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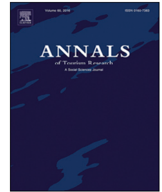

Research article

Transforming tourism's "field(work) of view"

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ABSTRACT

Academic fieldwork plays a crucial role in scientific advancement, knowledge production, and research training. However, the current investigations into fieldwork often focus on conduct, methods, and techniques, leaving the experience of solo female tourism fieldworkers largely under-explored. Drawing new connections between the intersections of liminality and gender in tourism fieldwork contexts, this study adopts a duo-ethnographic methodology and uses visual memorywork to explore the experiences and evaluate the effects of entering liminal tourism spaces on female scholars conducting solo fieldwork in remote Australia. The study contributes to theoretical advancements in gender studies, reflexivity, liminality, and transformative experiences research. Furthermore, the paper also provides practical implications for institutions and researchers engaged in remote tourism fieldwork.
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Introduction

Tourism spaces are "contexts of relations between people, aspects, things, and places consolidated by the phenomenon of tourism" (Cipolletti, 2014, p. 92). To gain a comprehensive understanding of what occurs in these spaces, tourism researchers must conduct fieldwork (Liang & Lu, 2006), representing a fundamental research practice (Matthews, 2012) and essential for knowledge creation and research training. Fieldwork requires researchers to travel to unfamiliar and often remote locations, necessitating the negotiation of new social and cultural exchanges for an extended period (Hall, 2011). Immersing in field(work) affords reflexive and critical ways to do research, which profoundly impacts researchers (Yamagishi, 2010). Despite this, existing literature still under-examines fieldworkers' personal, emotional, and social experiences (Davies & Spencer, 2010; Porter & Schänzel, 2018), particularly for solo female scholars-in-training (PhD candidates).

As Schänzel and Porter (2022) aptly recognise, patriarchal powers permeate tourism spaces, including research fields. Thus, the need to capture female researcher experiences in these spaces is particularly acute. While navigating through and reflecting on fieldwork positional and methodological challenges can enable growth and transformation, there has been little attention given to the reflexive accounts of the field experiences of female scholars (Porter & Schänzel, 2018). We argue that tourism academic field(work) represents a liminal and gendered experience for researchers, presenting a unique context to investigate solo female researchers' state of being, memories of lived experiences, and stories of resistance to power and hegemonic mascu-

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linity (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). By analysing tourism fieldwork through these lenses, we can better understand how the unique qualities of tourism field(work) impact the researcher, both in the field and beyond.

To address these omissions, this study presents a duo-ethnography of the fieldwork experiences of two solo female scholars in remote Australia. Two of the authors (Isabella and Anita) individually conducted their doctoral fieldwork in different destinations in remote Australia for an extended period, respectively, in Yulara, Northern Territory (Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park), Tasmania (Freycinet), and East Kimberly (Kununurra). In its notorious ruggedness, inconvenience, and seclusion from civilisation, we posit that remote Australia encapsulates liminal and masculine traits. In this paper, we use the term "field(work)" to indicate an assemblage of two concepts: field as research setting and fieldwork as both the methodology and research activities carried out in tourism settings. We aim to uncover the effects of entering and dwelling in field(work) on female tourism scholars by exploring memories and lived experiences, contributing to the ongoing discourse on female perspectives and gender studies in tourism research. By giving voice to the emerging chorus of solo female researchers, we hope to decipher the effects fieldwork in liminal spaces has on solo female researchers and highlight the epistemological worth of fieldwork in knowledge production.

Literature review

Constructing the tourism academic field(work)

The 'performative turn' in tourism knowledge production increasingly recognises the central position of the researcher self in the 'entire research assemblage' (Kennedy et al., 2022, p. 2), with ethnographic fieldwork enabling scholars to unpack the complexity and nuances of various tourism phenomena. Fieldwork occurs in a spatially different location from the researcher's typical environment (Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000). For tourism researchers, fieldwork often involves engaging in leisure activities and places (e.g., airports, hotels, beaches) that possess liminal qualities (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Zare & Ye, 2023). The term liminality stems from the Latin word 'limen', meaning boundary or threshold (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010). It has been described as "a limbo-like space" that is "betwixt and between" traditional social structures (Turner, 1979, p. 465), societal norms, and responsibilities (Preston-White, 2004). In tourism contexts, liminality elucidates how tourists perceive their environment and social roles differently than in their home contexts (Huang et al., 2018). Distinct from liminoid experiences, which are often practised by a particular group and involve the subversion of social norms, liminal experiences and spaces, while also existing outside normal structures, are temporary and are characterised by a return to normal conditions after the liminal period, such as a holiday or fieldwork trip (Pennington, 2017).

The literature recognises that outcomes of entering a liminal space extend beyond a physical change and the associated removal of daily routines to include expanded psychological space, offering enhanced opportunities for self-reflection exploration (Manfreda et al., 2023b; Nelson et al., 2021), transformation (Andrews, 2012) and space to "search for a revitalised sense of self" (White & White, 2004, p. 216). Despite the recognised connection between tourism experiences and fieldwork in tourism (e.g., Hall, 2011; Wolcott, 2008), the liminal qualities of tourism spaces have not been studied in relation to tourism researchers. Like tourists, when entering and conducting fieldwork, tourism researchers are removed from rigid and hierarchical structures and working relationships characteristic of academic contexts (LeBlanc, 2018). The researcher is in a 'middle place' where the old self is no longer as persistent, removed from the societal and, to some extent, institutional expectations of their usual environment. In this new field context, they can create 'who they are' and 'whom they could become.' This speaks to a critical element of liminal spaces: their potential as spaces for transformation.

While the liminality of tourism spaces is known for creating "a sense of freedom" (Huang et al., 2018, p. 3), female researchers may have the opposite experience. Fieldwork in tourism spaces can, in fact, be highly gendered and uncomfortable (Muhammad & Neuilly, 2019). Tourism fieldwork contexts are often recognised as having traits that are traditionally associated with the masculine nature of leisure spaces (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000; Yang et al., 2017), and for a long time, most instructional texts on fieldwork assumed that researchers were male and ignored the potential influence of gender on fieldwork (Schänzel & Porter, 2022). The first explorations of gender in the field revealed the extent of gender bias underlying assumptions about fieldwork. For example, Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) advise female researchers to consider their appearance and respond to sexual overtures and comments in a passive and/or submissive manner to avoid endangering rapport with participants and access to data. Arguably, very little has changed in the past 30 years, with more recent studies still reporting on female fieldworkers subjected to male-dominated social circumstances and societal expectations (e.g., Carvalho, 2018; Schänzel & Porter, 2022).

Past tourism research has highlighted gender differences in risk perception, with a heightened sensitivity towards corporeal, sexual, and racial risks for females deriving from their fieldwork encounters with people and environments (Hamilton & Fielding, 2018; Ye et al., 2020). These risks are sometimes mitigated by the presence of travel companions who can alleviate hostile and risky situations (Munar, 2018). Other studies have also identified positive biases contributing to the female fieldwork experience, such as eased access and heightened engagement with participants through possessing feminine traits (e.g., friendliness, approachability) (Carvalho, 2018; Hamilton & Fielding, 2018; Usher, 2018). Motherhood in the field is also an emerging area of reflection for female scholars, with studies highlighting the complexities of deciding whether to take children into the field or leave them behind and unpacking accompanying feelings of guilt that may arise from these choices (Braukmann et al., 2020). While these studies illuminate usually hidden logistical barriers to fieldwork, such as breastfeeding and child-minding, some reflexive accounts also discuss the benefits of motherhood during fieldwork, such as the provision of social capital in child-centred communities (Kerr & Stewart, 2021), closer connections with participants who are also parents, and access to insights on experiences of children who inhabit the social landscape of the field (Khoo-Lattimore, 2018; Muhammad & Neuilly, 2019).

Thus, there is no denying that researchers' gender and positionality become crucial when exploring tourism spaces (Porter et al., 2021; Porter & Schänzel, 2018). Despite policies claiming gender equality in higher education, the challenges, barriers, and risks female researchers face during fieldwork are largely unacknowledged (Braukmann et al., 2020), and the broader impacts on the career advancement of female academics are rarely considered. Female scholars who choose remote fieldwork often appear to engage in "edgework", a voluntary choice to participate in risky activities with a certain level of skill or expertise to challenge themselves, gain new experiences, or push beyond their perceived limitations (Lyng, 2004). These considerations are especially acute in remote research contexts, such as Outback Australia, which is harsh, isolated, and often associated with a masculine Australian identity (Thomas, 1996).

Methods

Informed by a social constructivist paradigm, this study uses a duo-ethnographic approach and visual memorywork to explore the experiences of two solo female researchers who conducted fieldwork in remote Australia. Social constructivism recognises the importance of subjectivity and individual experiences in interpreting the world, acknowledging that the meanings derived from these experiences are socially embedded and influenced by broader social structures (Creswell, 2013). Duo-ethnography involves co-constructing meanings through interpretation and dialogue, where the authors act as both the researcher and the researched (Norris & Sawyer, 2016). This approach enables a shared, subjective, emotional, and continual evaluative understanding of the social world (Benjamin & Schwab, 2021), making it suitable for exploring the experiences and perspectives of female fieldworkers in remote Australia. Duo-ethnography has been successfully used to explore gender differences in travel experiences (Pung et al., 2020) and to give voice to female experiences and perspectives (Mair & Frew, 2018; Spencer & Paisley, 2013).

Researchers' positionality: who are we in this inquiry?

The reflexivity and positionality of researchers are fundamental to the duo-ethnography approach and knowledge production (Witte et al., 2022). In this paper, we align with Reissman (2008) and Sparkes (2000) in recognising the researchers' roles as primary research instruments. Our paper highlights the significance of researchers' positionalities, including their academic and personal roles, such as being mothers or partners, in shaping their reflections and conversations. These experiences facilitate the creation of new interpretations and meanings of shared experiences (Gibbons & Gibbons, 2016).

The study was conducted by two early-career tourism researchers, Isabella and Anita, who completed their PhD studies in Australia. Isabella, a 33-year-old Chinese female, grew up as the only child in a densely populated metropolitan city. With a keen interest in nature and off-the-beaten-track attractions, Isabella prefers less crowded places. Despite being risk-averse, she chose Uluru as her PhD research site as it allowed her to use unconventional methods and visit the location. Anita, a 33-year-old Italian/Australian female, was born and raised in a small town in the Italian Alps and is the eldest of three siblings. She is a mother and wife living and working in Australia, with extensive experience in the luxury hospitality industry. Her fascination with the world's diversity led her to study non-traditional forms of luxury accommodation, often located in remote parts of the world. Although Anita has an assertive and exuberant personality, she had never travelled alone before her PhD fieldwork, making the experience unique.

Isabella and Anita met at tourism conferences, where they informally shared their experiences. Despite their different backgrounds, they found many similarities in their struggles, vulnerabilities, and transformative moments. These commonalities led to the conception of this study. Kim, an early-career Australian female researcher who had also conducted solo tourism fieldwork in a foreign location, joined the study towards the end of data analysis. She played the role of a disruptor, questioning and critiquing Anita and Isabella's interpretations of their fieldwork experiences, adding a valuable perspective to the research.

Research procedures

Duo-ethnography employs no fixed data collection and analysis methods, but it uses established procedures to facilitate conversations and interpretations. Following Mair and Frew (2018) and Pung et al. (2020), we combined visual memorywork and self/collaborative reflections to gather and analyse data. We employed photo-elicited (visual) memorywork to collectively elicit and analyse written memories, illuminating how women become part of society (Onyx & Small, 2001). Memorywork uncovers the active role of women in socialisation by revealing how events are remembered and constructed (Crawford et al., 1992). Photo-elicitation builds on this by delving into the deeper aspects of human consciousness and the emotional dimensions of individual experiences (Manfreda et al., 2023a), enhancing self-reflexivity and memory. Collaborative visual memorywork contextualises individual (memories of) experiences within social spaces and allows researchers to share, challenge, and transform their participation (Grimwood & Johnson, 2021).

Following the guidelines provided by Crawford et al. (1992) and Onyx and Small (2001), we performed a three-phase collaborative data collection and analysis process between February and August 2022: 1) retrospective visual memory-writing; 2) collective memory exchange and analysis, which led to 3) a co-constructed examination and theorisation of fieldwork experiences.

In phase one, a collection of photographs taken during fieldwork was used to trigger individual memory writing in the third person. Using a third-person perspective allows researchers to explore their emotional and sensory experiences with increased psychological space for reflexivity (Onyx & Small, 2001). We noted particular episodes, trivial details, and descriptions of experiences without providing "interpretations, explanations, or biographies" (Onyx & Small, 2001, p. 776). Self-reflexive practices were encouraged to acknowledge the influence of each researcher's positionality in memory writing. We collected 71 titled photos and corresponding memories in this initial phase. These were then exchanged, and individually, we reviewed and commented on each other's memory writing before our virtual meetings.

Phase two comprised seven 3-h virtual discussions where we exchanged, read, discussed, and questioned each other's photos, titles, and memory narratives. Our discussions centred around identifying commonalities, differences, cultural metaphors, implicit social explications, and contradictions (Onyx & Small, 2001). This phase allowed for recursive meaning-making, enabling us to interpret and reconstruct memories (Crawford et al., 1992). We also engaged in in-depth discussions on positionality to transparently disclose our roles and interpretations of our memories. Following each session, we revisited the discussed memories for "memory patching," adding additional layers of meaning that had emerged from our dialogues (Breault, 2016). Using guidelines for thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006), we developed an emergent coding system based on collective searching and reflections during this phase. In total, we generated 21 h of conversations, 71 photos, and 27,000 words of written memories, including photo titles, memory writing, memory patching, and reflections and discussions arising from the virtual sessions.

In phase three, we further examined and theorised the collective memory-making of phase two. Isabella and Anita summarised the feedback and coding and mapped common themes from the previous phase, individually and collectively. In this phase, Kim joined the research team to provide external peer debriefing, to challenge and critique interpretations, and to refine key themes from the dialogical process.

Re-imagining solo-female researchers' experiences of tourism fieldwork

Through retrospectively (co)constructing our fieldwork journeys, four themes emerged from the data analysis. The following narrative, featuring dialogues and reflections on Isabella and Anita's fieldwork experiences, presents excerpts of our visual (photographs) and written memories to maximise the authenticity and transparency of our voices, mainly following a chronological sequence of the fieldwork events. While we report each theme separately, we note that all themes must be viewed as a complex net of interrelationships in constructing our fieldwork experiences and, thus, should be viewed as intertwined and inseparable. Fig. 1 visually represents the themes, sub-themes, and their interconnections in conceptualising our fieldwork experiences.

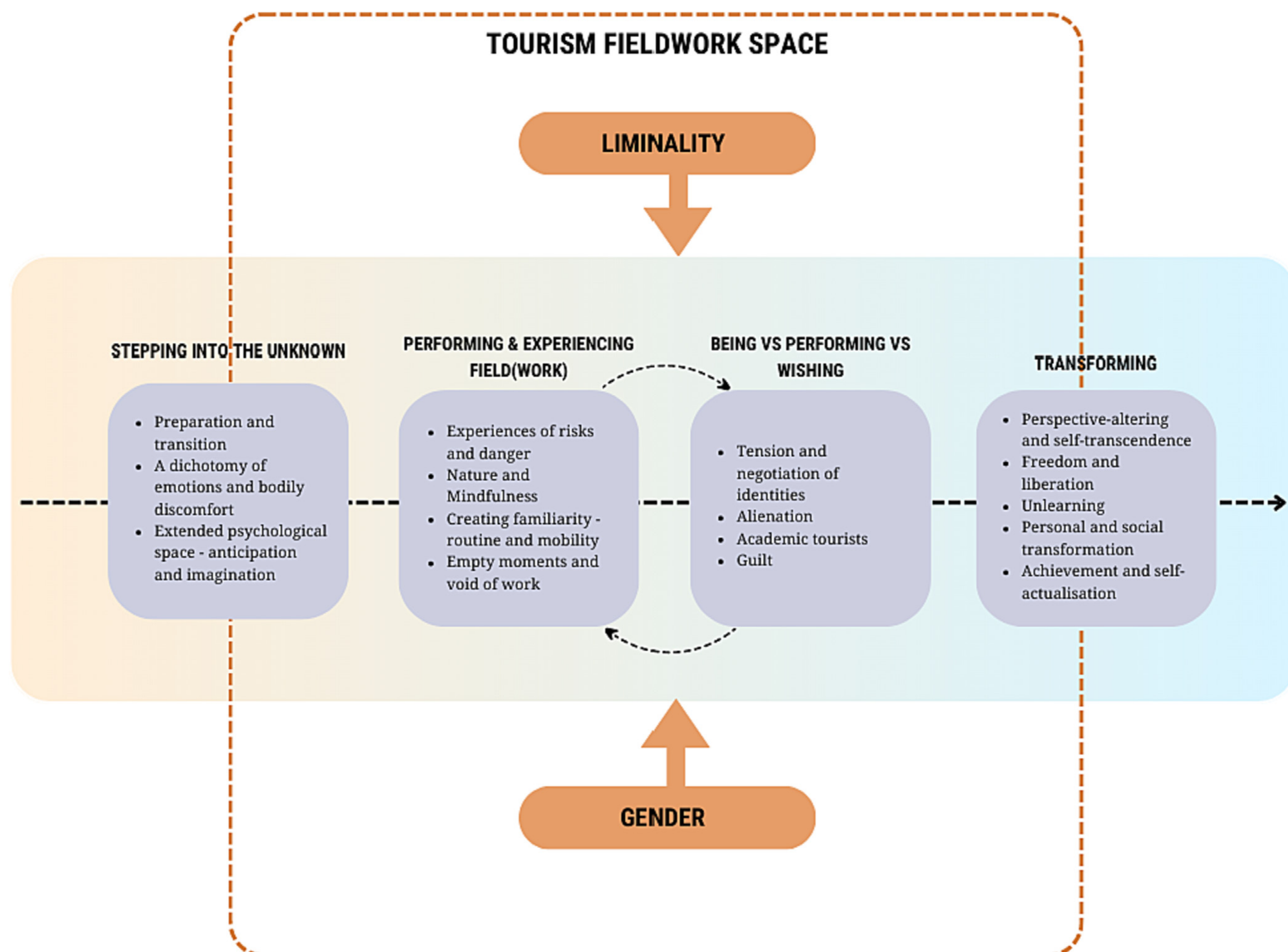


Fig. 1. Solo-female researchers' experiences of tourism fieldwork thematic framework.

Steps into the unknown

The transition to field(work) commences with leaving the familiar surroundings of our homes and institutions and embarking on a journey to our research site. Before fieldwork, we rehearsed this experience, envisaging all potential risks, completing ethics clearance forms, making necessary travel arrangements, and seeking advice from peers and supervisors. Like tourists, we allowed ourselves to dream and fantasise about the research adventure. However, our lack of previous fieldwork and solo travel experiences created an underlying uncertainty, which, combined with the time and resource-limited nature of research activities, resulted in intense feelings of frustration and anxiety. Preparation for fieldwork is a burdensome process, both physically and psychologically, underpinned by heightened awareness of soon entering an unfamiliar space while conducting familiar activities with strangers (Wolcott, 2008). The entry into the research field is the first passage into the unknown and possibilities, as Van Duijn (2020), p. 282) aptly stated, of being "everywhere and nowhere at once." This transition necessitates the navigation of new social and cultural milieus, requiring deep physical, emotional, and cognitive adjustments.

En route to arrival

I: She pulled over with ***mixed feelings of relief and worry****.* ***Relieved*** *that she could finally get some rest and* ***worried*** *about* ***the upcoming challenges of approaching strangers in the field****. She rolled down the window, taking a deep breath of the sandy, dry wind with an iron taste. "Oh well, "she thought, "one thing at a time."*

Hot and Sweaty

A: It felt like a very ***disorienting and unusual place****. Nothing like what she was used to. She was carrying her luggage and herself in the heated landing strip of an airport too small to be real,* ***sweating and feeling hot****, with the* ***wary understanding that she was in a place that was completely unfamiliar to her****.*

A dichotomy of emotions, such as excitement and fear, discomfort and fascination, admiration and boredom, is evident in our memories. Isabella's photo, "En-route to arrival," illustrates that, as a first-time fieldworker, the perceived danger and risks are intertwined with excitement and anticipation (Isabella's exulting jump). This emotional state is akin to the adrenaline-induced feelings experienced by people who engage in extreme sports, who, aware of the activity's risks, choose to participate and embrace the thrill (Laurendeau, 2008). This experience is further amplified by the voluntary choice of doing ethnography in remote tourist places and embracing such mixed feelings. This choice and type of work resemble edgework (Lyng, 2004).

The waiting game

A: That damn mask was ***suffocating*** *her, and she was trying not to be bothered by doing a meditation session on Headspace. In hindsight, the sense of suffocation was probably more emotional than a reaction to the mask. All the* ***emotions bottled up inside*** *that were* ***screaming for a release.***

The biggest car I've ever driven

I: Little did Isabella know that ten minutes after this photo, she ***crashed the SUV into a truck and spent the next hour crying on the side of the road****. She had never* ***felt so devastated and overwhelmed*** *in her life, as if everything had turned pitch dark […] Even today, her hands* ***still shake*** *as she relives those memories and emotions.*

Anita's description of her bodily discomfort and disorientation in "Hot and Sweaty" reflects the physical discomfort resulting from entering drastically different environmental conditions in the field. Equally, in "The waiting game," the feeling of suffocation caused by the forced mask-wearing resulting from mandatory COVID-19 health directives further added to the experience of physical and psychological unease. During the departure flight, Anita was filled with anxiety and fear, which resulted in physical discomfort as she attempted to suppress these bodily manifestations with meditation. Similarly, Isabella struggled with the physical reality of the fast-approaching fieldwork – '*The car drive [to Uluru] felt like it would never end. [Isabella] felt exhausted, dehydrated, and almost desperate*' – and experienced the lingering effects of a traumatic start into the field, signposted by a series of unlucky events (a car accident) and physical discomfort (hunger, heat, exhaustion).

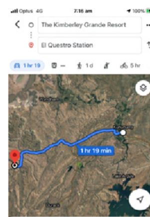
The intensity of transition experiences between home and the field also facilitated powerful yet uncomfortable moments of change, where researchers are static yet mobile, en route but not arrived, begun but not finished. These "limbo" moments emerged from the experience of enhanced physiological space, enabling deep reflection, admiration of people and places, and learning (Nelson et al., 2021). They are moments for creativity, dreams, and imagination, allowing the brain to move beyond logic and calculation and focus on broader and deeper meanings. While in transition, we do not yet feel all the burdens of the official fieldwork experience yet make that first step into an unknown and uncomfortable zone where we experience disorientation, excitement, and the anticipation of opportunities that may unfold in the field.

Performing/experiencing the field(work)

My evening "patrol" and the "unfortunate" incident

*I: Just as Isabella thought she locked in another interview tomorrow, the **two males insisted** on getting the interview right now **and jokingly refused to let her go**. She immediately had a **'funny' feeling** and raised her voice to almost shouting – "It's lovely chatting with you, see you later!". The two guys got scared of the attention it attracted. Isabella **quickly ran into her car** and drove off. Her **hands were shaking**. She **felt so stupid and naïve** at that moment. **Things could have really gone wrong.** She was **upset and angry** that she should have seen this coming and planned for it. She wished someone else warned her **not to be so gullible**.*

Where the hell do I go?



*A: She **got lost** and drove for 20 km in the middle of nowhere, looking for the right turn. She **was panicking** when, after a while, she realised she had definitely missed it. How does someone know with no reception where to go in the middle of nowhere? There were **no people to ask; nobody was passing** on the road, no roadside service stations to stop. It was **cold (2 degrees), the wildlife was coming from everywhere**, echidnas, wallabies crossing the road all the time. Anita eventually went back and drove at 30 km/h, finally finding the right turn, which was not signalled from the road…**all possible terrifying scenarios felt all too real**.*

The performative and sensory composition of field(work) involves adjusting to and living with the risks, uneasy environment, and multifaceted emotions. Navigating remote fieldwork alone as a female PhD candidate was daunting, uncomfortable, and unexpectedly risky. This study's three Australian field locations shared many notorious 'masculine' features: immensity, remoteness, lack of infrastructure and connectivity, extreme weather, and sparse population (Thomas, 1996). Neither of us had any prior experience conducting ethnographic field research or being alone in such unfamiliar and distant places, researching whilst simultaneously handling physical difficulties and psychological adjustments. We faced various challenges, including extreme heat/cold, getting lost, dehydration, and road accidents. The near-miss dangers of and the imagined worst-case scenarios brought lingering insecurities and fear to the forefront of our minds. As indicated in the above excerpts, Isabella narrowly avoided a potential assault by two male strangers due to her quick reaction in removing herself from the situation. If she had been slower to act, she could have been harmed without anyone nearby to help. On the other hand, Anita found herself lost in the wilderness, facing the risks of running out of petrol and potential wildlife attacks, all while unable to call for help. Contrary to Hamilton and Fielding (2018), it was impossible for us to avoid isolated places and interactions with (male) strangers to stay safe while in the field.

A misty morning

*I: …all alone within the entire sunrise viewing spot. It was so **densely quiet** with absolutely no sound. Then, occasionally, there was a light breeze. Isabella could stay in this moment forever. Uluru was just lying there, not bothered. The patch-burning residue formed a smoky belt loosely circling the rock, which created a wonderland-like atmosphere. She felt **mildly strung out, unsure where exactly she was**. These strung-out moments were so precious that they grounded and **forced her to slow down and embrace the occasional idleness**. Be a sloth and be okay with it.*

The outback at 5:43 am

*G: It was real, raw, and authentic… She had **shivers down her spine** and felt deeply emotional… A sense of achievement and pride for what she had been capable of doing on her own, of gratitude and **deep connection** with that place and its majestic nature. She felt miles away from her real life, thinking how different this life felt and how she was enjoying being there and in the present moment, alone, with nobody to share this moment but herself. She felt **more connected with herself and her thoughts** than she had felt in a very long while.*

However, the natural environment, pristine landscapes, and serene atmosphere allowed for peaceful moments, forcing both Isabella and Anita to slow down and immerse themselves in its presence. The prominence of the grand landscape was awe-inspiring. In Isabella's memories, she described the fleeting sunset and its striking colours as '*surreal*' and '*mystical*.' Anita's narratives similarly depicted the field as '*raw and authentic*,' causing '*shivers down her spine*.' The sublimity of nature can activate strong emotions and powerful reflections: reverence, curiosity, respect, insignificance, admiration, and, subsequently, "transcendental immensity" (Bell & Lyall, 2002).

Red dust and Harry Potter

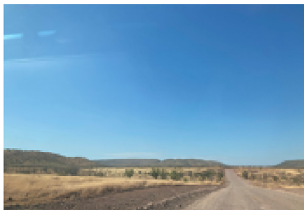
A: Anita listened to a Harry Potter book during the car rides. For some reason, Harry Potter had always been a safety blanket since she was a child. She would read/listen to it whenever she needed comfort as the books would ***remind her of a time of home, safety, warmth****. It was also a story completely out of reality, which let her* ***forget about all her life commitments****. This was important for her during fieldwork as her mind always felt cramped and busy.*

Isabella's mobile haven

I: Waking up at 5 am in winter was a whole new beast. Every morning, she would ***stay in the car for 10–20 min with the heater and music*** *on… The 10–20-min morning warm-up soon* ***became Isabella's routine*** *to keep her grounded and* ***ready to face a world of challenge****s. She would watch the temperature panel slowly go up whilst* ***humming along to her favourite songs*** *within* ***this secure car space****. Driving in the outback was also a powerful experience; she felt* ***in absolute control****.*

In addition to the immersive serenity of the landscape, Anita and Isabella established comfort and familiarity as tools they could draw on to support them in remaining focused on the research. A notable shared memory was the liberating driving experiences. Having/driving a car (4WD) enabled mobility, freedom, and safety for us in the field. Unlike city cars, driving 4WD on mostly empty and unsealed roads made us feel powerful, in control, and at times rebelliously "machos", given that almost everything else was perceived to be beyond our control in those unfamiliar environments. We both utilised the vehicle as a haven to recompose ourselves and find peace and tranquillity. Anita utilised the long drive to familiarise herself with the environment's foreignness and attuned to the feelings of danger and fright by listening to a Harry Potter audiobook during the drives, something of sentimental value that reminded her of home, safety, and security. With similar purposes but different execution, Isabella constructed her sense of familiarity by forming "new" micro-routines, small things, or trivial behaviours that she felt the need to perform/follow on a regular basis. These ritualised behaviours can offer fieldworkers a certain level of psychological security, control, and routine in an uncertain field.

Endless nothingness



A: It almost felt like she was ***driving in a continuous loop*** *with no visible points of focus. Eyes were almost* ***tricked into thinking she was not moving****, and for some reason, this was making her agitated. The only point of reference was not spatial, but it was time. Anita was checking her phone at regular intervals, showing that time was passing, yet* ***everything else felt still****. During the drive, she decided to stop at some points to break this continuous loop and try to take in the landscape, feel the earth and the heat, smell the air, and hear the sounds.*

A journey into the Milky Way and a journey inward

I: The guide told everyone that ***our senses are stuck in the past*** *- When we see the stars, we actually see the starlight that shined from 200 years ago because of its incredible distance to Earth. She was slightly shaken – so what is presence?* ***What am I in this vast universe****? The universe is* ***so much mightier than human beings****. How insignificant are we all in comparison to all beings in the universe? Isabella* ***felt powerless and insignificant at that moment*** *– as if Uluru and her were stuck in a half-dome. She can still recall* ***the perspective-shifting scenery*** *that night.* ***Time and space have lost meanings and almost seem irrelevant****.*

Finally, we experienced many 'empty' periods in between research sessions. The void of 'work' and the absence of 'normal life routine' in the spatially immense tourism field significantly expanded how we personally defined our surroundings, leading to a shared distorted sense of time and space. The removal of interactions during the work-less hours propelled us to be with ourselves in solitude, forcing us to confront loaded thoughts and emotions. Enforced solitary time and space unleashed room to reflect on many imaginative and daring moments from the field. This corresponds with the literature on liminal spaces, which

identifies tourism fields as providing expanded psychological space for self-reflection (Myers, 2010). Anita lost focus in spatial perception while driving and attempted to use time passing to re-anchor herself. Isabella also had an existential realisation about the transient nature of human beings. These intense sensorial and emotional moments of discomfort, fear, awe, adrenaline rushes, security, and the brave performative acts of confronting challenges provide nuanced and contextualised insights into female researchers' field(work) explorations.

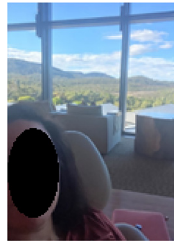
The phenomenological explorations of the ethnographic researchers and their research subjects are integral to knowledge generation in the field. The growing recognition of body and corporality in tourism scholarship contests the conventional hegemonic masculinity and disembodiment (Farkic, 2021). These findings support the ongoing debates that dismantle the image of a "lone, ungendered, unbiased researcher, going into the field like a neutral, empty vessel simply waiting to be filled with data" (Billo & Hiemstra, 2013, p. 321). The experiences and emotions of female ethnographic researchers in and with physical spaces are equally important in advancing knowledge and methodological inquiry.

Being vs. performing vs. wishing: The tension and negotiation of identities

Perseverance

*I: For the first three days, Isabella could not manage to recruit anyone. Partly because she found herself awkward with strangers, partly because the 40-degree heat drove everyone back to hotels after 8 am. She felt quite **useless and desperate** as if she had **wasted all this time for nothing**. She often experienced powerlessness when she failed to convince tourists to participate. **Sometimes, she didn't feel quite like herself**, as if she had to engage in exciting conversations to gain trust and **pretend to be someone else, like a salesperson**.*

Tiredness with a view



*A: She had picked the lodge lounge for the interviews because it had a full, unobstructed view of the wild outdoors. This made the fieldwork feel somehow lighter. There was this continuous sensation of being "on the clouds", almost like **being tipsy all the time**, but having this feeling made her more immersed in the atmosphere. This feeling was difficult to describe, but felt almost like she **was there, but not really, like this was all a dream**.*

Ethnographers often carry multiple roles and positions (insider/outsider) when conducting fieldwork, which creates tensions among different identities (Kennedy et al., 2022; Usher, 2018). Both Isabella and Anita felt that they were detached from reality and imprisoned in a constant state of switching between their various identities (academic, student, mother, daughter, friend, driver). Liminal spaces, such as grand natural sites, are recognised as creating opportunities for reflection on identity and search for personal meanings (Andrews, 2012). Ethnographic practices enable researchers to engage in intense and impromptu excursions into participants' lives to gain nuanced contextualised knowledge. However, the entanglements of work and leisure, of being simultaneously an academic and a tourist, and the constant shift between these different roles produce illusions of living like an alternative and "dream-like" persona. During the fieldwork, we both found ourselves immersing while detaching from the field(work), constantly shifting roles and mental states. For example:

My sustainability pledge

*I: In hindsight, Isabella wondered whether she did this as a **punitive reminder that she was NOT on holiday**. Fieldwork was still work that somehow, in her mind/culture, symbolised endurance, hard work, and even suffering. Therefore, she **shouldn't live too comfortably**, especially with her considerable improvement in accommodation compared to her bunk bed situation during the pilot study. The least she could sympathise with her past self would perhaps be **reusing linens, saving toiletries, and creating less waste.***

Just look up

*A: Guilt accompanied Anita throughout. She often found herself enjoying the moment, then realising that she was there for research… When she took this photo, she had joined some guests at a hot spring. She was floating around in these natural pools in an almost desert place. While soaking in the hot spring water, she thought, "I am here for research, so I should feel exhausted and busy all the time. **Am I wasting time**?" **She tried to resemble some sort of researcher's appearance**, or at least what society would expect of a researcher. But really, **how could she do that immersed in the water, with her bathers on, with nobody around?***

Guilt was prominent in Isabella and Anita's stories, which describe the mental justifications for enjoyment, boredom, and idleness. Because of the time- and resource-poor nature of PhD fieldwork, we could not afford leisure while researching. Such dilemmas arise from the neoliberal emphasis on time-efficient knowledge production and output-oriented research culture (Witte et al., 2022). Our stories revealed self-blame, punitive routines, and guilt, as we struggled to balance our researcher and self-identities without acknowledging their duality and fluidity. Isabella went so far as to deliberately make her stay uncomfortable to remind herself that she was not on vacation and should endure hardship to fulfil her work role. For example, she took her trash out daily, washed her plates/glasses, reused the linens/towels, and made up her own bed. The hotel would leave a sustainability card in her room each day for not using the housekeeping service. Anita felt unproductive during brief moments of leisure and questioned the authenticity of her researcher identity in the field. The contested nature of tourism fieldwork is depicted by the fact that one "must" do something (difficult) in a leisure space that is typically associated with doing nothing (idleness) or fun things (enjoyment). Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous section, we both attempted to combat this neoliberal productivity-driven mentality by prioritising self-care and forming routines. The 'empty moments' of doing 'nothing' are often the norm during fieldwork, despite being rarely recognised in the literature. We experienced many waiting periods and aimlessly walked around for potential participants in the pristine and tourist landscapes, which contradicted the traditional perception of a workplace. This emotional turmoil was also recognised by Witte et al. (2022).

Guilt also prevailed in fieldwork moments marked by a shift between our academic and personal identities as partners and mothers. Anita, for example, torn between PhD work and her ever-present motherhood, had to decide on which role to prioritise. However, the guilt of missing out on valuable time she could have spent with her son crept towards the end of fieldwork. *When the photo [of her son peacefully sleeping] arrived on the last night of fieldwork, a night which was marked by the realisation that she had achieved what she had come to do, all the guilt, sadness, and mixed feelings about leaving her three-year-old son at home came rushing back. She felt a strong urge to scoop him up and smell him, connect with him. She knew he was okay at home but could not help thinking he had suffered because of her absence. Was all this worth it? It was, but she felt selfish at that moment.* Juggling the expectations of her conflicting roles left Anita in emotional turmoil, which aligns with the findings of Braukmann et al. (2020) and Schänzel and Brooke (2022) on conflicting roles and responsibilities. Beyond guilt, the tension between performing duties as a researcher, fulfilling bodily needs as a person and societal roles as a mother or a partner led us to constant negotiations to (re)construct and separate/integrate our identities in the field.

Transforming

The endurance of field(work) struggles and challenges brought us a shift in perspectives about ourselves as individuals, researchers, and the world around us. This change was initiated by various triggers discussed in previous themes. During the transition into and experiences of field(work), we underwent intense and opposing emotional and physical states such as excitement and fear, admiration and boredom. In the "empty moments" of fieldwork, we felt a deep connection with nature. The negotiation of self and work identities was a continuous and highly stressful process, marked by challenging psychological states and feelings of guilt (Baker, 2021). These, coupled with the liminal and gendered characteristics of remote tourism fields, presented us with a platform for such change to occur (Sheldon, 2020).

Perspectives

*I: Far into the horizon, **Uluru became a tiny bump**, almost blending into the surroundings. At that moment, Isabella somehow had an **epiphany about all the problems and worries she used to be so dramatic about.** Nature acts as a life guru. As her dad always says to her – you can **always learn something enlightening from being in nature**. At the end of the day, when the time and distance are long enough, **all will pass**. Perspectives matter.*

Croc burger and beer

*A: After an overwhelming data collection, the staff offered her a beer. While she would not drink usually, she had thought, "Why not? **is not that I have to take care of my child** right now, and I am not technically doing any data collection." She felt free to be herself, **not the mother, not the wife**, not the academic, just herself … That night, she laughed, shared glory stories from the old hospitality days, and listened to staff members playing digeridoo and their stories of living in such a hostile yet wonderous place. **She forgot why she was there and allowed herself to be amazed by the resilience of these people who had chosen to live and work in such an untamed place**.*

In the accounts above, the realisation that Uluru can be insignificant and tiny propelled Isabella to be more tolerant towards difficulties and accept life as is. Dwelling in nature offers rich learning; as she noted, "*Nature acts as a life guru*". This therapeutic moment aligns with Sheldon's (2020) assertion that travel presents great potential for self-transcendence. In contrast to the guilt experienced, the negotiation of identities experienced by Anita during fieldwork also elicited a sense of liberation from responsibility (caretaker) and societal roles. The freedom of being herself again, not someone's mum, wife, or student, allowed her to inwardly pursue what she would

have liked to do (let go). This permitted her to view others' lives and stories without the constraints of societal lenses (norms, rules, stereotypes). Hence, Anita surrendered herself (judgments and her own identity) and allowed herself to perceive a genuine respect for the people she met while creating more intimate connections with her participants.

Unlearning busyness in the post-sunset void

*I: The **busyness was something that she had to unlearn** despite the unsettling sensations it brought. She locked the phone in the car and sat on the roadside, trying to **embrace the void and the nothingness, accepting and learning to enjoy the void and emptiness**. This is the complete circle of life, ebbs and flows, fulfilled and void. It took some time for her mind to slow down and **learn to be comfortable doing and thinking nothing**.*

Vastness

*A: She did not realise she stayed there for 3 h. She was just staring at the vastness. She felt a little guilty that she was not taking part in the guest conversations as much as she would usually have done. However, something about that view was just asking her to remain silent and contemplate it. She was in solitude, almost removed from the real world, for the entire time. **She was aware of what was happening around her, yet chose to ignore it**.*

During the fieldwork, we had to unlearn and re-learn, leading to a new way of being and behaving in the world (Bueddefeld & Duerden, 2022). In the examples above, Isabella let go of being constantly busy and accepted just being there in solitude without doing anything. Anita's deep immersion into nature by voluntarily disregarding her surroundings also demonstrated the benefits of being in and learning from nature. We had to come to terms with the conflicting identities of being a researcher in a tourism space and learn to accept that we could, and had to, be both at the same time - "*And was this [being an academic tourist] what immersion and participant observations were all about? Experience what tourists would experience?*" *[Anita].*

Touring the sunset

*A: That car was almost a metaphor for the conclusion of her fieldwork. She felt **spent, yet content**, after having gone through a wild ride in the outback and now finally immersing herself in the beauty, that wild and natural feel, that immersion in nature's untouched details. A bit dusty on the outside, the car could endure the harshest of conditions and go through immensely difficult tracks. And she felt quite the same […] she had **overcome difficulties, fears, and challenges**. And she felt **proud, accomplished, and confident**.*

Reflection

*I: Isabella pulled over on the roadside. "She had done it!!!" She exhaled long and loud, followed by a restrained yell, "YES." … Looking back, she **lived a strictly routine lifestyle** for the past 30 days…from 5 pm to 9 pm. This schedule was never something that she would keep up for more than three days, but somehow, she did it here at Uluru **for 30 days straight**, with **extreme discipline and persistence.** She walked almost 20 km daily and accomplished this tough fieldwork that she would have never **dreamt of doing alone**.*

Our field(work) gifted us with much more than data and stories of being a researcher in tourist places. They have brought about personal and social transformation, resulting in fundamental shifts in our perspectives and growth triggered by exposure to new challenges, roles, and disorienting dilemmas (Teoh et al., 2021). These events have elicited a deeper and more critical understanding of ourselves and our relationship with others. The car analogy from Anita's account above aptly describes the affirmation of her abilities, confidence, and achievements. Similar transformative moments were celebrated by Isabella in "Reflection", where a strong sense of self-actualisation emerges. It is a proud yet personal experience for both. The field has witnessed our dark, vulnerable, and uncomfortable moments, as well as our determination and success. Similar to the sentiments expressed by Carvalho (2018) and Munar (2018), these moments created a strong sense of meaning, relevance, and purpose in ourselves and the work undertaken in the field. Throughout our memory writing and conversations, we cannot help but appreciate how this transformation is still taking place within ourselves. The increased consciousness of who we are in the world as researchers and individuals is ongoing. This has been a deeply challenging and confronting process for us, yet also a process that has enabled us and continues to crystallise our growth.

Conclusions

Historically, there has been a scant focus on understanding solo female tourism scholars' fieldwork experiences and perceptions (Porter & Schänzel, 2018; Witte et al., 2022) and little acknowledgement in the literature or our institutions regarding the distinct challenges and experiences that face this cohort of researchers. Consequently, female researchers often carry out fieldwork without the benefit of drawing from the experiences of peers and the broader academic community. Many female researchers, especially PhD students, remain largely unaware of how gender and the liminal nature of tourism fieldwork spaces they visit can shape their research process, outcome, and personal and professional development.

Hokey (1996) notes that fieldwork should be recognised as more than just an intellectual endeavour but one that also coalesces with the emotional world of the researcher. For female researchers-in-training, the solo fieldwork experience can be a messy kaleidoscope of subjectivities in a space imbued with deep, liminal, and gendered traits. This paper directly addresses the need to shed light on and advance understanding of how solo female researchers navigate field(work) in unfamiliar, remote, and masculine tourism spaces. It unravelled some of these subjectivities through dialogue, reflection, and a healthy dose of positive confrontation, drawing upon the capacity for duo-ethnography to distil nuances of experience. This recognition of solo female ethnographers' experiences adds to the epistemological discussions on researcher reflexivity and normalises field(work) challenges and growth as integral aspects of knowledge advancement (Crossley, 2021; Witte et al., 2022).

Findings from this study add to the growing attention to creative methodologies in tourism knowledge production and the challenges in navigating the hetero-patriarchal research fields (Schänzel & Porter, 2022). The findings highlighted the bodily risks and challenges inherent in tourism fieldwork contexts for female researchers. This study illuminated the dichotomy of these experiences in the field, where liberation and gendered constraints (physical and psychological) coexist and must be navigated by female researchers without institutional support. Simultaneously, we posit that the liminal aspects of tourism field (work) can elicit growth, transformation, and enhance well-being, especially for novice researchers. This study demonstrates how the impacts of solo fieldwork are not limited to the duration of the trip: they do not start when the researcher actively enters the field, do not end when the researcher returns home, and there is value in creating space for reflective practice to be incorporated beyond the field. In providing a platform for reflective practice, duo-ethnography can be particularly powerful in helping us understand, reflect upon, and come to terms with our field(work) experiences and the sustained personal and social transformations that can result from them. Creating space for deep reflexivity also opens up opportunities to be intentional about researcher well-being and proactive in developing self-care strategies to support the researcher to be physically and psychologically safer in the field, despite the diverse challenges they face (Močnik, 2020; Vincett, 2018).

Recognising and embracing the liminal qualities and gendered experiences of tourism field(work) empowers researchers to consider how identities, embodied encounters, and field relationships intertwine with the qualities of tourism field(work) and, by extension, influence knowledge generation. We suggest that understanding the physical, psychological, and relational contours of tourism field(work) can engender rich, meaningful, and multi-faceted ethnographic encounters that resist the prevailing positivist approach and emotion-free fieldwork (Witte et al., 2022; Yamagishi, 2010). Pritchard (2014) recommends that the tourism discipline must work towards research encompassing the researcher's experiences and identity, which is often overlooked. By embracing the liminal and gendered qualities of tourism fieldwork contexts, researchers can work towards achieving this goal.

Practically, the choice of female scholars to engage in remote tourism fieldwork can be seen as part of a broader struggle against masculine and neoliberal academic institutions and structures. In many academic fields, there is a longstanding tradition of valuing research conducted in traditional, well-established locations, often associated with male-dominated academic networks (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). This can create barriers for female scholars. Directly addressing (novice) female scholars conducting fieldwork in remote tourist spaces, we hope that by sharing these experiences, other researchers might be prompted to see fieldwork as an opportunity not just to collect data and produce results but also to reflect, admire, and learn. By choosing to engage in remote tourism fieldwork, female scholars are disrupting these norms and asserting their right to conduct research in locations and contexts that may not be traditionally valued by academic institutions. This can help to shift the balance of power and create new opportunities for knowledge production and dissemination.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the fight against masculine and neoliberal academic institutions and structures involves more than just individual endeavours. It requires collective actions and more inclusive institutional structures that respond to diverse voices and perspectives. For a start, we note that institutions must recognise the role of gender – and the multiplicity of identities and risks that come with it - in these experiences and make appropriate adjustments to ensure the safety and well-being of female tourism researchers. Rather than limiting or constricting the engagement of female scholars in this type of fieldwork, institutions and ethics committees are called upon to provide appropriate support, together with supervisors, peers, and research mentors, to prepare researchers before, during, and after fieldwork, including training and ongoing support on how to cope with its physical and psychological demands. Future research should stress the importance of prioritising self-care and well-being during fieldwork, which could include exploring strategies to cope with this physical and psychological discomfort.

Lastly, this research is a personal reflection on the experiences of two solo female researchers-in-training (PhD students) associated with institutions in a developed country (Australia). Albeit in remote and isolated places, these experiences also occurred in Australia, a relatively safe destination. It is essential that tourism researchers continue to engage in such reflections to offer a more complete understanding of these experiences and thus elicit more awareness of the various ways in which specific characteristics (or people and places) can shape experiences of field(work). This could, therefore, include male and non-binary perspectives, different cultural perspectives, and experiences conducted in other tourism places and different destinations in developing countries.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anita Manfreda: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Isabella Qing Ye:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Kim Nelson-Miles:** Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2023.103665.

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