



# Even lovers need a holiday: Women's reflections of travel without their partners

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 27 August 2015

Received in revised form 1 November 2016

Accepted 6 November 2016

Available online xxxx

### Keywords:

Benefits of travel

Girlfriend getaways

Vacation satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction

## ABSTRACT

“Girlfriend’s getaways” have been said to potentially increase satisfaction with an individual’s leisure choices and potentially improve the couple’s relationship satisfaction (Durko & Petrick, 2015; Cavallari, 2008; Bond, 2008). This qualitative study sought to identify reasons women travel without their partners and what impact these vacations may have on their relationship and vacation satisfaction. Women traveled without their partners for several general reasons: female bonding, partner’s personal constraints, escape from daily routine, and a need for individuality. The vast majority of respondents believed that taking trips separate from their partner was a beneficial component of a healthy, romantic relationship. Nearly all were satisfied with the vacation taken without their partner, and would have been less satisfied if their partner had joined them. About two-thirds felt that their relationships were the same after the trip, while 31% believed the trip improved their relationships. Additionally relationships with travel companions were also enhanced. Marketing and operational implications for the tourism industry are offered.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism providers have noticed an increasing trend of individuals traveling without their spouses or significant others. This phenomenon includes “girlfriend getaways” (women traveling with other women) and “manacations” (men traveling with male friends). In 2008, AAA Worldwide Travel found that girlfriend getaways alone were a \$6 billion market. This trend has been attributed to women and men desiring to take part in vacation destinations and activities their partners may not enjoy (Bond, 2008). Practitioners in the field of travel have begun to build on this notion that joint travel may lead to satisfaction for only one individual of the dyad, and have recently started to examine the trend of couples traveling (as a means of leisure) without their significant other as means to increase vacation and relationship satisfaction (Durko & Petrick, 2015; Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012). Industry coined “girlfriend’s getaways” and “manacations,” are noted by some as a means to potentially increase satisfaction with an individual’s leisure choices as well as potentially leading to increases in the couple’s relationships satisfaction (Bond, 2008; Cavallari, 2008). Many destinations (e.g. and travel providers (e.g. JetBlue Airlines) feature girlfriend getaway itineraries or vacation deals on their websites, while the website [girlfriendsgetaways.com](http://girlfriendsgetaways.com) is solely dedicated to travel with female friends.

All-women escapes have also been mentioned in popular media such as *What Happy Women Do* (Bruess & Kudak, 2010) and are the complete focus of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Girlfriend Getaways* (Kasanicky, 2009). Additionally, industry magazines from *Midwest Living* to *Travel + Leisure*, and even the *Economic Times of India* have dedicated articles to the subject. While many articles focus on destinations, some suggest reasons to take a girlfriend getaway include: friends keep you healthy, reconnecting with your pre-mom self, new experiences, and free therapy from friends (Yorio, 2010). Manske (2013), writing in *Woman’s Day*, provided anecdotes of how girlfriend getaways can be energizing, empowering, and even healing, as women share time away from daily responsibilities, and how these trips can give women a sense of fulfillment and make them better mothers.

In 1982, the rock band Chicago sang, ‘even lovers need a holiday, far away from each other.’ This may allude to the notion of girlfriend getaways to meet this need. Bond’s (2008) research found that the majority of those partaking in the girlfriend getaways were married women (73%), with children under 18 (88%). Girlfriend getaways, defined as all-women based leisure travel (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013), is a common example, but travel without a spouse may also include travel with friends, coworkers, family members, and children. While the term “girlfriend getaways” is used frequently by popular media and travel providers, it must be noted that the term should be used with caution because the use of “girl” may not be appropriate to refer to adult women. Because of the prevalence of the term “girlfriend getaways” in the travel industry, it is used here.

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While previous research has considered motives and outcomes of “girlfriend getaways,” (Berdychesky et al., 2013; Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015), this study considers the impact the vacation may have on relationships and the overall vacation satisfaction outcome. It is possible that traveling without a significant other could make one value their relationship and time spent together that much more. It is also possible that the non-traveling partner forms resentment and/or mistrust in the relationship for not being included. This study seeks to begin to understand how travel without one's significant other contributes to perceived vacation and relationship satisfaction from the perspective of the traveling partner.

## 2. Review of literature

Several research studies have found that shared leisure leads to increases in relationship satisfaction (Durko & Petrick, 2013; Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Johnson, Zabriskie, & Hill, 2006; Newman & Newman, 2008). Additionally, studies have cited ‘travel’ as a leisure activity which provides a break from the mundane, fast-paced routine way of life, and may lead to increases in quality of life (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012; de Bloom et al., 2010). Thus, both shared leisure and vacation may positively impact relationship satisfaction.

For many people, daily routines include duties to family, career and partner. In relationships, individuals may have different likes/dislikes in terms of leisure activities, friends, and travel styles. A source of relationship discord has been attributed to a loss of individualism when personal preferences are not considered or met by a partner (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007). A longitudinal study of marriages in America conducted in 1980 and again in 2000, found a significant decrease in the amount of time couples spent together over the course of the 20 year study (Amato & Previti, 2003). This was attributed to demanding career responsibilities for both partners and an increasing need for independence over the course of a relationship. Amato and Previti (2003) found that couples who were satisfied in their relationships cited the importance of time apart as a contributing factor to this satisfaction. Thus, individual travel away from a significant other may be offered as a suggestion to increase relationship satisfaction, as it may give the individual an opportunity to escape the everyday routine, participate in their preferred leisure activities, and enjoy the camaraderie of others outside of their relationships.

Recently, academic researchers have begun to investigate the trend of girlfriend getaways from various perspectives. Berdychesky et al. (2013) used a constructivist grounded-theory approach in an investigation of girlfriend getaways and well-being. They concluded that escapism, different gender dynamics, existential authenticity, and empowerment, were the four “domains” that led to well-being as a result of traveling with other females. Their research, guided by feminist theory, included questions about travel as well as questions considering women's role in society. In a related paper, Gibson et al. (2012) considered these getaways in reference to the four life stages of women (adolescence, early/middle/late adulthood). Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015) considered girlfriend getaways in Malaysia, concluding that, although the sample was homogeneous in its demographic characteristics, it was heterogeneous in its accommodation and service preferences. Their study was split between single (45%) and married (44%) women, but it was not clear whether or not they were partnered or married. Motives for girlfriend getaways have also been found to have a heavy focus on female bonding time (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2015) and relaxation and/or excitement with girlfriends (Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2001).

A comprehensive tourism literature review by Durko and Petrick (2013) revealed travel may contribute to positive increases in adult and family relationships, which in turn can contribute to increases in satisfaction with life. Furthermore, a study by Durko and Petrick (2015) found individuals traveling without their significant other had higher levels of vacation satisfaction than those traveling without their partner or children. The current study sought to understand the

activities occurring during these vacations without a partner, to explain how these activities may be contributing to high levels of vacation satisfaction. The current study also furthered the previous research by questioning if travel without one's partner had an effect on the overall relationship.

### 2.1. Relationship satisfaction

Satisfaction, in general, is a measure of expectations across a variety of situations. As individuals, we contrive our own acceptable experience outcome level and base our satisfaction on whether a product, service or person meets or exceeds such acceptable standards. These acceptable outcomes are noted as a comparison level of which we base our experiences (Le & Agnew, 2003). When outcomes surpass our comparison level, we are typically satisfied. When outcomes are less than our self-contrived comparison level, satisfaction is generally negative or unmet.

Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) stated that satisfaction is one of the most essential components to remaining committed to a relationship. Additionally, a meta-analysis conducted by Le and Agnew (2003) found satisfaction was the strongest indicator of commitment to a relationship. Thus, when a relationship exceeds expectations, relationship satisfaction is assumed and expected. However, when a relationship does not meet a self-determined satisfaction level, relationship satisfaction is not achieved, and likely the commitment level is not strong.

Relationship satisfaction has also been defined as favorability that individuals report with their significant other (Roach, Frazier, & Bowden, 1981), and it is often a self-report interpretation of the quality of the respondent's relationship and their overall happiness with the relationship. Relationship satisfaction includes the positive and negative affects an individual experiences in a relationship, and is an indicator of how well a partner fulfills a variety of an individual's needs.

Aside from the direct economic impacts benefitting the tourism industry, trips taken without one's significant other may benefit the individual and their relationship. These vacations have been proposed as a means to potentially increase satisfaction with an individual's leisure choices as well as potentially leading to increases in the couple's relationship satisfaction (Bond, 2008; Cavallari, 2008; Durko & Petrick, 2015). Travel without one's partner has been found to lead to slight increases in relationship satisfaction on behalf of the traveling partner (Durko & Petrick, 2015). However, there is the potential that travel without one's partner may lead to satisfaction for only one individual of the dyad. Thus, there may be potential negative impacts, as it is possible the non-traveling partner may form resentment and/or mistrust in the relationship for not being included. The current study provided further research in this specific realm.

### 2.2. Vacation satisfaction

Research has categorized vacation satisfaction as an affective emotional post purchase evaluation and a cognitive response to an experience (Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1985; Oliver, 1993). Lounsbury and Hoopes (1985) were among the first researchers in the field of tourism to acknowledge a need for measuring vacation satisfaction to determine the psychological and individual benefits a vacation might provide. Their work included the notion that vacation satisfaction was a result of the actual experience, to include where the vacation was and how long it lasted. However, they further expanded on this to also consider an individual's satisfaction with job, family and spouse as causal factors or antecedents of vacation satisfaction, thus considering affective and cognitive factors be included to determine overall satisfaction.

Past research has shown that travel party companions may also have an effect on the evaluations people make regarding their satisfaction with a vacation (Newman & Newman, 2008; Kozak & Duman, 2012). A study of 466 international leisure travelers in the Netherlands concluded that attitudes toward the travel party and stress associated with the actual act of travel were the most important determinants of

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