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Exploring Tourists' Emotional Solidarity with Residents of Galveston County, Texas

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ABSTRACT

This study examines tourists' level of emotional solidarity with residents, which has never been done before. A similar factor structure comprised of three dimensions (sympathetic understanding, welcoming nature, and emotional closeness) was found as in previous studies. In addition, each factor yielded a high cronbach coefficient. Three separate linear regressions were conducted to determine if degree of interaction between residents and tourists predicted each of the dimensions within the emotional solidarity scale. Each test was significant ($p < 0.05$). Implications and future research opportunities are discussed.

Keywords: *emotional solidarity scale, exploratory factor analysis, Galveston, interaction between residents and tourists.*

INTRODUCTION

Emotional solidarity is defined by Hammarstrom (2005) as the affective bonds individuals experience with one another, characterized by perceived closeness and degree of contact. Durkheim (1995[1915]) is credited as the first to formulate the theory of emotional solidarity whereby he claimed that an emotional solidarity is forged through individuals interacting with one another, sharing similar beliefs, and engaging in similar activities together. While little work has been done in tourism concerning the construct, Woosnam and Norman (in press) recently developed a scale of emotional solidarity and found the construct to be multidimensional, comprised of three unique dimensions: *sympathetic understanding*, *welcoming visitors*, and *emotional closeness*. Such dimensionality is contrary to the work of Bahr, Mitchell, Li, Walker and Sucher (2004), Gronvold (1988), Lin and Harwood (2003), which treated emotional solidarity as a unidimensional construct, measured by only a few items. It was Gronvold (1988) who conceded that emotional solidarity (or 'affective solidarity' as he referred to the construct) is likely to consist of numerous dimensions.

To date, the only work in tourism involving emotional solidarity between residents and tourists pertains to data collected solely from residents. Tourists' level of emotional solidarity experienced with residents has yet to be examined. From an exploratory perspective, this paper has two main purposes: 1) to determine if a comparable factor structure (to that of Woosnam and Norman, in press) exists in assessing tourists' emotional solidarity with residents and 2) to determine if the dimension(s) of emotional solidarity can be significantly predicted from tourists' interaction with residents based on Durkheim model.

METHODS

Situated roughly 30 minutes southeast of Houston, Texas, Galveston County currently is the most visited coastal county in the state hosting approximately 5.4 million visitors (Angelou Economics, 2008) who spent US\$764 million in 2008 (Texas Tourism, 2009). In addition to the high degree of visitation in Galveston County, a large number of residents (i.e., 9,370) are also

employed in the tourism sector (Texas Tourism, 2009); making it an ideal location to assess tourists' varying levels of emotional solidarity and interaction with residents. Furthermore, with Hurricane Ike causing so much destruction in 2008, "visitation has not rebounded" according to the special events coordinator of the Galveston Convention and Visitors Bureau (B. Kunz, personal communication, July 1, 2009). Given such a claim, it is more important than ever to gain a better understanding of the relationships between tourists and residents on the island.

During five peak travel weekends in July and August of 2009, visitors were contacted on-site at four main attraction areas (i.e., the Seawall, Stewart Beach, Moody Gardens, and the Strand) throughout Galveston County, Texas and asked to participate. Data were collected using a self-administered survey instrument following a systematic sampling procedure with a random starting point (Babbie, 2010), whereby members of the research team approached every fifth visitor they located on the beach, public street, or parking lot (on Saturdays and Sundays between 10:00 am and 5:00pm) and asked individuals if they would participate. The overall response rate was 74.6% ($N = 447$).

The instrument that was used included sections on visitors' interactions with residents, travel information, travel history in Galveston, overall travel history, and demographics. Emotional solidarity was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Woosnam and Norman (in press), with each item reworded for tourists' interpretation. Each item had response categories on a 7-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). To address the first purpose of this paper, an exploratory factor analysis of the 10-item scale was conducted. Interaction with residents was measured using five scale items assessing frequency of interaction during different times of the year (i.e., during week, on the weekend, during peak vacation season, during off-peak vacation season, and during holidays) on a 7-point likert scale (1 = never to 7 = always). Cronbach's alpha for the items was high ($\alpha = .93$) as a composite score for the five items was calculated. To determine if interaction would significantly predict the dimension(s) of emotional solidarity, linear regression analyses were used.

FINDINGS

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with varimax orthogonal rotation was performed to determine factor structure of the emotional solidarity scale. KMO coefficients for the scale were greater than .60 with significant Bartlett tests ($p < .05$), both measures indicating a good factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Factors for the construct were determined based on two criteria: Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and an examination of the scree plot (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999). None of the items were removed due to low-loading (i.e., coefficients less than 0.40) or cross-loading (with coefficients greater than 0.40) as three factors resulted across the emotional solidarity scale (Table 1). Those factors were: *Sympathetic understanding* (four items, $\alpha = .92$); *welcoming nature* (four items, $\alpha = .81$); and *emotional closeness* (two items, $\alpha = .92$). Combined, the three factors accounted for 78.29% of the variance in emotional solidarity as each factor was high in internal consistency having Cronbach's alpha scores greater than .80 (Lance, Butts, & Michaels, 2006).

Table 1
Exploratory factor analysis of emotional solidarity scale

Factor and Item Description	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	α
Sympathetic Understanding		5.372	34.40	.92
I identify with Galveston Co. residents	.897			
I feel affection towards Galveston Co. residents	.841			
I have a lot in common with Galveston Co. residents	.812			
I understand Galveston Co. residents	.755			
Welcoming Nature		1.415	23.93	.81
I feel residents appreciate visitors for the contribution we (as visitors) make to the local economy	.841			
I feel residents appreciate the benefits associated with me (a visitor) coming to the community	.837			
I am proud to be welcomed as a visitor to Galveston Co.	.683			
I treat Galveston Co. residents fair	.559			
Emotional Closeness		1.043	19.96	.92
I have made friends with some Galveston Co. residents	.877			
I feel close to some Galveston Co. residents	.867			

At this point, to address the second purpose of the paper, mean composite scores for each of the three factors of emotional solidarity were calculated by summing item scores within each factor and dividing by the number of items within each factor. Factor means were relatively high for *sympathetic understanding* ($n = 447$; $M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.38$) and *welcoming nature* ($n = 447$; $M = 5.67$, $SD = 0.94$), however lower for *emotional closeness* ($n = 447$; $M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.61$). As stated earlier, a mean composite score for the five interaction items ($n = 446$; $M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.47$) were also calculated. Three separate linear regression analyses were conducted to determine if interaction could predict each factor of emotional solidarity. Interaction significantly predicted sympathetic understanding ($F = 124.780$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.22$), welcoming nature ($F = 52.093$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.11$), and emotional closeness ($F = 107.039$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.19$).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In relation to Woosnam and Norman (in press), a nearly identical factor structure of the emotional solidarity scale resulted in the current study. This adds credence to factor stability of the scale across multiple samples and contexts, and the fact that the construct emotional solidarity is not unidimensional as once proposed by Gronvold (1988). With such highly reported mean scores of the emotional solidarity items, this work supports that by Trauer and Ryan (2005) and Wearing and Wearing (2001), indicating the existence of closeness between residents and tourists. Further, it was shown that such solidarity is determined by the extent of interaction between tourists and residents of a destination, supporting Durkheim's (1995[1915]) model. Prentice, Witt, and Wydenbach (1994) found that tourists can be endeared to residents of a destination through informal interactions such as chatting and exchanging polities with locals.

As research concerning emotional solidarity is gaining steam, future research should be conducted that will allow us to understand more about potential antecedents and outcomes of the construct. Subsequent studies should examine residents' and tourists' level of emotional solidarity with each other, allowing for a comparative assessment. In such work, a full model of all four constructs (i.e., interaction, shared beliefs, shared behavior, and emotional solidarity) should be evaluated to continue to show support for Durkheim's model.

Implications for practitioners exist from this study as well. For example, destination marketing organizations and tourism/hospitality businesses need to promote greater interaction among residents and tourists, which could in turn foster a greater sense of solidarity between members of each group. Such venues in which this may best be feasible are special events/festivals as well as local shops and eateries 'off the beaten path' (so as to allow for greater intimacy). One billboard in Galveston has already sought to do this by promoting a local restaurant to tourists so they will "eat where locals eat!" Of course, a fine line exists between healthy interactions between residents and tourists and the feeling of being overrun by tourists in places frequented by locals. In addition to this, great attention must be given so as not to 'cheapen' the interactions in providing 'staged authentic' experiences to visitors as MacCannell (1999) cautioned.

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