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# Negotiating stigmatisation of deviant behaviour: an exploration of locals' perceptions of nude tourists

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**ABSTRACT**

Stigma may result in tense social interactions and discrimination between stigmatisers and stigmatised individuals. Despite its social relevance, stigma has been largely neglected in tourism sociocultural studies. Framed by Goffman's and Falk's theoretical propositions of social stigma, this paper aimed to explore local's stigmatisation of tourists' behaviour. This study revealed that locals' stigmatisation of tourists' behaviours can be spatially negotiated and deconstructed through social interactions. The data analysis also found that not all tourists are equally stigmatised and that tourists' conduct can be highly stigmatised if adopted by locals. Based on in-depth interviews, these findings were drawn from an examination of locals' perceptions of tourists' nudist behaviours in a Mexican destination. This research's results contribute to a fuller understanding of how locals (de)construct their stigmas of tourists' behaviours through local-tourist sociocultural interactions.

## Introduction

In his now classic theory, sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) states that societies establish the means of categorising social identity and the set of attributes seen as ordinary and natural for each social category's members. Thus, humans tend to undergo cognitive adaptation processes that cause them to exclude socially (i.e. stigmatise) individuals who possess – or are believed to possess – certain discrediting attributes (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Humans thus mentally reduce these individuals from whole and normal to tainted and discounted (Goffman, 1963).

Stigma appears to be a universal phenomenon. According to Falk (2001), stigmatisation can take place whenever and wherever some individuals' behaviours or characteristics are found offensive, reprehensible or deviant. Because divergent behaviours or characteristics are found everywhere, almost any conduct or trait can be perceived as deviant by some observer. However, how stigma is constructed by stigmatisers and experienced by the stigmatised depends on the specific sociocultural context in which the stigma develops. The meanings, practices and outcomes of stigma differ across cultures (Yang et al.,

2007). Therefore, individuals' conditions and behaviours can be expected to be socially discredited in a variety of ways.

The importance of subjecting stigma to empirical analysis arises from the significant consequences stigma has for the well-being and social lives of individuals who are stigmatised. Stigmatisation necessarily involves cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions to perceived negative deviance (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000). Stigma's consequences, however, are not restricted to those with a discredited characteristic, as people associated with stigmatised individuals are devalued purely as a result of their connection (Dwyer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2013). Both stigmatised and associated individuals may be affected by stigmatisers' negative treatment of and various forms of direct discrimination against them.

On a personal level, stigma negatively influences the social status and power, psychological well-being, academic achievement, personal and collective self-esteem and physical health of the stigmatised (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013; Major & O'Brien, 2005). On a collective level, stigma may result in tense social interactions between stigmatised and nonstigmatised individuals (Hebl et al., 2000). According to Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) and Falk (2001), stigma can have important implications for social interactions, leading to aversion, negative stereotypes, prejudice, indifference, hostility, interpersonal rejection, discrimination, disapproval, punishment and even extermination. Accordingly, scientific research is necessary to develop anti-stigma interventions in contexts in which reprehensible or deviant behaviours are an influential component of social interactions.

Due to its psychological and social relevance, stigma has been extensively studied both theoretically and empirically. This research, however, has concentrated on the stigmatised rather than stigmatisers and the associated social interactions, focusing primarily on the experience, impact and internalisation of stigma (Bos et al., 2013). Although the number of publications on stigma has grown exponentially over the last decade, this area of research still remains an important priority (Bos et al., 2013).

Because stigma is a social construct, studies need to include the social dimension of stigmatisation, namely, the interactions between stigmatisers and the stigmatised in real life. One of the most interesting and least understood areas related to social stigma is the dynamics of interactions between stigmatised and nonstigmatised individuals (Crocker et al., 1998). Because stigma is defined within the context of social interactions, researchers have acknowledged the importance of studying stigmatisation in real and ongoing social interactions (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005).

Due to tourism's liminal role and its dimension of sociocultural interactions, a variety of tourism spaces are ideal scenarios for analyses of stigma. Certain behaviours are more easily adopted by tourists and tolerated on vacation than they would be at home because of the higher degree of anonymity that tourism offers (McKercher & Bauer, 2003). This allows tourists to get involved in discreditable behaviours such as drug use (Uriely & Belhassen, 2006) and prostitution (Oppermann, 1999) or to be open about stigmatised conditions such as homosexuality (Hughes, 1997). As a sociocultural phenomenon, tourism brings social groups (i.e. tourists and locals) into frequent contact. In this process, cultural gaps and local normative structures can lead to stigmatisation of tourists' behaviour. Analysing stigma in tourism contexts is thus necessary for understanding how tourists' behaviours can be labelled as deviant and can trigger stigmatisation by locals.

Despite its social relevance, stigma research has been largely neglected in tourism contexts. The existing literature has studied associated stigma as experienced by tourists rather than as constructed by locals and their interactions with tourists. Moufakkir (2015), for example, examined how Arab and Muslim tourists are stigmatised when their hosts associate these visitors with Arab and Muslim nationals who are immigrants in the host country. However, according to Hebl and Dovidio (2005), local-tourist interactions may influence perceptions not only of the stigmatised but also of the stigma itself. Based on this conceptual framework, the present study sought to answer the questions of how residents in tourism destinations stigmatise certain tourists' behaviours and how stigmatisation may change through host-guest interactions.

To address the gaps in the literature, this research explored local perceptions of tourists' nude behaviour based on Falk (2001) and Goffman's (1963) theories of social stigma. Nudity in public spaces has been regarded as a deviant behaviour characteristic of some tourists (Andriotis, 2010). Because the form and degree of modesty vary across societies (Douglas, Rasmussen, & Flanagan, 1977), attitudes towards public nudity vary across sociocultural contexts. Nudism activities in tourism settings thus offer an ideal scenario in which to explore stigmatisation of tourists' behaviours. The present findings and conclusions were drawn from an empirical qualitative study focusing on a nude beach in Mexico – a context that has been largely ignored in the sociocultural debates of general tourism studies.

## Theoretical framework

### Stigma

Stigma is a special kind of relationship between individuals' attributes and stereotypes, namely, an undesired differentness (Goffman, 1963). Stigma refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Jones et al., 1984) or an attribute or feature that conveys a devalued social identity within a specific social context. Consequently, stigma is not located entirely within the stigmatised but also occurs within the social context that defines an attribute as devaluing (Yang et al., 2007). Dovidio, Major, and Crocker (2000) state that stigma has two fundamental components: the recognition of difference based on some distinguishing characteristic (i.e. 'mark') and the consequent social devaluation of the person in question.

Stigma is conceived fundamentally as a moral issue in that it intervenes in what matters to individuals' lives (Goffman, 1963). The members of a social category may strongly support a standard of judgement that they and others agree does not directly apply to them (Falk, 2001). Thus, stigma is activated by a set of stereotypes (Moufakkir, 2015) that are either positive or negative (Goffman, 1963). Falk (2001) argues that stigma and stigmatisation can occur whenever and wherever some individuals find behaviours or characteristics of other people offensive and/or reprehensible. Therefore, stigma is attached to conduct viewed by observers as deviant since deviance is 'in the eye of the beholder' and not in the essence of the 'deviant' (Falk, 2001, p. 24).

Therefore, stigmas appear everywhere because almost any conduct or characteristic can be perceived as deviant by a particular observer (Falk, 2001). Because social responses to behaviours are shaped by shared cultural meanings (Yang et al., 2007), cultural beliefs largely dictate which attributes are stigmatised (Major & O'Brien, 2005). What is

stigmatised in one social context may not be stigmatised in other situations (Crocker et al., 1998). Likewise, stigma has a temporal dimension as it can change over time: increasing, decreasing or remaining stable (Moufakkir, 2015). Conduct that is stigmatised at one time may not be stigmatised at another stage (Falk, 2001).

Based on the nature of the stigmatised individuals' condition or conduct, stigma can be either 'existential' or 'achieved' (Falk, 2001). Existential stigma derives from a condition that the stigmatised person either does not cause or over which he or she has little control. Examples of this condition can be nationality (Moufakkir, 2015), mental illness (Corrigan, 2005) and obesity (Myers & Rosen, 1999). Achieved stigma, on the other hand, refers to a stigma earned because of conduct, including, for example, prostitutes (Sallmann, 2010) and alcohol and drug addicts (Room, 2005).

After examining the social psychology of stigma-based social exclusion, sociologist Gerhard Falk (2001) called for a distinction between stigmatisations that are a product of societal deviance and those that are a product of situational deviance. Societal deviance refers to a condition widely perceived – in advance and in general – as being deviant and stigmatised. Nudism, in some societies, is an example of this because of the high degree of consensus that public nudity violates social norms (The Guardian, 2017). In contrast, situational deviance refers to actual acts by individuals who thereafter are stigmatised. A burglar is an example since, rather than the individual's social identity, the person's crime leads to the subsequent stigmatisation. Therefore, situational deviance cannot lead to stigma unless it is discovered, while societal deviance exists as a potential label to be attached to those who identify themselves or are identified as stigmatised.

Stigma can also be acquired by association (Dwyer et al., 2013). An unpopular label can be conferred on some individuals by others based on their association with a stigmatised person. These people will then suffer the consequences of this 'mark' in a manner similar to someone who has engaged in deviant behaviour. Whether derived from societal, situational or associated deviance, stigma leads to what Goffman (1963) calls 'a spoiled identity', meaning that the stigma has disqualified the stigmatised individual from full social acceptance. Stigma negatively alters social interactions between perceivers of stigma and the stigmatised (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005).

Because societies establish boundaries based on agreed upon labels, all societies will always stigmatise some conditions and behaviours. For the stigmatisers, stigma appears to be an effective response not only as an act of self-preservation or psychological defence but also as protection from the existential and moral experience that is threatening them (Yang et al., 2007). Stigmatising also strengthens group solidarity by delineating 'outsiders' clearly from 'insiders' (Falk, 2001, p. 13). Boundaries can be defined by the distribution of political, institutional, economic or territorial power. As Bos et al. (2013) suggest, people with more power may stigmatise individuals with less power in order to maintain inequalities between groups (Bos et al., 2013) and achieve a collective sense of morality (Falk, 2001). In social stigma relationships, insiders – or signifiers – are usually in a favourable power position as compared with outsiders, who are the target of stigmatisation.

Although stigmatised individuals are often avoided (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005), in many social contexts, interactions between stigmatisers and the stigmatised are inevitable and even necessary. Social situations in which outsiders and insiders interact – termed

'mixed contacts' by Goffman (1963) – can lead stigmatisers and the stigmatised to change behaviours and rearrange their lives in an effort to adapt. Over time, social interactions also have an effect on both the stigmatisers and stigmatised's perceptions. According to Hebl and Dovidio (2005), interactions may influence perceptions not only of the stigmatised but also of the stigma itself. Thus, stigmas are not immutable as they may change over time with repeated exposure to stigmatised individuals. As perceivers of stigma increasingly come in contact with members of a stigmatised group, the stigmatisers and stigmatised are more likely to feel favourably about each other. Consequently, as proposed by Corrigan and Kosyluk (2013), one way to reduce public stigma may be targeted, local, credible and continuous contact with stigmatised individuals. This proposition, however, still lacks empirical support.

As a sociocultural phenomenon, tourism is likely to be a particularly important arena for the (de)construction of social stigmas. First, tourism is about social interactions, and the quality of relationships between locals and tourists depends largely on how accentuated cultural differences are (Armenski, Dragičević, Pejović, Lukić, & Djurdjev, 2011; Reisinger, 1994). Tourism thus brings into contact individuals with contrasting cultural and moral values that assign different significance to behaviours, some of which may be stigmatised. Second, unlike other forms of travel and other situations with social interactions, individual tourists travel more to experience different states of mind than different places (Selänniemi, 2003). When tourists are on holiday, they undergo not only physical and temporal but also psychological transitions that allow them to adopt conduct that may be discreditable in their everyday environments.

In order to avoid being stigmatised, many individuals engage in deviant behaviour in secret, and they are thus not rejected because their behaviour is hidden from the public. Due to tourism's liminal role (McKercher & Bauer, 2003), it may provide tourists with the chance for covert deviant behaviour. While away from home, tourists are less likely to be marked as deviants – at least not permanently – because their deviance takes place only temporarily and anonymously. Nonetheless, their behaviour is discreditable, and, unless it remains hidden, they may be discredited.

Within the same framework, tourism may act specifically as a modifier of stigmas and stereotypes. Interactions between the stigmatisers and stigmatised can change insiders' perceptions of outsiders and their notions of the stigmas in question (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005). Unlike tourists, who are only temporarily in contact with locals, locals are exposed to tourists' behaviours permanently. This does not necessarily mean that locals approve of tourists' behaviours, but locals' frequent contact with them can make unfamiliar behaviours more familiar. According to social exchange theory, locals' perceptions and attitudes towards tourists are shaped by tourism's perceived benefits (Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006). Thus, locals' acceptance or tolerance of tourists' behaviours in the destination – including discreditable behaviours – can be conditioned by tourists' economic importance.

### Nudism

Organised public nudity has been traced back to the Greek civilisation, but it was not until the 1920s that nudity was widely practised in European societies, mainly Germany, France, Switzerland and England (Clarke, 1982). Early nudists condemned clothing as dangerous to

humans' physical, psychological, sexual and moral health. Clothing was seen as emblematic of class distinctions and part of an oppressive psychological sexual regime. Nudism practitioners have thus long regarded social nudity as a medical, philosophical and political movement that can remediate social harms such as gender, class and racial inequalities (Barcan, 2015).

Nudism has been conceptualised as a leisure activity, cultural practice (Jaurand, 2006) and even lifestyle (Barcan, 2015) – a perspective largely derived from the naturism philosophy. The evolution and current manifestations of social nudism centre around a philosophy of valuing bodies' contact with nature. Nudism is defined and understood through a complex articulation of discourses about nature, human nature, natural bodies and natural landscapes (Bell & Holliday, 2000). Naturism's fundamental ideal is that nature and its elements are always medically beneficial to humans (Barthe-Deloizy, 2003), thereby emphasising the non-sexual and family component of public nudity (Holmes, 2006). Public nudity, however, does not always subscribe to naturism's philosophy.

As a type of nudism space, nude beaches have become quite popular in tourism. This popularity is due, on the one hand, to the conjunction of natural elements – sea, sun, sand, wind and the human body (Barthe-Deloizy, 2003) – and, on the other hand, to the experience of relaxation, socialisation with like-minded people and liminality (Douglas et al., 1977). In his work on beaches as liminal spaces, Preston-Whyte (2004) analysed the liminal properties of beaches, which are perceived and experienced in multiple ways. Liminality occurs when individuals experience a transition from one station of life to another or from one culturally defined stage in their life cycle to another. Liminality represents a liberation from the imperatives of the normative practices and performance codes of ordinary life (Shields, 2013). In tourism research, the concept of liminality tends to be associated with beaches as 'a place in between, neither land nor sea, where the normal social conventions need not apply' (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006, p. 764).

Liminal spaces such as beaches lie in a limbo-like space often outside normal social and cultural constraints, in which moments of freedom and escape from everyday responsibilities and constraints can be experienced. Beaches can be socially and spiritually liminal, but other practices on beaches such as surfing and nudism can also lead to a suspension of time and communion with oneself (Preston-Whyte, 2004). Booth's (2001) study documented how beaches are a space used to escape the strain of stress and life's complexities. The cited author states:

> [Beaches are] a sanctuary … [in] which to abandon cares – a place to let down one's hair, [and] remove one's clothes – … of uninhibited social interaction[:] a paradise where one … [can] laze in peace [–] free from guilt, drifting between the hot sand and the warm sea [–] and seek romance. (pp. 3–4)

Nudist beaches are spaces in which the atmosphere of liminality allows individuals to relax and let go of their life's tensions. However, in terms of clothing constraints that Western societies have imposed, liminality on beaches is not restricted to total nudity. Preston-Whyte (2004) observes that beaches are a sacred place in which the normal status quo is temporarily suspended. On beaches, clothing is reduced as much as possible, so this allows everyone on the beach – not only nudists – to experience liberation from the

social norms of clothing in public spaces. Similar to many other public spaces, beaches are socially and culturally perceived, constructed and contested. Consequently, tensions between individuals can develop within beach spaces that can disrupt people's liminal experience.

However, the naturist and leisure components of nude beaches are not their only attraction since they are also constructed and attractive as sexual spaces. They offer a wide range of sexual opportunities for nudists – from voyeurism and exhibitionism to sexual intercourse (Andriotis, 2010; Douglas et al., 1977; Holmes, 2006). Simple curiosity and a predilection for watching others' bodies are other motivations for visiting certain nude beaches (Holmes, 2006).

On these beaches, male homosexuals' presence and practices are relatively common (Barcan, 2015). Nude beaches are a unique space in which gay nudists escape social norms, have the opportunity to explore their sexuality identity and enjoy experiences and feelings often repressed in conventional public spaces (Andriotis, 2010; Jaurand, 2005). Sexual activity by homosexuals has also been repeatedly confirmed by previous research since nude beaches offer homosexuals opportunities for voyeurism and exhibitionism, as well as 'cruising' and 'swinging' in the open air (Andriotis, 2010; Douglas et al., 1977; Holmes, 2006; Monterrubio, 2013). However, the sexual dimension of nude beaches is not exclusively enjoyed by homosexuals as heterosexuals also participate in sexual acts (Douglas et al., 1977). Nude beaches are thus often condemned by locals as sites of licentiousness (Barcan, 2015), and these places may be regarded as attractors of sexual deviants and voyeurs, exhibitionists and perverts (Booth, 1997). This means that not all social nudist practices are true to the naturist philosophy and, thereby, free from stigmatisation.

Regardless of the type of nudism space and despite the social, political and health benefits of naturism – including improvements in body image, self-esteem and overall life satisfaction (West, 2018) – nude beaches have been subject to social and legislative condemnation. Goodson's (1991) research revealed that public perceptions and attitudes towards nudism have changed over time and have been shaped by the specific cultures in which these mindsets develop. In many western societies, any form of public nudity is widely considered deviant and an offensive practice (Andriotis, 2016) since many people believe that nudism deviates from societal norms and constitutes an erotic act of immodesty associated with sexuality (Andriotis, 2010). As Preston-Whyte (2004) claims, 'public nudity commonly carries with it a level of social opprobrium, largely shaped by religious dogma, which tends to be articulated through expressions of disgust, disapproval, and suspicion' (p. 355). Therefore, social attitudes towards nudism have been largely repressive, based mainly on moralist, religious and conservative perspectives. Labels associated with public nudity include weird, creepy, senseless, immoral, indecent, sexually deviant and depraved, as well as that publicly nude individuals are sex-crazed perverts and even paedophiles (Booth, 1997; Daley, 2005; Douglas et al., 1977). As Barcan (2015) argues:

> [D]espite nudists' fervent belief in the moral, social, and psychological benefits of their practice, nudism has widely been seen as a strange, even deviant practice, and nudism has always had to fend off accusations – both jocular and outraged – of perversion and licentiousness. (p. 2)

## Study context

Using Falk (2001) and Goffman's (1963) theoretical framework of social stigma, the present study sought to explore locals' stigmatisation of nude tourists. To this end, Zipolite, the only Mexican nude beach, was selected as a study context. Zipolite is characterised by a remote rural location, low population density (i.e. 1059 inhabitants in 2010), high level of socioeconomic marginalisation (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social [Sedesol], 2013) and small scale tourism development. Historically, alternative means of making a living in Zipolite have been scarce (Brenner & Fricke, 2007), and tourism currently remains the main economic activity.

Nudism in tandem with a hippie lifestyle has been part of Zipolite since the inception of tourism in the area. In the 1970s, a few hundred hippie travellers came to Zipolite for the first time, and, since then, it has been known as a 'hippie paradise' (Brenner & Fricke, 2007). The hippie lifestyle includes nude bathing and the use of soft drugs. This type of tourist and behaviour was tolerated because local families realised that these visitors represented a new, relatively easy source of income. Although, initially, development remained mainly in the hands of locals, foreigners have settled in the area and become developer-tourists (Brenner & Fricke, 2007). The community is thus now made up of natives and people who have primarily come from other parts of Mexico and Europe. In the beginning, foreigners – mainly Europeans – were the main nudist tourist group in Zipolite, but domestic nude tourists and other visitors drawn by their curiosity have increased in number in recent years.

In the 1990s, Zipolite's growing fame as Mexico's only nude beach began to attract people from major cities of Mexico and Europe. Zipolite's two-kilometre-long beach is actually clothing-optional as nudity is not compulsory in any part of the beach (see Figure 1). Although nudists can now be found all along the beach, nudist activities largely concentrate at the ends of the beach. Nudists were pushed down towards the



**Figure 1.** West side of Zipolite beach.

west end of the beach in the 1990s because more conventional backpackers were not as keen on taking off their clothes as hippies were (Smith, 2006).

Similar to other nude beaches studied previously (Andriotis, 2010; Douglas et al., 1977), Zipolite has become particularly popular with gay tourists. The influx of gay tourists has grown considerably in this destination, some of whom are involved in nudism. Locals rarely express dislike or disapproval of homosexuality, but overt gay sexual activity has been identified as a major concern even though the economic importance of gay tourists has also been acknowledged (Hughes, Monterrubio, & Miller, 2010).

Zipolite is highly publicised as the only 'official' nude beach in Mexico (see www.mexicodestinos.com), and new strategies have been implemented to increase nude tourism in the area. In 2016, Zipolite hosted the VI Latin American Naturist Encounter – known in Spanish as 'ELAN 6' – and, in 2017, Zipolite hosted the 2017 Nudist Festival. The latter was a three-day event that sought to promote internationally both nude tourism and Zipolite as the only nude beach in Mexico. The festival also fostered greater acceptance of the human body and a rejection of the idea that nudism is bad or perverse. Activities included, among others, yoga, talks, body painting, traditional folk dances and live music. The event attracted a considerable number of visitors, which was reflected in accommodation establishments' high occupancy levels (EFE, 2017).

## Methods

The information on which this paper is based was gathered as a part of a much larger project focusing on both locals and nudists' perspectives on nudism. Clearly, both the stigmatised and stigmatisers' voices matter in a study on stigma, but due to space limitations, the findings on both groups' perspectives could not be included in the present paper. In order to meet this study's aims, a qualitative approach was adopted. Qualitative research has proved to be particularly useful for investigating sensitive topics as it allows researchers to get inside informants' intimate, private spaces (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009). The relevant literature encourages the use of qualitative methods to examine stigma as they can help to understand better the cultural nuances and subjective impacts of stigmatisation (Bos et al., 2013; Moufakkir, 2015). The value of qualitative approaches, however, does not depend only on understanding how stigma is experienced by the stigmatised (Sallmann, 2010) but also on exploring the processes of how stigmatisers stigmatise others. Yang et al. (2007) suggest that 'how stigma threatens moral standing can be ascertained by eliciting the actual words used by informants to describe their stigma experiences' (p. 1533). Though limited in terms of generalisability of findings, qualitative approaches can be used for this purpose. Thus, in-depth interviews were used in the present study to explore locals' stigmatisation of nude tourists in order to grasp individuals' point of view in depth and harness the power of language to illuminate the meaning they give to this phenomena (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). Bourke (2014) maintains that positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet, so researchers need to acknowledge who they are as individuals and as members of the groups under study. The present study's researchers are native to the region in question, and, after clarifying our academic objectives and identity, we were perceived by locals more as a type of insiders than outsiders. We believe that both our possible

insider positionality and not being nudists was an advantage, as this helped locals become more open to sharing their perceptions, and we gained a full, contextualised understanding of locals' accounts. We do not have specific opinions about nudism, at least in terms of how locals perceive it since we have never been involved in it – either as hosts or as nudists. The residents regard nudism as an economically important leisure activity within tourism. We believe that, by being self-aware of our views on nudism, subjectivity could be minimised throughout the entire research process.

A total of 25 adult locals – 14 females and 11 males – were interviewed in late January and early February 2017 in the selected destination. This period coincided with the 2017 Nudist Festival that took place from 3 to 5 February in the location. All interviews were in Spanish. The interview guide included three sections. The first sought to identify residents' perceptions of nudism and nude tourists, which was the most important data for this research's purpose. The questions were related to the notion of nudism, the meaning of their own and others' nude bodies, opinions and attitudes towards nude tourists and nude tourists' benefits and costs – both individually and collectively. The second section focused on exploring residents' perceptions of the nudist festival in the community, while the last section sought to gather sociodemographic data. Some interviews had to be scheduled in advance, and they were administered in different parts of the community and at participants' homes or workplaces, including some located on the seashore. Residents economically related and unrelated to nude tourism were incorporated into the study.

Researching sensitive topics such as stigmatisation and nudity requires particular attention to ethical principles in order to avoid harming or jeopardising informants (Decker, Naugle, Carter-Visscher, Bell, & Seifert, 2011). Special attention was paid to guaranteeing participants' voluntary participation, including informed consent, and avoiding any risk of harm through confidentiality and anonymity. Thus, the study and sections of the interview guide's purposes was explained in detail to participants prior to their participation in the research. Without any pressure added, they were asked to give their consent to be interviewed and audio recorded. Participants were also informed that the information they provided would be strictly confidential and be used exclusively for the study's academic purposes.

The interviewees were also promised that they would remain anonymous during the entire research process including the publication of findings. This is why informants' names are not provided in the sections dealing with findings in this paper. In research on sensitive topics, participants may experience distress (Decker et al., 2011). We anticipated that, during the interviews, participants could disclose sensitive personal information (i.e. their own feelings towards nudists) or talk about their own stigmas. To avoid causing any distress, informants were advised that they were free to choose not to respond to any specific question and to stop the interview at any time.

Several factors have frequently been identified as influential in perceptions and attitudes towards tourism. Sociodemographic variables such as gender (Pizam & Pokela, 1985), birthplace (Davis, Allen, & Cosenza, 1988), length of residence (Madrigal, 1995), education level (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003), economic dependency (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Williams & Lawson, 2001) and tourist-resident contact (Akis, Peristianis, & Warner, 1996) can be influential factors in residents' perceptions of tourism. Thus,

different sociodemographic backgrounds were incorporated in the present study to give voice to individuals with a wide variety of experiences.

Most interviewees (10) were native to the community, while others came from the surrounding area (9), from Mexico City (3) and from abroad (3). Informants' age ranged from 24 to 72 years old, and their length of residence in the community was from 2 to 50 years. Although most participants had a job directly associated with tourism, individuals with no direct relationship to tourism and nude tourism were also included. Waiters, hoteliers, restaurant owners, cooks, merchants, housewives, fishermen, tattoo artists, chambermaids and retirees were interviewed. Regarding their civil status, 15 were married, and the rest were single. Their education levels were diverse, but almost half of them (11) only had primary school studies and only four had a university degree. Although eight people reported not belonging to any religion, 17 declared they believed in a higher divine being – most of them Catholic.

Direct observation during the festival was used as a complementary technique. Observations allow researchers to record and analyse behaviours and interactions as they occur in social settings. This method is particularly useful when investigating situations involving several actors, in which an understanding of non-verbal communication is likely to be important or the behavioural consequences of events are a focal point of the research (Ritchie, 2003). In the present study, observations focused on nudists' behaviour and social interaction processes between locals and nudists and other visitors. From beginning to end, observations were carried out overtly both within the community and at the festival activities. Informants were made aware of the study's academic purposes at all times. Revealing our interests to informants proved useful in terms of snowballing. The fieldwork researchers discussed their observations and impressions on a daily basis, and notes were written down at the end of each day. The observations were particularly useful for corroborating interviewees' narratives with data from real settings, extracting relevant 'pieces' of reality for further exploration in interviews and identifying and contacting potential informants.

The interviews were analysed as explanatory accounts, following Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Connor's (2003) suggested procedure. Each interview was analysed independently, and data with similar content or properties were sorted and grouped under higher-order categories. These categories were tied to the theoretical framework of social stigma including deviant behaviour, stereotypes, societal and situational deviance, stigmatisation's mutable nature, stigma components and cognitive and behavioural adaptation to stigmatised behaviour. The analysis was based on both explicit and implicit explanatory factors. While the former were based on the explicit reasons and/or patterns mentioned by informants regarding their perceptions of nude tourists, the latter were based on reasons and/or patterns inferred in accordance with stigma-related conceptual and theoretical propositions.

Based on the framework of stigma theory, the analysis identified four relevant themes with theoretical implications for understanding stigma and stigmatisation processes in tourism contexts with the component of tourists' deviant conduct. The emerging themes centre around the (de)construction, negotiation and differentiation of nudism stigma among locals. These findings and a theoretical discussion are presented in the following section.

## Findings and discussion

### Insider-outsider interaction and stigma deconstruction

Nudist activity has long been a feature of the destination in question and an attraction to both nudists and tourists driven by curiosity about nudism. Tourist activities with a nudism element mainly enjoyed by hippies started to develop in the 1970s. Local people regarded these new visitors as an economic opportunity and interacted with them willingly. From the beginning, local people thus became accustomed to outsiders' nude bodies. In fact, according to early journalistic records (Pérez, 1978), nudism was one of the original attractions of the destination. Those native to the community are born into a sociocultural context in which nudism, albeit only done by some visitors, is part of everyday life. According to the interviewees, nudism is something 'normal', something 'natural' and 'the way God sent us to earth'. The 'naturalness' of nudism was justified by informants in terms of the way people are born, so the nude body is natural because humans come into this world without clothes.

Locals' interactions with nudists have contributed to the (de)stigmatisation process of nudism. Because nudism activities take place on the beach, extremely few locals have direct contact with nudists while nude. Most interactions take place with nudists when they are clothed in hotels, restaurants and other public spaces in the community. Through local-nudist contact in these places, residents have become aware that nudism is not necessarily related to promiscuous sexual activity and that nudism can instead be based on naturism principles.

Participants were asked their thoughts on why nudists go nude and how they perceive nudism. In response, interviewees claimed that, by talking with nudists, they have come to understand – though not necessarily share – nudists' reasons for nudism. This behaviour is far from being adopted by locals. However, many locals have learnt that nudism is not only taking one's clothes off but, in the informants' own words, 'a way of life', 'a lifestyle', 'an expression of freedom', 'a way to get rid of taboos' and 'a way to show who you really are' and express 'no prejudice', 'no fear', and the like. A 49-year-old male community native stated:

> To me, nudism is a way to express your own body in a healthy way – something natural. When we were born, we were born unclothed, so nudism must be seen as natural. . . . Nudism creates a certain type of culture; it breaks stigma and 'moral quality' issues. . . . Nudism must not be regarded as something bad but as direct contact with nature. We have talked to many nudists, and most of them claim that, in nudism, there is the closest possible contact with nature. Nudists accept themselves and their bodies the way they are. Nudism is not about showing off, it is about feeling good about yourself.

From a theoretical point of view, these findings have implications regarding the deconstruction of stigmatisation of deviant behaviour. Deviant behaviour is likely to become less stigmatised when socially reprehensible behaviour is part of insiders' everyday environment. In tourism contexts with permanent deviant behaviour by tourists, these behaviours tend to become 'normal', albeit only when performed by outsiders and, as seen in the following section, when practised in tolerated spaces.

In addition, 'mixed contacts' (Goffman, 1963) inevitably lead to changes in perceptions of stigma. This reinforces the idea that interactions alter perceptions of stigmatised subjects

and the stigma itself (Corrigan & Kosyluk, 2013; Hebl & Dovidio, 2005). Based on the present study, perceptions are likely to change fundamentally in tourism contexts when mixed contacts are more permanent, such as recurrent economic transactions and sociocultural exchanges between nude tourists and locals. This research's results empirically support the assertion that, in tourism, cross-cultural communication contributes to the elimination of social prejudices and the promotion of a fuller understanding of differences and positive social change (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 267). In cross-cultural interactions in which deviant behaviour can be a controversial issue, stigmas are likely to evolve. In the case under study, nudists have shared their naturism philosophy with locals, and this has led to a different understanding of nudism among locals. Unlike other social arenas in which contact between stigmatisers and the stigmatised is not a core component, tourism may significantly contribute to resignify tourists' behaviours and, therefore, social stigma.

## Spatial negotiation of stigma

The literature on social stigma has reported that, when faced by the possibility of mixed contacts, stigmatised individuals are often avoided by stigmatisers (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005). In tourism contexts with stigmatised tourists' behaviour, however, stigmatisers cannot always avoid mixed contacts. Interactions between both groups can be conceived as a requisite, at least for economic transactions. Since, in the present case, outsiders are not necessarily possible to avoid, insiders have developed other coping strategies to deal with nudists' behaviours – mainly spatial restriction.

Although nudism has been a feature of this destination since the early stages of tourism development, nudism has been restricted to a quite specific space, that is, the beach. The beach is roughly divided into three parts, the east – known as the 'Playa del Amor' (Beach of Love) – the west and the middle part – the latter being the longest section. Nudism was first allowed only on both ends of the beach, but nudism has spread and it can currently be found all along the beach. Most nudists, however, concentrate at the ends.

Nudism is permitted by locals only on the beach. It has never been permitted in the main community area where businesses, houses, schools, the church and residents' everyday lives are located. In this area, everyone, including visitors, must be clothed. Some businesses have recently allowed nudism within their premises, but they are few and all located on the seashore. Most businesses, such as accommodations, food and pubs, have no-nudism policies in their businesses.

Some nudists have tried to go nude into businesses and along the main street, but locals have asked them to put on clothes. According to informants, the main reasons for this are hygiene and that children should not be exposed to nude bodies and locals – and other tourists – do not feel comfortable seeing other individuals' nude bodies. A waiter, who had lived in the destination for five years, reported:

> The only part where tourists are allowed to be naked is on the beach. . . . At the beginning the only place they had was the Playa del Amor, but then they spread to the main beach, and nudism is now tolerated as long as it takes place on the beach. While nudism is the main attraction for visitors, nudists are not allowed off the beach. . . . I don't like it when some nudists come to the main street. There are children. . . . Yesterday, for example, a visitor came nude to the main street, and a local told him that there are children here in the street and he needed to put on clothes. That's why there are exclusive zones for nudism.

A 35-year-old female hotelier residing for eight years in the community said:

> We see nudism as the main attraction of our beach but do not allow nudism in our places for different reasons. When we started this business, we did allow nudism inside, but little by little we have been asking people to stay clothed here inside. This is because we have found dirt [i.e. faeces] on chairs, for example. We do not all have the same hygiene codes. . . . There are also non-nudist customers who are not willing to sit in a chair used by a nudist. There are customers who do not know how to deal with nudists so that is why we ask nudists to put something on when entering our premises. They can get naked on the beach, and we actually ask non-nudists to respect nude tourists.

As this evidence suggests, in tourism contexts, mixed contacts between stigmatisers and the stigmatised cannot always be avoided, and stigma is somewhat dependent on the territorial and situational performance of deviant behaviours. Tourists will tend to be less stigmatised if public deviant behaviour is performed in spaces not directly used by locals. Unlike other beaches that are visited and used by both tourists and locals (Roca, Riera, Villares, Fragell, & Junyent, 2008), Zipolite Beach is mostly used by tourists, and this is due to their particular behaviour. Some locals, especially when with their family, avoid visiting the beach. The beach has now been constructed more as a tourist space and, as such, a place in which certain behaviours can be tolerated and even spatially (de)stigmatised. Tourism spaces can, therefore, provide tourists with the chance to practice deviant behaviour covertly.

According to Andriotis (2010), nude beaches become explicitly deviant because, in one way or another, they allow differences and accommodate deviant behaviours. Consequently, it can be argued that, as long as deviant behaviour is performed in spaces socially defined for tourists, tourists will tend to be stigmatised based on situational deviance and less on societal deviance. This corroborates Andriotis (2010) general assertion that the function of beach heterotopia is shaped by three interrelated components: the physical space, its users and their activities, and community tolerance towards these activities. Therefore, achieved stigmatisation of nudity, arguably, can be said to be spatially negotiated.

### Differentiating stigmatisation among outsiders

In the context of a nude beach, not all outsiders are equally stigmatised. As previously stated, the destination under study is particularly popular with nudists, hippies and homosexuals. Hippies were not purposefully examined in this study as a specific visitor segment, although they are also generally stigmatised as a social group in other contexts (Dean & Rud, 1984). However, nudists and homosexuals, according to the analysis of locals' perceptions, are closely associated through the sexual dimension of nudity. Many informants brought homosexuals into the conversations during the interviews and differentiated them from non-homosexual nudists.

Male homosexuals are perceived as a quite noticeable tourist segment in the destination, as well as an extremely specific group of nudists. Andriotis (2010) suggests that – as deviant expressions of sexuality – homosexuality and nudism are both not always accepted as they deviate from the normative structure of societies. Thus, homosexual nudists could be doubly stigmatised for both existential and achieved stigma: homosexuality and nudism.

Although homosexuality is widely stigmatised (Falk, 2001), the present study suggests that homosexuality per se is not reprehensible by locals, although they reject these tourists' sexual behaviour on the beach. Locals recognise the economic value of gay tourism in the destination, and, as such, gay tourists are accepted or at least tolerated. As a specific social nudity group in the destination, homosexuals are often associated with non-naturism philosophies and linked to the sexual component of public nudity. These visitors are perceived as a nudist group that gets involved in sexual acts on the beach. In a similar way, swingers and exhibitionists are not recognised as genuine nudists but categorised as sex seekers. A 60-year-old male who owns a hotel and regards nudity as 'normal', said:

> Some visitors are nudists and others are exhibitionists. Nudists are those who walk and tan without clothes along the beach. They're seeking to enjoy nature. . . . As time passed, many started to go nude for exhibitionism. They want to show their organs to others. And others get nude to have sex. For example, a few years ago a male with a large penis who came from the surrounding area came frequently. He knew he had a big penis, and he used to get naked and walk around the beach, but he was not a nudist, he was an exhibitionist. Eventually, I think, locals asked them not to come here anymore. I dislike exhibitionism. . . . We have got a problem here in Playa del Amor. It's now full of gays. They have now proliferated, and they have sex indiscriminately. They do not protect themselves from infectious diseases. They do not care where they throw away condoms. During the high season, condoms are everywhere. You can hardly find heterosexual couples there – only gays.

The fact that specific subgroups within outsiders are differentiated in term of how they and their behaviours are perceived suggests that not all individuals engaging in deviant behaviour are equally stigmatised. This, in turn, leads to a continuous (re)(de)construction of stigmas. In the case of nudism, the negative stereotypes and discrediting labels associated with public nude bodies can be both counteracted by practising social nudity for socially justified and accepted reasons (i.e. naturism) and intensified by sexualising public spaces under the label of nudism. In tourism spaces in which a particular deviant behaviour is performed by several groups, stigma can thus be both challenged and strengthened.

### Outsiders' behaviour and stigmatisation of insiders

As shown above, stigmatisation of nudism is highly dependent on its geographical dimension. In tourism destinations in which spaces for tourists' deviant behaviours are either explicitly or implicitly well defined, stigmatisation is an issue of situational rather than societal deviance. In other words, tourists are stigmatised if they are 'discovered' practising deviance. However, because the nude beach is perceived as a space for tourists' behaviours and it is not widely used for locals' recreational purposes, this allows nudism not to be stigmatised. This suggests that, when mixed contacts do not take place in spaces in which deviant behaviours are performed, stigmatisation is unlikely to be as significant.

This study's results suggest that, in tourism contexts, behaviours may not be perceived as deviant when performed by tourists. Nude tourists are perceived as individuals with different lifestyles and diverse moral codes, and their behaviour is somehow justified because they are outsiders. Furthermore, since tourists are not directly seen in active acts of deviance by locals, this reduces the possibility of stigmatisation. The economic value that nude tourism has for locals, both at the individual and community levels, is also a significant factor in the acceptance and tolerance of devaluating behaviour. A

European restaurant owner who has lived in the community for over 12 years stated, 'in Zipolite, we all make a living from tourism. It is undeniable that over half of tourists – be it for getting nude, curiosity or unhealthy fascination – come for nudism purposes'. A cook residing for 48 years in the destination further claimed, 'I do not care what nudists do as long as they come and shop in my store.'

However, when not in tourism spaces and not performed by tourists, social nudity remains highly stigmatised. Informants were asked whether they, as locals, have practised or would practise nudism. Despite locals perceiving the nude body as something 'natural' and 'normal', the answer was clearly that they do not go nude. A 33-year-old local fisherman said, 'we as a community are used to seeing tourists naked, but we do not get undressed [in public].' Locals going nude in public is simply unacceptable and, for some, inconceivable. Notions of shame, modesty and respect are the main reasons given for this. A 27-year-old hotel manager stated, 'I would not do it because they all know me here. That [nudism] would cause me shame.' Laughing and blushing, a female beach vendor said, 'I would feel embarrassed. I cannot imagine myself nude [in public].' In addition, a female hotel owner who has lived all her life in the community and recounted how nudism started in the destination said,

> I do not like nudism and I do not like tourists going nude at my place. I dislike it. Your body is yours only. Nude bodies must be between two people only, only with my partner, so I would never exhibit my body on the seashore. Perhaps I think conservatively, but I have never participated and will never participate in nudist activities because I do not like them. That is what *I* personally think. (emphasis in original)

Within the theoretical framework of stigma, this evidence suggests that certain deviant behaviours can be socially accepted when done by outsiders – albeit under certain conditions – but these same behaviours are highly discredited and discreditable if adopted by insiders. In a tourism context, deviant behaviours can be tolerated when performed by tourists but highly stigmatised if performed by locals, regardless of the type of space (i.e. the beach or locals' area). This leads to the conclusion that stigma depends on not only the conduct and space involved but also the performer's social role.

## Conclusions

Based on Goffman (1963) and Falk's (2001) theories of social stigma, the present study sought to explore locals' perceptions of tourists' deviant behaviour. By giving voice to locals' perceptions and experiences of nudists' behaviour, the results reveal that social interactions between stigmatisers (i.e. locals) and the stigmatised (i.e. nude tourists) considerably influence the changing nature of stigmas. Stigmas evolve over time, and they can be negotiated in tourism contexts. This research found that, when locals are quite frequently or permanently in direct contact with tourists engaging in societal deviance, stigmas can be gradually deconstructed and behaviours resignified by observers. Stigmatisation of tourists' conduct can be negotiated spatially so that certain behaviours are not likely to be stigmatised when performed in spaces 'belonging' more to tourists and less to locals. In cases in which tourists' deviance is not witnessed by locals, achieved stigma is less probable. These tourists, therefore, remain discreditable but not necessarily discredited in tourist settings.

In addition, this empirical study's results reveal that, in tourism contexts in which the same deviant behaviour is performed by specific tourist groups, not all of these outsiders are equally stigmatised. On nude beaches, for example, on which multiple deviant activities may coincide (Andriotis, 2010), stigmas of tourists' conduct can be either challenged or strengthened. In these cases, locals are capable of differentiating between behaviours and resignifying them in accordance with their own sociocultural normative structures and, thus, stigmatising some tourists more than others – even for the same deviant practices.

This study further showed that stigma depends not only on the deviant act itself and on the space in which it is performed but also on the performers' social role. In tourism contexts, stigmatisation of certain behaviours also depends on whether the performance is done by tourists or locals. Deviance may be tolerated as long as it is an outsider (i.e. tourist) issue but seen as highly unacceptable if associated with locals. In summary, this research's main contribution lies in a fuller understanding of locals' processes of stigma (de)construction of tourists' deviant behaviour through local-tourist social interactions.

Stigma has negative effects on societies. Whether stigmatisation is a consequence of existential or achieved conditions, it can lead to aversion, prejudice, indifference, hostility and discrimination. Anti-stigma interventions thus need to focus on modifying public opinions of and attitudes towards socially discrediting attributes. This should take place on intrapersonal, interpersonal, community and institutional levels and in collaboration with target populations and relevant stakeholders. Moufakkir (2015) suggests that, to challenge stigma in tourism, stigma needs to be challenged in society as a whole. The present study, however, found evidence that tourism itself may potentially challenge and even change stigma. If managed properly, tourism can function as an anti-stigma mechanism. As this research suggests, by promoting cross-cultural interactions and understanding between tourists and locals and managing tourist and/or local spaces, stigma can be changed.

While sensitising locals to tourists' behaviours helps reduce stigmatisation, the relevant stakeholders also need to reflect on how to maximise tourists' sensitivity to locals' morality. Tourism encounters are moral encounters, and, as social activities, they are mediated by a range of moral issues (Mostafanezhad & Hannam, 2014). MacCannell (2011) argues that tourists characteristically cross lines of moral differences in order to experience different states of mind. While this may improve tourists' experiences, visitors need to be aware of local structures so that their behaviours can be adapted to avoid conflicts with local values.

These visitors should be aware that how people ought to behave and what individuals believe to be right and wrong do not arise from a universal moral code. Tourists need to understand that morality differs across cultures and learn to respect ways of thinking different from their own. According to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2001), tourism should contribute to developing mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies. Thus, tourism activities need to be conducted in harmony with local cultures, and host communities should respect tourists who visit them and learn about their lifestyles. In this way, negative impacts on local cultures can be minimised and more responsible forms of tourism promoted.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, these findings need to be treated with caution. The results cannot be generalised to the rest of the study population or to

other communities in other destinations. Because the meanings, practices and outcomes of stigma are culturally defined (Yang et al., 2007), the present findings are applicable to the specific social group, time and space under study. In a study of stigma (de)construction, understanding both the stigmatised and stigmatisers' perspectives is important. Since this paper had only enough space to present the stigmatisers' voice, the results discussed here can be regarded as a one-sided perspective on stigmatisation. Furthermore, the researchers' positionality as possible 'insiders' may have created empathy with locals, and our own views on nudism may have influenced the present interpretations. However, objectivity was pursued at all times by maintaining awareness of both issues.

The results highlight further opportunities for research. Using quantitative approaches, numeric data could be obtained, and the findings generalised to the rest of the population. In this way, sounder managerial decisions can be made for tourism. Other research questions remain in terms of how tourists experience stigmatisation and how stigmas influence their tourist experiences overall. By researching the social and psychological implications of stigma in different tourism contexts – based on the experiences of both the stigmatised and stigmatisers – more effective interventions can be developed to improve cross-cultural understanding among groups.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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