



Towards a Model of Travel Fear



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper was to identify and better understand factors and conditions related to fear in travel. A review of literature on concepts such as constraints, shock, panic, risk, anxiety, and worry provided the necessary content from which to both summarize the tourism literature on fear, and also formulate a Model of Travel Fear. This model, developed through content analysis of the literature, and student trip summaries, is comprised of six main components. These include Characteristics of the tourist, Fear-inducing factors of a trip, Strategies to reduce (or amplify) fear, Travel stage, Fear intensity, and Fear responses. Suggestions were made for future research, particularly empirical testing of the model, and for applications of the model in the tourism industry.

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Introduction

Men are moved by two levers only: fear and self interest

[Napolean Bonaparte]

Fear is an emotion that manifests in several different ways and at different stages during travel. Anticipation of the travel event presents its own set of fears, as does travel to the site, the on-site experience, travel home, and even recollection. However, despite what is a central component of the travel experience, tourism research on fear is lacking despite the number of fear-inducing events such as natural disasters, epidemics and terrorist attacks (Gold & Revill, 2003; Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006; Santana, 2003).

A possible reason for the lack of an intensive research agenda on fear in tourism studies is the confusion over related terms such as anxiety, panic, shock, worry, or risk (Santana, 2003). Crisis management has emerged in tourism as a tool to prepare for disasters and mitigate consequences (Avraham, 2004), but how does it connect with the aforementioned terms? Many studies on crises fail to mention fear or anxiety at all (Carson & Liburd, 2007; Faulkner, 2001; Mansfeld, 1999; Ritchie, 2004), while other studies mention these terms only in passing (Barton, 1994; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999). Some theorists have used fear-related terms interchangeably. For example, Kingsbury and Brunn (2004) make no differentiation between anxiety, risk, safety, and fear (Lepp, 2004). Some studies use risk as the defining characteristic of fear (Dolnicar, 2005). To be sure, it is not just tourism studies where research is scarce. Fear is a topic that is decidedly underdeveloped in general (Gold & Revill, 2003).

Given the dearth of academic work on fear in tourism, the purpose of this paper is to develop a comprehensive model of travel fear to stimulate more intensive research in this area. This includes a review of interdisciplinary research on fear; a survey of current research in tourism on fear and related terms such as constraints, shock, panic, anxiety, and worry; and development of the model.

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Interdisciplinary research on fear

Research has shown that ordinary people know a lot about emotions. Study subjects can reliably name emotions; they can identify emotions of people photographed; and can report and agree upon antecedents of emotions (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). What is less settled in the literature, however, is agreement on whether: (a) there is a set of so-called basic or universal emotions (prototypes or schemes); and (b) if there are such sets, which emotions are the ones that are in fact basic.

Examples of (a) and (b), above, are numerous. Ekman, Friesen, and Hager (2002) argue that there are six basic emotions, including anger, happiness, surprise, disgust, sadness, and fear, all of which are manifest in facial expressions (Batty & Taylor, 2003). Plutchik (2002) reasoned that there are eight basic emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy. Research by Ekman, Friesen, and Ellsworth (1982) isolated six basic emotions (anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise); Izard (1971) lists anger, contempt, disgust, distress, fear, guilt, interest, joy, shame and surprise; while Shaver et al. (1987) argue that there are six basic emotions: love, joy, surprise, anger, sadness, and fear. What is important to the present work is the near universal agreement that fear is one of a few basic emotions.

Fear is a primitive emotion shared by all sentient beings (Gold & Revill, 2003), and it has adaptive value because the capacity to feel or experience fear allows us to avoid dangerous situations (Skre, Onstad, Torgersen, Lygren, & Kringlen, 2000). Fear is “an organism’s defensive response to a present threat.” (Cisler, Olatunji, & Lohr, 2009, p. 35). Recent studies on state and trait emotions provide greater depth into our understanding of fear. Sylvers, Lilienfeld, and LaPrairie (2011) contend that state emotions “refer to affective adaptations to specific situations” (p. 124). By contrast, trait emotions “refer to affective characteristics of a person across time and situation” (p. 124). Following Epstein (1972) and Barlow (2002), Sylvers et al. (2011) offer the following detailed definition of state and trait fear:

State fear is an aversive emotional state during which an organism is motivated to escape a specific and imminent threat. The characteristics of state fear include short-lived arousal that quickly dissipates after the threat is avoided. Trait fear, therefore, is the persistent and pervasive experience of state fear across situations. In colloquial terms, a “scaredy cat” is a vivid description of a trait fearful individual, who avoids taking risks that most perceive as relatively benign but does not appear distressed when these risks are absent.

Fear differs from the closely related concept of anxiety in that the latter is “an organism’s preparatory response to contexts in which a threat may occur” (Cisler et al., 2009, p. 35). Differences between fear and anxiety are briefly outlined in Table 1.

Like emotions research in general, theorists have also isolated specific types of fear, again, with no universal acceptance of one model or approach. Based on a summary of almost 1000 titles using “fear” as a keyword, Gold and Revill (2003) found that fear can be linked to eight prominent sub-types: anxiety, awe, phobia, insecurity and uncertainty, threat, hate, loathing, and trauma. Reiss (1991) argues that there are three fundamental fears, including fear of injury, fear of anxiety, and fear of negative evaluations. Skre et al. (2000) divide fear into five different types, including: (a) agoraphobic fear, where certain environments are felt to be dangerous with an urge to escape to safer confines (e.g., wilderness setting); social fear; (c) fear of animals; (d) nature and situational fears, such as storms, heights, and water, fear of vehicles, flying, or tight spaces; and (e) blood-injection-injury fears.

The study by Shaver et al. (1987), mentioned above, is useful not only in identifying basic or universal emotions, but also for the methodology used to determine such. Based on a hierarchical cluster analysis of 135 emotion terms, the authors categorised each basic emotion into a tree structure of primary, secondary and tertiary emotions (see Fig. 1 in reference to cat). The categorisation provided an effective way in which to disentangle the many terms that are closely related to the more general emotion “fear”. The two secondary emotions of horror and nervousness describe well the various tertiary emotions that fall into both, as supported by other research.

Exploring the terrain of travel fears

The tourism studies literature is replete with terms and approaches that touch upon travel fear, i.e., emotional responses to crises, uncertainties, or other calamities of a subjective or collective nature in the way it has been conceptualised above. Some of the earliest studies in tourism emphasised the link to psychology through fear. For example, Plog (1974) investi-

Table 1
Experiential characteristics of fear and anxiety.

Dimension	Fear	Anxiety
Emotional valenc	Negative	Negative
Temporal focus	Present-focused	Future-focused
Duration of arousal	Phasic (brief)	Tonic (sustained)
Defensive direction	Avoidance (escape)	Approach
Specificity of threat	Specific	Diffuse

Adapted from Sylvers et al. (2011).

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