

Using Emerging Methodologies to Examine Adventure Recreation and Tourism Experiences: A Critical Analysis

Susan Houge Mackenzie

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

Leisure and tourism researchers are increasingly exploring methodologies beyond traditional survey-based research in an effort to better understand recreation and tourism experiences. Emerging methodologies, such as autoethnography, may allow researchers to critically examine adventure experiences from new perspectives and thereby enhance theoretical models and practice (Hall, 2004). In contrast to external perspectives often employed in recreation and tourism research, autoethnography allows for detailed longitudinal exploration of these experiences across many timepoints. Ellis (2004) described autoethnography as “a form of ethnography... part auto or self and part ethno or culture” (p. 31) and “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (p. xix). Critical scholars (e.g., Anderson & Austin, 2012) have argued that autoethnography provides novel insights in tourism and leisure studies by illustrating the emotional complexities and contradictions inherent in these experiences. This method has been used to understand a range of recreation and tourism experiences, including whitewater rafting (Jonas, Stewart, & Larkin, 2003), adventure guiding (Buckley, 2012), and cycling events (Coghlan, 2012).

Despite the contributions of these studies, autoethnography remains a controversial methodology because nontraditional criteria are used to evaluate empirical inquiry (Sparkes, 2000). No universally accepted standards have been developed and scholars continue to debate proposed criteria (e.g., Anderson & Austin, 2012). For example, evocative autoethnographers reject traditional “objectivist” criteria such as validity, reliability, and generalizability. Instead, they characterize their work as the “epistemology of emotion” (Denzin, 1997, p. 228). Conversely, analytical autoethnographers adhere to more traditional, prescribed methodological guidelines (e.g., Anderson, 2006). In this study, analytical autoethnography was used to develop an authentic yet critical account of adventure guiding experiences. Beyond the theoretical and practical implications of this investigation for adventure researchers and guides, this project illustrates the benefits and potential pitfalls of using autoethnography to develop theory and practice in recreation and tourism.

Method

Analytical autoethnography was the methodological approach employed in this study, which requires the use of an established theoretical model to analyze and interpret data (Anderson & Austin, 2012). I adhered to corresponding methodological principles of analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, dialogue with informants beyond the

self, complete member status of researcher, and commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006). I also reflected on Richardson's (2000) criteria for evaluating personal narratives during the analysis and writing stages, which include substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impactfulness, and expression of a reality or lived experience. I recorded daily journal entries and weekly e-mails for a 120-day period while engaged in adventure guiding. Journal entries and e-mails were focused on recording internal psychological experiences, in addition to a wide range of external adventure guiding elements. In line with analytical autoethnography tenets, a psychological framework (reversal theory; Apter, 2001) and associated coding tools (O'Connell, Potocky, Cook, & Gerkovich, 1991) were used to initially code psychological states and emotions and to establish emergent themes. Data were then reanalyzed to identify common patterns or discrepancies. Finally, multiple data sources were triangulated to verify the consistency of interpretations.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis indicates that adventure guiding can be associated with dynamic positive and negative emotions and emotional labor, which may in turn affect guide well-being. Interactions with clients, coworkers, and managers emerged as key factors in these experiences. Findings highlight the effect of internal and external factors on guide experiences, well-being, and group safety. These results contrasted with previous findings regarding adventure client experiences (e.g., Coghlan & Pearce, 2009). These results indicate that traditional frameworks may not accurately reflect adventure guides' lived experiences and that their experiences require further scholarly examination.

The emergent method of autoethnography was effectively used in this study to identify complex and dynamic factors characterizing adventure guide experiences and to highlight key contextual differences between guide experiences and dominant models of tourism and recreation experiences (e.g., Richins, 1997). Despite the potential benefits in terms of unique data collection and theoretical expansion, the use of autoethnography presented unique challenges. These included identifying rigorous methods for implementing this novel methodology, identifying appropriate data coding guidelines, gaining acceptance in peer-reviewed outlets, and dealing with issues related to reporting and dissemination of personal data with large audiences.

These findings have exciting implications for methodological and theoretical developments in recreation and tourism. The theoretical findings may improve psychological models of adventure guide experiences and direct best practices for enhancing guide well-being. The methodological findings indicate that despite limitations in relation to traditional notions of generalizability, analytical autoethnography may provide an effective method for illuminating unique, nuanced insights from insider perspectives. This project addressed research gaps regarding guide experiences and the call to incorporate more experiential methodologies in recreation and tourism research (e.g., Weber, 2008).

References

- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373–394. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280449>
- Anderson, L., & Austin, M. (2012). Auto-ethnography in leisure studies. *Leisure Studies*, 31(2), 131–146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2011.599069>
- Apter, M. J. (Ed.). (2001). *Motivational styles in everyday life: A guide to reversal theory*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10427-000>
- Buckley, R. (2012). Rush as a key motivation in skilled adventure tourism: Resolving the risk recreation paradox. *Tourism Management*, 33, 961–970. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2011.10.002>

- Coghlan, A. (2012). An autoethnographic account of a cycling charity challenge event: Exploring manifest and latent aspects of the experience. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 17(2), 105–124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2012.729899>
- Coghlan, A., & Pearce, P. (2009). Tracking affective components of satisfaction. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 10(1), 42–58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/thr.2009.18>
- Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452243672>
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Hall, M. (2004). Reflexivity and tourism research. In J. Phillimore & L. Goodson (Eds.), *Qualitative research in tourism* (pp. 137–155). London, England: Routledge.
- Jonas, L. M., Stewart, W. P., & Larkin, K. W. (2003). Encountering Heidi: Audiences for a wilderness adventurer identity. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 32, 403–431. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891241603253835>
- O'Connell, K. A., Potocky, M., Cook, M. R., & Gerkovich, M. M. (1991). *Metamotivational state interview and coding schedule instruction manual*. Kansas City, MO: Midwest Research Institute.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Evaluating ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6, 253–255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/107780040000600207>
- Richins, M. L. (1997). Measuring emotions in the consumption experience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(2), 127–146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/209499>
- Sparkes, A. C. (2000). Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17, 21–41.
- Weber, K. (2008). Outdoor adventure tourism: A review of research approaches. In M. Weed (Ed.), *Sport & tourism: A reader* (pp. 57–70). New York, NY: Routledge.