'What's On Your Bucket List?': Tourism, Identity and Imperative Experiential Discourse

Dr Thomas Thurnell-Read

Department of Social Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
LE11 3TU, UK
Email: t.thurnell-read@lboro.ac.uk

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KEYWORDS: Authenticity, Bucket List, Cultural Capital, Experience, Identity, Selfhood

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its first use in the 2007 motion picture *The Bucket List*, the concept of a list of experiences and achievements an individual wishes to complete before they die, or 'kick the bucket', has become widely accepted in common usage. Illustrated by the movie narrative which sees two elderly American men diagnosed with terminal cancer travel to Rome, Egypt, India, and the Himalayas, the concept has, from its inception, espoused the notion that travel experiences offer self-fulfilment and are a measure the success or meaningfulness of one's life. The phrase entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013 as an informal noun meaning 'a list of things that a person hopes to experience or achieve during his or her lifetime' and gained further cultural cachet in September 2014 when USA President Barack Obama staged an impromptu visit to Stonehenge following a NATO summit in Wales and announced to gathered journalists that, with his visit to the site, he has now 'knocked it off the Bucket List'.

Inspired by the film's narrative, a number of individuals responding to terminal illness with their own efforts to complete a Bucket List of things to do before they die have either received considerable media interest or seen their own accounts published via blogs and books[1], while websites such as *www.bucketlist.org* and *www.www.bucketlist.net* allow users to compile Bucket Lists by making selections from a range of suggested activities or experiences. The content of such lists is revealing in that the majority of Bucket List items focus on leisure and touristic experiences as life goals such as to 'See the Northern Lights', 'Swim With Dolphins', 'Go On A Cruise' or 'Go Scuba Diving'. As such, there is a notable correspondence between the rapid emergence of the Bucket List concept and recent scholarly work exploring how tourism and travel are used to construct selfhood and identity (Cohen, 2010; Bosangit, Hibbert and McCabe, 2015). Thus, tourism can provide an individual with 'a density of good memories' that can be read as evidence of 'having lived life to the full' (Desforges, 2000: 936) and can be understood as part of 'an existentialist narrative of *freedom* to become oneself' (van Nuenen, 2016: 200).

This article asserts that Bucket Lists are an emergent format for enacting the apparent links between tourism experiences and identity. In a more general sense, Bucket Lists represent a new way of telling ourselves and others about our lives and aspirations. Based on a Critical Discourse Analysis of a set of recent Bucket List texts drawn from a range of media platforms (Fairclough, 2001; 2003; 2010), the analysis adds to understandings of the intimate links between identity and tourist experience by suggesting that an imperative experiential discourse underpins the Bucket List ethos and positions the acquisition of meaningful experiences through travel as a central facet of processes by which identity and selfhood is formulated, performed and mediated. As Wang and Alasuutari (2017) have recently argued, this process of 'experientialisation' is one of the central trends in contemporary tourism. More specifically, therefore, it is argued that this discourse has been readily adopted by the tourism industry and associated media actors in order to present the accumulation of specific tourism experiences as a *necessary* task. Importantly, however, the combination of destinations and activities that constitute many Bucket Lists are not available to all but, rather, rely on the possession of appropriate levels of economic and cultural capital. As such,

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[1] Examples include British journalist Helen Fawkes (www.helenfawkes.wordpress.com), British teenager Alice Pyne (www.alicepyne.blogspot.co.uk), American Susan Spencer-Wendel (author of 2013 memoire Until I Say Good-bye: My Year of Living With Joy), and British cancer patient Stephen Sutton, who has raised over £5m for The Teenage Cancer Trust (www.facebook.com/stephensstory).

the article will explore how the widespread use of the Bucket List concept must be understood as part of an emergent 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) where individuals are exhorted to define themselves and their worth through meaningful and valued experiences.

2. TOURISM, EXPERIENCE AND SELFHOOD

The question of how a person can live their life in a fulfilling and meaningful way has long fascinated philosophers, theologians and academics (Eckstein, 2002). Sociological scholarship, in particular, has developed a preoccupation with the idea of individualization where, as Giddens (1991: 9) formulates, self-identity is something worked upon by the individual as lifestyles are chosen and monitored as part of a 'reflexivity project of the self'. According to Beck (1992: 137), such has managed to 'open the human biography up' in that the individual social agent is increasingly called upon to make choices about their life and about who or what they should be and become. This freedom or, as Bauman (2000) would assert, 'liquidity' allows individuals to craft their own biographies in a manner increasingly free from the traditional ties of community, locality, family and kinship. This trend has readily been portrayed as offering increased freedom and personal agency in allowing individuals to actively choose how they shape their identity and lives in what Giddens (1991) terms a 'life project'. Others, however, such as Rose (1989: 10), have warned that with such pressure 'to act upon our bodies, souls, thoughts, and conduct in order to achieve happiness, wisdom, health and fulfilment' comes increased anxiety and pernicious influence from other actors such as government agents, marketing gurus and lifestyle experts.

The emergence of the Bucket List can be understood within this wider cultural trend. The notion that tourism provides meaningful experiences that promise to in some way enrich and enhance the life of the tourist have long been central to analyses of tourism and tourist practices (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). With varying degrees of scepticism, the seminal theorists of tourism studies envisaged tourism as a search for personal meaning in a context of increasing alienation with modern life. While Boorstin (1961) diagnoses modern tourism as a largely superficial extension of the artificial 'pseudo-events' of modern culture, MacCannell (1976) sees tourists as spurred on by dissatisfaction with the safety and predictability of modern life in seeking out the 'authenticity' of people and places yet tainted by the deleterious influence of modernity. To varying degrees, tourists are said to relate to tourism experiences as a means to define and, for some, redefine the self (Cohen, 1979). Tourism is seen as 'a vehicle for transmitting identity' (Edensor, 2000:74) and as involving 'spaces and times of self-making' which 'allow latitudes, freedoms and experimentations' (Franklin, 2003: 2) where 'the parallels between people's internal and external journeys' bring about transitional life moments and 'new beginnings' (White and White, 2004: 202). Tourism experience can be represented as transformational, as a moment of epiphany leading to self-actualisation (McClinchey, 2015) and as demonstrating how the self is worked upon, developed and evolved (Bosangit et al., 2015). Tourism is therefore often seen as a site of renewal and transformation where individuals can seek fulfilment and the 'reinscription of the self' (Johnson, 2007: 162).

Importantly, this relationship between tourism and identity has to be narrated and performed. Desforges (1998: 176; 2000: 935), for example, draws on Bourdieu and Giddens to describe how young travellers bring 'experiences back home to use in the narration of identity' and how they use 'the relatively unique experiences provided to narrate a new individualized identity'. This has been most readily observed in studies of young independent travellers or 'backpackers' (Richards and Wilson, 2004) and young British travellers undertaking a 'gap year' before or after university, who have been shown to seek out of 'worthwhile experiences' as a means of creating and performing a particular new or enhanced identity (Snee, 2014). Travel experiences are told and retold as 'well-stylized travel narratives, which culminate in the telling of a profound self-change that their

narrators have undergone' (Noy, 2004: 96) with certain activities and particular valued destinations being used to narrate an 'adventurous self' (Bott, 2014). Narratives of selfhood and travel often involve 'the trope of self-discovery' (Johnson, 2007: 154), and utilise 'a developmental vocabulary' (Cohen, 2010: 129) where phrases such as 'learning about the self' and 'getting to know the self' foreground the intimate links between travel and selfhood.

There is, therefore, an apparent consensus that tourism is, or can be, 'an important human experience' (Pons, 2003: 48). However, there is considerable debate as to what constitutes a genuine, authentic, travel experience (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006; van Nuenen, 2016; Wang, 1999). Tourism destinations can be valued for a combination of physical, geographical, social and cultural qualities (Kuby et al, 2001) or because specific places become associated with historical events (Ringgaard, 2010). Further still, as Lew (2011) suggests, attributing status to specific tourist locations can be done on either an objective level, in measurable qualities of the location itself, or on a subjective level, in the specific feelings that one is able to feel when immersed in the setting and any associated activities. While Urry's (1990) concept of the tourist 'gaze' proved influential, a recent trend has seen a shift from 'gazing' to 'experiencing', with tourism theorists stressing a desire for physically and intellectual immersion in tourist location (Perkins and Thorns, 2001; Knudsen et al. 2007; Soica, 2016) and a particular value placed on intense or challenging embodied experiences (Matteucci, 2014; Kolar, 2017). In their analysis of memorable tourist experiences, Tung and Ritchie (2011) identify the importance of emotions and senses (*affect*), of planning and anticipation (*expectations*), of the perceived presence of an outcome or result in terms of personal development or self-discovery (*consequentiality*) and, finally, of the possibility of 're-living' the experience through the telling of stories and viewing of photographs or souvenir artefacts (*recollection*).

Authenticity is simultaneously collective and subjective and is not a static objective quality, nor a simple opposition to its dichotomous other inauthenticity, but is produced through a process of negotiation (Olsen, 2002). Establishing authenticity involves 'an intense classificatory and legitimation struggle' (Munt, 1994: 116) as particular destinations, forms and styles of travel and, importantly, specific discursive performances through which other people are made aware of one's experiences reveal a clear yet contested hierarchy of tourism and travel experience (van Nuenen, 2016). Thus, the Bucket List joins the range of ways in which tourism enters the social imagination, with media representations (Crouch, Jackson and Thompson, 2005), travel writing (McClinchey, 2015), cinema (Tzanelli, 2007), advertising (Park et al., 2013), souvenir photos and videos (Merchant, 2016) and tour guides (Ong et al., 2014), storytelling (Kane and Zink, 2004), social media (Wang and Alasuutari, 2017), and internet blogs (Walter, 2016; Bosangit et al., 2015) all contributing to an increasingly contested field of accounts of what kind of traveller or tourist one should be and what sort of experiences are viewed as worthwhile. As shall be discussed further below, the appeal of Bucket Lists appears to lie in their ability to offer an authoritative collation of desirable experiences involving the delineation of what destinations and activities ought to be seen as worthy of an individual's attention. However, a critical reading of Bucket List texts reveals the need to consider both positive and negative implications of the rising prominence of the Bucket List as a means for portraying the value of tourism to the construction of selfhood and identity.

3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *BUCKET LIST* DISCOURSE

The following analysis uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as espoused and expanded by Fairclough (2001; 2003; 2010), to make an exploration of the Bucket List cultural phenomena. The CDA approach is appropriate to the study of the rapid emergence of the Bucket List concept as it allows for an examination of the occurrence and implementation of particular 'dominant' interpretations and explanations of aspects of social and cultural life (Fairclough, 2010: 9). CDA is

concerned with the nature of the inclusion, exclusion and relative prominence of particular meanings and ideas within a discourse and involves a close and critical reading of cultural texts to understand how 'discourses constitute part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another' (Fairclough, 2003: 124). Importantly, CDA can be understood as a critical perspective which foregrounds a kinship between the related tasks of linguistic analysis and social analysis meaning it is distinguished as having a 'more or less political concern with the workings of ideology and power in society; and a specific interest in the way language contributes to, perpetuates and reveals these workings' (Breeze, 2011: 495). As such, CDA is normative as well as descriptive and is of use in unpacking Bucket List discourses as a site for the contested construction of a particular vision of a fulfilled and meaningful life.

To provide a sizable and varied corpus of examples of recent usages of the Bucket List concept, a set of 50 items were generated through various searches using standard internet search engines using 'Bucket List' and related popular terms such as 'Bucket List Ideas', 'Bucket List Britain' and 'Bucket List London'. Searches were limited to items published between 2014 and 2016 with items appearing highest in search engine rankings being chosen and items were excluded if the term was only used incidentally rather than as a central theme of the content. Search engines were preferred to dedicated media databases, such as *NexisUK*, as the latter do not include the diversity of platforms across which the use of the Bucket List concept, given its widespread cultural visibility, can be found. Indeed, the sample of 50 items was deemed to provide sufficient coverage because it provided a variety of clear usages of the term including those in mainstream magazines and newspapers, specialist travel magazines, travel agencies and brokers, webpages of both professional and amateur travel writers and personal blogs of individual travellers, couples and families.

The content analysed ranged from one-off journalistic pieces to individuals involved in extensive undertakings promoting their lives through comprehensive blogging and the use of photo and video diaries. Of the 50 separate items in the sample, 26 were identified as professional content (e.g. written by a professional journalist or copyrighter), 19 as amateur content (e.g. by individual bloggers), and 5 could best be described as straddling the professional-amateur distinction in being written by non-professionals but for a site or enterprise with some clear commercial or pecuniary intention (e.g. the personal blog of a lifestyle entrepreneur whose website content served to advertise a range of paid-for personal development guidance resources and courses). Some appeared as simple lists, others with each item carrying images, lengthy descriptions and hyperlinks to businesses offering package tours and other services connected to that destination or activity. While the majority appeared to be lists selected and complied by the author of the media text, several reported findings from 'research' conducted as a public relations exercises on behalf of companies, such included one well publicised list compiled by the internet search engine *Ask Jeeves.*

The sample was analysed for themes relating to individuality, identity, travel and tourism with other salient themes emerging during the analysis including uniqueness, authenticity and involvement. This involved a detailed reading of the items included in each Bucket List with a particular attention to what experiences or destinations were chosen and how they are presented and communicated as being desirable and worthy of desire. The normative quality of prevailing discourses was, therefore, allowed to inform the emergence of analytical categories. While analytical prominence was given to textual content – including word choice, phrasing and 'grammatical mood' (Fairclough, 2003: 115) – the analysis also involved interpretation of images and layout. Beyond examination of these specific features of sampled texts, the analytical task involved a critical analysis of the Bucket List ethos more generally. Such reflects CDA's concern with 'the way in which orders of discourse are structured, and the ideologies which they embody, are determined by relationships of power in particular social

interactions, and in the society as a whole' (Fairclough, 2001: 26). Thus, the position, prominence and purpose of the Bucket List in wider discussions and practices relating to selfhood and identity remained the overall concern of the undertaking.

4. "EPIC EXPERIENCES AND MUST-VISIT PLACES": *BUCKET LISTS AND THE SPECIFICITY OF TOURIST EXPERIENCE*

As might be expected, many of the Bucket Lists analysed conformed to an established cannon of culturally valorised and objectively worthy destinations and attractions such as the Eifel Tower, the Grand Canyon, the Giza Pyramids and the Taj Mahal. Many destinations were positioned as desirable due to being the original, best or most extreme example of something. Thus, Munich's Oktoberfest beer festival was 'not only the original, but it's also the world's largest beer festival' and the Louvre 'houses one of the world's greatest art collections', while the British Museum is 'one of the world's greatest collections'. Similarly, Bucket List readers are urged to 'Experience 'Britain's best drive' through the Lake District and take in 'England's finest view' from the North York Moors. Similarly, participation in cultural activities were often framed as being worthy experiences as a result of taking place in their 'correct' and original cultural milieu. Thus, it was important to 'Eat Sushi at the Tokyo Fish Market' or to 'Learn the Haka in New Zealand', while 'The Old Course at St Andrews is considered by many to be the "home of golf"'. Other destinations drew their significance from their prominence in movies, such as the steps to the Philadelphia Museum of Art made iconic by the *Rocky* movie series training montage scenes, or through repeated cultural representation, as in the case of 'Drive Route 66'.

However, this reliance upon established objective measures of value gives rise to a particular tension involving 'the problem of creating unique encounters under the common conditions of global tourism' (Ringgaard, 2010: 119). In order for Bucket List experiences to be desirable, they must preserve a sense of authenticity and uniqueness in spite of being publically declared and approved of according to shared cultural norms (Urry, 1990; Lewis, Kerr and Pomering, 2010). Further, then, this might be seen as part of the struggle for legitimation involving 'the protracted and increasing difficulties which companies and travellers have in spatially defining separated practices from other like-mined travellers' (Munt, 1994: 117). Beyond specifying famous, iconic or unique destinations or sites of interest, in addressing this tension few Bucket Lists failed to include precise stipulations as to how a particular site ought to be encountered. A common feature of Bucket List texts is that they do not simply suggest places to visit by recommending *what* to 'see', they prescribe a particular experience by insisting on *how* best to see and 'feel' it. In doing so, they combine objective and subjective understandings of authenticity, as identified by Lew (2011), by presenting both easily understood measures of worth (e.g. 'the oldest', 'the original') with subjective but highly prized descriptions of movements, feelings and embodied engagements.

A good example of this combination of objective and subjective worth is *Wanderlust Magazine*'s '23 BIG bucket list adventures' article which described the 'Trek to Machu Picchu, Peru', as follows:

> "It's more satisfying than the train, and there are lots of options. It's virtually impossible to make a bucket list that doesn't include Machu Picchu. A secret city, never found by those pesky conquistadores, perched in the mountains, swirled by mists and mysteries – it's the stuff of travel legend.
>
> The trouble is, when you've seen so many, many photos of the Inca citadel, there's a danger it'll be a bit of a let-down. And that's one reason why, if you can, you should go on foot. The city deserves the slow build, the accumulated excitement, that trekking there provides."

The use of words such as 'more', 'lots', 'secret', 'legend' and 'deserves' serve to impress upon the reader the desirability of this specific experience. As Arellano (2004: 67) observes, in her own study of tourism at Machu Picchu, 'a large and complex repertoire of images' whereby 'the ancient Inca civilization is converted into an object of sporadic dreams, fantasies, and desires for travelling' means that specific corporeal performances are accredited as being more authentic or worthwhile than others. The specificity of such suggestions works to aggregate place, movement and activity. Thus, as Pons (2003: 62) identifies, tourism involves more than simply arriving at a place, 'it is a way of inhabiting and apprehending them' and a means for people to 'dwell in various mobilities' (Pons, 2003: 62). This reflects recent understandings of tourism sites as not simply produced or 'staged' for passive appreciation by a static 'gazing' tourist actor, but as simultaneously constructed and consumed by a range of tourist and non-tourist actors (Rakić and Chambers, 2012).

A further means of developing specificity in the various textual descriptions of Bucket List experiences is the combination of multiple activities. For example, seeing the Northern Lights is augmented so that the reader is urged to not just witness the lights but to 'capture' them on camera. Similarly, one should either 'Take a Helicopter Ride into the Grand Canyon' or drive and then hike a certain route 'in order to really experience the Grand Canyon'. This, specificity might involve particular forms of transport such as flying in a hot air balloon or riding the Trans-Siberian railway, or particular times of the day (notable sunrises and sunsets) or times of the year as in, for example, visiting 'Lapland in Winter'). Such clearly reflects an apparent wish to be immersed, involved and fully engaged in a setting (Olsen, 2002; Soica, 2016) and the desire to assess the authenticity of a particular experience by the intensity and affective impact of involvement (Knudsen and Waade, 2010; Kolar, 2017). As will be analysed in more detail below, the imperative that 'you should go on foot' to Machu Picchu also proves telling in revealing the slippage inherent in much use of the Bucket List concept where agentic choices are replaced with authoritative pronouncements of what one 'should' or 'must' do. A particular relationship between the individual and the wider cultural field of tourism emerges where the reader of the Bucket List is encouraged, and at times beseeched, to acquire particular travel experiences as the measure of their individual identity and self-value, yet those very experiences are, in the specificity of their recommendation, strikingly normative and *un*individual. It is this tension which is the subject of the following section.

BUCKET LISTS AS EXPERIENTIAL IMPERATIVE DISCOURSE

> 'I'm a list fanatic; in particular, I'm a lover of bucket lists. If you want to live a life filled with achievement, success, fun, and adventure, you need to dream big. And, the first step to dreaming big, is to create a bucket list.' (https://daringtolivefully.com/bucket-list-ideas)

This notion, that following a Bucket List involves 'a need to dream big' and desiring a life full of rich and rewarding experiences, is a useful reference in discussing the relationship between tourist experience, identity and self-actualisation (Desforges, 2000). One list states that to 'travel all around the world' is 'the single best activity that exposes you to new cultures, broaden your mind, move out of your comfort zone, allow you to meet new people, and experience the wonders of the world'. Similarly, for another author, 'traveling to the more remote corners of the globe' was the best way to 'test your patience and skill, navigating from one obscure area to the next' and would therefore be able to bestow 'a satisfaction in knowing that you're experiencing something so different from your norm'. The central principle of the Bucket List is, therefore, that travel experiences are a means of measuring one's worth as an individual engaged in a life which is worthy and meaningful. Travel is presented as having unique transformational power (Bosangit et al., 2015), and as a site for 'the process of re-examining identity' (White and White, 2004: 216) where individuals are reassured of the importance of 'living life to the fullest' (van Nuenen, 2016: 201). Travel experiences are

therefore positioned not just as 'a special experience that is deeply felt and long remembered' (Lew, 2011: 572), but as akin to Giddens' (1991) 'fateful moments', where identity can be forged and a sense of selfhood expressed. This section will unpack this theme in more detail, and will suggest that the Bucket List discourse is one that makes acquiring experiences an imperative task as part of the wider pervasive discourse of selfhood and 'becoming' identified by Rose (1989).

This tenet was evident in the many Bucket Lists where the reader is implored by what we might term an experiential imperative discourse, that is, where the language, tone and framing of the text position the experience described as essential and obligatory. For instance, a magazine feature offered a Bucket List of eight 'Must-Experience Festivals', whilst a blogger made use of a pair of asterisks in presenting 'the ultimate list of London activities that you just *have to* squeeze in' whilst another utilised capitals to ensure the readers awareness of their obligations in regard to the '21 things you MUST do in west London: The 2016 Bucket List'. The experiential imperative discourse is readily apparent in talk of 'must-see list of sites' and is particularly pronounced, as was explored earlier in the paper, in the manner by which not only particular destinations or activities were valorised but particular ways of doing and ways of experiencing them are stipulated in precise detail. For instance, strawberries and cream are 'of course obligatory' when you 'Catch a game of tennis at Wimbledon'. Drawing on Fairclough's (2003) notion of the 'grammatical mood', we can see how the Bucket List discourse is often either 'declarative', in stating which tourist destinations and experiences are the best, or 'imperative', in the common use of word choices and sentence formations that express the destination or experience as necessary, obligatory or demanded. Indeed, one travel magazine offered an 'ultimate travel bucket list' with the strap line 'destinations and adventures to top everyone's wish list'. The individual is lost or, rather, the individual is promised value if they conform to the definitive (i.e. 'ultimate') declaration of what 'everyone' should wish for.

Somewhat paradoxically given the Bucket List concept originates as an intimate dialogue with oneself, or at least with close confidantes, concerning what experiences one wishes to define their life, and eventual death, by, there is a lack of 'interrogative' formations. Rather than asking questions of oneself as to what events or experiences would provide a measure that one's life had value, the Bucket List as presented in the imperative tone is merely another means by which 'experts' speak with authority about what one should be expected to aspire to. With few notable exceptions (such as the author of a family bucket list reflecting on 'a really wonderful moment' when asking her young daughters to devise a list and 'ponder on what they love to do and return to, as well as what they'd like to do/try'), Bucket Lists are rarely presented as emerging from the free agentic choice of individuals. In explaining this further, a useful distinction is that made by Cohen and Cohen (2012) between the 'hot' authenticity springing from the imaginations of tourists themselves and the 'cold' authenticity of more institutionalised and formal authorities such as tourism industry professionals and travel writers. While the premise of the Bucket List is that each destination of each list should stem from that person's own individualised desires and dreams, the reality is that the majority of uses of the Bucket List concept are top-down, 'cold', declarations of what *should* be desired.

An important tension can therefore be observed. In being both a guide to and a measure of a 'life well lived', the Bucket List is overtly individualistic. Yet, in order for the experiences which constitute the list to be recognised as worthy authors soon resort to canonical and at times derivative experiences. The majority of Bucket Lists simply offer a selection of goals chosen by a recognised or self-appointed expert that the reader is urged to accept or, in the parlance of many Bucket Lists, be 'inspired by'. Bucket Lists are never purely individualised but instead, as with many narrations of

travel and tourism experience (Kane and Tucket, 2010), draw on socially approved understandings of value and worth. As Munt (1994: 114) notes, it is 'deeply ironic' that the pursuit of individuality in tourist discourses frequently fails to escape the widespread conformity of actual tourist practice.

The imbalance between personal and social level understandings of the value of tourism experiences is therefore revealed by a closer critical reading of the Bucket List discourse. We might draw on the distinction made by Wang (1999), and reiterated by Kontogeorgopoulos (2017), between inter-personal and intra-personal existential authenticity to suggest that the Bucket List discourse predominantly favours the former and neglects the latter. While destination choice is informed by self-identity (e.g. aspirations) due regard must be given to the part played by social norms (e.g. acceptance), meaning even the most individualised narrative of tourism experience attends to conventions, rituals and expectations about which destinations, activities and experiences are socially recognised as desirable by others (Lewis, Kerr and Pomering, 2010). Returning to Rose (1989: 227), we can see the Bucket List as yet another means by which 'the self is not merely enabled to choose, but obliged to construe life in terms of its choices, its powers, and its values'. However, the individualistic content of most Bucket List content occludes the various ways in which tourist experience can never be entirely individually. Rather, tourism is inescapably social in that in order for choices to be experienced as having value they must be recognised as such by others. This is of significant importance in understanding how, in being typically presented as individual triumphs, Bucket Lists are detached from the wider social and economic structures of privilege that allow some to pursue self-actualisation through travel.

Thus, there is an expressed inequality in elevating what are invariably expensive touristic experiences to the status of life-affirming events, with the associated promise of fulfilment and self-actualisation, when such are only attainable by those who possess the requisite level of economic, cultural and social resources (Bourdieu, 1984). In presenting an array of life-affirming experiences as there for the taking by any individual motivated enough to be 'daring to live fully', the Bucket List discourse actively obscures the great cost of pursuing many of the suggested Bucket List experiences. As Heath (2007: 101) observes, the 'right' sort of travel can be a valuable commodity in the 'economy of experience', meaning those who can afford to deploy economic capital in acquiring the symbolic capital of culturally valorised tourist experiences can expect to benefit from increased status in their personal, educational and occupational lives. Crucially, however, the task of defining what is desirable and worthy of appreciation is dominated by cultural intermediaries – in this case professional travel writers and amateur bloggers in possession of demonstrable levels of cultural capital – who, according to Bourdieu and Nice (1980a), hold 'a power to consecrate' and to 'produce legitimate classifications' (Bourdieu and Nice, 1980b).

In regards to tourism experiences, authenticity is rhetorical in that in needs working on and sustaining through verbal and bodily performances and encounters (Ringgaard, 2010). In this sense, the Bucket List discourse implies 'that some individuals are *more individualized* or *more reflexive*' than others (Dawson, 2012: 307). If the Bucket List is about living a good life through the pursuit of travel and tourist experiences, then this indeed appears founded upon the notion that those with more economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) are likely to lead a better life than others. This is particularly problematic when, for example, we consider the inequalities observed in both the quantity and quality of women's leisure relative to that of male partners (Aitchison, 2013) and the manner in which the leisure practices of working class British tourists are often lampooned (Casey, 2013) or viewed with fascination as examples of unrestrained vulgarity and excess (Andrews, 2010). Indeed, the Bucket List discourse appears to rest precisely on a universalistic conception of 'the tourist' which early scholarly work on the subject by the likes of MacCannell (1976) and Urry

(1990) were criticised for. Further still, similar to Bott's (2014: 104) assertion that there is a lack of understanding of 'the significance of local people, customs, socio-cultural life and economies to the subjective and discursive production of adventures', the work of those who labour within the tourism industry to produce and provide such unique experiences is almost entirely ignored. Like other discourses relating to consumer desire and experience identified by Fairclough (2003: 137), the Bucket List discourse 'occludes the relations and circumstance of production'. The defining theme of the Bucket List discourse is to present experiential fulfilment through tourism activity to those individuals whose defining feature is their boldness to proactively desire a certain tourist experience. In these and further criticisms to be explored below, it becomes clear that the Bucket Lists discourse, in its present usage, has strayed far from its original role as a vehicle for existential reflexivity.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis conducted has examined how the Bucket List phenomenon has emerged as an exemplar of how travel is cast as 'a serious quest for meaning' (Cohen, 2010: 130) and has, at its core, the belief that decisions about destination, style and form of travel are made with reference to personal identity and enable 'the narration of a fulfilled self' (Desforges, 2000: 937). Its emergence is therefore in line with wider trends in which a response to the dislocating and anxiety inducing effects of 'liquid' modernity (Bauman, 2000) is to mobilise autobiographical strategies in the narration of the self (Burkitt, 2005). Such aligns well with Franking and Crang's (2001: 19) observation that styles of tourist consumption are 'emblematic of many features of contemporary life, such as mobility, restlessness, the search for authenticity and escape', and with earlier work that casts tourism as a search for existential meaning absent in the course of modernisation and rationalisation (Cohen, 1979). The appeal of Bucket Lists might therefore be seen to lie in their ability to assuage what Bauman (1992: 195) refers to as the individual's desire for 'reassurance that what they do makes sense, is worth doing, is not a waste of any of the precious moments which succeed each other in the flow of their individual lives' and, in doings so, provide a sense of what Giddens (1991) famously referred to as 'ontological security'. Thus, the sociophysiological purpose of the Bucket List is an important one; it offers the chance to contemplate the self and the life one is leading, to reflect on one's own mortality and then to redouble one's efforts to live a rich and fulfilling life in spite of the many potentially alienating conditions of the modern world.

However, the analysis quickly departs from this essentially optimistic reading of the Bucket List discourse as offering a new way to think about ourselves and the lives we lead. As discussed above, whilst the Bucket List discourse frames a plethora of unique experiences as available to those with sufficient motivation to strive for them, it does so by drawing on socially recognised and overtly prescriptive accounts of where, what and how to 'do' tourism meaningfully. Bucket Lists prescribe specific experiences and in doing so offer only a partial recognition of the ways in which 'identity is socially constructed, symbolized and embodied' through tourism practices (Andrews, 2010: 28). Indeed, Bucket Lists produced by actual individuals to recount their travels appear to be a useful means of mediating memory and serve to recall and perform tourism experience to themselves and to others (Tung and Ritchie, 2011; Merchant, 2016) as part of presenting a transformative and evolving self (Bosangit et al., 2015). However, such iterations of the Bucket List concept are relatively rare. The Bucket List discourse strays far from its initial conception as a means to structure one's life and actions around personal priorities and values and, in doing, to find self-actualisation. Rather, the Bucket List is now predominantly put to use to cajole the individual into an ongoing and, potentially, unending cycle of experience acquisition. Supposed authentic experiences are rarely free from wider and sometimes competing cultural, political and economic concerns (Lacy et al., 2002). Indeed, it can

be argued that the spread of the Bucket List concept stems from its ability to foster desire for continued expenditure within the tourism and leisure sectors rather than any underlying existential concerns to increase the wellbeing of individuals by propelling them towards self-actualisation.

The tendency for hedonic choices that relate to individual pleasure to predominate means that the Bucket List ethos conforms to a self-centred framing of what constitutes a happy and meaningful life. There is rarely any mention of which other individuals (friends, family or intimate partners) might experience a particular activity alongside you and, further, the majority of items listed are directed at specific activities which bring benefits to the individual only. Experience that benefit others are in the minority. For instance, one list included a 'Charity/Kindness' section containing items such as 'Take part in a charity walk' and 'Send a letter to a soldier' while others included items such as 'Pay the toll for the car behind you', 'Visit a nursing home' and 'Bond With My Flatmates'. However, altruistic activities are kept to a minimum and where they do feature they are often contained within the self-orientated discourse of the imperative to acquire meaningful experiences on an individual level. Thus, while 'Give Blood' featured on several lists the implication was that this would be a one off task undertaken largely for the experience of doing so and certainly would not involve a continuing commitment to make regular and recurring donations once activity has been 'ticked off' the list by being experienced once, for the first time.

Illustrative of these concerns is a remark made in the reader comments section of one major British newspaper website's coverage of the 2014 'Great British Bucket List' which described the list as 'Typical of ME, ME, ME Britain'. The commenter's criticism, that the Bucket List reads as a list of 'basically anything that involves spending loads and loadsamoney [sic] on yourselves as we all know that's the secret to true fulfilment [sic]', brings the self-focused acquisition of Bucket List experiences to the fore. The criticism levelled – that the Bucket List discourse valorises a particularly solipsistic vision of self-fulfilment and, further, merely deploys economic capital (i.e. 'loadsamoney') in the pursuit of happiness – is perceptive in its substance if not exactly eloquent in its expression. Throughout the Bucket Lists analysed, there are overt references to economic capital such as 'Drink a $1000 Bottle of Champagne' or ostentatious luxuries such as 'Stay one night in the Burj Al Arab Hotel (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)' and 'Eat in a Michelin-starred restaurant'). Indeed, the plot of the original film only allows the humble blue collar mechanic Carter Chambers to visit Paris, Rome, the Himalayas and other distant destinations due to the obscene wealth of his new found friend and patron, the millionaire Edward Cole. In the case of the majority of Bucket List items the requirement of considerable economic capital is implicit rather than explicit; indeed, a backpacking trip to Machu Picchu requires far more resources (time, money, equipment and expertise) than a single meal in a prestigious haute cuisine restaurant. We can see how claiming prestige in relation to tourism experience involves the distribution of forms of capital. As Kane (2012: 281) explores in relation to mountain tourism, 'Bourdieu's theorising of distinction in a field suggests that legitimacy requires recognition of those with the dominant capital and status'.

Wang and Alasuutari's (2017: 11) recent discussion of experientialisation is relevant here in that it reminds us that in spite of the current predominant use of the Bucket List discourse as a commercially motivated imperative to desire and pursue tourist experiences, authentic experiences are 'realised by showing personal involvement' and by being used by people who are 'engaged in defining themselves: what they like and dislike, how they live their lives, and how they relate their preferences to those of their friends'. Thus, the important observation that authenticity, as found in tourism experience, is implicitly relational (Ringgaard, 2010) is somewhat lost by many Bucket List texts which treat the reader as an atomised subject. Bucket Lists simultaneously typify the promise of authentic, fulfilling experiences and the anxiety generating potential of being told what to desire

and, via the implicit imperative to self-advertise, the need to compares one's own life and experience against that of others. The vision of happiness and fulfilment offered by the original film *The Bucket List*, and by the many approximations and distortions of the concept since, is one that is thoroughly individualised. With few exceptions, Bucket List items focus on the individual and their experiences. Yet, this is not to say that they are asocial. On the contrary, they are founded on normative, socially approved understandings of appropriate and desirable places and activities and, further still, are ordered around predicted and stipulated emotional and affective responses. Further, they draw socially prescriptive notions of desirable experiences which are firmly rooted in class based dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984). The Bucket List discourse neglects the cultural specificity of tourist experiences and does not take into account the 'fields of action' in which particular performances of tourism, shaped and in turn shaping social differences such as gender, social class and nationality, take place (Andrews, 2010; Brown and Osman, 2017).

Lastly, a number of additional criticisms arise and further indicate how the Bucket List discourse has become corrupted or diluted. First, the concept of the Bucket List has become largely shorn of any overt association with the finality of death and mortality that might urge us to reflect on the meaning and values of life (Bauman, 1992). Of the 50 Bucket List texts analysed, just nine made overt reference to death and things to do 'before you die', whilst one referred to doing things within your 'lifetime', another was framed by the author's successful battle with cancer and another with the author overcoming the grief of having lost a young child to a rare illness. Second, the multiplication of Bucket Lists serves to dilute their potential to bestow meaning. Thus, rather farcically, one travel writer's website offered 49 separate Bucket List posts including lists as diverse, and peculiarly specific, as 'Epic Ideas for Your Dog Bucket List' and 'Bucket List of 17 Cheesy Travel Pictures You Must Take'. Likewise, annual lists represent a further corruption of the original concept, where it implicitly should take a lifetime to define oneself through completion of the list, by offering perpetual renewal of desires with a 2017 Bucket List soon to be replaced with a new set of targets, goals and desires in 2018. Third, the content of many Bucket Lists feels in many ways rather sanitised and conformist. While some exceptions included references to gambling, such as 'Go to a casino in Las Vegas' or 'Have a flutter on the Welsh National at Chepstow', the desire for forms of leisure experience which are excessive, illegal or morally injurious (e.g. Thurnell-Read, 2012; Smith and Raymen, 2016) or that relate to sex (e.g. Bauer, 2008) are notably absent from the Bucket List discourse. Instead, what ought to be a meaningful and highly personalised endeavour to find meaning and self-fulfilment in one's own life has, in effect, become a means to further the imperative to desire and acquire experiences stipulated by cultural intermediaries from a limited range of culturally condoned options.

6. CONCLUSION

The article has explored how, in a short space of time, the concept of the Bucket List has gained cultural prominence as a technique of ordering how one thinks about one's identity and the life one leads. The article has used a Critical Discourse Analysis of a sample of recent Bucket Lists to define the concept of the experiential imperative discourse, the discourse which promotes the pursuit of meaningful experiences as the necessary imperative of individuals seeking reassurance that they are valued as a person and that their life, as they are choosing to live it, is one they and others see to be 'well lived'. This concept adds to our understandings of the relationships between tourism and experience and represents an emergent cultural trope through which discourses about identity, selfhood, happiness and self-actualization circulate. The analysis has shown how from an initially optimistic stance the Bucket List concepts has largely lost its potentially for fostering meaningful existential reflection and has, instead, become a vehicle for culturally specific ideas of what

constitute 'good' tourism experiences, where tourism is 'done' in the right way, to be imposed on individuals who are prompted to desire a constantly renewing range of tourism experiences.

While the analysis offered is drawn from a limited sample of uses of the Bucket List concept, it has shown how the notion of the Bucket List allows for an investigation of how tourism experiences are thought about, desired and promoted as meaningful markers of selfhood and identity. It has sought to destabilise the notion that authentic tourism experiences are purely the result of freely autonomous actors in order to offer an important critical rejoinder to the now extensive body of scholarly work that posits tourism as meaningful and enriching for the individuals involved. Thus, the article has shown how the specificity with which certain discourses about the value of tourism relies upon culturally specific ways of attributing status and value to tourism and travel experiences. Such works to give some individuals possessing the requisite cultural capital to define particular experiences as both objectively and subjectively legitimate and, as such, worthy of our desires.

Further research is required to investigate specific iterations of the Bucket List discourse and to unpack how tourism is, indeed, envisaged as part of a 'life project' (Giddens, 1991) in terms of planning, anticipation and recollection. The implication raised here has been that such is likely to be differentiated by social class, gender, age and cultural background, all of which may influence the desire or ability to engage with and respond to the imperative experiential discourse. Likewise, allusions to the utility of the Bucket List for the tourism industry to exert pressure upon individuals could be explored in more depth by, for example, conducting research with notable industry actors who, it has been suggested here, act as 'cultural intermediaries' with the power to consecrate some tourism experiences as more desirable and worthy than others.

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