



UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

OLDER WOMEN - 'DOING THINGS A DIFFERENT WAY':

AGEISM, SEXISM AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES.

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'It's not unusual to want sex at sixty-five,
It's not unusual to jitter bug and jive,
So if you're ever tempted to think we're half alive
You're very wrong, you know -
There's not much we can't do
As well as you.
It's not unusual to abseil or roller skate,
Or have you hair done specially to go on a date,
Or ride a bike to uni - you know it's not too late!
It's not unusual - it happens every day,
No matter what you say,
We're learning things we never knew.
'Cos we don't have to do
What you want us to -
We're doing things a different way.
It's not unusual to act and dance and sing,
Canoe or camp or disco, or any other thing -
Like put on lingerie for a wild, romantic fling!
It's not unusual, it's not unusual.'

The women in the study sang this song as part of a show they co-wrote and publicly performed.

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ABSTRACT

According to the dominant discourses on ageing and on women in our society, older women are unproductive, unwell, inactive grandmothers who spend most of their time sitting, knitting in rocking chairs - their main use in life is as unpaid baby sitters. Using Weedon's post-structuralist, feminist, analysis this thesis focuses on a small group of 'ordinary' older women whose daily lives defy ageism and sexism - the dynamics of their freedoms and constraints are explored. The findings suggest that it is not until they are free of responsibility for their husbands and children that older women are free to fully participate in leisure on their own terms.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any other university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Patricia McCann

26/11/95
Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Feminist writers on women and leisure have objected to the traditionally androcentric focus of leisure research which largely persisted until the early 1980s (Betschild 1990; Henderson 1990; Wimbush and Talbot 1989; Henderson et al. 1989; Wearing and Wearing 1988). Androcentricity can be understood to mean the view that males' experiences are 'central' and women's experiences are evaluated against a norm based on studies of men. An androcentric approach to studying leisure obscures the fact that women experience and conceptualise leisure quite differently than men and on much less than equal terms (Bella 1989). One of the negations of women's leisure experiences, which stems from a gender blind perspective, is to view leisure as 'free time', that is, time spent away from paid work - however even when women do have paid work their gender roles ensure that they rarely come home to free time.

Defining leisure by types of activities has also been challenged (Henderson 1990; Wearing and Wearing 1988) in part because it often does not encompass many of the specific activities which women regard as leisure and because no 'activity can always be leisure because nearly anything may be an obligation under some conditions' (Wearing & Wearing, 1988 p.115). Bella (1989) argues that to label another person's experience is to exercise power and control over them and that the 'naming of one person's experience as "leisure" by another is an example of alienation through naming' (p.167). In this study, which seeks to explore leisure as a potential vehicle for women's resistance to social constraints, I have chosen

to use a very broad working definition of leisure as a 'freely chosen activity which one enjoys and finds satisfying' (Wearing, 1992a p.18). Henderson observes that in ' the sense of activity, recreation and leisure have often been used interchangeably' (1990, p.231) the words are also used interchangeably in this study.

The term 'resistance' is meant in the sense used by Weedon (1987) of 'subjects who refuse to identify with the subject position which they offered' (p. 100). Such resistance may be open or covert, it occurs on a continuum from acquiescence to rejection of repressive discourses. This study also incorporates resistance in the sense referred to by Wearing (1992a p.11), to describe individuals who 'refuse what they are told they should be and ... reach towards what they could be'.

The situation of neglect, misunderstanding and androcentrism regarding research on women and leisure is 'beginning to be addressed' (Henderson, 1990 p.229). But there is still much that remains to be done, '[r]esearch related to leisure is needed on, for, and by women. Feminist research is one way to make the worlds of women (including the leisure world) more visible' (Henderson et al., 1989 p.53). The field, the theories, the terms and definitions of leisure as they apply to women are still very fluid and open to challenge and re-interpretation - it is an area where nothing is settled. This fluidity is an indication of the need for an increased feminist research focus on women and leisure in order to more fully understand what the issues are for women.

Although research on women and leisure is beginning to be addressed, feminist research on older women is still in its early stages (Mason 1988). It has been suggested that this dearth of research on older women is a product of ageism and

sexism working in combination. '[P]erhaps it is not surprising that persons who are both female and old, and therefore doubly devalued, have been on the periphery of attention in social science.' This statement was written fifteen years ago by feminist academics Fuller and Marshall in the preface to their work, *The Older Woman* (1980 vii). Since then, a number of feminists have lamented, wondered and commented on the neglect of older women and ageism as an area of research, (Reinharz 1992; Williams 1988; Macdonald and Rich 1983). The invisibility of older women in our society has been singled out by feminists as a particularly destructive manifestation of ageism. In regard to health and leisure, Anderson and Luxford argue that the media invisibility of physically active older women 'colludes with the stereotype, restricting and discouraging older women from maintaining or taking up new forms of physical activities' (c.1988 p.102). The results of the demonstrable ageism towards and lack of awareness and understanding of older women, particularly in regard to their involvement in leisure, are wide ranging and serious.

One example of the consequences of the lack of visible, positive role models amongst older women is the devastating erosion it can enact on women's self esteem. Shevy Healey defines herself as an 'old woman', and from this perspective she assures us that it:

is difficult to hold on to one's own sense of self, to one's own dignity when all around you there is no affirmation of you. At best there may be a patronizing acknowledgment; at worst, you simply do not exist (1986, p.61).

Baba Copper writes eloquently about the fact that we 'know next to nothing about what it is to be an old woman in this society' (1986 p.56). She says that one of the consequences for her of this lack of exposure to older women, is that now in her

sixties.

My fantasy life is twenty three years old. I feel trapped. I stay here because I don't know where I am going or even where I want to go. I can't visualize what I will be doing when I am eighty years old. It's just not there ... Fantasies and the role models are tied together! (1986 p. 54).

Older women are the focus of this project and questions raised in a study on leisure and ageing by Wearing (1992a) have been adapted to explore the ways older women deal with the repressive discourses of ageism and sexism. My study asks whether, when faced with sexist and ageist constraints on their lives and leisure, do 'ordinary' (a self definition) older women acquiesce to sexist and ageist discourses, or are they able to resist and even reject these repressive stereotypes in their daily lives? Are these women able to choose freedom or is the cost so high that they conform and cut their lives to suit sexist and ageist cloth?

I believe that this project may contribute to positive changes for women in three ways, firstly, by highlighting empowering examples of 'ordinary' older women who, via their leisure activities both public and private, demonstrate resistance to repressive ideologies and expose them as social constructs which can be successfully challenged. Secondly, I hope that my research may work against the lack of positive social recognition which can serve to undermine an older woman's 'sense of self' and dignity as described by Shevy Healey (1986 p.61). Thirdly, my study may help to redress the depressing lack of visibility of older women as role models which so impoverishes us as a society. As Baba Copper says, '[e]mpowerment of women will come when we identify with women older than we are and not before' (1986 p.57).

The method chosen for this study is to collect primary data from personal interviews with a small sample of older women. This data will be augmented by

the analysis of sections of a video of a public performance which the interviewees with twelve other older women and with help from several theatre professionals, co-wrote and danced and sang their way through. The performance was fostered under the auspices of a local community arts organisation and a government grant helped with the cost of production. Several of the participants and theatre professionals spoke to me of the challenge the performers faced in believing that their 'ordinary lives' could be interesting enough to be worth putting on the stage. The director referred to this challenge in her programme notes, 'underlying our discussions was the question "who would be interested in hearing about what I used to do or what I think now?"'

I have chosen to use first person for this project, as I see this as sound feminist practice. On the subject of using the first person, Reinharz (1992) has observed that 'utilizing the researcher's personal experience is a distinguishing feature of feminist research.' She contrasts this with the fact that use of the first person is virtually banned in mainstream positivist research and said to 'contaminate a project's pseudo-objectivity' (1992 p.258). She argues that while including the researcher's 'lived experience' of the research process, may be regarded as 'bias' from a positivist perspective, from a feminist position it is 'an explanation of "the researcher's standpoint"' (p.259). In other words it is cogent that the researcher's perspective and perceptions be included in order to gain as true as possible an understanding of the research process and results. As a feminist, self-reflexive, qualitative, researcher I believe that use of the first person is a necessary acknowledgment of my role in the research process and that not to use it is, as Webb (1992) claims 'deceptive and biased' (1992 p.747).

My study applies a post-structuralist feminist analysis to the stories of older

women who self identify as 'ordinary', they are pensioners and grandmothers and in the autumn of their lives they show resistance and even rejection of dominant repressive sexist and ageist discourses. These women defy the 'squashed ant' (Wearing and Wearing 1988) syndrome, their stories might well help other women to do the same.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's leisure received very little attention from researchers until the early 1980s. According to Bella (1989), one of the early modern social scientists to study leisure was Veblen; he published his book on leisure theory in 1899. Bella states that Veblen began a tradition of 'great works' on leisure which were androcentric to the point of misogyny. He believed that women were ancillaries to their husbands and only able to experience 'second hand' or 'vicarious' leisure (1989 p.153). This tradition perpetuated a 'blatant' male bias which largely persisted until the late 1970s when feminists began to research women's leisure. American feminist Henderson (1990, p.230) credits 'Talbot (1979), Deem (1982), and Gregory (1982)', with being pioneers in discovering ways to examine what leisure means to women. An important addition to this list is an Australian study by Anderson (1975) whose study on women and leisure was ground breaking in its revelations on how differently and unequally women experience leisure when compared to males' experience of leisure.

Prior to these early feminist studies women's leisure was seen as being virtually the same as men's, a descriptive variable of men's leisure, or not important enough to consider in the first place (Henderson 1990). In the past leisure has predominantly been seen as part of a dichotomy 'free time', as separate and apart from the pressures of paid work. According to Bella (1989) this duality of paid work and free leisure time reflects a capitalist, androcentric view of society and simply misconceives women's experiences to the point where they become obscured and misunderstood.

Feminist studies soon revealed that women's leisure is uniquely different to men's in quantity, quality and, as Thompson says, 'it is subject to direct and hegemonic male control' (1992, p.272). This control largely stems from sexist, gender role assumptions, which dictate that women have a primary duty of care to their families in addition to any other activities, including paid work - or leisure, which they may undertake. Men have merely been expected to undertake paid work, after which they have had a right to 'free time' - women's gender role expectations ensured that they may never find a time which is free from the demands of the care ethic. Feminist discussions of the way sexist ideologies and discourses have served to limit women's roles, opportunities and freedoms and to promote those of men, include, Betschild 1995; Wearing 1993a; Bella 1989; Green, Woodward and Hebron 1990; Henderson et al. 1989; Wimbush and Talbot 1988; Woodward and Green 1988; Darlison 1985 and Anderson 1975.

The term recreational activity has been commonly used to describe the way people spend their free leisure time (Henderson 1990). Leisure has been categorised via the practise of making lists of nominated recreational activities. Bella (1989) has also described how 'time budgets' have been used to compartmentalise human activities into subcategories such as time spent on work, cooking, church going, parenting and leisure. Both time and activity lists have been 'problematized' (Henderson 1990; Bella 1989; Wearing & Wearing 1988; Mason 1988), they fail to capture women's leisure experiences because women's domestic gender role obligations intrude into the largest part of their activities and endlessly fragment their time. It has also been found that many women do not feel they have the right to leisure if they do not have paid work (Henderson 1990; Wimbush and Talbot 1988; Anderson 1975). In addition studies of leisure as activity have generally failed to note that women are very often

looking after children while engaged in activities labelled as leisure. Furthermore during family leisure activities, such as picnics and holidays, women usually work harder than ever co-ordinating and servicing family comfort and day to day needs (Wearing 1993a; Henderson 1990; Bella 1989). There is strong evidence that using time and activity lists alone is not enough to provide an adequate understanding of women's leisure.

Instead of viewing leisure by analysing how one's time is spent or through types of activities, Henderson (1990) has suggested that leisure as 'meaningful experience' (p. 233) may be more useful in understanding what leisure means to women. Using a relatively nonprescriptive term like 'meaningful experience' to describe leisure, can be understood to indicate that the activity so nominated has been freely chosen and is personally rewarding to the woman concerned. While acknowledging that the concept of leisure as 'experience' does hold some 'built in' gender constraints for women; Wearing and Wearing (1988) also believe that this concept is, 'characterized by freedom of choice and ... self-expression, self-enhancement and enjoyment' (p.117).

Arguing from a radical feminist perspective Bella (1989) suggests that for women with family responsibilities freedom is not an appropriate signifier of leisure, since for these women 'obligation is always present' (p.172). The subject of freedom and constraints in women's leisure is one which is open to considerable debate. Post-structuralist leisure studies (Wearing 1994, 1993a, 1991, 1990; Wearing & Wearing 1988) argue that even within restrictive gender roles women have the option to resist constraints and some personal space can often be achieved. In an integrative review of recent literature on women's leisure, liberal feminist Henderson (1990) largely concurs with Bella's views on women's lack of freedom,

but also notes that there are contradictory findings and some women do successfully plan their days to achieve personal leisure.

Feminist studies of women's leisure overwhelmingly agree that overall married women have much less freedom in their leisure than men do (Wearing 1993a; Green et al. 1990; Henderson 1990; Henderson et al. 1989; Wimbush & Talbot 1988; Woodward & Green 1988; Deem 1986; Darlison 1985; Anderson 1975). In addition to ideological constraints, Woodward and Green (1988) in a study conducted in Sheffield U.K. describe such resource inequalities in women's access to leisure as, difficulties with transport, awkward timetabling of activities, lack of time and space, financial constraints and inadequate choice and facilities. Despite wide differences amongst individual groups of women in access to leisure, these feminist studies indicate that women, in all walks of life have less freedom of access to leisure than do their male counterparts.

Darlison (1985) believes that women have traditionally been discouraged or actually prevented from access to sports and recreation because 'women's participation in physical activity did, and does ... [threaten] the very basis of power relations between the sexes' (p.32). This suggestion that there is a connection between women's involvement in leisure and the attaining of a heightened degree of empowerment, is also made by Wearing (1993b) in her paper on gendered leisure. An Adelaide study on violent and abusive men, Jenkins (1990) implicitly also lends support to Darlison's and Wearing's position on leisure and empowerment. Jenkins argues that traditional, male gender role socialisation, promotes the belief that a male can expect 'obedience, submission and deference' in an 'ownership' (p.38) relationship to other family members. Whether or not women exhibit such submissive behaviours (but especially if they don't) Jenkins

suggests that male role expectations inhibit violent men from taking responsibility for their abusive behaviours. A similar American study on men who batter women, by Pence and Paymar (1993), finds that such men use social isolation to keep women house-bound, dependent and submissive. Women who attempt to gain access to sports and recreation commonly find that this is a trigger for violence in an abusive relationship.

These are extreme examples and Weedon (1987) has argued that repressive gender discourses primarily work through the consent rather than the coercion of women. Woodward and Green (1988) also find that 'norms about femininity, respectability and motherhood operate as powerful constraints' (p. 144) on women's freedom to engage in recreation (p.144). They report that there are a variety of mechanisms of 'social control' which enforce these sexist ideologies, ranging from verbal aggression and ridicule, 'through to the threat of or actual use of physical violence against women' (p.144). Since many men seem to fear it so much, it does appear likely that women's leisure can be a source of at least partial liberation or 'relative freedom'. Henderson et al. (1989) have suggested that leisure involvement may be a means of women finding empowerment despite the constraints of their gender roles and accordingly they have argued for more equal opportunities for women to access leisure.

Entering the debate on leisure, freedom and constraints, Wearing and Wearing (1988) claim that too often Marxist, socialist and radical feminist theories have shown women as powerless in the face of capitalist society and male hegemony. They believe that these feminist theories have presented an image of women 'who lie like squashed ants' (p.119) crushed by the weight of male power. While they agree that women's leisure suffers from gender inequalities, as do all

women's social experiences, these researchers also emphasise that leisure is widely acknowledged as having a basis in freedom.

Using a post-structuralist analysis Wearing and Wearing (1988) argue that Foucault's ideas on power as socially diffuse, dispersed and to some degree available to everyone no matter how lowly, offer a more realistic and positive view of women's position regarding leisure. They suggest that rather than characterising women as helpless victims, careful research will reveal that they are capable of resistance and finding 'some room to move' in most situations (p.120). They believe that leisure as a discourse of freedom as well as control, is an ideal vehicle for women to resist social constraints, 'it may be one area of life where space for themselves can be created and male power held at bay' (p.121). Wearing has conducted several subsequent studies on leisure and resistance with mothers of first babies (1990) and on women's identity in late adolescence (1992b). In these studies she has demonstrated how through leisure, in spite of gender constraints, 'for some women resistance to the domination inherent in traditional passive, submissive feminine stereotypes is possible' (1992b p.337). Unfortunately, sexist social constraints on women do not disappear with age, they are merely joined by the stereotypes of ageism.

In her study on ageing and leisure (1992a), Wearing shows how women and men aged fifty five and over, can also resist repressive, ageist discourses through leisure activities. In addition she highlights the fact that older women, due to the combined forces of sexism and ageism, are subject to greater repression than are older males; examples are given of how the media predominantly promotes harmful, negative images about older women. Feminist post-structuralist Weedon (1987) further argues that all media representations of femininity and

masculinity are constructed to either 'confirm or challenge the status quo' (p.101). She claims that the press in Britain works to voice and cement dominant social discourses on sex and gender, with the aim of identifying and pillorying what is considered 'unnatural'. For the majority of British press the 'unnatural' includes 'Greenham peace women as well as rapists and child abusers' (1987 p.101).

Australian researchers Anderson and Luxford (c.1988) have found that older women are indeed inhibited by media negativity and invisibility from seeking physical recreational activities. Lest one assume that media in Australia has become more selective and positive in its presentation of images of non 'dolly bird' women, I have collected two recent examples from first, the *Northern Territory News* 17 August 1995, p.26, and second the *Sunday Territorian* 10 September 1995, p.12, (see appendix B). The first item dominates the 'women's pages' with a large headline about a 'Fat women in bikinis debate', it reports at length that the mayor of an Italian seaside resort plans to ban 'ugly' women in swimsuits from being seen around town. He is quoted as saying that 'one can't tolerate certain sights.' Accordingly he has decided that 'buttocks, cellulite thighs and drooping boobs will all be banished.'

The second item is presented by the newspaper as a snippet for the readers' amusement. They acknowledge that it is not 'correct' but so funny that they have printed it anyway. This seems to imply that only humourless feminists would not find it hilarious. Basically this gossip column item conveys the idea that any women not conforming to a dolly bird image should make themselves invisible

and abstain from public exercise for fear of offending sensitive eyes.

Unfit

Humorous but *definitely* politically-incorrect. After staff started regular fitness runs, a certain Darwin office has designed a new section logo. The design features a red circle with a slash through the middle (al-la-Ghost-busters) with the words:"Fat chicks in bike pants".

Weedon (1987) notes that the strategies the press use in their gender monitoring role include the selection of incidents reported on as well as the manner in which they are reported. These news items are typical of such strategies in that they attack and humiliate women who do not conform to some youthful image of perfection and yet still dare to go to the beach or join a fitness run. Unfortunately in many cases these dominant sexist and ageist stereotypes are successful in inhibiting older women from enjoying or even attempting physical and other recreational activities. Payne and Whittington (1980) in an American study assert that older women are 'burdened with more negative stereotypes than any other age-sex group' (p.9). They identify a dominant American stereotype of older women as 'sick, sexless, uninvolved except for church work and alone' (p.9). They conclude that when scrutinised most of the stereotypes vanish in the light of evidence.

Unfortunately stereotypes, however false, can influence behaviour through social control mechanisms and thus become self fulfilling prophecies. The consequences of these social discourses can be injurious to the health and well-being of older women. The Australian Council on the Aged (ACOTA), addresses this issue in a federal government submission entitled 'Equal Opportunity and Status for Women' (1989). This report expresses concern about the 'substantial barriers' in our society 'to the active participation of older women generally in leisure and sporting activities' (p.8).

ACOTA emphasises in their submission the real dangers of 'over medication' to the health and well-being of older women, and strongly affirm their belief that a solution can be found through the 'increased participation of older women in leisure and sport' (1989 p.9). Their paper asks the government to promote this issue in their policies and planning. Despite the importance of, and pressing need for, more feminist research on older women and leisure, work in this area is very limited. There are some excellent isolated examples in popular culture of older women who find enjoyment, health, empowerment and social networks through physical recreation. These include McDonald's (1992) anecdotal study 'Put Your Whole Self In' and the play 'Steaming' by British playwright Nell Dunn (1981).

The Research Questions.

These questions have largely emerged from the literature and they are essentially concerned with gender issues and gender inequity in the field of leisure. Ageism when applied to older women becomes inextricably linked with sexism; in fact when targeting older women, ageism works to intensify sexist practices.

1. Do these older women experience leisure in a way that acquiesces to, resists or rejects dominant sexist and ageist discourses? (This question was adapted from Wearing 1992a.)
2. How have these women's leisure patterns changed over time and what factors influenced those changes?
3. Can involvement in leisure help older women build and maintain self esteem ? Can leisure in fact be a vehicle , or a means by which older women can expand^{and} develop their confidence and personal autonomy ?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The Research Framework.

This is a feminist research project and therefore the prioritising of women's issues is a key factor among my methodological concerns. A major goal is the presentation of older women's experiences in a manner which counteracts their history of invisibility and misrepresentation in many past studies of leisure activity (Henderson 1990).

The epistemological basis of my research is the understanding that older women can be 'knowers', they are experts on their own stories, and that the everyday details of older women's lives are important. Margaret McColl (1987) in a health evaluation study, 'for and with' older women, notes that in our society they are doubly 'jeopardised', because they are 'subjected to the prejudices of both sexism and ageism' (p.2). One way of challenging what McColl describes as a 'continual stream of negative ... stereotypes which label older women as physically incapable, frail and dependent', (p.18) is to collect some of the stories of 'ordinary' older women whose daily lives defy such proscriptions.

The primary source of data for this research project was the collection of older women's stories about the role that recreation and other leisure activities play in their lives. I also asked whether and how their patterns of recreation had altered over the years since their youth, I was particularly interested to find out whether oppressive patterns of gender relations impinging on leisure such as those outlined in my literature review would emerge from this question. The methodology employed in this study is based on understandings gained from

feminist post-structuralism as expounded by Weedon (1987). Her theory on feminist post-structuralism is particularly suited to the aims of this study because it has as its 'primary concern' the wish to understand both the place of 'individual women in society and the ways in which they are both governed by and resist specific forms of power' (1987 p.74).

A feminist post-structuralist position does not accept the humanist idea that the 'self' is a fixed essence. Instead one's subjectivity or sense of self is seen as socially constructed, fragmented and changeable, due to the influence of powerful and sometimes contradictory social discourses. Discourses are not unlike ideologies except they are not tied to Marxist concepts of class, they may represent class, race gender or other powerful interests. Discourses are ways of knowing and though they claim to be the truth, they are only versions or interpretations of the truth (Weedon 1987).

Gender biased discourses such as those regarding the family, which see women's role as 'naturally' in the home, eternally nurturing, are often based on so-called 'commonsense' (Weedon 1987). Commonsense knowledge acts to obscure the unstable and contradictory nature of many dominant discourses; it preserves the status quo by causing gender biased discourses to appear natural and inevitable. The range of discourses available to a person is generally determined by factors such as race, class, age, gender, sex and ethnicity. We are born and raised into subject positions determined by discourses, but as we experience life we are normally exposed to alternative discourses. Generally, dominant discourses offer rewards for the assumption of particular subject positions and thus work through consent. Weedon (1987) has noted that when individual interest is not served through a particular subject position resistance can occur. If resistance or rejection

happens, alternative discourses may be chosen or even created, because the existence of discourses depends on the social agency of the individuals who support them.

When women resist repressive subject positions, dominant discourses are challenged and this can be the beginning of a process of social change. The cost of resistance may be very high as it was for many early suffragettes, who endured jail and forced feeding. The treatment of the suffragettes is an instance, as Weedon (1987) says, of the way when consent (in their case to women not having the vote) fails, the agents of hegemonic discourses may resort to coercion. Feminist post-structuralism is a useful feminist research tool because it can expose masked oppressions and challenge sexist, gender power relations (1987). In this study patterns of older women's challenges and resistance to sexist and ageist discourses are highlighted using feminist, post-structuralist analysis. One aim of this study is to ascertain whether, as Wearing argues (1994; 1992a), when the discourse of leisure with its inherent basis in freedom, intersects with repressive discourses such as sexism and ageism, a space is created where resistance can occur.

In addition to a predominantly post-structuralist analysis, this study also employs understandings from socialist, radical and liberal feminist leisure studies. In these endeavours I have been mirroring the views of Reinharz (1992 p.213) who says 'that feminist research is driven by its subject matter, rather than by its methods', meaning that 'feminist research will use any method available and any cluster of methods needed to answer the questions it sets for itself'.

Considerations of the Data Collection Process.

As important and interesting as the subjects of how older women meet the challenges of ageism and sexism were to me, it was even more important that the participants had power over what they chose to tell and how they wanted to tell their stories. In this respect I hoped to emulate Susan Yeandle (1984) who 'valued the "digression" as much as the core information and allowed interviewees to define the end of the story' (quoted in Reinharz 1992, p.25).

By valuing any 'digressions', I aimed to reduce the tendency of an interviewee/researcher relationship to contain an hierarchical imbalance of power which automatically privileges the concerns of the researcher. This power imbalance is so 'built in' to the researcher/interviewee relationship that even while cautioning prospective interviewers against patronising behaviour, E Job et al. (1982) wrote '*avoid interrupting - except in cases where respondents are exceptionally talkative and need to be brought back to the point quite firmly. These people are used to such interruptions in their ordinary lives, and will not be offended by them*' (emphasis added, p.10).

As a feminist researcher one of my goals was to avoid as far as possible patronising or exploitative relationships with participants and to aim for empathic and respectful relations. One way towards achieving these aims is to use self reflexive reporting of events during the interview and analytic processes. Stanley and Wise describe this process of showing 'how' we obtain our findings, as becoming vulnerable by making 'absolutely explicit the centrality of researchers in all research processes' (1983 p.196). For this study use of the first person is part of the process of making the role of the researcher an explicit one.

Method.

As a feminist researcher it is particularly important to me to use a research method which empowers the participants to tell their own stories in their own words. Graham (1984) writes that the 'use of semi-structured interviews has become the *principal means* by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives' (quoted in Reinharz, 1992 p.18). Reinharz, (1992) in her wide ranging and useful work on feminist methodology, endorses the use of semi-structured interviews in feminist research with women. Firstly she values the way semi-structured interviews provide access to women's views, feelings and memories in their own voices. Secondly Reinharz puts forward a convincing argument that qualitative interviews of this kind offer an 'antidote' to generations of research which has ignored women or allowed men to interpret women according to malestream practices. These are important advantages for this study which seeks to promote the views and experiences of a category of women who are not often heard and rarely consulted.

As well as the recorded interviews I was also able to view the video of a cabaret theatre piece performed by the group with the aid of a small, four member, support team of professional theatre workers. The video has been particularly relevant to this study because the script was democratically workshopped with the group and its themes arose from their priorities, concerns, experiences and insights. Many of the lines were written by the women who actually speak them and amongst the participants there is a very tangible sense of ownership of the performance. I was able to transcribe excerpts from the video tape and these together with the interview material have provided invaluable evidence of older women's resistance against debilitating sexist and ageist discourses. The use of the

video as well as the interviews is an example of triangulation of data described by Reinharz as the use of 'one type of data to validate or refine another' (1992 p.201).

The Participants.

I interviewed four women for approximately one hour each. I recruited participants through a Darwin dance group for people over fifty-five, which I shall refer to as the DDG or the group. The class has been running for about eight years, the number of participants fluctuates from around six up to eighteen and the age is in reality flexible, from late forties up to late seventies. It is open to women and men, but as far as I know no man has ever wished to join the group. I attended a class and obtained permission from the instructor to speak to the group about my project and to ask for volunteers for my interviews. Group members tend to arrive in small groups and rather than take the time of the whole group with my request I preferred the more informal approach of speaking to the smaller groups as they arrived.

On the morning of my second visit to the class I arrived early and spoke to the groups of women, with a brief outline of my proposal, as they arrived. The first three women met my request with silence, this was soon broken, to my relief, by the arrival of two sisters who both immediately and cheerfully volunteered. One of them told me later that her husband had been interviewed for an oral history project and so this would be her turn now.

One of the first three told me later that she had been 'done' already and she felt that being interviewed once was enough. Another of that group later agreed to be interviewed and during the interview told me she thought her 80 year old friend, late of the dance group, would enjoy participating. I gave her an information

sheet with my phone number for her friend who soon called me at home to volunteer as a participant. The participants were each given pseudonyms selected from works on women's myths and legends (Walker 1983; Monaghan 1981). The names were chosen because there seemed to me an affinity between the pairs. By which I mean that each modern woman personified some important qualities of her ancient namesake. ¹ Similarly a social club which all four of the women interviewed belong to, has also been given a fictitious name, the 'Merry Widows'. It should be noted that this club has members who are married couples as well as single women and men. However, roughly 70% to 80% of its members seem to be widows or divorcees - hence the name.

The Interviews.

All of the interviews were held in the homes of the women, one took place out of doors in a garden setting and three were held indoors at dining room tables. I hired a microphone and attached it to my portable tape-recorder, which on its own gave only a very poor quality of sound but with the rented microphone I got a fairly clear reproduction. I took ten or fifteen minutes to explain the information and interview permission forms and a brief outline of the subject of my study. Most interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes long and all were informal and relaxed.

In keeping with the unstructured nature of the interviews there were no set questions or order of asking them. Generally we began with a general prompt from me, such as, tell me about yourself? or tell me how you came to join the group? or what do you personally get from going to the dance group? In the first instance I was interested in finding out what these women gained from attending the dance group and also about the patterns of other recreational activities they

pursued in their wider lives. At the analytical level I was keen to discover whether the women in the dance group acquiesced to or resisted the dominant social discourses of ageism and sexism.

Towards the end of the interviews when the areas I was concerned with had been generally covered, the participants were encouraged to add any extra comments they wanted to make. Reciprocity was important, and several of the women who requested copies of the tapes received them promptly. Confidentiality has been strictly maintained; on several occasions the participants spoke of matters they did not want included in the study and this of course has also been respected. Efforts have been made to keep the names of the women and the organisations they belong to anonymous.

Interview Transcripts.

Excerpts from the interviews have been incorporated into the body of the paper. Square brackets are used to indicate researcher comments on the tone or mood of the speaker. Occasionally words have been repeated where the interviewee's speech included such repetition, often this is an indication of a hesitation and commas are used to identify such small pauses. Longer pauses, where the speaker is considering her next words, are often indicated by an umm, this being a reasonably close approximation to the sound made. More extensive profiles of the participants based on the interview material have been included as an appendix (A).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION PART 1

FINDINGS

Yet most people who are aged 80 and over right now refute these ageist horror stories in their daily lives. They live independently, either with other family members or alone. They deny that they are lonely or neglected. They enjoy good health, both mental and physical. They do face increasing problems, but they cope with them creatively and courageously. These people are not "marvellous for their age" - they are *normal* for their age. They are the majority - the *large* majority. This is the inescapable conclusion reached from all existing international research.' E. Job, 1984, p. 4.

In this quotation Job describes the kind of healthy independence that characterises the women in the small sample used for this study. Whilst Job emphasises the fact that many older people do not fit the stereotypes ascribed to them, she also cautions that those stereotypes do have an inhibitory and negative influence on some older people. When older people succumb to the repressive discourses of ageism, they are generally seen to suffer through diminished levels of activity which negatively affects their health and well being (McCallum 1989; ACOTA 1989; Job 1984). Thus despite the optimism of this opening quotation Job's book concludes with a statement on the need for ousting 'self-fulfilling ageist stereotypes' in order that the 'full potentialities of old age' may be realised (1984 p.218).

This study does not attempt to gauge the percentages of older women who do conform to repressive stereotypes rather it looks at a small group of women who are realising a great deal of personal potential their lives. The findings suggest that Darwin has its share of both active and inactive older women. An Australian

Bureau of Statistics study of Urban Northern Territory (Gardner 1991) claims that 36% of women over 45 are non-participants in sport and recreation. Since my sample was drawn from a group of older women who enjoy dancing as a form of recreation and exercise, it cannot be surprising that they are all active individuals. It appears likely that they have always resisted ageist discourses. Thematic patterns emerging from the findings suggest that each woman's level of acceptance of sexist discourses has fluctuated over time. During some periods of their lives they have acquiesced to the lack of freedom inherent in gender role expectations; at other times, with changing circumstances, they have resisted or rejected those discourses. The information on these gender role patterns comes largely from the interview data which also implicitly demonstrates resistance to ageism. The data from the video material explicitly indicates that these women have been much less tolerant of repressive ageist discourses, which they naturally encountered rather later in their lives, than sexist discourses.

General Characteristics of the Interviewees.

The four volunteers for this study share a lot more in common than simply belonging to the same dance group. All of the women belong to the same social club, the 'Merry Widows' and its choir group, and all attend the University of the Third Age (U3A) and all play bowls of one kind or another. None of these women were born in Darwin, though all have made it their home and they have lived in the Northern Territory for a combined total of nearly one hundred years. Three of the women were born in London and all now have grandchildren who live in the Territory. The DDG (their dance group), is not composed of primarily English born women, I believe that most are Australian born, several have European accents and one has Chinese ancestry. This is a reflection of the fact that Darwin has a long tradition of attracting and retaining visitors. Darwin is

strongly multi-cultural and has Aboriginal, Timorese, Philipino and various other ethnic dance groups, some of which have at times performed with the group that I am studying. The DDG is not at all ethnocentric in its choice of material and has had Indian, African, Timorese and Philipino instructors teaching and sharing their dances. Nor is it ageist in its selection of dances and the group is proud to have publicly performed rap dancing and been encored by an audience of high school students.

All of the women have mentioned plans for future recreation, some things they have yet to try and some they have not had time for lately but will return to. The women I interviewed are all active, alert, possess strong senses of humour and lead busy lives. They all enjoy live theatre both as spectators and performers and share a large social network with many friends in common. At the same time each of these women has separate interests and friends outside of the shared network. Finally all of them contribute to the wider Darwin community through some form of voluntary commitment to an organisation of their choice.

Summarised Profiles.

Thalia.

'Old age is not a burden; it is a privilege denied many.'

These are Thalia's views, she was born in Sydney and lived there until she was in her early sixties. She is now eighty and has spent the last eight or so years in Darwin. Her thirty year long marriage ended some twenty years ago and now she lives on her own in a one bedroom unit with a small backyard garden area. She prefers to go out for her leisure activities, which currently include ballroom dancing (her favourite) four times a week, the Merry Widows' social club and

choir, U3A, Chi Kung (physical and breathing exercises), line dancing, gardening and being a Girl Guide volunteer grandmother. Thalia is also very fond of travel and she manages to save for an annual interstate or overseas trip. This is helped by a Northern Territory Government interstate travel subsidy. Thalia and her husband raised four step sons and one son of her own birthing who also lives in Darwin. She enjoys regular contact with her family but also believes that they all need room to live their own separate lives.

Eartha.

Eartha is seventy three years old, she is the only interviewee who is currently married and the only one to live in a house rather than a home unit or a flat. For her, leisure is the things you 'want' to do not the things you 'have' to do. She was born in England but has lived in the Northern Territory for over forty years. Her husband spends four days a week from home working on the family property, Eartha is the book-keeper, but she has been based in Darwin for nearly a decade. She has two grown up sons and a number of grandchildren, one of whom boards with her so he can attend high school in Darwin. Her leisure activities are diverse, including some things that she does every day such as walking the dog, an hour's gardening and swimming in the wet season. During the week while her husband is away she shares a number of activities with her friends and sisters, these include, social bowls, gardening club, the DDG, the Merry Widows social club and choir, being a member and secretary of a retired businesswomen's club, U3A activities and several hours a week volunteer work in her church's shop. She also likes 'good' television, especially gardening shows, and always has a good book 'on the go.' She and her husband both enjoy gardening and visiting plant nurseries together, as well as weekend beach walks with the dog and most recently they have taken up line dancing. She has a dual lifestyle, that of a

married woman two or three days of the week and a single woman for the other days, as she says 'I have to make my own amusements during the week', this seems to work very well because as she says 'he's got his interests I've got mine.'

Terpsichore.

She does not divide her life into recreation and chores, for Terpsichore leisure is 'enjoyment in doing' and it encompasses her whole life as a seamless tapestry. When asked how housework fitted into this description she replied, 'I do it when I feel like doing it and then I enjoy doing it' and if it feels like a chore then she does it 'later'. She does not believe in telling people her age because she thinks that it causes people to relate to the age instead of the person. However she has been admitting to being 'over sixty five' for some time now and she has a vitality that defies chronology. She was born in England and moved to Australia in 1959. She has lived in many places in Australia and when her marriage ended about a decade ago she took the opportunity to move back to Darwin, she likes the tropical lifestyle and two of her three children were also in the Northern Territory at that time. She lives in a roomy flat about a kilometre from the city centre. Proximity to the city suits her because she is an active member of two theatre groups and often has rehearsals for 'back' or 'front of stage' commitments. She also belongs to the DDG, plays social bowls, participates in the Merry Widows social club and choir, attends U3A, is enrolled in ballroom dancing medal classes and is a competent book binder which she learnt as a hobby. In the course of her travels in the Territory Terpsichore has been given an Aboriginal skin name and totem group. She also enjoys fossicking and collecting gems and minerals - when she can find the time - she has a 'miners right' certificate, to do this.

Athena.

Athena is sixty-six years of age, she is widowed and lives in a two storey home unit in a complex which appears to be largely owner occupied. Before retiring she worked for many years as a doctor's receptionist and book keeper. She has two grown up sons, one is single and lives at home with her and the other is married with children, all live in the Darwin environs. She has clear ideas about what she considers leisure activities and she was ready with a list of them when I arrived for the interview. Clubs are important in Athena's recreation, she is treasurer of the Merry Widows club and in their choir, she is an honorary member of an auxiliary club, attends U3A regularly, and enjoys fortnightly card evenings with a like minded group of women and she is a regular member of the DDG. She usually walks the neighbour's dog every day, exercise for them both, but her greatest love is lawn bowls and she is captain of the women's team at her club. She is also on several committees for bowls and plays the game four times a week. Other recreation includes, three or four good library books a week (adventure not love stories), big crosswords and a regular morning of badminton once a week. In her spare time she rescues tattered dollies from church shops, shampoos their hair, washes them up and knits them a complete outfit of clothes so they can be resold to help raise money for her church. She has a lot of good friends and often goes to the theatre or cinema with groups of friends who organise such outings at the drop of a hat and 'we troop along' she says.

Themes.

There is a dominant impression from the interviews that these women have undergone a journey during the course of their lives. This journey or voyage is marked by different stages, from the restricted but relatively 'safe haven' of the family, to the freedom and autonomy of a stage which looks askance at the

constraints of married life. Eartha of course is something of an exception to the norm in that she has an unusual amount of autonomy and personal time and space for a married woman of her generation - she is currently living a 'both ways' life style. Statements from each of these women have been brought together to provide a composite picture of the broad stages of the voyages they made from constrained gender roles to much freer existences, via the good ship 'Leisure'.

'The Family - a Safe Haven?'

All of the women I interviewed were married for many years, raised children, enjoy their grandchildren and seem satisfied with the amount of contact they now have with their families. Athena refers to a time of limited leisure when her children were young, in a way which does not suggest much difficulty with constraints, 'when you're first married you're in the flush of, of, umm, married bliss and you're quite happy to be home with your family and looking after your house.' She seemed fairly comfortable with the 'fact' that 'also of course you've got small children so you're not able to do these things.' She was quite definite that 'once the children were off [her] hands' she was not restricted by her husband, she was 'one of the lucky ones' because he encouraged her to go out even though he himself preferred to stay at home.

Each of the women I interviewed was adamant that they were not restricted by their marriages and family lives. Thalia said, 'I was free with my family, I went dancing then.' In fact this occurred because her husband became the president or chieftain of a Scottish social club which the whole family attended and where all her of five children learned to dance at the club functions. Although she still loves to go dancing, that family centred leisure is quite different to the more

independent leisure activities she enjoys now that the family has left home. It is interesting that Thalia and Terpsichore who loved and performed dance from the time that they were small children, both managed to find ways to dance during their married years and both are still dancing for their primary recreation.

In spite of all achieving some varying degrees of leisure space, all of the women also felt that when their children were small there were periods when, as Terpsichore says of theatre 'I didn't do any for a while, because we had children.' Athena commented, 'as your, your life goes on umm, you possibly do wish you could go out and do more' but this was not feasible while your life 'was tied up with home, children, and umm family', even though her husband was 'very tolerant' and 'never minded' her doing anything.

'Stormy Weather - Crossing The Bar?'

This section refers to a time of crisis when the women I interviewed first found themselves in a position where their children had grown up and their husbands were no longer with them (except for Eartha). One of the women is a widow, two have been separated or divorced from their husbands and one has a husband who is only home two or three days out of seven. All of them found they had to construct a different identity to the one they had been accustomed to and for all of them leisure seems to have been an important means by which they 'found' their new selves. To add to their challenge this phase of their journey was broadly coincidental with a period when the dominant discourses on ageism might be expected to impinge on their lives and liberties.

Thalia and Athena were the most explicit and articulate about the voyage which carried them from an identity which was largely based on socially determined

gender roles to a much freer position in which they now hold a great deal more personal power. When Athena described the first stage of her widowhood, she told me she had always been a very independent person and so 'I gave myself a talking to.' She told herself, 'now look, nobody's going to come and look after you and do things for you and feel sorry for you.' She still believes, 'you've got to look after yourself and make sure you're not lonely yourself.' Athena admits that at first she was frightened of being lonely 'so I more less joined everything I could, um, almost things I didn't even want to do especially.'

Thalia was more purposeful in the way she turned to leisure as a resource, her marriage took several years to 'wind down' and so her process of losing a partner was possibly less abrupt than Athena's and she had more time to prepare for it. Firstly she had to recover from the effects of a very bad menopause, including 'bad turns' which left her shuffling and with poor balance. She believes 'that you've got to learn to find out what you're body's telling you' and also that 'you've got to do things for yourself, a lot of things you've got to do for yourself.' So, not being 'one to go to the doctors', in her mid fifties she returned to yoga at least once a week to regain what she'd lost and she told me 'it was my saviour.' By sixty-two she had retired from factory work and left her home in New South Wales to join her son and his family in Queensland. She kept up her yoga there and eventually taught yoga herself for five years in Queensland from the ages of sixty-four to sixty-nine.

Thalia regards ballroom dancing as a key element in how she 'found' herself and re-entered society as a single woman. Once her daughter-in-law was settled (they all moved to a new town together) she decided it was time to address her own needs and so she went to a dance one Saturday night. 'I got myself all prettied up

... I sat there and I sat there, I felt like Gracie Fields when she said, "I took me harp to a party and nobody asked me to play" nobody come to ask me for a dance.' In spite of the agony of that night Thalia decided 'you're not going to beat me, I'm not going home' and the next Thursday she went back to that group to their afternoon dance. It was hard to cross that threshold but she said to herself, 'it only takes one step' and this time she was asked to dance. A local well established couple 'adopted' her for two weeks and introduced her to partners and then after a fortnight they told her 'you're on your own' and she never looked back. Thalia speaks of this experience as a turning point in her life.

That was my saviour really, from being on my own. That taught me that I was no longer a married woman. I was once more on my own. I had to find my way. You've got to find your own way. You don't live in yesteryear ... you've got to look forward to what's ahead of you.

Terpsichore's trajectory after marriage suggests a similar pattern of finding herself through leisure activities, she moved back to Darwin, a place she had only left for her husband's 'job's sake', and when she got back embraced the local theatre and ballroom dancing scene with gusto. Some years later, joining the DDG gave her the first opportunity since she was twelve of being involved again with dance as performance and theatre. She told me she had always loved to dance, 'mainly I like to dance and perform.' When I commented on the forty-odd year gap in her doing dance as performance she replied, 'I'm making up for lost time, yes [chuckles] yeah well I enjoy it.'

Eartha faced some of the same issues to do with having newly available time and no partner to share it with when she came in to the city from a rural life on the station in her early sixties and her husband chose to spend the major part of his week in the country. She too made new friends and she also took up new activities, these included dancing, bowling, painting and voluntary church work, as well as maintaining her gardening interests and nurturing family

relationships. Athena who says she has many friends who are widows appeared to be speaking collectively when she assured me that life was 'possibly fuller' as a retiree without a husband. She qualified this however, by quoting another woman's performance in the group's public show, interestingly she didn't quote exactly and in fact put forward her own rather different individual point of view. 'Don't get us wrong, we've got nothing against love and men and husbands, but we've learned to adapt as we had to, without men.' Lest the bravery of these women and their focus on the positive in life, imply that this was an 'easy passage', I will finish this section with quotes from Thalia who passionately dislikes negativity, and who remarked, 'believe me it wasn't easy.' Speaking of the period of her marriage ending Thalia told me 'I went through it and I, I've looked at photos [of herself from that time] ... it wasn't a very good time.' Rather more cheerfully she marks the end of the transition period, 'Crossing The Bar', with the statement 'but anyhow I found myself ... and I moved up here.'

'You are over the first flush of loneliness and ... your life gets on a more even keel' (Athena).

With this metaphor, (which gave rise to the voyage theme of these findings) Athena was describing a consolidation which occurred for her, she says it needs 'at least a year, a couple of years it takes to sort your life out and do, you know, decide what you're going to do and what you're not going to do.' After the first 'rush of bereavement' she gradually got over her fear of loneliness, 'weeded out' those activities which didn't really interest her and discovered she had lots of friends. One of the things this group of women has in common is that they have many friends, both shared and separate. All of the women have their own individual interests which they do not share with the others as well as being linked through a common love of dance and the membership of some of the

same clubs.

Athena says that it reminds her of school-girl days where you do things in groups together and have 'best friends' - she likes the way they often do spontaneous things such as get up a party booking to go to the theatre together. It is clear that all of them value these friendships very highly and that friendship networks underpin a great many of their activities. In spite of this there seems to be very little dependence on or need to give up any personal freedom because of these relationships. Thalia stayed in Queensland for nine years altogether, she had stayed on another five years by herself, after her son and his family had moved to Darwin - because she was having a good time. However after nine years her best friend got a boyfriend and he moved in with her and Thalia believes, 'two's company three's a crowd' so she moved on and came to live in Darwin. This was not hard she said because 'I make friends easy, I make plenty of friends.'

Friendship and freedom seemed to crop up quite often as topics during the interviews; Thalia told me that it meant 'everything' to her; both she and Athena borrow their neighbours' dogs so that they can enjoy a pet without compromising their freedom. Only Eartha who still lives in a family home owns a pet dog, if she wanted to be away there are relatives who would care for the dog. Perhaps even more strongly than friendships and freedom, this stage of life, for these women, seems to be characterised by self confidence and an inner certainty, as Athena said, about what things they're 'going to do and what [they're] not going to do.' Of all the activities that Athena was left with after her 'weeding' process, sports were the most important - especially bowls. 'Bowls is a real drug [she laughed] it gets you in.' Not only is she captain of the women's team, she is also a 'sports champion' as is attested by the many trophies and awards she has displayed on a

high shelf in her lounge room. During the Masters Games and at carnival times she finds the energy to play bowls all day every day for a week at a time. She likes the challenge of bowls, the exercise and the fact that 'all [her] friends belong.'

Athena and Thalia both seemed to have had several shorter involvements with organisations and activities from which they fairly quickly moved on, 'a bit dull' said Thalia of one, but these activities served as a springboard for them to find more compatible longer term interests. Thalia soon discovered that, now that she didn't 'have to', sewing, knitting and being at home, are 'not a pleasure [but] a chore.' Above all she loves to dance and even as a child of six performing in concerts she tells me 'I loved it, loved every minute of it.' She described the 'stormy' period of first being alone as having to 'find' herself and in the process of doing this she made use of two leisure activities which she sees as her 'saviours'. Yoga healed her body and helped her relax, while ballroom dancing served as her rite of passage back into society. In fact now that she herself is 'on an even keel' she tells me that ballroom dancing has 'opened a door for quite a lot of people around here, that I've got out you know, to go and do things.' One of these, a neighbour who rarely went out, has told her, 'I forget about the garden now [Thalia] that I've learnt dancing.' As a child at school Thalia loved geography and dreamed of travel, but she never did travel until the mid 1970s when her marriage was in its final stages. Now at eighty she manages at least one interstate or overseas holiday a year and she has a marvellous time, she has photos to prove it.

Terpsichore's leisure choices were comparatively purposeful and usually quite long term; she spoke of joining X's theatre group and Y's dance group in a way which suggested commitment and shared goals under an artistic leader. Within

these choices she was quite clear about her priorities and informed all concerned that she was not currently available on Friday evenings - they are reserved for medal dancing classes. Her childhood concert dancing classes were cut off at the age of twelve when her father died and money was short. She has always loved dance and theatre and at present these interests occupy the majority of her time. She is a vibrant, active woman yet - somehow it took her close to forty years to fulfil her wish to return to involvement in dance performance.

Eartha's interests are quite broad, and like Terpsichore's they all tended to be long term, she usually ceased an activity with reluctance and only because the teacher had left town or some such immutable reason. Since coming into town about ten years ago, Eartha has become involved in the gardening club with renewed vigour, she has varied leisure interests and she ably combines them with her home and family commitments - creating a balance that seems to work well for her. She and her husband have 'plenty to talk about' when they get together as well as enjoying activities such as line dancing and gardening. The 'even keel' that Eartha enjoys is well earned; it is different to that of the other women because she still experiences the world from a married perspective. She has yet to face the particular patch of 'Stormy Weather' created by being without a partner, I believe that in the event, her leisure interests and dual lifestyle would stand her in good stead and help her steer her towards the 'fair winds and calm seas' of an autonomous identity. As she says, 'I'm different from most couples, because, I have all the week to myself.' A comment by Athena about the activities of the DDG also applies to the way the women I interviewed approached life in general, 'we're willing to learn anything, but we generally adapt it to our own style.'

The Doldrums - 'she's sitting around knitting at the present moment' (Thalia).

This stage seems to come from the inability to formulate new roles and derive satisfaction from an identity which doesn't revolve around service to one's husband and children. At this time it appears that it may be not uncommon for the prevailing winds of sexism and ageism to inhibit the older woman from even beginning to voyage beyond the known world of her home and family. In the following excerpt Thalia describes a negative, unhappy woman of her acquaintance.

She's sitting around knitting at the present moment. See, I, I've been through that stage ... you're doing everything for your kids while they're little. And then you're doing it for the grandchildren but later on, you've got nothing. Your life, your children have grown up and they've left. And you're one? two? people and you, you don't know what we're going to do with your life.

Thalia captures in a nutshell the dilemma of acquiescence, a state in which it can be virtually impossible to even visualise an alternative role to family concerns. She told me that she had been through just such a debilitating time 'when all [her] family went.' All of the women I interviewed seemed to be close to and fond of their grandchildren and some do babysit them, but even Eartha whose grandson boards with her, does not seem either to limit her activities for his sake or to live her life around his presence in her home. Their lives extend far beyond domesticity, home and family concerns. When I asked Thalia if she had any idea why more people didn't think as she did, that 'old age is a privilege' she replied: It's different attitudes, a lot of people are still with their husbands and their husbands don't want to do anything, so they don't want to do anything and so hence they just stay put. Then there's those that don't want to go outside the door, they expect everybody to come to them, which doesn't happen. You must close the door and get out ... go out and enjoy, meet people, do things, do things with your life that's what you're given life for.

These opinions reflect a belief which seemed to be held by most of the interviewees that the presence of a husband can be one of the most effective dampeners on the life and leisure of a woman.

'The Forsaken Mermen - or Beware the Shoals of Patriarchy.'

This phase describes a stage where the three single women are currently expressing wariness and concern at the lack of freedom they see in the lives of their married peers. These feelings may well be augmented by memories of their own marital experiences, which they refer to positively and yet with a degree of ambivalence. Thalia is especially wary; she told me that once she had 'found' herself, 'the men didn't interest me much, they were only lookin' for somewhere to put their feet, under a table ... I'd had that, I'd had years of that.' At the same time she gave the clear impression that she did not feel negative towards her former husband in spite of her being so wary of men looking for a relationship. She told me that her current state of freedom means 'everything' to her and several times during our talk she informed me gleefully 'I've got freedom.' This was ambiguous because Thalia had earlier told me she was 'free with [her] family.' I asked about the two freedoms and she told me that now she had a different freedom altogether' and then she explained why:

because, well I don't let my family's troubles trouble me. My family's troubles is their troubles. I had mine now they've got theirs. If they have children they look after them, like I looked after mine, don't come to me for babysittin ... I baby sat mine, they baby sit theirs.

Thus freedom seems to be equated with a personal independence from family expectations and responsibilities. Thalia believes that her children are happier this way and she certainly does seem to be on very good terms with her sons and daughter-in-laws with regular family contact and interstate visits. She is a free

spirit and even at eighty her family still finds her unpredictable, 'I'm always surprising them ... especially the one's down South', she chuckles. She has drawn her boundaries with her family and they obviously respect and accept them, but, she does not seem to be interested in negotiating domestic space with a resident male, she equates that possibility with the loss of her freedom.

Athena told me, 'men are very sexist people you know?' Amongst the examples she gave of this were some of the reasons males advanced against allowing the women equal membership of her sports club. 'They just didn't like playing with the women, they used to say things like, "Oh no the women will get bitchy about things, or get upset easily, or something like that".' She is also acutely aware of the limited freedom women in couples have compared to 'the widows', by which she seemed to refer to all of her women friends who had ever been married and now were not for whatever reason. I gained the impression that Athena (while loyal to the memory of her husband), found the vast majority of men rather puzzling, sad, creatures, who would not do anything, and would not join in, and but who were useful, though not indispensable on the dance floor.

Terpsichore, is rather reserved on personal matters, in speaking of her marriage she asserts, 'we didn't restrict each other' and then she says of the marriages she sees around her: 'that's probably why I'm not very keen on what I see of most of them, [chuckle] umm, that they're so restricted. I never have been. I never was.' She describes herself and the other women I am interviewing in terms of freedom, 'I think we're all sort of liberated types that go in for these things.' I gained the impression that these women are aided in preserving their state of single freedom by keeping a critical eye on the alternatives.

Eartha, while not unaware of others' problems is adamant that she is not confined in her marriage, 'I have all the week to myself and I make sure I spend the time, when my husband's home, with him.' There can be no doubt that Eartha is happy in the balance she has achieved between personal activities and couple oriented ones. 'I make sure that I keep Sunday and Monday for him and do things with him, like the line dancing and Sunday outings, that sort of thing.' Nevertheless she is describing here the traditional female pattern of female deference to her husband's life style. Like all the women I interviewed Eartha felt this was natural and satisfactory, however, in hindsight these patterns of deference are often felt to contain elements of constraint.

On this theme the DDG show the women workshopped and performed showed a strong scepticism about notions of marital bliss and living 'happily ever after'. Many of the skits in the performance were strongly anti-sexist and anti-ageist and one in particular aptly sums up this stage of female independence that I have called 'The Forsaken Mermen'. The skit concerns a woman choosing personal freedom over a relationship with a 'male' suitor. It begins with two of the women sitting talking in a stage cafe, one wears a large, black, moustache and takes a male role, 'he' tells the other that he would do anything for her (even shave off the moustache) he wants to settle down and have children. She answers to the effect that she is on the pill and plans to travel and after some further exchanges she walks off and leaves him sitting alone in the cafe.

This conclusion implies a rejection of the 'joys' of coupledness in favour of personal freedom. Another early skit in the show has a similar theme, here a 'couple' mime ironic responses that mock the words of the romantic song 'Tea For Two', which is being sung in the background. Even while valuing the past,

the show consistently lampoons romantic sentimentality suggesting a wisdom which sees beyond stereotypes and media hype.

DISCUSSION:

Wearing (1992a) notes that Foucault 'urges us, as a form of resistance, not to be confined by discourses' (p.11). It is evident from their profiles that the four women I interviewed have outstepped the ageist and sexist discourses which surround and enmesh many older women in our society. In her study on 'Leisure and resistance in an aging society' Wearing posits that the opposite to resistance is 'acquiescence' (1992a). Not surprisingly, given the toe tapping nature of my small sample, not much current personal acquiescence emerged from the stories of these interviewees. Nevertheless a picture of such acquiescence and its causes can be found in their constructions of other women who are not able to access leisure with the same freedom as themselves.

The women's stories suggest a voyage, or a journey which has spanned their lives and occurred in stages. To take this analogy further, on a macro-scale these journeys have taken place within a climate where the prevailing winds can be symbolised as sexist and later in life ageist discourses. For older women ageism provides an added social pressure pushing them in the direction of containment and conformity. In order to look at the micro level of these women's changing resistances, negotiations and acquiescence to constraints on their identities and their freedoms (especially in regard to leisure) it has been useful to look at their journeys over time. The following discussion applies the lens of feminist post-structuralism to the women's journeys in order to bring in to focus the way the dynamics of freedom and constraint have operated in their leisure experiences.

'The Family - a Safe Haven?'

In the findings section on the family as a 'safe haven', comments made by the women hinted that there was some ambivalence in their feelings about the constraints on freedom which are built into the gender based roles of wife and mother. These comments indicated that the emphasis dominant family discourses place on women's overriding commitment to the servicing of their families did chafe at times. Nevertheless, just as Thompson (1992) found, these women were in no doubt that the welfare of their families was their paramount priority.

Despite those signs of minor chafing at gender role restrictions, the interviewees generally accepted their discursively defined, gender subjectivities with a very good grace. In fact the language they use suggests that they perceived their roles of wives and mothers as natural and inevitable. This acceptance is shown in the way they speak of personal recreation versus family responsibilities, for example, '**of course** you've got small children so you're not **able** to do these things', '**obviously** you ... feel you **should** be at home with your husband', 'out of **necessity** you don't go out as much'(emphasis, added, Athena) and 'we didn't go anywhere much because you **had** to stay home with the children' (emphasis added Thalia). The use of words and phrases like, of course, obviously, had to, should, not able to, and out of necessity, implies these women have an acceptance of nuclear family gender roles which is so complete that it excludes other alternatives.

According to Weedon (1987) this family stage of women's lives, is dominated by patriarchal, gender power relations in which women's interests are

'subordinated' to those of men. She points out that while in theory women have a wide range of options in life, all of those which we share with men involve coming to terms with 'what is constantly being offered to us as our primary role - that of wife and mother' (1987 p.3). In post-structuralist terms the virtual 'inevitability' of wife and motherhood for women in our society is normalised by a common-sense appeal to the 'natural'.

We are told that it is right and natural that women should find their highest purpose and greatest fulfilment through the roles of wife and mother, as they are currently defined by the hegemony. Such common-sense definitions not only mask the oppressive nature of those roles, but also make invisible the fact that they are merely one discursive version of the truth. It is hard for women to challenge those roles when there seems to be no viable, socially sanctioned alternatives. As Weedon (1987) says, this biological, gender role theory and the 'common-sense positions which it informs, offer women forms of fixed subjectivity which render the status quo natural and marginalize attempts to change it as unnatural' (p.27). This situation would have been especially true for women of an older generation such as those in this study.

A number of recent Australian leisure studies, (Wearing 1992b; Dempsey 1992; Thompson 1992; Wearing 1991) have referred to the cost of resistance to dominant, patriarchal discourses as being so great as to inhibit some women from even contemplating the idea. Dempsey's longitudinal study of a country town, explicitly reveals the painful social cost for women who challenge dominant, gender, social mores, leading him to the conclusion that in the community he studied, few women dare and virtually none succeed in rocking the boat of gender power relations.

This is not to deny that for the group studied, as their children grew older, access to leisure activities was possible to varying degrees. Gardening club, tennis, amateur theatricals, bowls and dancing were activities mentioned during the interviews. Research by Thompson (1992) argues that wives' participation in such recreational activities is facilitated when their husbands are also involved in the same leisure activities. Otherwise, wives' personal leisure tends to be tailored to suit their husbands' life style and wishes. This was certainly the case with the two women who kept up with their dancing during marriage. In Thalia's case the whole family went dancing as a result of her husband's position as head of a cultural and social club. Terpischore's husband not only enjoyed dancing, he also shared at times her interest in the dramatic arts - directing rather than performing.

Nevertheless to a certain extent these women, in so far as they diverted some of their energies away from their families and into their own recreational interests, were resisting the patriarchal, family discourse which decrees that wife and motherhood should be a woman's 'source of full self-realization' (Weedon, 1987 p.38). This should be seen within the framework that Thompson (1992) describes in her study on older women and tennis. She argues that although some married women manage to incorporate leisure activities into their lives and thus achieve a measure of freedom, 'one cannot ignore the structural, ideological and cultural limitations out of which women forge their particular form of leisure' (1992 p.272).

'Stormy Weather - Crossing The Bar.'

In this project important changes in subjectivity for the interviewees have been precipitated by changes in 'marital relations', that is to say the ending or dramatic

altering of a marriage relationship. At this point their journeys have reached a transitional stage, where these women are faced with the challenge of crossing discourse barriers and constructing new subjectivities or becoming stranded in obsolete gender based roles. Like many women of their generation they have spent most of their lives accepting the reality of a discourse which proclaims that it is 'natural for women to defer constantly to the interests of men and children' (Weedon, 1987 p.40). Three out of four of the interviewees were more or less abruptly thrust into a position where husband and children were not there to need them any longer. This is a common and traumatic time for women when, as Thalia says, 'you don't know what you're going to do with your life.' With the anchor of the husband and family largely swept away, women's gender-defined family roles are no longer a matter of inevitability and commonsense - in fact those roles often do not make much sense at all.

From a post-structuralist perspective this is one of those key times when an individual as the site of 'discursive struggle' may 'produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses' (Weedon 1987, p.106). No matter how safe, happy and comfortable it may be traditional marriage contains elements of constraint for women in our society. When the husband has gone and the cage door swings open the woman within must find new discourses and construct new subjectivities if she is to step out of the cage. The participants in this study forged new relationships and discovered new ways of being largely through their involvement in recreational activities. It can hardly be surprising that a discourse on leisure, which is widely regarded as being inherently connected with freedom and individual choice (Betschild 1995; Wearing 1994; Betschild & Green 1994; Wearing 1992a; Henderson 1990; Samdahl 1988; Wearing & Wearing 1988) should have become a bridge for these women

towards their construction of newer, more autonomous identities. In this regard these women's trajectories are an illustration of an hypothesis put forward by

Henderson et al. (1989) cited in Henderson (1990, p.229) they:

proposed that through leisure, women can learn to value themselves as individuals and obtain the confidence to challenge society's gender role restrictions and stereotypes. Leisure involvement for women may be a means of liberation from restrictive gender roles and, thus, a means for empowerment.

'Over the first flush of loneliness and ... your life gets on a more even keel' (Athena).

Anderson (1975) in her work on women and leisure writes that, due to their socialisation, women do not believe they have the 'right to pursue their own interests'; instead they devote their lives to 'service and self sacrifice for their husband and children' (1975 p.1). In this study I have found that while married, the participants did engage in leisure activities to a limited degree, but those activities were indeed constrained and moderated by their family responsibilities. Once however, those participants who were no longer part of a couple, had crossed over from identities founded on traditional, gender based family roles, they enthusiastically embraced recreational activities. Wearing (1991) has shown how leisure discourses can provide an opportunity for resisting feminine stereotypes and constructing 'alternative ... identities based on individual interests' (p.579).

This stage of the non-married participants' journey is characterised by three factors. Firstly autonomy, they have developed strong ideas on what they want to do and what they do not want to do, on what is a pleasure and what is a 'chore'. All of the women interviewed are following their interests and devoting a good deal of time to activities they find fun and enjoyable. Some of these interests such

as dance performance, travel and dedication to sport, are offshoots of favourite childhood activities that have lain dormant for many years.

A second characteristic of these women, linked to autonomy, is the possession of a highly valued personal freedom. They come and go as they choose and they make decisions based on their own best interests; they do not appear to defer to others in such matters.

Thirdly, while all of the women have strong family feelings and loyalties (two of them had me in tears with stories of family kindness and family tragedies) they do not live for or through their families. Instead friendship is a very significant part of their daily lives. On a day to day basis their friendship networks provide encouragement, support, inspiration, and camaraderie. As Athena says of her women friends, 'you meet up with people in your same circumstances ... and you do the same things with them.' Events like dining out and going to the theatre that you might have gone to with a husband, 'we have a group of us that do most of these things; they're bowlers and they're dancers and that sort of thing.' As well as local outings the women told of interstate and even overseas holidays they went on with friends. Thalia spoke of the way Terpsichore encouraged her to become involved with performing in the play 'Oedipus Rex', 'my friend said "why don't you come?" I said "alright I'll go," so my friend and I went.' This experience of performing in the chorus, as an elder, in a complex interesting play, was one she spoke of with great feeling and joy, 'it came together just like a jigsaw.'

Weedon (1987) writes of the way a subject's resistance to dominant discourses at an individual level may mean they are won over to a new discourse and thus

increase its social power. The participants have actually demonstrated a desire to win others, particularly friends, away from sexist and ageist stereotypical behaviour and over to the benefits of a variety of recreations. Athena spoke of her efforts to encourage others to be more active because 'there are an awful lot of people that don't do anything.' Thalia was quite proud of the results of her attempts to reach other women whose lives were confined and homebound, 'I've got a few people going, that never ever went dancing before'. The fact that, as eighty year old Thalia says, 'they're younger than me' is an indication that the link between age and activity levels is more a state of mind than a matter of years.

The three single women and to an extent Eartha, have moved from a subjectivity defined by family responsibilities, and being 'tied to the house', to one characterised by freedom, autonomy and friendship between equals. From a post-structuralist point of view these changes are a reflection of the fact that 'an individual's sense of herself ... is open to continuous redefinition' (Weedon, 1987 p.106). This process of redefinition of one's subjectivity can be seen as Weedon argues, one where women's memory and experience of oppressive discourses can provide the 'basis for the articulation of alternative meanings, which do not marginalize and subordinate women' (1987 p.127).

For the participants in this study, it seems that conflicts and contradictions arose when the dominant discourse which defined their biologically based, family, gender, roles were no longer able to give meaning to their daily lives. Weedon (1987) has observed that our subjectivities are never fixed, they are always open to competing discourses. When, as for these women, a situation occurs where they are subject to definitions of femininity and age, which conflict with the way they see their best interests, a space for resistance or even the rejection of the



repressive discourse is created. Such a transition may be fearful and hazardous and not all women are able to navigate the crossing.

The Doldrums - 'She's sitting around knitting at the present moment' (Thalia)-
Marooned or Castaway?

This phase is one of acquiescence to dominant discourses and reflects an acceptance of and probably an internalisation of sexist and ageist mores for women. One result of accepting ageism, is the ageist underuse syndrome described by (McCallum 1989), which seriously undermines the health and well-being of older people. In her study on older women and men and leisure activities, Wearing (1992a) found that for couples, it could be either the husband or the wife who exerted pressure on their partners to acquiesce to ageist social norms, or even a mutual choice to stay within their traditional gender role boundaries. The women I interviewed seemed to feel that it was primarily pressure from a male partner which limited a woman's recreations and outings and hence her ability to create a freer identity when her children had grown up.

This section is concerned with those women who are on their own, or married with grown up families, and who don't cross the bar, they remain trapped in discourses which are about constraints rather than freedom for women. Although this does not include any of the interviewees in this study, it does refer to women from amongst their contemporaries whom they have constructed as curtailed and limited in their personal choices. The following excerpts from Athena's interview illustrate this point very well:

You ask any of the ladies at the club who have got husbands, they can't join the things that we join because they're still tied to the house and home, umm, as I say you wouldn't get too many husbands would be tolerant enough to let their wives run around as much as the widows do ... [speaking of married women attending club outings, especially weekends away she told me they say] 'Oh no, my husband doesn't want to go. I can't go if he doesn't want to go.' They are curtailed from coming. They tell you they'd love to come but they can't because they have to be home for their husbands. I think a lot of the men just feel that if they're home, their wives should be home, I think, I don't know if it's just to talk to, or just to wait on them or what?

These observations accord with a number of leisure research studies which claim that male partners limit women's leisure activities (Dempsey 1992; Thompson 1992; Woodward and Green 1988; Wimbush and Talbot 1988; Darlison 1985). Thompson's study suggests that some married women would not commit time on the weekends or to going 'away', for tennis, because they felt constrained by their husbands wishes, 'weekends, he likes you to be here'. Other women said they would choose never to go out of town, 'on my own and leave my husband home ... I'm lucky to still have my husband, a lot of women haven't and that's why they go' (1992 p.280). It seems that some women decide to make leisure sacrifices for their husbands and some feel they have no choice.

Even with no husband to police sexist mores, some women have internalised repressive discourses about appropriate feminine behaviour and in effect, police themselves. An example is the woman described in the 'Findings' section who is 'sitting around knitting', she appears to have exhausted her purpose as a family factotum, her family has gone but she is unable to break free of a subjectivity which has no meaning outside of family service.

The interviewees shared a voluntary and willing belief that their children, and husbands had in the past, constituted a legitimate claim on their energies, talents

and leisure time. A post-structuralist analysis would view this as an internalisation of the commonsense discourse that it is 'natural' for women to have less power than males and to serve their families. According to this theory women are interpellated into a humanist discourse which constructs their subjectivity in such a way they perceive themselves as fixed in their natural roles of wife and mother. This subjectivity is bolstered by the media and by all the monolithic institutions of our society, law, medicine, education, religion, welfare systems, psychology and of course, marriage and the family. In this way women are socially constructed to be active agents in their own relative powerlessness (Weedon 1987). Of course this powerlessness varies greatly amongst women, with discourses on race, class ethnicity and gender also impacting one's social options and subjectivities.

Due perhaps to the sharing of belief systems inherent in the dominant discourses the interviewees showed sympathy and empathy towards the limited nature of the personal freedoms of their married contemporaries. However, they seemed to have less sympathy and understanding for those widows and other single women who still remained primarily baby sitting, knitting and 'tied to the house.' This was a common expression of Athena's and always conjured up to me a vision of a woman bound to a house as one might be to a tree or to railway tracks. The women who remain in this housebound position, the doldrums, appear to fit the profile described by the ACOTA (1989) submission concerning older women at risk from lack of activity. McCallum (1989) and Wearing (1992a) also both refer to the deterioration which can occur from a lack of stimulus and excessive conformity to sexist and ageist stereotypes.

Wearing (1992a) has noted that forms of resistance to dominant discourses, in

particular ageing, 'are neither uniform nor unidimensional' (p.11). Resistance may occur on a continuum, Weedon (1987) believes that it can occur even when subjects are 'forced to conform at least externally' (p.100). Weedon (1987) argues that it is very hard for women to 'opt out' of patriarchal nuclear family structures, in a large part because they are faced with the lack of a 'real alternative' (p.40). To some extent this is an answer to Weedon's own question as to why do women 'tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men' (p.12).

The fact that there are few alternatives, particularly for older women with a life time's experience of social controls applied through patriarchal power systems, provides a compelling argument for why many do not break free of oppressive discourses. Woodward and Green (1988) aptly sum up the manner in which these social controls, 'ranging from verbal hostility, ridicule and unwanted comments with sexual connotations, through to the threat of or actual use of physical violence against women' (p.144) operate in both the private and the public arenas.

Individual men are able to exercise control over the activities of 'their' women in this way, and women as a whole experience circumscriptions on their freedom of movement because of their fears of encountering male hostility in leisure venues or on the streets (p.144).

Even Athena and Thalia, who are quite free of domestic constraints, do not seem comfortable about going out alone at night, as Thalia says of using public transport at night, 'at my age you don't look for trouble.'

'The Forsaken Mermen - or Beware the Shoals of Patriarchy.'

This section refers to a state of mind from which the three single women seemed to view the majority of marriage relationships around them, and cultural

idealizations of marriage, with a strong degree of scepticism. Their main concern about marriage, was the perceived lack of liberty it entails for women. In spite of their certainty that **their** marriages 'didn't restrict' them, I was conscious of a degree of ambiguity in my interviewees in regard to their marriages and personal freedoms. Even Athena, although positive her husband was not 'jealous or possessive' or curtailing of her, also acknowledged that her husband 'never wanted to go out ... whereas I like going out and I like company, so out of necessity you don't go out as much as you would if you've got a husband like that'. Nor did she begin most of her current much loved leisure activities until she became a widow.

Soon after her marriage ended Terpsichore, although somewhat wistfully positive and philosophical about the frequent moves in her married life, moved back to Darwin and has stayed firmly put for over a decade. Thalia who on the one hand asserts that she has 'enjoyed' everything she's ever done, also discovered that many things she did for her family were a 'chore' once she did not 'have to' do them. It also seems paradoxical that although Thalia insists she was 'free' in her marriage, she regards the possibility of a domestic relationship with a new man as a return to something she's 'had years of' and clearly doesn't want any more of.

According to these women they did not choose to be without partners, but they have made the best of the situations they found themselves in, as Athena said, 'we've learned to adapt as we had to, without men.' Perhaps this assurance was thought necessary because the women have coped remarkably well with their changed circumstances. In addition, they give the impression they would think long and hard before going into a new marital situation. A post-structuralist

perspective would argue that their belief that marriage circumscribes women's freedoms is an entirely accurate view of a comparatively powerless, subjectivity constructed from sexist, patriarchal, family discourses.

These conclusions, in regard to the way marriage limits women's recreation, are strongly supported by evidence from feminists researching women and leisure (Betschild 1995; Thompson 1992; Dempsey 1992; Henderson et al. 1989; Wimbush and Talbot 1988; Woodward and Green 1988; Darlison 1985). A Northern Territory quantitative study on Sports and Recreation also lends support to these views in that it asserts that married women, 'including those in de facto relationships and women who lived in a 'couple with dependent children' household had the highest levels of non-participation of all marital status and household groups' (Gardner, 1991 p.23).

Weedon (1987) writes that, where a subject position is compatible with an individual's interests, (such as a woman's commitment to a long term marriage) the individual will be an effective agent of that discourse. However, when 'there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced' (1987 pp.112-113). It is this situation which I have described as women being wary of the 'Shoals Of Patriarchy, or to continue the nautical image, as 'Forsaking Mermen'.

Thus a post-structuralist position would see this phase of the women's journeys as one of resistance to oppressive, sexist, discourses. Such resistance may extend to a variety of the 'natural' expectations that women will provide a life long source of free labour, this is demonstrated in Thalia's views, 'I hate these bloody grandmas that's always running around having to babysit and spoiling the kids, I

don't do that'. An indication that such sentiments may range across cultural and racial divisions can be found in a comment by well known Aboriginal writer Ruby Langford (cited in Wearing, 1994 p.11), 'I'd heard about an Aboriginal hostel in Granville for people who'd raised their families and didn't want to become live-in baby-sitters for the kids.' The hostel provided a quiet haven where Langford was able to find space to write her book.

Wearing speaks of women claiming space and time for themselves as a process of 'rewriting the script of "woman" beyond phallogocentric socialisation' (1994 p.13). For the interviewees this process seems to involve some necessary 'letting go' of service roles for their children, grandchildren, and male partners - past, present or future. In her leisure studies research on women in midlife, Betschild reaches similar conclusions, observing that it is not until women are released from the, 'obligations of being responsible for others and the double work shift that they really can choose what they want to do for themselves' (1995 p.100). Thus older single women appear to be ideally placed to resist sexism and ageism through self-enhancing leisure activities - small wonder that they seem inclined to guard their state of single blessedness.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION PART 2.

FINDINGS

The main content focus of the second part of the findings is from excerpts from the video of the performance in which the four interviewees and twelve other older women acted danced and sang as well as co-wrote. The performance was based on the lives, stories, thoughts and dreams of the sixteen women; the script was democratically developed through a workshop process. They were supported by four theatre professionals, a director, a choreographer, an assistant to these two and a musical director.

Whilst the interview material was implicitly anti-ageist in that the women manifestly do not conform to ageist stereotypes, the performance material is more explicit and confrontational in its dealings with ageism. The performance opened with the women donning stereotypical old fashioned 'granny' hats and shawls. (During the show the women wore simple silk tops matching in style, but of different colours over black pants; character changes were largely signalled by changes in head wear.) While the rest of the women settled down in their 'little old lady' clothes, the spotlight focused on a 'typical' grandmother, wearing a shawl and sitting knitting in a rocking chair. Her skit was based on the theme 'old folks are worth a fortune', when it was over, all of the women got up and stuffed their hats and shawls into a rubbish bin shouting remarks like 'let's go down to the pub' and 'alleluia!' and 'I'll drink to that.'

Anti-ageism is also evident in their rendition of the song 'It's Not Unusual',

which can be seen as a collective statement; a crystallisation of the group's combined responses towards ageist norms and stereotypes. Using words and ideas from the group, the musical director arranged them to the tune of the well known pop song. The ideas and statements in the song emerged from a workshop which aimed to encourage the women to talk about the things they did

that society found unusual:

It's not unusual to want sex at sixty-five,
It's not unusual to jitter bug and jive,
So if you're ever tempted to think we're half alive
You're very wrong, you know -
There's not much we can't do
As well as you.
It's not unusual to abseil or roller skate,
Or have you hair done specially to go on a date,
Or ride a bike to uni - you know it's not too late!
It's not unusual - it happens every day,
No matter what you say,
We're learning things we never knew.
'Cos we don't have to do
What you want us to -
We're doing things a different way.
It's not unusual to act and dance and sing,
Canoe or camp or disco, or any other thing -
Like put on lingerie for a wild, romantic fling!
It's not unusual, it's not unusual.

In this fashion we are given a list of the activities which society thinks are unsuitable for older women to be doing. Hence it is not generally expected that they will, 'want sex at sixty five', 'learn to jitterbug and jive', 'abseil or roller skate', exert themselves for a special 'date', 'ride a bike to uni', or 'act and dance and sing', 'Canoe or camp or disco', or wear 'lingerie for a wild, romantic fling!' This musical refutation of ageist assumptions contains a statement of their belief that such expectations add up to the suggestion that older women are 'only half alive', an idea they firmly refuse. The song expresses a rejection of such

stereotypes, because these women are doing things 'a different way', setting their own course under their own steam. During this song one woman roller skated several times across the stage, she learnt to do this especially for the performance, it was something she had always wanted to try. Other women danced and did high kicks in unison as they sang.

Anti-ageism is evident throughout the show; another segment specifically targets the superficial, social judgements these women have to live with. In this section the women make announcements broadly following a set format, 'society thinks ... but I'm ...'. In these statements different women single out a variety of ageist assumptions that have affected them personally:

'Society thinks I'm a built in babysitter - but I'm a rap dancing rager.'

'Society thinks I'm just a bowler - but I'm a sports champion.'

'Society thinks I'm a pill pusher - but I'm a health fanatic.'

'Society sees me as a senior citizen - but I'm really twenty one.'

'Society thinks that I'm a keen gardener - but I'm really the family detective.'

'Society thinks I'm useless - but I help with meals on wheels.'

'Society thinks of me as grandma - but I work for rights of the disabled.'

DISCUSSION

Arguing from a post-structuralist perspective Wearing (1992a) has claimed that ageism is a discourse of 'deficiency', which emphasises any limitations that may come with age and thus 'reinforces the social constraints and negative stereotypes associated with ageing in our society' (p.12). The items from the show, highlighted in Part Two of the findings section of this paper demonstrate an awareness of, and resistance to ageist assumptions. Their song 'It's Not Unusual' for example, focuses on the many mainstream lifestyle and leisure activities in

which older women do participate. The song explicitly challenges ageism with statements like, 'there's not much we can't do / As well as you' and 'we don't have to do / What you want us to.'

In the same vein, the statements beginning, 'Society thinks ... but I'm ...' are calling for others to stop minimalising them and look beyond surface appearances. These older women are more than grandmothers, gardeners, baby sitters, bowlers or senior citizens; they are complex, interesting, active individuals and they are asking to be recognised as fully human. Different segments of the show target particular stereotypes, for example the opening item where the women wear old fashioned clothes and the skit takes place in a rocking chair. American feminist researchers Payne and Whittington (1980) state that the idea of a 'granny' in a rocking chair sewing or knitting is the major public image of how older women spend their leisure time. This view is debunked when the women trash their old style clothes and 'leave' the stage to go to the local hotel for a drink.

Payne and Whittington (1980) identify asexuality as one of the 'most persistent and pernicious stereotypes of older women' (p.14). Their singing of the lines 'It's not unusual, to want sex at sixty-five' and to 'put on lingerie for a wild romantic fling', are just some of numerous instances where women in the show refute the belief that older women are both, 'Sexually Inactive and Sexually Uninterested' (p.14). In their conclusion Payne and Whittington, (1980) dispute the 'popular view of older women as weak, ineffective, inactive, asexual old maids or widows', whose leisure time is spent in 'lonely solitude' (pp.22-23). The evidence from the DDG performance suggests that in fact, the opposite is true and those negative labels should be reversed. Instead, these are feisty, strong, effective,

active holistically complete women, whose leisure time is filled with friendship and exciting activities.

Using post-structural analysis Wearing (1992a) has postulated that the discourse of leisure with its legacy of freedom, inherently contradicts the 'dominant degenerative discourse on aging' and thereby provides a 'space for resisting ageism' (p.11). The DDG performance lends support to this argument by providing examples of collective resistance by a group of older women who are using their leisure activities to gain a public voice and resoundingly dismiss ageist stereotypes.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study grew out of my desire to learn more about those older women whose lives do not seem to conform to the dominant ageist and sexist stereotypes which saturate the society in which they live. A qualitative, interview methodology was chosen to facilitate a process whereby such women could be invited and encouraged to share their stories. There were three research questions:

1) Do these older women experience leisure in a way that acquiesces to, resists or rejects the dominant sexist and ageist discourses? (Wearing 1992a)

The evidence strongly suggests that the interviewees currently experience leisure with a high degree of personal autonomy. Once they are not living with a male partner these women gradually cease to conform to sexist gender norms. Several of the women show a consciousness of macro social gender controls by avoiding activities which put them at risk, such as using public transport at night. Dance and theatre activities offer the women a vehicle or means of vocal public rejection of ageist discourses. Terpsichore finds a personal solution to ageist attitudes by simply refusing to tell anyone how old she is.

2) How have these women's leisure patterns changed over time and what factors influenced those changes?

The most significant change in these women's leisure patterns seems to be that leisure is more or less constrained during the years of marriage and raising a family. There is an increase in the freedom and intensity of leisure activities as family responsibilities decrease.

3) Can involvement in leisure help older women build and maintain self esteem? Can leisure in fact be a vehicle or means by which older women can expand and develop their confidence and personal autonomy?

There are clear indications that leisure can be more than just a barometer or indicator of freedom; the evidence suggests that leisure may also be a facilitator and an enabler towards freedom and autonomy. This was particularly the case for Thalia and Athena who both spoke of important personal gains they made through involvement in leisure activities.

One of the strengths of a qualitative study like this is that it allows an in-depth close-up view of what older women experience and perceive from a personal perspective - it gives older women a chance to speak and be heard. On the other hand, a study such as this suffers from the fact that generalisations are difficult to make and care must be taken not to make easy assumptions based on such a small sample. For example the women all seemed to feel that 'the men are not joiners' (Athena) and this may lead one to believe that compared to women, males suffer from a lack of participation in leisure activities. However, there is conflicting information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics who have published the results of a 1991 quantitative survey in the Northern Territory on Sports and Recreation, which suggests different a view. The survey shows that for the age group of 45 years and over, women make up 36% of **non**-participants in sport and recreation, while males in that age bracket constitute 30% of **non**-participants, indicating that 6% fewer women are involved such activities (Gardner, 1991 p.23). It could be misleading to draw conclusions which involve numbers from a small qualitative study like this one. Ideally knowledge of these leisure issues will be increased through the undertaking of larger qualitative studies which incorporate the views and experiences of a much greater number of older women. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some institutions housing older people are deficient in facilitating access to leisure activities and more research is needed in this area.

Wearing argues that 'leisure is an area where the positive interests and abilities of the aged can be developed and ageism with its negative connotations resisted' (1992a p.12). It seems likely that leisure may also be an area which could be empowering for others who struggle against a range of repressive discourses. As well as those who experience ageism and sexism, people who suffer from class bias and racism and people with disabilities may well benefit from an increased participation in leisure activities. This could well provide new and fruitful areas for further leisure studies research.

This study, and all of the related literature reviewed, agree in finding that increased levels of leisure activities promotes the health and well-being of older women. Ideally such a finding will encourage professionals and policy makers to support projects which improve older women's access to appropriate, self-chosen leisure activities.

Endnote

¹ The name Terpsichore means 'lover of dancing', (Monaghan, 1981 p.244). Thalia or Thaleia is both festive and the 'abundant, overflowing, flowering one' (p.136), the name Athena is chosen in the sense of 'the warrior ... a protector of the tribe' (p.42). Eartha is a name of the Goddess as nature's mother who brings forth life and who was traditionally invoked by farmers when planting their crops (Walker, 1983 p.264).

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APPENDIX A**Profiles of the Four Interviewees:****Thalia:**

'Old age is not a burden; it is a privilege denied many.'

These are Thalia's views, she is eighty years old and lives alone in a small one bedroom unit amongst a cluster of other one story units built by the Northern Territory government for pensioner accommodation. Her 30 year long marriage ended nearly twenty years ago; she retired from factory work at around 62 having raised four stepsons and one son of her own birthing.

Thalia has strong views on recreation, 'close the door and get out', she advises us to enjoy life because, 'that's we're given life for.' She does no knitting, sewing, or crocheting, these were a necessary part of raising a family and even helped to provide her mother with an income during the depression. But not now, 'huh, [a chuckle] no I've done all that, been there done that, no sewing, I go and buy everything ready made now, [she finished with a chuckle].' It is obvious that Thalia has not had an easy life, but she carries no trace of bitterness, 'I enjoyed doing everything that I've done, I enjoyed it all.'

Thalia finds that given the quite generous Northern Territory Government pensioner concessions on electricity, rent,

transport etc. and the fact that she doesn't smoke or drink, the pension is enough to have a 'good life'; in her view 'if you learned to live in the depression, you can sure learn to live on the pension.' In fact, she is able to save for annual interstate and even overseas (Bali, Tasmania and New Zealand) holidays. Part of Thalia's independence must stem from her lack of susceptibility to consumerism, 'I see all these things that they advertise; I don't want those things.'

Dancing is the cornerstone of her leisure activities, she began to learn at the age of six but illness and finances forced her to give up her lessons at the age of nine. Now Thalia has an abundance of dancing, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday she goes ball room dancing, usually from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, and if transport is available she relishes attending a dance which goes for 4 hours on Saturday nights. On Wednesday nights she goes with her daughter-in-law to Chi Kung (a 'wonderful' Chinese style of breathing and exercises), on Thursday mornings to U3A programs and she has recently taken up line dancing classes. She has created a tiny but exquisite garden, mows the lawn with a hand mower and clips the edges with scissors 'I find out it doesn't hurt m' hands so much as those other clippers.'

Thalia also finds time to play carpet bowls once a week, belongs to the Merry Widows Social Club, and their choir, sporadically attends Life Be In It activities and has recently started going to line dancing lessons. Both the Merry Widows

and the U3A hold lectures, organise outings and arrange field trips as a follow up to lecture sessions. These organisations have provided offered the chance to visit Katherine and the Daly River, to go on harbour cruises, to go gliding and experience abseiling. Partnered parachute jumping is currently under consideration by Thalia as a possible future recreational experience.

She regards all of these activities very positively, even though she cracked a rib abseiling with the YMCA, 'That was when I knew I was really on my bloody own love.' She told me that she was hanging over a fifty foot cliff, on the end of a rope and receiving instructions, 'but I'm only short and I couldn't do what they were trying to explain to me.' Then she told me she realised 'I was on my own and I had to find my own way down.' Thalia has a admirable independence and she regards coming to terms with being on her own, after her marriage ended, as a major personal challenge of her latter years. Yoga, which she practised and taught for five years in her sixties, and ballroom dancing were named as vital elements in a process she refers to as 'finding myself.'

Thalia is not at the moment a current member of the DDG, though she loved it and especially found wonderful the opportunities it gave her to participate in the more mainstream theatre activities and community arts productions - such as Oedipus Rex. Unfortunately two years ago an accident heralded the giving up of her car and this curtailed her DDG

group attendance, it was transport, 'that's where I get held up, I can't always get a lift.' Another of Thalia's activities is to be a Girl Guide Grandma, the majority of Northern Territory children see very little of their grandmas as they mostly live 'down south', accordingly a number of older women have been invited to be honorary grandmas. They help on special guide projects, attend functions and go away for weekend camps with the guides.

Eartha:

Eartha is 73 years old and she is the only interviewee who is currently married. She lives in a house with a swimming pool (not uncommon in the Darwin climate) and a large yard situated close by to several of the other interviewees homes. All her working life she has done office and book-keeping duties and though retired she still does the books for the family property - now shrunk to 300 acres. Most of her married life has been spent in the outback of the Northern Territory; she came to Australia in 1950. Though she and her husband are now comfortably off they have worked hard for many years to achieve this. When they met in the early fifties in Alice Springs she was an English, migrant, office worker and he was a traveller from New Zealand working as a yard sweeper.

Her husband spends from Saturday to Tuesday evenings in town and the rest of the week on their property, 'when we're together there's plenty to talk about.' Eartha likes to schedule her recreation so that some things are shared with

her husband and others with her sisters and friends. There are also everyday activities such as walking the dog, gardening for an hour every morning and doing a few rounds of the pool several times a day - except in the dry season when it's too cold. Activities she in the time she reserve to share with her husband include, beach walks with the dog, visiting plant nurseries, gardening, theatre, cinema and line dancing classes. Line dancing is such a favourite that they have bought the video and practice at home; they may progress to the rock and roll classes when they have mastered the line dancing.

During the other four days of the week she is involved in many different activities including social bowls, between two and four games a week normally - each game lasts two hours. On Thursdays she attends U3A lectures or outings and on Fridays she attends the DDG, its 'one of the things that keeps us going.' She values the dance group chiefly as exercise, but acknowledges its social side as she and her sister and friends, all catch the same bus, share a coffee, dance, lunch and shop together afterwards. She has also thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities the dance group has provided to participate in a diverse range of public theatre performances.

Eartha attends church regularly and once a week she does a three hour stint in the cathedral shop. She is a member and the secretary of a retired business women's social club and a member of the Merry Widows' social club and their choir

group. The Merry Widows meet every second week, one fortnight they share lunch, the next they share an outing or a trip or a party; they are a very active club. Many of the other married women members cannot attend the outings, usually because the husband's object, but this is not a problem for Eartha.

Her greatest love is gardening and she tells me, 'I'd spend as much time as I could in gardening, but, um, I think age has caught up with me a bit. My back tells me when it's time to stop.' She is a foundation member of the gardening club, 37 years now, she has been a past president on at least six occasions and as the current newsletter editor she is just now bringing out the latest issue. She told me 'I love visiting nurseries and I can never resist a plant.' Other favourite recreations are a good book or a good television programme - especially gardening ones. While watching television she often embroiders or crochets, but only mentioned this when I commented on the abundance of lovely cushion covers etc.

For several years she enjoyed painting but gave it up when her teacher moved south several years ago - by this time she had managed to run out of hanging space anyway. Quite incidentally Eartha mentioned towards the end of the interview that her grandson is a full-time boarder so that he can attend secondary school in town. Furthermore the spare bedrooms are often fully occupied by friends and family staying over. She personally maintains this household and its responsibilities - laundry, cooking, cleaning, gardening, shopping, caring etc.

with an impressive ease and still finds time to enjoy numerous leisure activities. In her view leisure encompasses the things you 'want' to do, not the things you 'have' to do. Although she has a small car she doesn't use it much - except for grocery shopping because she considers herself a traffic hazard since she has impaired vision due to glaucoma.

Terpsichore:

Terpsichore has been admitting to being 'over sixty five' for some time now, she lives in an upstairs flat in a two storey complex which is pleasant and shaded by well established trees. There are two balconies to her home and these provide the opportunity for some out door living spaces. The area is close enough to town (about a kilometre) to walk in if her small car is giving problems. Her marriage ended about eleven years ago and this gave her the opportunity to return to Darwin, she likes living here and had only left it because her husband had chosen to. She has one daughter resident in the Territory and two sons who live interstate. On principle she doesn't discuss her age, she says, 'I think it's a mistake' because she believes that if 'people tell you their age every time you see them you think of their age instead of them.'

Terpsichore began dancing at the age of four and only stopped at twelve because her father died and there was not enough money to pay for classes. But theatre and performance are second nature to her and all through the many places and homes that her marriage took her, whenever possible she joined local

drama and musical comedy groups. She performed in pantomimes, plays and playreadings and was always happy to be involved at any level, whether backstage with props or costumes or swelling a chorus line with chants and songs.

At the time of our interview she is working backstage on a local drama group's play production, this involves rehearsals three times a week for two hours, over six weeks, but increases during the final week of rehearsal. She has recently finished participating in a play reading series for the Darwin Theatre Company and is now gearing up for opening night this week of a new play. This will require her to work backstage on Thursday and Saturday nights for three weeks (7 p.m. to 11.30 p.m.). Although she has a strong commitment to the needs of her theatre groups, she is clear about her priorities and is not available on Friday nights as that is reserved for her medal dancing classes. 'I told them at the beginning,' she said, 'I'm not coming Fridays.' Ballroom dancing is a special love, she recently achieved the New Vogue Silver Medal and is working towards her Bronze Latin Medal. She also attends ballroom dances on Saturday nights and the DDG on Friday mornings. Terpsichore has her sights set on another ballroom style for which she hasn't yet 'gone in for the medals' and she assures me with a chuckle, 'I will later, I will.' She plays twilight social bowls on Tuesdays, belongs to the Merry Widows Social Club and goes to U3A meetings when her theatre commitments allow time for these activities.

In the lounge and in the kitchen are several displays of stones which she has collected and cut and polished - in the cupboards there are many more stones waiting to be sorted and polished. She is not currently an active member of the Gem and Mineral Club, but hopes to eventually find time to return to that group as it is a much loved hobby. Another hobby is book binding which she came to learn in some depth after attending a U3A lecture on the subject; this is one she still keeps up and I was shown some very competent examples of her handiwork. About a year ago she took the opportunity go gliding which also emerged from a U3A lecture and found it marvellous. In the past when the opportunities presented themselves, she has enjoyed yoga, shell collecting and jewellery making (to set peridots she'd collected). For Terpsichore, leisure is 'enjoyment in doing' and it encompasses all of her life as a seamless tapestry. When queried as to where housework fitted into such a description she replied, 'I do it when I feel like doing it and then I enjoy doing it,' and if it feels like a chore then she does it 'later.'

Athena:

Athena is sixty-six years old, she is widowed and lives in a two storey home unit in a complex which appears to be largely owner occupied and has well established palm gardens dotted about. Before retiring she worked for many years as a Doctor's receptionist and book-keeper. Her grown up old son lives at home and leads his own active, independent life. She and most of her friends are widows, but they do not seem to suffer

loneliness, in some ways she says, 'it's like going back to school girl ages.' This is because they socialise in groups of female friends and have 'best friends.' It seems that dancing without a male partner was a challenge at first but, she says 'you soon get over your embarrassment and just got up and danced with each other.'

Athena is no doubt about what activities in her life she considers recreational and she had prepared quite a long list of them prior to our interview. In some ways she finds life is 'possibly fuller' first as a retiree and then later as a widow, when volunteer work as well as recreation become more feasible. 'We start doing things that we couldn't do when we were working,' this is helped by the fact that 'your time's your own. 'Her husband was a man who liked to fix things and he spent virtually all his leisure time in the shed pottering and fixing. He had never wanted to go out and though he encouraged her to do so, Athena says 'obviously you sort of feel you should be at home with your husband.' This was especially the case when her husband became very ill, even though, 'he was very tolerant, he never minded me going anywhere.'

Part of her recreation centres around clubs, she is the treasurer of the Merry Widows' Club and in their choir, and is also an honorary member of a women's auxiliary group which is generally reserved for wives and widows of a local service club. She regularly attends U3A classes and enjoys fortnightly

evening meetings with a group of women who like to play a card game called Bolivia. Whenever the kitty gets full enough they all go out to dinner together on the proceeds 'and have a good splurge.' She goes to the DDG classes on Friday mornings and through this has been in a number of other local theatrical shows as well.

She was disappointed to miss out on abseiling when a YMCA course for it was cancelled, but hopes the opportunity will come up again. She has no pets but usually manages to borrow the neighbour's dog and walk it for an hour a day - she can't go any longer because it's 'a very little dog with very little legs.' She tells me this with a chuckle - many of her sentences are punctuated by chuckles. She also enjoys a good book and giant sized crosswords. When her grandchildren are in town (they live about forty minutes from the city) she looks after them and they join her in walking the dog and visiting the beach - these are obviously happy occasions.

Forced to give up tennis in her early thirties when she broke her achilles tendon on the court, Athena has recently found (through U3A) 'badminton really answers the love of tennis without the dashing around the courts.' They just go to 'have fun', but initially they were all new to the sport and are now quite proud of the skills they've acquired. She tells me with relish that Badminton is another one of those sports where women can compete successfully with men if generally 'matched in ability and age.'

But her 'real love' is lawn bowls, one of the few activities she pursued before the death of her husband. Lawn bowls she tells me, is another 'game where ladies can play against men on an equal footing, because there's no brute strength in it you see.' Consequently a 'lady bowler can beat a man bowler without any trouble at all.' Athena tells me that sadly, a lot of men won't play mixed bowls 'because they don't like being beaten by the women' this statement was followed by a hearty laugh. Lawn bowls takes up 'an awful lot of [her] time', she plays Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, is on two committees and is also Captain of the women bowlers.

Apparently the women had to campaign hard for the privilege of full. not associate membership, 'we tried for at least two years before we got it through.' Unfortunately, but probably typically for Australian sports, women sometimes win the battle only to lose the war, because as Athena said, 'it really hasn't done us any good.' When the dust had settled the changes entailed, higher dues, handing over all their monies, the loss of a woman president - because you can't have two president's of the one club - plus the retention of the odd sexist more concerning dress rules and the fact that women may not smoke on the greens. There are about 70% more males than females in this club, consequently since the amalgamation there have been no women presidents, though there have been a secretary and treasurer - 'jobs the men don't want.'

Athena has found that leisure activities have played a key

role in helping her establish a new life after her husband died after which she says - 'I more or less joined everything I could .. because. I was frightened of being lonely.' After a time however, 'I stopped doing the things I didn't want to do', and now she feels, 'I am lucky, I got a lot of good friends.' In her view older people in Darwin are almost too well catered for because some people take this abundance of opportunity for granted, however, 'for those that want to do things there's plenty to do in Darwin.'

THURSDAY *Woman*

Fat women in bikinis debate rages

ROME: The mayor of an Italian seaside resort who sparked a so-called Bikini War with a plan to ban "ugly" women from walking around town in swimsuits has said he was merely against "vulgarity".

Andrea Guglieri, mayor of the northwestern Riviera resort of Diano Marina said this week: "It is not true that I have issued any decree."

He spoke as the rest of Italy enjoyed the main Ferragosto (Assumption Day) summer holiday.

Guglieri added: "I merely made recommendations to combat vulgarity."

He said no fines would be levied against anyone who refused to listen to the authorities.

Scanty

The mayor hit the headlines last weekend when Italian newspapers, who dubbed the summer spat the Bikini War, reported he had banned "ugly women" from his town.

The daily *Il Giorno* quoted the mayor as saying: "It's a pleasure to see a beautiful girl in a bikini, even if it's very scanty."

"But one can't tolerate certain sights."

"We're making allowances this year."

"But next summer there'll be no more flab all over the place."

"And buttocks, cellulite thighs and drooping boobs will all be banished."

Yesterday, Guglieri said he was saddened by the media coverage of his plans when compared with more important issues.

He said: "You have the Bikini War on one page and the real war in Bosnia on another. That is really sad."

He cited as examples of "vulgarity" heavily pregnant women strolling around town in bikinis, or anyone of either sex baring a big belly off the beach.

He added: "A big belly and swimsuits don't look good."

Most Italians, leaving the semi-deserted cities to the elderly and foreign tourists, ignored the fuss and crowded the country's popular beaches en masse as usual.

Racist

But the ex-mayor of the Tremiti Islands in the Adriatic intensified the debate by saying Guglieri's remarks and various bans imposed by other mayors elsewhere were racist and discriminatory against ordinary people.

Former mayor Giuseppe Calabrese said: "It's a form of racism. It's not just important and beautiful people who go on holiday but also the workers, the employees with their arthritis and cellulite."

"And they are the ones who spend most too."

Unfit

□ Humorous but *definitely* politically-incorrect. After staff started regular fitness runs, a certain Darwin office has designed a new section logo. The design features a red circle with a slash through the middle (a-la-Ghostbusters) with the words: "Fat chicks in bike pants".