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# **Understanding the Meanings and Interpretations of Adventure Experiences: The Perspectives of Multiday Hikers**

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# Understanding the Meanings and Interpretations of Adventure Experiences: The Perspectives of Multiday Hikers

## Abstract

Our paper argues for a more critical academic understanding of adventure as a meaningful subjective experience bound up between the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary*. Through a phenomenological approach we explore the motivations and experiences of multiday hikers (n=21) in two different settings: (1) independent solo-hikers in the northern Swedish mountain range and (2) participants of a guided ‘charity challenge’ six day hike in the Nepalese Himalayas. Although the nature of the two experiential contexts differed considerably in terms of commodification, our material highlights remarkable similarities regarding the individual adventure experience. Thus, although adventure tourism literature often seeks to pin down adventure to particular features, categories or levels, and questions whether commercial adventure can be adventure, we argue that adventure is only meaningful when understood from the perspective of the individual experiencing it. We draw particular attention to the ways in which the hikers tell *their* adventure and contextualise their quest for the extraordinary within *their* ordinary. Their adventures are embedded within their everyday life and part of their life stories. Adventures offer the extraordinary, yet they also contain ordinary rhythms of eating, sleeping, walking, for example. Although mundane, these are an integral part of the adventure experience. Overall, the article demonstrates how hikers in two differing contexts and at quite different levels of commodification do perceive and feel to have an ‘authentic’ adventure experience. This allows us to challenge the negative light in which much of the adventure tourism field paints commodified adventure as somewhat lesser and build instead a more inclusive understanding of adventure. Who defines adventure, if not the adventurers themselves?

Keywords: hiking, adventure experience, interpretations, meaning, slow adventure

## Introduction

The starting point for our paper, and understanding of adventure, is that adventure is a subjective experience and should be addressed as such. Supporting the more critical advances in adventure tourism literature (e.g. Dake, 1992, Elsrud, 2001; Varley & Semple, 2015), we move away from defining adventure through concepts such as risk or thrill. Instead, we argue for the value of exploring individual adventurers' - in our case hikers' - stories to understand motivations for, and experiences of, adventure. Thus, this paper takes the hiker's perspective of consuming the adventure experience. In particular we examine the relationship between the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary* aiming for a phenomenological understanding of the embeddedness of the hiking experience within everyday life. Guided by the question, what are the motivations and experiences of multiday hikers, this paper brings together original material from two studies. Study 1 interviewed 16 solo-hikers in the northern Swedish mountain range. Study 2 interviewed 10 participants of a 'charity challenge' six day hike in the Nepalese Himalayas. Even though both forms could be broadly framed as "slow adventure" (Varley & Semple, 2015), the nature of the two experiential contexts differed considerably in terms of commodification, risk and length. Despite this, our material highlights remarkable similarities regarding the individual adventure experience. This led us to question the value of classifying adventure in terms such as ideal, soft, hard, staged, risky when different forms of hiking adventure appear to provide similar subjective experiences.

The on-going debate in the adventure tourism literature revolves around the dominant questions: What are the essential elements of adventure? How can adventures be categorised/theorised? In attempts to answer these questions, debates about commodification, risk and uncertainty arise (see for example Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Cater, 2006; Fletcher, 2010; Holyfield, 1999; Larsen, Øgaard & Brun, 2011; Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen, 2016; Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Varley, 2006). Beedie & Hudson (2003, p.627) suggest "there exists something of a paradox whereby the more detailed, planned and logistically smooth an itinerary becomes, the more removed the experience is from the notion of adventure". In this paper, we address risk as part of the adventure story (Elsrud, 2001) and view risk as subjective (Dake, 1992). This is not to suggest that 'real' risks do not exist; however, for the understanding of adventure experiences, we argue that the subjective *perception* of risk is more important than the actual *quantification* of risk.

Discussions about risk, uncertainty and planning, lead into attempts to describe an ‘adventure ideal’ – consequently questioning whether commercial adventure can be adventure (Cater, 2006; Fletcher, 2010; Holyfield, 1999; Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Varley, 2006). Indeed, there are suggestions “that the ‘true’ or ‘original’ adventure, in its ideal type, has clear characteristics that the commodity version cannot allow” (Varley, 2006, p.173). These kinds of debates have developed into theoretical models displaying adventure types or ‘intensities’ in some form of scale (e.g. Varley, 2006). With our material, we challenge preconceptions about the ideal/real versus commodified adventure demonstrating that the experience can indeed be similar. We respond to a call for studies on the similarities/dissimilarities of the motives and experiences of supposedly different adventurer types such as commodified vs. more individual (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016). Further, we propose a challenge to the negative light in which much of the adventure tourism field paints commodified adventure. Although we recognise that adventure tourism literature often asserts that adventures (or tourism experiences generally) are subjective, we notice that despite this, there remains an emphasis on classification and categorisation; so, it appears that many researchers do not take this assertion seriously. Thus, moving towards studying adventures as subjectively defined and described by those engaged, we gain new perspectives and build a more inclusive understanding of adventure.

### **Theoretical Context**

In developing our theoretical framework, we draw upon literature from sociology and tourism studies. Bauman (2007) describes how contemporary society can be considered as a society of consumers, moving away from an industrialised society of producers. The nature of work, leisure and identity changed as Western society moved through fundamental economic shifts (Hobsbawn, 1996). Consumption is now posited as the central tenet of identity formation, not to mention economic stability, in a context of neo-liberal consumer capitalism – which at the same time is characterised by precarity, anxiety and uncertainty (Hall et al., 2008). Whilst identity should be recognised for its temporal nature (Bauman, 2005), consuming leisure, is recognised as one of the key ways consumers construct (or at least *perceive* they construct) their self-identity (Rojek, 2005). Thus, all adventure tourism experiences, commodified or not, can be viewed as a form of consumption. This is opposed to viewing them as a form of *escaping* consumption. We note here the work of Baudrillard on prestige, which he argues can be defined by being discrete: differentiation may “take the form of rejection of objects [and] the rejection

of consumption, and yet, this still remains the very ultimate in consumption” (1998, p.80). Thus, we understand the hiking participants as consumers on a theoretical level, yet, recognise that they would not describe themselves in these terms (and therefore use foremost the term ‘hikers’ throughout the paper).

In scholarly debates, the ‘tourist experience’ is often positioned in contrast or dichotomy to ‘everyday life’ (Larsen, 2008). This largely relates to the notion that tourist experiences are extraordinary, whilst everyday life “exclude[s] mystery, magic, passion and soul” in its ordinariness (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995 in Lindberg et al., 2014, p.491; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017). There is a particular tendency for this within adventure literature (Arnould & Price, 1993; Breivik, 2010; Elsrud, 2001; Scheibe, 1986; Simmel, 1971), partly caught up in notions dichotomising work and leisure. Although it has been recognised that distinctions between everyday life and tourist experience are becoming increasingly blurred (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Jack & Phipps, 2005; Lash & Urry, 1994), there is a tendency, to view this in a negative light, arguing that tourism loses its extraordinariness (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Franklin & Crang, 2001). Cohen and Cohen (2012, p.2182) suggest that tourism’s commodification “reduces its special appeal”. This negative perception of commodification is again especially true for adventure tourism literature (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Cater, 2006; Fletcher, 2010; Holyfield, 1999; Imboden, 2012, Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Varley, 2006). The focus of tourism theory on escapism, exoticism and the extraordinary coupled with the associated critique of the commodification of (adventure) tourist experiences as lesser, appears to forget the subjective nature of all of these concepts and how individuals subjectively experience *their* adventure and construct its meanings.

Although it is useful to consider how adventure experiences allow “escape from home, [provide] a quest for more desirable and fulfilling places” (Larsen, 2008, p.21), we further argue following Larsen (2008) that “‘tourist escapes’ are informed by everyday performances, social obligations and significant others” (p.22) and we must “de-exoticize tourism theory and adopt a non-elitist approach to tourism practices” (p.27). Larsen suggests, this is not to reject the idea of extraordinariness in tourist experience, but to recognise its contextuality in individuals’ ‘everydayness’, and how these are *not* dialectical to each other. This brings us back to the recognition that the experience of adventure is embedded in an individual’s life story (Larsen, 2007), and notably, how “consumer experiences are formed through ongoing

interpretations within the world that are bound to the concrete situation of the consumer” (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010 in: Lindberg et al., 2014, p.494). Each experience and *how* it is experienced is fundamentally personal (Filep et al., 2013; Weber, 2001).

### **Researching the Lived Experience of Adventure**

This paper presents a phenomenological understanding of the embeddedness of the hiking experience within everyday life (Li, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1990). We consider the individual lived experience and stories of the hikers as fundamental to our research. Originally, conducted as two separate studies, the similar unstructured and open interviewing style, coupled with both researchers taking part in the multiday hikes they were researching, allowed us to revisit and re-analyse our interview transcripts within the same framework. Study 1 explored the experiences of sixteen solo-hikers in northern Scandinavia (Schilar, 2015; Schilar, 2018). These long distance hikers walked mostly alone in fairly remote areas, carrying their own equipment and supplies, deciding their own itineraries, rhythms and camp spots. Study 2 (Large, forthcoming) draws upon ten interviews with participants of an organised six day group ‘charity challenge’ hiking event in Nepal, organised by a third party commercial company, where participants raised funding for charity. This type of event tends to have a relatively high level of security and comfort: luggage is carried, food/transport is provided, and the group is accompanied by experienced guides and medics. Both studies were conducted in-line with relevant disciplinary ethical guidelines. Freely informed consent was gathered from participants in both studies – giving particular attention to the circumstance that in both cases the researcher was known to the participants in the context of doing the activity. The group nature of study 2 presented particular issues around anonymity since many participants shared their ‘life stories’ on the hike – therefore this was discussed carefully with participants. Participants in study 2 have been assigned pseudonyms, whilst participants in study 1 favoured their first names to stay connected to their stories. Both researchers recognise the importance of reflexivity, and understand that “interviews are inevitably shaped by the circumstances of their telling” (Fleetwood, 2014, p.7).

Our interest in the hikers’ stories and the importance to consider their individual meanings of the adventure experience, pushed us for a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. At its core, phenomenology can be described as the study of lived experience, aiming for ‘deeper

understanding' (Curtin, 2006, p.303). It recognises that people will create their own meanings from situations they experience. Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on explaining common, everyday experiences for shared meanings. It is often associated with hermeneutics when the method is taken as interpretive (Polkinghorne, 1989). Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach enabled us to explore and interpret the lived experience(s) and meanings of the hikers in our studies telling their adventure. Our analysis identified commonalities in their lived experience of adventure across both studies, which we discuss in the remainder of this paper. These include motivations for participation, how the hiker constructed the adventure in terms of their own life, and how risk and nature are perceived in the context of adventure for example. Although we explore these similarities in the following discussion, we recognise that phenomenology does not seek conclusion or generalisation, thus, we do not lay claim on representativeness nor do we aim for providing any (management) implications (Li, 2000).

## **Analysis and discussion**

### **Why Go Multiday Hiking?**

Adventure is 'something' happening within an individual's life story(ies) (Schiebe, 1986). For some people, being an 'adventurer' is part of who they are (or who they want to be), others may seek an adventure experience for particular reasons. However, although adventure is part of life, and certainly contains elements of *ordinary* there are also elements of adventure that are *out of the ordinary* – differentiating it from the everyday (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). We argue that these elements are temporally and spatially subjective, so the adventure experience can transcend objective limits and definitions. Adventure is therefore meaningful only within the context of one's personal life story, and it is apparent that people actively seek adventure precisely in relation to their everyday. Drawing upon our material, we found – regardless whether people were first time multiday hikers, or more habitual hikers – that, for one reason or another, they felt to be at a point in their life where they were *ready* for adventure.

I'm trying to think about why I signed up to it, but I'm not sure that I entirely know, I just think I was at a point in my life where I was thinking I want to do something really adventurous, and actually I need to find it, it's not going to be in [hometown]! (Emily, charity-challenger)



It is this call for freedom – to just walk as long as you want or even rest as long as you want – this independence. And I think one of the biggest points was to try out to be alone for a longer period, without friends, without any people. I am extremely curious of this experience. I really looked for the adventure. (David, solo-hiker)

Thus, it appears that for many hikers, the adventure experience does not just happen upon them – they are active in their decision to consume it or be consumed by it. The notion of challenge – what it means to the individual – also frequently appears in the stories. Additionally the searches for solitude, or for shared experience, were commonly described. Also, we noticed that seeking adventure appeals to those who are searching for healing.

It is difficult to describe, but at that moment I did not feel well at all, and I felt so lonely. [...] And I had this feeling that nobody understands me. And then I thought I just need to get out of this spiral that I was in somehow. [...] And here I feel differently. It is so soothing. It is an experience that does well to me. (Janina, solo-hiker)

With regards to the sense of it being a challenge and what it meant to me personally if I am brave enough to go and do something like this and can I do it physically will I ... am I independent enough to do it, and will I get through it, all those aspects that I was really quite worried about, just being somewhere a long way from home and somewhere I've not been before, that was all as expected – like it was a bit of a challenge at times but it was brilliant and I loved it, and I thrived on it. And to be honest, deep down I knew I would, because part of it is like learning that you're stronger than you think and things aren't as bad as you imagine and all those kind of feelings I think. I think I expected to feel a closeness to my mum when I was away. Like I don't believe in ghosts and I don't believe someone is still with you when you die but I expected to feel inside a, that she was very present in my thoughts, and she was, but not as much as I expected. And I think I realised that it was more about me changing my life and leading a life I wanted to lead rather than doing it for my mum. And I suppose part of it is that, this person has had their life taken away and they sacrificed so much to make sure

that I was confident and brave, and I was brought up so well, I think that what I've realised since was that it was about taking control of my life for me and it was just one little thing, but it was a big thing for me. (Sarah, charity-challenger)

The material above seems to reflect narratives of adventure in popular culture, which often demonstrate the relationship between a significant life event – grief, loss, relationship breakdown – as trigger for wanting an adventure. The 2014 film *Wild* portrays the autobiographical account of Cheryl Strayed's 1100 mile solo hike following the death of her mother and her quest for healing. The film's line: "everything hurt except my heart" reflects the notion that the physically and mentally gruelling challenge of such adventure allows for some kind of healing process to occur. We note clearly from our material that not only the more independent forms of hiking, but also the more commodified version allows hikers to describe similar perceptions about their adventure.

In line with much of the literature discussed earlier, it is also apparent that the need and/or desire for adventure is closely tied up with identity and sense of self. For some, this was wanting to experience a different side of themselves – for others they wanted to use their adventure to actively construct a different aspect of themselves – or at least how they thought others would view them.

So, once I signed up I kind of let myself forget about it for a while [laughs] and it didn't seem like reality and I can remember seeing people I hadn't seen in a while and telling them about it 'by the way' and they were like 'that's out of character' and I was thinking 'not anymore it's not, I'm going to be doing stuff like this all the time.' (Sarah, charity-challenger)

Oscar [about his friends perspective]: "They think I am a bit crazy [laughs], but they think it's fun for me so... [laughs] I think it's a bit cool." (Oscar, solo-hiker)

In this brief discussion on drivers for seeking adventure, it seems that often some sort of life event (or indeed lack of) motivates people to engage in adventure – whether it be boredom, bereavement or wanting to be seen in a different manner. Interestingly, similar motivations

were present in both studies. This reflects a more universal desire to do something out of the ordinary *for oneself*; yet enact this desire in different manners. We propose that this reflects the subjective nature of adventure experience from the outset and problematizes attempts of categorising, objectifying adventure. For adventure tourism (research), differences should be embraced (Cater, 2013) and celebrated.

### **Understanding the Meaning of Hiking Adventure Experiences**

The stories of the hikers often reflect a strong desire to do something outside of *their* ordinary; sometimes challenging themselves, but also seeking engagement with nature, the outside – the ‘wild’. The ‘wild’ symbolises a space where we can lose ourselves and be immersed in our adventure (Semple, 2015, p.65). Thus, one needs to step out of the everyday motions of daily life and desire for the “unknown” (Nicola, charity-challenger). The adventure *departs* from “normal life”:

It’s good to go away from normal life, all-day life, and to carry your equipment and get away from the city. (Oscar, solo-hiker)

Sort of the uncluttering of your normal lives, when you’re not at home planning.  
(Emma, charity-challenger)

This notion of everydayness and normality is important to consider further. Hikers frequently project the symbolic ideal of the hike as being significantly different from their everyday life. On the one hand, it can appear as a different daily routine, a different location, a different context. On the other hand, in line with Larsen (2008), the multiday hike (whether days or weeks) creates another normality, everyday life or rhythms, which actually recreate much of the former.

We recognise nature as a subjective and contested concept (Fletcher, 2014), particularly when caught up in notions such as wild and remoteness (indeed, as we argue are interpretations of other aspects of adventure). Despite this, following authors such as Varley and Semple (2015)

we want to highlight the importance of nature in the hikers adventure experience – in particular with its ascribed difference to the everyday and its perceived transformative potential.

“Life here [in nature] is so different, completely different and very relaxing, even though the things you do are tiring”. (Madis, solo-hiker)

Emma: “I think it’s a very cleansing experience, wasn’t it mentally?”

Stephanie: “We wanted it to be though didn’t we?”

Emma: “But the de-stress as well, we came away from there completely de-stressed and it was like trying to keep that calmness in your life.” (...) “It was beautiful.”

Stephanie: “And I remember us all coming back and saying how would we describe this to people, and it was better than we’d hoped.”

Emma: “Totally, absolutely magical.”

Stephanie: “Totally.”

Emma: “It was very spiritual.”

Stephanie: “And we talked about all of that while we were there didn’t we?”

(Stephanie & Emma, charity-challengers)

Our analysis further suggests that the hikers’ narratives often reflect elements of fantasy. We draw upon Fletcher’s reading of Zizek (1989) in his understanding of the idealised experience of eco-tourism (2014, p.35-37) and apply Fletcher’s contention that the “experience can be seen as a fantasmic construction that derives much of its motivating force from the pleasurable emotions that it is believed to offer” (2014, p.36). Essentially, Fletcher uses Zizek’s work, which is built heavily on Lacan’s Imaginary – Symbolic – Real principles. Zizek maintains that fantasy – “the screen concealing gap” between the Real and the Symbolic allows us to “frame through which we experience the world as consistent and meaningful” and “fantasy is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance” (Zizek, 1989, p.132-142 in: Fletcher, 2014, p.36). In this line, nature space can be interpreted as enabling fantasy for constructing one’s adventure. Yet, hikers might *escape* through fantasy into adventure, at the same time they cannot escape everyday life altogether.

I don't try to escape society. Because that is the *wrong* way (laughs). (Andreas, solo-hiker, his emphasis)

Interestingly, the narratives were closely tied up in or even “enabled by” (Jack & Phipps, 2005 p.9) everyday practices. This problematises the idea that adventure is “an exotic search for the other” (p.2) or that the hiker is “a passive dupe of the labour process” (p.5) as a simplistic work/leisure perspective would suggest (Jack & Phipps, 2005). Although the nature of the adventure encourages simplicity and a break from everyday routine in some senses, we suggest that hiking actually can be quite hard “work” and relies heavily on routine everyday practices: dressing, eating, sleeping and walking. What the adventure seems to allow however, is the time and space for someone to address their home life and reflect on how to use this experience in the future:

(...) transform my home situation into a situation that makes me feel better, or more productive, or a better father or husband or whatever... in day-to-day life you don't, or you very seldom, have the time or mind-set that gives you the possibility to think about those things. (...) Being able to transform into a more social person, being able to transform into being adaptive to other people's needs. (Magnus, solo-hiker)

Where people are and what they are doing impacts upon their behaviour, as Bauman and May (2001, p.128) note: “the order of the world around us has its counterpart in the orderliness of our own behaviour” – experiencing other nature, culture, space and place therefore allows us to behave differently. This “reinvention”, however, takes “form in social practices” (Jack & Phipps, 2005, p.106). Yet, based on our material, we question the assumption that commodified adventure “fail[s] to deliver their promised or imagined rewards” of “rich meaningful experiences” (Varley & Semple, 2005, p.76).

Following advances in understandings of ‘slow’ adventure (Varley & Semple, 2015), in direct challenge to notions of ‘excitement’, ‘adrenaline’ or ‘risk’, narratives from the hikers highlight the seemingly *unadventurous* and ordinary aspects as central to their experience. Sensory

experiences in nature: such as listening to the “birds chirping” (Ben, solo-hiker), “the sound of the wind and the pouring water” (Disa, solo-hiker), the smell of “the grass and bushes”, “even when it rained, I usually don’t like the rain but even though we got caught in it I loved it, it didn’t matter anymore because it was just the experience” (Emily, charity-challenger) as well as seeing wildlife: “a bee just sat there, and I found it so beautiful” (Andreas, solo-hiker) “And we saw the monkeys and (...) Yeah, it was just absolutely incredible” (Felicity, charity-challenger). There also appears to be a strong sensitivity towards the place where the adventure is experienced; here in particular the topography of hills and mountains:

Only I feel so humble under these great, great, great hills.....(...) It is an incredible landscape. Yes, I mean it is sparse and on this part there are just rocks for kilometres. It is inhospitable so to say, but it is just impressive. (...) You feel so small. (Disa, solo-hiker)

Nicola: “The mountains were just awe inspiring weren’t they? They were just so big. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Emma: “They were amazing.”

Nicola: “I just haven’t seen anything like it. They just went up, and up and up.”

Emma: “In the clouds.”

(Emma & Nicola, charity-challengers)

Beedie and Hudson (2003, p.626) note the particular allure of mountains for their “actual and symbolic representations of adventure”. Also, people’s sense of place is subjective (Entrikin, 1991). Thus, when we speak of concepts such as wild, nature or remoteness, one needs to consider people’s interpretation according to their own relative view, partly formed through prior experiences (or lack of) as well as popular narratives and stock stories of adventure (Semple, 2013; Swarbrooke et al., 2003). Popular understandings of adventure suggest that adventure is possible – even when “slow” (Varley & Semple, 2015) – as long as contextualised within wilderness, remoteness and in its non-commodified form. The solo hikers’ explicitly framed their experience as ‘wilderness experience’, yet, noting that wilderness was relative in regard of huts, trails or the presence of other people (Schilar, 2015). Thus, people perceive different levels of wilderness or adventure and feel a freedom to choose *their* level. But does

this compromise the sense of adventure? We would propose no. As Nash (1967, p.1) points out: “one man’s wilderness may be another’s roadside picnic ground”. Despite the different style of the adventure, the charity challengers, although not speaking of “wild” or “wilderness”, did talk about going into the “unknown”.

It was nice to go away into the unknown. I loved not knowing, you know, cos I didn’t want to know, I didn’t want to look on, you know, the internet and go on google maps, I just wanted to not see where I was going in a way, just to you know, go and do something new, a totally new adventure, yeah. (Nicola, charity-challenger)

It was just the most incredible experience. It ... I find it really hard to kind of actually, properly describe the experience to give it justice. This probably doesn’t look very eloquent, but I just ... I just ... when I ... when I was walking through, quite often there was only really me, [name of other hiker], and maybe a couple of ... a few other people just ahead of us, um, and it was always quite peaceful where we were. Um, and I would just kind of zone out, completely zone out and just take it all in [...]but I just really started to feel like I was in The Hobbit [laughs] or Lord Of The Rings and I was [laughs]. And I was like, ‘Oh, look, there’s the Hobbit Hole!’ (Felicity, charity-challenger)

These discussions reflect how people make sense of places and experiences in their own terms and will always impose *their* meanings (McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998). One can only suggest that defining adventure in objective and dichotomous terms is meaningless when we consider people’s subjective experiences.

### **Concluding Comments**

This paper argues for a more critical academic understanding of adventure experiences. We examined multiday hiking experiences, drawing on original material from two studies with considerable difference in commodification (Varley, 2006). Showing the similarities across the material, we question the value of pinning down adventure to particular features, categories or

levels. The advances in literature on slow adventure, for example Varley & Semple (2015), or the assertion of adventure as narrative (Elsrud, 2001), demonstrate a movement away from traditional understandings. Despite this, there remains a dominance in interpreting the more 'risky', 'uncertain' or 'unplanned' experience as more meaningful or adventurous – with more commodified versions of adventure depicted in negative light. Although the work of Varley and Semple (2015) broadens adventure understandings, it also could be seen to romanticise certain aspects of slow adventure through the emphasis on “time, nature, passage and comfort” possibly denying these elements to be characteristic for more commodified adventure forms. Yet, we propose that these features were important for *all* hikers in both of the studies – and notably, appeared to be valued in the adventure narratives told to us. Thus, we argue that the presumption that a more commodified experience will be somehow lesser, misunderstands or ignores the subjective experience of those taking part. This seems to resonate with the concerns forwarded by Jack and Phipps (2005) as well as Larsen (2008), that elitism can (and does) creep into scholarly understandings of tourism and, we argue, of adventure. Even when broadening our understandings and considering hiking as form of slow adventure there is a danger of merely placing it in a “'better past', 'an older, slower, quieter world'” (Parker, 2002 p.32 cited in: Jack & Phipps, 2005, p.23).

This paper, further, adds to calls by those such as Larsen (2008) to move tourism theory away from focusing on the exotic, escape and extraordinary. We question the critique of commodification of experiences depicted as responsible for “de-exoticising tourism”, or causing the “death of tourism” through providing less meaningful experiences. Instead, our material depicts everyday aspects as central to the meanings and interpretations of an adventure experience. In this context, we noted the particular sense of place of nature and the outdoors allowing to experience something *different* away from home, whilst safely adopting *ordinary* tasks and roles. It leads us to conclude, that notions of adventure will partly depend on one's everyday life, and in line with other literature (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Jack & Phipps, 2005; Lash & Urry, 1994), notions of ordinary and extraordinary are blurred. Thus, adventure happens within an individual's life story.

From our material, we recognise the importance of 'nature' - the outdoors - (whilst also recognising it as a contested concept (Fletcher, 2014)) as a meaningful factor in the slow adventure experience. Yet, spending time in nature could actually be considered as quite



ordinary. However, for many, being so consumed by nature makes it extraordinary; and engaging profoundly with nature might be intended. This idea is sold to us (explicitly or implicitly) by tourism industry as well as popular culture; maybe this is why we seek this form of slow adventure in the first place? Further, we could argue that hiking in nature makes us feel secure; something we struggle to achieve otherwise in an uncertain, anxious contemporary society. We reach out of *our* ordinary. And at the same time, our ordinary is key to defining this extraordinary experience. Yet, whatever our adventure, many everyday aspects - planning, walking, sleeping, resting, eating, watching - become an integral part.

Overall, we argue when taking the hikers' perspective, different types of experiences can be seen as adventures for *them*, regardless of how the activity could be objectively framed. Elements such as risk, uncertainty, remoteness, challenge, wilderness, are subjectively interpreted by hikers and we cannot ascribe 'more' or 'less' adventurousness to different activities. We suggest that theoretical models attempting to map out adventure should not be used to attribute different activities to different levels, but rather be used as departure point for researching the subjective perspective, for example; letting interview participants chart their own adventure experiences and providing more longitudinal understandings of people's engagement with adventure throughout their life course. Accordingly, we argue for the importance of understanding the hiker's individual story and experience – their sense of adventure might be at odds with what is defined and described as adventure. Further, we challenge the negative light in which much of the adventure tourism field paints commodified adventure. We partly suspect that many researchers (alike us) are engaged in the activities they investigate, which represents not only a gain, but also risks a certain bias, where researchers unconsciously impose their personal idea of adventure and seek to delineate their own adventurer-identity. Furthermore, common ways in which adventure is constructed can be criticized as quite masculine and exclusive to more feminine narratives and experiences of adventure, hindering inclusion and empowerment through adventure experiences (Doran, 2016). Although we do not disagree with those such as Varley (2006) recognising the increasing commodification of adventure, or indeed that there are people seeking the more commodified version versus others seeking a more 'authentic' alternative, we support Beames and Varley's (2013) recognition that the boundary between these two groups is transitional and often blurred. Instead, adventure is only meaningful when understood in the context of the individual experiencing it. We therefore question whether there is actually any meaningful

difference between commodified or non-commodified adventure. Certainly all of our hiker's *felt* like they had an 'authentic' adventure experience, and described these in very similar ways. This leads us to question whether the nature of an adventure experience actually matters to anyone other than the individual involved.

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