Women’s Stories of Joy in the Outdoors

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Thesis Abstract

While outdoor experiences, particularly those involving risk and or activity, are highly valorised and valued we know little about the subject of joy in the outdoors. This study makes inroads into this gap in our understanding by exploring three women’s experiences of joy in the outdoors and grappling with the varied meanings from these stories.

Methodologically this study acknowledges the role that narrative/story has in how we know, live and recount our lives. It draws upon my own experience of the outdoors and the women participants to re-present the women’s interview transcripts into fictional short stories. I also consider some of the conundrums of the narrative research process. The stories were analysed to draw out key themes.

These themes challenge dominant views from within outdoor education and recreation literature and practice. In particular this study highlights; the role of simplicity in both the activity the women were engaging in and simplicity of possessions; the participants’ sense of an aesthetic in their surrounding environment; relationships with both people and animals provided a background to the women’s experience and an absence of a focus on their own bodies which is contrary to much of the historical and contemporary literature.

The women’s stories reveal a number of challenges to the orthodox view of how the outdoors can be valued, experienced and participated in. These findings suggest the need to explore and offer a range of alternative ways of spending time in the outdoors to enable opportunities for positive emotional experiences such as joy. This would require subversion of the dominant discourse of risk and outdoor pursuits as the most valid and valued form of outdoor experience.
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Contents

Women’s Stories of Joy in the Outdoors ................................................................. i
Thesis Abstract ........................................................................................................ ii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. iii
Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
  Attempting order .................................................................................................. 3
  A note to the reader ............................................................................................ 4
Review of Literature ............................................................................................... 4
  Defining the outdoors ......................................................................................... 5
  Leisure .................................................................................................................. 7
  Outdoor recreation .............................................................................................. 10
  A History of female participation in the outdoors ............................................. 11
  Stories of women in the outdoors ...................................................................... 15
  Literature specific to joy in the outdoors ........................................................... 19
  Positive emotional experience .......................................................................... 20
  Psychological theories of positive emotional experiences in the outdoors ...... 20
  Literature which applies a social lens ............................................................... 30
Methodology and Methods .................................................................................. 37
  Ontological .......................................................................................................... 37
  Epistemological .................................................................................................. 37
  Truth ..................................................................................................................... 38
  Narrative .............................................................................................................. 40
  Conversations/interviews .................................................................................... 47
  Analysis -drawing from the conversations/interviews .................................... 51
Telling stories .......................................................................................................... 52
  What is a story? .................................................................................................... 52
  Why tell stories? ................................................................................................ 53
  Stories/Fiction ..................................................................................................... 56
  What makes a story? .......................................................................................... 60
  Poetry in/as research ......................................................................................... 62
  Whose stories of joy? ......................................................................................... 63
  Researching friends ........................................................................................... 65
  Self in research .................................................................................................. 69
  Presenting my own story within the research/self in research ......................... 70
Issues in gathering and telling the stories of joy ............................................... 72
  The quality of the story ..................................................................................... 72
  Authenticity ......................................................................................................... 75
Introduction

I tasted the lost Joy with unusual fullness. It had been a particular hill walk on a morning of white mist. The other volumes of the Ring had just arrived as a Christmas present from my father, and the thought of all the reading before me, mixed with the coldness and loneliness of the hillside, the drops of moisture on every branch and the distant murmur of the concealed town, had produced a longing (yet it was also fruition) which had flowed over from the mind and seemed to involve the whole body. That walk I now remembered. It seemed to me that I had tasted heaven then (Lewis, 1955, p. 158).

I was over-come with an intense feeling of joy. I had an inner sense that everything in my world was balanced. I was surrounded by immense beauty. I could feel and hear the long frozen grass as I walked across it. I was able to absorb the exquisite beauty of the sun shining on the intricate spiders’ webs and able to bask in the love of my entire family as they walked in awed silence along the alpine path ahead of me. My nephew appeared almost in silhouette against the cloudless blue sky and the intense white of the snow covered mountains, as he was carried along on the shoulders of my brother. I had a deep sense of knowing that this was what life was about, everything made sense. I knew I was loved and that I loved. I knew that I had enormous good fortune to spend time in a valley in the mountains in mid-winter where the world appeared frozen but my face was still warmed by the sun. Indeed everything made sense - I felt joy.

The above are two descriptions of moments of joy. Both descriptions allude to the myriad of conditions that may have induced this feeling of joy. C.S. Lewis’s description includes “the drops of moisture on every branch” and “the loneliness of the hillside”. My own experience highlights the “the sun shining on the intricate spiders’ webs” and the “love of my family”. But what do we really know
about what prompts the unsolicited moment of joy? And why do I want to know more about what conditions reign when joy is experienced?

Both in my professional role as an outdoor educator and in my personal life as an outdoor enthusiast I have had the fortuitous opportunity to experience joy and to witness others experiencing joy. These rare, intense, moving and emotional occasions have driven me to ask the question that forms the basis of this research. This study is an attempt to develop greater understanding of the sources of joy, and in particular, women’s experiences of joy that occur in natural environments.

Confining the location of experiences of joy to those that occur within a natural environment is both a practical solution to managing the size of the project and a reflection of my professional and personal interest in the outdoors. The term ‘natural environment’ is obviously open to numerous interpretations. However, for the purposes of this research I am using the descriptor to refer to locations that have had minimal human manipulation. Examples of environments I consider natural include, remote wilderness areas, parks and reserves, beaches and rivers.

The purpose of this research is to develop a greater understanding of women’s experiences of feeling joy in a natural outdoor environment. I am particularly interested in understanding what shapes the women participants’ sense of joy. Why do they think that on that occasion an intense emotional experience occurred? What conditions of possibility permit the emergence of ‘joy’ for each of the women? How do the women ‘talk’ about joy and how are their experiences of joy linked to their lives, their sense of who they are, and what they may become?

This study of joy will enable greater understanding of the potential of positive emotional experiences in the outdoors. It will reduce the current research gap in this under-researched topic and highlight the potential of further research gains in this area. Importantly, greater awareness of this topic by practitioners
may generate a repositioning of outdoor recreation that enables alternative practices, to enhance the emotional experiences of participants.

As is suggested by the two descriptions of joy previously aired, joy appears to spring from a culmination of factors. This research will interrogate what and who is instrumental in ‘producing’ an ‘episode’ of joy in three women’s lives. The project’s focus highlights a positive aspect of time spent in the outdoors in stark contrast to much of the deficit and/or risk–based literature in the Outdoor Education and Recreation field. The thesis also contributes to expanding understandings of joy, privileging the particular and nuanced understandings of three women, rather than the more generalised accounts of joy as an emotion that characterises many psychological accounts.

In order to gather, analyse and re-present the data that made up the women participants’ stories of joy, I have had to confront a number of methodological and methods challenges. This study adds to the growing body of research that draws upon narrative, fiction and poetic representation to explore what we can know, how we can know and how we can share participants’ experiences. In particular, my visibility within the research in the recounting of my own experiences and through the ongoing self-reflective process may challenge some readers and researchers. This form of research may well introduce readers to an alternative way of hearing and telling about experiences and may in turn produce more research. My hope is that all involved, the participants, the readers and the researcher are able to feel that the information gathered and analysed has a sense of resonance for them, enabling a reflection on their own moments of joy and what these do and might mean.

**Attempting order**

As a keen tramper, I am used to carrying a pack. Over the years my hands on experience has taught me what to take and how to pack it. I now know what to keep at the top so that I can easily access it during the day and what to leave at the bottom because I am unlikely to need it at all. But I find inevitably there are too many things that need to be on the top and, unlike a suitcase, the space at
the top of a pack is quite limited. This packing dilemma is replicated in the pulling together of this thesis. I have often struggled with what should the reader know first, what do they need to understand to make sense of what follows? I have attempted to order this section according to the principle of what you may need during the early part of the day. However, just as the airline policy instructs, you should not pack someone else’s luggage so I can only make a best attempt to order this in a logical fashion.

A note to the reader

The methodological chapter discusses my role as a researcher, both unashamedly present within the research and within the thesis representation. However before you get to that chapter you will notice my bordered and italicised researcher notes, which I recorded throughout the research process. These are my attempt to honestly capture and reflect upon the messiness of research about experience, emotion and feeling. These notes are included with a view to adding depth and portraying the realities of my research process in something approaching an authentic manner.

Review of Literature

This review begins by providing key definitions and relevant context material for this study. Specifically, I include a definition of the term ‘outdoors’ and key relevant developments within the domains of leisure and outdoor recreation.

Literature drawn from historical and contemporary portrayals of women’s experience in the outdoors is discussed. These historical portrayals have arguably shaped how we understand and experience the outdoors in New Zealand. The historical portrayals are supported by consideration of the ways in which women’s experience in the outdoors is constructed within the genres of ‘adventure’ and ‘back to nature’ writing. These constructions enable the reader to more fully understand the historical and contemporary influences, which may have shaped both the outdoor experiences for the women in this study, and the tools and resources they had to ‘do’, talk, and write about them.
I then explore the ways in which joy is theorised in relation to the outdoor environment. This is followed by a discussion of literature which widens the scope from that of joy to the broader topic area of positive emotional experience in the outdoor environment. This latter part of the literature review is divided into two sections. The first of these sections predominately draws on scholarship that utilise psychological theories, while the second section explores literature informed by sociological lenses.

Before beginning to tell a story about other stories I want to be clear about the field from which the literature has been drawn. Achieving this clarity is difficult as the boundaries between fields are artificial and blurred, but I have attempted to draw upon literature within the fields of outdoor education, outdoor recreation, and at times, utilise material from the fields of sport sociology and physical education. Definitional and boundary issues will thus be discussed throughout this review of literature and thesis. In relation to geographic positioning, I draw upon the work of the growing number of New Zealand and Australian academics who contribute to this field of enquiry but necessarily supplement this with and acknowledge the historical impact of the literature mainly produced within the United Kingdom and the United States. I acknowledge that field and geographic boundaries colour these stories in a particular way, and it could be argued that this colour is white, as my heritage and that of my participants is European in origin rather than the Māori descendants of Aotearoa New Zealand. Further, the literature is dominated by ‘first world’ countries drawing mainly upon white populations.

Defining the outdoors

The context of this research occurs in the outdoors, thus it is necessary to define meanings commonly advanced for the term ‘outdoors’. Within the academic sphere and beyond it, there are many conflated terms used to delineate activity which occurs in “natural” or outdoor environments. New Zealand authors, Cosgriff, Little and Wilson (2009) acknowledge the overlap and the distinctions between the location terms “nature”, “wilderness” and the “outdoors” within the context of the outdoor recreation, education and leisure fields.
As with other Western nations, the concepts of nature, outdoors and the wilderness in Aotearoa-New Zealand are complex and ever-changing, and it is questionable as to whether these interpretations are ever anything more than a social and gendered construct. (Cosgriff, Little, & Wilson, 2009, p.18)

Davidson and Stebbins (2011) devote multiple pages to definitions of nature and “nature challenge activity” and note the difficulty of making definitional distinctions, highlighting the geographic and cultural privileging of this term. Once beyond the murky territory of definitions and terms used to describe the location of the activity or event (i.e. outdoors, wilderness and nature), progress is also impeded when trying to review or describe the experience. This range of terms includes outdoor pursuits, outdoor adventures, outdoor activities, outdoor experiences and outdoor recreation.

Robyn Zink and Lisette Burrows (2008) pose a challenge to the distinctions of the outdoors in the outdoor education context and the seeming lack of interrogation of the term. The authors note that within the outdoor education context any discussion of the meaning of the outdoors “tends to be linked to notions of a ‘natural’ environment which, in turn tends to be equated with National Parks or other areas that are viewed as ‘wild’ in some way” (p. 252). The authors suggest that this view of the outdoors positions it a neutral space rather than one which is “over inscribed with meaning” (p. 255). Similarly, Jo Straker (2008) debates the implied and unchallenged universality of the term outdoors and this seeming denial of it as a contested and ambiguous space.

There are a number of ways in which the outdoors is construed. These constructions include the outdoors as place (Brown, 2008; Wattchow & Brown, 2011) as natural environment or wilderness, as landscape (Abbot & RuRu, 2010) and as cultural places (Carr, 2004, 2006). Unsurprisingly, each of these terms and constructions are imbued with and reinforce particular historical and contemporary socio-cultural meanings. Inevitably, as with any categorisation, these categories reinforce what is considered ‘in’ and what is left out. Close attention to these categories and terminology would also lead to investigation of the people and social forces that influenced and constructed these categories
and whose agenda was being met, however discussion of these topics to any depth is beyond the scope of this study. (See Straker, 2008; Zink and Burrows, 2008 for discussion on the term outdoors in the New Zealand context).

While the literature highlights the definitional challenges of utilising the word ‘outdoors’, in my study I am confident that given the geographic location in which this study takes place and the contemporary (if unchallenged) understanding of the term outdoors, my choice of the term ‘outdoors’ will be understood by many and pragmatics force me to make a term choice. However, as with most terms, I acknowledge that it will be subject to interpretation, be loaded with cultural understanding, and always open to change.

Leisure

The outdoor experiences explored in this study most closely align with the broad domains of leisure and recreational studies and more specifically within the field of outdoor recreation. Therefore it is important to explore some of the key concepts central to leisure debates.

Some of the key traditional identifiers of these broader fields have included activities which have been freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, relatively free from internal and external constraints (Kelly, 1978, 1987; Mannell, 1999; Rojek 1995, 2005, 2010; Shaw, 1985, 2010; Stebbins, 1992, 2005, 2011; Wearing & Wearing, 1988). Haworth and Veal’s (2004) introduction to “Work and Leisure” outlines some of the historical and contemporary challenges to defining the field of leisure and presents some of the central debates chronologically. The authors note that one of the key differences between the 1975 edition of the same title and the current edition is

In the 1970’s the work-leisure nexus was pushed to the fore because of issues raised by the emerging abundance of leisure; in the 1990’s and currently, a key issue is the emerging lack of leisure, at least for some. (Haworth & Veal, 2004, p. 3)
Discussions of freedom and constraints have been a critical focus for much of the leisure research. Indeed, Mannell (1999) suggests while leisure research has produced a plethora of leisure attributes, the central and most commonly agreed of these attributes is associated with freedom or lack of constraint. “This lack of constraint is a quality typically attributed to situations or settings; the setting is free of requirements that people do anything” (p. 237).

Furthermore, Mannell suggests that the notions regarding lack of constraint have a variety of labels “freedom of choice, freedom from constraints, the freedom to do something, self-determination, lack of role-constraints, low work-relation and “final” goal-orientation” (1999, p. 237). The desire for escape has regularly been attributed to the rationale for leisure existence. Rojek (1995) utilises the work of Cohen and Taylor (1992) to illuminate the links between escape, leisure and freedom. Cohen and Taylor see that everyday life “is a mixture of ‘chained activities’ which render collective life predictable, and ‘escape attempts’ which aim to utilize these activities as a precondition of freedom” (as cited in Rojek, 1995, p. 107).

Cohen and Taylor’s (1992) study indicates that escape attempts can take many forms, including sport, holidays, gambling, sex, criminal activity, drugs, hobbies, and fantasy. However, they are clear that these forms of escape may be manipulations which may indeed be counterproductive to achieving the desired feelings of freedom. In particular, the authors highlight the treadmill effect of the consumerisation of leisure in which the consumer is enticed “with fantasies of leaving routine and monotony behind without supplying any of the means of empowerment to make the trip possible” (p. 107). The inevitable inability to achieve or secure all the ‘products’ we desire, may instead reinforce feelings of being trapped by “chained activities which render life predictable” (as cited in Rojek, 1995, p. 107). Cohen and Taylor suggest that “precisely because leisure promises to free us it can give us a demoralizing sense of anti-climax and even despair when, instead, it leaves us feeling trapped” (as cited in Rojek, 1995 p. 107).
The rendering of leisure as a commodity able to be “bought” is pervasive within leisure, sport, and recreation. In the outdoor context, there has been increasing opportunity to purchase outdoor experiences and outdoor identities. In the New Zealand tourism context Cloke and Perkins’ (2002) research provides evidence of this increasing trend in their exploration of tourism brochures that promoted outdoor adventures.

In addition to the increase in opportunity to purchase leisure, there has been a corresponding increase in the literature that explored the commodification of leisure. The work of Kelly, 1987; Rojek, 1995; Varley, 2006; Wearing B & S, 1996 all contribute to our understanding of commodification of leisure. Literature exploring the commodification of outdoor recreation became prominent in the mid 1990’s with the work of Chris Loynes (1996) and has accrued since then. In particular the on-going work of Ralph Buckley (2007), Cloke and Perkins (1998, 2002, and 2005), and Leigh Davidson (2008) have contributed much to the commodification debate with a New Zealand context.

In an outdoor context, David McGillivray and Matt Frew’s (2007) examination of commercial rafting as an opportunity to purchase an identity as an adventurer raises some interesting challenges surrounding the commodification of leisure. The authors walk through the steps of participating in a rafting experience and the multiple opportunities for a participant to obtain and promote the identity of an adventurer. In particular the authors highlight having purchased a rafting ticket the customer is kitted out in the trappings of an adventure including the helmet, wetsuit and buoyancy vest. At this stage, photos are taken on cell phones and quickly transmitted via Facebook or other social media mechanisms to “witnesses” of this identity creation or solidification. The participant is then guided down the river with a few “spills and thrills” and safely bought back to base in time to purchase the DVD filmed from strategic vantage points on the river or in some instances from an accompanying kayaker. Having completed this adventure the first time participants will have started to generate their identity as an adventurer while the ‘experienced’ multi-experience purchaser will have continued to endorse their adventurous identity. McGillivray and Frew note,
It is concluded that experiences have emerged as new tradable commodities. An industry of commercial adventure organisations has emerged to service a demand characterised by a quest for managed instantaneous gratification and edited memories, rather than for authenticity and self-discovery. At the soft, or mass, end of the adventure market, it is perhaps now possible to talk in the language of ‘post-adventure’ whereby both producers and consumers stage a theatrical performance which produces a visual representation of authentic experience transferable to a virtual witnessing audience. The post-adventure experientialists, although possessing little knowledge of the intricacies of the adventure sports activities in which they participate, know and value them in terms of their mediatised status value and cool fashion statement. (2007, p. 54)

The literature that explores the commodification of leisure is particularly relevant for my study as it could be argued that the women’s experiences of joy are the antithesis of commodification. Unlike the examples presented by McGillivray and Frew, the participants in my study had few witnesses, no links to technology, were seemingly unconcerned about their identity as adventures, and while their activities had some equipment requirements, they were not engaged in commercial activity. It is therefore important to explore experiences that are seemingly going against the trend such as the experiences of the participants in this study.

**Outdoor recreation**

Outdoor recreation is a subset of the wider domain of leisure and the women participants in this study were engaged in outdoor recreational activity. Sport New Zealand, (formerly SPARC), the Government organisation charged with supporting sport and recreation in New Zealand, defined outdoor recreation as “a range of leisure, recreation, cultural activities, undertaken in natural, heritage, rural open space” (SPARC, Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2009-2015). I consider that this research is based within the professional field or practice of
outdoor recreation but the scholars whose work I interrogate in this review seldom refer to their own field as outdoor recreation. Rather they more commonly associate with terms such sport, leisure studies, and outdoor education. Again this highlights the definitional challenges that confront this study in that the context of the activity being explored is that of outdoor recreation, but the literature that supports it occurs in a range of related fields. This definitional challenge reiterates the need for this study to draw upon a range of literature from a variety of fields and related contexts.

A History of female participation in the outdoors

An overview of some of the historical key themes and conceptualisations of women’s participation in the outdoors is necessary in order to track and trace current understandings of the role and experience of women in outdoor activity. This section is not intended as a full history but simply traces some of the key moments and shifts in how women involved in the outdoors have been perceived in recent New Zealand European history. As David Kirk suggested in his research of defining physical education in post war Britain

By focusing the analysis on current or recent concerns, I am not presenting a version of presentism (the reading - and distortion - of past events through contemporary lenses). Rather, my concern here is to better understand our current circumstances by understanding how we arrived at the present state of affairs. (Kirk, 2012, p. ix)

Bob Stothart and Ian Culpan’s encyclopedia of historical aspects of Physical Education in New Zealand also reiterates the importance of understanding our social history. “The importance of understanding, valuing and appreciating the debates and dilemmas, the, trial and tribulation, the successes and catastrophes, and the policies and practices of yesteryear helps future leaders avoid the mistakes of the past” (Stothart & Culpan, 2012, p. 1). As with all history this can only be my reading of someone else reading, and as Kirk and numerous historians, philosophers and social scientists have shown us, what gets selected as worthy of recording for posterity has been evaluated through a particular lens with their inevitable optical flaws. New Zealand author and historian Michael King noted, in his history of New Zealand that “it is currently
fashionable to speak of the ‘histories’ of a country, as if there are many versions of national history (which there are) and many ways of approaching such histories (which there are)” (2003, p. 10).

New Zealand’s outdoor recreation and outdoor education climate has historically been greatly influenced by the cultural and political milieu of Britain, (Boyces, 2000). Organisations which promoted outdoor activity, such as the Scouts and Outward Bound, were created in Britain in an attempt to curb juvenile delinquency and prepare young men for the war. Allin (2000) noted that “Both Kurt Hahn and Baden Powell, instigator of the Scout movement, were primarily interested in developing the fitness and moral character of boys with particular concern to release male aggressiveness and sexual tensions” (p. 51).

Having initiated the Boy Scouts in 1906 Lord Baden Powell first wrote about offering similar opportunities for girls and considered forming a Girls Scouts troop in 1909. However under the direction of his wife and sister he decided to opt for the notion of Girl Guides whose prime role was to provide the support in the background that enabled the Boy Scouts to lead pioneering expeditions and have adventures. Lord Baden-Powell’s sister Agnes:

…warned mothers that short skirts might be suitable for vaulting gates, but violent jerk and jars could fatally damage a woman’s interior economy and she also noted that because of violent exercise there were now more girls with hairy lips. By 1920, Baden-Powell was promoting girls as nurses, future mother and guides to the next generation. (Cook, 2001, p. 45)

In looking to the dominant messages relayed to and about women in the outdoors during the 1940’s and 50’s the clearest images are those from the uniform groups such as the Air Training Corps and the Sea Cadets, which were either being established or expanded during this period. And while the rationale for the establishment of these programmes for young men rested on concerns of fitness for war and averting juvenile delinquency, the physical aspects for the girls where aimed at improving general health and war time
efficiency. There was also an emphasis on the need for the girls to retain their femineity and the explicit suggestion that a girl’s role was to support her male colleagues. Cook (2001) noted that girls “were rarely educated for leadership and the virtues expected to be engendered through their games were loyalty, co-operation, smartness, cleanliness, fairness exemplary manners, self-control and respect for authority” (p. 44).

Also within the domain of organised outdoor activity is the world-wide organisation Outward Bound. Outward Bound first offered courses for girls in 1950. The central aim of the girls’ programme was that, while triumphing over difficulties, the girls were to remain “humble and unassuming”. “The girls were also expected to appreciate their surroundings and to learn something of home-nursing” (Cook, 2001, p. 49). The programme included; demonstration of bathing a baby, anatomy and physiology of the female pelvis, and feeding and weaning children and ante-natal care (Cook, 2001).

Moving from the organised uniform groups to a recreational context, within the same time frame as Baden Powell was considering the role of girls in the Scouting movement, Freda Du Faur an Australian woman begun to undertake regular visits to the New Zealand’s mountains. Du Faur’s 1915 description of her climbing exploits in New Zealand’s Southern Alps highlight both the gendered societal constraints and the dynamic nature of these gendered expectations. Du Faur, having come to the Mt Cook region to climb and having based herself at the famous Hermitage Hotel, found that her desire to undertake ambitious climbs was constrained by the supposed expectation that she had a chaperone rather than simply climb with the male guides.

One old woman implored me with tears in her eyes not to spoil my life for so small a thing as climbing a mountain. I declined gently but firmly to believe that it would be spoilt, and added, with some heat I am afraid, that if my reputation was so fragile a thing that it would not bear such a test, then I would be very well rid of a useless article. (Du Faur, 1977, p. 36)

In this instance however, Du Faur relates that she succumbed to the pressure of the other guests at the Hermitage and engaged the services of a chaperone,
which she had to pay for. In being ‘forced’ into taking this course of action “I sighed, not for the first time in my existence, over the limits imposed upon me by the mere fact that I was unfortunate enough to be born a woman” (1977, p. 37). While clearly outlining a number of restrictions placed on her as a woman climber including the inadvisability of being unchaperoned, the constricting nature of woman’s attire, and the potential for damaging your complexion, Du Faur suggested that changes to attitudes occurred within as little as five years. So now five years after my first fight for individual freedom, the girl climber at the Hermitage need expect nothing worse than raised eyebrows when she starts out unchaperoned and clad in climbing costume. (1977, p. 37)

The 1960s saw an expansion of the outdoors as a recreational and educational environment in Britain, the United States of America and in New Zealand. However, despite increasing participation by women in outdoor pursuits, research emerging in the mid 1980’s begun to highlight a range of issues that impacted upon women’s participation in the outdoors. This research emphasis continued to this day internationally and within New Zealand (Bell, 1996; Humberstone, 1990, 2000; Jones, 2012; Loeffler, 1995; Lugg, 2003; Pinch, Breunig, Cosgriff, & Dignan, 2008; Prince, 2004; Spowart, Hughson & Shaw, 2008). While these authors draw upon a range of theoretical lenses to frame their work, there are a number of common themes such as barriers to participation, gender stereotyping, and the social construction of gender including motherhood and femininity. In short, these authors and many others identify and discuss a range of social inequities which make full participation in all aspects of the outdoors unlikely.

These historical portrayals trace a path where both organised and unstructured participation in the outdoors is characterised by the gender norms of the time. This historical lineage is important for this study as it provides a historical backdrop to contemporary experiences.
Stories of women in the outdoors

In order to more fully situate this study within the literature surrounding women’s experiences in the outdoors I discuss two clearly separate literary genres that explore these experiences. I have used the terms adventure writing and back to nature to describe these genres. The rationale for including these genres in this review is that these works provide insight into how women’s experiences were being written about and how they described their own experiences. This glimpse of the literature provides a snapshot of popular culture and highlights the dominant messages surrounding women in the outdoors and importantly what messages are invisible.

The literature that attempts to illuminate women’s experiences in the outdoors predominantly deals with the “adventurer” pitting herself against the elements. Unsurprisingly, these earlier epics concentrate on acquiring the technical skill necessary to undertake these adventures while balancing the expectations of appropriate feminine behaviour. Du Faur’s (1915) description of the first woman’s ascent of Mt Cook highlights the effort of maintaining proper dress standards and the respect of other women while attempting the rigours of mountain climbing.

When I appeared at lunch the women looked me over and demanded, “Is it worth it?” I was sunburned from brow to chin, and was already beginning to peel. I admitted that it was a pity that mountaineering had such a devastating influence on the complexion, but pointed out it was only a temporary evil and as nothing to the joys I had acquired at the same time. Naturally they remained unconvinced, as these joys were a closed book to them. (Du Faur, 1915, pp. 45-46)

Hence while Du Faur’s writings go into rapture over the beauty and joy of her mountaineering exploits she concentrates on the burdens and constraints placed on her as a woman mountaineer.
Conversely Arlene Blum’s account of the 1984 all women’s expedition to summit Annapurna engrosses the reader in the personalities, dynamics, and emotions involved in such an undertaking.

Freezing rain fell on the tent, but inside we were warm and close. Cuddled in my sleeping bag and talking with my friend, I felt at last that being leader was not so isolated... I was very happy now to be part of the group of friends. Although Annapurna loomed large and cold outside, the sharing of experiences and growing understanding within would help unite us into a team that could face the challenge. (Blum, 1984, p. 106)

Christine Dann and Pip Lynch’s chronicle of New Zealand “Wilderness Women” also recounts the “pleasures and pitfalls of being a woman in the wilderness” (Dann & Lynch, 1989, p. 11). Perversely, while a number of the women express a love for the outdoors, their accounts concentrate on their efforts to overcome environmental, technical, and social hardships. Recollections, such as those from the diary of Louie Roberts, a New Zealand mountaineer in the 1930’s, recall the trials and tribulations of her outdoor experiences.

Early breakfast was largely ambulatory, the sand-flies being also up and doing and one can’t eat through mosquito netting. We were off at seven, a perfect Sunday morning, and not too hot for travelling. We had been well warned of the tribulations of this new track, and the weaker sex set off with some sinking at heart to try themselves out on it. And, oh, those packs amongst those trees and pitfalls, and to unaccustomed muscles! (Dann & Lynch, 1989, p. 34)

Indeed, it is notable that while discussion of emotion is scarce, when it is present, it commonly deals with the emotion of fear and the need and desire to overcome its grip.

The dance with fear fascinates me. Learning to accept fear, to take in without letting it take over is one of the challenges of climbing ice. Fear sharpens my senses. It dances
through my body. It tunes me. It wraps its fingers around my heart and squeezes gently. (da Silva, 1992, p. 109)

While I note the relative absence of discussions of emotion I am not suggesting that they did not occur, merely that they are seldom recounted. It may also be significant that the literature predominantly deals with women involved in the more “sensational” and adventurous journeys into natural environments rather than the more common place experiences “available” to “most” women. The subtitles of a number of books on women’s outdoor experiences include ‘Be Brave, Be Strong: A journey across the great divide (Homer, 2011); Fearless: One woman, one kayak, one continent (Glickman, 2012); ‘Stories of New Zealand Women at Home in the Wilderness’ (Dann & Lynch, 1989); Women Who Dare: North Americas most inspiring women rock climbers (Nobel, 2013); and Going Alone: Women’s adventures in the wild (Rogers, 2004). These examples highlight the use of vocabulary and front page imagery which draws upon wilderness, adventures, and pursuits that I suggest are not common in the lives of a majority of women. Therefore, while it is not difficult to understand why the library shelves are not overflowing with books on a woman’s walk to the local reserve, this does ensure that only the “adventures” are recounted. Thus the recollections of possibly intense emotional experiences that may occur while on a less ‘adventurous’ excursion into the outdoors remain untold.

In summary, a review of the literature which describes women’s adventures in the outdoors is dominated by discussions of the need to deal with barriers to women’s participation in the outdoors, overcoming physical hardship, and the outcomes seemingly produced by these endeavours. These outcomes are commonly discussed as feelings of empowerment, and an awareness and pleasure of physical movement and personal strength. Although many of the texts describe moments of joy and the impact of beauty, more space is devoted to the discussion of fear. The dearth of literature describing moments of joy in the outdoors highlights the need to understand these moments more fully which supports the need for this study.
The back to nature genre literature describing women’s relationship with the natural environment and the outcomes of this relationship is rich in its depiction of emotion. A central theme in this genre of literature appears to be the need and desire to nurture. This nurturing encompasses a need to nurture the self, physically, spiritually, and emotionally and the need to nurture the earth. This relationship is commonly described in synergistic terms, where both the earth and human’s well-being is dependent upon each other.

Phrases such as re-vitalising, reconnecting and healing are regularly used to describe the reunion of women with the natural environment. Denise Mitten and Rosalind Dutton (1996) discuss the healing power of nature “the wilderness offers many gifts - spiritual peace, a positive surrender of control, a feeling of connection, and a new sense of empowerment” (1996, p. 138).

Mary-Faeth Chenery (1984) has also contributed to the understandings of the desirability of a connection with the natural environment and the pursuit of positive emotional experiences within that environment noting

\[
\text{We should without apology be able to imagine pursuing happiness and to imagine more people feeling strong, experiencing joy often, having more friends, stopping longer and noticing the incredible beauty of the autumn colours, expressing themselves more creatively and supporting a caring community.} \quad (\text{Chenery, 1984, p. 201})
\]

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<th>Researcher’s Notes</th>
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| While working on this thesis I continued to work as an outdoor instructor with groups in the outdoors. As I explored the literature it connected me with my own experience which I relate below.  

\[
\text{Having tramped in the night before we spent the day exploring the head of the valley, which was only a couple of hours walk from where we had set up camp. The weather was stunning, the grandeur of the vista unparalleled and the group mellow from a day without packs and with time to relax. Before the sun left the}
\]
valley floor we headed back to camp as a group. However, as this was a well-marked route and because I wanted to give the group some space from their instructor, I directed the group of students to head back to camp without me. I sat on the river rocks in the sun for 20 minutes or so to make sure that I wouldn’t catch them up. Then I removed my tee shirt and begun walking back wearing just my bra and shorts. The feeling of sun on my skin was fantastic. Unhampered by the group I moved quickly just for the sheer love of feeling strong. When the track forced me away from the river and sun and into the bush, my skin quickly cooled until goose bumps altered the topography of my flesh. Heading back to the water’s edge the huge river rocks seem to radiate heat as I bounded from rock to rock.

Why if this is my experience and I have reveled in it so many times have I not made the link to the potential importance of this physical sensation to the participants whom I lead in the outdoors? I resist the thought that this is due to my negligence as an outdoor educator, especially as this omission is mirrored in both the literature and in my experience of co-working with my outdoor instructor colleagues but rather suspect that this failure to take the body into consideration is a widespread practice. (In hindsight - maybe understanding the role of the physical body in outdoor education could have been a topic in my outdoor education degree)

Literature specific to joy in the outdoors

As I highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, I know via personal and anecdotal experience that for some people, moments of joy occur in the outdoors. Ideally this review would elucidate the key research literature which theorises joy in relation to the outdoor environment, however I have been unable to identify any literature that explores the notion of joy in the outdoor environment. This missing theorisation of joy in the literature has meant I have turned to alternative literature that explores notions of enjoyment or positive emotional experiences in outdoor environments. This missing theorisation is important in the sense that it highlights the impetus for this research project. Indeed, the dearth of literature in this topic reiterates the need to address this gap in understanding experiences of joy in the outdoors.
Positive emotional experience

Much of the literature dealing with positive emotional experience is derived from within the psychological and sociological domains. In the following sections I deal with these two domains separately.

Attempts to define and measure emotion and emotional response have seemingly preoccupied the field of psychology from at least 1884 when William James’ article titled “What Is An Emotion?”, explored this topic (as cited in Cashmore, 2002, p. 99). However, this review is not intended as a map to explore this vast topic but rather focuses upon the literature pertinent to the specifics of this study. Thus I begin by exploring the ways psychological theories and principles have informed understandings of positive emotional experiences in the outdoors.

Psychological theories of positive emotional experiences in the outdoors

This section examines three key theories and models that have been widely used in outdoor recreation and leisure domains as vehicles for understanding emotional experience. Initially, I explore Abraham Maslow’s concept of peak experience and the foundational role it has played in the psychological models that followed. This is followed by an exploration of Csikszentmihalyi’s model of flow and the subsequent utilizations and critiques of this dominant psychological model. I then address the more recent model of the Adventure Experience Paradigm developed by Martin and Priest (1986) and discuss its grip on both the theoretical and applied field of outdoor recreation.

Peak Experience

Abraham Maslow remains a key figure in developmental psychology. His hierarchy of needs continues to influence education, therapy and motivational behaviour. His research into peak experience was driven by a desire to move away from psychological work immersed in the study of illness which dominated the field and instead focus on research with people he considered to be healthy.
While the peak experience construct was not developed specifically to apply to an outdoor context, it is relevant in this review because it is commonly associated with outdoor experiences and also because of the pivotal role it has played in the development of the psychological theories that followed.

Maslow (1964) described “peak experience” as “moments of highest happiness and fulfilment” (as cited in Privette, 1983, p. 1362). Early researchers including Laski (1961) and Leach (1963) use descriptors such as profoundly significant, joyful, transitory and rare to describe “peak experience”. The other notable feature of the term “peak experience” is its common association with joy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990, 1999; Maslow, 1970; Privette, 1983).

Gayle Privette (1983) compares the three constructs of Peak Experience, Peak Performance and Flow and notes that peak experience has a “mystic or transpersonal quality” (p. 1364). Privette suggests that terms such as cosmic, pure psyche, absolute and ecstasy are used to describe peak experience.

Alan Ewert (1989) made direct links between Maslow’s theory of peak experience and outdoor adventure. The similarity between what happens in peak experiences and an outdoor adventure experience is striking. Indeed, many, if not most, outdoor adventure education programmes strive for their students to experience the same items as described by Maslow (Ewert, 1989, p. 13).

Interestingly Privette’s comparison of the key characteristics of the three constructs notes that peak experience “tends to be perceptual, receptive, and passive” (p. 1364). This notion of passivity and emotional experience is particularly interesting given the psychological constructs that were later developed in an attempt to more fully explain emotional experience within an outdoor context seem to ignore the idea of passivity and instead focus on active adventure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990, 1999; Martin & Priest, 1986).

Ewert (1989) suggests that Maslow’s theories, particularly self-actualisation and peak experience, have provided a basis from which a number of models have developed to explain behaviour in an outdoor context. However Alf Walle
(1997) clearly elucidates the inconsistencies in this suggestion. Walle refreshes our memory in describing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and reminds us that Maslow asserted that those needs specified as higher needs (self-esteem, self-actualisation) will only be sought once lower level physiological needs have been met. Walle notes “the risk theory of adventure, in contrast to Maslow, argues that only through risk and danger do some individuals meaningfully satisfy their higher needs” (1997, p. 268).

Flow

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has made the most significant and continuous contribution to the literature devoted to flow theory having published prolifically on this topic from 1975 to the present day. Csikszentmihalyi’s research explored at length people’s motivation for involvement in activities with seemingly little external reward. Results from his 1975 study of people from a diverse range of fields, including rock climbers, dancers and chess players described experiences of total involvement where actions just seemed to flow. Thus Csikszentmihalyi coined the term flow, as it was the term used by research participants to describe their experience.

Csikszentmihalyi’s central notion is that flow is experienced “when people perceive opportunities for action as being evenly matched by their capabilities” (1975, p. 50). However, if an equal match of skill and challenge does not take place the alternative states of boredom or anxiety may occur. The practical example commonly used to illustrate and compare the three states of ‘flow’, anxiety, and boredom described in the flow model, is that of an experienced white-water kayaker kayaking in three different situations. In the first scenario, a kayaker paddles a river which is difficult but within their ability, they may experience a feeling of being totally engrossed in the pursuit, find it intrinsically rewarding, and achieve a sense of flow. Conversely, if an experienced kayaker is put on slowly moving water with little opportunity to be challenged they may experience a state of boredom. If the kayaker was to paddle a river with rapids beyond their ability to safely negotiate they may experience a state of anxiety. Thus the appropriate level of challenge balanced with the level of skill is integral to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’.
Csikszentmihalyi, in collaboration with others, has worked on the flow model for nearly 30 years and six characteristics or essential elements have remained the same. These six characteristics are people clearly knowing what it is they are trying to achieve and receiving immediate feedback on their progress in achieving this goal, action and awareness merge and a loss of awareness of the self as being separated from the action; and this merging being made possible by the centring of attention on a limited field of stimulus. MacAlloon, Csikszentmihalyi, Harris and Park (1983) draw on a rock climbing example to illustrate this latter characteristic noting

From all the action an individual might undertake, sensations he might process, thought he might entertain, the parameter of the activity define a narrow subset as relevant – a man climbing a rock. The remainder of the human repertoire is rendered irrelevant and irritant and is screened out. The physical and mental requirements involved in staying on the rock act as a screen for the stimuli of ordinary life. (1983, p. 367)

The other three characteristics are a sense of heightened awareness in which an individual becomes more aware of internal processes which can result in a loss of self-consciousness, a sense of control over actions and environment or a lack of concern over the need to control the activity; and an auto telic experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1999). Of the six characteristics listed above it is the merging of action and awareness which Csikszentmihalyi suggests happens to such a degree that participants in an activity cease to be aware of themselves as separate from the actions being performed. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that flow is the “state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (1990, p.4).

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1 Autotelic comes from two Greek words – auto (self) and telos (goal) and “refers to a self-contained activity, one that is done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 67).
Interestingly, Mihaly and Isabella Csikszentmihalyi’s reformulated model developed in the 1990s, increased the number of channels offered as possible ways of codifying experience. Initially the flow model proposed three channels, of boredom, flow, or anxiety. This was later added to by suggesting an apathy channel to account for the situations of low levels of perceived skill and low levels of challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). The flow model was then reformulated to include eight channels, with the additions of, control, arousal, worry, and relaxation (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura 1986). Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura also encouraged researchers’ to experiment with additional channels. Ellis, Voelkl and Morris (1994) suggest that “a model’s ability to define flow experiences, in comparison to other types of challenge-skill ratios, increases as the number of channels increases” (1994, p. 340). However four years later Voelkl and Ellis (1998) drew attention to the swing back to the original flow model in research which attempts to understand optimal experiences in daily life.

In a step away from the academic text, Csikszentmihalyi’s book on flow would fit within the “self –help” genre with the by-line being “steps toward enhancing the quality of life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, cover page). Within this book the author clearly outlines his intention to draw upon the tools of modern psychology to explore the question “when do people feel most happy?” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 2). Once again Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is at pains to illustrate the links between challenge and skill in noting

…the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times – although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. (p. 3)

Numerous studies have expanded, integrated and extrapolated on Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory from a broad range of fields and applications, including flow and work (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Mannell, Zuzanek & Larson 1988; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi , 2002;), flow and sport (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Jackson, 1992; Kimiecik & Jackson, 2002), and flow and leisure and recreation (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Jones,
Hollenhorst & Perna 2003; Vitterso, Vorkinn & Vistad, 2001; Macbeth, 1988; Perkins & Nakamura, 2013). Many scholars accept the psychological construct of flow and their research emphasis is on validating, applying, and extending the model (Kerr & Houge-Mackenzie, 2012; Mackenzie, Hodge, & Boyes, 2011).

Indeed as Ellis, Voelkl and Morris (1994) suggest, a separate paper would be needed to reference the literature that deals with the utilisation of flow in the field of leisure alone. Although the flow theory holds favour with many, there is a quantity of literature which attempts to highlight a diverse range of issues associated with Csikszentmihalyi’s model of flow. While these issues are numerous, I will illuminate those which are of particular interest to this study.

Mitchell’s research (1983) into mountain climbing suggested that Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow lacked antecedents. In particular he highlighted the importance of freedom of choice to willingly participate in an activity and the role of uncertainty of outcome in achieving the flow state (as cited in Boniface, 2000, p. 63). While authors have attempted to draw links between experience and flow, in some instances in my opinion, they have failed to note the inconsistencies with their results and the original model of flow which Csikszentmihalyi (1975) developed. For example, Jim Macbeth’s (1988) research into ocean cruising and draws links to flow also discusses the characteristics of the merging of action and awareness. He suggests that while it is difficult to link this characteristic consistently with the experience of ocean cruising that when it does occur it is most likely to be in the circumstance of bad weather at night where a sailor must sit for hours at a time maintaining the boat on a safe course. Macbeth suggests:

…that the self has been absorbed by the sea and the night, and the action of controlling the boat has merged with awareness to the point where there is nothing but the compass light and the hand on the tiller. The activity is all consuming. (1988, p. 220)

However, while Macbeth highlights the demanding nature of this activity he fails to mention any sense of enjoyment felt by the sailor who is focused on maintaining a safe course. As Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) has pointed to the
importance of enjoyment as an indicator of the state of flow, then it appears that the experience that Macbeth describes may fit outside the parameters of flow.

Also linked to the notion of enjoyment are the findings of Ellis, Voelkl and Morris’s (1994) research. These authors drew attention to the high levels of enjoyment indicated in the activities which would fit into the low challenge, high skill channel. These results contradict the flow model in that boredom rather than enjoyment would be the expected outcome of a low challenge, high skill activity. Ellis, Voelkl and Morris (1994) suggested that a solution to this contradiction, if these results are replicated, is a renaming of the boredom channel. However, a name change seems an oversimplified response to a more complex issue. I suggest that these results have far reaching implications for those within recreation and leisure whose role it is to facilitate participant enjoyment and who have adopted the flow model as a means for maximising the opportunity to meet this goal, (this information would be particularly relevant). For example, the provision of low challenge and possibly low risk activities matched with those participants who have a high skill level may help them achieve their goal of providing enjoyable activities.

Recently, Davidson and Stebbins (2011) suggest that by its very nature, flow tends to dilute somewhat the sense of environmental wonder participants feel, because their concentration is so intensely focused on executing the core activity (p. 16). This observation is particularly salient for my study with its focus on the intense emotional experience of joy within the outdoor environment but not necessarily dependent upon notions of risk or adventure.

Peak adventure - adventure experience paradigm

Drawing upon the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1975), Ellis (1973), and Mortlock (1984) Peter Martin and Simon Priest (1986) developed the Adventure Experience Paradigm in order to interpret adventure experiences (Priest, 1999). The model developed to illustrate this paradigm utilises the two axes, risk and competence, with the suggestion being “that challenge is the interplay of risk and competence” (Priest, 1999, p. 159). The model presents five conditions of interplay. These are exploration and experimentation, adventure, peak
adventure, misadventure, and devastation and disaster. This model acknowledges the personally specific nature of these adventure experiences by allowing for individual perception of risk and competence.

Gaylene Carpenter and Simon Priest (1989) took the adventure experience paradigm into a new domain when they suggested that it move beyond its association with outdoor pursuits and be applied to other leisure pursuits. The authors suggest “any novel or new experience defined as adventurous by the participant may become subject to understanding and interpretation within the context of the paradigm (p. 70). However I suggest that this assertion underestimates the pervasive notion of adventure as risk; something that Priest (1995) himself has supported.

Adventures are a rich blend of joy and sorrow. On one side, there lies the exquisite beauty of the outdoors and the exhilaration of facing or overcoming challenges. On the other, there lies the ever-present threat of injury or even death. (Priest & Baillie, 1995 p. 307)

Walle (1997) also draws our attention to researchers’ regular correlation between adventure and risk taking. While he acknowledges the possibility of a broader perspective of the term ‘adventure’, Walle thinks that the narrow perspective has prevailed and propelled researchers into risk focused research. He describes this tendency as a “monolithic adventure as risk model” (p. 280).

In addition to critiquing narrow definitions of adventure, Walle (1997) also critiques the pursuits that could fit within the category of adventure. In particular he highlights Ewert’s (1989) assertion that fishing is not an adventure pursuit. Rather Ewert positions fishing within the recreation category because of his assumption of it being a low risk activity. However, Walle’s critique of this categorisation is based upon what he considers to be Ewert’s inaccurate assessment of the complexities of fishing. While there can be little doubt that this is an inaccurate assessment in a New Zealand context where fatalities from drowning while fishing make regular news headlines, Walle’s critique does not problematise the notion of categories per se. This is an omission which again points to the positivist epistemological assumptions which suggest in this
instance that better categorisation skills or bigger categories will result in better research. This position fails to see the limiting nature of categories and to acknowledge that as long as there are categories there will be pursuits that fail to meet the arbitrary criteria and thus be excluded.

Overall critiques

I have discussed some of the particular critiques of peak experience, flow and peak adventure literature. However there are a number of critical points and issues that are common to all three of the emotional perspectives outlined above.

Most of these issues relate to a broader critique of the positivist paradigmatic orientation. Positivism, posits the notion of a homogenous group having a knowable emotional experience, is a central issue. This assumption is evident in the numerous generalisations which suggest that there is a common, global goal for all who participate in outdoor adventure pursuits and in some cases, this generalisation extends to those who work to facilitate outdoor recreation activity. While it seems that the terms may change from peak experience, flow and peak adventure the underlying assumption that this applies to a homogenous group does not change. For example Mitchell (2000) states that “the key concept, the desirable condition, the sought-after goal of climbing is the social-psychological condition of flow” (as cited in Boniface 2000, p. 65). I am suggesting that the terms peak experience or peak adventure could easily be substituted for the word flow in this generalised quote that assumes people are all pursuing an activity for the same reason and for the same outcome. Mitchell’s claim is not an isolated example of an assumption of a homogenous group striving for the much valorised emotional outcome of peak experience/flow/peak adventure. Similar statements can be found in Ewert (1989) and Priest and Gass (1997).

This notion of a global, homogenous group of outdoor “adventures” fails to acknowledge cultural or historical contexts and the impact of the social construction of gender, class, race, and social hierarchy. Being subsumed into
a group ignores the complex, subjective, individual ‘cocktail’ that comes into play when people are engaging in a leisure experience. This lack of acknowledgment is made evident by Privette (1983) when she notes that peak experience is a “prototypic and generic construct”, independent of particular types of behaviour including interpersonal interactions (p.1361).

McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) go some way to highlighting some ingredients in this ‘cocktail’ in their research which endeavours to explore the transaction among “environmental context, mood states, focus of attention and perceptions of risk and competence which shapes the character and quality of the experience” (p.11). However this research is still formulated on positivist notions which assume that the “truth” of an outdoor experience can be discovered.

Walle’s (1997) research in the area of adventure tourism also highlights the myopic view of homogeneity when he notes that “much academic research tend to circumscribe all adventurers into a homogenous group which seeks risk in order to experience what Maslow call self-actualisation” (Walle, 1997, p. 277). Walle suggests that while risk seekers make up a sizeable segment of the adventure market, they are still merely a specific group which possesses non-universal characteristics and desires.

Blurring the lines between the psychological and the social domains is the literature which draws on both disciplines. Lyng’s (1990, 2005) social –psych analysis of voluntary risk taking also contributes to the ways in which particular outdoor experiences in the form of action sports are understood. Lyng adopted the phrase ‘edgework’ to describe this “conceptualizing risk taking as a form of boundary negotiation – the exploration of ‘edges’ as it were” (2005, p. 4). While Lyng’s work originated in extreme sports, more recently it has been applied to a broader range of adventure activities (see Stranger, 2007). Lyng posits that voluntary risk taking behaviour can be viewed as a response to the social conditions of modernity. Adventures can provide a vehicle of escape or be acts of resistance where “actors resist the imperatives of emotional
control, rational calculation, routinization and reason in modern society” (Lyng, 2005, p.6).

While edgework studies based on outdoor experiences provide valuable insights into risk taking as forms of resistance, escape and a desire to transcend their social lives, this work is still largely predicated on action and activity (Holyfield, Jonas & Zajicek, 2005; Laurendeau & Brunschot, 2006; Young & Dallaire, 2008). Thus, again we see the dominance of literature that promotes the message that the route to positive emotional experience is via action and activity and often linked to risk taking. This is a notion that this thesis hopes to trouble.

**Literature which applies a social lens**

This section of the literature review explores how positive emotional experiences in the outdoors have been examined and theorised by those whose work could broadly be described as sociological. Most of the sociological work I draw on here is located in the fields of outdoor recreation and leisure.

**Kinaesthetic awareness**

One of the other common factors of particular interest to my work is the absence of discussion of positive emotional experiences in the outdoors. Jackie Kiewa’s (1999) short chapter titled “Kinaesthetic awareness: At home in our bodies” is an exception to this. Kiewa stresses the “deep rooted joy which seems to emanate from an immersion in kinaesthetic awareness” (p. 355).

While this chapter draws heavily upon the kinaesthetic experiences of rock climbers Kiewa notes that these feelings are not exclusive to them nor only to the highly skilled. However, (disappointingly), she does conclude that there are common elements that are seemingly prerequisite for these feelings to occur. She suggests the “recipe” to be a dash of challenge, not too much, or too little and the presence of feelings of belonging in the natural world. And again this chapter feels the need, which is common in text books to advise the reader as to what they “should” do. In this instance, Kiewa directs that “at home in our bodies, at home in the wilderness: it is an ideal which should be a major goal of any outdoor program” (p.356) (emphasis added).
Therefore while Kiewa highlights positive emotional outcomes for time spent engaging in an outdoor environment, again this experience is presented as contingent upon the existence of a challenge.

**Extraordinary experience**

Eric Arnould and Linda Price (1993) use the term “extraordinary experience” to describe “unusual events characterised by high levels of emotional intensity and experience” (p. 25). While this research occurs in an outdoor context, it is clearly positioned within a consumer research framework in which a multi-day rafting trip is the consumer product and an “extraordinary experience” is the by-product for some consumers. Arnould and Price question the positive emotional outcome in its seeming contrast to some of the physical realities of white water rafting including being wet and cold. The authors draw three central themes from their findings, these being: communion with nature, communitas or connecting with others, and extension and renewal of self.

The value of this work to my own research is in several areas. First and most obvious is its focus on positive emotional experience in an outdoor setting. Second, the findings suggest the three themes of communion with nature, communitas and personal growth/self-renewal. The authors however acknowledge the inter-related nature of these themes and the complexity of any experience involving a group of diverse individuals participating in a multi-day adventure. Third the authors draw attention to the ineffable nature of these experiences and the longevity of the positive memories that the rafting trip evoked.

Vivid recall of the experience is evidenced throughout the retrospective reports, with comments such as that it “made a lasting impression” or “was an overwhelming experience.” One participant notes, “Although it has been a long time, probably eight years once I began writing, the feelings and sensations come right back.” Respondents vividly remember their rafting experience but find it difficult to describe. A consistent theme was, “You almost have to do it to really understand the experience.” One participant said, “It is easier for me to describe the intense moments experienced in rafting and these are perhaps more
alive memories. Those longer periods of quite solitude, which are just as vivid in my mind and heart, are somehow more difficult to put into words. (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 37)

Also of direct relevance to my work from a methodological perspective is Arnould and Price’s (1993) attention to the role and function of narrative and the changes in the post trip stories. “The narrative qualities of the experience and articulation of the interwoven themes of communion with nature, communitas, and the extension and renewal of self, become more pronounced with time and retelling” (p. 37). Further, the authors’ acknowledgement of the importance of the culturally informed scripts which imbibe all aspects of the participants experience is pivotal.

The narrative of the experience is central to overall evaluation. For these experiences, participants may access an array of culturally informed, preconscious scripts or narrative themes (e.g., overcoming adversity through personal initiation or the quintessentially romantic story of the self-perfecting self (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 42).

However, an important point of difference between my own research and the work of Arnould and Price is the fact that their research was based within a commercial environment where the participant experience was being facilitated by a paid professional guide with all the attached implications that this has.

Bodies in the experience

Particularly relevant for my own work is research that explores a sense of feeling or embodiment especially in relation to this being a positive experience. Sarah Cant (2003) examines accounts of cave exploration “to explore how some cavers have constructed caving as a pursuit that is highly sensuous, disrupting conventional construction of the ‘heroic’ figure of caver” (p. 68). Cant’s work is useful within my research context because it highlights the unconventional nature of narrative portrayals that describe outdoor explorations or experiences in positive emotional language. This positive emotional language includes descriptive terms such as intimacy and sensuality to describe experiences. This work also highlights some caver’s expressions of pleasure
brought about by the bodies’ physical experience of caving. However, again Cant reiterates that this reflection upon the positive physical nature of this experience is unconventional.

Paradoxically, whilst the rough physicality of moving through caves does provide a heightened awareness of the body and the senses, the soft, fleshy-ness and subjectivities of embodied experience are rarely acknowledged. (Cant, 2003, p. 72)

In the related area of Physical Education, Canadian academic Brian Pronger emphasises feeling when he describes his experience of swimming.

Swimming in order to accumulate reassuring physical capital- in very short order turned out to be much more: a profound intrinsic experience. My sense of reality, of time, space, reason, and of sight, sound, and kinesthesis, as well as my most solid senses of who, what, or how I was as a human being, my sense of the true origins of my life, was transformed by swimming. Everything that for almost twenty years had made me certain of the social structure of my finite life dissolved in the infinity to which moving through water brought me. (Pronger, 2002, p. xii)

Australian outdoor education academic, Brian Wattchow exemplifies these rare examples when he describes “walking barefoot upon river stones, their round edge jostling beneath the body’s weight, giving way yet supporting, is a sensuous pleasure known to most river travellers” (2004, p. 9). Jan Wright and Alison Dewar’s research which focused on women and sport also draws our attention to the preponderance of literature which deals with the multitude of discourses surrounding the body. Importantly however they note:

In general most of the recent literature paints a bleak picture, particularly for women and girls where the body is couched as a deeply problematic site associated with feelings of unhappiness, frustration and lack, whereby bodies are experienced as constraining, as preventing them from becoming all they would want to become. (Wright & Dewar, 1997 p. 82)
In considering the research exploring women’s absence, exclusion or impediment, bodies feature most significantly in the work devoted to considering the barriers that have hindered either woman’s participation in outdoor recreation, or their aspirations for leadership roles. In a number of these texts the body features specifically in relation to what it can and cannot physically do, or what others perceive its physical limits to be. “Fat Girls Don’t Abseil” (Lynch, 1991) highlights the bodily constraints in discussing issues such as obesity and dealing with bodily functions such as menstruation and toileting. Martha Bell’s (2004) research articulates women’s childhood experiences of physical incompetence in sport and outdoor pursuits. Using the literal and figurative metaphor of a canoe portage, Liz Newbery (2003) articulates the complexity of the gendered bodies constrained participation in outdoor activity.

Unusually New Zealand authors Christine Dann and Pip Lynch (1989) suggest that physical factors have never been major restraints, but rather it “is the social and psychological factors, real or apparent, and much more difficult to overcome” that have held women back (1989, p.11). However, this quote implies a steadfast distinction between the way the three factors of body, mind and society exist.

While I highlight these examples of acknowledging the body in physical activity I argue that these examples are atypical of the research and literature surrounding the outdoors. Pronger (2002) reiterates this absence when he narrates his experience of being inspired by bodily feelings, felt through swimming, to learn more about the body and what was possible. Pronger thought that physical education would be the most likely source of this wisdom so duly changed his career path to undertake study in physical education. Only to find that any sense of the wonder and infinity where completely absent from everything he was taught. He notes

The technological education that I was receiving rendered the wonder second. And as I survey the array of scientific, government and commercial texts on physical fitness, I hear only silence in this regard. The technology of physical seems deaf to this dimension of life. (Pronger, 2002, p. 15)
This quote reiterates what it is I am arguing – that of the absence of feeling bodies in outdoor research, I am intrigued by his contemplation that education rendered the wonder second, for my tentative findings, in the field of outdoor education suggest that the wonder is not second but rather is almost nonexistent in most instances. I rather more agree with his notion of hearing only silence in this regard.

Experience of nature

A study which “sought to grasp the meaning and experience of nature” (Cosgriff, Little, & Wilson, 2009, p.16) for a group of New Zealand women has interesting parallels with my study. This study of women in their middle to later life drew upon the women’s leisure experiences in nature to attempt to understand their current perception of nature and their relationship to it.

The findings are grouped into three central themes. The first of these themes, which the authors have titled “nature as more than words”, focused on the blurred definitional boundaries of the term ‘nature’ and in some instances its increasing links to commodification of the natural space and activities that can occur within it. The second theme explored nature as a sensory experience and expressed the women’s feelings, which included “alive”, “real”, “present”, “grounded” and “nature as a visual thing...but more so a feeling”. (Cosgriff et al., 2009, p. 25). The final theme unpacked the women’s feelings of “nature as a part of me” (p. 26), and described notions of nature being an extension of the self, and enabling a holistic connection.

There are a number of parallels in the methods and methodology drawn upon in this research and those deployed in my own study. The methodological similarities include; the use of guided interviews and the research participants are drawn from a similar demographic. Methodological similarities exist in that the Cosgriff, Little and Wilson study deals with the complexity of language and experience by enabling the women participating in the study to be able to choose their own definition or meaning for the term nature. Secondly, this study was not limited to a particular site, setting or recreational activity and instead gave the women the opportunity to “describe their own understandings of nature
and their leisure experiences within it” (p. 28). Importantly there are also some significant differences between this study and mine, including the focus on how previous experiences have contributed to contemporary perspectives and the Cosgriff, Little and Wilson study does not explicitly explore positive emotional experiences.

Literature surrounding the practice of friluftsliv also explores positive emotional experiences in nature. Indeed Nils Faarlund defines friluftsliv as “a Norwegian tradition for seeking the joy of identification with free nature” (cited in Henderson and Vikander, 2007, p. 56). While the practice of friluftsliv originated in Norway its philosophical underpinnings and the practices that are grounded in this philosophy have spread to small pockets in many countries. The migration of friluftsliv practices has also bought about wider international interest and scholarship focusing upon this topic. Henderson and Vikander (2007) draw together the contributions of academics from a number of countries to explore a range of topics related to friluftsliv practice and how it is played out within the contributors’ country. Hvenegaard and Asfeldt (2007) articulate how this joy is embraced and enacted within the teaching programme of a Canadian university. In particular they highlight the joy of discovering place, joy of knowing the place, joy of feeling at home and the joy of living simply. Several of these themes resonate with the experiences of the women involved in this study and provide a seldom heard, but growing challenge to the dominant voice of outdoor experiences being about adventure, risk, speed and challenge.
Methodology and Methods

The ‘how’ of gathering an individual’s recollections of moments of joy and representing them is complex. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) highlight this complexity when they suggest that:

... qualitative research, as a set of practices, embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the forms its finding and interpretations take (pp. 7-8).

In this chapter I discuss both methodological considerations and the techniques deployed to gather data concurrently, rather than presenting these two necessarily interrelated aspects as separate entities.

I begin with a description of the ontological and epistemological positions that afford a theoretical framework for this research. The discussion of epistemology and ontology is followed by a discussion of narrative as this forms the methodological basis of this research. This is succeeded by an elucidation of the strategies drawn upon to analyse the women’s experiences of joy and consideration of who and what informed these strategies. The penultimate section of this chapter provides information on the study participants and how their information was drawn from our conversations and represented in written form. Some challenges and issues in gathering and re-presenting the women’s stories are highlighted in the final section of this chapter.

Ontological

The ontological basis for my research is that there is no single reality, thus there is no way in which to uncover or discover the ‘true’ source of joy. Rather, what exists is an opportunity to have a greater understanding of the sources of joy for a small number of women involved in this research.

Epistemological

My epistemological position is based on the belief that as the researcher I am intimately connected with the knowledge that is produced throughout the entire
research process. With insight from Pillow (2003), Richardson, (1992) and Richardson and St Pierre (2008), I am aware that rather than merely describing women’s experiences of joy I will inevitably be inscribing meaning to those experiences of joy.

**Truth**

The process of identifying the ‘truth’ of ‘story’ or lived experience is central to discussions of narrative research. Narrative research is situated within the broader field of qualitative research, and as such is open to accusations of subjectivity, partiality, and lack of rigour that characterise critiques of this broader field. The narrower field of narrative inquiry is doubly “cursed” by its use of ‘stories’ as data, with all the associated connotations the word story enacts. So how will I as a proponent of narrative research deal with the issue of ‘truth’ as it relates to stories, not least of all issues of unreliability and falsity? The feminist biologist Donna Harraway (1986) regards all scientific knowledge claims as socially constructed and the “concepts, methods, theories and results [of scientific knowledge] as historically and culturally specific” (Harraway, 1986, p. 79). Harraway argues that:

> …facts are laced with values: life and social sciences in general are story-laden, these sciences are composed through complex, historically specific story-telling practices. Facts are theory-laden, theories are value-laden; values are story-laden. Therefore, facts are meaningful with stories.

(Harraway, 1986, p. 80)

Margarete Sandelowski (1994) suggests that within the narrative context fictions and truths are not opposites but rather that fictions are truths within the stories that contain them. In arguing this she draws on Denzin’s (1989) work on biographical and autobiographical truth. Denzin suggests that truth is consent within a community of minds of events believed to have occurred (facts) and with how these events were experienced by interacting individuals (facticities). Therefore understanding that ‘truth’ as a social construction is fundamental to the field of narrative inquiry. William Tierney and Yvonna Lincoln (1997) also highlight the socially constructed nature of truth when they note:
No longer are knowledge statements considered to be mirrored reflections of reality as it is in itself; rather, they are human constructions of models or maps of reality. Through exchanges with the world, these constructions evolve toward more useful depiction. The more evolved models are not necessarily more accurate descriptions of reality, but their use provides a more successful interaction with the world than previous models. (Tierney & Lincoln, 1997, p. 7)

Linking each of these perspectives is an appreciation that there is not just one way of knowing. While accounts of an event may differ, one may not necessarily be more factual than another. In dealing with issues of truth Tierney (2000) argues that narrative should be judged through “multiple filters” rather than as a seamless and hermatically sealed process. This “judging” through multiple filters should consider that all forms of narrative inquiry are situated within complex cultural, historical, political and social spheres. Tierney argues that while it is appropriate that narrative texts are interrogated, this interrogation should not take place to “catch people out” when they find contradictions, but rather “they should piece together how these multiple presentations account for contested versions of reality” (Tierney, 2000, p. 542).

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1991) note that “reflection and deliberation are methods that move back and forth in time, carrying with them uncertainty” (p. 263). A narrative is always tentative to a degree; it produces likelihood, not certainty (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, p. 263). Therefore I consider that ‘uncertainty’ is synonymous with story and with life, and that story is an attempt to recount aspects of a life. Nonetheless I am not suggesting that “anything goes” but rather a thorough interrogation of methodological approaches may ensure that an account is one “that fits with available visions of the possible worlds” or potentially even transcends these visions (Blaikie, 1993, p. 214).
Narrative

Narrative inquiry is a methodology increasingly employed in a range of disciplines in order to gather rich descriptions of lived experience. However the increased use of narrative as a mode of inquiry does not mean that narrative is necessarily a ‘new’ way of understanding anything. The French critic Roland Barthes (1977) pioneering work on narrative emphasised the ubiquitousness of narrative in his oft quoted statement, “the narratives of the world are numberless” (p. 79). He went on to describe the methods by which these narrative messages where conveyed, “by articulated languages, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures and the ordered mixture of all these substances” (p. 79). Barthes articulated the presence of narrative in both everyday life and in every society in every age. He described its presence in “myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, paint, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation” (p. 79).

While, as Barthes would suggest, the presence of narrative is ageless, the use of this term within academic disciplines has shifted over time. Contemporaneously for some authors, aligning themselves with narrative has meant focusing primarily upon the formal structures of narrative consistent with literary theory (O’Neill, 1994). Indeed this form of narrative analysis was so prevalent that in 1994, O’Neill described the plethora of narrative theories and books about narrative theory as being close to epidemic proportions (p. 12). For others, myself included, the term narrative has a much more fluid meaning than that offered by the aforementioned technicist understanding. The forward of Ken Plummer’s book, “Telling Sexual Stories” describes an alternative understanding of narrative.

The fascination with texts - with narrative structure, genre and metaphor – is now supplemented with questions around the social and political role that stories play, with the social processes through which they are constructed and consumed, with the political changes that stories may encourage. (Plummer, 1995, forward)

The burgeoning interest in narrative in the early 1980’s has frequently been described as the narrative turn (Bochner, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005;
Kreiswirth, 2000). Martin Kreiswirth suggests that this phrase describes “the massive and unprecedented eruption of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative that began about twenty-five years ago and is still gathering magnitude and momentum today” (2000, p. 295).

Bochner (2001) was more specific in his consideration of the phrase. In his description he clearly outlines it as both a turn towards and away, and essentially a challenge to the dominant notions of social science by noting

The narrative turn moves away from a singular, monolithic conception of social science toward a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research; away from fact and toward meanings; away from master narratives and toward local stories; away from idolizing categorical thought and abstracted theory and toward embracing the values of irony, motionality, and activism; away from assuming the stance of the disinterested spectator and toward assuming the posture of a feeling, embodied, and vulnerable observer; away from writing essay and toward telling stories. (Bochner, 2001, p.134)

From the 1990’s onwards, research based on narrative methods has gained in acceptability in some disciplines within the academy (Macdonald et al., 2002). In addition to the increasing volume of work drawing upon narrative, Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff (2012) draw attention to the range of literary styles being drawn upon to ‘retell’ research stories. These literary styles include realist tales, ethnodramas, poetic representations, auto-ethnographies, and fictional tales.

Kreiswirth’s (2000) work maps the increasing legitimacy of narrative across a broad range of disciplines. Many of these fields may previously have seemed unlikely to release their grasp on the ascendancy of research based in the more traditional scientific paradigm.

Until relatively recently, formulating, or thinking about formulating, say, economic theory, jurisprudence, or medicine in terms of narrative was not an available option. The production and dissemination of knowledge in these domains were governed by largely scientific or quasi-scientific modes of inquiry and discourse, by non-storied forms of investigation and
reportage. Narrative models were so far outside the disciplinary paradigms that they were literally inconceivable, at least as analytic tools. Story may have appeared in these contexts, but it would have been mobilized and thought of only as digression, example, or rhetorical ornament, something supplementary to the guiding armature of rational argument, and not worth commenting on. But, as we know, things have changed; the wheel has turned. (Kreiswirth, 2000, p. 295)

Proponents of narrative research through exploration and debate have increased the exposure and profile of this research methodology. Numerous authors could legitimately claim to have aided our understandings of narrative research and to have assisted in its increasing credibility and acceptance. Amongst these are Atkinson and Silverman, (1997); Barone (1992, 2007), Bochner (2001), Clough (1996, 2010), Ellis and Bochner (1992) and Noddings (2003). However, particularly noteworthy, is the work, of Jean Clandinnin and Michael Connelly who have contributed greatly to the understanding of the place of narrative within education research (1991, 1997, 2000). Also John Van Maanen’s (1988, 1995) critique of ethnographic methods and his own contribution, described by Richardson as a combination of “realist, confessional and impressionist narratives” (2000, p. 935) firmly placed narrative on the research agenda for debate. Similarly, Laurel Richardson’s many publications have had a significant part to play in foregrounding the issues of representation in narrative research. (1990a, 1990b, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003, 2005)

While there is an increasing acknowledgment and acceptance of the role of narrative research, and I have elected to undertake narrative research for this project, I am aware that there continue to be challenges associated with it and critiques levelled at it. Unsurprising are the challenges from those that operate within a positivist framework that oppose narrative researchers’ ontological foundations. These challenges are a part of the wider debate surrounding qualitative and quantitative research which has been thoroughly articulated in, Crotty (1998), Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Eisner and Peshkin (1990), and Scheurich (1995). Of more interest to this project is the debate occurring within the narrative research community itself.
Atkinson and Silverman’s (1997) vitriolic repudiation of the narrative turn summarised by Bochner (2001), provides an example of some of the critique and debates surrounding narrative research. Atkinson and Silverman describe the ‘narrative turn’ as “a blind alley, a preoccupation with the revelation of personal experience through confession and therapeutic discourse, a vulgar realism, and hyper-authentic, misleading, sentimental, exaggerated, naively heroic and a romantic construction of the self” (2001, p. 133).

While these critiques are not often amassed in the one article as they have been in the Atkinson and Silverman example, the criticisms quoted above do represent a fair segment of the rebukes that narrative research has had to withstand.

**Researcher’s Notes**

It is extremely hard to separate some of these issues as they are so interconnected. For me it has been a matter of finding a balance between creating a flow that the reader is able to follow, while not replicating notions of discrete parcels of information dealt with in a linear fashion which reads like a recipe. In reality my writing of this section was more like a spider’s web where everything is connected, or at times, a game of snakes and ladders where I made progress on one issue until I struggled to separate it from surrounding issues and therefore lost ground. Kreiswirth also confronts this issue and notes that “my sketch, like all storied forms, cannot help but stress sequence, causality, and even teleology by placing the various phenomena under discussion in a serially lined, temporally ordered chain, whose cumulative end point is in a position to control what came before it” (2000, p. 299).

In order to paint a picture of the ways in which research that draws upon a narrative methodology has been utilised, I want to direct the reader’s attention away from the broader contributions discussed above and concentrate on more specific examples. Narrative research in education has provided us with evocative stories and innovative works. In 1987, New Zealander, Sue Middleton used her own childhood paintings to explore her relationship to Māori
people. In this work she speaks as both a child artist and an adult academic. In proposing the appropriateness of stories in educational research, Elbaz (1991) argues that:

Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of fit of the notion of story with our intuitive understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers’ knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way. (p. 3)

The special edition of the Sociology of Sport Journal (2000) titled Imagining Sociological Narratives also points to the rising tide of acceptance within the sport sociology field. This edition’s introduction provided by New Zealander, Jim Denison and American Robert Rinehart suggests that

To us the shift into personal experience narratives, storied accounts or ethnographic fiction requires a highly complex and complicated conceptual shift in the way one approaches subjects and topics. It requires a shift in sensibilities - perhaps even in world view - that we believe should affect every decision the researcher makes about the study all the way from the germ of an idea to the field to the text.  
(Denison & Rhinehart, 2000, p. 3)

Macdonald et al. (2002) highlight the increase of an interpretive research perspective in the areas of sport and physical education from the 1990’s. The authors note that “as might be anticipated with any research tradition, the interpretive perspective grew in methodological sophistication and theoretical strength as it gained currency and acceptance in the physical education community” (2002, p. 139).

Within a sport and recreation context, the work of English academic Andrew Sparkes (1996, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2008) and Sparkes collaboration with Brett Smith (2009) has contributed greatly to the field of narrative inquiry. This contribution has included a number of research papers utilising a narrative methodology and being active promoters of narrative research. In the
concluding remarks of a paper devoted to narrative methods in sport and exercise psychology Smith and Sparkes note:

…the stories that surround and envelop us, which are woven into the fabric of our research and applied landscapes, can enrich our understanding and are ripe with possibilities for inquiry. As such, we feel that narrative is not only a worthy way of theorising and doing research in the domain of sport and exercise psychology, but that there are also exciting and interesting times ahead. (2009. p. 10)

An example of the practice of narrative research within a New Zealand physical education context is provided by Denison’s story titled “Gift”. In this short, unpretentious, well-crafted and evocative story, Denison (2000) explores the theme of young people with a gift for sport. Again I draw on Denison and Rinehart’s introduction to the special edition of the Sociology of Sport Journal, which highlights the prominent undertones of this short story which they describe as: “consideration for parental influence, the place of achievement in western nations and the structured unfairness of sport” (Denison & Rinehart, 2000, p. 2). This example is particularly useful in highlighting how a number of complex issues can be elucidated in a short story.

Within the sport and physical education context Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff (2012) bring together contributions from a number of leading New Zealand, Australian, British, and American scholars to explore narrative approach. The introduction highlights that:

…interest in narrative ways of knowing has grown dramatically in recent times, across the range of subject disciplines, but in spite of its promise as a way of knowing the social world, it has to date remained a relatively little used research approach within the field of PE and sport. We think this is a pity given that narratives can help to illuminate individual experiences located within broader social and cultural structures, and their potential to facilitate professional self-reflection. (Dowling, Fitzgerald, & Flintoff, 2012, p. 2)
Importantly for both the context and topic of my research topic the editors draw the reader’s attention to the value of narrative in connecting with and understanding emotional experience. The editors highlight this emotional experience in suggesting

That few would deny that their enthusiasm, or indeed loathing, for physical activity or sport is linked to strong feelings, yet surprisingly little attention has been paid to how these emotions structure embodied experience in the field of PE, health and sport. (Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff, 2012, p. 3)

In the Australasian context, there are a small number of examples of work within the fields of outdoor education and outdoor recreation which draws on narrative methods. Jo Straker’s (2004) use of her own letters provide an evocative insight into what she was thinking, feeling and smelling on a journey in Antarctica. Australian academic Brain Wattchow thoughtfully utilises narrative and poetry in a number of his research projects that explore, amongst other things, sense of place, connections to the outdoors and slow travel (Wattchow, 2004, 2008 and Wattchow and Brown, 2011). As these contributions are from the relatively small New Zealand and Australian outdoor research community and from an outdoor context they are particularly pertinent to my own research.

While I have attempted to canvas the range of ways in which narrative has been utilised in a number of disciplines, I have also highlighted the lack of consensus as to what the term means. Although committed to the notion that meanings are fluid, I feel it is necessary to offer a starting place to the meaning of narrative upon which I have based this research. The quote from Churchill and Churchill (1991) most closely sums up my understanding of the term in this research context.

Churchill and Churchill suggest that narrative is generally understood as:

…stories that include a temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events: to render, or to signify, the experiences of persons-in-flux in a personally and
culturally coherent, plausible manner. Narration is a threshold activity in that it captures a narrator’s interpretation of a link among elements of the past, present and future at a liminal place and fleeting moment in time. (as cited in Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162)

In particular, this quote highlights the temporal nature of knowledge, and is consistent with my ontological stance of no single reality. Especially when consideration is given to the difficulty of attempting to understand an emotional experience which occurred in the past, is retold in the present, and is changed even in the telling.

Researcher’s Notes

I have often wondered whether the women’s memory of their personal experience of joy would be forever changed by being a participant in this research process. Therefore not only is as Churchill and Churchill suggest this narrative a fleeting moment in time it also potentially affects future moment’s in time as the women reflect upon their experience.

Conversations/interviews

Considering the prominence of interviewing as a research method and the complexity of interviewing, the volume of work produced on this subject is unsurprising (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008). However as one would expect, there are some consistent themes within these texts. Pamela Maykut and Richard Morehouse’s (1994) section devoted to interviewing exemplifies many of these texts in that it includes discussion of forms of interviewing (in-depth, unstructured, semi structured), the use of interview guides and schedules, planning questions and ideas around questioning techniques. Drawing upon Maykut and Morehouse (1994), I developed a discussion guide, which while entirely flexible allowed me to have a basic structure for the purposeful conversations we engaged in. Some adjustments to the discussion guide were made throughout the research process, which meant some variation for each interview. These changes to the conversation structure also reflected
my increased confidence in my ability to ‘host’ the conversations and correspondingly less need to rely upon the discussion guide. While the primary focus of the conversations with participants was to discuss an episode of joy and what they believe inspired it, there was also broader discussion to both situate the topic and to place the participant at ease. Because this research aims to gain an understanding of women’s experiences of joy in the outdoor I wanted to attempt to elicit feelings, memories and discussion surrounding the topic of joy. A semi structured conversation enabled me to ask a range of questions including what came to mind when they reflected back upon one moment of joy, how they would describe that moment, and what the impact of that moment of joy has been for them. Smith and Caddick suggest that researchers using interviewing as a method of gathering data “adopt an attitude of curiosity, inviting participants to elaborate on a point, clarify it, and or add more detail in order to fill out the picture of whatever the research is trying to understand” (2012, p. 64).

**Researcher’s Notes**

*While I agree with the outcome this suggested practice is attempting to achieve I find myself at odds with the term adopt as it seems to suggest a false portrayal of curiosity. I also think that this term does not sit well with me because I genuinely felt curious and interested in understanding the women’s experience of joy, hence my desire to engage in this research topic.*

The process of gathering data described above, seems relatively clear cut. In short this process appears to be developing a question guide based upon what it was I wanted to understand and amending this as I saw fit. However this summary belies the complexity of the considerations that could inform the process of drawing upon interviews/conversations as a form of data. I also do not want to suggest that my research was a simple process choreographed before it begun and performed according to the choreography. Rather, I want to draw attention to the fact that the process by which I elicited stories/information/data and what meanings I made from the stories/information/data was mediated by my engagement with a range of
theories, ideas, and discussions. This engagement, albeit on the margins, includes the ideas put forward by postmodernism and post structuralism. These theories were not at the forefront of my thinking when I was giving consideration to the interview process and questions, however while not intentionally framed by postmodern/poststructural thinking my epistemological stance shows some consistency with these theoretical frameworks. I would therefore suggest, that while I had previously (prior to postgraduate study) not been exposed to concepts of postmodernism or the meaning of the term ‘epistemology’ that my accumulated experiences – in its broadest sense, have led me to understand that there is no fixed reality. This is relevant to this discussion of conversations/interviews as it establishes that as the researcher, I did not set out to find “the” story or meaning of the women’s experiences of joy, but rather a range of possible stories and meanings of the women’s experience.

Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace (1996) introduced the notion of treating the interview as a gift. This allows for the participant to be re-conceptualised from a powerless interviewee to an “active participant in the production of knowledge in the research process” (Limerick et al., 1996, p. 458). They note:

Adopting the metaphor of a gift compels the researcher to treat data with a degree of respect and to be continually sensitive to the giver. The notion of gift does not suggest a unidirectional power relationship in which the researcher is a passive receiver of the interviewees’ stories, but rather commands a reconceptualisation of the researcher as the conduit of the interviewees’ stories, affording those interviewed a voice in the literature and the community. (Limerick, et al., 1996, p. 458)

The notion of accepting the contribution of participants as a gift, and their role as the authority on their experience of joy was an underlying premise of this research process. This is reflected in my discussion with the participants and also in the value and gratitude that I feel for both the gift giver (research participant) and the gift (interview ‘data’). In acknowledging both the gift giver
and the gift, I am not suggesting that a hierarchal position associated with research and the positing of the researcher as expert, is avoided. While a number of strategies may be employed to develop the least hierarchal relationship possible in the process surrounding the information gathering, the representative form of the information gathered remains the domain of the researcher. I acknowledge this conundrum here and extend my commentary on representation in the section entitled ‘Re-presenting the Stories of Joy’.

The physical setting in which the interview takes place and who chooses this setting can have an effect on the research ‘outcome’. Limerick et al. (1996) suggest that encouraging the participants to choose a venue may alter the power dynamics in favour of the participant, however the selected location may prove to offer many distractions and disruptions to the interview process. I was also aware that because the participants were friends and acquaintances of mine, the physical setting could have played a role in clearly differentiating the research situation from the social interactions in which we regularly engaged. In each case the participant chose the location for our interview/conversation. In one instance the conversation occurred in the participant’s home, the other occurred at a quiet coffee shop, and the third took place at my house.

With the permission of the women participants, I recorded each of the interviews and took additional notes on body language and gestures used to emphasise a statement. These notes proved invaluable. Due to the seeming inadequacy of verbal language to express the women’s experience, they frequently attempted to convey meaning through physical gestures.

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Researcher’s Notes

As Karla was at the critical moment of describing her moment of joy she outstretched her arms, held her hands palm upwards, her face was a beaming smile and she said “it was just augh”. My first thought was how do I spell that? How do I even begin to convey the emotion delivered through those sounds, movements and facial expression, in a written form?
Analysis - drawing from the conversations/interviews

Once I had completed an interview with a participant I transcribed the tape. In order to immerse myself in the conversation I read the transcript many times looking for themes and attending to the gaps and silences surrounding what was not said. In addition to what the participants were and were not saying, I paid attention to the resources they were drawing on to make sense of their stories. These multiple readings of the women’s testimony were taking place alongside my immersion in the existing, albeit sparse, literature that attends to emotion in the outdoors.

Because of the number of pages involved it seemed difficult to juggle all the conversation. Finally I cut up the transcript and pasted it on to large pieces of paper in groupings that I had selected as being dominant themes within the conversation. The issue then became not how to present the findings, but rather how to re-present the stories which had been presented to me. The acknowledgment of the ‘existence’ of uncertainty and multiple versions of reality is critical when using lived experience as research and this understanding was at the forefront of my planning around the presentation of data. The vexatious questions which consumed my thinking could be summarised as: How do I deal with multiple stories, collected by a multiple self, being presented to a multiple audience?

My response to these representational issues was to utilise the transcripts and my prior knowledge of each of the participants to develop a fictional story that attempts to convey some of the central themes prevalent in the participants’ recollections of their moment of joy. In some instances I used quotes directly from the transcripts and mixed these with contextual information in an attempt to ‘place’ the participants within the story. In one instance, while in the process of going through the transcript closely in order to write a story, the large number of descriptive phrases and the clarity with which they were articulated, struck me. Having gone through the transcript and highlighted these descriptive
phrases, I then placed them together in the order in which they had been verbalised. This assemblage of phrases describes Jacqui’s moment of joy and could be termed a poem.

To write the discussion chapter, in which the analysis is presented, I drew liberally upon quotes from the women, seeking to understand and make sense of their experience rather than to know the ‘truth’. In the final section of this thesis I gave consideration as to what greater understanding of joyful experiences could mean in the recreational and educational sphere.

**Telling stories**

**What is a story?**

Kendal Haven (2007) suggests that

> The structure of story is so powerful that our minds automatically use story elements, story relationships, story architecture to understand and to make sense out of the real world events and people around us. Life is a story because we force ourselves to view it and to plan it as a story. (p. 10)

Despite the widely acclaimed support for the role of stories in human lives a definition of story itself is nevertheless difficult to source (Brunner, 1991, 2004; Denison & Markula, 2003; Haven, 2007; Lather, 1997; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005).

Haven (2007) pursues a number of avenues in an attempt to define stories, including drawing on academic treatises and dictionary definitions. He concludes that while no consensus as to the defining features of ‘story’ can be found, most accounts conceptualise story as an account of events, real or imagined. This is a definition that resonates with my own understandings of story.
Why tell stories?

Recognition of the significance of the ‘story’ and its relationship to how we live our lives forms the basis of the narrative inquiry process. The significance of the story is two-fold. Firstly the information gained through ‘story’ may enable a more thorough understanding of people (researchers and researched) in a temporal context. Secondly, narrative researchers argue that lives are lived out through stories, and that indeed lives are located within ‘the story’. Jerome Bruner (1991) makes the link between stories and how lives are lived when he suggests that “narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions and identifies storytelling as a human mode of thought” (Bruner cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. ix). However while Haven’s (2007) research into the power of story highlights the unusual level of agreement between academics and others as to the power of story he also notes the struggle to define what story is. Haven suggests that stories are our universal storehouse of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, passions, dreams, imagination, and vision (p. 13).

This research endeavours to re-present a collection of stories regarding the sources of joy, so that a more robust understanding of joy can be achieved. As much as is possible I would like readers to feel immersed in the participants’ recollection of an episode of joy to enhance this understanding. Narrative is the research method that I feel will best enable me to achieve this desire for immersion. For as Ellis and Bochner suggest

The narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered. Invited to take the story in and use it for themselves, readers become co-performers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text. (2000, p. 748)

An example of a willingness to experiment with narrative research findings which particularly inspired my approach was Patti Lather’s (1997) presentation
of her work with women living with HIV/AIDS. Lather and her co-researcher Chris Smithies set out to defy the reader’s “urge to make sense of”, or to impose order on a subject where the researchers felt that “untroubled witnessing won’t do” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 255). The result was a text which juxtaposed the stories of the women living with HIV/AIDS, with “factoid boxes, interpretive moves of the researcher and inter-texts from angels that bought together moments of history, poetry, sociology and popular culture inter-woven with policy talk. This creation of a multi-layered text was an attempt to deal with the “multiplicity and complexity of layers that unfold an event which exceeds our frames of reference, evoking insight into what not knowing means” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 254). Lather’s work has informed how I have re-presented the stories of the women’s experience of joy and also the way in which I interject my experience as the researcher in the form of italicised researcher notes.

In discussing the rationale for the utilisation of stories within my research it is also important to consider the wider role of writing as a way of knowing. Laurel Richardson’s work has contributed greatly to the notion of writing as a method of inquiry. She notes that

Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing – a method of discovery and analysis. (Richardson, 2000, p. 923)

Richardson (2000) encourages researchers to acknowledge their role in “wording the world” and the imprecise nature of describing in words the ‘world’ we study. Once again this is consistent with my epistemological stance that as the researcher I am intimately connected with the knowledge that is produced throughout the entire research process. This stance is reflected in the way I have presented my research in this thesis. Giving consideration to the practice of writing has enabled me to better understand the research material.

Interestingly, while I have highlighted both the foundational nature of narrative in our ability to make sense of the world, and its increasing acceptance amongst
research communities, the language utilised to discuss narrative research practice continues to lean heavily towards emphasising the notion of a heroic quest or crusade. Examples of this heroic language include the title of Jipson and Paley’s (1997) text “Daredevil Research” and Eisner and Peshkin’s (1990) description of the study of qualitative judgements as “the newest frontier” (p. 367). Margaret Vickers describes “researchers as storytellers as writing on the edge and without a safety net” (2002, p. 608). This language validates and glorifies those prepared to “swim against the tide” and the research goals they set out to achieve.
Given that I have drawn on interview transcripts and my prior knowledge of the research participants to write short fictional stories, I now explore understandings of the fictional. Throughout this chapter I have used the term

Researcher’s Notes

Metaphor of a journey and its overuse, post grad study as a journey, world cup campaign, research projects in general; no wonder I am sometimes tired, maybe it isn’t the overwhelming task of completing a Masters, maybe it because I am always travelling on a journey (maybe it’s jet lag). However it seems almost impossible to avoid this language and I am aware that close reader scrutiny will uncover terms and phrases within this thesis which will convey similar (unanticipated) messages and metaphors. Richardson (2000) suggests that researchers “will not lose the language of science when they learn to write in other ways” (p. 936). She likens this situation to a student learning two languages with the advantage being that it allows them entry into a new culture and it “leads them to a deepened understanding of their first language, not just grammatically, but as a language that constructs how they view the world” (2000,p. 936). Attempting to craft this thesis has forced me to focus on both how I utilise language to construct “a view”, but also on how language constructs my (world) view. I am also aware that the written language is all that I have to convey my message in this instance, however Elliot Eisner asserts the most common medium we use is written language

One feature of a medium is that it mediates and anything that mediates changes what it conveys; the map is not the territory and the text is not the event. We learn to write and to draw, to dance and to sing, in order to pre-present the world as we know it (Eisner, 1991, p. 27).

Stories/Fiction

Given that I have drawn on interview transcripts and my prior knowledge of the research participants to write short fictional stories, I now explore understandings of the fictional. Throughout this chapter I have used the term
story many times and now I introduce the notion of fiction. Unsurprisingly confusion exists over the definitional boundaries of both of these terms. John Van Maanen used the term impressionist tales to describe “words, metaphors, phrasings, imagery and most critically, the expansive recall of fieldwork experience” (1988, p. 102). Barone & Eisner (2006), Denzin (2000), and Holt (2008), have utilised the term experimental writing to encapsulate the varied forms of writing becoming more prevalent within the social sciences. Sparkes’ journal article titled “Fictional Representations” sets out to explore the distinctions between creative non-fiction and fiction in a research context. Sparkes suggests that the major point of delineation is “that ethnographic fiction claims to draw on actual data gathered by the researcher in the field. In contrast, creative fiction makes no such claim” (2002, p. 2).

While a number of authors (Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Sparkes, 2002) work to reduce the confusion that exists between the definitional boundaries of these many and varied terms and other authors use a number of terms synonymously, few clearly state that all research has a fictional foundation. This fictional/fact debate has clear links to notions of truth in research which I discussed earlier under the sub-heading ‘Truth’.

Research that unabashedly draws on fiction, rather than the usual refusal to accept that all research is based on fiction has not been without condemnation. For some researchers there seems to be a continuum of narrative acceptability. For example Plummer (1995) who is clearly an advocate of the role of story in research, seems to contradict himself and his belief in the predominance of the role of story when he labels as ‘extreme’ the assertion by Patricia Clough (1992) that “all factual representations of empirical reality, even statistical representations, are narratively constructed” (p.2). Plummer’s viewpoint is useful in highlighting the seemingly invisible ‘line in the sand’ as to what constitutes ‘acceptable’ research. Sparkes (2002) (under the sub heading “On the Risks of Fictional Representations”) drew upon a number of authors (Denison & Rhinehart, 2000;
Frank 2000; Nilges, 2001; Richardson, 2000; Sanders, 1995) to warn of the potential risks of embarking upon fictional research. A summary of these risks includes professional obscurity, the likelihood that fiction would have little traction with policy makers, and the difficulty of drawing on literary skills to produce something that contributes to our understanding of social life.

While Jipson and Paley (1997) reiterate the risks associated with involvement in fictional research in similar ways to those mentioned by Sparkes, they also discuss why some of these risks occur. In particular they highlight the challenge to systems of power that fictional research presents. In some instances this challenge is viewed as an attack and dealt with accordingly. Jipson and Paley suggest

> The emergence of difference frequently disturbs ordered systems which have defined protocols for thinking and talking, creating and doing over time. More often than not, articulations whose terms are "unknown and risky" confront power that has determined what is negative and positive intellectual space. (1997, p. 7)

Although fictional research may confront and challenge some power systems, it cannot be assumed that it operates in a structure free from power, rather that consideration need to be given to what power relations does it re/produces.

As noted in the narrative discussion above, narrative research highlights power issues. Naturally the re-presentation of the data in a fictional form is not free from power considerations. Laurel Richardson (1990) notes that “Power is, always, a socio-historical construction; no textual staging is ever innocent. We are always inscribing values in our writing. It is unavoidable” (p.12).

While I have previously mentioned a number of authors who draw on fiction (Dennison, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Nilges, 2001; Sparkes, 2002) the work of Halas (2001) provides a particularly relevant example of fictional narrative. Halas utilised fictional narrative in an attempt to investigate the lived experiences of troubled young people who participate in a school physical education program. Halas uses "excerpts from interview transcripts, fieldwork observations, reflective journal writing and personal memories (from the
author's past experiences as a teacher at the school)" (p.77) to create fictional narratives which describe the students’ experience of physical education and its interconnectedness with other aspects of their lives. This has obvious links to the research methods which I have employed in this project.

In addition, directly relevant to my research is the assertion by a number of authors of the ways in which fiction can evoke emotions (Banks & Banks, 1998; Frank, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). Banks and Banks clearly privilege fictional research above other forms of research for capturing the emotional texture of experience. They suggest that “what fiction can do that no other sort of expression does is evoke the emotion of felt experience and portray the values, pathos, grandeur, and spirituality of the human condition” (1998, p.17). While I disagree with both the privileging of one form of generating understanding and the essentialist overtones of the above quote it does nevertheless, highlight the increasing acceptance of fiction within research for constructing and conveying emotion.

In defence of my own work and my choice to re-present the woman’s stories as fictional I draw upon Marilyn Strathern’s (1986) assertion that all forms of research writing draw upon literary techniques in an attempt to become a persuasive fiction (citied in Sparkes, 1995, p. 14). This is obviously an epistemological stance that forms the foundation of this research project. Therefore, while I accept the merits of research labelled fictional, such as being able to provide anonymity for participants and its capacity to evoke emotion, as suggested by Banks and Banks (1998) I consider that these are the outcomes of a different literary style or genre. Other literary styles could have included for example, a report or a case study. To clarify, I am suggesting that all written research is interpreted, crafted and constructed using literary techniques to tell a persuasive account.

This epistemological stance also has implications for those concerned about the risk of a loss of scholarly standards. If you remove the fact/fiction labels as markers of scholarly standard then on what do we rely? Atkinson, a tentative advocate of fictional research, suggests that recognising “that all human inquiry
and reportage are essentially the same" (1990, p.3) does not necessarily equate with a loss of scholarly standards. However, rather than question the very foundation upon which this thinking is based, Atkinson instead offers alternative criteria which need to be applied in order to achieve a scholarly standard. This issue is raised again and discussed in more detail in this chapter under the sub heading ‘quality of research’.

To summarise my stance on fictional research, boldly, I think the non-fiction/fiction distinction is redundant. I am comfortable with accepting the label of a narrative researcher who utilises story. Therefore the process I undertake of reformulating participants’ stories into a fictional form demonstrates an intersection between the methodology I employ and the theoretical resources in which my research is located. If as narrative research suggests, all research involves the re-inscription of “data” with meanings imbued by the researcher then a deliberate and emphatic re-inscription surely unsettles easy distinction between fiction and fact in all research.

What makes a story?

There were many issues I needed to consider once I had opted to re-present the data as fictional stories. However important as all of these considerations were uppermost in my mind, was whether I could actually write a story. Coming from a family tradition of storytelling, I was confident that I could verbalise an engaging story. However the process of story teller to story writer has become an important part of my research apprenticeship. The formal steps of this process involved writing my first story and then sitting with John Doolan, a lecturer in the English Department of Otago University, who imparted sage like advice, and, importantly for me, declared that my work had all the requirements of a story. The second step was to participate in a fictional writing course tutored by well-known fictional author Christine Johnston. Both of these steps enabled me to gain a more thorough understanding of some of the conventions and techniques of planning and writing a story.

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2 I am grateful to John and Christine for imparting their knowledge however neither can be held in any way responsible for any irregularities in my emergent writing style.
While I nod towards postmodern leanings, the unity in my stories, achieved by literary techniques such as presenting a linear story line undermines my desire to embrace the messiness of postmodern lives. Elbaz (1991) would likely accuse me of falling back

On conceptions of unity and wholeness which are posited within the discursive space of modern thought, conceptions which serve to mask the fragmented nature of modern social life in which facts and values, ends and means, thought and actions are split apart and the individual’s life is similarly divided up into spheres and role (private and public, work and play, theory and practice. (p. 5)

In accepting inconsistency as a possible/probable outcome I also want to acknowledge a number of competing tensions. These tensions include; my desire to write a story which the research participants will recognise as their own, to tell a story that realistically portrays my position as researcher and complete a bigger story (a thesis) which contains the all the necessary elements required of a Master’s thesis. Ironically my construction of linear, discreet, consistent stories leaves me open to the charge of inconsistency with my own epistemological stance. This is a stance that accepts fluidity, fragmentation and inconsistency as being among the few ‘certain’ factors, and an awareness of the fragmentation, partiality and fluidness of stories regardless of how I re-present them. Lincoln draws attention to uncertainty and highlights the complexity of presenting polyphonic ‘voices’ in one format.

If all texts are only partial, historically and culturally situated and highly gendered, then it is but a small leap to conclude that the multiple understandings which come from any ethnographic project have only a limited chance of being presented in a single text. If texts are necessarily partial and situated, then it is a type of realist pretence to hope that any given text can tell the “whole story.” Multiple stories feed into any text; but equally importantly, multiple selves feed into the writing or performance of a text, and multiple audiences find
themselves connecting with the stories which are told.  
(Lincoln, 1997, p.38)

Again I have to acknowledge that these tensions are not resolvable but rather the inevitable reality of the messiness of storied lives and research.

**Poetry in/as research**

Poetic research has a number of supporters and has been increasingly used as an alternative method of representing ‘data’. Richardson’s (1992) “Louisa May’s Story of Her Life” is a five page poem drawn from the transcript of an interview with Louisa May which provides an evocative example of poetry as research. Corinne Glesne uses what she describes as poetic transcription to draw the reader’s attention to the life of a research participant. Glense defines poetic transcription as “the creation of “poem-like composition from the words of interviewees” (1997, p. 202). Glesne “arranged the exact words of the participant to create a meaningful representation of the participants lived experience” (Sparkes and Douglas, 2007, p.171). More recently the term poetic representation has been used to describe poem-like compositions. Sparkes and Douglas (2007) note that the use of poetic representations in the sport and physical activity domain has been limited, yet in other disciplines researchers have “both advocated and harnessed the potential of poetic representation as a means of analysing social worlds and generating different ways of knowing about these worlds and their place in them” (p. 172).

Predictably, research which utilises poetry to represent ‘data’ raises a number of issues. Many of these issues also form the bulk of the critiques levelled at the notion of fictional stories within research. These include debates around truth, quality, and scholarship which are discussed within this chapter. A repetition of the critiques against story being levelled at poetry can be evidenced by Cynthia Pointedexter’s (2002) discussion of the difficulty in evaluating the standards of poetic research. Pointedexter asks questions about norms and standards for research poetry. Do we evaluate them by artistic or scientific means? Do we judge them because we better understand a type of situation or group of people or because we more fully understand one particular
person? Perhaps the most applicable standard is whether they further empathy and/or understanding (2002, p.713).

Sparkes and Douglas (2007) draw upon a number of authors’ work (Pelias 1999, Pointedexter, 2002, Richardson 2000) to highlight some of what they consider appropriate criteria for judging their poetic representations of elite female golfer motivations. These criteria include aesthetic merit, whether they evoked emotional experience, and whether or not they brought about reflection on the part of the audience. While these are obviously vexing questions, my discussions of issues of truth and quality contained within this chapter highlight the un-resolvability of these situations, especially considering the epistemological stance on which this research is based.

While I acknowledge the marginalised nature of poetry in/as research I found that viewing the ‘data’ in this reconfigured form enabled me to think differently about it. Richardson (2000) argues that “settling words together in new configurations lets us see, and feel the world in new dimensions” (p.933). I also consider that having taken the words directly from the transcript and having presented them in the order they were verbalised enables the reader to glimpse the emotion and poignancy of the women’s phrases.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Researcher’s Notes}

\textit{I found the need to utilise “in/as” because it seems impossible to separate poetry being used within research, therefore ‘in’ from the possibilities of poetry as a way of better understanding material therefore ‘as’ a form of research.}
\end{quote}

\section*{Whose stories of joy?}

The research participants were selected from a group of my women friends and acquaintances who were able to answer ‘yes’ to the preliminary question, ‘have you experienced joy in a natural environment’? Drawing on friends as a research resource is relatively rare and this methodological decision requires a sound rationale. I begin by describing the basis of my friendship with each of the participants as a prelude to fleshing out this rationale. It is difficult to
describe the nature of a friendship yet I will attempt to paint a picture of the ways in which I relate with my research participants. While I consider all of my research participants, friends, none of them know each other as they all mix in different circles.

Karla and I became friends when I worked on conservation projects on the land she managed. For two years we regularly worked alongside each other in the planting of trees, the clearing of tracks, and the attempted eradication of weeds. We hauled water up to newly planted trees and tended a sheep struggling to give birth to a lamb. Throughout all these projects we yawned. We talked about both our work with young people, Karla’s family, our relationships, spirituality, admiration of our physical strength and our privileged position of enjoying life. I rarely see Karla now as I no longer work in conservation and Karla’s living situation has changed. But I still feel our friendship endures to such an extent that I feel comfortable calling out of the blue to ask Karla to look after my pet lamb.

Jacqui and I have been good friends for many years. We have been on holidays together, we celebrate our respective birthdays together, we regularly car pooled to work, discussed work, house renovation, buying land, political situations and movies. I think our friendship could be measured by the fact that she has a key to our house and feels comfortable enough to come round and watch sport on our telly and drink our wine when we are not there.

Michelle, three other women and I shared a house together when I was in my early 20’s, which was a very formative time. In this house I was first exposed to feminist principles, outspoken women and became envious of the seeming confidence and opportunities afforded to those with a university education. Sharing a house with Michelle became a bit of a pattern during my tumultuous twenties as whenever I found myself between flats I would return to occupy Michelle’s spare room and sit around the fire (it always seemed to be winter), drink port, and solve the problems of the world. In the intervening years Michelle and I have often lived in different cities but have always kept in touch.
Presently we see each other for coffee or dinner when the hectic life of a mother of two children and our work schedules allow.

In each of the cases the women’s reaction to my story of their story was enormously positive and all asked if they could have a copy. Karla remarked about my ability to capture her in the story and to highlight what she thought were the key points. Jacqui took a copy of her story and the lines and showed her partner. The next time we met, Jacqui’s partner bought up the story and responded positively to it.

The participants were offered the opportunity to make any alterations. Jacqui wanted to take out one line from the ‘poem’ as she thought it was out of place with the other phrases, in that it was not descriptive but rather a point of clarification. This line was removed.

**Researching friends**

My initial decision to draw on stories from people I knew was based on the belief that our level of rapport would enable me to elicit more personal information. This notion came about from the preliminary reading of interview literature. This reading included the work of Oakley (1986) who discusses the merits of developing a personal rapport with participants.

> It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interview is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (Oakley, 1986, p. 41)

However while the degree of rapport between researcher and researched is central to the debates around the researcher/researched relationship, its desirability has become a contentious issue (Marcus, 2001; Springwood & King, 2001). The more I read the seemingly more naive I had been to have considered rapport desirable. Indeed George Marcus puts forth notions of ‘rapport under erasure’ when he suggests
The hold of long-standing ideas in anthropology about fieldwork relations, condensed in the still powerfully evocative term rapport, are transforming circumstantially in the midst of research projects for which the images, scenes, and associations that the term rapport summons up will no longer do. (2001, p. 519)

Springwood and King (2001) report that “rapport as a methodological fixture and generic trope, then, endows ethnographers with powerful claims to understanding, authenticity and authority” (p. 404). However they also describe the collapse of the “emotive and intellectual bonds facilitating rapport, trust and identification as ethnographers have increasingly studied up, returned home, and otherwise twisted the gaze” (p. 404).

Having considered the notion of rapport and the contemporary critiques of it more closely I now think that my original use of the term rapport was based on my understanding of the term in non-research specific contexts. In my previous employment as a social worker and in my current role as an outdoor educator the ability to build rapport is a desirable attribute. However while obviously these relationships are hierarchal they are not based on a desire to take something from those I am relating to. This personal definition differs somewhat from the definition put forward by Schensul, Schensul and Le Compte (1999) who define building rapport as “developing good personal relationships with people in the research setting that facilitates access to activities and information necessary for conducting the study” (p. 28).

Upon reflection, my understanding of the term rapport and my desire to establish it was premised on the notion that study of an intense emotional experience may benefit from an emotional bond between the researcher and researched participant, I consider that it is the ‘intent’ for the building of rapport which is both the major issue and the point of difference between my relationships with participants and the brand of research rapport discussed by Schensul et al. (1999) Marcus notes “rapport signalled instrumentally building a relationship with a participant or informant with the pre-designed purposes of the anthropologist’s inquiry in mind” (2001,p. 521). This quote highlights the intent of the relationship as being to elicit information as opposed to this
research situation when a prior friendship already existed. This existing friendship with the participants is based on shared interests and mutual respect. Therefore, in this instance, critiques levelled at the notion of rapport building for the sake of eliciting information do not apply.

**Researcher’s Notes**

*I considered avoiding terms such as utilise and elicit because I have a sense that they allude to a researcher biased power dynamic and a selfish outcome orientated perspective. However I decided to use these terms in an attempt to be blatant and open about my motives. These motives are self-centred; I want to draw on participant’s emotional experience in order to understand it more fully, and to complete a thesis in order to be awarded a Masters.*

The style in which this thesis is written is consistent with epistemology, in that, rather than presenting everything as perfectly planned and implemented I have chosen to discuss the ‘realities’ of the project. I hope this honesty highlights the dynamic nature of the research process and also my own fallibility while avoiding leaning towards the heroic quest.

While I have articulated my understanding and use of the notion of rapport my decision to draw upon my friends as research participants requires further justification. The defence of this decision obviously has to be supported by the rigorous work of scholars who have undertaken similar research practices. However such work was hard to find and even the promisingly titled “Friendship as Method” by Lisa Tillmann-Healy (2003), was focused on developing friendships with research participants rather than researching those with whom you are already friends. Similarly, Bruce Grindal and Frank Salamone’s Bridges to Humanity Narratives on Anthropology and Friendship (1995), suggest that “at least a portion of some field friendships is based on mutual, even if unacknowledged, gain; and once that gain is no longer present, the friendship no longer has active value” (p. 3). While these authors deal with friendship and intimate relationship they are focussed around building mutual relationships with
the intention of gathering research ‘data’. It is also worth noting that the aforementioned studies are all set in a context of long term anthropological research.

In discussing the relationship between the researcher and research participant, Harry Wolcott (1995) asks the question “how intimate is intimate?” While not ostensibly based on a friendship relationship Wolcott is clear that there is a level of knowing required in order that he may know even one individual “in sufficient depth that I could write with confidence because I felt I knew what I was talking about beyond the relatively safe practice of quoting “informants” (p.78). In an attempt to ascertain whether he knew his participants well enough to adequately tell their tales, Wolcott (1995) developed a working criteria to help gauge how intimately he knew his participants. He lists these criteria as ‘what do I know of this person’s sleeping arrangements, what do I know about how this person’s laundry gets washed, dried and put away? and how much do I know about any of my informants’ grandmothers?’ (Wolcott, 1995, pp. 79-82). While Wolcott describes these as arbitrary criteria which serve as indicators of his knowledge of another’s life, interestingly he notes that they act as “…reminders of how little any of us customarily knows about others except for the most intimate of our personal –rather than our professional –associate” (Wolcott, 1995 p.79) (italics in original).

Tillman-Healy (2003) highlights what could be a limitation of drawing on my friends as research participants when she notes “throughout life, friendships have a pronounced likelihood of developing within (rather than across) lines such as culture, education, marital and career status, and socioeconomic class” (p. 731). One of the implications of relying upon this select pool as Tillman-Healy suggests, is the likelihood that friends are more likely to “reinforce and reproduce macro level and palpable social differences than to challenge or transcend them” (2003, p. 731).

From a New Zealand context, Russel Bishop’s (1995) exploration of Kaupapa Māori research closely examines the relationship between researcher and
research participant. Bishop introduces the notion of whakawhanaungatanga as a powerful research strategy. Central to this research strategy is the establishment and maintenance of whanau. While my research participants are friends rather than family, the relevance of Bishop’s research methodology is that it again challenges notions of distance and objectivity and values the sense of connection between researcher and researched. Bishop stresses that rather than family type relationship being acceptable in research, these relationships are actually integral to research in his context.

**Self in research**

Tracking the move from omnipresent but detached researcher invisible in the research to that of researcher as visible and a central character, and in the case of auto ethnography, the only character has been well mapped out (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In brief, these maps illustrate the primarily ‘orthodox’ understanding of the role of the researcher in qualitative research as that of the objective observer. Dwyer notes that observation was considered to be an objective act that in no way influenced the object’s true significance, a significance that existed prior to the act of observing it (1982, p. 57).

The methods by which the illusion of an objective position was maintained have also been explored. Kulick and Wilson (1995) note that many scholars have explained researchers’ attempts to vanish within the research. When they comment,

> As Clifford (1988), Geertz (1988) and many others (Marcus and Fischer 1986; articles in Clifford and Marcus 1986 and in Oakley and Callaway 1992) have documented, researchers established their authority at the beginning of their accounts with a tumultuous or difficult arrival scene and/or claim to fluency in a local language, and then they proceeded to vanish from their texts. (Kulick & Wilson, p. 3)

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3 literal and metaphoric whanau and whanau processes
While there has been a dramatic paradigmatic shift in considering the researcher’s role within research practice, the issue of the appropriate ‘place’ of the researcher has by no means been resolved. Some of these debates have focused on ‘how much self’ should be exposed in the research.

Simply briefly inserting autobiographical or personal information often serves to establish and assert the researcher’s authority and ultimately produces texts “from which the self has been sanitised” (Oakley, 1992, p. 5). But flooding the text with ruminations on the researcher’s subjectivities also has the potential to silence participant. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 170)

Other debates around the researcher in the research which bear relevance to my work include critiques of the place for and level of emotional engagement by researchers with their research topic and participants (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Behar, 2003; Bochner, 2001; Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Fine, 1998; Lather, 1997; Lerum, 2001). While this discussion has obvious links to debates surrounding objectivity and subjectivity, degrees of emotional engagement have also been critiqued by those who those whom accept the role of the researcher as subjective. However it seems that for many, the tension arises when some invisible marker of emotional engagement is crossed. This is a particularly relevant tension to be aware of when this study itself is based in the emotional domain and draws upon narrative inquiry, fiction and poetic representation.

**Presenting my own story within the research/self in research**

In addition to the complexity of presenting a participant’s story, I need to address the issues related to the telling of my own story and how it is to be overtly or covertly ‘heard’ in the presentation of this thesis. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) confront the issue of self in the research when they ask “Whose self? What self? Which self?” They suggest that:

...the time of the single, true, authentic self has come and gone.

Instead, we confront multiple identities: identities formed in and around our social locations, identities evoked in the field, identities created as a result of the interaction between our data and our selves, in and out of
the field, experience-near and time distant. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.1060)

Central to the issues surrounding my role as the researcher, with a self-confessed personal investment in the project, are the implications of my experience on the findings and acknowledging how this alters as I alter, throughout (and because of) the research process. As Denzin and Lincoln suggest

Bridges to the self-seem to be as many as bridges to our respondents, each of them eliciting new glimpses, new images of what our own possibilities might be, of how we might become, of how and in what ways me might come to know. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.1060)

Regardless of which self I include in the research, factors including my age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic group, feminist politics and my personal experiences of joy, will impact on the entire research process. However, as I have previously discussed in this chapter, these factors can be reflexively considered, but will always remain a part of the research ‘mix’.

While I have attempted to ensure my visibility within the research process this has raised an issue of personal vulnerability. For example I have included in this thesis a description of my moment of joy and the love of my family (the experience which I feel prompted this research topic). I have also presented papers describing my research progress at two academic conferences where I spoke of this emotional experience. However while I felt a level of vulnerability I still chose to do it and I have had to reflect on why I chose to disregard the seemingly prevalent academic convention of emotional detachment – a convention Kari Lerum (2001) suggests is a form of protection. Lerum uses the term academic armour to describe the “physical and psychological means through which professional academics protect their expert positions or jurisdictions” (2001, p. 470).
Upon reflection my rationale for submitting myself to this level of exposure is that I wanted the readers and audience to have a level of personal engagement with my motivation for undertaking this research. Secondly while I felt a level of vulnerability I was not incapacitated by it and it allowed for a consistent approach with the way in which I have chosen to represent the research data. I asked my participants to engage in research which could conceivably have exposed them to a level of vulnerability. Ruth Behar suggests “we ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but we ourselves remain invulnerable” (1997, p. 273). To reveal my own experience of love for family and intense emotion does open me up to feelings of vulnerability, however it does not seem unreasonable. Doing so enabled me to understand how difficult it could be for participants to talk about intense emotional experience.

**Issues in gathering and telling the stories of joy**

**The quality of the story**

In a similar vein to the debates surrounding notions of truth are those discussions that highlight the difficulty of measuring the quality of narrative research. Measures prominent within quantitative research such as generalisability and validity cease to be applicable within qualitative research. The postmodern era has tempted researchers to embrace uncertainty and complexity. Bishop (1995) highlights this when he suggests that, using stories as ‘data’ is aimed at “uncovering the many experiences of the participants, emphasising complexities rather than commonalities” (p.78).

Numerous authors have attempted to shed light on this challenge by suggesting the application of alternative methods to ensure the quality of research outcomes. In 1985, Lincoln and Guba promoted the use of the term transferability to take the emphasis off generalisability. They moved beyond this stance in 1994 to take account of the overreliance on criteria that focussed upon methods. Van Maanen (1995) also threw his hat into the ring when he advocated for transparency and verisimilitude. Patti Lather’s publications from the mid 1980’s to the present day reflect her interest in this topic and also the
dynamic nature of what constitutes criteria. The prominence of the criteria
debate can be evidenced by Sparkes’ (2002) suggestion of the obsession with
criteriology and Richardson’s assertion that “it is our continuing task to create
in “…postpositivist/poststructuralist research practice, there are no secure
foundations. Practice is not based on reliable “methods” that produce validity.
Rather, practice is a site of innovation” (p. 362).

Brett Smith and Nick Caddick (2012) draw attention to a number of qualitative
researchers who adopt a non-foundational position and develop and use lists of
criteria to judge research. Smith and Caddick highlight that the practice of the
non-foundational approach is not to:

…propose a set of universal criteria that can be applied to all qualitative
research. To apply universal criteria would mean going against a
subjective and constructionist epistemology. It would also mean that
new or alternative research would be rejected, as this work would not
match the pre-established criteria. (2012, p. 70)

Instead they support the practice of researchers drawing from a list of criteria
and modifying, subtracting, or adding to this as appropriate to the specific
research that is being judged.

Dowling (2012) too draws upon a range of authors (Clough, 2002; Ellis &
Bochner, 1996; Smith, 2009; Sparks, 2002; Wolcott, 1995) to bring together a
range of ‘measures’ to judge the quality of narrative research. Central elements
of these ‘measures’ include “authentic in the sense of being true to life” (p. 54);
do the narratives persuade us to revisit our taken for granted values, do they
spur the reader to develop emphatic understandings of the world of Others, do
do they generate a sensory affect and do they enable new stories to evolve? I
have reflected and drawn upon these central ‘measures’ in re-presenting the
women’s stories and poetic representations.

Alongside the multitude of markers of quality proposed, the notion of reflexivity
features prominently in a large number of texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000;
Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Findlay, 2002; Fine et
al, 2000). Wanda Pillow (2003) notes reflexivity’s predominance and its role in establishing criteria when she suggests “reflexivity is commonly used in qualitative research and has been posited and accepted as a method qualitative researchers can and should use to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations” (p. 175).

Definitions of reflexivity seem scarce and the notion is used by different writers in different ways. However Charlotte Davies (1999) has attempted a broad definition of reflexivity and suggested that it means:

A turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the way in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research (p. 4).

While Davies (1999) focuses upon reflexivity within the method by which the research is produced, the ability to be reflexive throughout the entire project including what was drawn from the women’s stories was crucial in this project. However as Lather (1993), notes that while reflexivity might be the new canon it is not without its challengers. Davies notes that there “are few guidelines for how one goes about the doing of it, especially in a way that both is reflexive and, yet, notes the limits of self-reflexivity” (p. 685).

Again, this claim returns to postmodern understandings of subjectivity, as opposed to notions of the self as a fixed and stable entity. It highlights the notion of the subject as being constituted/produced through discourse. Furthermore, Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, Laws, Mueller-Rcokstroh and Petersen (2004) ask

How are we to conduct reflexive work if the one who gazes and the one who is sometimes gazed at are themselves being constituted in the very moment of the act of gazing by the discursive and political and contextual features constituting the moment of reflexivity? (p. 368)

The broad definition provided by Davies and quote above from Davies et al. clearly outlines a process which I have been engaged in throughout this research project.
I am also aware that while the move from quantitative to qualitative has enabled researchers to refute the necessity for validity claim, in some instances it seems only the language has changed rather than the intent. For a number of researchers the term validity seems to have simply been replaced by equally difficult to defend terminology. Perhaps more tellingly, this may indicate an unwillingness to explore more personally challenging postmodern discourses. So while there seems to have been movement from a rigid recipe towards a more flexible approach, and Sparkes (2002) notes the intent of his book is to describe rather than prescribe, there still seems to be ample evidence of researchers demanding recipes and authors providing them.

**Authenticity**

In the production of this thesis I have become aware of the lure of the authentic. The desire to represent the authentic experience of my research participants, and myself somehow appears nobler and more powerful. I have had to become particularly vigilant in considering whether I am being lured towards the hallmarks of authenticity or in some instances I need to acknowledge that I have grasped those markers willingly. Erica Meiners notes these productive possibilities by acknowledging the lure of authenticity and the place of fiction. My readings of these texts led me, forcefully, to situate my writing and thinking in between the fieldwork and the fictions, as I recognised the need for the aura of authenticity attributed to the ethnography, yet desired the power and the complexity of the fictions. I view this role tension as productive. (Meiners, 1999, p. 359)

My attempts to avoid or reduce the use of research language such as ‘interview’ or ‘conversation’ to denote a data gathering method, is one example of my struggle to resist the markers of authenticity. Marvasti and Faircloth suggest that qualitative researchers preoccupation with the authentic self “to some extent mirrors the scientific preoccupation with objectivity” (2002, p. 772).
My use of language such as quest, struggle, and lure also points to a heroic engagement to right the wrongs, a task that Marvasti and Faircloth 2002, may well describe as the moral project. The lack of neutrality attached to terms can make writing a juggling game. The supposed detached writing synonymous within scientific reports is beginning to have appeal. In considering what word I would use to describe the interview/guided conversation, I was reminded of my trip to Nepal where discussion amongst some visitors attempted to establish whether you were a traveller or a tourist. These labels and the meanings attached where hierarchal. The connotation attached to the word traveller was that of a person attempting to connect with/live with the, people, environment and culture, without exploitation (authentic experience), while those who were mere tourists were simply there to observe it, and therefore exploit it. I felt this naïve form of categorisation was an attempt to validate behaviour and justify the search for the authentic. Similarly I feel that some of the markers of authenticity in research require closer inspection.

This plethora of measurement possibilities has left me in a quandary, because it seems that these terms are all predicated on there being a quantifiable standard and ideally a substantive answer to an acknowledged problem. This again reverts to the desire to resolve the unresolved and tidy the messiness. But what is the alternative? Does it then fall to the dreaded “charge” laid against qualitative and narrative research in particular of ‘anything goes’? Therefore while I acknowledge this dilemma in establishing markers of quality, I nevertheless understand that I am required to do so, not least of all for the purposes of meeting the standards of a Master’s thesis. The latter in itself is obviously a measuring stick, Indeed Clandinin and Connelly insist on the importance “for each researcher to set forth the criteria that govern the study and by which means it may be judged” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1997, p. 85).

Therefore I ask the question, can one women’s story of joy have relevance to others? How can the story of one women’s moment of joy be utilised by others, to help them make sense of their lived experience? I argue that the resonance
or dissonance of the story with one’s own can lead to new insights about one’s own life. While this narrative research presents ‘accounts’ of three woman’s experience it is based on the premise that, as Ballard (1994) suggests, “stories convey knowledge within the context of the complexity of human affairs, expanding our understanding of other people and our sense of community with them” (1994, p. 302). As Ballard suggests my stories of the woman’s experience aim to increase the range of interpretations, the range of knowledge, and the range of experiences available” (1994, p. 302).

**Writing the indescribable**

It is important to note that feelings of joy are characterised by words such as; indescribable and ineffable. Therefore in asking people to describe an episode of joy I was aware that I was not only presenting the participants with a difficult task, of describing joy, but also that in re-presenting these stories I too would have to grapple with this vexatious problem. David Beer’s (1997) description of a poem by Emily Dickinson explores the ways in which we can ‘know’ but find difficult to convey.

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There’s a certain Slant of Light,
Winter Afternoons -
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of cathedral tunes -

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us -
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the Meanings, are -

None my teach it Any -
‘Tis the Seal, Despair -
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air -
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When it comes, the Landscape listens -
Shadows—hold their breath -
When it goes, ‘tis like the Distance
On the look of Death -

The “certain slant of light” Emily Dickinson refers to in the poem is not real, in the sense that it exists outside the perception and experience of the reader, it is real because it is experience. It is not accessible to any observer at any time, but to certain experiencers at certain times. It does not imprint a visible scar on the body, but makes a difference internally in the perceptual/preceptual realm “where the meanings are.” When it appears and is noticed, this light usurps authority over all realities. The landscape listens to its approach. The shadows hold their breath. The despair that Dickinson described was not accessible to normal forms of perception. It could not be described using scientific instruments; however, it was a real, painful, and indelible experience, common among human beings, and likely part of Dickinson’s own experience (Beer, 1997, p.111).

While Beer’s (1997) exploration of Emily Dickinson’s poem is focused on the subtleties of externalising the internalised feelings of despair rather than that of joy, I suggest that the difficulties in conveying these feelings are similar. However, it should also be considered that if a participant were to ‘voice’ the indescribable nature of joy, that this too ‘tells a story’ about their experience.

Informing this study is an awareness that the language that the participants and I use and the resources that we have to draw upon to understand and make sense of the moments of joy, is shaped by numerous forces including culture and social milieu. Maslow (1970) acknowledged this dialectic dilemma in his discussions of peak experience.

Small wonder it is then that the mystic, trying to describe his experience, can do it only in a local, culture-bound, ignorance-
bound, language-bound way, confusing his description of the experience with whatever explanation of it and phrasing of it is most readily available to him in his time and in his place. (Maslow, 1970, p. 72)

Laski’s observations of religious people’s description of ecstasy also highlight the environment – bound nature of vocabulary.

To a substantial extent the people in the religious group knew the vocabulary for such experiences before they knew the experience; inevitably when the experiences are known; they tend to be recounted in the vocabulary already accepted as appropriate. (Laski, 1961, p. 14)

Hence with this knowledge uppermost I own the cultural experience and influences that have shaped my language and resources surrounding the concept of joy and I am aware the women’s retelling of their experience is similarly shaped by a range of unique factors. Again, this situation represents the reality of research which draws upon lived experience.

**Ethical considerations**

Predictably, a number of ethical considerations have arisen throughout this research process. Of paramount importance to me was the need to care for the participants who had willingly given me access to their emotional stories and their time. This point is especially pertinent as all the participants were personal friends. In order to care for the participants they were given as much information as was possible in a written form. They were made aware of the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time. They were given access to the transcripts and the stories to ensure they were comfortable with them and given the option to make alterations. Anonymity was not an important consideration for any of the research participants. However, there may have been a lack of awareness on the participants’ part as to the entire contents of the research and their links to it and also of the possibilities of publication and conference presentations. Therefore attempts to ensure anonymity were made.
However, it should be noted that in reality if a person intentionally attempted to establish the identity of the participants, this may be possible.

Other implications of having been involved in this research also became apparent throughout the research process. Firstly, while listening to and transcribing the interviews I witnessed two of the woman hearing themselves verbalise something that they had not previously consciously considered. For example, throughout my conversation with Karla it became apparent that some of her thoughts and feelings about her lack of access to freedom came as a surprise to her and were seemingly unconsciously revealed through the conversation process:

...I don't get a lot of time on my own. I think I could get more, just listening to myself I realise I could take more than I do, like I don't like to take too much time on my own because of the family and other things...

(Karla Transcript line fragment 76).

I am also aware that in having the participants describe one moment of joy that the memory of that moment now may be coloured/ altered by the experience of relating it to me or even by their memory of my story of their story.

Issues in representing the data

While I suggest that Narrative research methods have been the most appropriate for my inquiry there are a number of issues that needed to be reflected upon and in some cases acted upon, to maximise the potential of this research project. Narrative research theory calls attention to how dynamics of power and authority are always present in the research process, and attempts to redress the imbalance these dynamics cause. Researchers including Shulamit Reinhartz (1992), Ann Oakley (1986), Ruthellen Josselson (2007) and others, have articulated realities such as gender, culture, class and paradigmatic issues that inform the discourses surrounding the research process which contribute to these power imbalances. What follows is an articulation of some of the issues surrounding the information gathering process and the power dynamics that are integral to it.
In an attempt to redress the power imbalances that have been maintained through notions such as the researcher as expert and the objective researcher, I have attempted to strive for the least hierarchical relationship possible. Thus, as Oakley (1986) suggested:

It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interview is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (p. 41)

I invested my personal identity in the relationship. In part this occurred because I had a previous relationship with the participants and this was added to by sharing with participants that my initial interest in this research stemmed from my personal experience of joy.

Embedded in the issue of power and authority are the complications that surround ownership of the research findings. The question continually raised by researchers in dealing with issues of ownership of the ‘story’ (data) is ‘whose story is it’? Michelle Fine (1998) has suggested that through the process of gathering a story and retelling it in their own words social scientists become the owner and authority of that experience. She argues this practice may ultimately contribute to the marginalisation of the participants’ experience, an outcome which would be contrary to the research purpose (Fine, 1998). However, I suggest that the issue of ownership and potential marginalisation may be partially addressed by have a personal relationship with the participants. While I have previously discussed conceptualisations of power within a research context, it is particularly relevant, in this instance to acknowledge that the power dynamics are not static but rather in a process of perpetual motion. I argue that awareness that the form of the researcher/researched relationship is as inconsistent and temporal as the stories being researched, is critical in any attempt to negotiate this relationship.
In summary, my process of narrative research can therefore be characterised by a particular range of debates around power, truth, relationships between the researcher and the researched, the ineffable nature of joy and the complexities involved in presenting the research findings. Central to these debates is the uncertainty, messiness and complexity of working within a field where the storied layers of lives are used as data. This matrix of uncertainty allows for innovative ‘creations’ in conducting, analysing and presenting narrative research, creations that challenged my desire for order and control. As such I suggest that narrative research can perhaps best re-present the ineffable nature of joy and the uncertainty and messiness of storied lives. The presentation of this thesis is driven by my desire to engage with these tensions and contradictions and to resist the temptation to order the messiness and resolve the unresolvable.
The Women’s Stories

Karla and I journey through joy

Words in italics are drawn directly from the transcribed interview.

As I trudged through the empty sheep yards and up the hill in pursuit of Karla, I thought few would guess that she was 52 years old. I smiled at the irony of the situation for if you were to consider the spring in our steps, Karla’s age could be more accurately portrayed in my 36 years and my puffing and heaviness of step seemed more appropriate to a 52 year old mother of three. As we neared the brink of the hill I was thankful for the constant bleating of Karla’s small entourage of furry faced, hand reared lambs, as their noise partially masked the sound of my puffing.

We made this small trek to the top of the hill so Karla could show me where she had an emotional experience that she described as joy. We turned away from the wind and the view that looked down into Picton and sat instead facing east and looking out towards the Cook Strait. As we nestled down out of the wind, the lambs busied themselves, alternating between nibbling grass and watching Karla, as she begun to recount a moment of joy.

Within the family we have a tradition that we can choose what we want to do on our birthday. Last year I made the decision to come up here on my own and sleep outside. I bought a sleeping bag, my pillow and a woolsack to keep the moisture out and I lay up here in this exquisite spot for the night. But I wasn’t completely alone because three of my lambs came as well. So I just had a sleeping bag and a pillow and me and two of the lambs snuggled into the woolsack because it’s quite big so they just went down and got right in underneath and the cat came up as well, so the cat, three lambs and two donkeys. The donkeys kept coming along and putting their heads down and made mumbling noises while they nuzzled my face. I just felt like augh (not as a filler but rather an exhale complete with relaxing shoulders and face, to signify completion) and yeah this is it and I could die tomorrow and I’ve done this beautiful thing yeah there was something really joyful about it.
In this moment Karla described the significance of the experience with an audible exhale and the movement of her arms in a wide circle in front of her. She completed this movement with her hands resting in her lap, a relaxing of the shoulder and a broad grin. I felt that I knew exactly what she meant. But I was instantly struck with thoughts as to how I would be able to present this important sound and movement in a written form. Numerous qualitative research authors have championed the need for thick rich descriptions when utilising narrative research methods however these calls belie the complexities of re-presenting spoken words and gestures in a written form.

In the silence that followed I contemplated Karla’s story of joy. Karla also seemed to be still engaged with her story of joy, for suddenly she said “do you know what was the first thing that came into my mind when I thought of this one episode of joy? “I love my lambs, I just love them”. As Karla went into raptures about her lambs, describing the snickery sound they make and recounting the story of one lamb jumping off the jetty into the water in an attempt to follow Karla’s departing dingy, I wondered why animals kept emerging in her story of joy.

“I have to admit it Karla, I don’t get the lambs thing, what is it about the lambs, I know you feel like their mother but you have your own children”. The lambs make wee noises and you know they are sort of snickery … and particularly with …being a mum with kids because I really was a bit younger [and] I don’t think I was quite ready and they worried me a little bit when they were tiny but lambs are easy because they’re fed and that’s it, they don’t have any other problems, they just drink, and then … snuggle in and then they just snicker, well that’s just gorgeous, you know what a big relief, so there is no demand on you that you don’t understand or can’t meet really, I think, simple demand of food.
My notes

While integrating Karla’s actual words directly from the conversation transcript into a narrative composition was difficult, I wanted to persevere with this format for a number of reasons. Firstly, I considered it important that Karla’s contribution and story be valued thus I wanted Karla to clearly recognise herself in her story. Secondly, I wanted the reader to be able to gain a sense of Karla as a person, including fleeting glimpses of her life rather than just a snapshot of one moment of joy. Therefore I have attempted to provide both glimpses of her life and a context in which to frame her episode of joy. However Karla’s story is obviously mediated by, amongst other things: the story I have framed her words in; the placement of the transcript in relation to other segments of speech and my interpretation of Karla’s story.

We decided to continue our journey within Karla’s moment of joy, while carrying on with our journey around this small island. So once again we stood up into the full force of the wind and walked along the ridgeline, intent upon checking the progress of a group of native seedlings recently planted by Karla, myself and a conservation group. As we walked, we talked, with Karla ruminating over what she had just heard herself say about the lack of demands placed on her by animals.

I think that when I am with people I tend to give myself away and be listening to them or trying to, that’s just my training, I was in charge of my four brothers and sisters on the hills, I had to make sure they were alright. I still think I find that quite difficult to change now when I am with people. I feel responsible for them being happy or being related too.

So when I am on my own that’s when I feel myself and I can actually feel this body has a being within it or around it or something which actually has a shape of its own too because I just give that away when I am in a group. So when I am on my own I have the space to feel and hear.
As Karla’s conversation had moved away from the animals to her sense of aloneness, so too had the animals moved away as we entered the fenced off section of regenerating bush. Periodically we bent down to inspect small seedlings or to remove the persistent weeds, many of which were the ancestors of plants intentionally sown in the gardens on the nearby mainland, whose seed had blown over on winds similar to the ones battering us now. Once again as we walked and weeded, we talked.

My notes:
On several occasions throughout our conversation Karla conveyed how interesting it was to hear herself say something and to realise the implications and meanings of the thoughts she was verbally articulating. For example I’ve just been intrigued listening to myself, it’s funny isn’t it, cause I hadn’t picked up, during our conversation, I felt it was exciting to be a part of and witness to, this process of reflection. Karla’s comments also suggested to me, that the process of reflection had been a positive outcome, which was what I desired for participants involved in this research project. Coincidentally while attempting to write Karla’s story I felt overwhelmed with the task ahead of me and I sought help from John Doolan a Lecturer in the English Department at the University of Otago. I went to John in the hope of uncovering the five essential ingredients of a good story or some such quick fix notion. However John told me that there were two main adages to becoming a better writer. The first was “write every day”, and the second was “how can I know what I think until I see what I say”. When John imparted this wisdom it immediately reminded me of Karla’s process of hearing herself say something and reflecting upon the significance of her words.

Do you remember what joy felt like Karla? It felt like when I was a kid, that sort of sense of utter freedom of being somewhere on your own and a kid and like you could make up things stories or, like I used to go off on the hills. I’d make up stories when I was out there, you know, I could be anybody I was actually a famous tennis player a lot of the time for some unearthly reason, a real world famous tennis player, and I fantasised and I think it was that that I used to love
when I was little I could be up on the hill and fantasise. But here I was not fantasising but being in a real situation that I just loved it. [There were] probably not a lot of feelings, just exquisite, just right there, present I suppose, I find that with the animals on the island that is what I am feeling more and more, just present so when I was little I wasn’t present, I was often looking at when I grow up I’ll be, or someday I do and all that sort of feeling, but now I just feel more and more that I am just present. And especially when I am with animals, because they don’t talk to you, so you don’t have to come up with anything. We have a lot of people around so I think the animal time is the most exquisite time for me, I don’t have to think, talk be anything but what I am. It’s a pretty big feeling, like I can’t think of anything I would rather be sort of feeling ‘this is it’ (said with emphasis), like when I die, that’s my wee dream, that’s what I want, someone to haul me up that hill, right up the top there so that that’s where I go …well that’s how I feel up there sort of oarge (exhale) me and my place.

We soon emerged from the bush and meandered across the paddocks and back down the hill with the donkeys and lambs in tow. The short fluffy donkey lets me wrap my arms around its neck and cuddle it, the other one however remains aloof. As we cross the stile and walk the short distance to the house, a noisy gull swoops down onto the lawn and demands some food. Coincidentally, the gull had been rescued many months before when I had been staying on the island to supervise a group on a conservation project. Karla had required assistance on this ornithological rescue mission and one of my intrepid conservation group members had willingly leapt from Karla’s boat into the freezing Marlborough sounds to rescue the injured bird. As the months have passed its visits are getting to be rare as its wing has healed quite well, so today Karla delights in its appearance and quickly responds to its persistent squawks by throwing it some food.

I laugh at the scene before me. The lambs milling around in the adjacent paddock, the donkeys leaning over the fence and the sea gull hopping around the lawn. It felt like I was a participant in a surreal nativity scene or just about to board Noah’s ark.
While Karla makes coffee I looked at the cork notice board covered in photos of what were obviously mementos of happy times with her children, her husband, friends and numerous animals. Positive affirmations were interspersed amongst the photos and dotted around the shells and driftwood which decorate the window sills. As Karla watches me looking at the photos of her family, she seems drawn to discuss the paradox between the exquisiteness of being on her own in her moment of joy balanced with the knowing that she had the love and support of her husband.

*Part of the whole exquisiteness of being out there is that I felt like Daniel was supporting me. He's just, such a friend, that was the feeling, so not am I out there with these animals on my own but I am not out on my own because I am lonely or kicked out, I am out on my own because this person values and respects my aloneness and that’s pretty special because when I was a kid you were out on your own because your mother kicked you out and now I am out on my own because he values that. And says [“if that’s] what you want to do, do it, and I really value that for you”. He knows that I need it, so that felt really, really nice. It’s like I was surrounded by support as well, though not support, because I didn’t need support, surrounded by love I suppose.*

Sitting in the dining room, finishing our coffees I realise that some of Karla’s focus has gone as she anticipates a number of tasks that need to be completed before day’s end. As I contemplate this, as if on cue, the phone rings. Karla honours the commitment to being a participant in this research project by not answering it, we are both silent while a harassed teacher leaves a message inquiring about the possibility of accommodation on the island in a fortnights’ time for a large group of children. Once again we both laugh at the irony of the situation. Here in this idyllic spot, surrounded by beauty, with the opportunity to go to bed at night with the sound of the waves and the wind and tired to the bone from physical work. Then there are these influxes of people wanting accommodation and to be involved in the conservation work. *Funnily enough we surround ourselves with heaps and heaps of people on the island and then there is these wonderful rare moments of total peace and wonderful moments of heaps of people too but I can’t get the feelings that I get when I am on my own.*
The journey through Karla’s story of joy, which occurred on her birthday, up on the hill with magnificent views, her lambs snuggled up beside her and the support and love of her husband seemed to be coming to an end. I was fully aware of the multiple pulls on Karla’s time and the wind had picked up and the sky darkened so a small door in my mind had begun to let in images of an adventurous boat trip back to the mainland.

I gathered up my stuff and we walked along the cliff tops to the steep path that led us down to the jetty. Seemingly inspired by the view and due to her generous nature, Karla kindly shared the last couple of gems about her experience of joy.

I think the view is important and that makes sense from my life as well cos I grew up on top of Tara hill, the top where the view was vroom (hand gestures indicating a sweep) right out to the heads; absolutely huge view, exquisite view. My grandparents lived right on the point and we looked right out to the point and I think just having that huge space and being up, looking out like that was all to do with feeling at home, that was part of it, like when I first went to the island I thought ough animals, view, sea all the things I love were all there and one package really. Just up high looking out, that is important to me and I remember somebody gave me the Prophet, 20 years ago, and I read the first part of it and it said something like that he was on the hills looking out over these people, and that’s exactly how, that fitted so exactly with my life, when I am up there I can feel things better, I can feel about people better, connect with them in better ways to me, you are not being messed around by their - actual what people think they want, I get a different space, I get a feeling of things rather than words of things.

I think the wordlessness is important, my dad taught me about being outside, and he didn’t talk a lot and we got the cows in, he would look across the cows at me and it was all eye contact, he was like an animal, he really was, he didn’t talk he just looked and related. And sometimes he picked me up if he saw I was tired or whatever and I was about 6 or 7 and I bought the cows in by myself
and I remember his face, I don’t remember him saying anything but I remember his face when I bought the cows in, all 90 cows on my own and his face was just like absolutely like so proud, it was the biggest moment in my life and I thought ooah god, it was exquisite and that was no words and that was important, it became really important to me, words seemed to cloud things and I think the reason that I am loving with the animals is that there are no words, there just movement or touch or wee noises that mean they are happy or yeah, it’s all just there and unspoken and um so I think the elements were on my own, no words, nothing that pulls me out of just being, yeah I think that’s pretty central to my feelings.

With those last words Karla threw me a life jacket and then expertly pulled the boat over to the ladder so we could board. As I leapt on to the bucking dingy I clutched my notes and tape recorder because I knew it was the record of a precious gift, whose loss could never be recovered. As it was impossible to talk over the sound of the engine and the wind we sat huddled in silence while we sped across the water. Karla drew the boat in to the partially submerged steps and we both stood up. We quickly hugged with Karla still maintaining the boat in position, I, somewhat inadequately thanked her and leapt off. I stood for a while waving while Karla stood in the stern of the boat and negotiated her way between the buoys. I climbed the hill, up to my car with feelings of excitement mixed with a twinge of technophobic doubt. As soon as I got into the car I unwrapped my recording device from its double layer of plastic bags and pushed play. The relief of hearing Karla’s voice recollecting the many intricacies of her moment of joy was beyond belief. With the tinge of doubt extinguished, I drove home full of anticipation as to how I would best protect and display Karla’s precious gift.

My notes

In an attempt to ensure Karla’s anonymity I altered some inconsequential (subjective) information. However, when I wrote her story and subsequently worked with it I used her actual name. Naturally, before anyone was to critique my work I would change her name to the pseudonym. Having made this
seemingly simple change, the story altered completely. I could no longer picture the person I knew, I could no longer hear the intonations in her voice or visualise her body language as I read her transcript. And I seemed to be exposed to a story, of which I was completely unaware, rather than the reality being that I had written the story myself and merely changed the names of the persons involved. This slightly surreal experience gave me a glimpse of insight as to how this story might feel for most readers.
Michelle’s Story

Diary entry

January 1997

During the last two years travelling around Europe on the bones of my arse I had dreamt of tramping trips like this one. And I don’t know why I had been so worried about the couples thing. All my anxiety about being the gooseberry with the two other couples and it hasn’t even been an issue. I think tramping makes it like that, we are all doing it together and it’s just so easy and fun and we are all supporting each other. For me, this type of experience epitomises living in New Zealand. The crystal clear water of the Greenstone River and the Routeburn is the type of thing you don’t see anywhere else. Who would have believed that this could be the third day of brilliant sunshine, clear blue skies and temperatures in the 30’s and we are only a stone throw from the notoriously wet, west coast.

Got to Lake McKenzie at about 11 am and had a moment that I could only describe as sheer joy. We just sort of all looked at each other and it was just one of those things where everyone looked at each other and then it was just total go for it, so we all just stripped off and jumped in. It was just amazing it was just like utter ecstasy, that feeling like your body being covered in cold, cold water and all around is mountains and it was so peaceful, it was just like sheer joy.

It seemed really pure and clear, like I suppose physically in terms of the clear sky, the sun, the blueness, the actual water the actual medium of water, so clear and also the fact that there were no responsibilities, other than socially, there were no responsibilities, no one for me to be responsible too, I was just doing it for me, it was sheer joy for me. I think that was what came to mind straight away, just that incredible sense of freedom.

The other amazing thing was that I didn’t feel any inhibitions. I didn’t feel embarrassed about my body or anything, it was just heaven. We were just so
relaxed …and there was that feeling of togetherness too, I had no sense of the couple thing at all.

*It [was] just utterly exhilarating.* Just that feeling of how incredibly tingly it is on your body, like to go from really intense heat into extreme cold plunge, it’s just utterly exhilarating cos it comes right up your whole body, it’s like a shock and you can hardly breathe and then it’s just like wow, you just feel clean and alive.

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**My notes**

_During my conversation with Michelle I realised how much of her story of joy had been filtered through the experiences of the intervening 15 years. However I wanted to capture both the essence of the experience as she lived it in the moment and to relate some of the filters through which the story is being told now. Hence I have developed two diary extracts, one which is set at the time of her story of joy and the second one which is set at the time of our conversation. The second diary extract offers an alternative perspective of her story that has been modified in part by her experiences of parental responsibilities._

_However, I do not wish to convey that these are the only filters nor are they necessarily the most significant but merely that there are always alternative stories. I am also aware that the time frame is both relevant and irrelevant as while 15 years is a considerable time, Michelle would have offered an alternative story regardless of whether the event described had occurred the previous hour or 15 years earlier._
July 2009

Now that Catherine turned five and started school and Melissa has an afternoon nap I finally got some time today to do some sorting out of the boxes that we have never got round to unpacking. While I was sorting stuff out, I found an old diary from 1997 and read a few pages. There was one page that really struck me. It is description of a tramping trip on the Greenstone and Routeburn track and the details of a moment of sheer joy when we skinny dipped in Lake McKenzie. It’s funny because I have always remembered that moment. *I often think I’d love just to take off and go off there and do the same thing.* And whenever I’ve skinny dipped in other places since then and I’ve always thought ‘ooh wow’ that was amazing that day.

The other thing that stood out when I read it was the clearness. *That might be a function of the fact that I am a mother now and how things seem quite muddled, like the day always seems quite muddled and complex and there are always other people to consider and there is always noise and there are always pros and cons to everything. I remember that it seemed really pure and clear.*

I also think that having been a teacher for so many years and most of my time in the outdoors was centred around taking kids on camp. Therefore my experience of sheer joy was a lot about freedom and lack of responsibility.

*I realise when I think about it just how important that was as a sort of a balancing thing. It’s just unfortunate that the way my life is at the moment that I just don’t have that as a regular part.* However now I have other forms of joyful experiences. *Just seeing kids do things, you do experience joy.* The other is quite different, like it’s hard to compare them because they are just entirely different. *But it’s probably quite different from that feeling* [on that day at Lake McKenzie] *which was utterly abandoned, uninhibited freedom.*
Jacqui’s story

Words in italics are drawn directly from the transcribed interview.

We adopt the pose. Arms crossed, legs slightly apart, a scanning gaze, the odd pointing gesture and low muttering about wave size and wind direction and a few well-placed nods complete the repertoire. As the dogs run about sniffing and pissing we look out over the small waves of what was to be my first surfing lesson. Normally my role on these surfing trips was to walk the dogs. Obviously, dogs are the necessary accoutrement for any surfer. I thought that my two spoilt cats that were lounging around at home, wouldn’t give me much surfer cred. However, I shelve any doubts I had about ever becoming a surfer and listen to what Jacqui had to tell me about what the waves and wind are doing.

As surfing is Jacqui’s passion she approaches the mission of trying to teach me to surf with the zeal of a fanatic. So as I stand there perfecting the surfer pose, Jacqui tries to initiate me into the intricacies of the whole surfing experience. She is resolute in her desire to make me see surfing as more than a single experience but rather a combination of events and factors that combine to produce the ‘whole surfing experience’.

“What it is, is that whole experience of going, you get in your car, you drive to a spot, you look at the surf, within seconds you know you are going to go out, if you procrastinate more than 5-10 minutes you know you are not going to get out there but it’s a whole experience of putting your suit [on], and the anticipation of going out in the water, getting out the back and then just sitting there.

As Jacqui continues in earnest to sell her passion for surfing to me, she put herself on the line and attempts to communicate some of the various roles surfing plays in her life. Annie you have to understand that it cleans me from head to toe. I was going to say cleans my soul but that’s a bit corny. It’s about being in the moment and spirituality and being in the here and now, this is how I
find it, on the water. I look for it. We both laugh at the corny clichés and Jacqui’s struggle to articulate her feelings.

My notes

Jacqui uttered the last two italicised lines when we met to discuss the transcript of our initial conversation about her experience of joy. In an attempt towards collaborative research, I discussed with Jacqui some options for representing the data from the transcript. However while Jacqui was interested in my research from the perspective of a participant and as my friend, she clearly saw the work of managing and representing her information as being a part of my role as the researcher. Therefore it seemed that my attempts to mitigate research issues such as power and authorial authority where somewhat misguided, as these were not necessarily issues for the participants. It is also noteworthy that many examples of collaborative research have an outcome, which is intended to bring about change that may benefit participants either directly or indirectly. Therefore it seems unreasonable to expect the participants in this research to enter into a collaborative research process for which they will see little or no gain.

However we can procrastinate no longer so we change into our wetsuits, pick up our boards and head down the dunes to the beach. My borrowed board seems huge and with the slight breeze blowing along the beach I find it difficult to carry it tucked under my arm. My ungainly gait is far from the cool surfer look I had envisaged. Rather than the toned, tanned and healthy living image I aspired to, I felt more like the Michelin woman as I struggle down the beach in my wetsuit with this massive board under my arm and my extra-long leg rope entangling itself around my feet with every step. I haven’t even got into the water and already I have two things to work on. Firstly, perfecting the surfer pose and secondly developing my cool surfer walk while confidently carrying my surfboard. Jacqui had obviously mastered this as she demonstrated her cool, confident walk and then running the last few meters into the water with her board outstretched in front of her.
I walk into the water, lay my board out and gingerly lie on top of it. I follow Jacqui out over the small waves to where it becomes flat water out the back. As I paddle along I feel quite balanced on the board and love the feeling of accelerating to push through the waves and then crashing down the other side. Shortly, I join Jacqui out the back and she shows me how to sit on the back of the board and stay upright. I get this quite quickly and I think it looks quite cool. While we float around Jacqui continues to convert me to her surfing religion.

One of my favourite bits is just sitting out [here] when its calm so all the big sets have come through and you are just sitting on the water and the sun shining or the winds blowing and you’re just sitting. It’s just really cool and it’s a real floating experience and you look back at the land and you get a different perspective, it just amazing so the whole experience [is] totally different from anything else I do.

Having practiced sitting out the back and looking cool the time has come to actually try the surfing part of surfing. With the help of Jacqui’s instruction I lie flat on the board, wait for the wave and begin pushing up with my arms as the board accelerates. I paddle out again and repeat this action numerous times. Having got to the stage where I look like I am doing a push up on a moving, unstable surfboard, I progress to attempting to crouch on the board as it picks up speed on the wash of the small waves. This surfing lark is harder than it looks and quite tiring.

So I paddle out the back and resumed my newly acquired, cool, sitting stance and watch Jacqui as she effortlessly surfs a small wave and then paddles out to where I sit and offers tips and words of encouragement. Once you’re on the wave it’s easy, [but] getting to that point is the hardest thing, but once you’re up, you have done all the hard work. You would not believe the skill level it takes to get on a wave, even to ride a wave for 10 seconds.

I think the highlights in surfing for me come from being in the moment, being really focused. *I feel in some ways like I am talking in a cliché but it’s like everything just doesn’t matter and that’s because of the focus. Like there’s no*
way that your head is anywhere else because you can’t, because you are really having to focus with what you are doing with your body and what you are doing on the board. I mean you really have to focus and break it down into phases so there is no room to think about anything else or feel anything else. It’s like any sport, you really have to be focused on what you are doing to actually do it.
And so for me surfing is those feelings, …the feeling would be being there, in the here and now, concentrating and focusing and being right where you are. Like I say, its clichéd, [but] nothing else matters, nothing else exists.

My notes
Throughout our conversation I note that Jacqui makes a number of statements which seem to place a positive value on time spent in the outdoors. And statements that seem to align the outdoors as a lifestyle choice rather than simply a recreational activity. Also statements that suggest she chose an alternative path even though she was aware that “that was what I wanted, but didn’t do it for a long time, other things got in the way”. For example “my adolescence took off in another direction”. However Jacqui also seems clear that along the journey that is her life, she has returned to the outdoors through the pursuits of surfing and that is “therapeutic, regenerating, feeding me, healthy.” There may also be a link between phrases such as “cleans me out” and “the ultimate is being on the clear space before it breaks”. In a later discussion Jacqui described her “time off the rails” where the only outdoor activities involved being stoned and going out to rural areas to look for magic mushrooms and adventure. Jacqui clearly sees her surfing as a positive aspect of a wholesome lifestyle.
Enough of sitting around out the back and being a poser, back to trying to surf. I repeat Jacqui’s words of wisdom to myself as I lie on my board looking over my shoulder for the next appropriate sized wave – “Okay Annie commitment and focus”. I grip the board as I feel the wave move under it, I lean forward and swoosh down the white water of the wave, as the board begins to slow down I jerkily try to get into the crouch position. Jacqui had demonstrated the action of getting into a crouch as one fluid movement, I can visualise it but I cannot perform it. So once again the board shoots out from under my feet and I collapsed into the water. Tiredness and cold are getting the better of me. I love being in the sea but I feel like I have had enough for my first surfing lesson. I drag my water logged body up the beach and the dogs take a brief break from harassing the gulls and run over to greet me. I sit on the beach and watch Jacqui for a while, but the small waves do not keep her amused for long. Soon she emerges from the waves and runs up the beach with as much energy and style as she had when she ran in. We both laughed as we recollect some of my more stunning moves and I begin to relax.

As we walk back up the dunes, tired and happy with the dogs bounding around our feet, Jacqui assured me it was all worth it. [Once] you do it, you want to do it and do it again for that moment and that’s the addictive nature of it…. Seriously, even though you can be freezing cold and your lips are blue and your fingers are white and you just had a good ride you want to go out the back again and do it again. Even though I know I am tired and exhausted like I just did some surfing recently and I was just freezing cold and my body just stopped, stopped functioning properly, but I still wanted to go and do it again. As Jacqui continues to extol the virtues of surfing the exertion of walking up the sand dunes pumps the blood into my extremities and I begin to think that I may one day get feeling back into my fingers. As the feeling of warmth returns so does the possibility that I will have another go at surfing and under my breath I repeat my new surfing mantra – commitment and focus.
A description of Joy

It was that moment when I got to my feet
I was just moving along
just doing it
with surfing you rely on the energy of the wave
I was in the right place
the right spot
floating and I was doing it
it's quite an achievement
it requires quite a commitment
the moment came when I finally made it to my feet
the hardest thing in surfing is getting to your feet
beautiful conditions
the waves just peel and they peel perfectly right across the bay
just a gentle floating feeling
[doesn't] last very long
probably 30 to 45 seconds
which is a life time in surfing

you're floating
this energy it sways
you can feel the energy of it
you're standing on this board and you just zoom
it's a whole thing

the first thing that comes to mind is what I am looking at in front of me
the bay
the water was really greeny blue
so it's the colours
and the shape
you have got the bush and mountains as well
looking across and there is all the boulders
just the shapes and the colours
the green and blue and the bush
the colour and the shapes are really vivid
standing quite tall
up on the waves everything is kind of a different perspective

doing it
finally being able to
you are not a real surfer until you stand
until you’re actually on the face of a wave
the ultimate is being on that clear space before it breaks
the ultimate is to be just skimming along there
I wouldn’t say it was an achievement
it was an experience
the actual experience of riding on this face
this greeny blue face

it was gentle
when you fell off you didn’t get pummelled
it was safer
it was warm
it was sunny
I was on holiday
I was quite relaxed
Discussion

This final chapter draws upon the tools and resources highlighted in the methodology and methods section to engage the reader in a nuanced discussion of the salient points. The four areas underscored by this discussion are, the role of personal relationships in the women’s experience of joy, the ways in which the women’s physical bodies did and did not shape their stories; the simplicity of both activity and possessions, and lastly the centrality of the aesthetics of the surrounding environment. The final section of this chapter is devoted to exploring what all of this could mean and articulates several challenges to the current orthodoxy of thinking about and practising outdoor recreation and education.

Relationships

Relationships with people, animals and places framed or at least informed, the experiences relayed in each of the women’s tales of joy. In Karla’s case, support from family to engage in the activity played a pivotal role both in enabling the activity to occur and in creating the conditions for ‘joy’ to be experienced. Karla describes her husband’s attempts to support her desire to be alone on her birthday:

and then there was Daniel with this little breakfast just bread and water for his monk wife he said, so it was six o’clock in the morning and Danny never wakes up early and um he had deliberately woken up early to bring me this breakfast and show me that he was supporting me being out there and I felt like that’s Daniel and that was just part of the whole exquisiteness of the thing like he’s just so, such a friend that was the feeling, so not am I out there with these animals on my own but I am not out on my own because I am lonely or kicked out, I am out on my own because this person values and respects my aloneness and that’s pretty special (Karla’s Transcript, section 73).

Michelle talks in some detail about the sense of acceptance and camaraderie generated between her friends on the tramping trip where her moment of joy occurred. As illustrated in her narrative below, the supportive relationships between trip members enabled her to not only contemplate diving naked into
freezing water but to actually do it. The sense of “all doing it together”, the ‘fun’, the ‘support’ and the absent coupledom anxiety (earlier expressed) came together in a fashion that meant inhibitions were vanquished and ‘anything’ seemed possible.

So there was that sense of being together which was really nice, and I think yeah that it was particularly nice for me too because I was with two couples and before I had gone on the trip I was really sort of worried about that, like two guys, two girls and me and I felt like a real gooseberry and so I was really anxious before I went but when I went it was just so easy and I think tramping makes it like that, like it’s just you’re all doing it together and it was just so easy and fun and you’re all supporting each other and there was no sense, I had no sense of the couple thing at all, so when we did that it was just really nice cause it was just no you know inhibitions, like it was, I didn’t feel embarrassed about my body or anything it was just heaven you know, I think that was what made it so good because we were just so relaxed.

(Michelle’s transcript, section 23)

When compared to the other women’s stories, mentions of relationships in Jacqui’s testimony were relatively scarce. While she did mention that her partner was surfing at the same time, the proximity of a family member did not necessarily feature as significant to her personal moment of joy. Unlike Michelle’s who was unsure about how she would connect or feel comfortable with her tramping friends, Jacqui conceivably regarded her positive relationship with her partner at that moment as a given and not necessarily noteworthy. Alternatively, it may have been the aloneness, the intensely private and personal focus on the wave and her body’s response to it that was more important to her in that moment than who she happened to be surfing with. Whatever the case, for at least two of the women relationships were a key ‘shaper’ of their experiences. Being with people and/or having support from them to engage in the outdoors shaped how and what they experienced in the name of joy.

Karla’s conversation transcript and the story I constructed based upon that transcript illustrates the importance she accords to her relationships with both
people and animals. She expresses her deep love of many of her lambs and cats. Her sense of ‘mothering’ extends to how she cares for and thinks about her animals. She has a robust sense of responsibility for both her family and the animals. She describes a sense of communing with her animals and the peace that this has brought her. As described in her story, Karla has an unusual living arrangement, on a small island with a farm and a range of tame and domesticated animals including, donkeys, lambs, sheep, cats and even a tame-ish sea gull. This situation enables Karla to indulge her love for animals in a way that would be difficult for most of us. However it is interesting to note the scarcity of literature that has explored relationships with animals and the outdoors. Personally, I have a small scruffy dog with deep brown eyes that I love beyond description and her inclusion in any outdoor excursion or adventure adds to the enjoyment of the experience exponentially. I am sure that I am not alone in this experience however my literature searches suggest that this relationship between human and animal has remained largely unexplored.

It is worth considering the ways existing and prior relationships (whether with people or animals) contour outdoor experiences within the context of current outdoor education and recreation practice. While contemporary outdoor practices embrace the notion that outdoor experiences potentially yield productive outcomes in terms of social relationships and sense of belonging to a group (Bialeschki, Henderson & James, 2007; Zink, 2005; Zink & Boyes, 2006), the women’s testimonies point to the ways existing relationships, brought in to any given experience, may also serve to shape what it is possible to know, understand or experience in any outdoor context.
Bodies

From both Michelle’s and Karla’s stories emerge rich and nuanced descriptions of physical sensation. For Michelle:

   it’s just that feeling of like how incredibly tingly it is on your body, like to go from really intense heat into extreme cold plunge, it’s just utterly exhilarating cos it comes right up your whole body, it’s like a shock and you can hardly breathe and then it’s just like wow, you just feel clean and alive and yeah I think I do remember that feeling. It’s just utterly exhilarating (line 34 Michelle’s transcript).

For Karla, waking up outside with dew on her face while her body was all warm from being in her sleeping bag and wool sack points to the centrality of the physical feeling to her experience of joy.

In each of these experiences bodily feelings emerge as an intense source of pleasure. However, these pleasurable bodily feelings rarely rate a mention in much of the outdoors and physical activity literature. Rather, negative portrayals of women’s bodies, in particular, pepper the scholarly literature. As Wright and Dewar reiterate:

   In general most of the recent literature (in Physical Education) paints a bleak picture, particularly for women and girls where the body is couched as a deeply problematic site associated with feelings of unhappiness, frustration and lack, whereby bodies are experienced as constraining, as preventing them from becoming all they would want to. (Wright & Dewar, 1997, p.82)

A similar sentiment flavours outdoors-specific literature. For example, Lynch (1991) highlights female bodily constraints of participating in outdoor activity while Kaye Richards (2003) emphasises the women’s body as a “central site of oppression and gendered meaning, and the outdoors is not exempt from these” (p.49). Further, when outdoor literature does address emotion in any substantive way, often discussion centres on the ways in which hardship, fear and physical pain evoke emotional responses, rather than on bodies as sites of
pleasure and bodily sensation as integral to a joyful experience (Blum, 1984; da Silva, 1992; Dan & Lynch, 1989).

In contrast with the aforementioned analyses, Michelle’s and Karla’s stories position positive bodily sensations at the very heart of their experience of joy. Un-prompted, the ‘feeling’ of cold water on skin and the experience of being warmed by a wool sack and tickled by morning dew are clearly pivotal for both women. Indeed, given the centrality of physical sensation in the women’s expressions, it may be fruitful for outdoor providers to understand the potentially generative potential positive bodily sensations may yield for their practices. That is, understanding and ‘hearing’ stories that privilege physical pleasure over pain and hardship may provoke a consideration of alternate ways of developing, delivering and experiencing outdoor activities.

Physical confidence and competence was embedded within two of the women’s experiences of moments of joy. In Jacqui’s case it was the physically demanding and technical skill of standing on the surf board and the physical aspect of using her body that she foregrounded. Michelle’s story points to the physical nature of being on a multi-day tramp which involved carrying a pack through, at times, steep terrain. Implicit, within both Michelle’s and Jacqui’s experience, is a confidence and comfort in their capacity to move. In Jacqui’s case the ability to stand and ride the wave was a critical element to her moment of joy.

And the moment came when I finally made it to my feet, because the hardest thing in surfing is getting to your feet (line 27 Jacqui’s transcript)

Interestingly, while the physical nature of their respective activities was mentioned by both women, this physicality was framed as simply a means toward an end. That is, physical capacities were a vehicle for permitting particular activities (surfing and tramping) to occur rather than dispositions worthy of mention in and of themselves. Their bodies, their shapes, looks and capacities to do things were glaringly absent from their testimonies. Indeed, the relatively slight mention of their physical body’s abilities and their confidence in them seems at odds with both contemporary and historical literature which tends to privilege descriptions of women’s bodies as a deficit in physical activity.
and outdoor recreation (Bell, 2004; Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Humberstone, 2011; Lynch, 1991; Warren & Loeffler, 2006; Wright and Dewar, 1997). Much contemporary and historical literature represents women’s bodies in the outdoor environment as burdensome, as less than capable of performing the feats of physical endurance or constrained from participating due to social expectations and norms (Bell, 1996; Du Faur, 1915; Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Humberstone, 2011; Lynch, 1991; Newbery, 2003; Wright and Dewar, 1997). Jacqui’s and Michelle’s testimony, on the other hand, does not focus upon either their exclusion or inability but rather assumes physical competence as a given.

Importantly, Jacqui and Michelle’s lack of focus on their bodies points to their personal situation of being physically and socially able and it would be interesting to consider potential alternative positioning of their bodies in the stories if this was not the case. In light of a contemporary Western obsession to craft and display an ‘ideal body’ in order to have a happy life (Duncan, 2007), the testimonies of women who do not possess the physical capital Jacqui and Michelle appear to possess, could differ markedly from those shared in this research. Ironically the apparent failure to buy into the ‘body beautiful obsession’ evident in the women’s stories of joy seems somewhat opposed to the pervasive attempts to sell health and happiness through physical attributes (Bordo, 2003; Shilling, 2003).
Simplicity

The notion of simplicity was evident in all three of the women's stories. Within the women's experience simplicity was portrayed predominantly in two ways; the simplicity of the experience and the simplicity of possessions and requirements. These two portrayals are discussed separately below.

Simplicity of experience

For Michelle the simplicity of the experience was evident in the activity of having a brief skinny dip in a mountain lake on a hot day. Jacqui’s experience too was the relatively simple act of standing up on a surf board for the first time. Karla’s moment of joy occurred while spending an evening on a hill-top farm with only her tame lambs and cats for company. What is particularly striking about these experiences and why I consider it important that a wider audience understand them, is the fact that these were simplistic experiences, experiences that bear little relation to those advanced as desirable in most outdoor recreation literature and/or practice. Given that both in practice, and in literature there is an assumption that the underlying foundations of outdoor recreation, and even outdoor education, are adventure, risk and challenge (Miles & Priest, 1999; Priest & Gass, 1997; Prouty, Panicucci, & Collinson, 2007; Warren & Loeffler, 2006; Zink 2003). The women’s testimonies would suggest that simple, low risk, low cost, low technology experiences can bring about intense positive emotional experiences such as joy.

If providers of outdoor experiences could grasp this awareness and use it in their planning and provision of experiences this may enable a wider diversity of people (and women) to participate and potentially engage with the outdoors in varied and emotionally fulfilling ways. This may also prompt a re-envisioning of what is deemed to be ‘valuable’ outdoor recreation and education. Instead of privileging narrow notions of risk, challenge and adventure as the fundamentals for a quality outdoor experience, providers could instead regard positive emotional experiences as meaningful and legitimate outcomes of time spent in simple outdoor activities.
Simplicity of possessions

Karla experienced joy with few possessions in tow. As described in her story, a sleeping bag and a wool sack to keep out the moisture were her only possessions. Michelle’s moment of joy occurred while on a multi-day tramp with her only possessions being those she could comfortably carry on her back. Even Jacqui’s experience required simply a surf board and a wet suit.

The idea that joyful experiences in the outdoors can transpire with scant paraphernalia runs contrary to many of the practices embraced in outdoor recreation and outdoor education. Evidence of this can be seen in the virtual and physical shopping spaces that cater for outdoor recreationalists which endeavour to sell the possessions you need ‘to get away from it all’. These ‘necessities’ include portable kitchens, tents with carports and miniature rotary clothes lines. While these examples are all ‘low tech’ there is also an abundance of high tech equipment available. This ‘high tech gadgetry’ includes global positioning systems (GPS), advanced communication devices including satellite phones and personal locator beacons (PLB). The availability of this equipment has also seemingly coincided with the increasing pressure to purchase it or risk being considered an ill-equipped, risk-taking and irresponsible outdoors person (Cuthbertson, Socha & Potter, 2004; Henderson, 2003).

At the same time, however, commentators such as Henderson (2003), Payne and Wattchow, (2008) and Wattchow, (2011) have noted an emergent rejection of the aforementioned tendency to complicate experiences through increasing both the volume and technical nature of the equipment “necessary” to participate in outdoor experiences. That is, some are advocating a move towards or swing back to, more simplified ways of engaging in the outdoors (and indeed many others spheres of life – for example slow cooking, slow travel). In many ways each of the women’s testimonies embrace the kind of simplicity this ‘slow movement’ calls for.
When considering the ways simplicity is represented in the women’s accounts, it is also evident that for each of the women, simplicity arises in contrast to or response to, complexity. Karla’s story is particularly illustrative here. In recounting her experience of joy in being up on a hilltop with the lambs, Karla describes the difference between raising children and raising lambs, clearly positioning motherhood as a complicated and potentially anxiety-producing activity compared to the ease of raising lambs:

…with being a mum with kids because I really was a bit younger and I don’t think I was quite that ready and they worried me a little bit when they were tiny, but lambs are easy because they feed...they don’t have any other problems,… what a big relief, so there is no demand on you that you don’t understand or can’t meet (Michelle, transcript section, 71).

For Michelle too, the act of jumping naked into icy water can be rendered simple in contrast to the hustle and bustle of a life recently lived in big, crowded cities in Europe. While not wishing to establish a set of limited dualisms here (e.g. simple/complex; easy/hard), what is interesting about the gestures toward simplicity embedded in each of the women’s accounts, is the way in which simplicity is born out of or ‘read’ against something else.
Aesthetics

The women’s full and at times poetic description of the look, shape, feel and colour of the natural environment clearly positions the surrounding aesthetic as an important element in the women’s moments of joy.

Michelle transcript clearly articulates the value of the aesthetic when she notes “it seemed really pure and clear, like I suppose physically in terms of the clear sky, the sun, the blueness, the actual water the actual medium of water” (line 27). Later in the conversation Michelle listed what she thought of as “essential elements” for her moment of joy and the centrality of the aesthetic of the environment is clearly evident in the description below.

Well probably, quiet environment, you know quiet peace, um beauty you know the beauty of the landscape, yeah mountains are like really important to me, to see hills, mountains. Water, to have water, whether it be sea or lake, um the camaraderie, feeling close to people, um and the freedom, the lack of responsibility probably. Yeah those would be the key ones. (gestured with fingers to indicate listing off) (Michelle’s transcript, section 44).

Jacqui’s testimony highlights

The first thing that comes to mind and it’s funny isn’t it because the first thing that comes to mind is what I am looking at in front of me, which is the bay, the water was really greeny blue, so it’s the colours, like what sticks out are the colours and the shapes (um um) like and because, yeah and also because where I was surfing was out at Kaikoura, …. yeah it’s just North, so basically when you look you have got the bush and the mountains as well, yeah and then you’ve got the highways just follows around. You know the bays? (yeah) well it’s where you come across through Kaikoura and then across the land and head into the coast. That point where you hit the coast is where the break is. And there is that bay that sweeps around so my first thought, when I think about it is looking across and there’s all the boulders as well, it’s just the shapes and the colours, it was the green and blue and the bush and
then, I can’t remember if I could remember the mountains but just all the
colour and the shapes are really vivid (Jacqui’s transcript section 33).

The importance of Karla’s aesthetics surroundings is borne out in her
conversation transcript below.

the beautiful night that it was, the top of the island where I was you could
see right down into (location) and right out to the heads (gestures with
arm to indicate both directions) and um just oh (spoken with real
emphasis on the oh) the position is just exquisite on the top at night time
and I often stand up there anyway at night time, so it was a very familiar
position (Karla’s transcript section 59).

These quotes, drawn from the women’s stories illustrate the centrality of the
aesthetics of the environment to their experience. Their women’s reaction to
and engagement in the beauty they revelled in was obviously individual,
subjective and greatly shaped by a wide range of forces.

Karla’s sense of familiarity, family history and connectedness with what was her
home environment had an impact on how she felt about her surroundings.
Jacqui too had some familiarity with her environment and her detailed
description sought a reassurance from me that I too knew where she was
talking about. For Michelle the location was new but her experience appears
linked to the symbolism of a ‘clean and green New Zealand’ that she had
valorised and yearned for while travelling overseas.

It is hardly surprising that the aesthetics of the surrounding environment had a
profound effect on the women’s experience, but what meaning can we draw
from these different experiences of the aesthetic?

The key learning has similar tenents to the simplicity discussion in this section,
as it was the women’s ability and opportunity to immerse themselves in the
environment for a period of time that created the space for this aesthetic
appreciation. Karla was able to sit alone and in silence admiring her
surroundings, Michelle viewed the mountains and bush from water level as she
skinny dipped in the lake and Jacqui had time to take in her surroundings as she contemplated the wind, waves and conditions prior to surfing. This point reiterates the need for practitioners to consider creating space for ‘down time’ and ‘alone time’ in the natural environment when planning our outdoor programmes and for individuals to understand the value of this space to sit, look and feel the environment around us.

Within the Australasian Outdoor Education academic context, we are starting to see a ground swell of research that supports place based programmes that enable, amongst other things, the participants the space to engage with the natural environment (Brookes, 2004; Hill, 2013; Straker, 2008; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Recent work by Cosgriff, Little and Wilson (2009) articulates the value of critically reflecting on NZ current outdoor education programmes and asserts the potential of alternative approaches to outdoor teaching and learning that would indicate a “responsiveness to the specifics of the people and contexts and their unique social, cultural and ecological histories (and futures)” (p.229). It will be interesting to see whether this academic interest moves far beyond the academy and the handful of programmes they operate as this would necessitate a move away from the activity and action packed experience that still appear to dominate outdoor education programmes (Brown, 2009; Cosgriff, 2008; Hill, 2008; Zink & Boyes, 2006; Zink, 2003).

**Reflecting on the Process**

In a similar vein to much of the writing surrounding outdoor activity, the world of post-graduate study is littered with testimonies of the challenges and pitfalls of the academic journey. My process has been no exception to those litanies of hurdles and the occasional minor triumphs as I have ‘battled’ through the lows of family bereavement, relationship struggles, work commitments and the highs of positive feedback and successful conference presentations. Despite these highs and lows one of the most enduring and surprising aspects of this study for me has been in grappling with the intellectual and emotional methodological challenges.
In particular, authenticity and the enmeshed terms of truth, fact/fiction and story captured my thinking and my practice. Authenticity was important in relation to honouring the content, emotion and character of the women’s stories and giving consideration to this in the gathering and re-presenting of their experience. The desire to re-present the women’s stories authentically was particularly important as they were all friends of mine, however while this added an extra dimension to the project it also enabled me to know and attempt to recreate their cadence, their language and elements that make the story ‘theirs’. (However, I am aware that this story is not theirs, it is my recreation of their story). At a personal level, striving to act and thinking authentically was important to my own sense of value and ethic.

The contentious notions of truth and fact, particularly in opposition to fiction consumed my thinking throughout much of this study. This consumption and interest is hardly surprising given that I had always planned to turn the women’s recollections of joy into fictional short stories. More surprising however was the vehemence of opposition to any challenges to the orthodox measure of truth and the related terms commonly used in research such as robust and valid. Strong adherence to and support of the orthodoxy is evident within academic literature and was also mirrored in my own experience as I was challenged by academics. These verbal challengers focussed upon either my lack of definition for the term joy or my chosen method of re-presenting the women’s stories. The use of the word stories itself was highly contentious with at times seemingly no interrogation or reflection on the storied nature of their own ‘data’ and their role in this story. This still leads me to question what gets heard, what gets recorded, and what gets valued.

Hopefully, my attempts to grapple with some of these methodological conundrums and the resultant learning from this study generates further reflection and this introspection creates a small gap in which ‘alternative’ methodologies could be more fully considered.

It is also worth noting that while I have suggested that the methodological conundrums have challenged and consumed me – they have also been the part
of the process I have enjoyed most. It is supposed to be hard, it is supposed to be engaging and challenging – and it has been.

**What could all of this mean?**

Finally, it is important to consider what the findings of this study could mean to outdoor educators, outdoor participants, programme providers and those with a curious mind.

This study, which explores the experience of three women in the outdoors, highlights the potential for outdoor recreation participants to have moving positive emotional experiences which exist outside of the dominant outdoor paradigm of the risk/challenge nexus. This study suggests positive emotional experiences can occur in a variety of settings and environments therefore the scope of what is regarded as outdoor recreation and the activities made available, could be enlarged to encompass wider settings and activities. Importantly, it might open up the possibility for less activity and less physical challenge and risk. This thesis can expand the range of experiences that can be considered to constitute outdoor activity and diversify the range of bodies and people able to engage in and enjoy it. I acknowledge a small but burgeoning cadre of research that is beginning to acknowledge this space. I see my study as making a small contribution to this field and assisting with complicating the notions of what the outdoors mean and the challenges to the orthodoxy.

The women’s testimony renders seemingly commonly understood terms such as bodies, simplicity and relationships as complex and shifting. What these women’s stories do is turn some understanding “on their head” and requires us to think in a different way about everyday words and descriptors. Challenging common terms and descriptors could rupture our thinking, creating a generative space where readers could think differently. Hopefully this can become a launching pad for new discussions and have implications for practice.

It is of interest that definitions of adventure are often based upon the outcome being uncertain however the prescriptive nature of many outdoor texts seems to
be contrary to this uncertainty. The dominant discourses surrounding outdoor education and recreation is focused upon limiting any uncertainty. Perils of new orthodoxy, each turn or twist creates new orthodoxy. While outdoor education and recreation has moved from dominant paradigm it has moved to embrace a new orthodoxy that fails to embrace any uncertainty.

This thesis highlighted the challenge of capturing the indescribable. The outdoors could do more to enhance the potential to be able to have these conversations and express these feelings in meaningful ways. We could discuss and acknowledge these experiences as commonly as we discuss fear and hardship and give time and space to the nuanced experiences that can occur when in the outdoors.

Moments in the outdoors are as important as the much acclaimed journey. Accepting this statement could be quite a liberational notion for pedagogues, outdoor providers and outdoor recreators but with this acceptance would need to come the understanding that you cannot plan moments and that there is no recipe to concoct a ‘joy in the outdoors’ cocktail. We can however give consideration to the women’s stories of joy and what they felt was important to them, the simplicity of the moment, the intense physical feelings, an aesthetic they appreciated and the support of people close to them. And even if by some fortuitous coming together of unknown elements, a moment of joy occurs, it is still unlikely that any one other than the individual would even be aware that it had occurred. This is the reality for educators and providers of recreation, in that we seldom know when something is going to make a difference. However, we can be aware of and willing to consider a diverse range of ways of ‘being’ in the outdoors and the potential of these alternative ways of being.
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