PERSONAL EMOTIONAL JOURNEYS ASSOCIATED WITH ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES ON PACKAGED MOUNTAINEERING HOLIDAYS

1 INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable growth in recent years in the provision of and demand for packaged adventure holidays, including those based on mountaineering (Buckley, 2010; Pomfret, 2006). The increased interest in packaged mountaineering holidays has been encouraged by advances in equipment and technology, more mountaineering-based films and literature, and a proliferation of indoor climbing walls (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Hales, 2006). Tourists with relatively limited mountaineering experience can now attempt to scale impressively high peaks by booking a packaged mountaineering holiday. There is a body of knowledge about the experiences and personal emotional journeys of recreational adventurers, including mountaineers (Breivik, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Delle Fave, Bassi & Massimini, 2003; Ewert, 1985; Martin & Priest, 1986; Mitchell, 1983; Priest & Bunting, 1993). By contrast, there is only a limited amount of research that examines these experiences specifically for tourists who engage in adventure activities within packaged adventure holidays (Kane & Tucker, 2004; Kane & Zink, 2004; Fletcher, 2010). Yet, the growing importance of many types of packaged adventure holidays means that there is a need to gain improved understanding of tourist experiences during these holidays. Given this dearth of research, the paper examines the personal emotional journeys that tourists experience while participating in adventure activities during their packaged mountaineering holidays. A secondary aim is to investigate whether the adventure activities within these holidays provide experiences that they consider to be adventurous. Through investigating these themes, the paper extends understanding of the personal emotional journeys of mountaineers from an adventure recreation to an adventure tourism context.

Adventure tourism is a broad concept which for the purpose of this paper is defined as ‘guided commercial tours where the principal attraction is an outdoor activity that relies on features of the natural terrain, generally requires specialized sporting or similar equipment, and is exciting for tour clients’ (Buckley, 2006, p.1). Adventure activities are generally thought to involve such qualities as uncertain outcomes, risk, challenge, insight, anticipated rewards, novelty, excitement and stimulation, separation and escapism, discovery and exploration, focus and absorption, contrasting emotions, commitment, responsibility and play (Cater, 2006; Ewert, 1989; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret, 2003; Walle, 1997). Adventure tourism comprises a diverse array of land-, air-, and water-based activities, from clear cut adventurous pursuits, such as white-water rafting, scuba diving and mountain biking, to less obvious ones, such as charity challenges and wildlife watching (Pomfret, 2006). Mountaineering is unequivocally adventurous given that it is considered to be a risky sport (Jack & Ronan, 1998) and that it involves uncertain outcomes and elements of real or perceived danger (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989).

Emotions are often highly important during people's involvement in adventurous activities, described as 'biological, cognitive and behavioural' subjective responses to important life events which manifest themselves as feelings of contentment and discontentment (Parrott, 2004, p.6). Adventure is often all-consuming and challenging, and this means it can prompt diverse and often conflicting emotions, ranging from feelings of fear and risk to deep satisfaction and elation (Swarbrooke et al, 2003). As Sharpe (2005, p.29) notes, 'emotions accompany us on our journey through experience, acting as expressions of and lenses through which we understand what we encounter.' The full journey begins before the trip, through preparation and planning. It then involves the stay at the destination, and eventually it continues after the trip with recollection and reflection (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). This study, however, only examines the aspects of the emotional journey that occur while tourists are participating in adventure activities at the destination. The journeys can be rich and intense, although their intensity varies according to personal views about the adventure, the levels of perceived and real risk, the relevant past experiences of the participants, the emotions encountered during adventure involvement, and the overall effects on individuals having engaged in the adventure activity (Morgan, Moore & Mansell, 2005; Pomfret, 2006; Weber, 2001). The strength of the emotional journeys potentially may also be contingent on whether or not the adventure experiences are commodified within a packaged holiday experience. Adventure experiences increasingly are being commercialised, or 'packaged, promoted, marketed, bought and sold – essentially consumed as a product' – and packaged adventure holidays are one feature of this trend (Berger & Greenspan, 2008, p.92). These processes often involve attempts 'to deliver a planned, controlled version of an activity usually defined as dangerous and unpredictable' (Fletcher, 2010, p.6).

Varley (2006) suggests in his Adventure Commodification Continuum that some adventure tourists are 'post-adventurers' (p.188) who experience highly commodified but toned down adventures that are made 'safe' through the use of guides. Such tourists are grouped at the ‘shallow’ (p.188) end of the continuum because they are merely skimming the surface of adventure and enjoying a carefully controlled experience. More intense, non-commodifed versions of adventure exist at the opposite end of the continuum, which ‘original adventurers’ (Varley, 2006, p.188) engage in. It is problematic to commodify these adventures due to the necessity for self-sufficiency, and the involvement of real risk and uncertainty. Packaged mountaineering holidays are at the ‘shallow’ end of the scale as the adventure experiences are largely controlled by the guide and there is a general 'deferring of control to experts' (Beedie & Hudson, 2003, p.627). Organisations promoting packaged adventure holidays usually attempt to create 'the illusion of risk' (Holyfield, Jonas & Zajicek, 2004, p.175), at the same time as exerting considerable control over the tourists and applying risk-avoidance strategies (Cater, 2006; Ewert, 1989). As adventure is about uncertainty (Price, 1978) and impetuousness (Holyfield et al, 2004), the highly controlled and 'safe' nature of packaged adventure holidays, however, might reduce the intensity of the emotional journeys for tourists on these holidays. At the same time, it may be the case that these tourists enjoy their holidays as genuine adventures (Holyfield, 1999; Holyfield et al, 2004) and experience what they consider to be authentic emotional journeys.

Due to the important role that the emotional journey plays during adventure activity participation, this paper considers three key themes that relate to this journey. These are, first, perceptions of risk associated with adventure activity participation; second, the contrasting emotions encountered during activity involvement; and third, the "other world" feelings that adventure activity participants experience. These emerged as important themes in the reviewed literature, presented in section 2 below, and it also transpired that they were significant in the study's primary research findings, as discussed in section 4.

2 EXISTING UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONAL EMOTIONAL JOURNEYS EXPERIENCED DURING ADVENTURE ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

The next section of this paper provides a theoretical overview of adventurers and the emotional journeys that they experience during adventure activity participation.

2.1 Perceptions of risk experienced during adventure activity participation

While some argue that risk, either perceived or real, is an essential component of authentic adventure experiences (Ewert, 1985; Martin & Priest, 1986; Robinson, 1992), others view it as a secondary feature (Kane & Tucker, 2004; Varley, 2006; Walle, 1997). Many adventure recreation definitions highlight the importance of intentional risk-seeking (e.g. Ewert, 1989) and the interaction between risk and competence (Weber, 2001), suggesting that adventurers are likely to experience some degree of risk during adventure activity participation, whether they are 'post adventurers' (tourists) or 'original adventurers' (Varley, 2006, p.188). Some associate risk with the pursuit of positive outcomes (Ewert, 1989), whereas others view it as the potential to lose something of value, manifested as uncertainty (Martin & Priest, 1986). These differing perceptions are influenced by individuals’ personal assessment of risk, the degree of actual risk incurred, and personality characteristics (Martin & Priest, 1986; Weber, 2001). The more experienced and competent people are in any given adventure activity, the better equipped they are to gauge the level of real risk involved. They ‘utilize their perceived competence to manage the danger associated with the risk found in adventure experiences in order to maximize their opportunities for peak adventure experiences' (Morgan & Stevens, 2008, p.953-954). This viewpoint is supported by Demirhan’s (2005) research on mountaineers’ perceptions of risk in 19 outdoor recreation sports. His findings established a strong link between perceived levels of risk and experience, with more experienced mountaineers claiming to feel lower levels of risk.

Acknowledging that risk plays a lesser or greater role in adventure experiences, it is important to note that hazardous sports such as mountaineering possess inherent dangers; 'things can and *do* go wrong' (Holyfield et al, 2004; p.60), and the possibility of serious injury or death is very real. Hence, one of the key challenges for the adventure tourism industry is to ensure that tourists enjoy an adrenalin-fuelled experience while concurrently reducing the level of actual risk involved (Williams & Soutar, 2009). It is important that adventure tourism organisations ensure that potential risks are well managed and that their clients do not come to any harm. This is done through the implementation of legal, operational and physical risk management measures in order to safeguard their clients (Buckley, 2010). Failure to do this could be ‘inherently destructive to their [the adventure operator’s] business’ (Cater, 2006, p.322). Professional guides are employed to “manage” tourists throughout the duration of their adventure holiday, and they exert considerable influence over their clients’ experiences (Fletcher, 2010; Kane & Tucker, 2004). For instance, mountaineering guides choose for their clients 'where to walk, when to stop to admire the view, how the group are positioned on and off the rope, how to walk and conserve energy, how to move around obstacles and so forth' (Beedie, 2003, p.156).

In exploring how people’s perceptions of risk and their competence levels affect their expectations and experiences of adventure, Martin and Priest (1986) developed the Adventure Experience Paradigm (AEP). Adventurers are grouped into five distinct categories within the paradigm. Exploration and experimentation occur when risk levels are low, competence levels are high and activities are not always perceived as adventurous. Adventure, peak adventure and misadventure emerge when perceived levels of risk rise, and participants sometimes are insufficiently competent to deal with them. Peak adventure is the point at which the adventure experience is most valued, and it happens when risk is imperceptibly reduced, providing an opportunity for participants to test out their skills and to experience euphoric feelings (Priest & Baillie, 1987). Devastation and disaster occur when there is a significant mismatch between competence and risk levels which can result in injury or even death.

Since its inception, the AEP has been utilised as a theoretical framework in research. Morgan’s (2001) study, for example, tested the construct validity of the paradigm through an examination of white water rafting tourists and their perceptions of competence and risk. Key differences in perceptions of danger, anxiousness, fear and control were found between the exploration/experimentation, and the peak adventure categories of respondents. Another study (Morgan & Stevens, 2008) investigated the changes in perceptions of competence and risk throughout extended involvement in a 14 week introductory scuba diving course. Respondents demonstrated a substantial reduction in perceived risk and a notable increase in perceived competence from the start to the end of their course. These findings endorse the AEP’s key proposition that changes ‘in perceived risk and competence occur due to involvement in adventure recreation experiences’ (p.960).

The above discussion highlights the role that risk plays in adventure and it emphasises the influence of competence levels on participants’ perceptions and management of risk. This study’s first objective is to examine people’s perceptions of risk during packaged adventure activity participation. Risk, either perceived or real, potentially evokes strong emotional responses, such as heightened fear and excitement, and hence it may form part of the emotional journey for tourists on packaged adventure holidays.

2.2 Contrasting emotions experienced during adventure activity participation

Contrasting emotions are integral to adventure experiences and form a memorable part of participants' emotional journeys. Such emotional peaks and troughs result from the degree of uncertainty, potential risk and challenge incurred by adventure activity participation, eliciting waves of 'terror and elation, joy and despair, [and] anxiety and pleasure' (Swarbrooke et al, 2003, p.14). Most research concerning the felt emotions encountered during adventure focuses on positive emotions and, in particular, on the flow concept. Flow is defined as 'the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p.4). Flow has its origins in Maslow’s work on 'peak experience', characterised by 'moments of highest happiness and fulfilment' (1968, p.73). Peak experience is encountered when individuals are intrinsically motivated to participate in autotelic, inherently rewarding activities. Perceptions of risk and competence strongly influence the flow experience (Martin & Priest, 1986). Hence, if participants view the risks associated with a particular adventure activity positively and feel sufficiently competent to deal with them, then they are more likely to experience flow (Priest & Bunting, 1993).

One key feature of flow is the 'challenge-skills' dimension, which is considered to be 'the golden rule of flow' (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.16). Flow is only experienced when the participant's perceived level of competence is appropriately matched to the level of challenge demanded by the activity. If this fine balance is achieved then 'both challenges and skills exceed the level that is typical for the day to day experiences of the individual' (Ellis, Voelkl & Morris, 1994, p.338), adventure participants successfully complete the task in hand, and they encounter a state of flow (Boniface, 2000). Various other flow dimensions emanate from the challenges incurred through adventure participation. Participants become completely immersed in the activity; they feel in harmony with their environment, and they experience a state of deep concentration and a ‘sense of control’ (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.26). They lose any feelings of self-consciousness and the passage of time becomes distorted. Onlookers often cannot easily grasp the reasons for adventure participation, given that most activities are perceived as potentially dangerous, but flow offers a compelling reason why the entire experience of adventure is so greatly appreciated by participants.

The flow concept has been the focal point of investigation for a range of research on participants of adventurous and non-adventurous sporting activities (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Yet, problematically, some studies ‘have failed to significantly predict the majority of flow indicators with the literal match of challenge and skill’ (Jones, Hollenhorst & Perna, 2003, p.19). This could be due to the indeterminate nature of flow, which makes it difficult to test (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Despite the difficulties in measuring flow, researchers have attempted to authenticate its significance to fulfilling adventure experiences. For example, Csikszentmihalyi’s early work (1975) established the importance of flow to the quality of the rock climbing experience. Rock climbing was chosen as participation necessitates intense concentration, physical danger, immediate feedback, competence and calculated risks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Later research (Delle Fave et al, 2003) found that the flow experiences encountered by high-altitude climbers were most prevalent during climbing and camp activities and they resulted from a combination of their climbing competencies and the expedition challenges that they faced. It is interesting to note that playfulness encourages a state of flow. In their study of white water rafting participants, Wu and Liang (2011) found that the most powerful influence on flow was playfulness; as such, flow can be experienced when participants are highly playful. As both flow and the AEP (see section 2.1) attempt to explain optimal experiences (Massimini, Csikszentmihalyi & Carli, 1987), they have been examined together. Boniface’s (2000) work on ‘the positive experience phenomena’ (p.55) explored the palpable link between the two concepts, and it found that the AEP’s condition of peak adventure facilitates flow and personal development opportunities. Another study (Jones et al (2003) showed similarities between the AEP and the four channel flow model (Massimini & Carli, 1986) - an adaptation of the original flow concept - in predicting optimal experiences in a white water kayaking setting.

Although the above review primarily focuses on the positive feelings associated with adventure, this study's findings also examine negative emotional states. The study’s second objective therefore analyses the contrasting emotions that tourists experience, throughout their emotional journey during their packaged adventure activities.

2.3 “Other world” feelings encountered during adventure activity participation

Adventurers are known to experience “other world” feelings during activity participation, due to adventure’s core elements of challenge, separation and escapism, and focus and absorption (Cater, 2006; Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Varley, 2006). Such elements are reflected in the flow experience and its associated dimensions, identified briefly in section 2.2. The ‘action-awareness merging’ dimension (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.19) involves complete absorption in the adventure activity. It is experienced once participants are able competently to meet the challenges posed by the adventure activity, and it is closely related to another measure of flow, ‘concentration on the task in hand’ (p.20). Adventure participants concentrate so intensely on the activity itself that any thoughts or concerns that are not directly relevant to the task are blocked out and they experience the fusion of action and awareness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When concentration levels are high they also enjoy peak adventure (Martin & Priest, 1986) through ‘intensely concentrating and experiencing a state of euphoria' (Jones et al, 2003, p.21). The ‘transformation of time’ (p.28) dimension radically changes participants’ perceptions of time during their complete involvement in the adventure activity. They experience a mismatch between perceived time and real time so that hours passing by seem like minutes. In everyday life ‘time dependence is a burden that can prevent us from becoming truly involved in what we are doing’ (p.28).

Although all types of tourism experience take place away from people’s usual environment and everyday routine, the intensive nature of adventure tourism sets it apart from other tourism forms. Adventure experiences are enhanced when participants figuratively enter another world which is distinctly different from the norm:

‘Exotic surroundings, new activities or unconventional social norms give an opportunity to enter into a parallel universe, where priorities can be different. Adventure is something apart. The ordinary world and everyday concerns are left behind’ (Swarbrooke et al, 2003, p.13).

This temporary transition from the ordinary to the extraordinary “other world”, to enjoy optimal experiences and associated emotions during adventure activity participation, is facilitated by the natural environment. According to Vespestad and Lindberg (2011), 'nature can represent the backdrop of both magic and spiritual encounters' (p.564), and as such it can profoundly impact on the emotions and experiences of adventure participants. Various studies have investigated this theme, although, as Curtin (2009) points out in her study of wildlife tourists, 'their embodied experience and subsequent emotions appeared to remain on the edge of speech' (p.458), alluding to difficulties in researching the experiences associated with this form of tourism. Arnould and Price's (1993) study examined the experiences encountered by white water rafting participants and their guides. The key findings were 'the emergent feeling of rejuvenation associated with a sense of communion with nature' (p.33), and the role of the guide in encouraging opportunities for participants to experience the intense emotions associated with this feeling, were key findings. Fredrickson and Anderson's (1999) research explored women’s experiences of physically challenging outdoor recreation trips in wilderness areas and how these natural settings could inspire them spiritually. A range of social and biophysical factors encouraged their respondents to enjoy a meaningful and spiritual wilderness experience, including being in an all-women’s group, receiving emotional support and encouragement from other group members, and feeling relaxed in a non-competitive atmosphere. Williams and Harvey’s (2001) work explored people’s sublime experiences arising from living, working or visiting diverse forest environments in south-eastern Australia. Their results established two types of optimal experience. The first, identified as diminutive experiences (Gallagher, 1993), is characterised by feeling insignificant and humble while experiencing ‘fascination with compelling elements of the environment: tall trees, vast views, high waterfalls, extreme of heat or cold’ (p. 255). The second, akin to flow-like experiences yet not associated with activity participation, induces a sense of relaxation and occurs in familiar, open environments.

This review reflects the study’s third objective, which examines the “other world” feelings that tourists experience during packaged adventure activity participation. In particular, integral elements of this extraordinary experience are a combination of the previously mentioned three key flow dimensions and the natural setting.

3 METHODOLOGY

This part of the paper introduces the research approach used to collect the fieldwork data. This data concerns the personal emotional journeys that tourists experience while participating in adventure activities during their packaged mountaineering holidays and whether the adventure activities within these holidays provide experiences that they consider to be adventurous. It also discusses how the fieldwork data were analysed and it provides an overview of the sample of respondents.

3.1 The research approach

A qualitative paradigm was used in a detailed examination of the research topic (Robson, 2002), and it generated rich material which could be analysed reflectively, allowing for meanings to be unpicked (Jennings, 2001; Tesch, 1990). Fieldwork data were collected by carrying out interviews with tourists during their summer packaged mountaineering holidays in the Chamonix region of France. This destination was selected because unlimited mountaineering activities are available here across the entire spectrum of mountaineering abilities and there are many companies offering packaged mountaineering holidays. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to develop insights into the emotional journeys of these tourists while they were engaged in adventure activities during their holidays.

The sample of respondents were drawn from three organisations which offer packaged mountaineering holidays based on skills development and summit attempts of alpine mountain peaks. These were the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) - the UK’s national mountaineering organisation - Jagged Globe, and Icicle Mountaineering. The BMC's primary concern is 'to protect the freedoms and promote the interests' of mountaineers (BMC, 2011), and the provision of packaged mountaineering holidays is just one element of its operations. By contrast, Jagged Globe and Icicle Mountaineering are commercial companies which focus solely on the provision of packaged adventure holidays. All three organisations consented to their involvement in the study and they agreed that the researcher could make contact with potential respondents.

A total of thirty-eight in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with tourists who were holidaying with one of the three mountaineering organisations. Interviews lasted on average for forty five minutes. The interviews focused on respondents’ experiences and emotional journeys while involved in adventure activities during their packaged mountaineering holidays. The interviews were carried out either during or immediately at the end of the respondents' holidays and before they left the Chamonix region and returned home. They took place in a locally based café or a restaurant once respondents had returned to Chamonix centre after a day in the mountains. Conducting the interviews on-site encouraged the respondents to give realistic and accurate accounts of the emotional journeys encountered during their holiday as the memories of their mountaineering activity experiences and the associated felt emotions were still fresh in their minds. Using this approach meant it was possible to address the transitory, gradually unfolding and complex nature of the interactions between outdoor adventure activity participants and the natural environment (McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998).

Other studies, based on experiences encountered by mountaineers, have adopted similar approaches to data collection. One such investigation (Faullant, Matzler & Mooradian, 2011) examined the two key emotions of fear and joy, which are frequently evoked during mountaineering experiences, and how these are linked to particular personality characteristics and to satisfaction formation. Questionnaires were administered to mountaineers at a mountain hut during their descent of a major mountain peak so that they could accurately recollect their experiences and the challenges that they encountered just a short time after summiting. Other research has examined the experiences of mountaineers concurrent with their mountaineering activities. This approach potentially provides a more accurate recollection of experiences than collecting data after participation in the mountaineering activity. For instance, one study (Delle Fave, Bassi & Massimini, 2003) focused on six climbers and used the experience sampling method (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson & Prescott, 1977) to analyse risk perceptions during high altitude rock climbing and also the quality of the experience. This method involves the completion of ‘on-line repeated self-reports’ (Delle Fave et al, 2003, p.82) in questionnaire format. Climbers were provided with an electronic pager which signalled to them each time they were required to complete a questionnaire. If they were climbing when they received the signal, they had to find a safe place before responding to the questionnaire.

In the current study, respondents were encouraged to provide rich, detailed narratives of their experiences through the researcher asking questions and pursuing relevant descriptions using further questioning. They were prompted to talk candidly about how they felt during participation in the mountaineering adventure activities which formed their holiday. The relaxed and informal surroundings in which the interviews took place encouraged respondents to discuss their experiences freely. The interview questions were designed to ascertain how the respondents’ emotional journeys unfolded over the duration of their holiday and to explore any significant emotionally-charged low and high points that they encountered. The design of the interview questions was broadly informed by previous studies about the experiences and emotional journeys of adventure activity participants. This was considered to be a rational approach given the dearth in research about packaged adventure tourists. However, the interviewer did not adhere to a rigid set of interview questions, but rather explored respondents’ adventure activity experiences generally through encouraging them to provide anecdotes and reflections about their experiences. The author started off by asking respondents about their holiday up until that point, their experiences of the adventure activities that they had participated in, the mountaineering skills that they felt they had developed, and their overall level of enjoyment. As each interview progressed, questions were asked which were designed to elicit respondents’ emotional responses to the adventure activities that they had participated in. More probing questions were asked about key aspects of the adventure activities that they had most enjoyed, and those that they had least enjoyed, and their positive and negative feelings towards these experiences. Certain questions were posed to encourage narratives about respondents’ feelings towards some of the core elements associated with participation in adventure activities, such as risk, challenge, escapism, focus and absorption, separation and escapism, commitment, uncertain outcomes and perceptiveness (Cater, 2006; Ewert, 1989; Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Walle, 1997). Some respondents were also asked to provide accounts of the experiences they had during previous mountaineering holidays.

3.2 Data analysis

Once all the interviews had been carried out, the ‘framework’ approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p.173) to analysing qualitative data was used to derive the most significant themes from the interview transcripts and to build up a full understanding of the respondents’ emotional journeys. This method involves ‘a systematic process of sifting, charting and sorting material according to key issues and themes’ (p.177), and it is based on a number of fundamental principles, which reflect the overall ethos adopted by this current study. For instance, the analysis here is based on the original descriptions and observations of respondents, it was a dynamic process which was subject to change, and there was a full examination of the interview findings. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the digital recordings. This was followed by the familiarisation phase in which the author became immersed in the data and repeatedly read through the transcripts to gain an overview of key recurrent themes and issues. During the next stage, the author developed a thematic framework in which ideas about the main themes were further refined. Many of the emerging themes were associated with those in previous research, as introduced in section 2 of this paper. The themes primarily focused on the personal emotional journeys that respondents experienced during their mountaineering activity participation. The indexing stage involved annotating the data in relation to the thematic framework. Following this, the charting stage entailed taking the relevant data out from its original source and reorganising it into its relevant ‘thematic reference’ (p.182), allowing links to be made across the entire sample of respondents. The final stage involved mapping and interpreting the data to establish the significance of different themes, and to make comparisons between respondents’ descriptions. In sum, this methodical approach to data analysis helped the author to unravel key themes and to identify illustrative direct quotes from the mass of interview data collected.

3.3 Profile of respondents

The majority of tourists who take part in packaged mountaineering holidays in the Chamonix region of the Alps are male (Icicle Mountaineering, 2011), and most of the respondents in this study were also male (65%). Most (85%) were aged between 18 and 45 years. 28% were aged 18–25 years old, 27% were aged 26–35 years old and 30% were aged between 36 and 45 years old. 12.5% of respondents were aged 46–55 years old and 2.5% were aged between 56 and 65 years old. 65% of respondents were male and 35% were female. The majority of respondents (45%) were doing an introductory level mountaineering holiday. The skew towards younger age groups and novice alpine mountaineers is partly due to the fact that 37% of respondents were on the BMC-run holidays. These holidays are heavily subsidised, and targeted towards young, novice alpine mountaineers, hence the participants mostly are university students and recent graduates. Many packaged mountaineering holidays focus on skills development and summiting significant mountain peaks, and this should lead to clients becoming more accomplished and self-reliant in the mountains. It is suggested, therefore, that the higher proportion of younger age groups in this study is in some measure due to the relative lack of alpine mountaineering experience of some respondents. The researcher was invited to attend the Icicle Mountaineering welcome meeting for tourists at the start of their holiday, enabling her to explain the study and encourage potential respondents to be interviewed. Consequently, a relatively high percentage of respondents (45%) were holidaying with this organisation. The researcher set up more informal meetings with potential respondents who were on Jagged Globe and BMC trips.

4.0 PACKAGED ADVENTURE TOURISTS’ EMOTIONAL JOURNEYS

Analysing the interview data led to the identification of three key themes, which also broadly mirror those in the literature review. The interview findings, however, focus specifically on the emotional journeys of packaged adventure tourists, whereas the review of past research primarily concerned the experiences of recreational adventurers. The themes that materialised from the interview data are, first, respondents' perceptions of risk associated with their participation in the mountaineering activities; second, the different, contrasting emotions that these tourists experienced; and, third, the "other world" feelings that they encountered.

4.1 Perceptions of risk experienced during packaged adventure activity participation

The first theme examines respondents’ risk perceptions during mountaineering activity participation. As highlighted in section 2.1, there is some collective agreement that risk plays either a primary or a secondary role in adventure activity participation and that various factors influence people’s perception of risk. The interview findings show that, while a majority of respondents did not perceive any degree of risk during their mountaineering activity participation, a minority recounted times when occasionally they felt at risk. The perceived absence of risk experienced by many was evident in descriptions of their journeys, which alluded to the importance of the guide in “guarding” them from potential perils and reducing possible risks throughout their holiday. Two examples illustrate these feelings.

‘I wouldn't have done the course had I thought I would be in any real danger. There was no way I would have gone by myself but it's nice to challenge yourself in an almost safe environment with a guide on hand to make all the important decisions.’

'The course allows for more challenges in a safer environment because you've always got the guide there with you. It's a totally different experience with a guide. On your own, you need more self-reliance so you have to think for yourself a lot more.'

These comments illustrate the absence of perceived risk due to the constant presence of guides. Other research on tourists taking different types of packaged adventure holiday concurs with this finding. Kane and Tucker (2004) concluded that white water kayakers’ experiences were ‘controlled by the tour guides’ (p.226), and the kayakers assumed that the guides would guarantee their safety. Fletcher’s (2010) study similarly highlights the important role that guides play in managing adventure tourists’ experiences. White water rafters explained that they felt very safe while rafting, yet if unexpected problems occurred they lacked initiative and depended entirely on their guides. Although the above descriptions suggest a lack of perceived risk, the respondents emphasised the challenging nature of their mountaineering activity experiences. As challenge is a core element of adventure (Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Varley, 2006), it is suggested that these respondents’ journeys were experienced as genuine adventures. The second respondent’s comments highlight differences between guided packaged and non-guided “independent” mountaineering activities, yet he emphasised the importance of challenge to his experiences. This reflects the viewpoint of others who argue that commodified adventure participants both perceive and experience their holidays as authentic adventures (Holyfield, 1999; Holyfield et al, 2004).

Despite the commodified, painstakingly controlled nature of packaged mountaineering holidays, a small number of respondents perceived a degree of risk while involved in mountaineering activities. One relatively experienced mountaineer commented that he felt distressed while attempting to summit a major mountain peak. Seemingly, the bad weather combined with the whole experience of ascending and descending the mountain triggered the respondent's petrified emotional state. He intimated that the guide magnified these feelings of fear because of the way he interacted with, and instructed, his clients.

‘It was a long and exposed climb, and the weather was stormy. We were up and ready at 4am, and when we set off no-one else was following. We carried on and we could see the storm coming in. We had to just go, and the guide really pushed us. ... Once we were at the top, the focus was on getting down. I was quite scared at the time, but after I got down I was “made up” with the excitement of it all. I remember falling in the snow up to my waist and I couldn't get back up. The guide was screaming at us. It was good but very frightening, and it was far more involved than just plodding up Mont Blanc.’

This respondent’s account illustrates the intense feelings of fear and risk he felt throughout the climb, yet he intimated that enduring these was worth it for the overwhelmingly positive benefits that ultimately rewarded him. Relating this respondent's experience to the AEP (Martin & Priest, 1986), as identified in section 2.1, it is suggested that potentially he falls into the misadventure category, in which there is a mismatch between perceived risk and competence. The level of perceived risk exceeds the participant’s level of competence, resulting in such felt negative emotions as fear and anxiety. Another respondent recounted a likely perilous incident during a significant rock and ice scramble, highlighting a further example of possible misadventure.

‘Doing Arête des Cosmiques was quite scary. When coming downhill, another girl went down first with no anti-plates on her crampons, even though she was supposed to have them on. She took another girl down when she slipped, and I had to do an ice axe arrest and the guide put the rope around the rock. Being able to do this in a real life situation made me feel more confident. It could have been dangerous as, if no one saved the fall, then, we would have gone off the ridge. You really need to trust others when you are roped up.’

Although the two last descriptions accentuate the significance of perceived risk and danger during mountaineering activity participation, it is not known whether the respondents were facing a truly hazardous situation. It is recognised that mountainous environments can be extremely dangerous places. For that reason, mountaineering operators and their guides cannot possibly guarantee 100% safety for their clients. Further, they cannot fully control the extent to which their clients perceive risk as this is influenced by many factors (Martin & Priest, 1986; Weber, 2001), as mentioned in section 2.1. This is evident in the reflections of one respondent who experienced high levels of perceived risk while trekking along some narrow mountain paths. She explained that:

'I had a big backpack on while walking down these foot wide paths with a drop off, and I found that although it wasn't technically challenging, that's where the adrenalin maybe flowed the most for me because I got the feeling of "if you slip, you're going to die".'

These comments highlight the potential risks - real or perceived - of being in a mountainous environment where steep drops are part of the terrain. It was not the respondent's lack of technical ability that led to such feelings, but rather the exposure she encountered from simply being in the mountains. In all likelihood, the risk of her falling off the mountain would be minimal, yet her emotions were dominated by fear.

Respondents' descriptions illustrate mixed experiences of perceived and actual risk during their mountaineering activity participation, yet most seemed to depend considerably on their guides to manage any potential risks. For a majority of respondents, challenge formed a more significant part of their experiences than risk. Conversely, a minority of respondents perceived some degree of risk while participating in certain mountaineering activities.

4.2 Contrasting emotions experienced during mountaineering activity participation

The interviews indicate that respondents’ experiences were full of intense, emotional peaks and troughs during their mountaineering activity participation. Their accounts reveal a multifarious mix of emotions, ranging from euphoria to abject misery, and they frequently referred to feeling downbeat, particularly while engaged in demanding mountaineering activities. Such sentiments are symptomatic of the amount of effort and energy that respondents expended in attempting to achieve their self-set goals. While descriptions about their mountaineering experiences were often punctuated with negative sentiments, a majority also alluded to moments of elation and deep satisfaction. Their stories suggest that they swung between negative and positive feelings, ultimately encountering flow or a flow-like state. Once they had reached their goal, any negative feelings were pushed to the back of their minds to make space for enjoying their actual achievements. For instance, one respondent talked about feeling anxious at the start of the climb up Mont Blanc, enduring the trudge up the mountain, being apprehensive about the potential pain involved, and feeling weary at the summit. Yet, he described how ‘when I got to the top, I felt pretty cold but at the same time amazingly elevated. Yeah, thank god we'd done it.’ Such comments suggest that the hard work involved in climbing the mountain was worth it for the ultimate, intrinsic “reward” of feeling exhilarated. The next example is a further illustration of this finding. This respondent talked candidly about his successful summit of Mont Blanc and he confessed that he had done only minimal training to prepare for the holiday and the summit attempt. His description exudes self-doubt, yet on reaching the peak of the mountain his change of mood is palpable. The emotional peaks that this respondent encountered seemingly compensated for the prolonged periods when the challenges involved in climbing mountains resulted in emotional low points.

'I've learnt things about myself; things I didn't think I was capable of. I've always struggled getting to the top of mountains and back down again. I didn't think I'd be able to do Mont Blanc. There were all these different points when I thought "I'm really not convinced I'm going to be able to do this" and there are so many difficult aspects and difficult bits of terrain to cross. You just do it one step at a time, and certainly on the ascent morning it's just like tiny pigeon steps, one foot in front of another, and you just keep going and ignore the pain. We got to the top and we were completely exhausted and we still had 10km to get back down again. So we really struggled with the down climb and getting to the bottom again. The top was awesome! It was absolutely exhilarating and we'd been building up to it for two and a half years. To finally make it to the peak is just fantastic. It's one of those things we both wanted to do. There were so many times that I could've just given up and stopped. Yeah, to get to the top was fantastic, phoning people and texting, then getting messages back, made me feel "we've really done it." Then there's the realisation that you've got to get down.'

These moments of exhilaration and deep satisfaction suggest that flow or flow-like feelings were the ultimate reward of respondents’ emotional journeys. As highlighted in section 2.2, a key dimension encouraging flow is a perceived positive challenge to skill balance (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The above descriptions are evidence of this positive balance, and they suggest that these respondents aspired to improve their skills by rising to the challenges that they faced and by dealing with any perceived or real risks. Although the challenges were thought to be significant, these respondents overcame these. They were ambitious about what they wanted to achieve from their holiday, and they were not willing to give up their aspirations easily.

Many other accounts provide further evidence of respondents putting their fears aside and tackling the challenges associated with adventure activity participation. They talked about pushing themselves beyond their "comfort zone" and about the benefits gained by doing this:

'It was a challenge on the ridge climb as there were often sheer drops on either side and I have a fear of heights! Part of the challenge was to see if I could just deal with it. I had to push myself mentally to do things out of my comfort zone, but I did it and I felt on a real high afterwards.'

A number of respondents expressed concern about being outside their comfort zone, yet when faced with situations which took them beyond their limits, they rose to the challenge. For instance, one respondent noted that 'there's only been a couple of times when it's been outside my comfort zone, and then I think "well, it isn't that much further out" and I get on and do it.' Such descriptions intimate that these respondents enjoyed the opportunity to experience the 'thrill and excitement' associated with commodified adventure participation, and to '*play with* their fears' (Cater, 2006, p.321). They pushed themselves, safe in the knowledge that the guide had assessed their ability, assumed responsibility for their actions, and considered them sufficiently competent to cope with the mountaineering activities that they were doing.

Several of the respondents seemingly encountered flow or flow-like feelings during their mountaineering activity participation, although often these were described as fleeting moments of pleasure. Yet, it is suggested that these short euphoric moments were remembered for some time after, as flow is ‘a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p.3). A majority of respondents seemed to appreciate their mountaineering achievements more post-completion and after a period of reflection. The next description captures the respondent's emotional turmoil during mountain climbing and the subsequent feelings of deep satisfaction on finishing the climb.

'I didn't enjoy reaching the summit; it was only the day after when I looked back. It was just a horrible slog and you're cold and trying to keep warm, and the way the altitude affects the brain, you don't seem to think properly. Simple tasks like sorting out your gloves and drinking water become a huge task to just get your head around. Once I reached the top, I felt great but I still had to get down. It was only later that I felt a deep satisfaction which I find hard to achieve any other way. It's a real sense that you've achieved something tangible.'

The above descriptions intimate that respondents experienced states of deep contentment either during the challenging mountaineering activities, or post-completion after a period of reflection. However, it is interesting to note that a small number of respondents expressed feelings of satisfaction while engaged in repetitive, less challenging activities, such as walking along a well-defined, snow free mountain path. The next description highlights this point.

‘On Gran Paradiso there were long spells of uphill plodding and, although it was quite tiring, I felt really nice and happy because I was thinking about my family and things. I got this real feeling of “I couldn’t be happier”. That’s the addiction of mountaineering and that’s why I come back every year.’

By their very nature, outdoor adventures involve routine and sometimes tedious activities interspersed with moments of exciting adrenalin-fuelled action. Although adventure is typically associated with feelings of excitement, fear and danger, participation in less challenging activities also has the potential to evoke feelings of deep satisfaction. For instance, white water kayakers perceived their packaged adventure trip 'as a spectrum of experiences from routine to extreme' (Kane & Tucker, 2004, p.226), and they found that both the less demanding and the more extreme elements of their holiday were equally rewarding.

The above discussion illustrates the emotional peaks and troughs that respondents experienced throughout their journeys during mountaineering activity participation. Respondents enjoyed flow or a flow-like state, either fleetingly while engaged in mountaineering activities, or after finishing and spending time reflecting upon their experiences. These highly positive states emanated from respondents perceiving a positive challenge to skill balance, challenging themselves and exceeding their “comfort zone”.

4.3 "Other world" feelings encountered during mountaineering activity participation

During mountaineering activity participation, a majority of respondents expressed feelings of being in “another world", which was dramatically different to their everyday environment. They referred frequently to feeling completely absorbed, escaping from reality as they concentrated wholeheartedly on the task in hand, and enjoying the moment so much that they had little recollection of time passing by. They used such expressions as ‘in a zone’, ‘in a sort of trance’ and ‘on a different planet’ to describe their felt states. The physical and mental challenges that mountaineering posed, the strong desire by respondents to develop their skills, and simply being in the natural environment seemed to evoke such feelings.

The respondents’ accounts of these “other world” states suggest the presence of certain flow dimensions (see section 2.3). The ‘action-awareness merging’ (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.19) element is an entirely absorbing, fluid process in which participants’ actions are perceived as natural and effortless – although in reality they are mentally and physically demanding - and body and mind ultimately meld into one. This is closely linked to another flow dimension, ‘concentration on the task in hand' (p.23). The ability to concentrate fully throughout the entire duration of activity participation, without being distracted by events occurring in the immediate environment or by home life matters, is an essential part of the flow experience. Only when participants are fully concentrating on the activity do they experience the amalgamation of action and awareness and the positive emotions associated with flow. One respondent’s comments illustrate these two dimensions. He explained that ‘when climbing mountains, you just go into a strange world of your own and just continue to plod up. You become aware of only what’s in front of you and you block everything else out. Then all of a sudden, you’re at the top!’ The following description exemplifies another respondent’s “other world” encounters, which were intensified by the high altitude in which many of the mountaineering activities took place.

‘You are in an altered state anyway because of the altitude. I had nothing else to worry about. I wasn’t worrying about work or family or anything else. It was just one activity that was happening at one point in time. You don’t have a chance to think about anything else. You’ve got to completely concentrate on what you are doing, otherwise things might go wrong.’

The 'transformation of time' (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.28) flow dimension also was apparent in respondents' descriptions. When in a state of flow, time is no longer important and it becomes distorted. Participants are relieved of any time pressures, resulting in the experience of either a diminished or an extended sense of time. A majority of respondents in this study often expressed surprise about how fast time passed while they were involved in mountaineering activities. The comments that follow demonstrate experiences of time quickening, which occurred due to the intense concentration necessitated for mountaineering.

‘I was astonished how quickly the time went. Mountaineering is such a time killer because you are so focused on what you are doing. I’d occasionally glance at my watch and it would be 3pm when I thought it was only around 12 o’clock. Climbing is about where you are right now, rather than where you are going. You get so into what you are doing at that precise moment that you just don’t notice what time is doing.’

During mountaineering activity participation, the natural mountain environment played a key role in respondents' experiences, encouraging them to feel as if they were in "another world". Section 2.3 briefly examined the importance of the natural environment in inducing emotionally charged "highs" for adventure activity participants (Arnould & Price, 1993; Curtin, 2009; Fredrickson & Anderson's, 1999; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Williams & Harvey, 2001). All respondents in this study talked about the positive impact that the mountainous landscape had on their state of mind and their psychological well being. They were awe-inspired by their surroundings and, simply being in the mountains enhanced euphoric feelings, encouraged contemplation, and transported them completely away from their usual everyday environment. Numerous respondents reflected on the high regard they held for the mountains, how insignificant they felt, and the overall humbling nature of their experience. Akin to Frederickson and Anderson’s (1999) findings, respondents’ positive reflections about how the natural environment made them feel were most apparent at points when they felt at ease and free from any real or perceived risk during mountaineering activity participation. The comments next illustrate how the mountainous landscape generated feelings for respondents of deep satisfaction and being in “another world”.

‘As the sun was rising this morning, everything was really so cool because of the amazing views. I know what seeing Mont Blanc should look like, but seeing it for real was something else. It was a really fantastic experience.’

‘When we were walking through the trees, every so often we’d get a great view and I just kept thinking “oh, it’s brilliant to be here”, and during overnight stays in mountain huts she enthused that ‘when I watched the sun go down it made me feel like I was on top of the world.’

‘When we arrived at the first mountain hut there was a beautiful view of Mont Blanc and it reminded me of just how beautiful the mountains are. I felt very happy with the sheer beauty of it all. Earlier on in the week we did this really easy walk and towards the end the valley opened up and it felt like being on top of the world. I just felt like it was great to be alive at that point. You didn't feel like you were in a predicament where you were in a state of fear. It was just a nice, relaxing stroll, in a way, to one of the most beautiful locations you can think of, with the weather being perfect and without crowds of people spoiling it.'

It is evident that the natural mountain environment encouraged these respondents to feel in harmony with their surroundings and prompted them to experience multitudinous emotional high points. Although the last descriptions intimate that respondents felt highly positive about their more passive, less demanding experiences in the mountains, they do not allude to feelings of risk and challenge, elements which are commonly associated with flow. It is concluded, therefore, that flow was absent from these experiences, yet nonetheless feelings of deep satisfaction were encountered. Previous research has found that mountaineers potentially enjoy both active and passive euphoric experiences (Mitchell, 1983). The active experience is defined as ‘active merging with mountains through the dynamics of climbing’ (p.147), and it is strongly linked to flow. By contrast, the passive experience occurs when individuals are not actively participating in mountaineering, yet the natural setting makes them feel awe-inspired and insignificant within their surroundings. Seemingly, then, the last descriptions illustrate respondents’ appreciation of passive euphoric experiences during their mountaineering activity participation.

The discussion above highlights how “other world” feelings played an important role in respondents’ emotional journeys, and how these were enjoyed concurrently with three specific elements of flow – complete absorption in, and concentration on, the activity, and a distorted passing of time. Simply being in the natural environment and appreciating the scenery also encouraged respondents to experience emotional high points.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the need for improved intelligence about packaged adventure tourists as there is only a limited understanding of their experiences, despite commodified forms of adventure tourism having seen dramatic growth in recent years. It has investigated the emotional journeys that tourists experience during adventure activity participation while on packaged mountaineering holidays. It has also examined whether the adventure activities within these holidays provide experiences that they consider to be adventurous.

The key findings reflect core elements of the adventure activity experience (Swarbrooke et al, 2003) and they are all concerned with the flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), hence they are strongly interrelated. Firstly, respondents expressed differing viewpoints about their perceptions of risk while involved in mountaineering activities. A majority neither perceived nor experienced their participation in the activities as risky whereas the element of challenge appeared to be more significant. These respondents intimated that it was the guide’s responsibility to assess any potential risks and reduce these during their activity participation. Feelings of flow are enjoyed when adventure activity participants are in control of their situation and when they have achieved a positive skills-challenge balance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). If during engagement participants perceive only a small degree of risk, due to feeling in control over their actions, then their skills levels are more likely to be matched with the level of challenge demanded by the particular activity. This results in a higher likelihood of experiencing flow. By contrast, there is a lower chance of encountering flow if the perceived levels of risk are high and there is a mismatch between participants’ skill levels and the degree of challenge within the activity. Seemingly therefore, most respondents in this study enjoyed flow or a flow-like state because of a positive match between the level of skill they had and the degree of challenge demanded from the adventure activities that they partook in. Secondly, respondents’ accounts reflected feelings of intense emotional peaks and troughs. On the one hand, they felt miserable, downbeat and weary - epitomising the physically demanding nature of mountaineering - yet on the other hand, they enjoyed flow or flow-like feelings of deep satisfaction and elation either during activity participation or some time after it had ended. Often, respondents pushed themselves to their bodily limits during activity participation, surpassing their “comfort zone” because they felt safe in the presence of their guide. Thirdly, respondents spoke about feelings of being in another world during adventure activity participation, which was quite distinct from their everyday environment and reflected three key dimensions of flow. These were ‘action-awareness merging’ (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.19), ‘concentration on the task in hand’ (p.23) and ‘transformation of time’ (p.28). The natural mountain environment positively contributed to this “other world” feeling and encouraged respondents to experience emotional high points, particularly when they were doing less strenuous activities.

Despite the commodified nature of packaged mountaineering holidays, the key findings demonstrate clearly that the respondents experienced elements of adventure. They felt challenged, pushed themselves beyond their “comfort zones”, encountered intense emotional peaks and troughs, enjoyed flow or flow-like experiences, and felt deeply satisfied with their accomplishments. Yet, they were not actually exposed to completely unadulterated adventure, as this involves uncertainty about the outcome, self-managed responsibility, and elements of real risk and danger (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989; Price, 1978; Swarbrooke et al, 2003). Primarily, they were driven by a desire to develop their skills, gain experience, and enjoy a safe holiday in which the mountaineering organisation and guide played a key role (Pomfret, 2011). Such motives are perhaps incompatible with those that drive “true adventurists”, yet the respondents still experienced adventure, albeit in a more ‘diluted’ form (Varley, 2006, p.188).

Although this study generated some noteworthy findings, there are a few limitations which influence the extent to which these can be generalised. The respondents in this study were taking holidays with three organisations from a comparatively large number which offer packaged mountaineering holidays in the Chamonix region. Using respondents from a wider range of organisations may have led to a different set of findings, a wider age range of respondents and more female respondents. Moreover, the BMC respondents had a different profile to those respondents from the other two organisations in that they were mostly younger, all were well educated, and, considering their age, all were relatively experienced in non-alpine mountaineering activities. These differences could also have led to differences in the results. A majority of respondents were interviewed either at the end or towards the end of their holiday. It would have been preferable to interview all respondents at the end of their holiday to realise the full extent of their experiences and emotional journeys. However, BMC respondents aside, many respondents departed Chamonix soon after completing their holiday, resulting in a condensed period of time in which to conduct the interviews.

Despite this study’s limitations, its findings help to provide insights into the emotional journeys and experiences of tourists who take other types of packaged adventure holidays based within natural environments. Seemingly, the mountaineering organisations involved in this study provide highly suitable holidays for their clients, which ultimately result in profoundly fulfilling adventurous experiences and memorable emotional journeys. However, for such experiences to happen, it is important that these organisations carefully match up their clients’ skill and experience levels, and also their expectations, with a holiday that is sufficiently, but not overly, challenging. It is suggested that packaged adventure holiday participants need reassurance that, while they are experiencing the adrenalin-fuelled sensations typically associated with adventure, the constant presence of their guides, who strive to create a risk-controlled environment, make them feel safe. With this in mind, participants can push themselves to their limit, feel relatively safe, endure the hardships associated with adventure, and ultimately enjoy long-lasting moments of flow, deep satisfaction and happiness.

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