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## Gender and empowerment: assessing discrepancies using the resident empowerment through tourism scale

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### ABSTRACT

While gender equality and empowerment are core components of sustainable tourism, most of the literature has approached the concepts from qualitative perspectives, thus limiting the ability to empirically test for empowerment discrepancies between men and women. With this gap in mind, this study sought to test the widely held notion that empowerment discrepancies exist between men and women in tourism development. Discrepancies in psychological, social and political empowerment were tested for using the 12-item Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS). The RETS was administered across five sample populations, with results revealing that gender discrepancies were present, but surprisingly, not in the direction suggested in previous literature. In all three US samples, there was evidence that women were more likely to perceive themselves being empowered than men. The results from the two Japanese samples did not find any significant differences, which is of interest because Japan is traditionally seen a very patriarchal society. Applications of the RETS can be paired with qualitative research to better understand empowerment success stories and then to apply these best practices to other destinations where empowerment discrepancies are present. Future applications of the RETS are suggested to help initiate “gender mainstreaming” within the sustainable tourism literature.

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### KEYWORDS

Empowerment; gender equality; sustainable tourism; sustainable development; sustainability; resident empowerment through tourism scale (RETS)

## Introduction

The international attention that gender equality and women’s empowerment are 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 for tourism, but also for many internationally endorsed development goals. In alignment with the MDG3 “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 empowerment between men and women within tourism development. The sustainable tourism literature is full of articles investigating the roles of women in tourism and their access to power (Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 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 specific communities, but it has yet to manifest itself in a more widespread, quantitative evaluation of men and women's 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 multifaceted construct with psychological, social, political, environmental and economic components (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Friedmann, 1992; Rappaport, 1984; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). Treating empowerment as multidimensional allows researchers to dig down deep into not only the overarching power structures within communities (*political empowerment*) but also to 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 multidimensional approach allows them to be identified at the dimensional level and it provides tourism officials with a clear picture of where to allocate resource to help remedy any discrepancies in perceived empowerment.

With these gaps in mind, this study's purpose is to examine perceived psychological, social and political empowerment<sup>1</sup> differences and similarities between men and women across five unique sample populations (three rural counties in Virginia, USA, and two distinct cultural groups in Oizumi, Japan) using the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) recently developed by Boley and McGehee (2014). The multiple samples not only provide the opportunity to examine discrepancies across multiple sites, but they also provide the opportunity 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 United States, more collectively focused, more masculine, less tolerant of uncertainty and less indulgent than the United States (see Hofstede, 2016, for more specifics). If significant gaps exist between men and women on their perceptions of empowerment, the RETS should be able to identify the gaps, on which dimensions of empowerment the gaps are located, as well as differences across specific items.

Findings from this study have implications for both practitioners and academics, because up to this point, a way to quantitatively evaluate perceptions of empowerment across genders has not existed. For practitioners, the application of the RETS provides them with the ability to identify specific problem areas where men and women are empowered differently, and it allows them to make changes in marketing and management plans accordingly. If problem areas are identified and strategies developed to alleviate the identified empowerment gaps, the RETS can help practitioners to track the success of initiatives targeted at empowerment and to see if their strategies are achieving the desired results. For academics, the study provides an 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 & Alarcón, 2014; Ling et al., 2013; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). However, these imbalances have yet to be investigated using large-scale quantitative research. Perhaps, perceptions of gender disempowerment are not as widespread as originally thought, especially

as there are real success stories 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. These success stories could provide the needed insight into how to address identified discrepancies within other tourism destinations.

## Literature review

### *Gendered scholarship in tourism*

Swain (1995) draws temporal parallels between the historical gender scholarship in tourism and the timeline of gender and leisure scholarship proposed by Henderson (1994). Considering the period of time between 1940 and 1980, Swain (1995), Henderson (1994) and Evans (1990) identify a time where women were once invisible in the literature. From this initial invisibility, gendered research in leisure and tourism evolved in the 1970s to be compensatory, where the notion was "add women and stir" and with the typical recognition of women being in a separate section or chapter (Andersen & Hysock, 1993; Kelly, 1978; Witt & Goodale, 1981), or with their contribution being acknowledged in the context of family leisure or under the topic of leisure and sexual behavior (Lonardo, 1972; Quist, 1972). Shortly thereafter, dichotomous differences between genders in their travel attitudes and behaviors were examined but not without contention, because gendered averages of attitudes toward travel or travel behavior potentially hide the true nature of ranges and overlaps in gendered responses (Evans, 1990; Henderson, 1994; Rhode, 1990). From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, attention was diverted from identifying mere differences in travel preferences and behaviors between genders to identifying disparities between men and women in all aspects of life, with a specific focus on remedying problematic discrepancies in tourism, such as access and rights to participate and empowerment issues (Gibson, 2001; Pritchard & Morgan 2000; Schevyens, 2000). The focus on gender disparities and how to address them was largely driven by international efforts, such as the 1995 United National World Conference on Women in Beijing and the establishment of the MDG3 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 was the popularization of a feminist gender approach in tourism studies that attempted to understand women's experiences and attitudes which were irrelevant in 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 in residents' perceptions of control over tourism development and in their subsequent political support for tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010).

### *Theoretical approaches to gender and tourism research*

This past gendered tourism scholarship has fallen under a variety of epistemological approaches that all try to explain what Kinnaird and Hall (1996, p. 100) refer to as "the gender complexities of tourism, and the power relations they involve". On one side of the continuum has been liberal and postcolonial feminist scholars exploring social reproductive phenomena from the experiences of women and seeking to understand the processes, such as patriarchy, colonialism and racism, affecting women's

agency to choose their role in social reproductive processes (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Vargas, 1992). On the other side of the continuum has been a Marxist feminist focus on women's role in the division of labor within capitalism and an emphasis on the importance of women's "power over material resources and institutions" (Duffy et al., 2015, p.74; Gibson 2001). Situated between these two positions are those who have embraced a political economic approach to studying gender in tourism. According to Nunkoo et al. (2012, p. 1540), this type of political economic approach "begins with the political nature of decision-making and is concerned with how politics affects choices in a society" (Nunkoo et al., 2012). Examples of this political economic approach include looking at how tourism has been woven into national poverty reduction programs – as demonstrated by Ferguson (2010) – and how potential gender discrepancies in perceived behavioral control over tourism develop could influence residents' support for tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Poststructuralist analyses have also been applied to understanding the patriarchal construction of tourism processes, such as marketing the destination for the benefit of the "heterosexual male gaze" (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000, p. 886). Similarly, through a patriarchal capitalism lens, the division of labor within tourism economies has been examined to see how well it conforms to traditional gender roles (Gibson, 2001). It has been found that women participating in agritourism in Galicia and Catalonia, Spain, were largely responsible for cooking and cleaning for the guests with an average 8.5 hours spent on tourism-related tasks. Thus, the women had a hard time distinguishing between tourism-related activities and their everyday domestic duties, thereby reinforcing the macrostructure of traditional gender roles through agritourism. However, when interviewed, the women described agritourism's potential to increase economic empowerment in their everyday lives at a microscale (Garcia-Ramon, Canoves, & Valdovino, 1995). Gentry (2007) discovered a similar phenomenon in her research on Belizean women working in tourism. While on the surface it looked like tourism was reinforcing gender-based segregation and the "housewifization of labor", some women were able to use these stereotypes as a means to start their own guest houses and restaurants, providing an opportunity to break away from the "economic-sexual cycle" in which they were previously entrenched (Gentry, 2007, p. 491). These examples provide credence for not solely relying on "macrostructural theories" to understand women's roles in the tourism industry (Gibson 2001), but to also conduct nuanced site-specific research that examines gender issues at a microscale to see how men or women perceive themselves being impacted by tourism development.

## **Empowerment**

A common thread between these theoretical approaches to understanding gender in tourism 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 for 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". Within the sustainable tourism literature, this overarching definition of empowerment has been partitioned into multiple dimensions (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). 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). Others, such as Sofield (2003) in his monograph on "Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism Development" in the South Pacific, have honed in specifically on the social and political dimensions of empowerment. 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 for 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*), and with a final tourism product that the residents are proud of sharing with visitors (*psychological empowerment*) and that sustains 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 literature review will narrow next to only include discussion of these three dimensions and their relationships to gender research in tourism.

### ***Psychological empowerment***

The psychological dimension of empowerment focuses on the capacity of tourism development to either build up residents' pride and self-esteem or to undermine it by making residents feel inferior (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). Its positive tenets of enhanced pride, self-esteem, and feelings of uniqueness stem from the travel of tourists to one's community to specifically see and experience the innate natural and cultural features of his or her community. The attention brought by tourism ideally leads to a sense of specialness because people have traveled from around the world to see what their community has to offer. Boley and McGehee (2014, p. 87) describe the phenomenon as enhancing self-esteem because residents "feel special and believe they have important skills and resources to share with visitors". Di Castri (2004, p. 52) frames it around the pride and self-esteem gained from residents re-evaluating "the universal value of their culture and environment". Psychological disempowerment, on the other hand, occurs when tourism development strips the community of its specialness resulting in residents no longer feeling unique or having anything of importance to share with visitors. It can also result in residents being embarrassed and wanting to disassociate with their community.

Given psychological empowerment has only recently been operationalized within a measurement scale, few tourism studies have been able to directly investigate if disparities between genders exist. Similar research has found the pride and self-esteem associated with psychological empowerment to be one of the most important non-economic benefits of tourism (Besculides, Lee & McCormick, 2002; Medina, 2003; Stronza & Gorillo, 2008), but the evaluation of this pride and self-esteem has yet to be broken down by genders. Gentry (2007) and Moswete and Lacey (2014) have touched on tourism development's potential to increase the self-esteem and confidence of women, but with the innate personal and subjective nature of psychological empowerment, perceptions of this form of empowerment likely depend on the type of tourism product offered within the destination and how closely women or men are tied to the production and consumption of the tourism product (i.e. meal production, guiding, interpretation, handicrafts, etc.).

### ***Social empowerment***

Social empowerment hones empowerment's focus on to the relationships between community members and how tourism development affects the community's cohesion and ability to collaborate (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). Scheyvens (1999) describes



social empowerment in terms of an enhanced community equilibrium, with residents feeling more connected and beginning to work together. It, in essence, looks at the potential for tourism development to either bring a community together or tear it apart. The antithesis of social empowerment is tourism development's well-documented power to create tension within a community and effectively splinter it around issues of greed, jealousy and unequal distribution of tourism's positive and negative impacts. Stronza and Gordillo's (2008) research in the Amazon attributes these community fissures to issues stemming from dissipating cooperation, community members being taken advantage of by tourism development enterprises, and some community members "buying" themselves out of traditional community obligations.

While disparities in social empowerment by gender have yet to be investigated quantitatively, qualitative research on the topic is well established along with the extant findings concerning other socio-demographic variables (Moswete & Lacey, 2014; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Sofield, 2003). Pertaining to the discrepancies on other socio-demographic variables, Ramos and Prideaux (2014) found tourism development to socially disempower the Mayan community of El Naranjo because the younger generation sought to develop a greater level of engagement in ecotourism while the older generation was more hesitant to engage in ecotourism. An example of positive social empowerment for women comes from Peterson's (2014) research within a rural fishing village in Baja California Sur, Mexico. She found that a group of women created the Hijas del mar cooperative 10 years ago by having initially sold popsicles. Today, with local, regional and international support, they are a cooperative that sells tropical fish and other marine products (Peterson, 2014). Another positive example of social empowerment comes from Moswete and Lacey's (2014) research in Botswana where they found employment in tourism increased social connections with outsiders and encouraged better lifestyle choices. Tourism development's potential to either foster collaboration or splinter a community makes for the need to further investigate perceptions of social empowerment by gender, to see if differences emerge and, if they do, to be able to develop strategies to address discrepancies.

### **Political empowerment**

Political empowerment is the dimension of empowerment most often described in articles that take a unidimensional approach to addressing power relations within tourism development (Madrigal, 1993; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). It is also the dimension of empowerment which most closely resembles the overarching notion of residents "gaining mastery of their affairs" within the parent psychology literature on empowerment (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Political empowerment surpasses the community participation literature's emphasis on mere inclusion to focus on residents having agency over tourism development within their communities (Scheyvens, 1999). It is in essence, the top rung of Arnstein's (1969) citizen participation ladder because of its emphasis on moving beyond nonparticipation (bottom rung) and degrees of tokenism (middle rung), such as informing and consulting, to ultimate citizen control at the top. Cole (2006, p. 631) describes this dimension of empowerment as the "top end of the participation ladder where members of a community are active agents of change and they have the ability to find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement actions".

Even though not directly called "political empowerment", much of the research on gender and empowerment within the sustainable tourism literature has focused on the channels of access women have or do not have to positions of power (Duffy et al., 2015; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Ling et al., 2013; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). One example of a political empowerment success story is from Moswete and Lacey's (2014) qualitative study in Botswana that examined women's perceptions of empowerment after a government-sponsored initiative was implemented to foster entrepreneurship through cultural tourism centered on cottage craft industries. When the women's participation in the tourism industry advanced beyond mere passive involvement to active participation and ownership, it revealed not only positive political empowerment but other benefits, such as freedom from economic dependency on men and freedom from familial obligations. It is noted by the authors that empowerment barriers still remain in Botswana, with women having a lack

of capital to start businesses, limited opportunities for higher education and low potential earnings in tourism (Moswete & Lacey, 2014).

With the past literature on gender and tourism reviewed and the three dimensions of the RETS presented, the paper will now seize the opportunity to quantitatively test for gender disparities in perceived psychological, social and political empowerment.

## Methods

### *USA samples: Botetourt, Floyd and Franklin Counties, VA, USA*

These research sites consisted of Botetourt, Floyd and Franklin Counties, VA, USA. The three counties were chosen based upon their similarities in tourism product (all located along the Blue Ridge Parkway), similar per capita tourism expenditures (\$1400–\$1600 per resident) and unemployment levels around 6% in 2012. While all three counties are located in close proximity to one another along the Blue Ridge Parkway, differences in tourism offerings help distinguish one from the others. Botetourt County's (population 33,154) tourism contributes \$1.4 million in local tax receipts and includes tourism offerings of wineries, a canoe trail down the state recognized scenic James River, Civil War heritage sites and the town of Fincastle, which served as the capital of the western frontier during British Colonial times (VATC, 2014). Tourism in Floyd County (population 15,390) brings in \$639,000 in local tax receipts and is largely centered around the town of Floyd's vibrant musical heritage, which includes a weekly "Friday Night Jamboree" at the Floyd Country Store where locals and tourists gather to listen to the region's bluegrass music (VATC, 2014). Franklin County's (population 56,411) tourism brings in \$2.7 million in local tax receipts and its two primary attractions are Smith Mountain Lake in the eastern portion of the county and its moonshine heritage, which has spurred Hollywood movies, popular press books and recent reality television shows (VATC, 2014).

The RETS was administered to residents of Botetourt, Floyd and Franklin Counties using a self-administered, door-to-door, pen-and-paper questionnaire that implemented a census-guided systematic random sampling scheme commonly used within resident attitude research (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Perdue, et al., 1990; Woosnam, 2012; Woosnam & Norman, 2010). Questionnaires were distributed to residents by the primary investigator between February and April 2013, starting with Floyd County and then moving to Franklin and Botetourt Counties. Throughout the six-week period of data collection, 1780 households were visited with 984 eligible individuals answering the door, resulting in a total of 703 usable surveys completed. In Floyd County, 233 usable surveys were obtained and included in the analysis from 328 eligible residents, for a response rate of 71%. In Botetourt County, 241 usable surveys were obtained and included in the analysis from 328 eligible residents, for a response rate of 73%. In Franklin County, 229 usable surveys were obtained and included in the analysis from 328 eligible residents, for a response rate of 69%. The breakdown in responses between men and women in Floyd County was 48.5%–51.5% and 50.9%–49.1% in Franklin County, and 47.1%–52.9 in Botetourt County (Table 1). The average age of respondents for all three counties was in the range of 56–60 years. Education levels varied slightly between the three counties with 38% of Botetourt County residents having completed a four-year college degree compared to 27% of Floyd County residents and 26% of Franklin County residents (Table 1).

### *Japanese samples: Brazilian and Japanese residents of Oizumi, Japan*

Oizumi in Gunma prefecture, Japan, is approximately 110 km northwest of Tokyo and roughly 18 km<sup>2</sup> in size. The town has introduced "ethnic enclave tourism" to revitalize its economy (Boley et al., 2015). 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, 3678 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



**Table 1.** Gender, education, and age breakdown by sample.

Variable <sup>a</sup>	Botetourt County		Floyd County		Franklin County		Japanese residents		Brazilian residents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender										
Male	113	47.1	112	48.5	116	50.9	225	49.3	79	45.4
Female	127	52.9	119	51.5	112	49.1	219	50.7	95	54.6
Education										
Less than high school	2	0.8	13	5.7	8	3.5	232	53.2	44	26.1
High School or GED	49	20.5	70	30.6	64	28.2	62	14.2	68	40.2
Technical, vocational or trade school	13	5.4	18	7.9	14	6.2	51	11.7	13	7.7
Some college (includes junior college)	85	35.6	67	29.3	83	36.6	—	—	—	—
4-year college	54	22.6	37	16.2	35	15.4	13	3	30	17.8
Master's degree	27	11.3	20	8.7	21	9.3	—	—	—	—
Ph.D/Professional degree	9	3.8	4	1.7	2	0.9	0	0	1	0.6
Age (mean)	55.6 years		60.0 years		56.5 years		53.7 years		41.7 years	

<sup>a</sup>Other socio-demographic variables such as income and ethnicity were not included because they were not equivalent for comparison.

2007, the chamber of commerce in Oizumi created the tourism bureau and identified Brazilian culture as a primary asset by which to attract tourists. As such, several events to celebrate Brazilian culture have been organized, including “Gourmet Yokochō”, a monthly street food festival held every fourth Sunday along Oizumi’s main street, and an annual samba festival where several samba teams from different parts of Japan compete for prizes. According to the data from the Bureau of Statistics in Gunma prefecture, 204,200 tourists visited the town in 2013.

Following an identical sampling strategy as with the three Virginia samples, data concerning the RETS were collected from Brazilian and Japanese residents living in Oizumi between November 2013 and June 2014. Residents were intercepted at their homes and asked to complete a self-administered survey instrument. In total, 5566 households were visited by the research team, while no one answered the door at 4012 homes. At the remaining 1554 homes, 650 surveys were completed for a response rate of 42% (i.e. 467 completed by Japanese residents and 183 completed by Brazilian residents). The breakdown between men and women among Japanese residents was 49.3% men to 50.7% women and 45.4% men to 54.6% women among Brazilian residents sampled (Table 1). The average age of the Japanese resident sample was 54 years old compared to the younger Brazilian sample (42 years old). In addition to being younger, the Brazilian sample was more educated, with 18% having a completed a four-year college degree, compared to only 3% of the Japanese residents.

### Measures and data analysis

The main focus of this study was to examine the disparities in levels of resident empowerment between males and females. The authors adopted 12 items from the RETS developed by Boley and McGehee (2014) and internationally validated in Japan by Boley, Maruyama, and Woosnam (2015). Twelve items comprised the three factors, including psychological empowerment (five items), social empowerment (three items), and political empowerment<sup>2</sup> (four items). Within the Japanese sample, all items were translated initially from English to Japanese, and then, from Japanese back to English by different translators (back translation) to ensure translational/linguistic equivalence (Brislin, 1970; Malhotra, Kgarwal, & Peterson, 1996). Respondents in the Virginia samples were asked to rate their perceptions of empowerment on a 1–5 scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The Japanese sample was asked to rate their perception of empowerment by using a 7-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree on each continuum. In addition to the RETS, residents were asked questions concerning socio-demographic information (e.g. gender, age, education, annual household income and length of residency).

Even though the RETS’ reliability and validity have already been validated through Boley and McGehee’s (2014) and Boley et al.’s (2015) studies, these studies did not perform confirmatory factor

analyses (CFAs) on the individual samples. With this in mind, five separate CFAs were performed using EQS v6.2 to ensure the RETS' reliability and validity within each of the five samples of interest. To test for significant differences between men and women across the dimensions of psychological, social and political empowerment, independent samples *t*-tests were performed in SPSS for each of the five samples. The criteria for significant differences between men and women were set at the significance level of 0.05 based on the recommendations of Green and Salkind (2011) and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010).

## Results

### *Confirmatory factor analysis*

Prior to examining differences in perceptions of empowerment between men and women, each sample was independently subjected to CFA in order to test for the reliability and validity of the RETS across the five samples (Table 2). Knowing that three factors have resulted from previous analysis concerning the RETS (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014), a three-factor solution was examined by adding each factor to the model incrementally using LaGrange multiplier (LM) tests as suggested by Kline (2011). Ultimately, after five iterations of LM tests, 9–14 error parameters<sup>3</sup> (i.e. 9 error co-variances and 2 cross-loading items) were identified and added to the “ideal model” (i.e. perfect absolute and incremental model fit indices).

To then address each error term, Wald tests were requested to trim the model by not affecting the  $\Delta\chi^2/\text{df}$  standard critical value of 3.84 established by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). As such, each of the 9–14 error parameters<sup>3</sup> was safely removed so as to not exceed the threshold.

For the three US-based samples of Botetourt County, Floyd County and Franklin County and the two samples (Japanese and Brazilian), the same three-factor structure (i.e. psychological, social and political empowerment) of the RETS resulted as had been presented previously in the literature by Boley and McGehee (2014) and Boley, et al. (2015). All measures of model fit were acceptable and well within the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010). Specifically, all comparative fit indices (CFI) were above 0.90 and all root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) scores were below the level of 0.08, indicating good model fit. In addition to having good model fit, the construct validity of the RETS was confirmed with standard regression coefficients all above 0.5 and with maximal weighted alphas (MWAs) above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). MWAs were included instead of Cronbach's alphas because they are a more robust estimate of internal consistency (Kline, 2011). See Table 2 for resulting factor structure, standardized factor loadings, reliability coefficients and model fit statistics.

### *Independent sample t-tests*

The results of the 73 independent samples *t*-tests across the five samples revealed that significant differences did exist between genders on perceptions of psychological, social and political empowerment from tourism. These differences were all within the US samples and revealed that across these five samples, women perceived themselves as either equally empowered by tourism to men or more empowered. The *t*-tests did not reveal any significant differences between men and women in either the Brazilian or Japanese samples from Oizumi, Japan (Table 3).

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. Women's perceptions of empowerment were specifically higher than men on the items of “Tourism in Floyd County makes me proud to be a Floyd County Resident” ( $3.92 > 3.61$ ;  $t = 2.58$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), “Tourism in Floyd County fosters a sense of ‘community spirit’ within me” ( $3.41 > 3.13$ ;  $t = 2.11$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), “Tourism in Floyd County provides ways for me to get involved in my community” ( $3.34 > 2.93$ ;  $t = 2.95$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and “I feel like I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in Floyd County” ( $2.87 > 2.53$ ;

Table 2. CFA of RETS across five sample populations.

Factors and corresponding items	Botetourt County <sup>c</sup>			United States (VA) <sup>a</sup>			Franklin County <sup>e</sup>			Japanese sample <sup>f</sup>			Japan (Oizumi) <sup>b</sup>			Brazilian sample <sup>g</sup>		
	R	MWA		R	MWA		R	MWA		R	MWA		R	MWA		R	MWA	
<b>Psychological empowerment</b> <i>Tourism in [ ]<sup>h</sup> ...</i>		<b>0.87</b>			<b>0.92</b>			<b>0.91</b>			<b>0.90</b>			<b>0.90</b>			<b>0.94</b>	
...makes me proud to be [ ] resident.	0.71			0.80			0.78			0.85			0.87			0.87		
...makes me feel special because people travel to see my area's unique features	0.68			0.88			0.83			0.82			0.86			0.86		
...make me want to tell others about what we have to offer in [ ].	0.83			0.87			0.88			0.77			0.85			0.85		
...reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors	0.74			0.80			0.77			0.75			0.86			0.86		
...makes me want to work to keep [ ] special.	0.77			0.73			0.81			0.74			0.86			0.86		
<b>Social empowerment</b> <i>Tourism in [ ] ...</i>		<b>0.87</b>			<b>0.94</b>			<b>0.91</b>			<b>0.94</b>			<b>0.94</b>			<b>0.98</b>	
...makes me feel more connected to my community.	0.77			0.93			0.88			0.93			0.90			0.90		
...fosters a sense of 'community spirit' within me.	0.87			0.95			0.92			0.90			0.80			0.80		
...provides ways for me to get involved in my community	0.86			0.78			0.68			0.88			0.95			0.95		
<b>Political empowerment</b> <i>I feel like ...</i>		<b>0.88</b>			<b>0.87</b>			<b>0.83</b>			<b>0.92</b>			<b>0.92</b>			<b>0.91</b>	
I have a voice in [ ] tourism development decisions.	0.66			0.77			0.83			0.92			0.83			0.83		
I have access to the decision making process when it comes to tourism in [ ]. <sup>i</sup>	0.82			0.78			0.78			0.88			0.91			0.91		
My vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in [ ]. <sup>j</sup>	0.55			0.72			0.61			—			—			—		
I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in [ ].	0.69			0.81			0.62			0.84			0.89			0.89		

<sup>a</sup>RETS items rated on 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

<sup>b</sup>RETS items rated on 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

<sup>c</sup>Satorra–Bentler  $\chi^2$  (47, N = 241) = 75.12,  $p$  < 0.001; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.04.

<sup>d</sup>Satorra–Bentler  $\chi^2$  (47, N = 233) = 55.75,  $p$  < 0.001; CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.03.

<sup>e</sup>Satorra–Bentler  $\chi^2$  (47, N = 229) = 69.53,  $p$  < 0.001; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.04.

<sup>f</sup>Satorra–Bentler  $\chi^2$  (42, N = 451) = 123.38,  $p$  < 0.001, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.07.

<sup>g</sup>Satorra–Bentler  $\chi^2$  (42, N = 183) = 71.96,  $p$  < 0.001, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.07

<sup>h</sup>[ ] represents community name.

<sup>i</sup>Worded as "I have the opportunity to participate in the tourism planning process in Oizumi" on Japanese Survey.

<sup>j</sup>Item not included within Oizumi questionnaire given residents' lack of ability to vote on such matters in Japan.

Table 3. RETS mean comparisons across gender by US (VA) and Japan samples.

Factor and Corresponding Item	United States (VA) <sup>a</sup>				Japan (Oizumi) <sup>b</sup>			
	Botetourt County		Floyd County		Franklin County		Japanese	
	M	t	M	t	M	t	M	t
<b>Psychological empowerment</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<i>Tourism</i> ...	3.84	3.63	2.52*	3.88	3.71	1.60	3.85	3.71
...makes me proud to be [ ] <sup>c</sup> resident.	3.83	3.70	1.27	3.92	3.61	2.58*	3.87	3.64
...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
...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
...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
...makes me want to work to keep [ ] special.	3.98	3.66	3.55***	3.96	3.86	0.85	3.88	3.78
<b>Social empowerment</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<i>Tourism</i> ...	3.50	3.36	1.53	3.35	3.04	2.50*	3.51	3.25
...makes me feel more connected to my community.	3.47	3.31	1.56	3.31	3.05	1.89	3.48	3.18
...fosters a sense of 'community spirit' within me.	3.59	3.44	1.47	3.41	3.13	2.11*	3.56	3.38
...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
<b>Political empowerment</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
I have a voice in [ ] tourism development decisions.	2.77	2.83	-0.64	2.76	2.53	2.11*	2.74	2.80
I have access to the decision making process when it comes to tourism in [ ] <sup>d</sup> .	2.62	2.66	-0.38	2.65	2.48	1.33	2.66	2.68
My vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in [ ] <sup>e</sup> .	2.55	2.68	-1.09	2.62	2.36	1.93	2.57	2.53
I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in [ ].	3.09	3.06	0.21	2.96	2.74	1.64	2.87	3.09
RETS items rated on 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.	2.86	2.92	-0.53	2.87	2.53	2.63*	2.86	2.91

<sup>a</sup> RETS items rated on 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

<sup>b</sup> RETS items rated on 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

<sup>c</sup> [ ] represents community name.

<sup>d</sup> Worded as "I have the opportunity to participate in the tourism planning process in Oizumi" on Japanese Survey.

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

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

$t = 2.63; p < 0.05$ ). Floyd County was the only county where women perceived themselves as being more empowered by tourism on aspects of all three dimensions of empowerment.

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" ( $3.98 > 3.66; t = 3.55; p < 0.001$ ). There were no statistical differences between men and women on their perceptions of social or political empowerment.

The results for Franklin County reveal 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" ( $3.50 > 3.19; t = 2.61; p < 0.01$ ).

## Discussion and conclusions

This study sought to test the widely held notion that empowerment discrepancies exist between men and women in tourism development (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). The hypothesized "empowerment gap" was tested in both the United States and in Japan because each country represents significantly different cultures across Hofstede's (1980; 1994) cultural dimensions. Results revealed that in fact gender discrepancies were present, but surprisingly, not in the direction suggested in previous literature (Duffy et al., 2015; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Ling et al., 2013; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). In all three US samples, there was evidence that women 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 as a very patriarchal society (Hofstede, 2016). 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).

These findings are only from two developed countries, but the results do indicate that the perceived empowerment gender gap in tourism development is not a universal phenomenon. It appears that some rural tourism destinations like Floyd, Botetourt and Franklin Counties in the United States are effectively empowering women within the tourism development process and that in other destinations like Oizumi, Japan, men and women perceive empowerment equally. This indicates that certain strides are being made towards achieving the third Millennium Development Goal, "to promote gender equality and empower women" (United Nations, 2000).

These findings have implications for both practitioners and academics interested in gender and empowerment. For practitioners, the application of the RETS provides a concrete example of how to directly test for empowerment discrepancies between men and women as well as on other socio-demographic factors, such as age, race, income and education. The RETS' ability to identify specific

perceived discrepancies in empowerment between men and women allows 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. The RETS also provides managers with a tool to track the success of their initiatives targeted at empowerment. After modifying marketing and management plans and developing these initiatives aimed at increasing empowerment, future applications of the RETS can help practitioners identify if their strategies aimed at alleviating empowerment discrepancies are achieving the desired results. Periodic applications of the RETS, in essence, allow for the testing of initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality to see if they are making the progress desired. More widespread applications of the RETS in locations believed to have empowerment disparities could help UN officials and others within the industry determine if they are making the desired progress toward the MDG3 focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women. These efforts would significantly contribute to political efforts aimed at what Ferguson and Alarcón (2014, p. 402) refer to as “gender mainstreaming” where tourism initiatives are tailored “to transform institutional and political processes based on the principles of gender equality”.

These findings also have many implications for academics. First, the confirmed reliability and validity of the RETS and its three factors through the five CFAs provide further credence for the international use of the RETS. Much of the previous literature has approached the topic of empowerment qualitatively, and this application of the RETS provides researchers with more confidence that the RETS is a reliable and valid quantitative tool for assessing perceptions of psychological, social and political empowerment across communities and across genders. In addition to providing researchers with a tool to assess and track perceptions of empowerment, this preliminary research also lays the groundwork for modeling perceptions of empowerment across genders to better understand the antecedents to perceptions of empowerment. Using multivariate statistics, the 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 for tourism when residents are empowered through tourism (Boley et al., 2014; Nunkoo et al., 2012). The RETS’ ability to identify successes and challenges also provides academics with a pointed place to direct future qualitative empowerment research. If discrepancies in perceived empowerment are found, then qualitative research can follow up with the questions of why and through what processes did empowerment form for one group and not the other? If success stories are found, qualitative methods can be employed to better understand how these exemplars came about and why males or females perceive themselves as being empowered.

### ***Limitations and future research***

While these findings add new perspectives to the understanding of gender and empowerment in tourism, limitations associated with the study must be acknowledged. First and foremost, this study only examined perceptions of empowerment within five samples across two countries. Empowerment through tourism development is very much a site-specific phenomenon and universal claims about empowerment or disempowerment cannot and should not be made from this type of site-specific research. Additionally, the two countries of focus were developed countries and it would be of interest to test for empowerment discrepancies in some of the world’s least developed countries where tourism constitutes a significant portion of the country’s gross domestic product. This would mimic the previous literature that has mostly investigated gender and empowerment within developing countries (Duffy et al., 2015; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Ling et al., 2013; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). Another limitation is that gender empowerment differences are inextricably linked to socio-demographic factors and traditional societal rules and norms (Gibson, 2001; Tosun, 2006). While these variables of race, ethnicity and class are not factored into the analysis of the present study, they undeniably might affect or could help explain perceptions of empowerment. Future research should dive into the complexities of how race, class and gender mix to provide some



with privileged positions of power and others with a lack of channels to power. Lastly, the study's quantitative nature leaves unanswered the question of why females perceived themselves more empowered in the Virginia counties. Quantitative research is helpful for testing for discrepancies but not for diving into the explanation of why these differences exist. It is suggested that future qualitative research should build off of this study to conduct interviews within the five samples to understand why individuals perceived empowerment from tourism the way in which they did.

In conclusion, empowerment of all residents is a core tenet of sustainable tourism that many suggest must be achieved in order for a destination's tourism industry to be considered "sustainable" (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Cole, 2006; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999, 2000; Sofield, 2003). This study has aimed to add to the understanding of gender and empowerment and increase tourism's sustainability by empirically testing the notion of a potential "empowerment gap" between men and women. While women were not found to be disempowered psychologically, socially or politically within these US and Japanese samples, many examples within the literature have indicated the opposite to be true. It is hoped that this application of the RETS spurs other researchers interested in sustainable tourism to consider employing the RETS within their survey instruments in an effort to test for psychological, social or political empowerment discrepancies. If discrepancies are found, the previous literature's suggestions for strategies to empower marginalized groups, such as formal educational training and increased access to start-up capital for entrepreneurs (Gentry, 2007; Moswete & Lacey, 2014), can be implemented to remedy gaps in an effort to achieve "gender mainstreaming" (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014). The application of the RETS can help play a role in this emphasis on gender mainstreaming by helping ensure that the lofty goals of sustainable tourism focused on maximizing the positive benefits of tourism across the triple bottom line are equally spread across both genders.

## Notes

1. Economic and environmental empowerment were not included in the study because neither had been developed into quantitative scales at the time of data collection.
2. Boley et al. (2015) adapted the political empowerment dimension of the RETS to a Japanese context by deleting the item pertaining to voting and changing the second item pertaining to having "access" to read "I feel like I have the opportunity to participate in the tourism planning process in Oizumi." Construct validity of the revised scale has been already confirmed by Boley et al., (2015).
3. Each of the five CFAs had a different number of error terms identified using LM and successful removed using Wald tests. Floyd County had 10 (9 error covariances/1 cross-loader), Botetourt Count had 9 (7 error covariances/2 cross-loaders), Franklin County had 11 (9 error covariances/2 cross-loaders), and the Brazilian and Japanese samples each had 14 (10 error covariances and 4 cross-loading items).

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