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Paris, Je T'aime: (Post) Feminist Identities and Emotional Geographies of Women's Travel Narratives of Paris

Paris seems the right place. . . It is where I became who I am (Marton, 2012 p.32).

Introduction

Paris has been the subject of dozens of travel memoirs; from Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1966) and Gertrude Stein's *Paris, France* (1940), writers have recorded their adventures, challenges and sensuous experiences in the City of Light. Both men and women have written descriptive, thorough and eloquent accounts of their Paris pursuits but it is women's travel accounts of Paris that have surpassed any other in the literary travel genre (Laing & Frost, 2012). Although many of these texts are referred to as travel memoirs, the *travel book* resembles or is a subspecies of a memoir, an autobiographical narrative (Dann, 1999). Like a romance novel or a quest romance, it is based on the idea of a hero setting out, experiencing trials and adventure, and returning home victorious and changed (Dann, 1999).

While Laing and Frost (2012) consider how books, including non-fiction narratives, as a cultural phenomenon affect our conceptualization of travel, attention in academia of the impact or influence of literature on tourism is still lacking especially in terms of women's literature and travel experiences in particular. Dann (1999, p. 161) asked, 'why do bookstores continue to devote considerable space to these and similarly popular titles, while scholarly considerations for their appeal are so correspondingly scarce and conspicuously absent?' The examination of tourism centred texts still awaits serious critical interest (Osagie & Buzinde, 2011). Laing and Frost argued that the book is a powerful agent for cultural change. The text as discourse is an important product of social relations 'and we need to explore and understand how their meanings have been constructed and used across the totality of human experience and that includes tourism experiences' (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005, p.2 in Osagie & Buzinde, 2011).

There are an overwhelming number of contemporary women's travel narratives of Paris; women documenting their emotional experiences, their trials and tribulations, their transformations and their deep identity and attachment for Paris. Despite the vast interest in Paris through various forms of media including the travel book, very little attention has been paid to women's travel narratives, travel books and their deeply emotional experiences. This research uncovers mundane yet meaningful experiences of women's travel to Paris and how this travel connects with women's (post) feminist identities and their emotional geographies of place. This paper investigates, as a new insight into consumer behaviour, women's travel narratives of Paris through the media/tourism text of a published travel book.

Literature Review

Literary Tourism and Women's Travel Writing

Literary travel is not simply a function of 'literary influences' but a medium through which a range of cultural meanings and values may be communicated (Squire, 1994). It has grasped the attention of tourism scholars as a form of niche tourism (Herbert, 2001) and garnered the attention of researchers exploring the Grand Tour, the English Lake District and Prince Edward Island, Canada (Conrad Gothie, 2016; Fawcett & Cormack, 2001; Squire, 1993; Towner, 1985). These examples illustrate the strength of literary tourism in specific regions and the complexities in dealing with heritage, nostalgia, authenticity, reality and imagination for distinct tourist experiences. Recently, the literary tourism discussion has returned because of the way in which media has altered how we record, document and share our travel realities and imaginaries both through time and space (Salazar, 2012). Notable research has explored travel literature and/or travel writing (Enoch & Grossman, 2010; Reijinders 2011). Furthermore, tourism scholars, through interdisciplinary approaches, are applying more complex theoretical analyses to various forms of travel writing and women's travel writing specifically (Osagie & Buzinde, 2011).

Women's travel has been a subject of consideration in tourism for quite some time (Bartos, 1982). Previous research has described women's travel patterns and feelings (Ohlenschlanger, 1990), and segmented women's pleasure travelers on type of traveler and decision-making roles (Kerstetter & Pennington-Gray, 1999, Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2001). Other research has focused on women's motivation to travel for leisure such as experience, escape, relaxation, freedom, social ties and self-esteem (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006, Rojek, 1993; Small, 2005).

Although travelers for centuries have documented their experiences through writing, only recently have scholars taken an interest in these texts as narratives for further inquiry (Richards & Wilson 2004). Researchers in literature and in tourism have studied women travel writers of the 18th and 19th centuries as part of the Grand Tour (Bohls, 1995; Lawrence, 1994; Robinson, 1990) and women's travel writing in the 20th century has been examined by literature, media and tourism scholars focusing on post-colonial women's travel (Kelley, 2000; Mulligan, 2000; Osagie & Buzinde, 2011). But less is known about women travelers and travel writers in the 21st century and during the feminist or post-feminist eras (Genz & Brabon 2012; Rojek, 1993). Women's travel has interested researchers focusing on sensuality, embodiment, and experience (e.g. Pritchard, 2007) but little attention has been paid to the emotional aspects and identity transformations of women's travel especially in relation to specific places.

Emotional Geographies

Tourists are pushed by their emotional needs and pulled by the emotional benefits of travel (Goossens, 2000). Memorable experiences at specific heritage tourism sites have also been shown to induce specific feelings and emotions (Kidron, 2013; Lee, 2015). Segmentation studies have applied emotions as they pertain to the enjoyment of leisure and tourism services (Bigne & Andreu, 2004) and emotion in the travel experiences of women have also already been documented (Falcone, 2011; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson et al, 2009). Buda, d'Hauteserre and Johnston (2014) argued that exciting challenges exist for tourism researchers when closer attention is given to the embodied emotionality of tourist places. A wide range of studies already exist that explore emotional responses of the body to loss, aging, eating, dying, memory as well as relating emotion to places such as the Scottish Highlands, going out at night, fast-food restaurants and meaningful natural landscapes (Bondi et al, 2005). Urry (2005) showed how specific sites are constructed in ways saturated with emotion, sometimes wild and frightening, and sometimes aesthetically pleasing and relaxing, and sometimes dependent on ideas of rootedness, Collis (2005) discovered that, for women, the connection between emotion and identity is very strong and the way men and women display and manage their emotional selves differs greatly even with regard to place and environment (Williams, 2002). Similar variations in emotions can emerge with women travelers and how they embody Paris and communicate the ways in which their travel experiences have altered their feelings, emotions, identities and transformed their lives.

(Post) feminism and Tourism

The three distinct segments of feminism (first wave – liberal feminism, second wave – standpoint feminism, third wave – poststructuralist or postmodernist) have been applied in tourism contexts in the past (Aitchison, 2006). However for over three decades, the interest by tourism researchers in feminism, tourism and gender has remained marginal in relation to other forms of tourism inquiry (Figueroa-Domecq *et al*, 2015). One form of poststructuralist feminism, *postfeminism*, has confounded and split contemporary critics with its sometimes contradictory meanings and pluralistic outlook (Genz & Brabon 2015). Much like feminism, postfeminism has several working definitions and does not really have one universally accepted agenda or meaning (Harris, 1999). Postfeminism is a pluralistic epistemology dedicated to disrupting universal patterns of thought, thus aligning itself with poststructuralism and postmodernism (Gamble, 2001). The 'posting' does not connote a breaking away from feminism nor a coming of age or a new third wave of feminism. Instead postfeminism is a slight shift away from the search for a common solution to the subordination of women and a rejection of the assumption that there is a unified subjectivity, a universal sisterhood (Genz & Brabon, 2015). While acknowledging the positive

influence of the 'cultural turn' within feminist and gender studies of tourism, Aitchison (2005) suggests developing synergy between seemingly oppositional perspectives.

First emerging in cultural and media studies, postfeminism expresses an intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism (Brooks, 1997) moving away from these notions of 'good' feminist identity and 'bad' feminist identity (Hollows, 2000). Common examples of the application of postfeminism to popular culture exist with girl power, Spice Girls, raunch culture, Sex and the City, metrosexualism, and Chick Lit (Genz & Brabon, 2015). More specifically, the character Bridget Jones, from the novel Bridget Jones Diary is a postfeminist protagonist (Genz & Brabon, 2015). She is bold, witty, ambitious and sexy yet also shallow, neurotic, compulsive, insecure and searching for love (Genz & Brabon, 2015). In this way, Bridget Jones Diary discards the notion of a perfect feminist identity and embraces incoherence and contradiction as the space of fulfillment. Postfeminism has yet to be an acknowledged epistemological framework in the context of tourism in general nor in the exploration of women travelers and literary tourism specifically. Its application to the study of women's travel narratives of Paris is appropriate considering travel books are becoming increasingly popular travel media texts.

Method

Tourism scholars often forget to examine cultural artefacts, such as paintings, literary texts, plays, films and songs. Yet these artefacts are indeed reflections and creative processes through which scholars can engage local particularities and articulate the intricate role enacted by tourism in everyday social complexities (Osagie & Buzinde 2011). The travel books chosen were categorized as contemporary travel literature in that they were published after 1990 (Table 1). Contemporary travel literature differentiated from other travel literature about Paris published in the 20th century (e.g. Gertrude Stein's *Paris, France*, 1940). These texts have had a profound impact on how Paris is represented by women, however, their form as modernist memoirs differ from those published during/after the 'postmodern turn'. For this research, 16 English language travel books authored by women were selected. A comprehensive list was created from local bookstores and web searches of Amazon.ca and Indigo.ca as well as travel websites/blogs about Paris or France. While this may not be the total number of contemporary travel texts about Paris authored by women, it represents a sample that is indicative of the authorship, style of writing, content, form and locations experienced by the authors.

Phenomenology does not merely call for an account of things we see in our world but shifts the focus to our "seeing" of objects and the world and the meaning they hold (e.g. the experience of reading a book on travel writing) (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Hermeneutic philosophers such as Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1989) rethink interpretation as underpinning all forms of understanding and they see it as ontological, as fundamental to being human (Ablett & Dyer, 2009). The central idea behind hermeneutics is that the analyst of the text must seek to bring out the meanings of a text from the perspective of its author (Bryman, 2001). Hermeneutics emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text; a researcher conducts 'a reading' to discover meaning (Neuman, 2000). Thus, the method selected for analyzing travel texts in this study was latent content analysis. Latent content analysis is an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data and a search for themes and concepts (Berg, 2008). Concepts involve words grouped together into conceptual clusters that form around a particular theme or idea (Berg, 2008). Berg (2008) suggested that content analysis is a passport to listening to the words of the text, and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words.

Table 1: Contemporary Women's Travel Narratives of Paris

Two to 1. Contemporary 4. Officer & Traver Carractives of Fairs						
Title	Author	Date Published/	Type of Experience	Pgs		
		Publisher				
Lunch in Paris: A	Elizabeth	2010, Back Bay	Single, American	314		
Love Story with	Bard	Books, NY	Short trip to Paris, but never left			
Recipes						
We'll Always Have	Jennifer	2014, Sourcebooks,	Married Mother takes young	372		
Paris	Coburn	Naperville, Illinois	daughter on tour of Europe			
			American			

C'est La Vie	Suzie	2004, Penguin, NY	Widowed, American	263
	Gershman		New Life Experience	
True Pleasures: A	Lucinda	2005, Greystone	Single, Australian, New Life	226
Memoir of Women	Holdforth	Books, Vancouver,	Experience, Walking Paris	
in Paris		British Columbia	Discovering Strong Parisian	
			Women of the Past	
An Extraordinary	Stephanie	2012, Harper	Adolescent, American	180
Theory of Objects	LaCava	Perennial, NY	Year in Paris	
Paris: Times Eight	Deirdre Kelly	2009, D&M	Single then Married, Canadian,	304
	-	Publishers,	Eight visits to Paris for various	
		Vancouver, BC	purposes	
French Milk	Lucy Knisley	2007, Simon &	Single, New experience, American,	193
		Shuster, NY	Traveled with Mother	
Mastering the Art of	Ann Mah	2013, Penguin	Married, American	273
French Eating		Group, NY	Husband transferred employment	
Paris: A Love Story	Katie Marton	2012, Simon &	Widowed, American	199
J		Schuster, NY	Several trips to Paris with husband	
Breathless: An	Nancy K.	2013, Seal Press,	Single, American, New Life	238
American Girl in	Miller	Berkeley, California	Experience	
Paris				
Paris: Extraordinary	Adrienne	2014, Silver Pen	Married, American, frequently	222
Moments	Michel Sager	Press,	travels to Paris conducting	
		South Carolina	art/culture tours	
Paris Letters	Janice	2014, Sourcebooks	Single, Canadian	249
	MacLeod	Naperville, Illinois	Two-year trip to Europe – ends in	
			desire to stay in Paris (love and	
			new life experience)	
Paris, My Sweet	Amy Thomas	2012, Sourcebooks,	Single, American	280
		Illinois	New employment	
Almost French	Sarah	2002, Gotham	Single, Australian	304
	Turnbull	Books, NY	New life experience	
Seven Letters from	Samantha	2014, Sourcebooks	Separated, American, New life	251
Paris	Verant	Naperville, Illinois	experience, re-kindling romance	
French Toast	Harriet	1997, St. Martin's	Single then Married,	205
	Welty-	Press, NY	American, New Life Experience	
	Rochefort		•	

Results and Discussion

Women's travel narratives of Paris were analyzed through the process of latent content analysis and by applying an underlying methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology. Through the repeated reading and interpretation of the texts, themes emerged relating to transformation, freedom and escape, and emotional experiences of place.

Transformation

Frost (2010) characterized transformation in tourism as a life-changing experience or an epiphany. In a similar sense, travel experiences in Paris brought about life-changes both physical and emotional not only by the actions/behaviours of the authors but by how they perceived themselves. Transformation related, in some instances to motivation for travel. Some of the authors left for Paris as part of an escape, to take a break from a

hectic life too focused on building a career and thus needed a change of pace. Janice MacLeod (2014) stated, 'Before I arrived in Paris, I was living in California, working as a copywriter in an advertising agency. I was thirty-four, single, lonely, feeling unfulfilled by my job, and on the brink of burnout. Something had to change' (p.1). Little did MacLeod realize but her travels to Paris would change the direction of her life; meeting her future husband and choosing to live there permanently. Holdforth (2005) came to Paris because her life was in transition, she did not like the job she was doing anymore so she decided to take a personal tour 'contemplating a life change' (p.7). The significance of place played a role in how the travelers imposed endings and new beginnings in their life journey (White & White, 2004).

For others, transformation meant a physical move and a deeply emotional motivation for leaving. Gershman's (2004) husband passed away suddenly and all she could think about was that her life had to change somehow. Having traveled to Paris frequently as a couple, they had made plans to go again and stay longer. But with his passing, she was even more determined to continue their dream, even if it were alone. Similarly, Kati Marton (2012) first knew Paris as the daughter of political refugees from Hungary but she returned with her second husband Richard. As Richard passes away and Marton is overcome with grief in a restaurant ladies room, she decides she needs to leave, 'I need to get away. Paris seems the right place. . . (p.32).

Part of the theme of transformation for authors was feeling triumphant after 'surviving' challenges. Dealing with French language difficulties, bureaucracy, specific cultural traditions, and social expectations and behaviours were aspects of the authors' narratives that weaved through their journey through self-discovery and enlightenment. These narratives are a 'quest for self-discovery'. While many of the authors experienced a transformation, whether emotional or even physical (by moving to Paris), they were not necessarily 'looking' for it. It is not so much that these authors are looking for change but of spiritual development and self-actualization. The traveler gains an insight into their own capabilities and some might be characterized as a rite of passage or moving to another stage of adulthood (Laing & Frost, 2012). Unlike travel during the time of the Grand Tour, women's travel to Paris is less about a consciously acquired stage of life or adulthood, but a happenstance postfeminist journey into self-actualization.

Freedom and Escape

Rojek (1993) argued that motivation for women's travel in the 19th and 20th centuries has been as an escape from modern life. Other research has focused on women's motivation to travel for leisure such as discovering experience, escape, relax, social ties and self-esteem (Chiang and Jogaratnam, 2006). Many of the authors' initial travels to Paris were motivated by a desire for freedom (e.g. Miller, 2013; Welty-Rochefort, 1997) and escape (e.g. Turnbull, 2002; Verant, 2014; Holdforth, 2005). Miller's motivation for traveling to Paris was escape *and* freedom,

I went to Paris because I was enamored of the sexy nouvelle vogue movies, which, like the eighteenth century novels I had read in college, offered entry into scenarios of freedom barred to me as long as I lived at home. I wanted to be sophisticated and daring . . . I longed to escape. . . (p.vi).

Women want freedom in their travels and a space of their own to experience this freedom (Small, 2005). For Deirdre Kelly (2009), escape meant something different. Life for her growing up was not great, 'I hated having a single mom, hated being left alone at home while she was sleeping around, going out dancing, and staying out without calling home. I waited and read and worried' (p.5). These varying notions of freedom and escape fit within the conceptualizations of postfeminism. Despite already being independent and free as a child growing up, Kelly searched for the security, comfort and freedom that an escape to Paris gave her. Interestingly, almost all of the female writers in their desire for escape and freedom often felt lost and perhaps in a transition phase of a new identity (Desforges, 2000).

In fitting with these notions of postfeminism, women are not traveling to Paris to "find themselves" or seek an escape from the inhibiting structures of a masculinized world. On the contrary, they are escaping their already developed feminist identities that have suitably situated themselves in a 21st century western lifestyle. Instead, they are reinventing themselves in an urban space that accepts them for their femininity that embraces beauty in architecture, art, fashion, literature, food; a place that encapsulates the senses and emotions traditionally associated with femininity and found in Paris' everyday mundane experiences.

Emotional Experiences of Place

The use of our senses aids our understanding of place experience at individual and social levels, in different historical, cultural and technological contexts; 'the senses'— touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing (Rodaway, 1994). Adrienne Michel Sager (2014) had been to Paris numerous times giving history and art tours to visiting tour groups. Sager never tires of the simple little moments that combine together to make up Paris, much like the tiny brush strokes of Monet in his creation of a masterpiece.

Paris for these women was a sensuous and emotional place. Much of their narratives consisted of positive experiences in specific locations eloquently and colorfully described so that the reader could try to imagine the pleasure they had. Authors' emotional experiences were at times extremely joyous; feeling at one with the city they would describe at length specific moments of pure happiness (e.g. McLeod, 2014; Thomas, 2012; Turnbull, 2002) but at other times their experiences would be extremely frustrating (e.g. Kelly, 2009; Mah, 2013). Even though many of these women were motivated by escape, freedom and independence and also craved a change of life-direction, they still experienced personal conflict and guilt at not following through with the goals they, and perhaps others, expected of them. These were usually the feminist ideals of successful professional careers or the demands of a typical marriage or family life. Thomas, speaking about her friend AJ's wedding, 'At that very moment that AJ was diving into the dream life that we had fantasized about growing up together, my heart had led me further affield. My heart had taken me to Paris' (p.211). After experiencing some ups and downs, Holdforth (2005) also attended a friend's wedding and wrote,

Finally Paris began to make sense to me. A city that was formal and frivolous, ancient and ageless, intensely conservative and furiously modern. That night, with the joyful newlyweds and the floating air and the music and the silly conversations in four languages, I felt a tender connection with the city. I knew that I would keep coming back (p.19).

Conclusion

In this paper postfeminism provided a conceptual framework for the application of hermeneutics and latent content analysis to the study of women's travel narratives of Paris. 'Places do have the capacity to shape our feelings' (Conradson, 2005 p.105). The pleasure of such places derives from the consumption of goods and services that somehow stand for or signify that place (Urry, 2005). This can be specifically applied to the way in which women travelers embody Paris and communicate it through their narratives. Paris arouses extremely meaningful and emotional experiences for the women travel writers in this study. Women felt empowered when 'surviving' challenges or being reminded of the sensuous experiences all around them (Wilson *et al*, 2009). For the post-feminist women in these travel books, it became okay to have raw emotions and feel vulnerable; a contrast to typical feminist ideals.

There were over-arching themes present within these women's stories: transformation; freedom and escape; and emotional experiences of place. Subsequently, Paris is much more than a distinct destination with a unique cultural heritage. Much like other popular media texts, women's travel books 'star' a protagonist (the author) who is independent, ambitious, brave, adventurous, takes risks, and intelligent. In addition, these women also grip all that is feminine thus blurring the boundaries of traditional feminism. They are re-inventing themselves as women who confidently embrace the sensuous and emotional experiences of everyday life, not necessarily searching for love but perhaps finding it. For other women, the search for love is with the city itself.

Postfeminism provides the context with which to appropriately conceptualize women's travel narratives of Paris giving tourism researchers a new perspective on the behaviours of the female tourist and travel consumer. It would be beneficial for tourism researchers to tap into this relatively untouched resource; that being the travel book or travel memoir as media and tourism text. While tourism researchers and practitioners are exploring new media and technology in order to better understand the travel consumer, it could be worthwhile to revisit traditional media texts that act as emotional, detailed and memorable stories of place.

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