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A Special Issue on "Leisure, Tourism and Risk"

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Introduction to special issue on 'Leisure, Tourism and Risk'

Perceived risk and safety are often regarded as factors that have the potential to influence leisure and tourism decisions. In particular, risk is referred to as a constraint to leisure and tourism participation, namely as a reason for not participating in a leisure activity or tourism experience (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Bianchi, 2006). However, research work in the area of adventure tourism and high-risk leisure activities reveals that risk is actively sought by some individuals (Lyng, 1990; Celsi, Rose & Leigh, 1993). Several studies have been conducted on risk, yet the motivations, behaviours, and emotions of individuals who voluntarily seek and/or avoid high-risk activities and experiences in leisure and tourism environments remain relatively unexplored.

For example, the relationships between risk and emotions have not been explored in detail. A number of studies (Warr & Stafford, 1983; Ewert, 1986; Warr, 1990) highlight that perceptions of risk are related to the arousal of specific emotional states, such as fear. Ewert (1986, p. 45) claims that 'fear is often anticipated in certain experiences or social situations which constitute a threat or risk'. Similarly, Lupton (1999) emphasises that feelings of fear and anxiety are closely related to perceived risk. However, the relationship between risk and fear seems to be unclear. As Rountree and Land (1996) point out, perceived risk and perceptions of fear are independently influenced by different variables. Furthermore, Warr (2000, p. 454) states 'there is corroborating evidence that measures of fear and measures of

perceived risk do not measure the same phenomenon and do not behave similarly with respect to other variables'. This argument emphasises the need to conduct further research on risk in order to understand whether and how it is related to specific emotional states.

More research is also needed to identify the most effective methods to collect data on risk. In this respect, the question arises as to whether the methods employed to investigate risk in leisure and tourism settings provide an in-depth understanding of the complex array of emotional states related to an individual's experience of risk. In addition, the ethical implications of conducting research on risk should not be ignored by tourism and leisure scholars. As previous studies (Jamieson, 2000; Melrose, 2002) reveal, conducting research on risk may expose both the researcher and the respondents to physical and psychological dangers.

Whilst a wide array of studies have been published that focus attention on risk, there exists a paucity of empirical data concerning perceptions of risk in specific leisure and tourism contexts, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The limited quantity and variety of studies of risk within leisure and tourism contexts in Africa, Asia and Latin America stands at odds with the central position that risk often occupies, both directly and indirectly, within leisure and tourism experiences. Consequently, this special issue of 'Recreation and Society in Africa, Asia & Latin America' aims to provide a forum for expanding current understandings of the linkages between leisure, tourism and risk and the implications of these links for wider society.

In the first article, Robert Fletcher provides an analysis of a recent media campaign launched by Colombian tourism authorities centred on the slogan 'Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay'. His paper explores how this campaign contributes to the construction of a 'public secret', namely something generally known but not explicitly articulated (Taussig,

1998). The author examines how this 'public secret', which evokes seemingly contradictory perceptions of safety and risk, plays an important role in attracting foreign tourists to the country.

Martina Shakya is the author of the second article, entitled 'Local Perceptions of Risk and Tourism: A Case Study from Rural Nepal'. Her work explores the impacts of tourism on poor, rural host communities in Nepal through the theoretical lens of the vulnerability concept and with a particular focus on risk. This is followed by Emily Falconer, who investigates risk, excitement and emotional conflict in women's travel narratives. By looking at the emotional, sensual and embodied journeys of female backpackers in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the author provides an analysis of their risky and frightening narratives.

The last article of this issue is by Gisele M. Schwartz, Danilo R. P. Santiago, Giselle H. Tavares, Cristiane N. Kawaguti, Paula M. Abrucez, and Sandro Carnicelli Filho. The authors explore perceptions of risk, violence, competitiveness and emotions among a group of Brazilian video game players. Their work casts light on the relationships between risk and the virtual environment, which have been relatively neglected by tourism and leisure scholars.

A notable aspect of the papers presented in this special issue is that risk is discussed from both the perspective of industry and consumers. The first two articles, by Robert Fletcher and Martina Shakya, analyse the meanings of risk from an industry perspective. It can be argued that risk is implicitly and explicitly referred to as a negative component for the development of a tourist destination. Robert Fletcher's work, for example, emphasises the importance of risk management in carefully manipulating how risk is represented, in this case in order to attract more tourists to Colombia. The idea that risk has a negative component is also emphasised by Martina Shakya, whose study discusses the relationship between the (positive) benefits of tourism and its (negative) risk-related costs. In contrast, Falconer's and

Schwartz et al.'s work highlights that consumers' experiences of risk may assume different meanings, not necessarily negative. In this respect, Emily Falconer claims that risk plays a positive role in the construction of backpackers' travelling narratives/experiences. The idea that risk can be positive from the consumers' perspective is further emphasised by Schwartz et al., who relate risk to pleasure in their exploration of Brazilian video game players' experiences. Despite these different perspectives, the four articles share a common theoretical stance on approaching risk; that is the rejection of the concept of objective risk and the emphasis on the perceptual and subjective nature of risk.

Overall, this special issue provides a significant contribution to our knowledge of risk in leisure and tourism. One of the most important contributions can be related to the specific contexts in which risk is investigated. Much literature has explored perceptions of risk in leisure and tourism environments (Ewert, 1986; Lyng, 1990; Celsi et al., 1993), yet research has mainly been focused on Western countries. These articles explore perceptions of risk in contexts that have been relatively neglected by tourism and leisure scholars, such as Colombia, Nepal, India, and Brazil. This is a significant contribution to knowledge, considering that perceptions of risk vary over time and space. Furthermore, the work on which the papers are based advances our understanding of risk from a methodological perspective. While quantitative methods have traditionally been employed in the investigation of risk, these papers use both quantitative and qualitative techniques. By employing qualitative methods, the articles also unveil the variety of emotions, perceptions and patterns of behaviour related to risk, which are of fundamental importance to obtain an in-depth understanding of people's experiences of risk in leisure and tourism contexts.

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"The Only Risk is Wanting to Stay": Mediating Risk in Colombian Tourism Development

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Abstract

Like many other nations around the world, Colombia is currently pursuing increased international tourism as a strategy for (sustainable) development. Yet while the nation possesses numerous attributes, both natural and cultural, conducive to tourism development, its ability to capitalize on this potential is presently compromised by the legacy of its protracted internal conflict, which has solidified its global reputation as an extremely hazardous destination and led to numerous international warnings against traveling in the country. In an effort to ostensibly end the conflict and restore order to society, the Colombian government has engaged in an aggressive internal security campaign intended, in part, to make the country safe for foreign tourists. In conjunction with this effort, Colombian tourism authorities recently launched a new media campaign centered on the ingenious slogan "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay." In this representation, I suggest, the tourism bureau is attempting to construct a "public secret" (something generally known but not explicitly articulated; Taussig, 1998a) enabling tourists to feel simultaneously safe and at risk without acknowledging the inconsistency between these perceptions, a dynamic that elsewhere I describe as intrinsic to the successful delivery of commercial adventure tourism in general (Fletcher, 2010). The relative success of this effort, as evidenced by the dramatic growth in international tourism arrivals to Colombia over the last several years, has important implications for our understanding of tourism marketing in general, as well as for other conflict-ridden nations also seeking to harness tourism development in the interest of economic recovery.

Introduction

Tourism, it is commonly claimed, is now competing with oil production for bragging rights as the world's largest industry (UNWTO, 2009). According to the UN's World Tourism

Organization, from 1950 to 2008 international tourism arrivals grew from 25 to 922 million generating US$ 944 billion in total receipts, representing an average annual expansion of around 4% per year (UNWTO, 2009). Greenwood (1989: 171) goes so far as to call tourism the "largest scale movement of goods, services, and people that humanity has perhaps ever seen." Notwithstanding the recent downturn in the global economy, this impressive growth is projected to continue into the foreseeable future, reaching an estimated nearly 1.6 billion international travelers by 2020 (UNWTO, 2009).

As in most other nations, Colombian authorities hope to harness this largesse as a driving force for national economic development (Brodzinsky, 2006). In support of this effort, in 2008 Proexport Colombia, the national export commission, in conjunction with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism, launched a new advertizing campaign around the innovative slogan, "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay" (Proexport, 2010a). This slogan, of course, is explicitly intended to address the nation's longstanding reputation as "South America's most dangerous country" (Brodzinsky, 2006), a substantial deterrent for many potential visitors. As the campaign's website describes,

> The campaign was created as a response to the great deal of questions raised at international fairs concerning the risks involved in visiting Colombia. From there, rose the idea of facing the problem of lack of knowledge about Colombia and changing the negative perception the world could have by underlining the positive. The goal of the campaign is to present Colombia to international tourists as a vacation alternative by showing that the only risk in coming is to fall in love with its landscapes, people, food, fairs, festivals, handicrafts, colors, and all the experiences the country can offer a tourist. (Proexport, 2010b).

The campaign is "based on the testimonials of nine foreigners who came to Colombia for a short time and decided to stay for good" (ibid.) and is currently promoted in 15 countries including the US, Germany, and the UK.

In this article, I analyze this attempt to mediate representations of risk in the interest of Colombian tourism development. I suggest that, through this ingenious new slogan and similar representations, tourism promoters are attempting to create what anthropologist Michael Taussig calls a "public secret" of Colombia's quite violent past, reassuring potential visitors that this violence is indeed a thing of the past while simultaneously and paradoxically reinforcing awareness of the potential for (continued) violence by obliquely referring to it in the slogan itself. As a result, the campaign encourages potential visitors to feel that they are at once both safe and at risk, a dynamic that I have contended elsewhere is central to the general success of adventure tourism (Fletcher, 2010), a market segment that Colombia appears quite eager to tap.

I begin by outlining Colombia's emerging campaign to develop its tourism industry, particularly in terms of ecotourism as a form of ostensibly sustainable development. I then describe the chief impediment to this process, namely, Colombia's long history of violent internal conflict and the contribution of this to pervasive and persistent images of the country as a savage place of chaos, disorder, and darkness. Following this, I discuss the government's heavy-handed approach to addressing this impediment by working to make the country safe for tourism (as well as other activities) through a strategy I call "fortress tourism." Subsequently, I turn to analysis of the tourism promotion campaign intended to address all of this, demonstrating the seemingly contradictory representations its promotional slogan conveys—a paradox reinforced by other dynamics of tourism development within the country as well. I conclude by discussing the implications of this analysis for our understanding of tourism marketing in general.

This study is based on a brief period of preliminary research conducted in the Colombia's Caribbean region in July 2009 to assess the feasibility of a larger project addressing ecotourism development that I hope to undertake in the near future. As part of

this initial research I participated in a week-long workshop with representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations throughout the region, organized by the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, to discuss the feasibility of harnessing ecotourism as a strategy for sustainable development (described further below). In addition, I visited a number of tourism destinations ranging from long-established sites such as Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona to others just beginning their initial planning stages. The bulk of the analysis, however, derives from secondary literature as well as a semiotic and discursive analysis of tourism promotion rhetoric and images via a wide range of print and visual media.

Waiting for Ecotourism

As part of the aggressive internal security campaign upon which Colombia has embarked in recent years (discussed further below), great hopes have been placed on increasing international tourism arrivals as a vital source of foreign income needed to stimulate an economy devastated by the longstanding strife. Authorities hope to reach 2 million annual visitors in the near future and eventually compete with traditional tourism powerhouses like Mexico (at around 20 million arrivals/year) to become Latin America's leading travel destination (Brodzinsky, 2006).

As throughout the world, sustainability is all the rage in Colombia these days, and hence tourism development is increasingly focused on ecotourism in particular. Defined broadly as an activity that sells an encounter with an in situ natural resource, or more narrowly (in The International Ecotourism Society's (TIES) classic characterization) as "responsible tourism to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people," ecotourism has been the fastest growing segment of the global tourism industry over the past several decades (Honey, 2008: 6). As per the TIES definition,

the activity is intended to confer both ecological and social benefits, and thus is widely viewed as ideal for sustainable development, particularly in rural areas of less-developed societies that have not often seen substantial gains from conventional development mechanisms and tend to possess in relative abundance the very asset (nature areas) ecotourists seek (Fletcher, 2009). The United Nations explicitly acknowledged this association by famously declaring 2002 The International Year of Ecotourism, citing "the need for international cooperation in promoting tourism within the framework of sustainable development so as to meet the needs of present tourists and host countries and regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future" (Http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1998/eres1998-40.htm; retrieved 8/12/2010). As a result, there are few countries that have not yet included ecotourism in their national development plans.

But the promise of ecotourism goes far beyond this. As Honey describes, "Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and, some claim, build world peace" (2008: 4).

At the workshop on ecotourism development in which I participated in the far northern Colombian province of La Guajira, representatives from a variety of government and non-governmental development agencies throughout the Caribbean region were all visibly eager about the prospect of harnessing ecotourism as a tool for sustainable development in their communities. A number had already banded together to create the Ecotourism Network of the Caribbean Coast, facilitated by the National Park Service. As many people enthusiastically pointed out to me, Colombia, possessing a profusion of biodiversity and

diverse topography, contains all of the natural resources that have made Costa Rica "ecotourism's poster child" (Honey, 2008: 160). In addition, as in the latter country, all of this nature is preserved within an expansive system of protected areas boasting 58 National Parks covering roughly 10% of Colombia's territory (SINAP, 2010). (And indeed, Costa Rican ecotourism developers, as my ongoing research in that country demonstrates, do display some concern that their market share may soon be captured by Colombia (and other less prosperous neighbors) offering better value if actions are not taken to retain it.)

Yet workshop participants were sober when confronted by recognition of the barrier likely posed to the realization of this potential by Colombia's largely negative image in the global consciousness, discussed further below, wrought by its longstanding political strife. A recent meta-analysis of 251 case studies of ecotourism practice in diverse locations, for instance, found that success in achieving conservation outcomes is strongly correlated with political stability (Krüger, 2005). Tourism infrastructure is already in place in many locations throughout Columbia while planned in others, and administrators are poised and ready to warmly welcome visitors. All that is needed now are the tourists.

A Culture of Terror?

The impact of violence and terror on Colombia's potential for tourism development is far from an isolated case. Phipps (2004), for instance, documents a long history of attacks on international tourists explicitly intended to increase perceptions of terror and scare off potential travelers. In large part this results from the fact that, due to its economic importance for many nations, tourism can be used as a political weapon by those wishing to harm the state by depriving it of valued revenue. In 1994, for example, 40 members of the Khmer Rouge attacked a Cambodian train, killing 11 Vietnamese passengers and taking 20 hostages, including three backpackers from wealthy western nations, who were held for

ransom. As a result of this action, Cambodian tourism dropped 50% that year (Phipps, 2004). In 1995, Kashmiri rebels demanding the release of confederates held by India captured six foreign trekkers, again all westerners. One hostage subsequently escaped, another was found beheaded, while the rest disappeared without a trace. Kashmiri tourism has been devastated ever since (Fedarko 2004). And once again in 1997, Egyptian rebels also seeking the release of imprisoned confederates attacked a popular tourist temple in Luxor, killing at least 68 visitors and local workers, in an explicit effort to deny the state valued tourism revenue (BBC, 1997). Similar instances are legion.

Yet in the case of Colombia, the threat comes less from any localized, concerted attack on the tourism industry or its international reputation than on the general aura of danger and violence that dominates international perceptions of the country as a whole. As inferred above, Colombia has long been paradigmatic of the chaos and violence that many associate with Latin America in general. The US government, for example has long issued strong warnings against travel to the country (addressed further below). In part, of course, this image is a construction propagated through frequently repeated media representations of both the country and region. Consider, for instance, depictions in the popular US films *Scarface* (Universal Pictures, 1983) and *Romancing the Stone* (20th Century Fox, 1984). In the former, the drug-running title character (Al Pacino) visits his Colombian suppliers to witness a traitorous subordinate punished for his betrayal by being hung from the skid of a hovering helicopter. In the latter, the sister of romance novelist Joan Wilder (Kathleen Turner) is kidnapped in Colombia in order to compel Wilder to deliver a map depicting the location of a precious gem that the sister's husband mailed to Wilder shortly before he was brutally murdered by the same criminals now holding his widow. On her journey, Wilder experiences the country as a place of nearly incessant violence, corruption, and intrigue as she is pursued by armed mercenaries who are also state police while encountering perpetual

threats spanning the entire nature-culture spectrum from hard-drinking drug runners to bloodthirsty crocodiles. This depiction is epitomized by a particular scene in which Wilder first flies into Colombia. As she traverses the airport, virtually every stereotypical image of Latin America is presented in rapid-fire succession, from colorfully-dressed indigenous people surrounded by squealing livestock to paramilitary personnel assaulting an unarmed civilian while bystanders look on indifferently.

In part, however, this association of Colombia with chaotic danger is based in a real history of deeply entrenched violence (Jimeno, 2001; Briceño-León & Zubillaga, 2002; OHCHR, 2005; Echavarría, 2010) that has indeed infused much of Colombian society with an air of continual threat, a sentiment well-captured, for instance, in the evocative writings of Gabriel García Márquez (e.g., 1968, 1970, 1972, 1979, 1988). This phenomenon has also been extensively analyzed by Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig, who has conducted periodic fieldwork in Colombia over the past thirty years. In a series of reports (e.g., 1984, 1987, 1989, 1992, 2003), Taussig describes the perpetual "state of emergency" in which the country seems to exist, observing in the late 1980s that

> since decades Colombia has been defined as being in a state of chaos such that predictions of imminent revolution, a bloodbath, or a military dictatorship have been made on an almost daily basis. Today, in a total population of some 27 million, being the third largest in Latin America, with widespread assassinations striking, so it is said, some thirty people a day, with 500 members of the only viable opposition party, the Unión Patriótica, gunned down in the streets over the past two years, with an estimated 11,000 assassinations carried out by the more than 149 death squads recently named in the national Congress over roughly the same time period, and with over 1,000 named people disappeared (surely but a small fraction of the actual number) (1989:7)

Colombian scholar Jesefina Echavarría recalls her own upbringing in similar fashion, writing:

As far back as I can remember, there has been war in Colombia. . .While I attended high school during the decade of the 1990s, a "war on drugs and terrorism" had been declared by the state against the drug cartels. Systematic violence was exercised by state and non-state forces, paramilitary groups were created, the practice of kidnapping became a commonly used method of warfare and targeted killings of political figures were complemented by indiscriminate attacks against the population. (2010: xi)

This is not to assert that this violence has remained constant throughout Colombian history. Scholars commonly distinguish three broad periods of violence in the country: "the civil wars of the nineteenth century, 'The Violence' around the 1950s and the violence occurring from the last decades of the twentieth century through to the present day (Echavarría, 2010: 23; see also e.g., Ramírez, 2002). Within this last period, additionally, Echavarría identifies important differences in terms of the type of violence exercised from 1982-1993, dominated by the rise of the infamous drug cartels, from 1993-2002, emphasizing opposition between state forces and revolutionary paramilitary organizations (most centrally FARC-EP), and the contemporary situation beginning in 2002, when nascent peace talks between FARC and the government broke down and the Democratic Security Policy (discussed further below) was initiated.

Notwithstanding such significant distinctions, Taussig contends that this long history of pervasive violence has instilled within Colombian society a palpable "culture of terror" (1984), an experience of "terror as usual" (1989) produced by the condition of never knowing at what point one might contribute to the ranks of the deceased or disappeared. Others have disputed Taussig's "culture of terror" label, however, arguing that it conveys an overly totalizing picture of the influence of violence within a society and thus denies the agency of inhabitants to resist this influence by finding spaces for the assertion of nonviolent thought and action (e.g., Margold, 1999). Regardless of the label given to it, a deep-seated fear of

systemic violence has been widely documented throughout Colombia (e.g., Jimeno, 2001). Taussig relates his own experience of the profound insecurity this sentiment provokes while waiting in his apartment for an informant who had earlier been "disappeared" by government forces and survived to go underground:

> I had premonitions of how I would feel and to what desperate lengths I would go if I panicked. I didn't feel or allow myself to feel panicky at that stage. That was the most curious thing. I saw myself from afar, as it were, in another world, going crazy, not knowing what was happening, what was being plotted, what would happen next, unable to breathe. . .I turned back to the crumpled cuttings from the newspapers and the cheap Xerox copies of letters between institutions and government agencies and then, truly, waves of panic flooded over me absolutely unable to move waiting for the police to surge through the door. Any moment. Dark suits. Machine guns waving. Machismo ejaculating in the underground opera of the State. (1989:19)

Fortress Tourism

It is this persistent perception of violence, inscribed not only within Colombian consciousness but the rest of the world as well, that national tourism promoters must confront. Their physical approach to doing so in recent years has been quite striking. The conventional strategy for protected conservation area management, characterized by top-down regulation entailing strict regulation of human use and heavy-handed policing of clearly-defined boundaries, has been labeled "fortress conservation" by academic analysts (e.g., Brockington, 2002; Igoe, 2004). Similarly, we might describe the Colombian state's current approach to tourism development as "fortress tourism." In 2003, newly elected President Alvaro Uribe initiated his so-called Democratic Security Policy (DSP) in an effort to end the perennial conflict and restore (state-dominated) order to the country (see Echavarría, 2010). Officially, this has entailed, among other measures, consolidating state control over Colombian territory, increasing the "efficiency" and "transparency" of government organs,

augmenting the military budget, and actively intervening in the illegal drug trade (Embassy of Colombia, n.d.). Part of this process has been explicitly intended to support tourism development, including the creation of a special "tourism police" unit within the Colombian National Police force. Military personnel have been deployed to patrol the nation's highways and facilitate safe passage, such that the sight of a camouflage-clad soldier bearing an M-16 walking the shoulder of the road while a similarly-decorated tank stands idly by, while shocking to visitors unaccustomed to such sights, has become commonplace for many Colombians. In already popular tourist destinations such as Cartagena, on the Caribbean coast, police and/or military personnel are stationed on nearly every street corner day and night.

While President Uribe's campaign has been subject to strong criticism from many quarters on a variety of grounds, including its emphasis on military force and neglect of fundamental social, political, and economic issues underlying many of Colombia's still-pressing problems (e.g., Amnesty International, 2002; Echavarría, 2010), it does appear to have achieved substantial gains in terms of its stated goals. Within two years of DSP initiation, according to Moreno (2004), homicides had dropped 25%, kidnappings 45%, and incidences of "terrorism" 37%. By 2006 Uribe's policy had reportedly produced a 78% decrease in kidnappings throughout the country (Brodzinsky, 2006).

The campaign also appears to have accomplished its goal of facilitating a dramatic surge in foreign visitation to Colombia. Between 2002 and 2006, foreign tourism arrivals increased 65% to 925,000 (Brodzinsky, 2006). The country's reputation has improved to the point that Lonely Planet, the definitive travel guide for mainstream alternative travelers, ranked Colombia #9 on its list of Top 10 destinations for 2006 (Lonely Planet, 2006), and international tour operators who previously avoided the country have begun to explore its possibilities (Brodzinsky, 2006).

Despite such gains, Colombia continues to be regarded with trepidation by many potential travelers, particularly those from the US where the government continues to issue dire warnings of potential violence.   On November 10, 2010, for instance, the State Department renewed its longstanding recommendation that travelers exercise extreme caution when visiting the country and banned government employees from travel overland within it, explaining:

> In recent months there has been a marked increase in violent crime in Colombia. Murder rates have risen significantly in some major cities, particularly Medellin and Cali. Kidnapping remains a serious threat. American citizens have been the victim of violent crime, including kidnapping and murder. Firearms are prevalent in Colombia and altercations can often turn violent. Small towns and rural areas of Colombia can still be extremely dangerous due to the presence of narco-terrorists (US State Department, 2010).

In addition to addressing remaining physical threats to tourists' security, then, to encourage increased visitation the government must wage an ideological campaign, reckoning with persistent perceptions of Colombian violence as well. And this, of course, is precisely the intent of the ingenious new tourism slogan quoted at the outset. In what follows, I analyze how this slogan appears to simultaneously acknowledge and negate Colombia's legacy of violence in the interest of tourism development.

Risk, Safety, and Public Secrecy

A minority of tourists, of course, will visit a location precisely because of its reputation for danger and violence (Mowforth & Munt, 2003; Munt, 1994), a phenomenon that encompasses Colombia. Self-styled adventurer Robert Young Pelton, for instance, regularly publishes his guidebook to *The World's Most Dangerous Places* (e.g., 2000) and offers personal tours to some of these locations. In the past, this has included visits to meet and

converse with Colombian revolutionaries, experiences reported in the popular international press (e.g., Cahill, 2002).

Most travelers, however, are not prepared to accept such levels of risk. Even most of those in search of so-called adventure tourism, it seems, desire merely the appearance of moderate danger rather than a truly life-endangering experience of risk (Fletcher, 2010; Holyfield, 1999). As I contend elsewhere (Fletcher, 2010), then, successful delivery of adventure tourism on a standardized commercial basis appears to require the creation of a situation in which participants are able to believe that they are safe and at risk simultaneously (for discussion of how to define these slippery concepts please see the aforementioned citation), thus allowing them to experience a desired level of thrill and excitement without the existential terror that acknowledgement of true mortal danger would likely entail. Walking this razor's edge, I suggest, requires the creation of what Taussig calls a "public secret," something "generally known but not generally articulated" (1998a: 246), a "magnificent deceit in whose making all members of a society, so it would seem, conspire" (1992: 132), wherein all involved are implicitly aware of the contradiction between the paradoxical perceptions of safety and risk in their experience yet are able to sustain this inconsistency due to the fact that the discrepancy is seldom explicitly acknowledged. Taussig describes public secrecy as endemic to social life, observing it in phenomena as diverse as statecraft (1992), shamanism (1998a), and the defacement of monuments (1999b), while others have subsequently extended his analysis to describe an equally eclectic array of activities (e.g.,; Fletcher, 2007, 2010; Bratich, 2006, 2007; Mookherjee, 2006; Watts, 2001).

Yet the crux of Taussig's analysis is that even when a public secret is in fact unveiled in an open forum, this may not lead to the secret's erasure. On the contrary, he suggests, "The mystery is heightened, not dissipated, by unmasking," for "power flows not from

masking but from an unmasking which masks more than masking does" (Taussig 1998a:222). In other words, proclaiming that one is revealing a secret reinforces the notion that there is in fact something that can alternately be concealed or revealed, when in fact, Taussig insinuates, the real "secret of the public secret is that there is none" (1999: 246). Or, as cognitive linguist George Lakoff of *Don't Think of An Elephant!* (2004) fame observes in that text, "Negating a frame evokes the frame." Paradoxically, public disavowal of the phenomenon in question is actually enhanced by its public exposure. Hence, Taussig (1998a:242) contends that "part of secrecy is secreting" and thus that "revelation is precisely what the secret intends." In adventure tourism, my analysis demonstrates, such exposure reinforcing concealment manifests in a variety of ways, from whitewater raft guides' common jokes that their trip is staged like Disneyland ("The raft's attached to a cable running down the river") to their purposefully capsizing rafts in relatively benign rapids to augment passengers' fear to scholarly researchers' increasing proclamations that commercial adventure tourism cannot in fact be "true" adventure since it lacks essential elements of novelty and uncertainty (see Fletcher, 2010 for details).

Colombia's new tourism slogan, I suggest, may function in a similar manner. On its face, the slogan appears to state quite simply that there is no longer significant risk of violence in visiting Colombia. Yet its total message is undoubtedly far more complex. As Lakoff asserts above, negating the notion of risk may paradoxically evoke this notion in readers' minds, what Taussig (1999: 141) as well calls "presencing through negation." For in stating that there is no risk, first, the slogan implicitly acknowledges Colombia's dark past in which such risk was indeed publicly acknowledged as rampant, thus conjuring in readers' minds half-conscious images of this situation known to most only through hyperbolic media images such as those earlier described.

In addition, in mentioning risk, the slogan alludes to the possibility of continuing violence in present-day Colombia, for it conveys the implicit message that the possibility of risk is sufficiently important that it must in fact be mentioned. This possibility, paradoxically, is reinforced by all of the measures described above intended to enhance visitors' (and residents') sense of safety prescribed in the DSP. The sight of armed soldiers patrolling the highways, while offering some degree of solace to anxious travelers, may simultaneously increase their discomfort by provoking them to wonder what the soldiers are patrolling for. Police checkpoints and bus searches serve a similarly ambivalent function.

And of course, as observed in the US State Department communiqué quoted above, actual violence continues to penetrate the tourism slogan's façade of tranquility at regular intervals in Colombia today. Indeed, Echavarría (2010: 3) contends that the Democratic Security Policy has paradoxically increased danger and insecurity by "legitimizing state and non-state violent actions that propel the very political violence the state promises to eliminate" (2010: 3). This violence, she asserts, is no longer localized in particular hot spots, as in the past, but now comprises "a war waged everywhere—from shopping malls to telecommunications—and everyone is suspect" (2010: x). Via the DSP, Echavarría suggests, Colombia has been transformed into something of a Foucaultian panopticon where, "In order not to be labeled 'terrorist' or 'terorist-sympathiser,' 'we' have to constantly monitor 'ourselves,' for the membership in the 'good nation' requires permanent vigilance and visible reconfirmation" (2010: x).

And in fact, notwithstanding the tourism slogan's insistence that significant risk is a thing of the past, visitors to Colombia are constantly reminded of the persistence of violence via warnings concerning which areas of the country to visit and which should be avoided, while simultaneously being assured that this violence is diminishing, and at any rate is contained within circumscribed locations far from one's own. At the ecotourism workshop

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mentioned above, a journalist described to me, with remarkable nonchalance, his recent experience of having been taken hostage by a band of rebels and marched through the Santa Marta mountains for nearly four months. Foraging for food and sleeping on the ground, he lost more than fifty pounds in this period. "Now that," he told me, "is real ecotourism." Numerous participants lamented their inability to show future ecotourists these mountains' striking beauty due to this continued rebel activity rendering such endeavors excessively dangerous.

This paradox of assurances of safety enhancing perceptions of risk is exacerbated by the reality that many of the tourists Colombian authorities hope to attract—and especially those in search of ecotourism—will be motivated precisely by anticipation of an experience of (moderate) risk. After all, this is the image of Colombia that has become ingrained in the global consciousness, and the titillation of observing (at a safe distance, of course) the reality corresponding to the image will likely be part of what many visitors will, if only half-consciously, expect. One of ecotourists' characteristic motives, in particular, involves a quest for regions offering a relatively unexplored frontier in which opportunities for novel and unplanned experiences abound (Fletcher, 2009). Indeed, it is precisely this motivation that Colombia is hoping to tap in offering itself as an alternative to current ecotourism powerhouses such as Costa Rica which is rapidly approaching saturation.

Enhancing this paradox still further is the fact that one of the main market segments currently promoted by Proexport is precisely adventure tourism (Proexport, 2010a). Photographs and video clips on the website display gleeful tourists rock climbing, rappelling, and whitewater rafting. And of course, in media representations of Colombia such as *Romancing the Stone*, danger is strongly linked with romance and excitement, as in the course of her quest for the elusive gem Wilder finds herself engaging in what amounts to

some high-stakes adventure ecotourism, slaloming down muddy hillsides through the rainforest, plunging off cascading waterfalls, 4x4-ing through the verdant countryside, joining authentic local festivals in remote villages as the only foreign participant, even falling into a passionate love affair with a rugged expat-gone-native (Michael Douglas).

In the Tourism Authority's new slogan, in short, far from being assured that Colombia presents no risk, tourists appear to be asked to accept that they are *both safe and at risk simultaneously*. Claiming that there is no risk in visiting Colombia paradoxically evokes the idea that there is in fact danger involved. The denial of violence conversely increases the intrigue and mystique that many tourists desire. The various dynamics described above, then, can be viewed as instances of the public exposure that Taussig considers integral to the public secret itself, helping to reinforce implicit awareness of a reality that is rarely explicitly acknowledged by tourism promoters themselves.

Instances of this paradox abound. As but one paradigmatic example, the section of Lonely Planet's website devoted to "Introducing Colombia" proclaims: "Colombia's back. After decades of civil conflict, Colombia is now safe to visit and travelers are discovering what they've been missing." This heady endorsement, however, is immediately followed by a "Travel Alert" (a postscript which, as Taussig (1999) contends, is a particularly appropriate place for revelation of public secrecy) stating, "Travelers should exercise vigilance at all times due to the level of violent crime. Although kidnapping and homicide rates in urban areas have dropped in recent years, they remain high" (Lonely Planet, 2010).

Appropriately, Taussig claims to have formulated his public secrecy concept while doing research in 1980s Colombia, where, he writes, "there were so many situations in which people dared not state the obvious, thus outlining it, so to speak, with the spectral radiance of the unsaid" (1999:6). In Taussig's (1999:6) analysis, in other words, the violence endemic to Colombia has long been one of public secrets sustaining the regime, "as when people

were taken off buses and searched at roadblocks set up by the police or military" and "mutilated corpses would mysteriously appear on the roads" with little public discussion of the (state) forces orchestrating these horrors. The new tourism slogan, then, appears as merely yet another pubic denial-cum-admission sustaining this public secret in the brave new era of "democratic security." In a society replete with public secrets, this latest addition inserts itself seamlessly.

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested that Colombia's new tourism campaign, centered on the "only risk is wanting to stay" slogan, constitutes something of an ideological security campaign parallel to the government's military security initiative, both of these intended to help reverse the country's longstanding international reputation as an extremely dangerous place in the interest, in part, of developing a nascent tourism industry to support economic recovery in the ostensibly "post-conflict" present. This ideological campaign operates, I maintain, through construction of a "public secret" allowing visitors to feel simultaneously safe and in danger without consciously acknowledging the inconsistency between these two representations, and thus to feel a valued sense of exhilaration without debilitating fear. The campaign's success in this regard, in conjunction with the associated military action, may be evidenced by the impressive surge in foreign visitation Colombia has experienced in recent years, along with increasing favorable coverage within the international travel press in recent years, as described above with respect to both trends. While the public secrecy dynamic appears evident within tourism promotion media, further research is needed to assess the extent to which this dynamic manifests within tourists' perceptions of their actual experience in Colombia, as I have documented elsewhere with respect to whitewater rafting and other forms of adventure tourism (Fletcher, 2010).

This analysis, I believe, has intriguing implications for our understanding of tourism (as well as other industry) marketing in general that have yet to be explored. Indeed, Taussig (1999) suggests that public secrecy's importance as a whole has been largely overlooked to date, contending that it in fact "lies at the core of power" (1999: 6), that "without such shared secrets any and all social institutions . . . would founder" (1999: 7), and hence that in comparison with public secrecy "[w]hat we call doctrine, ideology, consciousness, beliefs, values and even discourse, pale into sociological insignificance" (1999: 3). How tourism (and other) marketers are able to harness the power of public secrecy to promote their interests in other instances, then, would constitute another valuable subject for future research.

For instance, Young Pelton, mentioned above, recently announced his new partnership with Babel Travel to offer so-called "Cultural Engagement journeys into the World's Most Dangerous Places," including such "inaccessible and controversial countries" as "Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, North Korea, Burma and Iran" (Pollard, 2010). Despite this explicit reference to danger in the tours' announcement, Pelton insists that "[t]hese trips are considered 'dangerous' because they are designed to challenge how people view these places, not to scare them," that there will be "no attempt to add thrills, danger or vicarious thrills to gain attention," and that "[a]ll groups will maintain the highest level of personal and physical safety" (Pollard, 2010). The potential for public secrecy in such representations is abundant.

This analysis has particular implications for other conflict-ridden societies wishing to harness the power of tourism as a force for national development as well. The Sri Lankan governments' recent suppression of the longstanding civil war through dispersion of the Tamil Tiger separatists has opened the door to a tourism renaissance, assisted by the country's selection as *The New York Times*' #1 travel destination for 2010 (New York Times, 2010). As the *Times* explains of this decision,

For a quarter century, Sri Lanka seems to have been plagued by misfortune, including a brutal civil war between the Sinhalese-dominated government and a separatist Tamil group. But the conflict finally ended last May, ushering in a more peaceful era for this teardrop-shaped island off India's coast, rich in natural beauty and cultural splendors.

The feature goes on to note briefly in passing, however, that "a few military checkpoints remain" en route to the country's gleaming beaches. The country seems ripe, therefore, for framing in terms of the same public secret analyzed herein. Whether it, and other societies facing similar circumstances, are able to capitalize on this potential, and how this compares with the Colombian case, would make an intriguing focus for future research as well.

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Local Perceptions of Risk and Tourism: A Case Study from Rural Nepal

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Abstract

Tourism is commonly perceived as a profitable but risky option for communities in Africa, Asia and South America, due to the unpredictability of international demand and unwanted side effects on the local economy, society and environment. However, little is known about how people in destination communities themselves assess the risks and benefits of tourism relative to other sectors of the local economy. This article explores impacts of tourism on poor, rural host communities in Nepal through the theoretical lens of the vulnerability concept and with a particular focus on risk. As risk is context-dependant and socially constructed, vulnerability assessments should not only be based on categories of shock events that are pre-defined by outsiders, but also cater to people's perceptions and their local socio-economic context. Due to the volatility of tourist arrivals during the Maoist "People's War" in Nepal, rural tourism households were more likely to experience income shocks between 1996 and 2006 than non-tourism households. However, the analysis also reveals that in the local perception the benefits of tourism exceed the risk-related cost in the form of income fluctuations. In the notoriously insecure environment of rural Nepal, tourism is thus a preferred livelihood option, despite its 'objective' riskiness.

Keywords: *Risk, vulnerability assessment, tourism, rural development, Nepal.*

Introduction

Despite the recent economic crisis, tourism remains one of the most dynamic global industries and one of the largest generators of wealth and jobs (UNWTO, 2009; cf. UNWTO, 2002; WTTC, 2001). High-income countries still hold the greatest absolute market share in

tourism, but the growth of international tourist arrivals and tourism receipts has been particularly dynamic in developing countries in recent decades (Annex 1; UNWTO, 2007). Tourism is not only an avenue for national export and foreign currency earnings; it is also one of the few economic options to harness the development of remote, rural areas. The majority of low-income countries have therefore included tourism in their national poverty reduction strategies (Mitchell & Ashley, 2007). As the UN World Tourism Organization remarks, however, "tourism has not yet been given sufficient recognition by many governments and international development assistance agencies" (UNWTO, 2005, p. 1).

The lack of a straightforward correlation between tourism and development and concerns about the volatility of travel fashions explain the reluctance of policy-makers to promote tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation (cf. Elliot & Mann, 2005). In a similar vein, researchers have exposed a range of unwanted economic, socio-cultural and environmental side-effects of tourism in poor countries, such as the promotion of inequality, inflation, import dependency, over-exploitation of natural resources, environmental damages and cultural alienation (cf. Shakya, 2009, pp. 85-90 for an overview of the debate). However, most local impact studies on tourism and development have two important shortcomings: First, impacts of tourism are typically assessed from the perspective of outsiders, often without due consideration of local values and perceptions. Second, tourism is often judged in isolation rather than in relation to other economic options that are available in a particular local context. Arguably, effective policies for poverty reduction must account for local development potentials and constraints. Development policy must also cater to the aspirations, capacities and perceptions of local residents, which are a function of people's geographic and socio-

economic context. A sober re-assessment of tourism as a development option, which addresses the aforementioned shortcomings, therefore seems overdue.

This article analyzes impacts of tourism in poor, rural communities of Nepal with a particular focus on risk. Risk is a core element of the *vulnerability concept*, a theoretical framework that has gained importance in interdisciplinary development research to examine poverty dynamics and welfare implications of shocks and crises at the micro-level (Chambers, 1989; Watts & Bohle, 1993; Alwang, Siegel & Jørgensen, 2001). In the vulnerability concept, risk is looked at from different epistemological positions, as references are made both to the notion of "objective risk" as well as to the social constructionist, "subjective" view on risk in the social sciences (Wisner et al., 2004, p. 49; Sjöberg, Moen & Rundmo, 2004, p. 7; cf. Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Douglas, 1992; Kasperson & Kasperson, 1996; Lupton, 1999; Krüger & Macamo, 2003).

By looking at two different dimensions of risk, this paper aims at reconciling these contrasting positions. First, people's *exposure to risk* in the form of observable hazards, shocks and other harmful events will be analyzed. Second, *perceptions of risk* and the influence of such perceptions on households' economic decisions will be attended to. Tourism is related to both dimensions of risk. It may increase households' *de facto* risk exposure, as the volatility of tourist arrivals in developing countries could result in income shocks at the local level. Considering that uncertainty of income streams and economic constraints are notorious conditions in remote rural areas of Nepal, tourism could also be regarded as an opportunity for economic diversification and thus contribute to reducing households' vulnerability to poverty. Therefore, we will not only examine the impact of tourism on risk exposure but also explore how people perceive the riskiness of tourism relative to other economic options.

As one of the poorest countries in the world with a high tourism potential, Nepal has been selected as the geographical setting of the study. Based on empirical evidence from case studies and household survey data, tourism's impact on risk exposure and the risk perceptions of rural households in Nepal will be scrutinized. The article starts by analyzing the link between risk and tourism in the theoretical framework of the vulnerability concept. Overviews of Nepal and the research methodology are then provided. The empirical findings are presented in detail, leading to some concluding remarks.

Theoretical links between risk and tourism

In a neutral way, risk can be conceived as a probabilistic concept, implying chances of losses as well as chances of gains. Risk refers to the occurrence of an event with a probability $p<1$ as opposed to *certainty*, i.e. events with $p=1$. *Uncertainty* is therefore inherent in risk. In contemporary use, risk is commonly defined in its "downside" sense, referring to shocks and contingencies with unwanted, negative effects (Rohrmann, 2006, p. 2; cf. Lupton, 1999). During the past decades, the emergence of new, potentially harmful technologies such as nuclear energy and the global scope of environmental change have increasingly occupied scholars from a range of academic disciplines with the topic of risk, including psychologists, economists, geographers, sociologists and anthropologists. Different concepts of risk and risk perception reflect different theoretical approaches in these disciplines. These concepts can roughly be grouped as belonging either to a "realist" or a "social constructionist" school of thought (cf. Lupton 1999).

As in the probabilistic definition, the *realist paradigm* claims that risk objectively exists and can be calculated according to a known or unknown probability distribution (cf. Holton,

2004). Expert knowledge can thus be contrasted with the subjective understanding of lay people. Typically, the latter's risk assessment is found to be less accurate and "biased" as compared to the scientific "facts" due to the heuristics that people apply for estimating probabilities (Tversky & Kahnemann 1974). Psychometric studies of risk perception in psychology have aimed at explaining differential risk assessments through a range of quantifiable indicators and cognitive factors (e.g. Slovic, Fischhoff & Lichtenstein, 1982; cf. Sjöberg, Moen & Rundmo, 2004 for an evaluation). Proponents of the *social constructionist paradigm* stress that risk must be understood and negotiated in any economic, social, cultural and geographic context, making a distinction between expert and lay people's risk assessments redundant (e.g. Binswanger, 1980; Douglas, 1992; Kasperson & Kasperson, 1996; cf. Lupton, 1999). Scholars from both epistemological positions agree on the fact that people's risk assessments are inevitably subjective, depending on a range of personal factors such as knowledge, experience, education, gender, culture, social norms, values, beliefs and attitudes.

Despite their obvious influence on people's welfare and economic decisions, risk and risk perception have only recently been discovered as a topic of *development research* (Kanbur & Squire, 1999; cf. Morduch, 1994; Sinha & Lipton, 1999; Fafchamps, 2003; Dercon, 2005a; 2005b). Risk is also a core element of the *vulnerability concept*, which is increasingly being used as a theoretical framework to analyze people's susceptibility to fall into and remain in poverty (Chambers, 1989; Watts & Bohle, 1993; Alwang, Siegel & Jørgensen, 2001). Risk is inherent in the vulnerability concept in a dual way, reflecting both the notion of "realist risk" and the social constructionist view: *Risk exposure*, i.e. exposure to shocks and harmful events such as natural hazards or violent conflicts directly reduces people's welfare and can thus be regarded as a cause of poverty. In addition, people's individual risk

assessment influences their economic decisions. Poor and vulnerable people might thus feel forced to pursue a low-risk, low-income portfolio of economic activities, because they could not afford to engage in more profitable but risky options (cf. Wood, 2003; Ligon & Schechter, 2003; Thorbecke, 2004). *Risk management capacity*, i.e. the ability to spread livelihood risk by maintaining a diverse income portfolio, is therefore an important determinant of people's vulnerability to poverty.

Crises and shock events of a global scope, such as the SARS pandemic or the 09/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, have also prompted *tourism research* to focus more strongly on risk. The literature emphasizes the volatility of international tourism demand due to exchange rate fluctuations, economic crises, market trends, conflicts, terrorism, natural hazard events and pandemics (Vorlaufer, 1996; Sönmez, 1998; Neumayer, 2004; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; cf. Shakya, 2009). Risk assessment and crisis management are thus important concerns for the tourism industry (Beirman, 2003; Blake & Sinclair, 2003; ECLAC, 2003; Glaesser, 2003; Wilks & Moore, 2004; Eugenio-Martin, Sinclair & Yeoman, 2005; Laws, Prideaux & Chon 2007; Henderson, 2007, Ritchie, 2009; Pforr & Hosie, 2009). More recently, the contentious relationship between tourism and climate change has received international attention (Becken & Hay, 2007; UNWTO & UNEP, 2008; cf. Gössling & Hall, 2006).
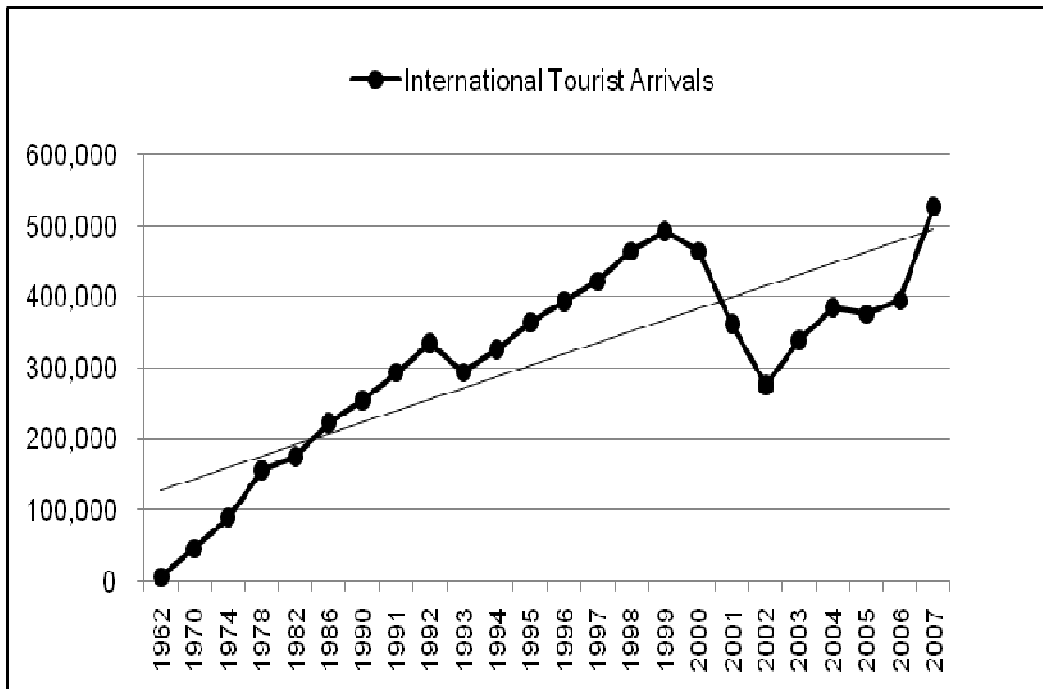
Figure 1: International tourist arrivals in Nepal (1962-2007) and trend line (data source: MCTCA 2008)

Developing countries are likely to suffer from tourism demand fluctuations. They are particularly susceptible to shock events such as natural disasters and violent conflicts, as well as to the negative consequences of climate change and global economic crises (cf. UNDP 2004). This is exemplified by international tourist arrivals in Nepal. Apart from the general upward trend of tourism development since the first recording of tourist arrivals in 1962, Figure 1 also shows marked fluctuations, especially in the period between 1999 and 2007. International arrivals continued to grow even during the early years of the Maoist "People's War" (1996-2006) and reached a preliminary high in 1999. They then sharply declined until 2002. It can be assumed that these fluctuations were caused by a combination of national and international events, such as the 09/11 attacks, the consecutive "war on

terrorism," the massacre of the Nepalese royal family (2001) and the intensification of the Maoist conflict (2002) (cf. Shakya, 2009, pp. 102-107 for a more detailed analysis).

Considering the relatively small share of tourism in the national economy of many developing countries, such shocks may not necessarily translate into macroeconomic impacts (cf. Annex 1). Again, this is exemplified by Nepal, where the travel & tourism economy was estimated to contribute 6.4% to national GDP and 5% of total employment in 2007 (WTTC, 2007). Moreover, the quick recovery of international tourist arrivals after the Asian financial crisis (1997-1999), terrorist attacks (e.g. the Bali bombings of 2002), the SARS pandemic (2003) and the Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004) is in stark contrast to the common perception of tourism as a particularly volatile option for developing countries (Prideaux, 1999; Darma Putra & Hitchcook, 2006). In Nepal, tourist arrivals increased to a historical peak in 2007, only one year after the official end of the "People's War" (Figure 1).

Even if the volatility of tourism demand may not result in macroeconomic shocks with long-term consequences, *local consequences* of demand fluctuations have to be expected. Kareithi (2003) and Calgaro (2005) are among the few existing studies who analyze local impacts of tourism decline. In the sense that it is subject to demand fluctuations, tourism can thus be regarded as a "risky" (i.e. volatile) industry. At the same time, it has been observed that developing countries have absolute and comparative advantages in tourism due to their abundance of cheap labor and immobile primary resources (Frentrup, 1969; Harrison, 1992; Vorlaufer, 1996). Noting that almost all developing countries are characterized by vast socio-economic and geographic disparities, scholars suggest that tourism could be a vehicle for the development of remote, rural areas (Wiggins & Proctor, 2001; Mihalič, 2002; Telfer, 2002). Empirical studies confirm the higher incidence and persistence of poverty in rural areas of

developing countries as compared to urban areas (cf. Ashley & Maxwell, 2001; Devereux, 2001; IFAD, 2001; Bird et al., 2002; Dercon 2006). Food insecurity, health problems, natural hazards and harvest failures illustrate that people in rural areas are also exposed to high levels of risk and hold relatively low stocks of assets in the national comparison. Therefore, rural households are generally more vulnerable to poverty than their urban counterparts. Under such endogenous conditions of risk, economic involvement in tourism should not be regarded exclusively as a welfare risk due to the likelihood of demand fluctuations. Instead, tourism could also be considered as a *chance* to escape rural poverty. This dualistic role of tourism—exposing households to the risk of income shocks, while at the same time offering the prospect of economic benefit— will be examined in the following paragraphs by looking at two particular aspects: First, the impact of tourism on households' risk exposure will be analyzed. Second, we will assess whether the choice (or rejection) of tourism as a livelihood option is motivated by households' concern with risk.

Geographical context

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, a least developed country with considerable tourism potential, was chosen as the geographical setting of the research. With 95% of the poor living in rural areas, poverty in Nepal is primarily a rural phenomenon (CBS et al., 2005). Poverty not only differs between rural and urban areas; the poverty headcount rate is considerably lower in the *tarai*, the narrow lowland stretch in the South, as compared to the Himalayan ranges, which cover the hill and mountain belts of Nepal. Socio-economic data for Nepal's mountain belt indicate a "geographical disadvantage" of this extremely remote and isolated region (cf. World Bank, 2006). The case of Nepal also confirms the relatively high *vulnerability* faced by the population of rural areas as compared to the urban population. Nepal's extreme topography, climate and hydro-geological setting explain the

high risk of natural hazards such as floods, slides, drought and epidemics, which particularly affect farm households in rural areas. The "People's War" of Maoist insurgents killed more than 13,000 people between 1996 and 2006 and particularly affected remote rural areas of Nepal. Access to crucial assets such as education, health, financial markets and physical infrastructure also depends largely on geographical location. This is not only due to the "natural remoteness" of Nepal's rural areas, but also due to the chronic political instability and the government's inability to effectively address regional imbalances. Despite an impressive overall decline of absolute poverty in Nepal during the past decade, people in remote rural areas have thus remained vulnerable to poverty in a socio-economic context of limited opportunity (cf. Shakya, 2009; World Bank, 2006).

Notwithstanding its relatively small macroeconomic importance, *tourism* plays a significant role in the local economy of Nepal's rural destinations, where trekking tourism, mountaineering and wildlife excursions take place. To protect Nepal's remarkable biodiversity, which is a result of the large variation in altitude and climatic regions, 19% of the country's area have been designated as national parks, nature reserves and conservation areas. The Himalayan ranges and the wilderness areas of Nepal's tarai belt are also important assets of the Nepalese tourism industry. This is exemplified by *Langtang National Park* and *Chitwan National Park*, two of Nepal's major tourist destinations. Langtang National Park is the third most important destination for trekking and mountaineering tourism in Nepal, whereas tourist activities in Chitwan National Park focus on nature-based activities such as jungle safaris and bird watching. With annual declines of up to 50% during the "People's War," international tourist arrivals at both destinations have fluctuated considerably between 1996 and 2006 (MCTCA, various years). Chitwan district and Rasuwa district (Langtang

National Park) were thus selected as "critical cases" to explore the links between tourism and risk during the "People's War" (1996-2006). These two districts represent different topographical and ecological zones of Nepal, namely the *tarai* lowlands (Chitwan) and the hills and mountains (Rasuwa). Together, the districts cover altitudes from 110 to 7245 m and represent a wide range of Nepal's topographical, ecological and socio-cultural diversity (MCTCA, UNDP & TRPAP, 2005; 2006).

Research Design and Methodology

To identify risk-related impacts of tourism, a *quasi-experimental research design* was chosen for the empirical study. A "treatment group" of tourism households could thus be compared with a control group of non-tourism households. Tourism households are defined as households that are economically involved in tourism, e.g. as lodge/hotel owners, restaurant owners, hotel employees, guides or porters. Quasi-experiments differ from "true" experimental research designs in that the independent variable is not manipulated by the researcher to induce the treatment effect (Schnell, Hill & Esser, 1995, p. 220). Evidently, such a manipulation would not have been possible in the framework of a tourism impact study. Likewise, randomization appeared inappropriate to form parallel groups of a sufficient size. Instead, one tourism community and a matching non-tourism community were chosen in each district. *Sauraha* in Chitwan district and *Thulo Syabru* in Rasuwa district were selected as tourism villages. Secondary literature, qualitative interviews and observations confirmed that both villages had undergone considerable socio-economic transformation due to tourism over more than three decades (cf. Hauck, 1996 on Thulo Syabru; Kunwar, 2002 on Sauraha). The non-tourism villages in both districts were chosen for their structural similarity with the respective tourism villages, e.g. with regard to their topographical setting, ecological zone, accessibility, poverty prevalence and ethnic composition. With differing

shares of tourism households thus being the main distinguishing variable, the pairs of tourism and non-tourism communities in Chitwan and Rasuwa were found to be sufficiently matching for the purpose of treatment-control group comparisons.

Table 1: Composition of Sample across Comparison Groups

Total Sample: 259 Households (100%), thereof:			
Tourism households (treatment group)	107 (41%)	Non-tourism households (control group)	152 (58%)
Households in tourism villages	128 (49%)	Households in non-tourism villages	131 (51%)
Households in Rasuwa district (mountains)	121 (47%)	Households in Chitwan district (lowlands)	138 (53%)

Source: Modified from Shakya, 2009, p. 177.

The resulting sample consists of 259 randomly selected households from the four villages. With 41% tourism and 58% non-tourism households, the sample represents sufficient covariation on the independent (tourism) variable and allows for comparisons between the treatment and the control group. The selection of the two geographically distinct districts aims at revealing contextual dimensions of risk, allowing for further comparisons between households in the Nepalese mountains and in the lowlands (Table 1). Based on a comprehensive questionnaire, *standardized household surveys* were conducted in the four villages in 2006 and the data entered into a SPSS database. Statistical tests were conducted on a range of risk-related variables, with the significance level determined at $p \leq 0.05$. Comparisons between the treatment and the control group could thus reveal causal

connections between tourism and risk. To control for third-variable effects (i.e. effects unrelated to tourism) and also to cross-validate and explain the research findings, *community case studies* were conducted in each village. The case studies draw on the village sub-sample of the household data and the findings from key informant interviews and collective appraisal tools such as focus group discussions. The findings from the quantitative analysis are presented in the following sections. Selected results of the community case studies complement the discussion of the findings in the concluding section of this paper (cf. Shakya, 2009 for detailed results of the qualitative analysis).

Tourism and risk exposure

We start the empirical exploration by analyzing the impact of tourism on *risk exposure*, i.e. households' experience of shock events in the reference period. Corresponding to the "realist" notion of risk, households were asked in the survey whether they had experienced natural hazard shocks, economic shocks or crime/violence-related shocks between 1996 and 2006. Although households were asked to also report events that were not pre-defined in the questionnaire, these three categories covered most of the shocks that households had experienced in the reference period. The definition of shocks in the survey was restricted to sudden, unanticipated events with an immediate, adverse impact on households' welfare (Shakya, 2009).

Table 2 lists the shock events that were most frequently reported by the survey respondents. Both tourism and non-tourism households reported that they had experienced natural hazards and economic shocks in the reference period. Income shocks as a consequence of "tourism decline" in the period 1996-2006 were mentioned by many (34%) of the tourism households. In contrast, 26% of the non-tourism households had perceived "harvest failure" as an economic shock. To test whether the connection between tourism

involvement and the experience of shock events is statistically significant, we looked separately at the three categories of risk. Table 2 suggests that tourism households were relatively more affected by natural hazards than non-tourism households. To conduct a chi-square test on this hypothesis, a dummy variable relating to the experience of natural hazard shocks was cross-tabulated with a variable specifying households as being involved in tourism or not. The test result is valid at p=0.063, thus leading to a rejection of the hypothesis as statistically insignificant. Likewise, there is no significant connection between households' tourism involvement and the experience of crime/conflict-related shocks. In contrast, a significant association between tourism involvement and the experience of economic shocks was detected (Table 3). Statistically significant at p=0.05, households involved in tourism were more likely to experience an economic shock between 1996 and 2006 than the non-tourism households. It can be followed that the tourism households were exposed to a higher level of "objective" risk than the non-tourism households.

Table 2: Experience of shock events, 1996-2006 (% of households, multiple answers)

Category of shock	Event	Tourism households (n = 107)	Non-tourism households (n = 152)	All (n = 259)
Natural hazard shocks	Floods	21	14	17
	Wildlife damage	23	12	17
	Drought	20	13	16
	Landslide	5	12	9
	Hailstorm	3	5	4
Economic shocks	Harvest failure	17	26	22
	Tourism decline	34	3	16
	Loss of job	6	3	4
Crime-/Maoist-related shocks	Theft	8	9	9
	Extortion	2	4	3

Source: Shakya, 2009, p. 300.

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Table 3: Experience of economic shocks, 1996-2006 (% of households, dummy variable)

	Tourism households (n = 107)	Non-tourism households (n = 152)	All (n = 259)
Experienced at least one economic shock	46	34	39
Experienced no economic shock	54	66	61
Total	100	100	100

U = 3.970; p = 0.046. The test is valid (0 cells have an expected count < 5).

Source: Shakya, 2009, p. 299.

Apart from looking at households' perception of "realist risk" in the form of shocks, we also analyzed subjective assessments of *development trends* in the period 1996-2006 as a control indicator and loose proxy for welfare variability (cf. CBS et al., 2005). In distinction from shocks, *trends* refer to changes that unfold slowly, or persist over a longer period of time. Unlike shocks, which are often perceived as "disastrous," the consequences of trends may not become immediately visible. Moreover, trends induce a process of adaptation and often take place unnoticed. Although trend assessments are obviously influenced by a large number of variables, they may at least partly reflect the welfare consequences of risk-related events. Thus, to find out whether households had actually perceived a welfare decline in the reference period—due to their exposure to shocks or for other reasons—we constructed a *development trend index.* At various stages in the survey, households were asked in which direction their personal situation had changed between 1996 and 2006 with regard to a particular welfare dimension, such as housing, health, education, income and security.

Responses were dummy-coded, "0" meaning "no improvement or worse," and "1" meaning that the household had experienced an improvement in the past decade with regard to the specific welfare dimension. The index was constructed by adding up answers to the respective survey questions. The higher the index score (value range: 0-7), the more positive a household assessed development trends in the observation period. For instance, a trend index value of 3 implies that the household perceived a positive trend with regard to three welfare dimensions (e.g. housing, income and education), whereas it perceived stagnation or a negative trend on the remaining dimensions (household amenities, health, financial situation, security).

Considering that tourism households had been relatively more exposed to economic shocks between 1996 and 2006, we would expect that they would also judge development trends in the same period as being more negative as compared to the non-tourism households. However, the opposite holds true; comparing their current situation with the one in 1996, tourism households assessed their situation in 2006 more positively as compared to non-tourism households (Table 4). The contingency coefficient C and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ρ both suggest a moderately strong, statistically significant connection between the variables.

Table 4: Assessment of Development Trends, 1996-2006 (% households)

Trend Index Value*	Tourism households (n = 107)	Non-tourism households (n = 152)	All (n = 259)
0	1	13	9
1	0	9	5
2	4	6	5
3	13	7	10
4	6	12	9
5	15	15	15
6	25	17	20
7	36	22	28
Total	100	100	100

* Value range: 0-7; a value of 7 represents the most positive assessment.

C = 0.325, p = 0.000; ρ = 0.257; p = 0.000.

Source: Shakya 2009, p. 301.

To further explore the causal link between tourism and development trends, we take a closer look at the responses of the *tourism households only*. The overwhelming majority (93-100%) of the tourism households in the survey sample arrives at positive assessments with regard to the seven dimensions of the trend index. For instance, *all* responding tourism households state that their household amenities, health/nutrition and education had improved between 1996 and 2006. Moreover, 84-92% of the tourism households attribute this positive assessment to their economic involvement in tourism. Concluding so far, tourism households

have noted greater overall improvements of their living conditions between 1996 and 2006 than non-tourism households and causally attribute these improvements to their economic involvement in tourism. This is *despite* the fact that they had experienced more economic shocks than the non-tourism households in the same period.

Risk perceptions in the local context

As claimed in the literature, the presence of risk may force people to pursue a low-risk, low-income portfolio of economic activities, since "the 'poor' will not take the entrepreneurial risk required to enter into particular profitable activities" (Dercon, 2005b, p. 12; cf. Morduch, 1995). The above findings suggest that tourism is a profitable, albeit risky livelihood opportunity in the context of rural Nepal. To find out whether *risk aversion* influences households' decision to engage in tourism, the causal links between risk perception and involvement in tourism shall be examined. Due to a lack of non-farm economic activities, *mixed farming* is the economic mainstay for the majority of the population in rural Nepal as well as in the case study communities (Shakya, 2009; cf. CBS et al., 2005; World Bank, 2006). Households were therefore asked in the survey how they rate the riskiness of tourism relative to the riskiness of farming. Across the sample, the share of respondents who consider tourism as more risky and those who do not are almost equal. However, the majority of non-tourism households (59%) perceive tourism as less risky than farming, as compared to only 40% of tourism households (Table 5). This finding, which is statistically significant, challenges the common association of poverty and risk aversion. Both the farm households *and* the tourism household are evidently not risk averse, as they pursue livelihood opportunities that they overwhelmingly judge as risky.

To further explore this finding, we asked non-tourism households about their *reasons for not being involved in tourism*. Table 5 summarizes the most important responses.

Evidently, the perception of tourism as being risky plays a subordinate role in people's decision to engage or not to engage in tourism. Only 16% of the non-tourism households mention concerns with risk as a reason for not being involved in tourism. More importantly, they regard their lack of skills, money and labor as restrictions that keep them from getting involved in tourism. Correspondingly, 80% of non-tourism households reported that they would be interested in getting involved in tourism (Shakya, 2009, p. 306). In accordance with findings from other studies, this result indicates that it is *not risk aversion* per se, but rather households' *investment constraints*, which keep them from engaging in new, potentially risky livelihood opportunities (Shakya, 2009; cf. Fafchamps, 2003; Binswanger, 1980).

Table 5: Risk perception of tourism versus farming (% of households)

"Tourism is more risky than farming"	Tourism households (n = 107)	Non-tourism households (n = 152)	All (n = 259)
Yes	60	41	49
No	40	59	51
Total	100	100	100

U = 8.475; *p* = 0.004. The test is valid (0 cells have an expected count < 5).

Source: Shakya, 2009, p. 306.

Table 6: Reasons for not being involved in tourism (non-tourism households only; n = 148, multiple answers)

	Frequency	Share
1. Lack of skills	90	61%
2. Lack of money	77	52%
3. Lack of labor	39	26%
4. Lack of tourists	33	22%
5. Too risky	24	16%
6. No interest	17	11%

Source: Shakya, 2009, p. 306.

Finally, we asked the tourism households about their perception of tourism's *profitability*. While 60% of tourism households in the sample consider tourism as more risky, almost all (91%) regard it also as more profitable than farming. This is despite the fact that the survey took place in 2006, i.e. under the impression of the tourism decline during the "People's War" (Shakya, 2009). In the perception of households that have already had some experience with it, tourism is thus a preferred livelihood strategy due to its profitability and despite its perceived riskiness. In contrast, the majority of non-tourism households perceive tourism as less risky than farming. However, the latter stay in farming because of the perceived constraints that keep them from engaging in tourism (Table 6). The findings suggest that risk perception might not be a strong predictor of households' economic portfolio; households rather choose their income portfolio based on a rational assessment of personal capacities and expected utility. Both the perceptions of the tourism and the non-tourism households

underline that tourism is overwhelmingly regarded as an *opportunity* rather than a potentially harmful risk.

Conclusions

It has been the aim of this article to analyze the causal connections between risk and tourism from the perspective of destination communities in developing countries. Noting that there are different theoretical approaches to risk, it was observed that the relationship between tourism and risk is ambivalent; tourism exposes developing countries to the risk of income shocks but also creates economic opportunities. This proposition was examined on the basis of household survey data from rural Nepal. The empirical findings suggest that the notion of *realist risk,* as expressed in pre-defined categories of shock events (e.g. the recording of natural hazard events or income shocks in a specified period), is insufficient to judge people's risk exposure and vulnerability to poverty. Despite the "objective" risk of welfare fluctuations as a result of temporary tourism decline, tourism households in rural Nepal have noted greater livelihood improvements during the "People's War" as compared to the non-tourism households. The research findings challenge conventional risk and vulnerability assessments that focus on pre-defined categories of risk in order to identify "vulnerable" population groups. The *social constructionist* view seems more appropriate to explain households' economic behavior under conditions of risk, as people assess economic opportunities and risks in relation to their individual capacities and livelihood context. The assessment of local risk perceptions reveals that households in the survey sample refrain from tourism not because they judge tourism as risky, but because they realize their limited capacity to benefit economically from tourism.

Complementary research findings from the community case studies give ample proof that tourism has a wide range of positive livelihood impacts, many of which go beyond monetary benefits. Tourism in rural Nepal was found to improve households' risk management capacity by offering a viable option for livelihood diversification (cf. Ellis, 2000). Moreover, tourism has considerably expanded households' economic prospects by improving education, health, physical amenities and financial assets. By improving households' risk management and coping capacity, tourism has contributed to reducing households' vulnerability to poverty (cf. Shakya, 2009 for details). These vulnerability-reducing impacts of tourism are particularly important in the geographical context of Nepal's remote mountain regions, which hardly offer alternatives for economic diversification beyond farming. As any other business activity, tourism is neither without risk nor without unwanted impacts. However, there is no reason to dismiss tourism *due to the risk of income shocks*, if the concerned communities themselves are willing to bear this risk. As has been stressed in this paper, risk and uncertainty are part of "normal life" in many parts of the developing world, especially in remote rural areas. Policy-makers and scholars must realize that poor people are not helpless victims but rational decision-makers who make the best of their limited opportunities. National development planners and the international aid community should support people in the endeavor to realize their full potential, rather than excluding them from exploiting their limited opportunities.

To make sure that poor people in remote mountain areas are getting their share of the global "tourism cake," policies should be targeted towards promoting new destinations and innovative, "pro-poor" tourism products (cf. Ashley, Goodwin & Roe 2001). Creation of physical and socio-economic infrastructure (e.g. transport infrastructure, financial markets, health-related and educational facilities) is another important precondition not only for

tourism, but for any economic development in remote, rural regions. Finally, other potential income sources besides farming and tourism—e.g. non-timber forest products or labor migration—should be explored to better insure rural households against livelihood risks and promote their socio-economic advancement.

Tourism is not possible everywhere and therefore is not a panacea against poverty and vulnerability. It is hoped, however, that policy makers and scholars will give up their reluctance to promote tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation. Many developing countries possess outstanding tourist attractions but are in dire need of know-how, investment and access to international tourist markets to better exploit their tourism potential. In the Nepal Himalaya and other remote regions of the world, many tourism assets are lying idle, while existing tourism activities and infrastructure are concentrated on a few regions only. This results in localized overcrowding and other unwanted side-effects, as noted by the "critical" literature on tourism and development. Actively promoting and steering tourism development towards new products and regions may thus not only spread the vulnerability-reducing effects of tourism, but also enhance visitors' travel experience.

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Annex 1: Economic contribution of tourism in selected countries (2007)

	T & T Demand Market Share	GDP Contribution		Employment Contribution		Export Contribution
	% of total world demand	T & T Industry GDP (% of total GDP)	T & T Economy GDP (% of total GDP)	T & T Economy Jobs ('000)	T & T Economy Jobs (% of total employment)	T & T Visitor Exports (% of total exports)
World	100	3.6	10.4	231,222	8.3	6.4
LDCs:¹						
Bangladesh	<1	1.5	3.9	2,024	3.1	0.6
Cape Verde	<1	10.9	19.2	16	17.5	46.1
Cambodia	<1	9.3	20.3	1,108	15.8	24.2
Maldives	<1	31.1	61.2	57	52.9	66.0
Nepal	<1	2.7	6.4	500	5.0	12.3
Senegal	<1	3.3	7.6	157	6.3	15.0

Sierra Leone	<1	3.3	6.6	65	5.2	20.7
Tanzania	<1	4.1	9.4	680	7.4	27.4
HICs:[2]						
France	5	4.1	10.9	3,349	13.2	8.5
Germany	7	2.9	10.0	4,261	10.8	4.0
Spain	4	6.8	18.2	4,046	20.0	20.2
United States	24	3.8	10.2	15,040	10.3	8.5

T&T = Travel & Tourism.

[1] Least Developed Countries, according to UN classification (UNCTAD 2007).

[2] High-Income Countries, according to World Bank classification (World Bank 2007).

Data Source: WTTC 2007 (estimates based on tourism satellite account methodology.)

Risk, excitement and emotional conflict in women's travel narratives

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Abstract

This paper focuses on my PhD research into the emotional, sensual and embodied journeys of female backpackers. Existing academic literature has largely characterised this form of tourism as a hedonistic quest for intense, heightened states of experience where embodied sensations are highly sought after. However this type of 'experience tourism' can often result in tensions between how the backpacker constructs and negotiates her responsibility for personal safety with her desire for exciting , and occasionally risky, experiences.

Drawing on narratives from female backpackers during my field work in India, as well as interviews with women who have returned home after an extensive backpacking trip to a variety of destinations in Asia, Latin America and Africa, this paper will focus on stories of 'bad' or frightening experiences, embodied constraints and examples of sexual behaviour that the participants perceived as carrying a high degree of both risk and excitement. Many of the travel narratives of the women fluctuate between promoting a strong, resilient character who embraces risk taking behaviour as part of an enriched travel experience, and feelings of anger, fear, vulnerability and loss of control. This can be seen most clearly in the conflicted subject position of many of the participants as their narratives display the tensions between how they should respond, and how they actually feel, towards local strangers as lone women travellers.

Furthermore, the paradoxical nature of these narratives can be linked to the shift in feminist identities, and reflect wider theoretical debates on cross-generational feminisms. Disassociating with feminism as a movement which is directly relevant to their lives, the participants in my study preferred to present a more individualised identity where they choose the activity of travel to strengthen and enhance their personal development. I argue that the ways in which the women negotiate risk in their travels with regard to personal safety, sexual behaviour and

construction of 'the other' notably mirrors this trend. Furthermore, the paper concludes by suggesting that it is the very conflicts and controversies between feminist identities and the search for risky, intense and sensual experiences that either inhibit or enhance the excitement of the backpacking journey.

Keywords: Backpacking tourism, gender, feminism, sexuality, risk

Introduction

Within tourist studies there has been a growth of literature that is specifically geared towards backpacking research. What constitutes as 'backpacking' is unstable and disputed, yet the key anthologies of backpacking research (Richards and Wilson, 2004, Hannam and Ateljevic 2008) for the most part identify backpacking as low budget, independent tourism that can extend over long periods of time and often lacks a specific prescribed schedule. Covering diverse areas of focus, existing academic literature has largely characterised independent travel, or 'backpacking', as a hedonistic quest for intense, heightened states of experience where embodied sensations are highly sought after (Cohen 2004, Black 2001). This 'experience tourism' often results in behaviour associated with risk taking and adventure. A gendered approach to this framework (Elsrud 2001, 2005) further asserts that women travellers adopt the arguably masculine traits of adventure narratives, incorporating 'risky' experiences into their travel stories as part of their journey of independence, empowerment and self-development, as these characteristics are often perceived to be achieved through backpacking tourism. Keen to develop my interest into the complex shift between second and third wave feminism and contemporary social identities surrounding gender politics, part of my research aims to amalgamate the activity and study of backpacking tourism with parallel theoretical debates in

gender studies on feminist identities and the decline of collective consciousness in western societies, specifically through changing notions of risk, sexuality and empowerment. The broader aim of the research therefore looks towards politicising the study of leisure and tourism, to determine whether independent women's travel can act as a lens through which to examine the changing character of feminist debate both within the academy and society at large.

This paper adheres to a gendered approach to backpacking, exploring how 'experience' tourism can often result in tensions between how the female backpacker constructs and negotiates her responsibility for personal safety with her desire for exciting, and occasionally risky, experiences.

Drawing on narratives from female backpackers during my field work in India, as well as interviews and focus groups with women who have returned home after an extensive backpacking trip to a variety of destinations, this paper examines the role of risk, excitement, fear and emotional conflict in women's travel narratives. Examples from interview data focus firstly on risk and excitement, especially with regard to accounts of sexual behaviour, drugs and alcohol. Thereafter, the paper moves onto stories of 'bad' or 'frightening' experiences and embodied constraints. I am to politicise the study of backpacking by situating these narratives in tourist theory as well as wider frameworks of feminist debates. Establishing links between these areas of work enhances our understanding of women's complex relationship with risk taking behaviour in spaces of travel and mobility.

Literature review

The paper will begin by examining some of the motivations for women's independent travel by exploring some key concepts in backpacking tourism theory and research, specifically with

regard to discourses of adventure and risk. Furthermore, I will introduce Noy's concept of the 'master script', which applies to a gendered analysis of backpacking behaviour as it can prescribe how women negotiate risk in their narratives. Relevant links can be made with the theoretical issues concerning women's experiences of travel in existing research and parallel contemporary theories into women's relationship with feminism, risk and sexuality. A brief review of the changing character of feminism will be introduced and referred to throughout this paper in order to situate women's emotional responses to risk within a wider context.

Backpacking, risk, gender and the 'master script'

Research into backpacking tourism encompasses multiple areas of focus, and covers a diverse range of issues within disciplines throughout the social, geographical and environmental sciences. The body of literature that explores backpacking as an individual journey of empowerment, personal experiences and development is most influential to my research into gender and risk. To begin with, Richards and Wilson (2004) outline the key characteristics of the 'global nomad'. Born out of an increasingly restless and mobile society, the alienated backpacker is 'driven into the far corners of the globe by the 'experience hunger' of modern society' (2004:5). Whilst some backpacking theorists claim that the backpacker is now less alienated from society as travelling becomes more acceptable and mainstreamed as part of a rites of passage, such as between finishing university and beginning employment, this 'experience hunger' still remains a crucial element of the journey of the improved self (Welk 2004). According to Cohen, this is reflective of the postmodern experiential mode, and he explains how 'freedom' for backpackers has become void of political analysis and replaced by 'unrestrained permissiveness found in enclaves, which enables utter hedonism and

experimentation under simple and affordable circumstances' (2004:51).

With regard to a gendered analysis of backpacking travel, there has been an emergence of research that supports the motivations of women travellers as following this trend of self development, journeys of independence and empowerment. Myers and Hannam (2008) refer to the association between women's growth in independent travel and their 'empowerment', highlighting the benefits of travel to women's identities as free and liberated individuals. Drawing on research into the differences between male and female travel, as well as the work of Humberstone and Collins (1998), Myers and Hannam put forward that women are much more concerned with the quality of their reflective and spiritual experiences of travel and the process of this reflection, where men are more orientated towards activity. Academic interest in gendered approaches to women's experiences of tourism appeared in 2005 in a special issue on 'Female Travellers' in *Tourism Review International.* Elsrud's paper on women's narrative and identity carries the most weight to my main argument. She asserts that the 'adventure discourse' that is still prominent in contemporary backpacking is still very much connected to masculinity, and women need to adopt this masculine discourse in order to perform their identities as a successful 'adventuress'. Elsrud notes that 'adventure narratives are particularly effective when it comes to expressing a strong and independent identity' (2005: 127). These 'tomboy' traits often reveal how traditional, weaker forms of femininity are abandoned in favour of masculine adventure, and downgrades women who cannot compete with such bravery and resistance to feminine restrictions. More recent research into women travellers (Wilson and Harris 2007, Wilson et al 2009) continues to confirm that a key motivation for their backpacking journeys is one of empowerment; to challenge gendered constraints, resist the gendered

geographies of fear and enhance their development as liberated, independent women with freedom of mobility.

Nevertheless, Elsrud further asserts that although strongly influenced by masculine norms, women can realise they have been given a discourse that does not belong to them or match their experiences. In this case, Elsrud uses the post-tourism framework to understand how their stories become ironic, thus mocking the traditional masculine adventure and become highly critically reflexive of their own adventurous acts. Elsrud's own approach to how gender is constructed in narratives acknowledges the post- structuralist polarisation of genders, yet also uses a structuralist perspective claiming 'whilst women and men as individuals can be 'individualistic', complex and contradictive in action, the structures of thoughts, the discourses, framing femininity and masculinity are more rigid' (2005: 125). To perform their roles as successful travellers, women must adopt the discourses of bravado and adventure while still working within existing frameworks of femininity and masculinity.

How women negotiate and subsequently portray elements of risk throughout their travels is therefore crucial to meeting this motive. Alongside challenging gendered restrictions is the concept of the 'master script' of the backpacking *story.* Noy (2003) who has conducted studies into Israeli backpacking uses the metaphor of the backpacking journey to describe the research process itself, where both backpacker and researcher enters in and accesses cultural capital, 'arriving at new destinations or colonies of knowledge previously unknown' (2003: 14) Regarding the backpackers in his study, Noy asserts that part of the motivation for such travel is the stories. Amongst a variety of influences and across a diverse section of travellers, many of his participants had been enthused from the travel stories and narratives of others, which in turn

may have pre-shaped their itinerary of travel and also their expectations of how a 'travel story' should be both performed and later narrated. Already familiar with the dominant discourses of risk and responsibility relating to travel, Noy argues that backpackers travel to gather their own stories, which will in turn reproduce the 'master script' of the backpacking tale encompassing, for example, adventure, risk, authenticity, cosmopolitanism, surrealism and hedonism. This concept is supported by Desforges (2000) who argues that the process of talking through their travel biographies provides travellers with the opportunity to construct their preferred self-identity, representing the positive role of travel in their lives. Similarly, Elsrud (2001) claims 'mythology is vital to narrative survival' (2001, p. 600) and addresses the construction of an 'adventure identity' where risk-taking behaviour plays a prominent part in women's travel narratives, thus promoting strength of character. As the narratives in my research reveal, normative gender roles are both reproduced and resisted through the construction of travel identities, and this 'master script' often produces accounts which are fraught with contradictions. I refer to this conflicted subject position in the narratives of my participants throughout my discussion, which I define as the conflict between the desired identities of the risk-taking, liberated, empowered, sexualised women travellers and the complex difficulties of gendered constraints and fluctuating notions of femininity that these women often experience during their trip. However this 'conflict' can be better understood when situated in the wider context of current debates on feminist identities and the issue of empowerment in current feminist literature.

The changing character of feminism and sexuality

Whereas the concept of the 'master script' applies to backpackers of both genders, women's

travel narratives often reflect wider theoretical frameworks of risk and risk-taking behaviour within a feminist context. The emergence of literature that seeks to address and understand the changing character of feminism as a cultural and political movement and ideology can offer valuable insights into these travel stories. This development is largely categorised under the metaphor of 'waves', where second wave feminism refers to the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the third wave taking shape towards the end of the 20th century. Second wave feminism has been very much associated with the works of radical feminist thought where patriarchal institutions were challenged. Claiming the personal as political, second wave feminist thought exposed issues such as violence against women into the public domain. Findlen (1995) and Drake and Leslie (1997) offer a more refreshed version of feminism which they hope more accurately reflects the lived realities and desires of young women in the aftermath of second wave feminism. They call for a 'messier' feminism which embodies the empowering values of the feminist movement, but allows for the complex pleasures and differences that emerge in women's lives.

Women's sexual behaviour and practices is an area that evokes intense disagreements between feminists. Segal (1994) strongly argues that the feminist movement must abandon the second wave notions that heterosexual pleasure is incompatible with women's happiness and empowerment. Vance (1992 in Kemp and Squires 1997: 327) highlights the tension between sexual danger and pleasure, claiming that whilst acknowledging danger is important 'to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live'. Vance exposes the paradox that where women have been traditionally shamed about sex, the radical

ideology on pornography reproduces this shame, and now sexual pleasure has become a 'guilty secret' amongst feminists. The message is clear; feminism must put forward a politics that supports pleasure and not focus on fear alone.

More recently, other feminist theorists have warned against the turn to 'pleasure' within practices of female sexuality. McRobbie refers to the post feminist masquerade, where young women want to reclaim their sexuality and the freedoms associated with masculine sexual pleasure are encouraged. However under the illusion of equality, there is no critique of masculine hegemony. In the name of sexual equality, women are encouraged to 'overturn the old double standard and emulate the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men, particularly in holiday locations' (2009: 84).

Drawing on these debates, I assess the extent to which links can be made between the increasing individualism and self-reflexivity of third wave feminism and the existing research on motivations and discourses of self-development of backpacking tourism. It is this very 'hedonistic' behaviour which is so closely related to narratives of risk within the travel stories of the women in my research, and how they communicate their experiences of risk often resonates with these conflicting theories. For instance returning to Elsrud and Wilson, I argue that their research into backpacking women as free and liberated individuals who seek heightened experiences, experimentation and masculine forms of adventure bears close resemblance to McRobbie's depiction of the post feminist masquerade and the issue of pleasure. It is of further importance to examine what is left unsaid. Woodward and Woodward (2009) further reveal the uncertainty silences and absences brought about by this changing character of feminism, and it is this current condition I want to unravel further through the narratives of travelling women as

they try and articulate their emotions and experiences of their journeys. Therefore the concept of the ideological 'master script' is useful for interpreting both gendered narratives and narratives of backpacking.

Lastly, we can also use this framework of contradictions, confusions and continual negotiations of feminist identities to look at the emotional affects of independent travel. Feminist theory has taken great interest in the politics of emotions, yet it is interesting to examine how the changing character of feminism has resulted in multiple and conflicting emotions for women, and examining risk within the travelling arena is a key space in which to explore how feelings of fear, shame, anger and empowerment can fit into wider theoretical frameworks. Through researching both embodied and narrated emotions, these debates can be applied in lived realities. When applied to the notion of risk for example, it is important to analyse how risk and danger are felt, as well as how these emotions are then understood, resisted, articulated and narrated into the travel story.

Methodology

The findings presented in this paper are taken from a wider research project into the sensual and emotional experiences of independent women travellers. My empirical research into women travellers took place between 2008-2010, comprising of in depth interviews with 34 women who were independently travelling in India in 2009 as part of my field work. Between 2008-2010, I also carried out individual, semi-structured interviews with women who had returned home from an extensive backpacking trip to a variety of global destinations in Asia, Africa, Central and South America, Europe and Australasia. Identifying what constitutes as a 'backpacking trip' is problematic, which is why I use the terms 'backpacker' and 'traveller' interchangeably.

However, all participants had travelled independently (not as part of an organised group or tour) for a period of time between two months and two years, alone or partly alone, and without male company for the majority of their trip. Whilst the youngest participant was 18 and the eldest 64 years of age, the findings used in this paper focus on interview narratives from women in the age range of 20-40. Similarly, although diverse nationalities were involved in the research, the examples in this paper are from samples with women from the U.K and USA. As part of my fieldwork in India, I immersed myself into the travelling community and gained access to participants through shared spaces such as hostels and cafés. In the U.K, I advertised for women who had returned home after a backpacking trip, and invited other women to become involved in the research through snowball sampling. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 2 hours, and were recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed interview data was then coded and analysed in accordance to the themes of the research.

Drawing on feminist methodologies and 'memory work' (Haug 1983, Small 1999) I also carried out four focus groups in the U.K with 4-8 women who had experience of independent travel to a wide range of countries. As part of the memory work project, participants were asked to write down a specific memory or 'travel story' from their travels and discuss their memories, alongside their reflective views and emotions, within the group. Influenced by the principles of memory work, the focus groups provided a forum for collective analysis and the process of collective reflection and group discussion is paramount to my data analysis.

All names and personal information have been amended to ensure the research participants remain anonymous.

Risk, excitement and sexuality

The following examples will attempt to link together notions of the backpacking master script and third wave discourses of the empowered, pleasure-seeking woman. Risk and excitement were very much linked with issues of high-risk sexual encounters, drugs and alcohol:

> *I really liked this guy too, in Cambodia, he was 47, so I think the high risk thing for me is that he was probably far too old, and we were taking crystal meth (an amphetamine based drug) and the whole thing was quite crystal meth based and so it got quite seedy. But then I just hopped on the back of his motorbike, no helmet, with this older risky man…we would then zoom through the streets off our heads, with me pressed up against him. There is something about motorbikes in those hot, mad countries…it gets me excited just thinking about it now…!* **Raquel, referring to her travels in Cambodia**

> *And the other thing that I was so aware of in terms of personal safety was safe sex, and alcohol played a massive part, and I think again here you have structure but when you are away with no structure you are pretty much drinking every night and that distorts your mind anyway let alone when you are actually drunk. I did find at times myself taking personal safety risks way beyond what I should have been in terms of safe sex. Again alcohol being a massive factor there. And the sense of risk or anything just completely distorted, despite the fact I was in a country with a very high prevalence of HIV and pretty much everyone having sex with everyone else all the time! Hilarious fun at the time….* **Maggie, referring to her travels in Thailand**

> *There are no inhibitions (with sexual encounters). You know you are not going to see them again so you can just be a bit more outrageous or….you can be whoever who want to be* **Meena, referring to her travels in Thailand**

> *You get into stupid situations because of the hype of being away. You get carried away in the moment don't you? You kind of have a moment of madness don't you? Looking back it was shocking behaviour…. but it was excellent fun!* **Louise, referring to her travels in Thailand**

It appears that stories that involve a high degree of risk are seen as part of the travelling experience. With regard to narrative and the master script, the above examples offer the participants the comfort of deciding which aspects of their travelling identities they wish to promote, in this case elevating the qualities of the resilient, daring 'crazy' fun backpacker, and the well rehearsed narratives give the illusion of control. Raquel expresses the sexual excitement she feels on the back of the motorbike, whilst Meena entertains the focus group with 'outrageous' stories of sexual encounters (many of which involved drugs, alcohol and unprotected sex). Tying into the pleasure seeking discourses of female sexuality and backpacking tourism discussed in the literature review, it can be argued that the women have been influenced by these discourses and acknowledge that to achieve a high state of stimulus, pleasure and gratification there often needs to be risk involved, resonating with Cohen's theory of the search for 'experience' tourism. However the above examples portray this risk as a pleasurable and enjoyable experience, both 'at the time' as Maggie points out, but also in the

process of the story telling thereafter (illustrated, for example, by laughter in the focus group). These narratives show how women can reject the notion of risk as a constraint to their travelling experience, and instead use it as a tool to enhance their experiences and subsequent travel stories.

Risk, fear and personal safety

Despite the well rehearsed narrative of this master script, many of the participants also expressed negative emotions in response to situations of risk and danger. Often, the women felt intimated, threatened and uncomfortable with situations which encompassed a high degree of risk, especially with regard to their positions as lone women and personal safety. However without what could be described as a feminist analysis to their experiences, arguably due to McRobbie's theories of feminist de-politicisation, these difficulties emerge as confused and fluctuating feelings about their positions as empowered and privileged women; a paradox which is often highlighted by feminists who study the shifts between the second and third wave. This can be seen most clearly in the conflicted subject position of many of the participants as their narratives display the tensions between how they should respond, and how they actually feel, towards local strangers as lone women travellers. Hollway (2000: 26) refers to the 'defended subject', where all research subjects 'are invested in particular positions in discourses to protect vulnerable aspects of self, may not know why they experience or feel things in the way that they do, and are motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some of their feelings and actions'. The reflective interview process offers the participants the comfort of deciding which aspects of their travelling identities they wish to promote, often elevating the qualities of the strong, resilient, tough and fun backpacker, and the well rehearsed narratives

give the illusion of control. As the interview progressed, participants were asked to rethink their 'amazing' travel stories to remember a time where they felt threatened or frightened. The following examples highlight how the script of the culturally aware women backpacker who integrates into local communities battles with socially constructed fears about personal security, particularly surrounding women's vulnerability.

June remembers an incident where she was walking alone at night down a darkly lit street with parked trucks, in Bangalore, India:

And the drivers were sleeping in their trucks, and I had to walk past them and I thought 'shit, this is not fun', and I got a bit tense. And then this pissed, drunk guy staggered round from behind a truck and I just put my hand up and shouted 'don't talk to me, don't touch me!' And there were a good few times I felt horrible, really shit, because this isn't me! I'm ignoring these people. They are saying hello to me and I'm being so rude, I can't even respond with a smile! I knew why I was doing it, but I hated it. I hated just feeling horrible. I would feel cross if someone did that to me, I'd think how rude, you have bloody come to my country and you can't even say hello to me!

Holly describes her feelings towards being approached by local men in the street during her travels in Morocco:

They wanted to take you places and show you things, they were kind of being hospitable but there was a fine line....I wasn't able to trust that and I didn't like that, it didn't bring out a nice side of me- not being able to trust anybody or enjoy

it. And I think it's rude to reject it in certain places too so…it was really difficult. (Holly arranges to meet them the following day against her will, and then does not turn up). It was awful! I just felt horrendous! I felt like I'd offended them but I didn't know how to get rid of them. I should have been clear. And in a way perhaps their values are better and it was a nice thing they want to get to know us. What's the point in only meeting someone for the night? But of course you always think well, do you just want sex out of this at the end of the day? It wasn't clear. I felt really rude.

The narrative accounts of these stories reveal the strain between the women's feelings of responsibility for their personal safety, and their guilt for not being a fully open, risk-embracing world traveller. Feelings of doubt and alienation are prevalent in the narratives as the participants struggle to justify their hostility to local people. The examples deal extensively with troubled reflections with regard to being 'rude', 'offensive' or 'unclear'. We can see in June the fractured, conflicting representation of herself as she exclaims 'this isn't me!' The women have spent the first part of the interview constructing a representation both of travellers who value authentic experiences and assimilation into local culture, as well as feeling excited by risk taking and rejecting gendered constraints. It is only through their own narrative whilst recounting memories of times where they felt 'threatened' that they begin to notice these contradictions, resulting in attempts to smooth them out during the event of narration itself. The women's narratives shift from affirming their backpacking identities to assuring us that they are sensible woman responsible for

their own safety. Holly justifies her behaviour by claiming 'But of course you always think….. (the worst)'. My experience of this interview and subsequent interviews, noted that Holly's position is assumed to be received empathetically by a female interviewer and fellow traveller, as running parallel to the script of the world traveller is also the well established gendered discourse of personal safety in public spaces (Wilson et al 2009), despite this discourse being largely absent of wider, socio-political explanations. This reflects the research of Wilson et al (2009) who studied the constraints on lone female travellers. Using critical discourse analysis, Wilson argues that travel guidebooks often fuel the conflicting discourses between 'empowerment' and 'fear' for women travellers, promoting both the 'gutsy' travelling character whilst reminding women travellers to always exercise a degree of caution.

However the paradoxical nature of these narratives can further be linked to the shift in feminist identities discussed in texts which seek to address cross-generational feminisms. Woodward and Woodward (2009) reiterate the point that whilst there is a general assumption by young women of the third wave that gender equality has been achieved in the West, and that there are no tangible hurdles to overcome, the concrete experiences in their everyday lives present a different picture, and often feelings of inequality are internalised and obscured under the identities of 'empowered' and 'lucky' contemporary women. Indeed with regard to the above examples, we can see these feelings of fear and objectification internalised into personal guilt and confusion. Shoemaker (1997 in Drake and Leslie 1997) observes how these tensions run parallel to the aftermath of second wave feminism:

We had to be just as hard as the boys....it was precisely this contradictory message- generated by the filtration of second wave feminism through the gender backlash of the Reagan years- that has created a generation of feminists who live this same contradiction everyday of our lives. (1997: 105)

This contradiction is very much in the forefront of the above narratives, where any collective, feminist analysis is replaced with a more individualised approach to self-reflexivity and 'messy' narratives which are continually in flux. If we are to refer this to Elsrud's theoretical research on the masculine and 'tomboy' nature of women's travelling adventures, the independent women travellers perceive themselves to be as 'hard as the boys' throughout their journeys, yet encounter challenges along the way when their gender inconveniently stands in their way. In contrast to the goals of second wave feminism which sought to collate the many voices and experiences of women in order to collectively address sociological issues, the women internalise the blame for not being able to situate their feelings of injustice appropriately. One of the predominant goals of the third wave agenda is to make things 'messier' by embracing the contradictions in women's lives (Drake and Leslie 1997) and their multiple performances with regard to femininity, yet as Woodward and Woodward warn, this can also have the subsequent effect of depoliticising seemingly personal stories.

Be that as it may, there were instances in the interview narratives where the participants tried to ease their troubled emotions and justify these responses to risk and danger, as the following quotes illustrate:

I remember particularly in Bali I would get like…people would say hi and then they would start being irritating.…so I just stopped saying hello back. And I just started feeling awful because maybe they were not being obnoxious guys and just being friendly. But from very early on I thought I can't let this get to me. Because if it bothers me it's going to torture me. So it's actually something that doesn't really bother me anymore. I think you know what, maybe I am missing out on something but I can't feel bad about his, because it's better to be safe. **Christa, India**

And am I am like oh god am I being racist? And then it's like no! These are five men outside a bar at night in the dark I am on my own they know I'm scared! But you feel that horrible guilt.… Like am I judging you? Am I being culturally insensitive? Maybe I'm terrible! **Wilma, India**

Like the narratives of June and Holly, the above two examples display the emotions of guilt, shame and confusion with regard to perceiving local strangers as threatening, yet Christa and Wilma both express a sense of injustice and resentment at these feelings. Reflecting on her experience, Christa concludes that it is 'better to be safe' than embrace the identity of the risk taking backpacker. Although she is aware of the 'master script', she refuses to be 'tortured' by failing to fulfil the role of the gutsy and courageous travelling woman.

With regard to discussing 'risky' situations and their emotional responses to this risk, what is of further interest is what is omitted from this narrative. The participants do not speak explicitly of

what it is that makes them feel uncomfortable or afraid- for example fear of sexual violence- or (with the exception of Wilma) pinpoint why reporting their feelings of hostility towards the local people in their stories make them feel so 'terrible', such as being perceived as racist, ignorant or uncomfortable with their privileged and powerful positions as tourists in developing countries. Lozanski (2007) in her study of violence in Independent travel in India asserts that patriarchal and colonial discourses are permeated into the narratives of Western travellers in India, where both Indian men and travelling women experience violence and marginalisation through colonial racism and sexual harassment respectively. Issues of gendered violence and post-colonial theory are buried within these transcripts and become apparent when we analyse what is kept unsaid. Haug (2000) in her work on women's anxiety supports this notion that in talking about fear of public spaces, women's narratives often take for granted that the interpreter will know what it is she is afraid of:

> All we hear is that a man might be lurking, but not what she expected him to do. She is at far greater pains to describe the brightly lit passage and the approach of that corner behind which there waited she knew not what. We established that we knew this scene from countless horror movies (Haug, 2000 in Radstone, 2000: 160).

Whilst the participants seem to agree that such caution is necessary in certain situations, their narratives also verge on apologising for such thoughts and feelings as once again they do not fit with the sought after identity of the strong, independent travelling women. For Holly, her socialised fear as a gendered subject 'didn't bring out a nice side' of her, and she repeatedly questions if she overacted to the 'nice' invites and attention from the Moroccan men in her story. Unlike earlier narratives of risk taking behaviour as bravado, here the participants downplay the

risk element in their narratives. Preferring to question if this risk is imaginary further allows participants to only use risk and danger to enhance their travel story, not to pass comment on cultural, racial and gendered dynamics in a tourist setting.

Conclusion

Risk plays both a prominent and complex role in the narratives of women travellers. Elevated as a key component in the pursuit of a hedonistic journey of self development, an element of risk is an essential part of achieving the heightened states of excitement and stimulation associated with the 'master script' of a successful backpacking trip. The examples of sexual behaviour which carry with them a high degree of risk are presented as part of this travelling 'experience hunger', identified as a key motivating factor in backpacking tourism by Richards and Wilson and Cohen, but also reflects Myers and Hannam's assertions that women's backpacking identities are tied into their positions as free and liberated individuals. Yet when articulated in the interview narratives, participants are able to retain control over how these stories are presented, and emphasise pleasure, enjoyment and empowerment over fear and danger. However, focusing on experiences where participants felt uncomfortable, risk is narrated in very different ways, evoking strong and conflicting emotions of guilt, confusion, anger, shame and doubt. I have referred to this multitude of seemingly opposing emotions as 'conflict' within the narratives of women travellers, and continue to assert that the paradoxical nature of these narratives can be linked to similar conflicts and tensions in shifting feminist identities, and reflect wider theoretical debates on cross-generational feminisms.

I argue that significant contributions can be made to the field of backpacking research, tourism and gender through an understanding of how backpacking motivations can be

amalgamated with wider feminist theories on empowerment, pleasure, fear and danger, especially with regard to female sexuality. By exploring the ongoing debates and conflicts within feminist theory itself, we can begin to not only identify how this plays out in women's narratives of their everyday lives, but also understand how emotions are expressed (and suppressed) through this fragmented process. Elsrud and Wilson's work has indeed begun to make significant breakthroughs in highlighting how women's adventure and 'gutsy' travelling discourses intersect with geographies of fear and notions of femininity, yet closer and more analytical connections with feminism as a social movement are required. Disassociating with feminism as a movement which is directly relevant to their lives, the participants in my study preferred to present a more individualised identity where they choose the activity of travel to strengthen and enhance their personal development. The ways in which the women negotiate risk in their travels with regard to personal safety, sexual behaviour and construction of 'the other' notably mirrors this trend. However some narratives, such as Raquel's reflective account of how she became aroused by dangerous motorbike rides in Cambodia, suggest a more complex relationship with risk, where the the search for risky, intense and sensual experiences are desired as well as feared. Risk, therefore, simultaneously enhances and inhibits the backpacking journey.

Finally, I argue that the discourse of the 'master script' and the emphasis on individual female pleasure and empowerment can obscure underlying issues of racial and gendered power relations in a tourist setting, leading women travellers to internalise emotions of blame, guilt, shame and fear instead of attempting to situate how their tourist identities fit in a wider social and global context. The examples in this paper suggest that a greater awareness of the

changing character of feminism and postcolonial theory could offer future clarity to such conflicting emotions, relieving the emotional turmoil present in women's experiences of risk both during their travelling journeys and in their future lives.

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Risk, Emotion, and Aggressiveness in Virtual Leisure: Brazilian Players Standpoints

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Abstract

The virtual environment has been the centre of interest in several areas of research, such as information science, management, marketing and leisure. Virtual games, in particular, have deserved special attention from leisure researchers, as they can be considered one of the favourite leisure options in contemporary societies. This study aims to investigate subjective aspects of the relationship between humans and the virtual environment, particularly as they relate to risk, violence, competitiveness and emotions felt during the game experiences. An internet survey was developed and administered to 250 players of virtual games in Brazil, aged between 18 and 30 years. Data were descriptively analyzed and the results indicate the presence of addictive behaviour in some participants. Participants have evidenced feelings of higher competitiveness in virtual environment games due to the possibility of easily violating ethical and moral principles to supplant a virtual adversary. Risk did not seem to be a worrying factor for the players, whom during the games tended to exacerbate risk behaviours, such as aggressiveness and competitiveness. Findings suggest that virtual games, *per se*, are not linked to an increase of violence and aggressive behaviour. To participants, personality traits are responsible for the aggressiveness expressed when virtual games are played. However, risk-taking behaviour can increase because players are protected by virtual anonymity. Further research is still needed to better understand the virtual environments used in the context of leisure experiences and their subjective elements.

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Introduction

Virtual environment

As a focus of attention in several areas of knowledge such as psychology and marketing (Balasubramanian et al., 2003; Yee et al., 2007), the virtual environment has become the locus where interesting emotional aspects can be performed, including the search for the sensation of risk and the possibility of engaging in simulated activities. However, one of the most striking features related to virtual environments is still the possibility of simulating real human behaviour.

The notion of a simulated environment and its social impact was promulgated by Garson (2009), who considers that the themes and types of simulation are as diverse as the social sciences themselves, and that due attention should be paid to understanding the consequences of them. The contemporary world, especially in its postmodern guise, has been viewed as a world of simulation, a world where representations and proprioceptive clones of reality abound (Baudrillard, 1993). Each new way of understanding the new virtual technologies in the social realm brings challenges and new perspectives and possibilities for replicating reality.

Baudrillard (1993) has a particular and interesting conception of simulating reality, affirming that the essence of simulation is miniaturisation and that the real is produced from miniaturised units that can be infinitely reproduced. Due to the fact that reality is no longer enveloped by the imaginary, Baudrillard (1993) has posited that reality no longer exists but has been supplanted by hyperreality. This is the era when the truth does not exist because all referential facts are imitations. Baudrillard (1993, p. 343) has also stated that "simulation is no longer a question of reduplication or simply imitation, rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself in an operation to deter every real process by its

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operational double". So, Baudrillard (1993) affirmed that simulation is characterised by a "precession of all models around the merest fact, which defines a true reality in the sense that this truth is exchangeable in the image of the models from which they proceed, in a generalized cycle" (p. 355).

All the important characteristics present in the virtual environment generate many social changes. Among these multiple effects, the changes that virtual elements have generated in relation to individual values, technological advance and new media bases have been especially significant in the leisure context.

Virtual Leisure and video games

The development of new linked psychosocial aspects derived from the experiences of using virtual environment in diverse social contexts is inevitable, due to the multiplicity of consumption forms and to the diversity inherent in the entertainment industry and the leisure experience. The influences of technological advances and the virtual environment have triggered countless transformations even within leisure activities (Bryce, 2001), propagating new forms of appropriation of leisure.

Schwartz (2003, 2007) has emphasized the importance of "virtual leisure" in the contemporary society. For Schwartz (2007) virtual leisure involves the use of new technologies such as the internet and video-games, for leisure and entertainment purposes. Schwartz (2003; 2007) suggests that the main difference between virtual and 'real' leisure is the possibility of expanding the perspectives of simulation and the lower perception of risk offered by virtual tools and technologies that offer the possibility to experience events from a simulated perspective.

Bryce (2001) examines aspects involving the use of the internet in relation to activity, place, meaning, leisure freedom and constraint, deviant leisure, and leisure and health. The

author recognizes the complexity of differing theoretical orientations in discussions related to the presence of the internet in social life and highlights the importance of encouraging scientific debate on the relationship between technology and leisure (Bryce, 2001). A resulting demand for systematic innovation and human adaptation stemming from the needs of a technological society is inescapable. However, Bryce (2001) emphasizes his concern with the values that can be propagated by the use of the virtual environment, especially the values deriving from the appropriation of virtual games as a content of leisure experiences. Bryce (2001) also signaled an attendant concern that the philosophy of free communication may be in direct conflict with some social and moral values, thus meriting public attention and the application of specific policies. Aspects such as space, time and social interactivity assume new meanings in the virtual environment and contribute to the modification and simulation of attitudes, values and behaviour (Williams et al., 2009; Yee, 2006), especially when playing with video games.

Among the various possibilities for virtual leisure enjoyment, video games have attracted the attention of various fields of study including education and psychology (Bellotti et al. 2007; Molesworth 2009). Bellotti et al. (2007), for example, point out the advantages of using video games in educational contexts, as a means of enhancing educational attainment. Molesworth (2009) focused on adults' conceptions of video games as a way to escape from the routine. Molesworth (2009) suggests that the unsatisfactory aspects of consumers' daily lives can be a motivational factor in playing video games. However, in all these fields of study, there is no consensus about the influences of these games in human daily life. Although some elements concerning virtual environments and video games have already been elucidated in previous research, some subjective aspects involved with virtual

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environments and video games have not been sufficiently considered in the literature regarding under-developed countries such as Brazil.

Video games and behavioural impacts

The singular features and characteristics of virtual games have created a compelling interest both in the objective and subjective aspects of these games, as they are experienced in the leisure context (Rienks et al., 2010; Ball et al., 2008). As Pivec et al. (2003) have demonstrated, despite different opinions about the characteristics of virtual games, there are some that are commonly acknowledged, such as interactivity, controlled risk, attractive challenges, the dynamism of visual images, rules and goals, the possibility of using fantasy, and the arousal of curiosity. Pivec et al. (2003) also draw attention to the fact that the level of satisfaction deriving from virtual games is a function of the games' impact on the players, which itself is a function of the different levels of player skills and/or involvement with the games. This fact reaffirms the complexity of analyzing the subjective aspects of playing virtual games.

The constant use of imagination promoted by video games allows a temporary escape from reality, often sublimating daily frustrations (Ng & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005), representing one of the most important motivational aspects for games' adherence. Through such games, people have the opportunity of being successful, at least in the virtual world. However, the pleasant sensation of success may lead to an addictive behaviour. This behaviour transformation may be correlated to levels of satisfaction, promoted by the imagination, as attained through the use of the virtual games.

In order to understand the addiction to virtual games, Chou and Ting (2003) pointed out that the repetition of activities in which a person is moderately attracted has a moderate effect on addiction. However, positive emotional states, coupled with a distorted perception,

may have a more evident impact in the addiction process. In Shapira et al. (2003), people with addictive behaviour presented higher levels of satisfaction and pleasure during the virtual experience with games than when doing other daily activities. However, it was not always that those players with high levels of satisfaction during experiences with virtual games became addicted, which suggests the complexity of the issues and the challenges for therapeutic treatment (Shapira et al., 2003).

The sophisticated equipment used for accessing virtual environments, particularly in new games, is able to promote unusual sensations and emotions, enhancing other dynamic acquaintance processes, relationships and competitiveness. Those aspects have attracted the attention of many researchers examining the association between virtual games and risk and aggressive behaviours (Przybylski et al., 2009; Anderson & Carnagey, 2009).

These aggressive behaviours apparently depend on the relationships established in the virtual environment. The authenticity of these relationships, the right to anonymous speech, the relative camouflage of action, greater willingness to take risks, the intense use of imagination and the compulsive use of the internet are some aspects explored in many studies focusing on the virtual environment (Moore, 2009; Puzis et al., 2009).

In early studies of aggressiveness in relation to the use of technological resources like video games, Graybill et al. (1985) and Jipguep and Sanders-Phillips (2003) did not notice an increase of violent behaviour in children playing video games. Similarly, Funk et al. (1997) could not correlate the use of violent games with children's aggressiveness. However, Fischer et al. (2010) have documented an increase in hostility when the game played contains high levels of aggressive content. The lack of a consensus in the findings of these studies reinforces the complexity of interpretation when the focus is the virtual environment.

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Virtual games can present widely diverse characteristics, such as adventure and risk sensations depending on the goals and on the types of challenges. However, the encouragement of competitiveness and the possibility of penetration into a different form of reality are some of the common points that can be observed in these kinds of games. These characteristics differentiate virtual games from other types of games played in other environments due to the different multidimensional subjective aspects associated with the virtual environment (Yee et al., 2007). Even when comparing games set in the same environment, some differences are evident. Some kinds of video games require more interactivity, and also more cognitive skill, than other action games employing the same virtual environment.

A virtual game can involve innumerable psycho-neurological tasks such as visual tasks, coordination control and also mental operations like analysis, synthesis, understanding and interpretation. These characteristics presuppose the understanding of the potential of the virtual game shows through analysis of its goals and content. However, when analyzing the potentialities of a game, it is necessary to consider not only the content, but also the ways this content is presented and the adequacy and clearness of its objectives. Those elements can be related to several dimensions, such as memory, spatial and time orientation, the demands of motor coordination, visual and auditory perceptions and organization process (Caglio et al., 2009).

Some subjective issues related to the virtual environment have been scientifically discussed, such as the possibility of developing aggressive behaviour when in contact with violent virtual games (Gentile et al., 2009; Huesmann, 2007). However, the point of view of the individuals directly involved in such experiences is rarely focused on. Such a gap in the academic literature motivated this study. Due to its complexity, some aspects involved in the

virtual environment, such as emotions, sensations, perception of risk and sexuality are not sufficiently understood. This research aims at investigating some of the subjective aspects involving human relationships processed in virtual environment. Although many of the cited studies have helped to elucidate some of these subjective elements concerning the virtual environment and video games, many challenges are still encountered, which have motivated the development of this study. The objective of this research was to understand the perception of any kind of risk, violence, competitiveness and emotion during games experienced in the leisure context, from users' standpoints.

Methods

An internet survey was designed and conducted with a non probabilistic sample of 250 Brazilian adepts of virtual games, aged 18-30 years (average of 24 years old), of both gender (57 female and 193 male). The study was undertaken for one month, during March 2009. The survey was developed using self-administered web-based open-ended questions and responses were coded and grouped by similarity into 4 indicators. The first indicator grouped the responses for the sample characterization and mode of interaction with the virtual environment (time spent, who taught, type of activities, reasons for use, type of technology used). The second indicator grouped the responses relating to aspects of violence. The third indicator grouped the responses with respect to risk. The fourth indicator grouped the responses on feelings and emotions perceived during gaming activity.

The data was analyzed using pre-established categories for grouping similar themes and the answers are presented as a percentage. Myers (1997) highlighted the importance of internet surveys and research related to information systems and the internet. However, although there has been an increase in the number of researchers who are using the virtual environment and the internet to develop research and collect data, the technology for online

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survey research is still young and evolving (Wright, 2005). Wright (2005) demonstrated that some of the advantages of collecting data through the internet are the access afforded to individuals in distant locations and the convenience of having automated data collection.

Among the disadvantages of online surveys, Wright (2005) included uncertainty over the validity of the data and sampling issues, and concerns surrounding the design, implementation, and evaluation of an online survey. Wright (2005) also advises researchers about the need to assess their research needs, budget, and research timeframe when implementing a web survey.

Participants were invited by the researchers via the internet. The contact between researcher and participants was made through Brazilian websites of online games and players were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. Those who agreed to participate in the study were properly informed about the objectives of the research and on how to participate. Participants were aware that they would not be identified and that they could withdraw at any time. They completed a consent form to meet the ethical procedures of the study.

The questionnaire allowed each participant to present more than one answer for each question, for this reason it was considered the incidence of each answer. Data were expressed as a percentage to illustrate and supplement the qualitative analysis (Jackson & Trochim 2002).

Results and Discussion

The results emphasised aspects such as the amount of time spent playing and motives of adherence to games. Other categories pre-established for categorisation were related to: symbolic aspects of violence contained in the games; comparing traditional kinds of games played in a real environment with the ones played in a virtual environment; the emotions and

sensations felt when playing video games; risk taking behaviour; self-image perception and fear.

The first question of the survey asked the participants who taught them how to play video games. Such a question is important to understand how people are introduced to the virtual environment. Among the participants, 60% were taught to play video games by their friends, 30% were introduced to video games by their parents and 10% claimed to be self-taught. The main reason for playing video games was the opportunity to have fun and to have pleasant experiences (60%), and 39% play video games just to pass the time. As seen in the first response, social groups are significant in introducing video games to other people. According to Wankel (1993) this can be explained by the desire for recognition and acceptance, and the desire to belong to a certain group. For Wankel (1993) the desire of belonging to a particular group, as well as the possibilities for recognition and social acceptance, are also determining factors for participation in activities in diverse leisure settings, creating fertile ground for the development of group relationships. It was also evident that the family often instigates the use of video games. This aspect was also evidenced by Vandewater et al. (2007) when researching the use of electronic technology among infants and preschoolers.

The participants maintained that on average they spent 3 hours a day, 4 days a week minimum, playing video games. The most frequent types of video games played were sport games, for 78% of the participants, followed by adventure games for the other 22%. Virtual game is a gaming category in which the experience occurs in the virtual environment, with the mediation of a computer and technological resources adequate for this purpose with internet access or based on computer simulators.

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When analyzing virtual games, it can be observed that there are many plausible reasons justifying the choice of game. Different ways of interaction, different processes of internal logic, the objective of the games and also the type of the game are influences in the decision-making process of playing the game and even in defining the amount of time spent with that activity (Primack, 2009).

Another interesting result points out that, for 71% of the participants, the games played directly with joysticks were preferred over those played at the computer, since playing games using a computer is believed to be more expensive due to the necessity of using a computer with high definition to access all the technological magnitude of the games, consequently this kind o game is less accessible to people with low income. Among the remaining participants, only 26% preferred games played at the computer, and 3% played virtual games using their cell phones.

For emergent countries like Brazil, participants also take into account the price of the equipment. The economic aspect also has an influence over consumers' decision making processes for choosing a game played without computer mediation. However, more research involving Brazilian game players is needed to understand the relation between economic factors and the willing of being virtually connected.

When asked about the symbolic aspects of violence contained in the games, 62% claimed that video game playing has no influence on their social behaviour. Participants asserted that aggressive attitudes are the outcome of predisposition within the perpetrators, regardless of environment, and that there is no relation with elements of violence in the virtual games. However, for 38% of the participants, virtual games can encourage violent behaviour, especially in those individuals with great difficulty in perceiving or understanding the boundaries between the imaginary and the 'real' life.

Although literature does not present a consensus as to whether exposure to video games increases aggressive behaviour, Krcmar and Lachlan (2009) agree that any effect of violence attributable to the games tends to decrease the longer the participants play. To Krcmar and Lachlan (2009) the length of play may have a curvilinear relationship to verbal and physical aggression. The studies of Gentile and Anderson (2006) reveal that violent games can have positive or negative consequences, although it is not proved that the effects are the same in every child. For these authors, virtual games can regulate individual and social violence, canalising violent behaviours into virtual actions (Gentile & Anderson, 2006). In this sense, there is still no consensus about the effects of virtual games.

When asked to compare traditional kinds of games played in a real environment with the ones played in a virtual environment, 63% of the participants asserted that there are differences between the two types of games. Participants stressed that traditional kinds of games allow greater social interaction, afford creative potential for communication, involve greater body participation and also promote health and cognitive stimulation advantages. For 31% of the sample, to play video games can promote individualism and generates social isolation. A proportion of 3.5% cited the predominance of imaginative functions during games played in a virtual environment and, for 2.5%, video games heightened the possibility of deteriorating health. Only 1% preferred to not answer this question considering their lack of opinion regarding the differences between the two types of game.

Stern (1999) disagrees with the idea that a virtual environment promotes individualism, but he is guarded in his conclusions. Stern (1999) believes that, when used consciously, the virtual environment may enhance interactivity by linking people all over the world, shortening distances and time if the opportunities are not misused. Focusing on the social interaction provided by a virtual environment, Stern (1999) explains that while technology may increase

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social contacts, when misapplied it may also expand the capacity to express bad adaptive behaviours and psychopathologies. Sodré (2002) also emphasised that the virtual environment promotes a great opportunity for interaction with others. Therefore, Sodré's (2002) position contradicts the perception of participants in the present study regarding enhanced individualisation as a characteristic outcome of games in the virtual environment.

Those participants who preferred to use video games instead of computers or cell phones also commented on important characteristics of the console, in relation to ease of control, the domain of the games and also the portability of the equipment, allowing it to be operated anywhere. Hutchison (2007) explored the design elements that make the virtual world so attractive to gamers. He also stressed that portability was one of the important aspects of video games. Based on his results, Hutchison (2007) analysed and suggested strategies for incorporating video games into educational programs. Some good strategies when using the virtual environment in the educational realm take account of the need to preserve the element of entertainment and the opportunities for interaction typical of videogames experiences. Another important point relates to the length of exposure to the virtual environment, so that the virtual dimension does not overlap the real task of education. Other authors who demonstrated the advantages of videogames in a pedagogical way were López and Cáceres (2010). López and Cáceres (2010) argued that these games allow the virtual simulation of a practical situation, facilitating the visualisation of a process and assisting in the achievement of learning.

However, the fun component of the video games serves as a motivator and a factor in promoting learning. It should serve as a catalyst within, but not as the objective of, pedagogical practices. López and Cáceres (2010) also asserted that it is important to be careful with the kinds of games introduced in educational processes, especially with young

people and adolescents, and certainly it is crucial to avoid the abusive use of the virtual experience.

Regarding the emotions and sensations felt when playing video games, participants asserted that both positive and negative emotions are present. Joy, pleasure and excitement were the main positive emotions indicated by the participants. On the other hand, fear, anger and anxiety were noted as negative emotions that can arise in a virtual game. Participants also affirmed that there is a 'mood swing' when playing video games, and emotional states can go from positive to negative, as well as the opposite. An immediate need for pleasurable feelings and escape from daily routine during leisure time was posited by the participants.

The search for pleasure and the necessity of experiences that are not related to the problems of daily life justifies the increasing search for virtual activities with exciting characteristics, such as are afforded by video games. In regards to the emotional field, virtual games can promote moments of real catharsis for users. By playing such games, it is possible to experience different emotions inherent in human-beings, such as fear, happiness, passion and anger, without provoking evident physical, social or affective injuries, except when addiction or compulsive behaviour occurs (van Rooij et al., 2010).

It can be noticed that, by focusing attention on the attractive factors of the virtual world, the design of computer games promotes sensations of thrill and excitement, attracting sensation-seeking players and those who seek a measure of escapism (Ravaja et al., 2006). Van Rooij et al. (2010) have investigated the relationship, in the context of gaming technology, between enjoyment of computer game play and two different personality traits: sensation seeking, involving the need for novelty, and self-forgetfulness, involving total absorption in the virtual experience. It was suggested that these two types of personality traits may lead to higher engagement in computer game play and that those categorised as

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highly sensation-seeking players may find a computer game more entertaining (van Rooij et al., 2010). Nevertheless, those classified in the personality category of self-forgetfulness have been perceived as having higher levels of real enjoyment.

The popularity of video games among people of different ages has inspired several studies (Kiili, 2005; Hutchison, 2007). Kiili (2005) suggests that virtual games attract people of all ages due to the fact that they usually offer fun, a range of emotions, interactivity, enjoyment, motivation and constant challenges, thus fulfilling some important expectations. For Hutchison (2007), the interactivity of games allows a continuous stream of challenging and competitive situations that have to be resolved, thus appealing to players of all ages. From Hutchison's (2007) point of view, competition is the key element influencing players' entertainment experiences.

The competitive aspect of virtual games stimulates players towards risk taking behaviour. In this virtual world, players are encouraged to take risks, explore, and try new things because the consequences of failure are not significant for 'real' life (Gee, 2007). The participants of the present research unanimously (100%) asserted that risk taking behaviour is not a worrying factor because it is exclusively related to the virtual environment. The participants also affirmed that, when playing, they tend to exacerbate risk-taking behaviours as well as aggressiveness and competitiveness, because they feel protected from 'reality'. As shown by the data, the knowledge that social rules are not automatically transported to the virtual environment promotes a greater propensity for risky behaviour. Fear of punishment and sanctions that underlie the social reality does not exist in the virtual environment, so the values and behaviours can be changed, as expressed in some participants' responses.

Williams and Clippinger (2002) developed research focusing on aggressiveness and competition in virtual games as well as the differences between players' behaviours in computer-opponent and human-opponent situations. The authors identified aggression and hostility exclusively as part of competitive gaming situations (Williams & Clippinger 2002). Williams and Clippinger (2002) also verified that players experienced higher levels of aggressive feelings after playing against the computer compared with levels experienced after playing face-to-face against a human opponent. These results suggested that aggression related to computer gaming may be reduced through a process of 'humanisation' of computer opponents. Larkin (2000) argued that the violence experienced in video games, television and films has an influence on, and stimulates antisocial and aggressive behaviours. However, all of the participants of this study believe that the violent content of virtual games does not induce behavioural changes in daily life.

It is therefore a social challenge, understanding about how the violence in virtual games and in real life is processed, and how the issue of violence is encoded in these contexts. Violence and fun in this virtual universe overlap, which can promote the trivialisation of aggression. However, the video game should not be mythologised as good or bad, or even taken as responsible for the spread of aggressive behavior. Indeed, video games can be considered as a tool for mediation of values, as well as other elements such as television or even the games played in childhood. However, this premise does not exempt them from representing a means of passage of ideological values, deserving therefore attention and extensive research.

Virtual games can also have an influence on players' self-image perception. Indeed, 73% of the participants affirmed that there is a positive effect on self-image due to the strong use of imagination in virtual games. For 17% of respondents, virtual games allow people a

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release from psychological constraints, while 10% of respondents did not notice alterations as a result of game playing related to self-image. Those participants who felt alterations in their self-image linked the experience to the possibility of being, momentarily, someone different from their real life persona. They also affirmed that, sometimes in real life, they face many repressive factors that, when given the opportunity, they try to counter by using their imagination in virtual games. In the virtual environment participants can transform themselves into powerful and stronger people, or even experience the feeling of crossing ethical boundaries, for example acting as 'murderers' without suffering any social punishment. As Taylor (2003) demonstrated, the player can self-identify with the virtual character. To Zillman (1998) and Jones (2002), virtual games give the opportunity of feeling and even of acting as courageous heroes. Indeed the virtual role of 'hero' or 'villain' can influence the imagination, the emotions felt and the virtual behaviour of players. These games are among the most popular due to the intense level of sensory, emotional and psychological involvement they offer the player. Narratives and visual and sound effects simulation add realism, enhancing the emotional content and imagination.

Fear, for virtual players, is not connected to the idea of a real death, becoming worthless and suggesting that there is an indifference to death. By neglecting this danger, a trivialisation of feelings and anxieties can be identified. These assumptions become real challenges, in order to find the mechanisms that trigger the subjective causes of this indifference and whether it can be extended to the behaviour in real life.

Conclusion

This study is limited to Brazilian players and their perceptions about some subjective aspects related to virtual games. So, further contributions will be important to understand subjective

aspects of virtual game players in different cultures, and places. The use of different methodologies can also enrich the understandings about emotions, risk and aggressiveness in virtual game players, offering the possibility for new discussions and methodological and theoretical approaches. However, the present research contributes to an initial discussion about the interfaces between virtual games, leisure and subjectivities. Subjective aspects of virtual leisure such as risk and aggressiveness are still rarely explored in the literature, highlighting the need for further studies in order to understand the dynamics of human relationships within the virtual environment. Based on the results presented in this research, it can be concluded that according to players' standpoints emotional experiences are accentuated in the virtual environment. Emotions that can be seen as conflictive such as joy, pleasure, excitement, fear, anxiety, and anger were indicated by participants as emotions that can arise in virtual games. Also, players asserted that there is a 'mood swing' because emotional states in virtual games can easily vary, for example, from pleasure to anger. Most of the Brazilian players believe that there are differences between games played in a 'real' environment and virtual games mainly because the former ones allow more social interaction. Meanwhile, video games can promote individualism and social isolation.

The participants also indicated a higher level of risk taking behaviour when playing video games and a belief in the influence of virtual games on the self-image of the player. Virtual games were not perceived by the participants to be associated with an increase in violence and aggressive behaviour in daily life. However, the degree to which these subjective aspects are involved in virtual environment experiences still represents a challenge to academia. Therefore, the results of this study have a direct implication for the progress of studies on subjective aspects involving the virtual environment, emotions and

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risk in order to broaden perspectives of understanding about the complexity of the issues discussed above.

The connections between the virtual environment and leisure experiences still warrants new approaches due to the need for understanding and elucidating the related subjectivities. Considering that the increasing presence of video games in modern society and that a wide diversity of motivations are present in the virtual games' appeal, new research is needed to identify how these games could influence human life.

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Neil Carr, Journal Editor

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