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## Seeking Authenticity: Re-conceptualizing Adventure Tourism

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Indiana University, Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Studies



# **Seeking Authenticity: Re-conceptualizing Adventure Tourism**

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#### **Abstract**

Adventure tourism is often defined in terms of the perceived risk in the recreation activity undertaken. Yet researchers have noted that there are limitations in current definitions; specifically, many definitions that are centered on the perception of risk lack acknowledgement of the role of traveling to unfamiliar places, or the touristic factors that are at play. As such, the purpose of this paper is to explore the application of authenticity as a guiding framework for adventure tourism by recognizing that both adventure and tourism are historically rooted in the notion of escaping modernity and finding ones' true self. Additionally, commodification of the setting and the experience are considered, with a particular focus on wilderness settings, are explored as they relate to a search for the authentic self. Conceptual and practical applications of a conceptualization of adventure within an authenticity framework are provided.

**Keywords:** authenticity, adventure tourism, adventure travel, wilderness experiences

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#### Introduction

"To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self"

(Kierkegaard as cited by Elsrud, 2001, p. 597)

This paper provides a review of current literature in regard to defining adventure tourism, and proposes a framework of authenticity as a means of reconceptualizing the existing discussion. There have been many calls to "reassess the value of conventional definitions" of adventure tourism (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003, p. 7) and there have been continued discussions of what does and does not constitute adventure tourism (Weber, 2001). Like many definitions within the tourism field, there is no one set definition of adventure tourism that all subscribe to, and some would even argue that there does not need to be one prescriptive definition. However, as Walle (1997) suggested, understanding may be gained from a move away from 'risk theory' as the center of adventure tourism. Thus, this paper suggests that the framework of authenticity could be applied to reposition the conceptualization and meaning of adventure tourism as it relates to the search for the authentic.

Take for example a comparison of the following scenarios: climbing at a local gym as compared to climbing Cotopaxi in Ecuador; fly fishing at a city pond as compared to fly fishing at a stream in Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia; backpacking across Western Europe with a group of friends as compared to solo backpacking across China; a guided kayaking trip as compared to a solo kayaking trip to the 30,000 islands in Georgian Bay, Ontario. Certainly there are different levels of adventure that can be perceived in each of these examples. As such, an application of a traditional approach to studying adventure recreation suggests an examination of the interaction of situational risk and personal competence (Ewert, 1989; Iso-Ahola, 1980), with a primary focus on the activity in question (e.g. climbing, fly fishing, backpacking, kayaking). While the recreation activity needs to be examined in order to understand how adventure is experienced in each of these examples, there are also other elements of adventure that warrant consideration, such as the role of traveling to unknown places and being in unusual settings that enable self-reflection in a time of modernity. Additionally, the commodification of the setting and experience are factors to be considered, which can be discerned as the level in which the experience or place is intentionally created or modified in order to construct a particular experience.

The perceived level of adventure for each of these scenarios may be related to an individual's competence in the activity, but also their familiarity with the places, and the whether the setting has been commodified and structured (i.e. type of environment, traveling in a group, utilizing a tour guide, etc.). It may seem obvious that traveling to unknown places adds a new element of adventure, yet the adventure tourism literature gives little acknowledgement to the ways an adventure experience is influenced by the tourism component (Kane & Tucker, 2004; Weber, 2001). In what ways does an adventure recreation experience change when the place the activity occurs is exotic, unfamiliar, or unknown?

Furthermore, the role of commodification of a setting or experience can lead to different perceptions of adventure. How does the perceived level of adventure change when the experience is a function of a packaged, insulated tour in a commodified setting as opposed to independent, unstructured activities in areas that have not been modified for consumption (e.g. Disney World versus a wilderness area)? It is not sufficient to simply say adventure tourism is an adventure recreation activity that takes place at a location one must travel to, but rather adventure tourism is a much more complex, synergistic idea where these components converge and influence the adventure experience.

Both adventure (Lynch & Moore, 2004; Mortlock, 2002; Nerlich, 1987) and tourism (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; MacCannell,



1976; Oakes, 2006; Olsen, 2002; Urry, 2002) experiences reflect the idea of escaping from modernity. The modern has been deemed the ordinary and the mundane (e.g. MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 2002), and adventure and tourism are the mechanisms through which individuals find what is considered the novel, the unknown, the 'Other', or the authentic. As such, the purpose of this paper is to explore the application of authenticity as a guiding framework for adventure tourism, and provide direction for future research in order to push the current discussion of adventure tourism closer to a clear conceptualization. To begin with a review of current adventure tourism definitions will be provided.

## Literature Review Adventure Tourism in the Literature

Many attempts have been made to define adventure tourism. Traditionally, it has been conceptualized around an integral component of an adventure recreation activity (Christiansen, 1990; Hall, 1989). Johnston (1992) reported that adventure tourism was travel for the specific purpose of pursuing adventurous recreation. Subsequently, other researchers began examining additional factors that defined adventure tourism. Grant (2001) recognized planning and preparation to be distinguishing factors for adventure tourism, and Millington, Locke, and Locke (2001) considered adventure tourism to occur when unusual, exotic, remote, or wilderness settings are places where adventure occurs. As such, often times no clear distinctions are made between nature-based tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, adventure travel, commercial expedition, outdoor recreation and outdoor education (Buckley, 2000; Fennell, 1999; Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2002).

Another subset of definitions of adventure tourism have risk as a main component (Fluker & Turner, 2000). Sung et al. (1996) proposed that adventure tourism is "a trip or travel with the specific purpose of activity participation to explore a new experience, often involving perceived risk or controlled danger associated with personal challenges,

in a natural environment or exotic outdoor setting" (Sung et al., 1996, p. 64). They conducted a qualitative analysis of past leisure and recreation theories in order to develop a new definition of adventure travel that would be able to act as a standard tool for measuring and segmenting the adventure travel market. They found that perceived risk, as it relates to the traditional adventure recreation definition, and the natural or exotic outdoor environment, were important factors to consider in a definition of adventure travel.

Similarly, others have taken a psychological approach and looked at sensation-seeking, riskseeking, optimal arousal, and/or novelty-seeking as factors related to an individual's motivation and propensity to participate in adventure tourism. Gilchrist, Povey, Dickinson, and Povey (1995) identified adventure tourists as high sensation seekers. Sensation seeking is "the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experiences" (Zuckerman, 1979, p. 10). High sensation seekers are defined as those who like adventurous, exciting, and novel vacations and express dislike for structured, enriching vacations. Stimulus avoiders were attracted to structure, preferring packaged (Lepp & Gibson, 2008). Studies have also shown that personalities can affect an individual's perception of adventure which has been suggested through their level of sensation-seeking (Zuckerman, 1979). Recently Schneider and Vogt (2012) used the 3M Model that explored personality and motivation in order to better understand desire for adventure travel of hard and soft tourists.

Another well-known definition for adventure tourism comes from Hall and Weiler (1992):

A broad spectrum of outdoor touristic activities, often commercialized and involving an interaction with the natural environment away from the participant's home range and containing elements of risks; in which the outcome is



influenced by the participant, setting, and management of the tourists' experience (p. 143).

They provided more specificity to the notion of tourism by considering the influence of being away from the home range and the management of the tourists' experience; yet, little explanation was provided in regard to what constitutes the tourist experience.

It has been reported by many authors that adventure tourism is still inadequately defined, which poses constraints for further exploration into the topic (Shepard & Evans, 2012; Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Weber, 2001). Specifically, Kane and Tucker (2004) addressed the concern that researchers attempting to define adventure tourism have largely been from the field of outdoor recreation, thus the perspective of a tourist experience has continually been underemphasized. Likewise, Weber (2001) asserted that, "adventure tourism is essentially viewed as an extension of adventure/outdoor recreation; [where] the contribution of the tourism aspect is generally ignored" (p. 361). Sung (2004) offered a more practical approach for tourism managers, by conceptualizing adventure tourism from a tourism lens, in which he identified four subgroups of adventure travelers: budget youngsters, soft moderates, upper high naturalists, and family vacationers. These four groups were created based on the travelers' demographic characteristics, socio-economic background, trip-related factors, and perceived importance of adventure travel components (e.g. type of adventure activity).

Moreover, it has been asserted that definitions from a risk-centered recreation model are inadequate, and can be particularly problematic because risk should not be the dominant feature and definitions should focus on other elements and characteristics that define adventure tourism (Bauman, 1996; Walle, 1997; Weber, 1997). Along this way, Swarbrooke et al. (2003) discussed the struggles of presenting a holistic view of adventure tourism that would consider intellectual, emotional or spiritual

aspects of an adventure tourism experience. In part this discussion comes on the heels of the expanding perceptions of risk and adventure to include both the physical and non-physical risk. Some researchers responded to this issue by utilizing a hard adventure to soft adventure continuum, examining different levels of challenge, uncertainty, setting, control, personal competency, e.g., to understand behavior (Lipscombe, 1995; Swarbrooke et al., 2003). Still, this approach is problematic because it does not account for the touristic component.

This paper acknowledges the need to move away from risk as the only defining factor and suggests that authenticity can provides such a framework. In order to better understand the connections between authenticity and adventure tourism, it is necessary to explore the connections between tourism and adventure, and the increasing commodification of experience in today's society.

#### **Adventure and Tourism**

A philosophical approach towards studying adventure and tourism would likely identify many similarities between the two concepts. In fact, the common underpinnings of the terminology could be a reason for the discordant understanding between adventure and tourism. Within the context of Western modern society, the meanings of these notions are linked to the ideas of exploration, uncertainty, and the unknown. In pre-modern societies, adventure and tourism carried negative connotations that can be noted from their linguistic origins; the word tourism is "derived from painful or laborious effort" (Tulloch, 1995, p. 1651) in which travel was motivated by instrumental need for survival, trade, or religious activity (Chambers, 2000). Similarly, the derivation of adventure was without the elements of excitement, enjoyment, intrinsic value, or glorification that are present in modern day conceptualizations of adventure (Nerlich, 1987). Likewise, etymologists associated adventure with chance, happenstance, and confluence of the unpredictable (Soupel, Cope, & Pettit, 2010).



The advent of modern tourism has been noted in the literature as the transition from travel out of necessity, to travel with purpose. Mass tourism represents the beginning of modern tourism and is imbued with social and economic implications that are centered on the idea that individuals participate in travel for the purpose of intrinsic gain (Chambers, 2000; Gmelch, 2004). Comparably, adventure in modern society has taken on the meaning of grandeur, risk, and novelty that can be planned, replacing the historic connotation of chance (Soupel et al., 2010).

The similarities between adventure and tourism can be seen with the interchangeability of the terms 'adventurers', 'travelers', and 'explorers,' and links both ideas to exploration, uncertainty, and the unknown (Walle, 1997; Weber, 2001). Adventure and tourism share a similar role in modern society, and in a sense, act as mechanisms to recover a sense of one's self in the modern world (Oakes, 2006). In this regard, adventure and tourism will be discussed through the framework of authenticity, drawing from their respective roles in seeking real, authentic experiences. Since authenticity has received a fair amount of attention in the tourism literature, theorizing and further conceptualization of authenticity will begin here.

#### **Tourism and Authenticity**

MacCannell (1976) has been a leading author in the theory of authenticity in tourism, having proposed one of the first theories of tourism that reflects the inherent need for people to seek the authentic. MacCannell argued that tourism is a form of resistance to modernity, and can be seen as an attempt to subvert alienation, which in contradiction succeeds in confirming it. When individuals seek authenticity by visiting other places and cultures, they reaffirm their alienation from the authentic or reality in their own lives (Oakes, 2006). In this way, tourism experiences are temporal and therefore only remain functional only as long as they do not become central to an individual's life plan (Cohen, 1979).

However, MacCannell's initial presentation of a theory of authenticity is problematic (Belhassen et al., 2008; Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010). A paradox arises in which tourists destroy what they seek, ultimately making a quest for the authentic unachievable (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). The tourists' quest is doomed for failure due to the commodification of tourism (Goffman, 1963, as cited in Kim & Jamal, 2007; Taylor, 2001). Commodification of tourism occurs when community aspects such as culture, heritage, nature, or identity are transformed into products that can be purchased and experienced by tourists. When tourism is commodified, the changes to these aspects bring into question the authenticity of the products being purchased.

Evolved views of authenticity have subsequently been proposed, such as the social constructivist perspective offered by Bruner (1994), Cohen (1988), and Hughes (1995), which viewed authenticity as emerging from and continuously constructed through social processes called "emergent authenticity" (Kim & Jamal, 2007, p. 183). Wang (1999) expanded on this conceptual foundation by identifying three types of authenticity in tourism including object authenticity and constructive authenticity, which had been identified by previous authors, and newly presented idea of existential authenticity. With an existential approach it is possible to consider the state of being in which one is true to one's 'real' self, including emotional experiences, or those experiences that are felt to be authentic, such as passion, thrill, love, excitement or boredom. This opens the door for considering authenticity in a subjective manner, which allows authenticity to be sensed and experienced, and has little to do with the authenticity of the toured objects (Belhassen et al., 2008; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999).

In a study of Renaissance festivalgoers who were found to be actively engaged and committed to serious participation in the production, Kim and Jamal (2007) studied experience through the applica-



tion of an existential approach. Their findings suggested that the engaged festivalgoers experienced "heightened bodily feelings, expressing, regaining, or reconstructing a sense of desired self, and developing authentic inter-subjective relationships" (p. 181). The existential approach is also referred to as activity-related authenticity because it includes "feelings that are activated by the liminal process of tourist behaviors" (Wang, 1999, p. 49). Turner's notion of liminality is thought of as the space where normal structures are no longer relevant and people experience anti-structure, giving them an opportunity to balance their identity (Graburn, 1983; Turner, 1969). Wang (1999) noted that "in such liminal experiences, people feel that they are themselves; much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than they are in everyday life" (p. 50). With this, the authentic self is sought by participating in touristic experiences (Kim & Jamal, 2007). It is this form of authenticity, existential authenticity, in which this paper structures a new conceptualization of adventure tourism around. Thus, this paper will move forward by first examining the traditional approaches to understanding adventure recreation, followed by consideration of authenticity, wilderness, and commodified settings.

#### **Adventure Recreation**

The celebration of adventure as an essential component of a meaningful life is illustrated by the quotes of Helen Keller (1880-1968) "Life is either a great adventure or nothing", Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), "We should come home from adventures, and perils, and discoveries every day with new experience and character", and Andre Gide (1869-1951), "It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves - in finding themselves". Adventure is closely linked to exploration and discovery of the hidden or unknown (Quinn, 1990; Weber, 2001). According to Quinn (1990), it is this human desire or drive to experience what is hidden and unknown that initiates adventure. Like tourism, adventure is the means for psychological

escape from modernism (Lynch & Moore, 2004; Mortlock, 2002). Further, the work of Nerlich (1987) suggests that the pursuit of adventure is a reflexive feature of modernity with escapism as a major component of adventure. For that reason, the notion of existential authenticity has similar applications as to adventure tourism, particularly in regard to the authentic self. Adventure activities have been shown to elicit particular authentic feelings such as thrill, fear, accomplishment, and excitement (Gold & Revill, 2000).

Current scholarship tends to identify the purposeful pursuit of adventure as adventure recreation. According to Ewert (1989), adventure recreation is defined as "a variety of self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction with the natural environment that contains elements of real or apparent danger in which the outcome, while uncertain, can be influenced by the participant and circumstance" (p. 6). Historically, it has been the emphasis on risk or danger that has helped to define the adventure component of adventure recreation. The word recreation signifies the deliberate nature of the adventure experience, in which an individual seeks certain outcomes, such as personal growth and discovery, spiritual enlightenment, enhanced relationships, or commune with the natural environment. Thus, traditional conceptualizations of the adventure recreation experience characterize it as a "search for competence with a valuation of risk and danger" (Ewert, 1989, p. 127), or as the interplay between physical and perceived competence (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989). Adventure recreation thus diverges from traditional outdoor recreation because it includes the "deliberate seeking of risk and uncertainty of outcome" (Ewert, 1989, p. 8).

Risk has been an important element to both conceptualizations of adventure recreation and adventure tourism. In terms of tourist motivation, it is commonly referred to as the Ulysses factor, which describes the force causing a person to do something risky or out of the ordinary (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981).



With declining risks in everyday life, it has been suggested that pursuits of tourism and adventure are being used as a way to balance this innate need (Cater, 2006). Risk is a multifaceted concept seen as "a stimulatory motive to participate in [an] activity" (Vester, 1987, p. 242). Individuals are more likely to accept the presence of risk in leisure, recreation, and tourism activities because it is a context in which people feel they can take more risks than usual and it is during these moments when individuals seek their true selves. This has been understood as a "risk society" (e.g. Giddens, 1991).

With the emergence of the subjective notion of adventure tourism as suggested by Swarbrooke et al. (2003), risk has been broadened in how it is understood within adventure tourism. Adventure tourism is associated with having both perceived and real risk, with the discussion of risk in adventure tourism revolving mainly around the perception of risk. While arguably an important component of the adventure experience, risk—real or perceived—is not the only element that individuals seek. As Voase (1995) stated, "A significant proportion of the tourists who seek adventure, with its uncertainty, can be expected to seek it primarily through novel rather than physically dangerous experiences" (p.45). This sentiment suggests that this need to seek the novel or unknown, in which perception of non-physical risk is inherently a subset of the unknown, is more aligned with the need to seek the authentic; thus moving the conceptualization of adventure tourism away from risk and towards authenticity.

#### **Authenticity and Commodification**

In addition to real or perceived risk within the activity or experience, it should be considered that individuals may choose tourism destination based on perceived authenticity. This section considers the role of wilderness in the quest for authentic experiences, as well the way in which adventure can be packaged as a tourism commodity and how that might influence the authenticity of the experience. These two ideas are, in a sense, cases in which au-

thenticity can be examined within the purview of adventure tourism and experience commodification.

#### Wilderness and the authentic self

An examination of authenticity in adventure tourism requires the role of wilderness to be addressed considering its own importance to the discussion. While adventure recreation experiences are not limited to wilderness environments, there is certainly a psychological and philosophical tie between adventure and the wilderness ideal. Wilderness, as currently understood in the Western world, is a cultural construct that privileges the designation and preservation of natural landscapes in a way that fundamentally separates them from human inhabitance and everyday existence. This conceptualization of wilderness grew out of reaction to the primarily utilitarian relationship with the natural environment that had dominated the settlement of the United States (Nash, 2001). The legal designation of Wilderness ensured that some wild land would remain within the United States, both for its own sake, and for the sake of those who wished to explore and adventure within it.

The energy behind the wilderness movement was perhaps as much about preserving the natural environment as it was about the desire for authentic experiences. One of the more famous accounts of this search is, of course, Henry David Thoreau's Walden (1854), which was followed by other attempts to find meaning and authenticity in the natural world. Much of this was in response to the rising industrialization of the United States at the time. leading to the formation of what Nash terms a Wilderness Cult by the late 1800's (2001). According to Nash, this was a time in American history where, in conjunction with the closing of the frontier, people began to hunger for authentic, primitive experiences, and an outdoor movement had begun. Wilderness camping, mountain climbing, scouting, and hunting were all essential elements of this movement, in which people sought for their opportunities to not only commune with nature, but also to increase



strength, virility, and masculinity. An essential part of this discourse, involved the opportunity to test oneself against the elements, and to conquer the environment in question (Ray, 2009). While not the focus of this paper, it is important to note that many contemporary authors have taken issue with the wilderness concept, primarily due to its racial, gendered and classist notions (Cosgrove, 1995; Ray, 2009). The importance of wilderness to the protected lands movement, as well as to the social and cultural fabric of life in the United States, however, should not be underestimated. This is especially true in the sense that wilderness provides the epitome of the authentic environment.

A third, and perhaps less controversial, element of the wilderness movement is its connection to spirituality and transcendence. Nash describes an urgent need for wilderness experience as the "antipode of civilization" (p. 157), a place to escape from materialism and to restore faith. Since then, many contemporary authors have written about the spiritual benefits of the wilderness experience (e.g. Hågvar, 1998; White & Hendee, 2000; Williams & Harvey, 2001), each with an emphasis on transcendence and escape from everyday life. In this way, the wilderness has often been considered a place of escape and renewal, utilized both by individuals and organized wilderness programs.

#### Commodification of experiences

Commodification, on the other hand, provides a differing account of authenticity in adventure tourism. This paper will not go into a full explanation of commodification in tourism since it is well represented in the literature, but will refer readers to Cohen (1988) and MacCannell (1976). There is also a modest amount of literature written on the commercial aspects of adventure recreation (e.g. Ewert, 1989, as cited in Lynch & Moore, 2004; Miles & Priest, 1990). This includes some discussion of how the commercial adventure experience is intentionally constructed in a way that feels authentic, but is actually ritualized and performed by those in charge of

the experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999).

Foley, Frew and McGillivray (2003) directly associated adventure with commercial activity in their study looking at the emergence of new forms of adventure activities. Regardless of the image of risk, many adventure recreation activities "are instead consumed in highly rationalized, managed and prepackaged environments" (p. 149). With an application of Weber's subjective view of adventure tourism, Kane and Tucker (2004) found that a group of American kayakers who traveled to the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand, did not consider themselves to be 'adventurers' because they had transferred the planning aspects and risk to their tour guide. This illustrated the idea of packaged tourism, or insulated tourism that is often found in adventure tourism as a niche market. "Adventure implies valued, authentic, uncertain experience, while package tourism implies a controlled insulated, ordinary experience" (Kane & Tucker, 2004, p. 231).

In another study on the same group of participants, Kane and Zink (2004) investigated the experience of packaged adventure tourism using Stebbins'(1982, 1999) constructs of serious leisure. They found that adventure tourism was either perceived to be packaged, safe tourism, or in contrast, as risky, uncertain adventure (Kane & Zink, 2004). With a packaged tour, the experience for a participant can be seen as a "relatively problem-free situation" in exchange for some personal freedoms (Schmidt, 1979, p. 446; as cited in Kane & Zink, 2004). However, adventure tourism in commodified settings may still offer opportunities for authentic experiences. Cater (2006) found in his study that visitors to adventure sites in New Zealand were not participating for the sake of risk; 94% of Cater's sample (N=100), perceived risk to be low or nonexistent at the adventure sites, but they did experience fear, which is considered to be an embodied authentic feeling (Cater, 2006; Gold & Revill, 2000). Fear is not only perceived to be an authentic feeling, but



it also a sensation that is increasingly diminished in our risk-averse society.

In this regard, it could be suggested that while wilderness could provide a setting with high prospects of sensing the authentic self, commodified settings have the potential to create genuine, authentic feelings through insulated activities. This suggests that previous definitions of adventure tourism that require a component an exotic natural environments, might limit understanding of adventure tourism. It is possible, though, with a treatment of authenticity that settings, commodified or wild, could be a setting for adventure tourism as long as the experience presents an opportunity for finding oneself through moments of existential authenticity. Additionally, when activities have been insulated and the risk has been removed, the feelings that result from the activity are still genuine and authentic.

It should also be noted that this idea could also be considered within the context of Cohen's (1972, 1973) notion that tourists move from the 'Center' to the 'Other', or from the familiar to the novel. In this regard, the 'Center' is the nexus of supreme, ultimate moral values, and an individual's spiritual 'Center' as to how they digest meaning where the 'Other' is exotic and unfamiliar and confirms or challenges the individual's spiritual 'Center'. Depending on how novel or familiar a situation is, the perception of adventure may be different. Thus, traveling to places familiar and close to home for adventure recreation, may not invoke the same level of adventure as traveling to unknown, faraway places though the activity and level of risk may stay the same.

## Creating a Framework of Authenticity for Adventure Tourism

From the above sections, it can be recognized that there is an inherent problem with some of the current definitions of adventure tourism that focus heavily on a risk-oriented perspective; risk may not be required for creating authentic experiences in adventure tourism. Instead, these experiences can be

described as moments that allow a person to escape from modernity, even if it is a contrived situation with low risk. There are a few authors who have provided an alternative perspective for defining adventure tourism.

Walle (1997) defined adventure as a modern concept, which could be either the traditional risktaking adventure or that which quests for insight. He suggests that, "By viewing adventure in terms of a quest of personal insight or enlightenment, a broader and more useful orientation becomes available" (Walle, 1997, p. 280). Walle challenged the prevalent risk theory of adventure and suggested that gaining insight is not just a side effect but an integral part of adventure seeking. This notion is seemingly aligned with the ideas of authenticity. It should, though, be noted that recent authors have identified flaws with Walle's conclusive statements (e.g. Weber, 2001), but the importance of his work is that it provides a new perspective for thinking about adventure tourism. Building on this discussion, Weber (2001) suggested that a subjective view is needed to look at the emic or individual perspectives of what constitutes adventure tourism.

Weber's study reflects a sociological approach to studying adventure tourists that focuses on the development of typologies. She considered the application of Leiper's (1979) *Tourism System*, which includes travel to and from the host community, as a part of the adventure tourism experience. It is with this, as well as Zurick's (1992) and Pearce's (1979) notion of tourists traveling to the periphery of tourist destination, that she is able to offer a new adventure tourist typology, the "overland tourist". The (noncommercial) overland tourists are those that travel to areas without the use of a tour operator or guide (Weber, 2001).

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the application of authenticity as a way to better understand and more clearly theorize adventure tourism. In this sense, this paper argues that the definition of adven-



ture tourism should focus on the role of existential authenticity created through not only the perception of risk in activity, but also by traveling to the unknown and the unfamiliar, which creates optimal opportunities for seeking one's true, authentic self. The studies discussed within the paper have all contributed to the literature, with a few studies in particular (e.g. Walle, 1997; Weber, 2001) that have moved the discourse of adventure tourism away from a risk-oriented perspective. However, there is still more work to be done in clarifying this concept in a way that both acknowledges the historical ties between adventure and tourism and also accounts for various elements that are at play in adventure tourism experiences.

There are conceptual and practical implications from this study. First, this paper reiterates the importance of considering the touristic component and commodification in the conceptualization of adventure tourism, which had been overlooked in many of the previous definitions in the literature. Second, this paper explicitly linked both adventure and tourism by their historical underpinning. They can both be seen as a quest for the authentic and escape from modernity, and have the potential to engender feelings of enlightenment and self-discovery. However, there is a need for future research to discuss how adventure tourism can be an ultimate quest for an individual's authentic self.

Third, wilderness settings have historically represented the setting in which quests for authentic adventure experiences have taken place. As Western culture has evolved and as our relationship with the natural world has been increasingly modified by technology and trappings of modern life, this outlet has grown in its importance. Concomitantly, adventure tourism in commodified settings may increasingly be viewed as a way to provide these authentic experiences perhaps not through the traditional notion of risk, but through the sensation of fear. Thus, even though contrived, these packaged experiences may still generate authentic feelings (e.g. fear, exhil-

aration, excitement) that are aligned with the adventure tourist's quest for the authentic. Still, further research is needed to investigate differences in adventure tourism experiences in wilderness and commodified settings; while both may create moments of existential authenticity, consideration of wilderness and its historical ties with the authentic self, add a further nuanced context that needs exploration.

Applications of this discussion may take form in practice through those tour operators and guides that are involved in creating adventure tourism trips. In keeping in mind the need for finding the authentic, tour guides may maximize opportunities for experiencing authentic feelings or utilize settings that provide opportunity to find the authentic self. However for the independent traveler, the acknowledgement of their quest for the authentic may provide direction in creating future adventure travel experiences.

It is also important to mention that the authors acknowledge the Western perspective taken in this paper, as it is necessary for situating a discussion on authenticity and to have a clear understanding of the distinct Westernized meanings of tourism and adventure (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). This paper attempted to expand the conversation that other researchers had recently begun in regards to rethinking adventure tourism (e.g. Walle, 1997; Weber, 2001). There is still much work to be done regarding defining and re-conceptualizing adventure tourism, and the application of an authenticity framework is merely the beginning.

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