality with gender and thus mistakenly conceptualised transgender as a form of homosexuality. The cited author argues that gender constructs include external aspects that communicate individuals' gender to others. Sexual orientation can be hidden or disguised, but gender expression cannot since, by definition, gender manifestations are always visible and exposed to social gazes. Because homosexuality is frequently socially condemned and trans people are strongly associated with homosexuality, they are often subject to both transphobia and homophobia (Molina, Guzmán, & Martínez-Guzmán, 2015). Research on tourism experiences must, therefore, differentiate between trans individuals and gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

Although, as stated previously, trans individuals' tourism experiences have not been completely neglected by academia, prior studies' scope has been extremely limited. Some researchers have exclusively analysed transgenderism in the context of sex work, especially in Thai contexts. For example, studies have looked at the commodification of *kathoey*'s bodies for tourists' consumption (Tan, 2014) and identity diversification among trans sex workers in Thai tourism destinations (Ocha & Earth, 2013). Western trans women's experiences of gender reassignment surgeries in Thailand have also been documented, as well as their association with Thai femininity (Aizura, 2010).

However, scholars have only quite recently begun to focus on gender dissident people's travel and tourism experiences (Olson & Reddy-Best, 2019). Because trans issues need to be acknowledged and examined in their specific contexts (Lafaurie Villamil, Forero Rozo, & Miranda Jiménez, 2011), these individuals' travel experiences in different settings should be incorporated into the global discussion and understanding of trans tourism.

5. Study

5.1. Background and setting

In 2018, Mexico's National Council for Discrimination Prevention (Conapred) and Human Rights National Commission (CNDH) conducted a survey on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The results show that almost 75% of trans individuals in Mexico have been discriminated against in terms of healthcare, education and employment. They have also encountered bigotry, within the past year, in public spaces such as restaurants, bars, nightclubs, shopping centres and banks because of their gender identity. The survey also revealed that trans individuals and those with non-normative gender identities experience the most discrimination as compared to other LGBT people in this country (Conapred, 2019).

Inequities exist despite Mexican laws confirming that trans people have the right to decide about their bodies, identity and sexuality and that they cannot to be discriminated against in any way (CNDH, 2018). Trans individuals are subjected to intolerance in many countries, but Mexico's transgender homicide rate is the second highest in the world, with only Brazil reporting more murders of trans people. Trans women in Mexico are one of the most vulnerable social groups as they are often subjected to verbal and physical aggression ranging from sexual harassment to rape, physical harm, death threats and murder (Romero, 2018).

In Mexico, a high percentage of trans people are unemployed, and, due to discrimination, many can only earn a living as sex workers or hairstylists (Molina et al., 2015). Prejudicial behaviour and violence against trans individuals are strongly associated with the patriarchal and heterosexist environments predominant in Latin American countries (Molina et al., 2015). Due to high levels of hostility and discrimination, suicidal ideation is prevalent among trans people in Mexico (women, 58%; men, 73%; and nonnormative gendered, 72%), and just over one in five trans individuals have tried to commit suicide (Conapred, 2019). In this country, trans people's average life expectancy is only 37 years (Acosta, 2019).

5.2. Methods

Picken (2018) argues that qualitative interviews are a convenient way to examine tourism phenomena and the multiplicity of meanings, experiences and relationships associated with tourism within complex contemporary settings. The cited author further suggests that interviews are the most effective method to gain 'thick' descriptions and a detailed understanding of meanings and processes involved in all aspects of tourism production and consumption. Research on tourism motivations and experiences – especially those related to sexuality and gender – have found qualitative interview data quite fruitful, given their potential for providing detailed accounts of participants' subjective perspectives (Monterrubio & Barrios-Ayala, 2015; Pritchard et al., 2000; Seow & Brown, 2018). The value of qualitative interviewing has also been widely confirmed in studies of transgender issues such as coming out and identity processes (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Zimman, 2009), sex work (Bianchi et al., 2014; Ocha & Earth, 2013), hormone and silicone injections (Padilla, Rodríguez-Madera, Ramos Pibernus, Varas-Díaz, & Neilands, 2018), discrimination (Dispenza et al., 2012) and travel-related experiences. However, investigations of the latter have until recently been extremely limited (Olson & Reddy-Best, 2019). The present study thus adopted a qualitative approach based on interviews.

5.3. Participants, instrument and data collection

This research focused on trans women. The decision to dedicate the study exclusively to this segment of the population was based on the existing evidence that cis men and women produce and consume

tourism in different ways (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015). In addition, recent statistics for Mexico show that social conditions, including discrimination, may be experienced differently by trans women and men (Conapred, 2019).

Interviews were conducted with participants residing in the metropolitan area of the State of Mexico (i.e. central Mexico), which ranks second in the entire country in cases involving homicides in the LGBT community (Mata, 2017). Eleven trans women were interviewed in 2019. The trans population is characteristically hidden in nature, so its members are difficult to reach (Rosser, Oakes, Bockting, & Miner, 2007). This characteristic was a challenge faced by this research, but a special effort was made to gather a sample that made theoretical saturation possible.

The final sample size was similar to those reported in previous qualitative research with trans people (i.e. from 5 to 15 informants) (Bianchi et al., 2014; Dispenza et al., 2012; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Molina et al., 2015; Olson & Reddy-Best, 2019; Zimman, 2009). The participants were recruited through snowballing due to this method's proven potential for reaching trans individuals. According to Ritchie, Lewis, and El am (2003):

> [S]nowballing is a particularly useful approach for dispersed and small populations, … [as well as] where the key selection criteria are characteristics which might not be widely disclosed by individuals or which are too sensitive for a screening interview. (p. 94)

An in-depth interview guide was developed that included 30 questions divided into four main domains: (1) sociodemographic profile, (2) sexuality and gender identity issues, (3) experiences in society and (4) travel motivations and tourism experiences. The sociodemographic items gathered information regarding participants' age, education, civil status and income, among other features. The sexuality and gender identity section included questions such as 'How do you prefer to be addressed by others?' and 'How do you present your gender to others in everyday life?' Examples of questions included in experiences within the society domain were 'How do you think your gender presentation impacts your daily life?' and 'What activities do you do during your free time?' Finally, the travel motivations and tourism experiences domain included varied items, including 'What motivates you to travel?' and 'What were your travel experiences like before your transition?'

The interviews were conducted in Spanish and took place in locations to which the informants agreed. These included hairstyling salons (i.e. as workplaces), cafes, restaurants, a flat and a university campus. The study's aims, structure and confidentiality were explicitly explained to the interviewees, who then gave their consent to participate and to be audio recorded. All interviews were done in person, lasting an average of 1 h.

5.4. Information analysis

Decrop (2004) reports that, by adopting investigator triangulation in tourism studies, personal biases in analysis and interpretation can be reduced. The data analysis was thus carried out by all three researchers. Each interview was conducted by two of the researchers and both commented on every session right after it ended. Then, each interview recording was analysed in detail by all three researchers independently. These individuals' comments were then compared and discussed, and the agreed-upon results were recorded in a previously prepared template under the main topics identified by Olson and Reddy-Best (2019). In addition, the data were allowed to 'talk' and reveal new emerging categories to explore in order to reflect the possible impacts of the study's specific economic and sociocultural context on transgender experiences.

5.5. Researchers' positionality

Positionality in studies is determined by where the researcher (i.e. outsider) stands in relation to 'the other' (i.e. insider) (Merriam et al., 2001). Because of positionality's potential influence on the present study, this aspect needed to be acknowledged throughout the research process. All the research team members are cisgender. While two researchers identify themselves as males and they were assigned a male gender at birth, the third researcher sees herself as a woman who was given a female gender at birth.

The two male researchers, who conducted the interviews, are members of the gay community, and this facilitated their access to the participants. To get involved in and become as knowledgeable as possible about the trans community, they participated in transgender-related talks, conferences, workshops and Facebook groups. This allowed them to assess – and gain a deeper understanding of – transgender issues.

The researchers' outsider role was an advantage to some extent. Merriam et al. (2001) claim that an outsider's advantage lies in his or her interest in the unfamiliar, the ability to ask taboo questions and a perceived non-alignment with subgroups, thereby often gaining access to more information. Given that both being an insider or being an outsider has its advantages, 'what an insider "sees" and "understands" will be different from, but as valid as[,] what an outsider understands' (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 415). Research that focuses on social stigma can be strengthened by an outsider position as this may provide a more holistic, contextualised perspective on the problem under study. For example, being an outsider may allow the researcher to challenge external negative representations of study populations more extensively (Wigginton & Setchell, 2016).

Possible bias derived from positionality can be considerably reduced through reflexivity. Bourke (2014) states that reflexivity involves self-scrutiny by the researchers, that is, a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the group under study. Killion and Fisher (2018) also suggest that researchers must reflect critically on possible bias particularly in interpretations of the information collected. To this end, the present researchers made a special effort to reflect constantly on their cisgendered self-concept, as well as how this might influence processes, representations and interview interpretations.

6. Findings

6.1. Participants' sociodemographic profile

The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 51 years old. Five participants worked mainly as hairstylists, and multiple simultaneous occupations such as dancer, athlete, student and saleswoman were also reported. Five interviewees had been involved in sex work. Low education levels were common in the sample as one individual had only attended elementary school, five had finished middle school and three had completed high school.

According to the participants, sex work is a quite recurrent occupation among trans women due to their low level of education and high levels of discrimination regarding job opportunities. The latter issue has been reported in the Mexican academic literature (Molina et al., 2015) and other contexts in Latin America (Lafaurie Villamil et al., 2011) and elsewhere (Sausa, Keatley, & Operario, 2007). Due to the type of work on which the interviewees depended, their income was variable. Six participants made on average under 6500 Mexican pesos a month (approximately 340 United States dollars).

Almost all the participants (number = 10) were single, but all of them had been in at least one relationship. Many relationships are kept secret due to social disapproval. As discussed below, this restriction probably has an impact on trans travel experiences. When asked about their gender identity, some participants self-identified as women and others as trans women and transvestites, but one individual did not

identify with any normative gender category. Most of them (number = 8) were heterosexual as they felt attracted to men, although bisexuality and homosexuality were also reported as sexual orientations. The majority (number = 7) had not changed their identification documents, and others intended to do so in the near future.

Body transformation was also common among the participants. Except for one (i.e. the youngest participant), all had taken hormones, while five had been injected with silicone in the breasts and/or buttocks and a few had gone through face surgery. According to Jordana,[1] 'we have been hyperfeminised and hypersexualised by society. The bigger your breasts and buttocks are, the better for you in society. If we get to look feminine enough, we reduce the risk of being killed.' Notably, body transformations may help trans women to go unnoticed in society, but adulterated injection silicon, in particular, exposes trans people to serious health risks (Wallace, 2010).

The participants' transition from a male to female gender was also explored. Gender transition is a process encompassing a 'declaration', which refers to the initial claiming of transgender identity, and 'disclosure', which refers to sharing the new identity after transitioning (Zimman, 2009). Most interviewees realised a dissonance existed between their assigned gender and true identity at an early age (i.e. declaration). Wearing female shoes, dresses and make up – but often hidden from others – was common among the participants during childhood. Viviana claimed, 'before revealing my true identity, I used to dress as a woman every Saturday night. I used to dress and put on makeup at a friend's house. . . . My family didn't know about it.'

For most interviewees, disclosure took place during adolescence. A few participants reported that declaration was a confusing, silent process, and disclosure was difficult and painful. The process sometimes involved family rejection. This result supports the conclusion that, while family can be considered a safe space to find acceptance, it can also be a stressful environment for trans individuals (Molina et al., 2015). Some participants also associated their suicidal ideation and attempts with family and social disapproval.

6.2. Contextualising trans travel experiences

All interviewees led a female gender-based life every day. Although a few were still referred to as male by family members and sometimes by unknown people, no participant reported switching over to a male gender since transition. This result reveals that, in their everyday environment, they are socially acknowledged as women. Their gender identity is recognised and legitimised by people with whom they socialise on a daily basis. This calls into question whether travel and tourism fulfils trans individuals' need for social recognition and gender identity, which has been reported as true of gay tourists (Hughes, 2002; Monterrubio, 2018) – an issue discussed further below.

The participants were asked whether they had been mistreated in public spaces due to their gender identity, both in their regular environments and on trips. Most interviewees denied being physically or verbally abused by others. The participants reported, however, often being the target of microaggressions such as whispering, staring, being misgendered or insulted (e.g. being called *puto* or *maricón*, which are derogatory terms for homosexual males in Mexico). Gender inflection is widely used in everyday Spanish in pronouns, nouns, adjectives and determiners (Nissen, 2002), which exposes Mexican trans women to more linguistic mistreatment.

Nonetheless, these aggressions, particularly verbal ones, were not considered violence by the interviewees. The participants had become accustomed to and had normalised these manifestations of interpersonal stigma, which, in their own words, were 'irrelevant'. Miranda said, 'when guys say bad things to me, I pretend I don't hear, I don't see. I pretend nothing happens. I ignore them.' Lorena shared, 'to me it is

now very normal to hear uncomfortable and offensive comments. I know how to deal with them.' This does not mean trans women are not mistreated, but the analysis revealed that many trans women are so used to these acts that abuse has been normalised and thus it is not perceived as hurtful.

The participants also reported experiencing discrimination and harassment. Some have felt discriminated against in stores, banks, hospitals and other public spaces in regular environments and tourism milieus. Some interviewees have encountered intolerant behaviours particularly in the use of public toilets, where they have been asked and even forced to use the men's toilet. Lorena related one such experience in a pub. 'Once I tried to get into the women's toilet. I was dressed as a woman, but they said I could not enter the female toilets because, in the end, I was a man, not a woman, they said.' The participants had concluded that being allowed to enter the women's toilet depended on being able to pass as a female.

Sexual harassment by cis men was also reported by the interviewees, but many of them concurred that cis women engage more often in violence and discrimination against trans women than cis men do. The participants also agreed that this harassment is due to how trans women have been largely stereotyped as sex workers. The interviewees further reported that other stereotypes see trans women as boisterous, rude and problematic.

6.3. Tourism motivations and constraints

The results reveal that trans women's push factors or motivations to travel and visit tourism destinations are quite similar to those reported for mainstream tourists (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). The participants reported travelling for basic reasons such as rest, relaxation and fun, as well as having a good time, bonding with family, socialising with friends, experiencing new places and different cultures and trying new food. In rare cases, holiday trips were taken to improve relationships with partners (Ryan, 2003).

In contrast with gay and lesbian tourists (Hughes, 2002; Pritchard et al., 2000), none of the participants reported travelling for sexual or gender identity purposes – that is to be a woman – or to socialise with other trans people. In addition, no interviewee said they travelled to escape from transphobia or cisgenderism.

With regard to pull factors, culture, nature and food were mentioned as relevant attributes when choosing destinations. Significantly, safety in destinations was quite specifically mentioned as a pull factor. All the participants declared that they would never visit destinations with a transphobic reputation. One particular place the interviewees avoided was Michoacán, in Western Mexico, which reportedly is one of the top five states with the highest rates of violence against LGBT people in the country (Mercado, 2009).

From the perspective of leisure constraints, intrapersonal constraints appear to be quite meaningful in trans women's travels. The participants reported the fear of being stigmatised, discriminated against or even murdered as the most significant constraints on their travel and tourism experiences. Twenty-four-year-old Lorena said, 'I don't travel because I'm afraid of being discriminated against. . . . I would never visit Michoacán because of the alleged discrimination and killing of trans women there. I am afraid of dying at this age.' Some of these women have resorted to negotiation strategies to find ways to travel. Their behavioural strategies appear to become especially effective when choosing trans tourism destinations. When they travel, the participants select places where freedom, acceptance, tolerance and safety for trans women are somehow guaranteed.

Family is, for many trans women, extremely important. Molina et al. (2015) observe that, although family disapproval and rejection are experienced by some trans people at the beginning of their gender transition process, their family continue to play a quite significant psychosocial role in their lives. The present study found evidence that trans tourism is often collective, and, for those participants who live

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants' anonymity.

with their family and friends, these companions are an important part of trips. None of the trans women interviewed reported travelling alone for tourism purposes, which contrasts with some cis women groups who are involved in solo travel (Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Little, 2008). Although trans women may travel alone for work, group trips are common in trans tourism. In particular, the present participants emphasised their need and desire to spend time and strengthen bonds with their mothers during trips.

The destinations selected and the interviewees' behaviours there differ when they are travelling with family or with friends. Travelling with family is characterised by more family-oriented activities such as sightseeing and experiencing quiet, relaxing environments. In contrast, trips with friends are more active as they tend to involve partying, drinking alcohol, going to nightclubs and, sometimes, finding romance and having sex. For some participants, travelling with friends was quite important as these trips have allowed them to feel part of a social group. Gisela, a 31-year-old who tried to commit suicide after her family rejected her choices, stated, 'my trips with friends have been quite memorable. They made me realise that I was not alone. They made me feel part of their group without necessarily sharing the same gender.'

The social disapproval of, and social stigma against, gender dissidence has led trans women to keep some aspects of their lives secret. Especially for those whose ability to pass as a woman is insufficient for them to go unnoticed, most of their affective relationships are kept quiet and out of the public's sight. According to social stigma theory, a fear of the consequences of not passing as a female during interpersonal encounters is one concern that trans people have (White Hughto et al., 2015). Thus, travelling with partners is an uncommon occurrence, except for those whose ability to pass as a woman is highly developed and the gender binarism of their relationships goes unquestioned. For those who keep their romantic relationships secret, travelling with their partners is practically an impossibility. Gisela, who has had relationships with 10 heterosexual men, explained it this way:

> The partners that I've had have been of the four-wall type [meaning her relationships have not been public, only within a room]. They [her partners] say their families and friends must not know we are a couple. They are heterosexual men who do not accept the fact that I am a trans woman. For them, I will always be a man in public society, so they have to keep me hidden.

6.4. Pre- and post-transition tourism experiences

A particularly important finding of this study was the interviewees' differentiation between tourism experiences pre- and post-transition. The research process showed that analysing experiences before transition helps clarify the significance of trans people's experiences with tourism. For participants, pre-transition travel was done in the male gender, so these trips did not pose any threat in terms of gender acceptance. Joanne acknowledged that:

> Travelling as a boy was normal, like any other person. I did not worry about people mistreating or discriminating against me in an unfamiliar place. Even as a gay boy, I never felt as vulnerable as I do now [as a trans woman]. I did not use to have problems when travelling as a boy.

While travelling in a 'male mode' protected trans women from being mistreated or discriminated, many felt uncomfortable playing a role with which they did not closely identify. Although some participants enjoyed travelling, others disliked taking trips as a male as this made them feel unhappy, strange and uncomfortable. A discordance was felt between the gender they had to pretend to be and their true identity. Gisela said, 'I had to pretend I was a boy, but inside I was a girl.' Abigail stated, 'travelling as a boy made me feel bad. I did not know how to wear clothes as a boy. I did not feel comfortable. It was not me.' Dana reported, 'I didn't like travelling as a boy. I used to feel strange.' Vania

asserted, 'before transition, I travelled to Europe, Asia and the USA, but there was nothing important in those trips and I didn't enjoy them because it wasn't me.'

Unlike pre-transition, post-transition travel was reported as comfortable, at least with regard to the interviewees' subjective being. After their transition, these trans women no longer need to hide who they truly are, and they are women on an everyday basis, including during leisure and tourism activities. Thus, evidence was found that post-transition travel is not important in the long term as an affirmation of trans individuals' gender identity, as Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) also report.

The present study's results reveal that the first times the participants travelled as women were of particular significance for gender affirmation. Vania, for example, has extremely significant, positive memories of the first time she travelled to the beach and showed her female body right after her transition. 'The most memorable experience I have had is the first time I went to the beach being myself, the first time I wore a bikini and wandered around the beach being myself.' Miranda, who has travelled abroad recently for sport competitions, cannot forget the first time she travelled to compete officially as a female. She recounts travelling to Las Vegas and Paris to compete in a football tournament and feeling how significant this was as the first time she had competed as an officially-identified woman in a female team. Abigail, in turn, related her own experience, including how important and memorable the first time she went on a trip as a woman with her family was. She said:

> The first time I travelled as a woman with my family, I felt free because I travelled being Abigail, being who I truly am. It was really beautiful because my family and I spent time together, talked and had a good time together. We had never done that before.

Subsequent travelling was not as significant for the trans women interviewed, at least in terms of their identity confirmation. Except for their first travel experiences as women, the participants did not associate memorable travel experiences with being trans women, and they did not report travelling as being important to their gender identity. For many, their most unforgettable trips had nothing to do with their gender transition. They recognised instead that travel and tourism had brought them benefits such as escaping from everyday routines, resting, relaxing, learning and bonding with family and friends. Due to restricted incomes, however, the interviewees did not travel for pleasure as frequently as they would have liked.

Travelling, especially abroad, brings these trans women social status, prestige, self-fulfilment and self-esteem. When asked about how travel benefits her as a woman, Miranda turned out to be one of the rare participants who had had the chance to travel abroad (i.e. due to sport achievements). She explained:

> I have succeeded as a trans woman athlete. . . . Travelling has made me mature, become more responsible about my own life. [I have] become more sensitive. I can now talk to different kinds of people. I value myself. Travelling has increased my self-esteem and made me love myself.

Jordana expressed pride in being a sex worker, and she continually travelled around the country to give speeches and workshops on gender and sexuality diversity. She asserted:

> Travelling to Europe has had an incredible impact on my family and my social environment. I get to experience other cultures. I value what I have. It has enriched me as an individual. . . . Travelling gives you a certain social value. It is absurd but travelling puts you on another social level. I don't know why but travelling has positioned me differently in social interactions.

As can be seen from the examples above, this study's findings suggest that tourism's benefits are not strongly associated with trans identities, at least in the ways tourism has reportedly done for gay and lesbian individuals (Hughes, 1997, 2002; Pritchard et al., 2000). Based

on the present research's results, travelling's benefits for trans women are quite similar to those perceived by cis travellers, such as personal transformation (Bruner, 1991) and social prestige (Riley, 1995).

6.5. Mistreatment and fear in travel

While the participants acknowledged travel benefits, social stigma clearly limited their opportunities. In addition, some interviewees reported negative tourism experiences. Mistreatment has ranged from being misgendered to sexual harassment and verbal and physical violence. As in their everyday environments, when travelling or engaging in leisure activities, trans women often must ignore people's whispering, staring and misgendering. However, the participants may react more strongly if they feel insulted, discriminated against or mistreated while on holiday.

A particular form of ill-treatment that these women have experienced during trips is discrimination due to the mismatch between their gender and official identification documents. When passengers were required to show official identification, the participants who had not yet changed their documents and still had male identification were questioned or they had difficulty gaining access to transport. For some, these experiences have been negatively meaningful. When asked about a memorable negative experience while travelling, Alondra, an escort who often travels throughout Mexico to provide sex services, recounted:

> Travelling by plane is quite uncomfortable. . . . It was six in the morning and I was at the airport heading to Cancun, and a female guard requested my identification, which by then was still assigned to a boy, and, the guard said, 'the ID belongs to a boy and what I see in front of me is a woman.' That bothered me a lot.

Evidently, those whose trans identity is visible are more exposed to overt discrimination in unfamiliar environments. Dana's physical and gender expressions have not been sufficiently congruent for her to pass unnoticed as a trans woman, which has made her a target for discrimination and violence. She described an experience during one of her recreational trips:

> My nieces and I were at a public pool, and one of the staff said to me, 'you cannot enter the pool because this area is just for men and women, not for you.' I told him that was discrimination.

She also related an unforgettable travel experience in which she and her co-workers were physically attacked. She used to work with a transvestite group and travel with them to different parts of the country. Once, after the show, they were attacked by a group of armed local men:

> The men brutally attacked my colleagues. . . . One of them grabbed and cut my hair with a knife. He cut part of my skin. I still have the scar, … and that was just for being trans.

A common negative experience during travel and leisure activities is related to the use of public toilets. Most of the trans women interviewed reported having been denied access to female toilets and requested to enter the males' side because, for some service providers, the participants are men, not women. Amanda recounted an experience during a trip this way:

> I tried to access the women's toilets, but they said, 'the men's toilets are over there.' I told them I could no enter the men's toilet dressed as a woman. In the end, they did not allow me to enter the women's [toilets].

Gisela reported that, at the gym she goes to, cis women do not always accept trans women in female toilets. She had a similar experience in a pub and realised that entering the male toilet could entail a risk for a trans woman. She stated, 'at pubs, drunk men can become rude and try to grab or touch you just because they see you are a trans woman.' This finding confirms that having to select a gendered toilet often

makes trans people feel somewhat uneasy (Chang & Chung, 2015). Experiencing uneasiness can be so uncomfortable that some trans people seek as much as possible to avoid using public toilets. For example, Joanne admitted that her gender passing is insufficient to go unnoticed as a trans woman and added, 'I avoid going into public toilets at all costs.'

In addition, trans women are exposed to sexual harassment when travelling. The participants reported that this harassment in the form of whistles, stares or verbal assault was not related to their trans identity but instead to being a woman. Vania expressed this most clearly. 'We are exposed to harassment to which all women, either trans or cis, are exposed to everyday. I have felt harassed when travelling. . . . Sexual harassment has been a negative experience for me.'

This finding corroborates Wilson and Little's (2008) conclusion that travel experiences and perceptions of fear are gendered and sexualised. Valentine (1989) developed the concept of 'the geography of women's fear', arguing that women use a number of avoidance strategies to deal with male violence in public spaces. This idea appears to apply not only to cis but also to trans women. When travelling, Jordana takes precautions. She is always alert and watchful of what is going on in her environment.

The fear of being discriminated against, mistreated, attacked or even murdered is an extremely significant constraint on some trans women's travel and tourism experiences. Avoiding travelling itself is an expression of the geography of women's fear. Vania, for instance, acknowledged the risks trans women are exposed to while travelling. As a result, she said, 'when travelling I try to be very cautious. I try to avoid dangerous places and situations. I completely avoid those situations in unfamiliar places.'

In cases like this, trans women's travel is dependent on negotiations of behavioural constraints. However, in more radical cases such as that of Joanne, constraints may become insurmountable obstacles to travel. Her classmates were planning a trip to celebrate their graduation from university. She would not travel with them because of the risks she perceives as a trans woman. She avoids travelling in general:

> I would like to travel, but I realise that things are not as easy as I used to believe. . . . I know travelling might mean losing my life. They are killing us, so we have to be very careful when deciding where to go. . . . I avoid travelling as much as I can.

7. Discussion

This study's findings are discussed below from two perspectives: trans people's motivations and experiences within LGBT tourism discussions and trans travel theory development. Regarding the former, the existing literature reveals that trans individuals' tourism experiences have been frequently included under the umbrella of LGBT tourism without appropriate differentiation (Southhall & Fallon, 2011). Social stigma has specific implications for the trans population, so the present research's results make an important contribution by providing empirical evidence of how trans women's travel motivations and tourism experiences are significantly different from those of gay and lesbian tourists. Trans women's tourism push factors (i.e. motivations) are related to resting, relaxing, socialising and bonding with family – similar to mainstream tourists' motivations (Ryan, 2003). However, trans women's most prominent pull factor is associated with safety in destinations.

Gay and lesbian travel motivations and tourism experiences (Hughes, 2002; Pritchard et al., 2000) include travelling to affirm a sexual identity, socialising with other gay and/or trans people or searching for gay and/or trans spaces. These aspects were not identified as relevant push factors in trans women's tourism. The need to escape from homophobia has also been found to be a significant motivational factor for gay men (Hughes, 1997, 2002). In trans tourism, neither transphobia nor cisgenderism are important push factors. Quite to the

contrary, manifestations of transphobia, whether subtle or violent, are among the factors contributing heavily to trans women's avoidance of travelling.

Hughes (1997) argues that, '[b]ecause of social disapproval of homosexuality, many gay men are forced to find gay space[s,] … and gays find it necessary to travel in order to enter that [kind of] space … to be gay' (p. 6). The present study found that gay and/or trans spaces are not significant in trans tourists' experiences and identities. Unlike gay and lesbian individuals who may need to hide their true identity in everyday environments, trans women – at least those discussed here – are acknowledged as women in their everyday life and thus enjoy a trans lifestyle in regular settings. For the participants, travel has little or nothing to do with their identities as trans women.

With regard to developing trans travel theory more fully, this research's findings build upon the quite recent pioneering work by Olson and Reddy-Best (2019). With this in mind, one of the current study's most valuable contributions is to refine the existing theoretical understanding of trans people's tourism and travel. The results strongly confirm Olson and Reddy-Best's (2019) first assertion that the fear of being discriminated against or even murdered is a significant tourism constraint for trans women. With reference to negotiations of travel constraints (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993), the present findings include that, due to intrapersonal barriers, trans women frequently avoid transphobic destinations. In other cases, these individuals' level of fear is so significant that travel in general is avoided at all costs. The results also indicate that visibly appearing to be trans women (i.e. a high risk of not passing as a female) can have a negative impact on travel experiences, such as limiting access to leisure spaces and toilets.

However, this study does not fully support Olson and Reddy-Best's (2019) second assertion that trans people can hide their gender identity in order to have uninterrupted travel and tourism experiences but at the cost of experiencing negative internal experiences. As stated previously, none of the participants interviewed for the current research regularly disguise their identity as they are women day and night and their gender expression is permanently female. Trans women may be unable or show no desire to switch genders, so these individuals are always exposed to their gender presentation's benefits and disadvantages.

Nonetheless, the results highlight the importance of distinguishing between pre- and post-transition travel experiences. Travelling before transition is not always pleasurable as presenting themselves as males means trans women must endure internal conflicts. Travelling after transition is more satisfactory as their gender presentation and identity fully match. The first post-transition travel experience, in particular, can be quite significant for trans women. For some, when they first ventured out of their everyday environment in an overtly female role remains an unforgettable experience.

In a third postulation, Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) assert that transgender identity may be positively impacted by the acceptance of, and interactions with, cis people while travelling. The present research did not find support for this assertion. As stated previously, the trans women interviewed lead a female life without interruptions. Trans women thus may seldom if ever travel for gender identity purposes. In their everyday lives and environments, these individuals are acknowledged and largely accepted as women, so they may not feel the need to search for spaces in which to be female. Trans women can be themselves every day, making travelling to affirm their identity as irrelevant as this would be for cis tourists.

8. Conclusion

This study sought to explore trans women's travel motivations and tourism experiences in a Mexican context. The findings thus contribute to expanding further the transgender travel theory developed by Olson and Reddy (2019). More specifically, the present research revealed that trans people's motivations and experiences are different from gay and lesbian tourists and confirmed that trans individuals report unique travel and tourism challenges, experiences and decision-making processes.

Trans people's tourism experiences have often been included under the umbrella of LGBT tourism, which ignores the complex differences between sexuality and gender and their implications for tourists' consumption patterns. Because of researchers' failure to differentiate between sexual diversity and gender identity, trans individuals' experiences have been largely misrepresented. Therefore, studies of trans people's tourism experiences must distinguish between gender- and sexuality-based experiences. Issues such as declaration and disclosure, gender identity and expression, cisgenderism, pre- and post-transition behaviours and gender-based stigma and discrimination all have unique implications for trans travel experiences.

This study's results have management implications because the findings are based on trans women's own voices. The participants were asked to give their opinions about research on trans people in tourism and suggestions for practical recommendations. The interviewees acknowledged the importance of considering trans people as a different group than gay and lesbian populations. They also agreed on the need for further academic research as a way to make trans people more visible.

As for practical recommendations, they said no special facilities are needed for trans people as differentiating services and facilities (e.g. toilets) would constitute another form of discrimination. They suggested instead that the travel and tourism industries should undergo sensitisation regarding gender issues. Joanne said, 'tourism organisations need to be sensitised about trans people so that [trans women] do not feel vulnerable or discriminated, [so they] can feel safe and [they] do not hesitate to travel.' Jordana also asserted, 'it is very important that the tourism sector – whether service providers, taxi drivers [or] airport and hotel staff – conduct transgender sensitising workshops. . . . Sensitisation is essential for trans people to feel safe … [to] travel.'

As with any research, this study was subject to limitations. Its findings, therefore, cannot be generalised to a broader population because of the limited number of participants. In addition, the research was designed to reflect that men and women experience tourism in different ways (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Kinnaird, Kothari, & Hall, 1994), so the data were collected exclusively from trans women. Consequently, this study's scope did not include trans men's experiences, which are essential for a broader understanding of transgender experiences and relationships in tourism.

As Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) openly acknowledge, their findings cannot be generalised to all gender dissident populations. This limitation is due not only to the number of participants but also, more importantly, to gender constructions that vary according to the social and cultural contexts in which they developed (Lamas, 2000). Olson and Reddy (2019) also report that trans individuals' travel and tourism experiences is still underresearched, leaving many areas to investigate within trans tourism gender and related travel behaviours. Thus, trans travel theory should not be regarded as fully developed but instead as an initial exploration that requires more empirical evidence and further expansion. Olson and Reddy (2019) assert that 'we have only begun to scratch the surface of the experiences of travelling as a transgender and gender non-conforming individual' (p. 260). Further research is needed on trans tourism experiences in different economic and sociocultural contexts and from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives in order to gain a broader and culture-based understanding of trans people's travel experiences.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgements

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