A discourse analysis of representational spaces: Writings of women independent traveller

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SUMMARY   *Since 1987 there has been a substantial growth in women travelling independently, with the mature well-travelled woman seeking more than a holiday lying on the beach. In response to this demand, there has been a plethora of travel guides which specifically target women by providing advice for and/or stories of independent female travellers. Women are noted to travel for different motivations than men. It is argued that independent women tourists travel for self-discovery, enlightenment, and/or educational purposes. They also view travel as an opportunity for respite from the confines and responsibilities of their domestic environment. Critical questions regarding how their travel is constructed and the meanings of women's travel experiences have not been addressed in the published literature to date. To advance our understanding of gender and tourism, and in particular, to examine gendered experiences of independent travelling, we used critical discourse analysis to investigate a selected travel guide. The Rough Guide to Women Travel: First Hand Accounts from More than 60 Countries, is examined to understand the role that discourse plays in the positioning of, and providing meaning for, independent women travellers. Findings indicate that, rather than escaping traditional notions of female dependence and associated values, these are actually reinstated in the construction of women as independent travellers. Themes that emerged from the research include: caring for others and being cared for, danger and security, connecting and networking and redefined identities.*

Key words:
women; travel stories; independent travel; identity

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades the independent travel market has matured from its mythical hippy roots of alternative travelling to a more commercialised experience (Bond 1997). There has been substantial growth in the independent travel sector.

Tourism New Zealand, for example, estimates that over 70% of visitors to New Zealand can be defined as independent travellers (Hyde and Lawson 2003). Some tourism academics and practiners have even proposed that the traditional mass package holiday is now in

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decline (Poon 1993; Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter 2001; Hyde and Lawson 2003). Socio-demographic changes such as individualism, more leisure time, and increased disposable incomes, along with the promotion and accessibility of global travel have been cited as some of the causes for tourists to seek out a more 'authentic' non traditional holiday (Hyde and Lawson 2003).

In addition, there has been a plethora of travel guides, stories, and advice for these tourist/travellers. Independent travel has become so common-place and "institutionalised" that many academics now consider it, despite the myths, as one facet of mass tourism (Noy 2004; Hottola 2005).

Research has shown that women are influential in the making of holiday-plan decisions, and comprise half of the pleasure travel market (Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter 2001). Despite this, the tourism industry and literature, tends to focus on a white male, heterosexual perspective to produce a homogenous understanding of *all* tourists (Galani-Moutafi 2000; Pritchard and Morgan 2000). Pritchard and Morgan (2000) argue, however, that womens' experiences of travel will be different and are affected by gender, as these experiences are interpreted within the wider social-political realm.

Independent women travellers have been documented as seeking self-discovery, education, experiences of cultures, and freedom from their domestic confines (Butler 1995; Chirivella, Caballero and Hart 1996; Pritchard and Morgan 2000; Williamson 2002; Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter 2001). Critical questions, however, regarding how independent women's travel is constructed, and the meanings of these experiences have not been fully addressed.

This paper investigates the written stories of independent women travellers using critical discourse analysis to examine how they frame and construct meanings of their travel experiences. Travel stories are written for reflection and self-discovery. The challenges and adventures as described by the writers are central to understanding what these women gained from their travel experiences (Fullagar 2002). Specifically, their stories focus on the learning that accrues through contact with different people, cultures, and landscapes (Elsrud 2001) as well as the meaning they ascribe to these.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL – THE ROLE OF TRAVEL GUIDE BOOKS

Independent travelling has been defined as "all tourists … who have not booked an air travel and accommodation package with a travel retailer. . .[They] have flexibility in their itinerary and some degree of freedom in where they chose to travel within a destination region" (Hyde and Lawson 2003:13). The definition of independent travel is still very ambiguous and despite repeated attempts within the tourism literature to define the concept, these tourists resist being easily categorised. Unlike mass tourist package holidays, this type of travelling comes in many different forms and can last from one week to two years or more. Rather than being at oppositional ends of a tourist continuum, the mass and independent tourist are in broad clusters (Kontogeorgopoulos 2003).

The independent travel sector is comprised of many different types of tourist, ranging from the alternative, new age, and backpacking types. Backpacking is envisaged as one type of independent travel and has become more "institutionalized, in contrast to the original hippie/drifter image" (Hottola 2005: 2). Recent discussions in the literature, however, have drawn on contrasting independent travellers to the mass package sector. Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) comments that tourists who strongly identify themselves with this form of travel, may in fact be very similar to the mass package tourists that they so despise.

Independent travellers are motivated by the desire to see authentic people, cultures, destinations and landscapes. They view the flexibility and freedom of independent travel as a means to obtain self discovery. Authenticity strongly underpins this type of travel and it is constantly used by the tourists to differentiate themselves from the mass tourist. In contrast to the mass tourist the travellers consider themselves to be cultural aware, sensitive to the environment and socially responsible to the local country that they are visiting (Kontogeorgopoulos 2003). In consuming new people, culture, destinations and landscapes, travellers reflect on their 'Self' and attempt to give meaning to their experiences through travel stories. It is through contrasting their 'Self' and 'Other' that travellers achieve self discovery (Galani-Moutafi 2000: 205). But at the same time, they can find it both challenging and overwhelming.

As such, they put strategies and or tactics in place to cope with this stress (Hottola 2005: 2).

Using travel book guides to research and plan is an example of a key strategy and/or tactic used by independent travellers to help them diminish feelings of vulnerability, anxiety and stress. Through research and planning with the aid of travel book guides, travellers are directed to specific tourist sites and accommodation. Independent travellers, are often informed by the guide books how to avoid mass tourist sites and meet up with other independent travellers. Through escaping into these tourist "metaworlds" or "metaspaces" the independent traveller can recover within in a familiar environment and culture. These spaces "increase the control of tourists and the dominance of their cultures in relation to the host community" (Hottola 2005: 2).

The commentaries, activities and information given in guide books help the independent traveller to plan and control their experiences (MacCannell 1989; McGregor 2000). As such, travel guide books frame and construct meanings of the independent traveller's experience (Siegenthaler 2002). The primary audience of travel guide books are Western, middle-class white tourists (Galani-Moutafi 2000). The *Rough Guide* and the *Lonely Plant* are the most popular guide books used by independent travellers (Bhattacharyya 1997). These guidebooks play an important role in channelling the tourist in what they see, how they encounter the site and thus, and what they should gain from the experience (Siegenthaler 2002).

Bhattacharyya (1997) argues that guide books are not the sole entity in the construction of the meaning of travel. Rather, there is a constant dialogue between the reader and the book which is enacted within the wider socio-political realm. Both the guide books and the traveller's stories contribute to the construction of meaning of independent travel and self-identity.

As noted above, over the past decade, the number of women guide books has increased; Not only do they provide advice, but they showcase and celebrate the idea of being an adventurous, 'independent' Western middle class woman who connects with the rest of the world. The communication and dissemination of these women travellers' stories are important in reinforcing the ideas of adventurous, independent and authenticity in women's travel experiences.

THE STUDY

This research critically analyses the stories written by women travellers in the fourth revised edition of the *Rough Guide to Women Travel: First Hand Accounts from More than 60 Countries;* with one to four stories for each country. The stories in this book present a number of "women writers, journalists, travellers, dreamers and escapists" (Jansz, Davies, Drew and McDougall 2000, back cover). The verbal and written sharing of their experiences with others is central to the construction of independent travel (Bhattacharyya 1997). This book represents the realities of independent travel for these women writers.

Fairclough's (1992) three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) - text, discursive practice and social practice - was used to analyse the stories. This is a holistic method that analyses the text (e.g., the women's written stories) within the context of discursive practises (e.g., independent travel) that are shaped by the socio-cultural realm in which they are produced (e.g., gendered, middle class Western culture).

This method allows us to understand how women construct and give meaning to their travel experiences, which are shaped by social cultural practices of independent travel. Our understandings of these women's meanings of independent travel are framed by the language that the writer's employ in their stories. Therefore, this study accepts that language constitutes and reinforces cultural and historically located meanings that promote accepted common-sense views or realities (Flairclough 2001).

Discourse analysis has become known as a theoretical stance in its own right and builds on the premises of social constructionism and poststructuralism (Phillips and Hardy 2002). The key ontological beliefs of discourse analysis are that there are no firm foundations or real truths to be discovered in the world. Instead, it is argued that our everyday actions, beliefs and common-sense understandings are viewed as dynamic constructions that are always in the process of production, construction and interpretation.

Discourse analysis, claims that all our social realities are constituted through discourse and are open to multiple interpretations. Language is seen as an important mediator in shaping our understanding of and in being shaped by the context in which it is used.

Critical discourse analysis adopts the premises of critical theory and investigates the structures of power and how they construct and shape meaning. For example, it will examine the dominant discursive practices and look at who is marginalised or what is not said in the discourse. It was therefore deemed appropriate for this study as it provided a holistic method for examining the meaning of texts within the context that they are produced and interpreted.

The present authors read all the stories in the guide book. Our discourse analysis of these stories identified similar themes. We use ten of these stories in this paper to represent and illustrate our analysis. These stories are: 'The luckiest women in Rio' by Cherry Austin in Brazil; 'Welcome to the land of the whole people' by Melanie McGrath in Burkina Faso; 'Friendships confused' by Kerry McKibbin in China; 'Falling among friends' by Jane Mathieson in Cuba; 'A sneaking civic pride' by Carolyn Steele in Canada; 'A lesbian holiday' by Deb Herman in Greece; 'Innocence and experience' by Rebecca Hardie in India; 'Carolyn came too' by Sheila Keegan in India; 'Hotel holiday' by Kathleen Jamie in Pakistan; and 'Behind Yemen's veil' by Dawn Hurley in Yemen.

THE FINDINGS

We discuss four themes that define independent travel for the women writers in the *Rough Guide Special* travel book: (1) caring for others and being cared for; (2) danger and security; (3) connecting and networking; and (4) redefined identities. The implicit discursive practice in all the written stories was to that they wanted to achieve independence and an authentic travel experience.

An authentic experience for the women travellers was one in which they felt connected to the local culture and that they had achieved some form of self reflection/ growth. Within the tourism literature, the concept of authenticity is frequently mentioned as the main motivation for this kind of travel (see Desforges 2000; Noy 2004; MacCannell 1989; Obenour 2004; Wang 1999). In defining authenticity the women independent travellers explained it as reflection of 'self' through experiencing the local people and culture. As the quotes below illustrate, the women felt that their social position and perceived freedoms were superior to the women that they encountered on their journeys.

These stories were framed and should be interpreted within the wider social practices of a white, Western culture. The guide book was published by Penguin in the UK and is primarily directed at a UK audience. This can be gathered from the editors and writers' comments throughout the book. Interestingly, there are only two narratives from two of the countries that make up the UK: Scotland and England. The story written by Margaret Jailler recounts her experiences of travelling around the Shetland isles with her daughter.

The selection of the remote Shetland isles for inclusion in the book is to perhaps represent "a modern romance of the myth of the North" (Jack and Phipps 2003: 293). In selecting the Shetland isles, Margaret avoids the traditional mass tourist destinations of Scotland, such as Loch Lomond and Edinburgh Castle, instead the isolated "wilderness" of these rural islands are sought to seek an authentic Scottish cultural experience.

The second story written by Lesley Riddoch as 'A Celt abroad in London' documents her memories of living and working for the BBC in London in 1998. The definition of independent travelling is challenged, as Lesley is working full-time and still frames her experiences as independent travelling. This story differs from many of the others written for the book, because rather than detailing the local life or landscapes it documents her struggles with the London transport system. What is absent from her story are any details which are central in the other stories regarding the local people, landscape and culture.

In contrast to the other stories, the reader is offered a familiar city landscape and the interactions that she briefly mentions are with illegal immigrants in London. Both the stories, isolated Scotland and urban London, illustrate the UK premise of the book as the assumption drawn from this evidence is that the UK does not offer a significantly different authentic cultural experience for the assumed readers of the book.

Theme 1:
Caring for others and being cared for

Within the concept of achieving independence in their travels, caring for others and being cared for created conflict for these women. Independence was constructed by many of the writers as being by and relying on themselves.

A number of these writers, however, in their travels found themselves caring for family and/or being cared for by the local people. For other writers, the main aim of their travel was to volunteer services to the local people.

For a few of these women travellers, the responsibilities of caring for others could not be avoided. As Rebecca Harding comments on her mother's request to join her on her trip to India:

> "What are your holiday plans this year, darling?" A perfectly innocent question. "I think I'm going to try and go to India in October." A perfectly reasonable answer.
>
> "Who with?" A mother's usual concern. "Mum!" She knows how I like to do things. "On my own."
>
> "Oh, don't worry sweetheart. I'll come with you." (Harding 2000: 257)

Rebecca's comments illustrate resentment regarding her responsibilities towards her mother in an unfamiliar environment. In her strategy to avoid these responsibilities and to quickly 'train' her mother to become an independent traveller, she launched her mum "in at the deep-end, and didn't want to stop until they reached their destination … I … suspect … that I might not really have considered her in this at all" (Harding 2000: 258).

Jane Mathieson's construction of independent travel changed when she took her two year old son to Cuba. Although she saw herself as being an independent traveller with a toddler, she soon realised that she needed her "maternal eye" (Mathieson 2000:159). Unexpectantly, in her mind, the trip became fraught with potential dangers for her son:

> My material eye scanned it [Havana airport] for hazards: as the waiting time increased, so did the number of lighted cigarettes held at the height of Oliver's face. (Mathieson 2000: 159-160)

On the other hand, these women often found themselves being cared for by the local people. This was in contrast to the stereotypes they held. These women discussed with surprise the generosity and caring shown by the local people, despite their initial wariness and suspicion:

> I hardly recall asking for help in Cuba: it was always there, spontaneous and gracious. If Cubans could export good manners, civility, generosity, care, … they would be the richest people on this planet." (Mathieson 2000:163).

Those women who volunteered to care for the local people, however, did not see their independence as a traveller being constrained. In their caring role, they viewed themselves as being autonomous, and it reaffirmed their beliefs in Western world dominance. But at the same time, these travellers often failed to understand the needs and beliefs of the foreign cultures:

> Not once in Afghanistan did I meet a person who questioned their faith in Allah. Despite, or maybe due to, living in all the hardship civil war incurs, these Afghan people display an unwavering belief that everything occurring in their daily life is Allah's will. (Beattie 2000: 8).

As the above quote illustrates, the travel experiences were often used to validate the women writers' own definitions of knowledge and freedom (Obenour 2004).

Theme 2:
Danger and security

As suggested above in Rebecca and Jane's stories when caring for a family member, there was always a feeling of being vulnerable. This distrust created the fear of being threatened and physically harmed in the environment, as illustrated by Jane's story of the lighted cigarettes by the local people. Apart from the many environmental dangers of traffic, animals and the landscape, foreign men were always viewed with suspicion.

In contrast to foreign men who were perceived as dangerous, local women were envisaged as friends and, therefore, trustworthy. For example, Kerry McKibbin viewed Chinese women as less of a threat compared to the men. The first women that she befriends ensured that Kerry avoided trouble. All women, however, were not genuine in their friendships. One Chinese woman (Lee) asked Kerry home for dinner so that she could practice her English. After helping prepare the dinner and buying some of the woman's craft work, this woman demanded of Kerry, "one person; one meal – twenty yen" (McKibbin 2000: 147).

This experience caused Kerry to reflect on her motives for travelling and illustrates the myths of authenticity, notions of sisterhood, and Western 'superiority':

> [H]ow dare she mock my gratitude with her fake hospitality! I was angry at her and yet, as I pressed on, I realised I was most sickened at myself. In her wisdom, Lee had managed to expose the holes in my dubious western, political correctness. I had thought of myself as a traveller, not a tourist, determined to seek out the real, contemporary China, to be a living part of history in the making. But she knew that at the bottom line, I had wanted to see inside a real, Chinese, peasant farmer's house. (McKibbin 2000:147).

Kerry's reflection illustrates that "[a]uthenticity is thus a *projection* of tourists' own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly onto toured others" (Wang 1999: 355). Kerry's reflection on her encounter illustrates that despite seeing herself as different from the mass tourist, she was still consuming and constructing the tourist sites through a Western gaze (MacCannell 2001).

There were many examples in the stories of the women feeling vulnerable and their negative perceptions of foreign men. These perceptions ranged from the "unwanted admirers" in Brazil to men who could pose as a more dangerous threat (Austin 2000: 89). Kathleen Jamie found herself in bed in a hotel in Pakistan when the manager knocked the door and insisted on checking the room.

> …he dropped his gaze to me. With a long arm, he indicated the rumpled bed. In a sense, his own bed. Mr Manager.
> "Is okay?"
> So ludicrous I wanted to smile. To smile while he was showing me the bed would have been the wrong thing to do.
> "Now you have checked, everything is in order, please leave."
> A thin face, black moustache; tall, thin legs in his jeans.
> "You are lone?"
> "Please leave now."
> "You, what country are? Student are?"
> That Urdu phrasing, carried into English. (Jamie 2000: 459).

After he asked her for sex, she finally managed to get him out of her hotel room.

Yet, as Kerry's extract indicates the security of global sisterhood does not always provide a safe haven either. It also illustrates the contested discourses between the experience/reflection and the discourses constructed around independent travelling. Kerry's story strongly reflects the traveller's desire to experience the authentic lifestyle and attempts to clearly distinguish themselves from the mass market. Yet, as her experience with Lee caused her to reflect on the discourse, this image of themselves may not actually be interpreted by the local people of the countries that they visit. It is an image that the independent traveller has constructed as "[t]he powerful subject possesses the gaze while the powerless other is completely defined by its status as the object of the gaze" (MacCannell 2001: 29).

In order to reduce their vulnerability and gain some security, certain strategies were employed by the women writers. These strategies included using the guide books, seeking out familiar Western products and foods, meeting other Western travellers. In addition to these strategies many of the women discuss how their previous experiences and assumptions helped them to cope with the initially unfamiliar environment and reduce their feelings of vulnerability.

Cherry Austin in Brazil for example, after her first few anxious weeks, where she was checking her money and constantly surveying the street for danger, she realised that her previous experiences of living in London provided her with strategies for coping with her living in Rio.

> Someone did try to rob me, one hot Sunday afternoon. He was scruffy, shoeless, dishevelled and dirty, and carrying a big stick. He was too slow – I saw him coming. It was easy to hop on the bus with my bag under my arm, as I have done so many times at home in London, and then I wondered why I'd been letting fear restrict my movements. … On balance, Rio was probably safer than London. Having rediscovered my common sense, I relaxed. (Austin 2000: 88).

In addition to using their skills and experiences, the women would recount how they used other strategies or "metaspaces" to recover and escape the local environment (Hottola 2005: 2).

The "metaspaces" used in the narratives were a variety of places such as hostels, friends houses and an international club for Western visitors. In both stories regarding Greece, for example, the authors stayed in areas that were visited by people similar to them in nationality and sexual identity.

Theme 3:
Connecting and networking

In many of the women's stories, connecting and networking with local people and other travellers was an important part of the experience. As with Kerry's story about befriending a Chinese woman, many of the other writers also note their connection with the local women. They trusted these local women as they felt they shared common experiences of the world.

When Dawn Hurly was invited to a traditional wedding by local women she felt "warmly welcome" (2000: 641). The strong emotional connections of this experience were such that Dawn could "conjure up the day, smell the incense, hear the song, and feel the warmth of the women's companionship" (Hurley 2000: 641).

French and Postcolonial feminists (e.g. Wearing 1998; Fullagar 2002) have argued that the idea that all women, regardless of race, class and colour share understandings of 'womanhood' as well as 'indepen-dence' and 'freedom' is misguided and patronising. As Dawn Hurley in Yemen comments illustrate:

> I wore a headscarf … which resulted in fewer lascivious looks from men … being female didn't just mean changing my dress code, it also altered my "girl power" quotient from high to almost non-existent. (Hurley 2000: 636).

This covering of her head Dawn felt masked her identity and subdued her constructed independence as a traveller. As such, the concept of connecting and networking in the stories is based on a mythical notion of 'common' experiences.

These experiences documented in the stories were always defined and compared by Western definitions of freedom and womanhood. These Western definitions were viewed as the goal for all women. When the local women refused to accept these Western concepts the writers found this difficult to understand.

Despite this, these women assumed that there was always a strong emotional connection between them and the local women. This illustrates, as Fullagar argues, how journeys are:

> …always mediated by the unconscious fantasies of western culture yet the process of identification is never certain, the other can never be known fully or authentically. In this way the familiar opposition between inauthentic tourist and authentic traveller comes undone (Fullagar 2002: 58).

Connecting to other travellers was also important as it relived feelings of isolation, any anxiety and for some authors provided a sense of freedom. For Deb Herman and her partner, the Greek island of Lesbos offered "[a]ll the ingredients of a classic Greek vacation …history, scenery, beaches and food; added to which are the joy and relief of being unremarkable". (Herman 2000: 239). This tourist resort on the island offered Deb and her partner the traditional mass tourist package holiday with the freedom to be a couple and connect with other lesbians at the destination. This story also challenges the definition of independent travelling, as the contained resort offered all the aspects of a traditional holiday but it did offer freedom.

> The menus didn't vary much from place to place, so we ate in the same one most of the week. The friendly, slightly harassed owner brought us free halva one night, presented for lovers with two spoons. We kissed on the beach in the moonlight without once having to check over our shoulders for trouble. If you understand what a big deal that is, then you want to take your lover to Lesbos. (Herman 2000: 241–242).

As the quote above illustrates, they were free to publicly connect as a loving couple as long as they stayed in that resort.

Theme 4:
Redefined identities

Reflection and reconsideration of these women writers' identities were evident in all the stories. Most stated that they had 'changed' in some way from their independent travelling experiences or they had re-evaluated their perceptions of significant people in their lives. Sheila Keegan found that her life as a single parent

running her own business was becoming "so regimented, so pressured, that there was never time to ask whether there was a better way of living." (Keegan 2000: 263). At the end of the trip, despite the problems and challenges of travelling with her child, she does think that her daughter has benefited from the experience – although the interpretation is not mutual:

> I would like to travel more with Carolyn. I am nostalgic for that space. But Carolyn's fantasy holiday is to travel first-class to the States to visit universal Studios, whereas mine is to spend six months living in a jungle in Borneo.(Keegan 2000: 268-269).

Similarly, Rebecca Harding alters her definition of her mother and their relationship when they travelled to India. Although she was initially reluctant to take her mother with her, during the trip she re-evaluated her interpretation of her mum and their relationship. Her original conception of her mum as a dependent person becomes altered as they travel together and she concludes:

> [I] hear a great crash of hilarity, and turn to look. There is my mother, sitting in the dirt, her sunglasses on upside down and she's pulling faces for England. Exaggerated mimes and japes to communicate. Those around her, young and old, are clapping their hands with glee. And it is mutual. She catches my gaze, pleasure transforming her face. And I return it, smiling straight out to her, basking in the warmth of her sudden comprehension." (Harding 2000: 261-262).

All the women saw themselves as travellers, rather than package tourists who passively consume people and places. In seeking this authentic and independent travel experience they assumed that they would change as individuals.

In Rio, for example, Cherry Austin changed her initial negative perception of the city and found that her encounters with the people, culture and music altered her image of herself:

"Me, I had a brand-new positive outlook, a fresh attitude towards people, passion and politics, a better body, a sense of rhythm; a ticket to London and a passport to a country with a stable economy. I felt like the luckiest women in Rio." (Austin 2000: 95).

As the earlier example from Kerry McKibbin also illustrates, there is a strong desire to differentiate the independent travelling experience from mass package travel. For many of the women writers, their definition of independence was about overcoming their fears and managing on their own. All this, they felt brought them increased confidence and helped them re-define who they were enabling them to return to their homes refreshed and ready to engage with their lives again.

The women writers do not question their own motives as they view their type of travel in an entirely positive light. It was only after Kerry's encounter with Lee that she begins to question her assumptions and perceptions of independent travelling.

CONCLUSIONS

This critical analysis of these women's written travel stories illustrate how a Western definition of 'independence' influences these women's constructions of being an independent traveller. The women writers defined independence as being on their own and relying on their skills and experiences. They also defined themselves as different and distinct from the mass tourist. This construction, however, is perhaps a myth.

As the analysis illustrates, they did not escape the confines of Western female responsibilities and values. In their travel adventures, these women were cared for and cared for others. They were responsible for others besides themselves, and relied upon others when in need or in danger. Part of being an independent women traveller was a desire to connect with the local people. Foreign men, however, were viewed as dangerous. While they assumed they would have an emotional connection with the local women, this was often not the case. Moreover, rather than a balanced connection, they often unconsciously patronised the local women.

We can conclude that these women did try and make a difference. These women writers, as with most women tourists, travelled for their self-discovery, enlightenment and/or educational purposes. They achieved these goals and believed that their identities were changed for the better. They believed they made a difference and that they were taking action to improve themselves, their families and the local people.

In their desire to get away from the mass package tourist representations, the women had constructed a positive image of their experiences. It was only in Kerry's story of encountering Lee that any critical questioning arose regarding the independent travelling experience. The women sought to make a connection with the local women they encountered. Yet, this connection was based entirely on their Western definitions and outlooks.

This paper has contributed to a broader and richer understanding of the gendered perspective on the meaning of independent travel. The literature has largely neglected this gendered analysis, assuming that all travellers would have the same perceptions regarding authenticity and self-identity.

The paper demonstrates that the tourism experience is differentiated by gender and poses an important question for the development of future tourism research and discourse.

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