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OLDER ADULTS SEEKING AUTHENTICITY

A Thesis in
Recreation, Park and Tourism Management

by
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ABSTRACT

Older adults' search for authenticity was examined through verbal descriptions of their pleasure travel experiences as well as their response to scenarios built around object authenticity (Belhassen & Caton, 2006); constructed/staged authenticity (Boorstin, 1964; MacCannell, 1973); and existential authenticity (Wang, 1999; Yeoman, Brass, & McMahon-Beattie, 2007). Older adults' verbal descriptions of their pleasure travel experiences did not include references to authenticity. However, when exposed to scenarios about authenticity, evidence suggested that older adults seek object authenticity, others engage in existential authenticity, and still others accept and even expect constructed events to be part of their pleasure travel experiences. The findings illuminate the way in which older adults think about authenticity, ultimately extending and enriching the literature on the topic.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations has estimated that more than 2 billion people will be 60 years of age or older by 2050. “They will account for 22% (or 1 out of 5) of the world’s populations, compared with only 10% in 2000, and this demographic shift will be seen across all continents” (United Nations, 2000, as cited in Patterson, 2007, p. 528). Variouslly called “older adults,” “seniors” (Shoemaker, 2000), “retirees” (Gustafson, 2002), and the “elderly” (Lieux, Weaver, & McCearly, 1994), this population is intriguing to the travel industry in part because a sizeable percentage possess discretionary money that they spend on travel (Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001; Patterson, 2007; Travel Industry Association, 2009). Furthermore, people 55 years of age and older (from this point on referred to as older adults) want to travel more often, visit long haul destinations, and stay away longer than other age groups (“Baby Boom Generation,” 2008; Shoemaker, 2000). They also have a “quest for self” attitude, which means that they tend to be self-absorbed, are perfectionists, and have high self-esteem (Pennington-Gray, 1999). Perhaps this is why many want to go on a once in a lifetime (“Baby Boom Generation,” 2008), exotic holiday in the future that involves, as Ross suggests, “. . .more in-depth ways of experiencing familiar places.” Is their quest for in-depth experiences equivalent to a search for authenticity?

According to tourism researchers and anthropologists, tourists seek authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences. Early on Boorstin (1964) argued that tourists are passive onlookers who seek the “extravagantly strange.” Since then, researchers have suggested that there are multiple types of authenticity, with recent conceptualizations focusing on existential and object authenticity (Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Wang, 1999).

These researchers suggest that tourists want and, as a result, create authentic experiences in a variety of settings, but they do not examine whether interest in and creation of authentic experiences is true across all populations. Nor do they utilize consistent definitions of “authenticity,” making comparisons difficult. Given the shortcomings of the research on authenticity and its limited application with older adults, the purpose of the present study is to document if older adults search for authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences. I analyzed verbal descriptions of older adult’s pleasure travel experiences as well as responses to scenarios about authenticity to address the following research questions: Do older adults seek authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences? If yes or no, how do they describe authenticity? And, “Do descriptions of authenticity differ based on type of travel (i.e., domestic vs. international)?” The last research question was included because Turner (1994) suggested, “Tourism paradoxically is a quest for authentic local cultures,” and when traveling outside one’s own nation, there may be a stronger desire for these different authentic cultures (cited in Burns, 1999, p. 33).

Authenticity

Several scholars have struggled with the ambiguities associated with authenticity (Boorstin, 1964; Cohen, 1972; MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Redfoot, 1984; Wang, 1999, 2007; Yeoman et al., 2007), and still today have yet to agree on a definition or framework. Boorstin claimed, “The modern tourist is a passive onlooker who seeks to enjoy the ‘extravagantly strange’ and ‘pseudo-events,’ which ultimately “induce both the tourist entrepreneurs and the natives to produce ever more extravagant contrivances for touristic consumption...” (cited in Cohen, 1988a, p. 30)

MacCannell (1973) was the first to suggest that tourists seek authentic experiences they cannot find in their ordinary lives. He promoted the idea of front-stage and back-stage regions of the tourist setting. Back-stages, according to MacCannell, are authentic stages where locals live without any tourists whereas front-stages are provided specifically for the tourist and it is these areas tourists are trying to go beyond in order to achieve an authentic experience. Building off of MacCannell's work, researchers have questioned whether the tourist is experiencing "staged" authenticity or a real view of that destination. It is within this constructivist approach, that there is less stress on the originality of the toured objects.

Also in 1973, Turner identified the modern pilgrim and "*communitas*" which are characterized by "liminality" in cultural pilgrimages. The existential or spontaneous *communitas* is exemplified by conditions outside the obligatory tasks of everyday life (i.e., economic or political tasks) (Wang, 1999). In these *communitas* social roles, status, and socioeconomic positions disappear, allowing the tourist to experience their authentic self through relationships built with the host destination or fellow tourists.

Turner further argued,

Tourism paradoxically is a quest for authentic local cultures, but the tourist industry, by creating the illusion of authenticity, in fact reinforces the experience of social and cultural simulation. The very existence of tourism rules out the possibility of [an] authentic cultural experience." (cited in Burns, 1999, p. 33)

If Turner is correct in his claim, why would older adults be concerned with authenticity if, supposedly, it can never be attained?

Using MacCannell's and Boorstin's work as a platform, Cohen (1979) identified five different typologies of tourists: recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and

existential. These typologies span the spectrum between the experience of the tourist seeking pleasure in the strange and the novel (i.e., the recreational tourist), to that of the modern pilgrim in quest of meaning or a search for one's center (i.e., the existential tourist). "It is in the experiential mode that the tourist is looking for an experience of authenticity in the lives of others" (Waller & Lea, 1998, p. 112).

Subsequently, Wang (1999) rethought the concept of authenticity and proposed the term, "existential authenticity." He claimed that tourists' experiences are authentic whether the toured object is authentic or not. The tourist "activates [an] existential state of *Being* within the liminal process of tourism," which creates an authentic experience (p. 352). Attempting to provide empirical support for Wang's claim, Kim and Jamal (2007) surveyed repeat visitors to a regional festival that they felt represented the characteristics of a liminal touristic space. Their results corroborated Wang's notion of existential authenticity, especially as it relates to individuals' participation in activities associated with friendship, identity-seeking, and self-transformation.

Existential authenticity also can be characterized by nostalgia and heritage. In terms of nostalgia,

...It idealizes the ways of life in which people are supposed as freer, more innocent, more spontaneous, purer, and truer to themselves than usual (such ways of life are usually supposed to exist in the past or in childhood). People are nostalgic about these ways of life because they want to re-live them in the form of tourism at least temporally, empathically, and symbolically. (Wang, 1999, p. 360)

Traveling to different heritage sites and experiencing one's past also is claimed to induce an existential authentic experience (Hughes, 1995; DeLyser, 1999). "Surrounded by copies and replicas, the consumer is thought to search for the seemingly authentic experience in attractions

that have historical integrity and help create a sense of place and belonging” (Waitt, 2000, pp. 838-839).

An additional perspective on authenticity is that it is not a tangible asset but, instead, is a judgment or value placed on the setting or product by the observers (Chhabra, 2005; Moscardo & Pearce, 1999; Xie & Wall, 2002). DeLyser (1999) states, “authenticity is not simply a condition inherent in an object, awaiting discovery, but a term that has different meanings in different contexts, in different places, to different people, and even to the same person at different times” (p. 612). Hence, as Chaabra (2005, p. 65) asserts, “tourists are active creators of authenticity....”

The on-going debate regarding authenticity continues with intense rebuttals and criticism, which only add to the confusion about the concept. For example, Steiner and Reisinger (2006) and Belhassen and Caton (2006) debated the existence of objects of authenticity. Steiner and Reisinger suggested, “Scholars should abandon both the expression ‘object authenticity,’ on the grounds of its heterogeneous usage, and the concept(s) it represents, for the principal reason that it has historically been conceptualized in ways that are ontologically unsound” (cited in Belhassen & Caton, 2006, p. 853). Belhassen and Caton challenged their position:

Tourists still go to the Louvre in order to see the Mona Lisa, and many of them would be disappointed if they were instead presented with a reproduction without being given what they considered to be an adequate reason for the substitution... These examples show that object authenticity is still relevant to tourists, and as long as this is the case, it must be relevant to scholarship as well. (p. 855)

Steiner and Reisinger (2006) went on to state, “the term authenticity is generally used in two senses within tourism: “authenticity as genuineness or realness of artifacts or events, and also as a human attribute signifying one’s true self or being true to one’s essential nature” (p.

299). Building from Steiner and Reisinger's "two senses," Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart (2008) surveyed American Evangelicals on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Their results suggested that the emotional experiences "religious tourists" have during their travels are directly linked to a "self-transformation" as well as the social environment in which their transformation and experiences take place. Thus, they argued, studies of authenticity must adopt a comprehensive approach to authenticity that accounts for objective, constructive, and existential authenticity.

The lack of agreement among scholars about authenticity suggests there is subjectivity in each tourist's experience. "People increasingly see the world in terms of real and fake... [due to the] shift to the Experience Economy. ...What consumers want today are experiences-memorable events that engage them in an inherently personal way" (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, p. 1). This is especially true for older adults "...who are particularly experiential in their value orientation" (Schiffman & Sherman, 1991, p. 189) and, as a result, may seek authenticity through their travel experiences.

Older Adults and Travel

According to the Travel Industry Association (2000), the older adult market is very attractive to the travel industry given its size, financial power, and availability of time. It is also a market that has received attention from tourism researchers. Huang and Tsai (2003), for example, studied the behaviors/characteristics of older adult Taiwanese travelers, including their "travel motivation, travel patterns, and travel destination choices" (p. 563). The authors concluded that a majority of older adult travelers were motivated to travel for rest and relaxation. Convenience was also considered to be important. These results were used to help Taiwanese travel agents identify and respond to the needs and desires of their older adult market.

In terms of older adults' motivations to travel, Guinn (1980) suggested they include "rest and relaxation, social interaction, physical exercise, learning, excitement and nostalgia" (cited in Huang & Tsai, 2003, p. 562). Romsa and Blenmen (1989) found that older Germans travel to see friends or relatives and for health reasons. And, Sangpikul (2008), in a study with Japanese older adults, documented novelty and knowledge as the top motivations for travel. These researchers identified a multitude of motivations for travel, which may, in part, be due to the variety of approaches they used to collect data. Romsa and Blenmen, for example, employed a list of motivations within a nation-wide survey, whereas Sangpikul generated a list of motivations from international travel literature. Similarly, Guinn asked respondents to respond to motivation statements and rate their importance. Not one of these studies included the desire for authenticity as a reason for pleasure among older adults.

In terms of older adults' travel patterns, Anderson and Langmeyer (1982) found that older adults prefer non-hectic, pre-planned, group-based, pleasure trips when traveling for leisure. Also, as recognized earlier, older adults want to travel more often, visit long haul destinations, and stay away longer than other age groups ("Baby Boom Generation," 2008; Shoemaker, 2000). Colli, Sharp, and Giesbrecht (2003) also identified several patterns including the importance of traveling by personal vehicle.

Research on travel destination choice among older adults has addressed the factors and attributes that affect their decision-making behavior. Zimmer, Brayley, and Searle (1995) and Shoemaker (2000), for example, noted that beautiful scenery, time, money, price of meals, special discounts, and distance influence older adult travel destination choices. Studies on travel destination choice have also shown that previous experience is a key factor when making travel

decisions (Crompton, 1992). The search for authenticity also could be a factor in travel destination decisions, but few, if any, studies have identified this gap in the research.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if older adults search for authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences. By analyzing verbal description of older adults' pleasure travel experiences as well as their response to scenarios built around the notion of object authenticity (Belhassen & Caton, 2006), constructed/staged authenticity (Boorstin, 1964; McCannell, 1973), and existential authenticity (Wang, 1999; Yeoman et al., 2007), I will document if older adults reference authenticity in conjunction with their pleasure travel experiences. I will also examine how older adults respond to travel scenarios that describe various types of authenticity.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Study Sample

The sample consisted of 298 older adults (i.e., age 55 and older) who had traveled with *Penn State Alumni Tours* (i.e., a service offered through the *Penn State Alumni Association*). Older adults were selected as the study population specifically because of their market strength and the limited attention they have received from researchers, especially in a tourism context. As noted earlier, older adults travel more often, visit long haul destinations, and stay away longer than other age groups (“Baby Boom Generation,” 2008; Shoemaker, 2000). The e-mail addresses for older adults who had traveled with *Penn State Alumni Tours* were obtained from the *Penn State Alumni Association*.

Pilot Study

Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted with a convenience sample of three older adults. The pilot study was conducted to: (a) identify problems with interview questions, (b) discover areas where more probing questions might be needed, and (c) get a feel for how to “manage” (e.g., speed up, spend more time) the interview. The only changes that were made to the interview protocol were to add more follow-up questions (e.g., “Why did you say...” and “Can you tell me more about that”).

Data Collection

Data were collected across a two-week period. First, an introductory e-mail was sent to 298 individuals who had traveled with the *Penn State Alumni Association* (Appendix A). The e-mail contained a description of the study and a request that all who are interested in participating in the study contact the researcher directly. A follow-up screening question was sent to all

interested individuals (n=53) immediately upon their response to the introductory e-mail. The screening question was: “Have you traveled for pleasure with *Penn State Alumni Tours*, with any other travel company, or on your own in the last three years”? Individuals who answered “no” to the question (n=26) were removed from further consideration and sent a follow-up e-mail thanking them for their interest in participating (Appendix A). Individuals who answered “yes” (n=27) were invited to review a description of the interview questions and set up an interview date and location (Appendix A). In cases where in-person interviews were not feasible (n=13), phone interviews were conducted.

After respondents agreed upon a date and time for their interview they were asked to bring in 10 photos of vacations that were most meaningful to them. Participants interviewed by phone were asked to email their photos to the author prior to the interview. The photos were used to prompt significant memories from past vacations. Before starting all interviews, individuals were asked to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix B).

While willingness to participate in the study was considered consent, at the beginning of each interview, expectations of the study were clarified and individuals were told that the interview was going to be taped. As an incentive, participants were invited to enter into a drawing for a Penn State football signed by Joe Paterno.

According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006, p. 59), saturation, “or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data” can occur within the first 12 interviews. Given that differences in response were expected based on type of travel (i.e., domestic vs. international), saturation was expected to occur between 12 and 25 interviews.

Study Instrument

I began the interview by introducing myself and briefly describing the study. Following this introduction I asked participants to read the consent form and for permission to record the interview. Then, in an effort to generate a comfortable environment, I asked the study participants to discuss destinations they like to travel to, how often they travel for pleasure, and to describe the photos they brought to the interview.

Following the discussion about past travel experiences I presented individuals with three scenarios that describe various types of authenticity. The three scenarios were as follows:

Scenario 1: You are visiting the Louvre in France to see the Mona Lisa and after your trip you find out that the painting you saw was actually a replica because the original was replaced for cleaning. How would this make you feel?

This scenario is built around “object authenticity.” It presents a situation where a tourist may feel cheated after being denied the opportunity of seeing the original. Belhassen and Caton (2006) argue that tourists seek object authenticity whereas Steiner and Reisinger (2006) and Wang (1999) believe the opposite. Wang actually argues that “the object-oriented foundation... has not been successful in explaining many of the motivations and experiences found in tourism” (cited in Kim and Jamal, 2007, p. 183).

Scenario 2: On vacation in Hawaii, you witness a ceremonial sacrificing of a pig and realize after the show that the performers are not native Hawaiians and the pig is plastic. How would you respond to this information?

According to Boorstin (1964), “The modern tourist is a passive onlooker who seeks to enjoy the ‘extravagantly strange’ and ‘pseudo-events’ which ultimately induce both the tourist entrepreneurs and the natives to produce ever more extravagant contrivances for touristic consumption...”(cited in Cohen, 1988a, p. 30). This scenario represents constructed authenticity or what MacCannell (1973) refers to as “staged” authenticity.

Scenario 3: While in downtown London, you visit a popular tourist pub with your family. This pub has been written about in the Lonely Planet travel magazine and other tourist travel brochures. While there, you find that a majority of the others in the pub are on vacation as well. After an unforgettable evening with your family at this bar, you realize you never met a local towns person. Would this information take away from your memorable evening?

According to Wang (1999), this scenario incorporates existential authenticity. In such a liminal experience, people feel they themselves are much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than in everyday life, not because they find the toured objects are authentic but simply because they are engaging in non-ordinary activities, free from the constraints of the daily. (pp. 351-352).

Further, Yeoman et al. (2007) suggest, tourism destinations [like the pub listed in Scenario 3] have an opportunity to create something real, what is termed ‘a sense of place’...which thereby provide[s] a destination with its own authenticity. (p.1135)

After reading each scenario, individuals were asked the following questions: “Can you tell me why you responded the way you did to this scenario?” and “Have you experienced similar situations in your pleasure travel? If yes, can you tell me about those situations?”

The interview was then drawn to a close with a general question about individuals’ pleasure travel. Every participant consented to a follow up interview, if needed. (See Appendix C for the interview protocol.)

Data Analysis

Data reduction and data display entailed several successive steps. First, my advisor and I independently read through the quotes, generated codes, and then met and discussed the codes and their relative representation in the data. Second, the resulting list of codes was refined by me: (a) independently reading through the data and presenting the codes to my advisor, (b) undergoing another round of verification coding, and (c) consulting one additional time with my advisor. My advisor and I reached at least 96.8% agreement on the coding of the data. Conclusions and additional verification procedures included identifying the most prominent patterns of data, analyzing clusters of categories, and looking for negative, disconfirming cases.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if older adults search for authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences. However, to enable a discussion about authenticity, I first needed to establish participants' experience with and thoughts about pleasure travel. Thus, the results are presented as follows: a description of the study participants, thoughts about pleasure travel and, lastly, responses to the authenticity scenarios.

Names used in this manuscript are pseudonyms. Table 1 includes these pseudonyms, participants' ages, and the date of each interview.

Thoughts About Pleasure Travel

Descriptions of Pleasure Travel Experiences

When asked to describe their pleasure travel experiences in general, four themes emerged: "Places," "Destination," "Duration," and "Reason." A description of each theme and subcategories that comprise it follow.

Places. Respondents discussed places in terms of their characteristics, i.e. "Different/New" (n=8), "Historical Sites" (n=5), and "Pretty Scenery/Beauty" (n=4). For example, respondents reported wanting to see different or new places when traveling. Sample comments were: "We like to go to places we haven't been before" and "We travel all different places." In terms of historical sites, individuals suggested they travel to "[enjoy] the history" or they travel to a specific destination "for its history." More generally, Sue indicated that she travels because she enjoys "historical sites and those kinds of things." With respect to pretty scenery/beauty, Jen claimed she "liked to see pretty places," while Bill said he enjoys "Switzerland for its alpine views."

Table 1. Participants' pseudonyms, age, and the date of their interview

Pseudonym	Age	Date
Jen	66	5-19-09
Harry	73	5-21-09
Rebecca	72	
Frank	59	
Grace	71	
Jacob	69	
Julie	63	
Linda	69	5-22-09
Barb	71	
Ann	72	
Sue	58	5-23-09
Harriet	64	
John	75	5-24-09
Lucy	73	
Margret	56	
Bill	67	5-25-09
Jeff	68	
Thomas	77	5-26-09
Jean	63	
Joan	66	
Karen	64	
Jerry	65	
Bob	71	

Destination. Many individuals cited specific destinations. Thus, the theme “Destination” was created and further delineated into subcategories representing types of destinations, i.e. “International Destinations” (n=37), “Domestic Destinations” (n=21), “Travel Abroad or Overseas” (n=6), “Historical” (n=6), and “Anywhere and Everywhere” (n=5).

The first two subcategories were International Destinations and Domestic Destinations. Both categories consisted of specific destinations. Common international destinations were Switzerland, the Caribbean, and France. Top domestic destinations were Hilton Head, Nashville,

and the “U.S.” International destinations were reported almost two times as much as domestic destinations.

More generally, individuals noted that they like to travel abroad or overseas. This subcategory—Travel Abroad or Overseas—is different from international destinations because there were no actual destinations cited. The responses comprising this theme (e.g., “We’ve done a fair amount of traveling abroad” and “We’ve generally been out of the country”) are broad statements documenting that respondents have traveled abroad.

The fourth subcategory was “Historical.” Sue and her husband “...spend a lot of time at different historical sites.” They travel mainly to Civil War battlefields and enjoy historical reenactments across the United States. Jerry, on the other hand, enjoys Savannah and Charleston because they are “...very interesting historical towns.” He “enjoy[s] the history” in each destination.

The final subcategory, “Anywhere and Everywhere,” included comments like, “We’re happy to travel anywhere” or “Anywhere is good.” Jeff reported he had traveled just about “everywhere,” which for some respondents meant over 55 countries. Others said the experience of traveling was satisfying enough, regardless of the destination.

Duration. Participants reported taking trips ranging from day trips to trips that lasted one-half of the year.

Reason. This theme included seven subcategories, i.e. “Travel with Family and Friends” (n=6), “Travel to Visit Family and Friends” (n=6), “Meet and Get to Know People” (n=5), “Business” (n=5), “Historical Sites” (n=4), “Culture” (n=3), and “Physically Active” (n=3). The first two subcategories were traveling with or to visit family and friends. A majority of respondents listed this as a main reason for pleasure travel. “We have traveled extensively with

my family” and “An awful lot of our travel...winds up being to see family,” exemplified the comments included in this subcategory.

Participants reported the “opportunity to interact with people...” and being “interested in getting to know the people” as motivators for travel. In order to increase these opportunities, several participants found it beneficial to travel to destinations where “people spoke English and [they] didn’t have to worry about a language barrier.” In response to the question, “Do you talk to the people when you travel,” Jean said, “Every chance we get.”

The fourth subcategory is traveling for business. Many participants reported working for overseas companies or traveling with a spouse who worked internationally. Jacob reported that “[his] business has taken [him] to most corners of the world over the last forty or fifty years.” Thomas reported being more familiar with foreign destinations because “he did business over there.” Rebecca also reported she did “a lot of traveling on her husband’s business.”

The fifth subcategory is historical sites. The description of history in participants’ responses transcended many of the themes and proved to be a major interest in participants’ vacation choices. For example, Jerry reported traveling to Dollywood in Tennessee and enjoying the history behind Dolly Parton and her musical career.

Also, several participants noted that culture was desirable when traveling. For Jen, “opportunities to see other cultures” are important while for Barb a “main thing” is “the culture.”

The last subcategory is the opportunity to be physically active. Bill specifically stated Switzerland was a favorite destination because of its “hiking and possibilities” while Sue enjoys destinations “where [she] can be physically active” in order to stay healthy. Table 2 provides a summary of the types of responses individuals shared about their pleasure travel experiences.

Table 2. Types of responses about pleasure travel experiences

Subcategory	Representative Responses
<i>Place</i>	
Different/New (n=8)*	We travel all different places. We like to go places we haven't been before. We rarely go back to the same place.
Historical (n=5)	I like to go to historical sites. We spend a lot of time at different historical sites. I travel to Britain for its history.
Pretty Scenery/Beauty (n=4)	We enjoy the scenery. I'd like to see pretty places. ...Switzerland for its alpine views.
<i>Destinations</i>	
International Destinations (n=37)	Switzerland Caribbean France
Domestic Destinations (n=21)	Hilton Head Nashville In the United States
Traveling Abroad/Overseas (n=6)	We've done a fair amount of traveling abroad. We've generally been out of the country. We also enjoy international travel.
Historical (n=6)	Britain for its history. Those are both very interesting historical towns. I like to go to historical sites.
Anywhere and Everywhere (n=5)	I've traveled just about everywhere ... anywhere. Pretty much go anywhere. We're happy to travel anywhere.
<i>Duration:</i> Participants reported taking trips ranging from day trips to trips that lasted one-half of the year.	
<i>Reason</i>	
Travel with Family and Friends (n=6)	With our kids we started traveling in the summertime. We visited Colorado with our older grandson. I have traveled extensively with my family.
Travel to Visit Family and Friends (n=6)	His brother lives down there so we visited occasionally. Now I have a son who lives in Switzerland so I've been there a couple of times. We love to travel to visit our daughter.
Meet and Get to Know People (n=5)	I'm interested in people. ...Opportunities to interact with people of that culture. We like Italy a great deal and England... because we can talk to the people there.

Table 2. Types of responses about pleasure travel experiences, cont.

Subcategory	Representative Responses
Business (n=5)	Switzerland is one of our favorites. I worked there for about a year so we have contacts there. Some of those were business trips. A lot of traveling on my husband's business.
Historical (n=4)	We enjoyed the history. I like to go to historical places. Those are both very historical towns.
Physically Active (n=3)	...Where I can be physically active. Switzerland for its hiking and possibilities. Things where I am physically active.

*Represents the number of responses placed in to this category.

Meaningful Pleasure Travel Experiences

Individuals were also asked to describe recent meaningful pleasure travel experiences. In so doing they referred to the “pleasures” and “enjoyment” associated with their experiences, especially as they related to: “History” (n=16), “Family and Friends” (n=12), “Pretty Scenery” (n=10), “Getting to Know/Meeting/Interacting with the Local People” (n=8), “Education /Learning” (n=8), “Confirmation of Readings” (n=5), “Different/Exotic Experience” (n=5), “Small Group Experience” (n=4), and “Interesting Architecture” (n=4). During this part of the interview participants were also asked to describe photos they brought to the interview in an effort to better understand their trips.

History. Many respondents indicated that they obtained pleasure or enjoyment from the history of the destination. For example, Jacob suggested that the vacation was “not only memorable from an enjoyable standpoint but of course historically... [it was] extremely valuable.” Harry was “particularly interested in the Island of Georgia where they used to do a lot of whaling.” Julie referenced her traveling girl group and mentioned they “were all interested in historic homes.”

Family and Friends. Traveling with family and friends represented the second most common response. For example, Sue said, “I’ve done some traveling with my single daughter” while Grace indicated, “My husband and I went up to visit his family.” Julie talked about a family vacation she enjoyed most. During her description of a family vacation she referenced her photo (Figure 1) and said, “There [are] my two sons in Florida on a trip to visit their grandmother and I like that one because it was one of the few times they were actually getting along and having a good time together when they were that age. But it was a good memory.”

Figure 1. Sons on a trip to Florida



Pretty Scenery. When referencing photos many people indicated that they took the photos because of the beautiful scenery or that the pictured item was particularly “pretty.” When reviewing their photos, Bill and Frank noted the “beautiful scenery in the background” and that “the surroundings were pretty.” Julie and Sue, on the other hand, stated that the scenes in their

pictures were “particularly beautiful.” Jeff’s reason for taking his picture (Figure 2) was because “the flowers tend to come down like grapes....”

Figure 2. Flowers draped like grapes



Interacting With the Local People. Many respondents identified the “opportunity to get to know the local people,” as an important part of their travel experiences. While in the Netherlands and Belgium, for example, Sue “had an afternoon at different homes and had tea,” which, to her, “...was very special to get into the home of someone from a different culture.” Similarly, “human contact, and the way people lived are more of interest...” to Linda. Karen exemplified this subcategory with her statement: “If you really wish to travel right you just really need to be open and talk to people.” She also went on to say, “If we just talk to people that we meet it makes our adventures so much more interesting.”

Learning. Participants also referenced the importance of learning. For example, Harry, who traveled to the Island of Georgia, discussed his opportunity to see whales and claimed it was “very interesting to see how the mothers feed the youngsters.” He also stated, “It’s better to be

with experienced people [when you travel]...you learn a great deal from people who have been traveling so broadly and so forth... you [also] learn a little more about the world.” Other respondents used phrases such as, “the trip was educationally valuable,” or they enjoyed destinations that were “more educational.”

Confirmation. Reading or hearing about a destination and finally seeing it while traveling was also important to individuals. Many enjoyed witnessing places or people they have read or heard about. For instance, Julie talked about the “famous” windmills of Holland and said, “that was...something you read about all your life and then you finally get to see it. It was pretty amazing.” Barb indicated, “The expectations were just that I’d heard so much about the African continent... I was interested to see all of that.” And, China, for Lucy, was the most interesting destination she had been to because she had “always heard about the Great Wall.”

Different/Exotic Experience. While discussing their trips, several individuals talked about their most memorable trips as being “different.” For example, Jacob stated that he and his wife have always “been interested in the offbeat kind of thing.” Lucy suggested that China was the most “different because it was not at all like anything in the United States and the people are different.” When discussing where and why participants like to travel, Linda claimed, “the more exotic, the better.”

Small Group Experience. Several people reported liking smaller groups when traveling. Rebecca “...like[s] small groups” when traveling while Joan, when talking about her and her husband’s trip to Alaska stated, “It was a really great way to see Alaska because... we got lots and lots of attention.”

Interesting Architecture. The importance of seeing different architecture while traveling was also important to individuals. Julie claimed that she and her husband were “both interested

in architecture.” The following picture (Figure 3) shows “just one of the architectural details that [she] photographed.”

Figure 3. A meaningful architectural detail



Grace and Thomas used phrases such as: “I thought the architecture of Amsterdam was really neat” or I enjoy “architectural things that you can look at that are really famous.” A summary in Table 3 provides insight to the pleasures and enjoyment individuals shared associated with their pleasure travel experiences.

Table 3. Pleasures and enjoyment associated with travel

Subcategory	Representative Responses
History (n=16)*	We are all interested in historical homes. These were not only memorable from an enjoyable standpoint but of course historically valuable. It was emotionally touching to go to the cemeteries and visit the beaches where the Word War II people landed.
Family and Friends (n=12)	We had our son and two daughters with us on the trip and that was a very interesting trip. This is a picture of myself and a friend of mine in Maryland. We had a wonderful time with our families.
Pretty Scenery (n=10)	It burned at the Civil War but it was so pretty and the columns were so unique. The mountain was just beautiful...it was just great. I loved the towers and the bridge.
Interacting with the local people (n=8)	Getting to know the people is nice. We enjoyed meeting and interacting with all the people. If you really wish to travel right you just really need to be open and talk to people.
Learning (n=8)	These are more educational. You learn a little more about the world. We were particularly interested in the Island of Georgia where they use to do a lot of whaling.
Confirmation (n=5)	That was something you read about all your life and you finally get to see it. It was amazing. The first time I saw a big elephant in the bush was really thrilling. When we stand where the great general stood and see what they saw it's just...I just...that's fascinating.
Different/Exotic Experience (n=5)	Different and fascinating China was – they're different. So we like variety.
Small Group Experience (n=4)	Great way to see Alaska because we got lots and lots of attention. We like the small groups. We always like a small group.
Interesting Architecture (n=4)	I thought the architecture in Amsterdam was really neat. Architectural things that you can look at that are really famous. We're both interested in architecture and that was just one of the architectural details that I photographed.

*Represents the number of responses placed in to this category.

What Older Adults Enjoy Most About Traveling for Pleasure

When asked what they enjoyed most about traveling for pleasure, two overall themes emerged—"Learning" and "Seeing Different Things." "Learning" was the most common theme, but "Seeing Different Things" was a very close second. A description of each theme and subcategories follows.

Learning. This theme reinforces individuals' interest in learning on their vacations or wanting to know more about the culture they are visiting. Five subcategories of "Learning" were identified: "History" (n=12), "The Learning Process" (n=7), "Wanting to Know More About the Places You've Read About" (n=7), "Getting to Know or Learn About the People" (n=4), and "Finding How Similar We All Are" (n=3),

Individuals enjoy the history in destinations. Comments such as, "We like to study about the history" and "I include with pleasure in my travels the fact that the travel has historical significance because both me and my wife enjoy the history of the areas that we visit," were representative of individuals' response to the question: "What do you enjoy most about traveling for pleasure"? Others reported enjoying "feeling immersed in the history" or "seeing some historic things."

The learning process was also important to individuals. Harry and Julie indicated: "It's a learning process when you go abroad" and "I think travel is a wonderful learning experience." Sue, on the other hand, stated, "I like to learn" while traveling while Joan enjoys having the "opportunity of learning."

The third subcategory included comments related to places individuals have read about. Common responses in this subcategory included: "Seeing things that I've read about," "It's always nice to see what you've read about," and "Getting to know more about the different tourist places that I've read about."

Several participants reported enjoying "seeing how other people live" and "learning more about people." Meeting and interacting with the local people was also important to respondents.

Along with seeing and meeting local people, many participants found "similarities" in other cultures. For example, Harry indicated, "It's kind of interesting to get to know how similar

people are all the way around the world. They have different cultural things but they all basically have the same interests and desires.” And, Karen found “...that we are all so different but so basically alike and so alike in our humanness...and our need for connectedness.”

Seeing Different Things. This theme is comprised of four subcategories, i.e. “Interaction with Different People” (n=10), “Seeing New or Different Things” (n=9), “New Places” (n=7), and “New Cultures” (n=7). The subcategories are very similar but vary in terms of what the participant is looking for in his or her pleasure travel experiences.

In the first subcategory Sue reported what she enjoyed most was, “...interaction with different groups of people.” “Seeing and meeting other people” and “Seeing how other people live” also were common responses. For Karen, the most enjoyable part of traveling is “...the wonderful people we meet.”

In the second subcategory, Seeing New or Different Things, the term *thing* is used to describe activities, places, or objects. Common responses included, “I like seeing new things,” or “doing different things.” “The experience of seeing new things” or “seeing things that are out there” were also mentioned by participants.

Seeing new places was the third subcategory. Many respondents indicated that what they enjoyed most about traveling for pleasure was “seeing new places” or places “totally out of [their] regular experience.”

The final subcategory was, New Cultures. Participants used phrases such as, “I want to see different cultures” or “I like to experience a different culture.” John suggested, “just being exposed to different cultures,” was what he enjoyed most about traveling for pleasure. See Table 4 for a synopsis of the themes and subcategories that emerged from the question, “What do you enjoy most about traveling for pleasure”?

In summary, the study participants were well traveled domestically and internationally. They are willing to travel “everywhere and anywhere” for a day or up to one-half of a year. What their travel experiences mean to them, which was addressed through multiple questions (i.e., describe your travel in general, describe particular trips with representative photos, and describe what you enjoy most about pleasure travel), resulted in some common themes. For example, two common themes were participants’ interest in history as well as getting to know other people through travel. Learning, which was connected to individuals’ interest in the heritage of a destination, as well as seeing new and different things was also referenced.

Table 4. What individuals enjoy most about traveling

Subcategory	Representative Responses
<i>Learning</i>	
History (n=12)*	I include with pleasure in my travels the fact that the travel has historical significance because both me and my wife enjoy the history of the areas that we visit. Seeing some historic things. I like to feel immersed in history.
The Learning Process (n=7)	Traveling is a learning process. I think travel is a wonderful learning experience. I think is people traveled more we would all learn to get along better. We would learn more about each other.
Wanting to Know More About Places You've Read About (n=7)	Be where people have been that I've read about Just to be able to stand where those people stood... it's really neat. Seeing things that I've read about.
Getting to Know or Learn About the People (n=4)	We like to learn more about the people Seeing how other people live. We like to read about and learn more about the people and so forth.
Finding How Similar We All Are (n=3)	Finding out that we are all so different but so basically alike and so alike in our humanness and our need for connectedness. We're more alike than different in most places. It's kind of interesting to get to know how similar people are all the way around the world.
<i>Seeing Different Things</i>	
Interaction with Different People (n=10)	It is the wonderful people we meet. Meeting different people. I always enjoy meeting the people.
Seeing New or Different Things (n=9)	I think seeing new things. Doing different things. Seeing things I've never seen before.
New Places (n=7)	Seeing new places. Places totally our of your regular experience. Just seeing places.
New Cultures (n=7)	I like to experience a different culture. I want to see different cultures. Just being exposed to a different culture.

*Represents the number of responses placed in to this category.

Responses to the Authenticity Scenarios

To address the research questions (i.e., Do older adults seek authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences? If yes (or no), how do they describe authenticity? Do descriptions of authenticity differ based on type of travel?), individuals were asked to respond to three authenticity scenarios. Each scenario focused on a different type of authenticity. The resulting data are displayed separately by each scenario and immediately followed by a table with representative responses.

Scenario 1: You are visiting the Louvre in France to see the Mona Lisa and after your trip you find out that the painting you saw was actually a replica because the original was replaced for cleaning. How would this make you feel?

The first scenario was built around the notion of “object authenticity.” It presents a situation where a tourist may feel cheated after being denied the opportunity of seeing the original. Four themes representing individuals’ responses to scenario one emerged. These themes were titled, “Disappointment” (n=20), “Experience Matters More” (n=7), “Not Upset” (n=3), and “Expect the Real Thing” (n=3). Following are descriptions of each theme and Table 5 with representative responses.

Disappointment

Rebecca said she “would not be happy” with seeing the replica of the Mona Lisa and would “have a very negative feeling.” Harry exemplified this theme with his statement, “Looking at something that’s fake and not the real thing I’d find that to be a pretty big

disappointment.” The Mona Lisa is a significant picture known globally and these participants unanimously indicated that they would feel “disappointed” if told they had seen a replica.

Other terms older adults used to talk about their disappointment were “cheated” and “duped.” These terms and associated explanations had a stronger sense of severity to them. Jen stated she “might have felt cheated,” but Margret and Jeff proclaim they would feel “very cheated” or “duped.” The percentage of respondents claiming to be disappointed, cheated or duped in some part of their response to scenario one was 87% (n=20).

Experience Matters More

Many of the participants claimed that they would be happy or “OK” with seeing a replica because the experience of being in the Louvre mattered more than seeing the real Mona Lisa. John’s comment, for example, exemplified this theme perfectly when he said, “I think to be able to visit the Louvre and to see the Mona Lisa is very impressive and very touching whether you see the original or a replica.” Others used phrases like, “It would still be the place and the experience” and “If I saw something that looked beautiful to me, okay.” According to Linda, “Being there in itself, being in the Louvre itself and looking at a picture whether it’s real or not really doesn’t matter to me. It’s the experience that counts.”

Not Upset

The responses comprising this theme implied that individuals would not feel bad if they found out they had seen a replica of the Mona Lisa. For example, Frank stated, “I’m not an art expert so I can’t appreciate the difference between a good looking replica and the real thing.” Ann, on the other hand, said, “I wouldn’t understand anyway.” Karen shared a different response. She claimed she, “would probably just laugh and say, wouldn’t that just be our luck.”

Lucy said she and her husband “would shrug it off.” Whether the picture of the Mona Lisa was real or fake, these participants would not have cared.

Expect the Real Thing

The final theme representing responses to Scenario 1 included a small number of statements that were strongly related to the “Disappointment” theme. Participants talked about “expecting to see the real thing” when traveling. Sue “would have wanted to see the original” Mona Lisa while visiting the Louvre and Thomas “...was there to see the original [and]... expected to see the original.” These participants all claimed to want to see the real Mona Lisa, which is a similar response to being disappointed with seeing a replica.

Table 5. Themes and responses to scenario one

Subcategory	Representative Responses
Disappointment (n=20)*	I'd be disappointed. I'd feel a little cheated. I'd feel duped.
Experience Matters More (n=7)	Take it in your stride and be glad that you got to go to the Louvre at all. It would just be the awesome experience of being in France, the reason for being there. Being there in itself, being in the Louvre itself and looking at a picture whether it's real or not really doesn't matter to me. It's the experience that counts.
Not Upset (n=3)	We knew it was a reproduction. I wouldn't know the difference. I wouldn't be upset by that.
Expect the Real Thing (n=3)	When you go you expect to see the real thing. I would have wanted to see the original. I was there to see the original, I expected to see the original.

*Represents the number of responses placed in to this category.

Scenario 2: On vacation in Hawaii, you witness a ceremonial sacrificing of a pig and realize after the show that the performers are not native Hawaiians and the pig is plastic.

How would you respond to this information?

This scenario was built around the notion that authenticity can be “constructed or, as MacCannell (1977) indicated, “staged” for consumption. Three themes emerged from the responses to Scenario 2: “Not Happy” (n=17), “No Big Deal” (n=16), and “Reasons For Travel” (n=16). Following are descriptions of each theme and Table 6 with representative responses.

Not Happy

This theme encompasses a variety of responses relating to the overall theme of not being happy. Participants’ answers ranged from, “That was unethical,” to “I would be a little upset.” Bob’s statement illustrated this theme perfectly: “You’d feel like what they were doing was somewhat of a sham if they were presenting it to be real.” Jeff would feel “bitter...,” while Rebecca would be “completely disgusted.” Seventeen participants were unhappy at some level with Scenario 2.

No Big Deal

Many participants thought the scenario was “pretty funny.” In fact, laughter accompanied many replies after hearing Scenario 2. Bill said, “That’s a little more humorous than anything” and Margaret suggested she “would probably laugh [her] head off ‘cause that would be hilarious.” Other participants said, “The fact that they weren’t native Hawaiian’s... I just don’t think it would bother me.” Barb does not expect authenticity: “Sometimes you just know to expect that something is for the benefit of the tourists and you don’t take it too seriously.”

Reasons For Travel

This last theme for Scenario 2 represents participants’ reasons for travel. Many felt the need to express whether they agreed or disagreed with the Scenario and then followed their response with an explanation as to why they felt this way. One major reason for travel is

“wanting to see what’s real,” or wanting to do “something more authentic.” Harry, for example, said he wanted to “see what they really do, what’s realistic, what’s true.” Barb suggested, “I do like to feel as though I’ve seen the real place when I go someplace.” Another main reason to travel is “to see the culture.” Both Harriet and Jen described “wanting to do very cultural things.” Enjoying an authentic experience and seeing the culture were key reasons for travel.

Table 6. Themes and responses to Scenario 2

Subcategory	Representative Responses
Not Happy (n=17)*	I’d be disappointed. I’d feel a little cheated or duped. We would be a little upset.
No Big Deal (n=16)	I would probably laugh my head off ‘cause that would be hilarious. That would not bother me. But it was theatrics, it was a show, and it was entertaining and that’s what we enjoyed, that’s what we expected.
Reasons for Travel (n=8)	You want to see what they really do, what’s realistic, what’s true I would like to do very cultural things.

*Represents the number of responses placed in to this category.

Scenario 3: *While in downtown London, you visit a popular tourist pub with your family. This pub has been written about in the Lonely Planet travel magazine and other tourist travel brochures. While there, you find that a majority of the others in the pub are on vacation as well. After an unforgettable evening with your family at this bar, you realize you never met a local towns person. Would this information take away from your memorable evening?*

Scenario 3 is built upon the notion of existential authenticity which, according to Wang (1999), is found through liminal experiences where:

...People feel they themselves are much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than in everyday life, not because they find the toured objects are authentic but simply because they are engaging in non-ordinary activities, free from the constraints of the daily.” (pp. 351-352)

Three themes emerged from the responses to Scenario 3. These themes were titled, “Importance of Meeting Locals” (n=15), “Authentic or Not, the Experience Matters More” (n=14), and “Disappointment” (n=9). Following are descriptions of each theme and Table 7 with representative responses.

Importance of Meeting Locals

The first theme represents the importance of meeting locals. A number of people indicated that they are “...looking for an experience where you get to meet local people.” Jacob said meeting the locals was “an important part of [his] international experience” whereas Jean stated that she is “always real interested in meeting other people and hearing their stories.” Other respondents like Karen acknowledged her goal was “to meet locals and talk to them.”

For some respondents, not seeing a local towns person would take away from their experience. Jen, Barb, and Jeff said, “Yes it would” take away from their experience.

Authentic or Not, The Experience Matters More

In this theme, the experience matters more than meeting a local towns person. For example, general responses included, “Whether they’re natives or not... you’re together in a jolly occasion,” and “As long as you’ve had the experience.” Others linked their answers to experiences with family. Julie and Sue felt, “Any memorable evening with your family is a memorable evening.” Frank said he’d “probably remember that [the memorable evening with the family] more than the fact that [he] didn’t meet any local towns people. Still other responses were focused on justifying why their family experience mattered more. Respondents claimed, “I would probably seek [locals] out in other places,” or “there are other opportunities to meet local people.” These participants suggested that their experience with family mattered more but, at the same time, hinted at the importance of meeting local people.

Disappointment

Many participants expressed their disappointment in not having the opportunity to interact with the local towns people. The most common response was, “Yes, it would take away from my experience.” Both Karen and Frank stated, “It would take away from [their] memorable evening.” The other most common response was the feeling of disappointment. Barb and Jeff said, “If there were no local people there [they] would be very disappointed.” Jen portrayed this theme perfectly with her response:

If I went with the thought that it was going to be authentic and realized that it had been written up so much as this is an authentic place, that instead the locals started to stay away because it was being inundated with tourists, then I would be disappointed.

“The Importance of Meeting Locals” and “Disappointment” are interconnected themes. Both have similar responses, but this latter theme recognizes the dissatisfaction and displeasure that would be associated with not meeting locals.

Table 7. Themes and responses to scenario three

Subcategory	Representative Responses
Importance of Meeting Locals (n=15)*	Yes, it would take away from my experience. You're looking for an experience where you get to meet the local people. They're always real interested in meeting other people and hearing their stories.
Authentic or Not, Experience Matters More (n=14)	It wouldn't be all that significant as long you had a good time at the pub. Any memorable evening with your family is a memorable evening. I would probably seek the locals out in other places.
Disappointment (n=9)	It would take away from my memorable evening. If I were in a pub and there were no local people there I would be very disappointed. It would take away from my memorable evening.

*Represents the number of responses placed in to this category.

Common across the three authenticity scenarios were the themes: “Disappointment/Not Happy,” “Experience Matters More,” and “Would Expect The Real Thing/Reasons For Travel.” “Would Not Be Upset/No Big Deal” emerged for two of the three authenticity scenarios. And, “Importance of Meeting Locals” emerged for Scenario 3, only. Table 8 highlights all the themes and with which scenario they correspond.

Table 8. Themes across the three authenticity scenarios

Theme	Scenario 1: Object Authenticity	Scenario 2: Constructed Authenticity	Scenario 3: Existential Authenticity
Disappointment/Not Happy	X	X	X
Experience Matters More	X	X	X
Would Not Be Upset/No Big Deal	X	X	
Would Expect The Real Thing/Reasons For Travel	X	X	X
Importance of Meeting Locals			X

The last research question, “Do descriptions of authenticity differ based on type of travel (i.e., domestic vs. international) could not be addressed as all the respondents had completed both types of travel in the last three years.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study led to three main findings. First, older adults did not reference authenticity when they were asked about their pleasure travel experiences in general. Second, when exposed to the three authenticity scenarios, older adults suggested that they seek object authenticity, others engage in existential authenticity, and still others accept and even expect staged or constructed events to be part of their travel experiences. Third, the way in which older adults respond to the notion of authenticity differs in part from the literature. My findings illuminate the way in which older adults think about authenticity, ultimately extending and enriching the literature on the topic.

Extending the Discussion on Authenticity

Older adults displayed evidence of object authenticity. They indicated that they would feel cheated, duped or disappointed if not given the opportunity to see the real thing. In addition, they accepted fake events if a valid reason was given and noted their displeasure with not having opportunities to interact with local people. Participants also identified staged authenticity. Acknowledging the fake ceremony, older adults knew it was a show and created solely for tourists. Older adults also hinted at existential authenticity. They stated that “*Being*” there mattered more than interacting with the locals. Thus, the findings in this study extend and enrich the literature on authenticity in three important ways. First, I found that various types of authenticity exist for older adults and that they are related to existing theories about authenticity. Second, older adults who travel for pleasure have come to “expect” staged events, but this does not preclude their wanting other “authentic” components incorporated into their experiences.

Third, older adults as a travel market are not homogeneous. They do not respond uniformly to the meaning of pleasure travel nor do they think of authenticity at all or as theorized.

In 1999, Wang proposed a taxonomy of three types of authenticity: Object, Constructive, and Existential. “A quest for [object authenticity] is viewed as a quest for ‘originals’ or for the ‘truths’ that underlie the logic of modernity” (Kim & Jamal, 2007, p. 183). It involves “a museum-linked usage of the authenticity of the originals that are also the toured objects to be perceived by tourists” (Wang, 1999, p. 351). The vast majority of older adults in this study alluded to object authenticity, regardless of which authenticity scenario they were exposed to. Not only would they be disappointed, but they would feel “cheated” or “duped,” indicating “that object authenticity is still relevant to tourists” (Belhassen & Caton, 2006, p. 855). This finding ultimately supports Belhassen and Caton’s supposition that tourists will be upset if they are shown reproductions of an object without being forewarned.

Constructive authenticity, or staged authenticity, is “the result of social construction, not an objectively measurable quality of what is being visited” (Wang, 1999, p. 351). Toured objects may or may not be authentic but “they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers” (p. 351). The older adults in this study provided support for constructive authenticity. They claimed that, “When you [travel] you expect to see the real thing” or “...the original.” Even though older adults did recognize certain events “were for the benefit of the tourists,” they also said they wanted some semblance of an authentic experience.

“Existential authenticity resides in the subject (i.e., the tourist) rather than in the toured object” (Belhassen, Caton & Stewart, 2008, p. 671). According to Wang (1999), “...existential authenticity, unlike [the] object-related version, can often have nothing to do with the issue of whether toured objects are real” (p. 352). In this study, whether authentic or not, it was the

experience that counted. This was particularly true when exposed to the object and existential authenticity scenarios. Participants claimed that the authenticity of the toured object held no importance to their experience. Instead, they, like many tourists, created authentic experiences through bonding, friendship, identity-seeking, and self-transformation (Kim & Jamal, 2007). This may help to explain why many participants suggested that they did not care about the authenticity of the event or place. Their focus was on the experience. The participant “not only gains pleasant experiences from seeing sights, events, or performances, but also simultaneously experiences intensely authentic, natural and emotional bonds, and a real intimacy in the family relationship” (Wang, 1999, p. 364). This yearning to interact with the local people could be described as a search for authenticity.

Older Adults and Authenticity

Older adults did not reference authenticity when asked about their reasons for pleasure travel. Instead, they spoke about the importance of experiencing the past. Yeoman et al. (2007, p. 1131) suggest people “search for authenticity based upon feelings of nostalgia... [and] their historic roots and heritage.” Cohen (1993) and Waitt (2000) agree. They feel that authenticity is connected to the past. This may be because when the future is uncertain consumers feel safe in the past and, as a result, search for authenticity based upon feelings of nostalgia (Boyle, 2004; Cohen, 1988b; Laenen, 1989; Plant, 1993; Taylor, 1991; Waitt, 2000). Future research should address whether the connection between history and authenticity is true for a representative sample of older adults. The results in this study provide preliminary evidence that there is a connection, but without further research this is simply conjecture.

Yoeman et al. (2007) identified 10 trends that will shape the concept of authenticity. Two of these trends have direct relevance to the findings of this study. For example, the authors

suggested, "...as the experience economy matures, ...consumers [will] search for and buy a real experience rather than something that is false, fake, or manufactured" (p. 1131). Older adults in this study provided partial evidence of this trend. They said that they expect to see the "real" object, but also valued the experience associated with the object. For example, in response to Scenario 1 individuals said they would not be happy that an authentic object had been replaced, but at the same time felt that it was really no big deal.

In addition, as levels of educational attainment grow, Yeoman et al. (2007) believe that consumers will become more discerning and sophisticated in their decision making, resulting in a quest for the authentic. The results of this study challenge this argument, which is surprising given that the sample was drawn from an educated sample of older adults. For example, none of the respondents suggested that authenticity was an important feature of their overall or most meaningful pleasure travel experiences. Only when presented with authenticity scenarios did they suggest authenticity might be an issue. Perhaps this finding suggests that level of education alone does not explain travelers' quest for authenticity. Instead, age and type of travel experience may need to be considered.

According to Adams and her colleagues (Adams, 1991; Adams, Smith, Nyquist, & Perlmutter, 1997), as individuals age there is a reorganization of their cognitive system and they tend to encode information in a more generalized way. The results associated with this life span cognitive development theory, however, are mixed. For example, Smith and MacKay (2001), studying differences in response to pictures of tourist destinations, found no differences based on age. They argued that their finding could be related to the social setting in which their study took place. Perhaps in this study the same situation applies: the setting in which the interview took place may not have been conducive to older adults recalling authenticity issues in a pleasure

travel context. Another plausible explanation for the fact that this sample of older adults did not volunteer authenticity as an important feature of their pleasure travel is the malleability of experience. According to Braun-LaTour, Grinley, and Loftus (2006), recent travel experiences can contaminate the memory of previous travel experiences. In fact, experiments in cognitive psychology (e.g., Loftus & Pickrell, 1995) have documented that “postexperience information becomes a blended part of [individuals’] memory of the original experience” (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006, p. 361). Thus, it is plausible that information about upcoming trips or discussions with others about their pleasure travel experiences could influence older adults’ memories of the importance they attached to authenticity in past pleasure travel experiences.

Implications

These findings have both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, marketers who advertise their destination as “The Real Tuscany,” or “China’s Best Kept Secret,” may be misdirecting their promotional appeals. In this study, authenticity was not recognized as a primary reason why older adults travel for pleasure. By changing their advertising to highlight instead the experiences to be forged, the cultures to be experienced, and the places to be seen, whether authentic or not, marketers may see an increase in visitors. Critical to the success of promotional campaigns is honestly communicating changes in the authenticity of objects and events (Yeoman et al., 2007).

In addition, associations such as UNESCO have been assessing tourists’ views on object authenticity (i.e., stable, genuine, traditional) when deciding whether or not to preserve heritage destinations. This may be problematic, especially because tourists, in this case older adult tourists, do not conceptualize authenticity and heritage in the same way. Such associations would be better served by addressing all types (i.e., object, constructed, existential) of authenticity in an

effort to determine tourists' views on the need to preserve events, sites, and larger destinations.

Theoretically, older adults do not actively refer to authenticity in the context of pleasure travel. When prompted, older adults in this study suggested that they would seek "real," "original," and/or "true" objects and events, implying that the meaning of authenticity continues to be at issue (Kim & Jamal, 2007). In addition, older adults' response to the authenticity scenarios suggested that there may be an interrelationship between object-related and existential authenticity (Wang, 2007). For example, the themes "Disappointment/Not Happy," "Experience Matters More," and "Would Expect The Real Thing/Reasons for Travel" emerged in response to all three scenarios. Of interest here is whether, as Belhassen et al. (2008) have suggested, "...toured objects/sites and social discourses... exist in dialogue with experiences of existential authenticity" (p. 674). Various types of authenticity may not stand alone but instead inform each other and emerge as a holistic impression of authenticity through the pleasure travel experience.

The results of this study add to the current authenticity literature by providing insight into an understudied consumer market. For example, many older adults who travel for pleasure "expect" constructed or staged events, but this does not prevent them from wanting other "authentic" components as a part of their travel experiences. Linda, for example, said, "...Being there in itself, being in the Louvre itself and looking at a picture whether its real or not really doesn't matter to me. It's the experience that counts," suggesting that the search for authenticity among older adults may be existential, but also may be linked to an event or a place. Given this finding, future research should focus on what older adults find particularly authentic about certain situations. By listing different scenarios or events, participants could identify which is more "real" to them and help to explain the authentic characteristics they find important. This may help to identify what older adults are searching for when, or if, they mention authenticity.

Also, their judgments on what classifies as an authentic experience may provide insight into their expectations for future travel.

Future Directions for Authenticity Research

The results of this study revealed that older adults search for authenticity but lack a common term for describing it. In addition, some older adults think of heritage as a synonym for authenticity. Researchers should directly address this issue to verify the way in which older adults define authenticity,

Recognizing that this sample was highly educated and not representative of all older adults in the United States who travel for pleasure and taking into account Yeoman et al's (2007) contention that changing consumer characteristics will impact the quest for authentic experiences, future research should sample older adults of varying socio-demographic (e.g., education, income) backgrounds.

In addition, researchers should study travelers who have only traveled domestically versus those who have experienced both domestic and international travel. Based on Turner's (1994, cited in Burns, 1999) work, I expected to find differences in older adults' search for authenticity based on their travel experiences. I was unable to address the issue, however, because all of the study participants had traveled domestically and internationally.

Recognizing that people may not recall how important certain facets of their pleasure travel experiences were to them, another useful approach might be to interview people directly after returning from vacation. By asking people about their recent pleasure travel experiences, one could gain a deeper understanding of what motivates people to travel and whether authenticity plays a role.

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APPENDIX A

Introductory E-Mail

Hello,

My name is Kayce D. Zielinski. As a masters student at Penn State I am required to complete a thesis. The focus of my thesis research is older adults and their pleasure travel experiences.

It is my understanding that you have traveled for pleasure with the Penn State Alumni Association. Given your travel experience, I hope you will be interested in participating in my research. All who do will be eligible to enter their name into a drawing for a Penn State football signed by Joe Paterno. Are you interested in participating in my study?

If YES, it will involve a 30-minute interview. I will ask you a series of questions, all of which have to do with your pleasure travel experiences. To arrange a time and place for the interview, please contact me, Kayce D. Zielinski, at kdz5003@psu.edu or 817-235-6798. I'm sorry to put the onus on you, but I am hoping that this approach will be less invasive on your time and those of other individuals who have traveled with the Penn State Alumni Association.

If NO, thank you for your consideration. Do you know of someone else who might be interested in participating in the study? Please forward his or her name to me at Kayce D. Zielinski, at kdz5003@psu.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Kayce

Follow-up E-mail to Willing Participants

Hello [insert name],

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. I am beginning interviews next week and will continue to conduct interviews through the end of May. Would you be available to meet next week? If yes, what day and time would you be available to meet? We can meet in the conference room in 801 Ford Building on the University Park campus or wherever is convenient for you. I've suggested the Ford Building because it is located close to the parking garage next to the Nittany Lion Inn.

You can respond to me using this e-mail address (i.e., kdz5003@psu.edu) or by calling 817-235-6798.

Thank you again and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Kayce

APPENDIX B

Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Older Adults Seeking Authenticity
Principal Investigator: Kayce D. Zielinski, Graduate Student
801 Ford Building
University Park, PA 16802
(817) 235 6798; kdz5003@psu.edu
Advisor: Dr. Deborah Kerstetter
801 Penn State Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 353 1471; debk@psu.edu

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to determine if older adults search for authenticity through their pleasure travel experiences. And, if yes, how they describe “authenticity.”

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked a series of questions solely based on your pleasure travel experiences. Also, participants will be asked to look at a set of scenarios and give their response.

The information you share with me during the interview will be recorded. The recordings will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be stored on my computer, which is password protected. The only individuals that will have access to the transcribed data will be the transcriptionist, my advisor, Dr. Deborah Kerstetter, and me. I will keep the transcribed data for three years, after which time I will delete it from my computer.

Benefits: Older adults may have a better understanding of their desires when traveling. Also older adults may view their travels differently than before, increasing their awareness to fraud tourist traps. Also this information could be important for future marketers. A destination can be advertised in a variety of ways, and if older adults are found to search for authenticity, tourism marketers could take advantage of this large market.

Duration: It will take about 30 minutes to complete the interview.

Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Kayce D. Zielinski at (817) 235-6798 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research.

Payment for participation: Participants will have to opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a Penn State football signed by Joe Paterno.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Willingness to participate in the interview implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to take part in the research.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

APPENDIX C

Examples of Questions Included in the Interview

Warm up

- Can you tell me a little about your pleasure travel experiences? For example, where do you like to travel to and how often do you travel for pleasure?
- Would you consider yourself to be an experienced traveler?
- Can you tell me a bit about some of your trips?

Focused questions

Now I would like to share a few scenarios with you and get your response to them.

Scenario 1: *You are visiting the Louvre in France to see the Mona Lisa and after your trip, you find out that the painting you saw was actually a replica because the original was replaced for cleaning. How would this make you feel?*

Scenario 2: *On vacation in Hawaii, you witness a ceremonial sacrificing of a pig and realize after the show that the performers are not native Hawaiians and the pig is plastic. How would you respond to this information?*

Scenario 3: *While in downtown London, you visit a popular tourist pub with your family. This pub has been written about in the Lonely Planet travel magazine and other tourist travel brochures. While there, you find that a majority of the others in the pub are on vacation as well. After an unforgettable evening with your family at this bar, you realize you never met a local towns person. Would this information take away from your memorable evening?*

- Can you tell me why you responded the way you did to these scenarios?
- Have you experienced similar situations in your pleasure travel? If yes, can you tell me about those situations...

Closing

- What do you enjoy most about traveling for pleasure?
- Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview after you have returned from your trip?
 - (If yes) Great. What is the best way to contact you to set up a follow-up interview?
 - (If no) Thank you for taking time today to participate in this interview.