

The Young Tourists' Perceptions of Fear on Holiday – A Gendered Perspective

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Abstract

This thesis explores young tourists' perceptions of fear while they are on holiday. This work is important because it sheds light on tourists' emotional experiences on holiday, adding to our overall understanding of tourist behaviour. While the importance of investigating perceptions of fear has been recognized within a number of different disciplines (e.g. psychology, sociology, criminology, marketing), perceptions of fear have remained relatively unexplored within the tourism experience. This thesis also investigates young tourists' perceptions of fear from a gender perspective. Although gender has been regarded as one of the most important factors influencing perceptions of fear, gendered perceptions of fear among tourists in the holiday environment in general, and young tourists in particular, have received little attention.

The thesis is based on three months of fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2007 on the island of Ios, Greece. The choice of Ios as a study site was based on the fact that the island is promoted as the 'party island of Greece' and attracts many young tourists. Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted among young tourists on the island. In order to explore gender-based similarities and differences in the perception and expression of fear, the interviews were conducted with 13 females and 12 males. Systematic observations were also carried out during the fieldwork.

The findings reveal that, although some respondents perceived fear as a negative emotion, others referred to fear as a positive component in the tourism experience. In particular, it was found that while on holiday on Ios young tourists participated in activities that they perceived as risky in order to experience fear. However, only optimal levels of fear were conceived as pleasant. With regard to gendered perceptions of fear, the results show that gender, despite having been traditionally constructed as a binary concept, did not play a major role in influencing young tourists' perceptions of fear on holiday. Rather, with the exception of women's concerns of sexual violence, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that more marked differences occurred in the perception and expression of fear among the various masculinities and femininities than between men and women.