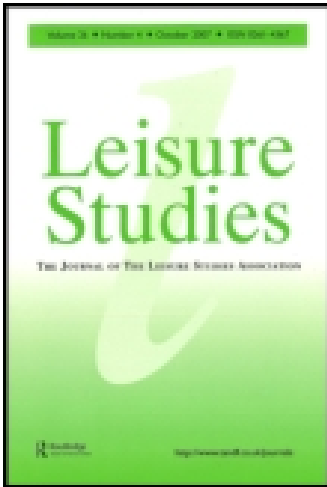


This article was downloaded by: [T&F Internal Users], [Miss Karen Allen]  
On: 23 July 2015, At: 07:46  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



## Leisure Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rlst20>

### The adventure experience paradigm and non-outdoor leisure pursuits

Gaylene Carpenter<sup>a</sup> & Simon Priest<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Leisure Studies and Services, University of Oregon Eugene, Oregon, 97403, USA

<sup>b</sup> Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Published online: 18 Sep 2006.

To cite this article: Gaylene Carpenter & Simon Priest (1989) The adventure experience paradigm and non-outdoor leisure pursuits, *Leisure Studies*, 8:1, 65-75, DOI: [10.1080/02614368900390061](https://doi.org/10.1080/02614368900390061)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614368900390061>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms

& Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# The adventure experience paradigm and non-outdoor leisure pursuits

GAYLENE CARPENTER\* and SIMON PRIEST†

\*Leisure Studies and Services, University of Oregon Eugene, Oregon 97403, USA and †Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario, Canada

This paper considers the applicability of the Adventure Experience Paradigm (Martin and Priest, 1986) in non-outdoor leisure pursuits. This paradigm was conceived in relationship to outdoor adventure leisure pursuits and, to date, has only been discussed in these terms. In this paper, the paradigm is first presented and clarified within the context that it was created; adventure experience. It is then applied to non-outdoor adult leisure settings and experiences. In presenting the paradigm and discussing examples related to both outdoor and non-outdoor leisure pursuits and settings, the authors suggest that a broader interpretation and application of the paradigm to the leisure experience is possible.

## Introduction

Research paradigms are an accepted form of expressing concepts and theories. They present ways to look at a phenomenon which are based upon literature and practice, and they stimulate further examination and investigation. Paradigms regarding observed behaviours establish an important framework from which the psychology of individual human action can be better understood. It follows then, that a paradigm which is founded in the literature related to human leisure behaviour may contribute to a better understanding of the leisure experience.

One such recently advanced model, known as the Adventure Experience Paradigm (Martin and Priest, 1986), was designed to interpret the adventure experience in outdoor pursuits. The paradigm was rooted in the works of Ellis, Csikszentmihalyi, and Mortlock, and each of their works related to the paradigm will be briefly highlighted in order to provide a context for presenting more detail from the Adventure Experience Paradigm.

As a researcher of the play experience, Ellis (1973) developed the optimal arousal theory of play. His work showed that individuals achieve a maximum level of performance when they are engaged at an optimal level of arousal. Furthermore, he found that play provided a context for stimulating people's need for optimal arousal. If the play setting was under arousing, the players became lethargic; or if the setting was over arousing, the players became nervous. In either instance, play performance declined.

Csikszentmihalyi's work (1975, 1982) identified a particular human experience that was occurring between these states of over and under arousal. In discussing his

research results during the mid-seventies, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) commented that anything one did could become rewarding if the activity was structured right and if one's skills were matched with the challenges of the action. He found that avoidance of either boredom (under arousal) or anxiety (over arousal), was achievable through balancing action capability with action opportunity. When this balance was realized, flow (an optimal level of arousal) was experienced.

Mortlock's work (1984) is based upon 20 years of facilitating adventure experiences. He identified the four stages of an outdoor journey to be play, adventure, frontier adventure, and misadventure. He viewed these stages as being on a continuum and found that movement through the stages arose from situations of no environmental fear to situations of extreme fear. In sum then, the identifiable components of the Adventure Experience Paradigm, emerge from the theory of optimal arousal advanced by Ellis, the flow experience identified by Csikszentmihalyi's empirical research, and Mortlock's experientially-based stages of involvement found in the adventure experience.

To date, the paradigm has not been explored in relationship to, or in an association with a broader range of leisure experiences; those not considered to be outdoor pursuits. It is the opinion of the authors however, that the Adventure Experience Paradigm model does apply to other leisure experiences. The purpose of this paper is to explore the validity of the paradigm in the light of leisure experiences other than those that Martin and Priest (1986) examined in its development. In order to do this, a brief discussion of pertinent terminology will be presented. This will be followed by an explanation of the paradigm and an application to outdoor pursuits and to other leisure experiences not considered to be within the realm of outdoor pursuits. Lastly, a brief examination of the similarities and differences between leisure and adventure experiences will be undertaken to further substantiate the paradigm's generalizability.

### Definitions

To be classified as an *adventure*, the circumstances of an undertaking should include some element of uncertainty (Priest and Baillie, 1987). For example, an experience might be adventurous when any one of the following is true: the outcome of the experience is uncertain; risks associated with the experience are unpredictable; the setting is unknown; equipment is unfamiliar; or participants are merely unsure of their abilities. Early expeditions to Mount Everest, for example, were faced with uncertainty about reaching the summit, unpredictable snow and ice avalanches, unknown climbing routes, unfamiliar oxygen breathing apparatus, and team members who were unsure of themselves and of one another (Ullman, 1964).

According to Martin and Priest (1986), the adventure experience was a state-of-mind where uncertainty arose from the interplay of *risk* and *competence*. Risk was viewed as the potential to lose something of value (such as mental, social or physical injury) during an adventure. Competence was the ability of individuals to influence uncertain outcomes. A synergy of skill, knowledge, attitude, behaviour, confidence, and experience aimed at avoiding risk or preventing loss was seen as the essence of competence (Priest and Baillie, 1987).

In summary, the adventure experience is a function of risk inherent in a setting (situationally specific) and a function of individual competence (personally specific). Adventures differ for individual participants. What is an adventure for one person may not be for another, and an adventure at a certain time or in a given place may not be the same at another time or place.

**The model**

Presented in graphic form (see Fig. 1), the axes of the Adventure Experience Paradigm are termed risk and competence as defined earlier. Five conditions may result from various combinations of risk and competence. These are described below, using canoeing as an example.

Condition one is *exploration and experimentation*, representing circumstances

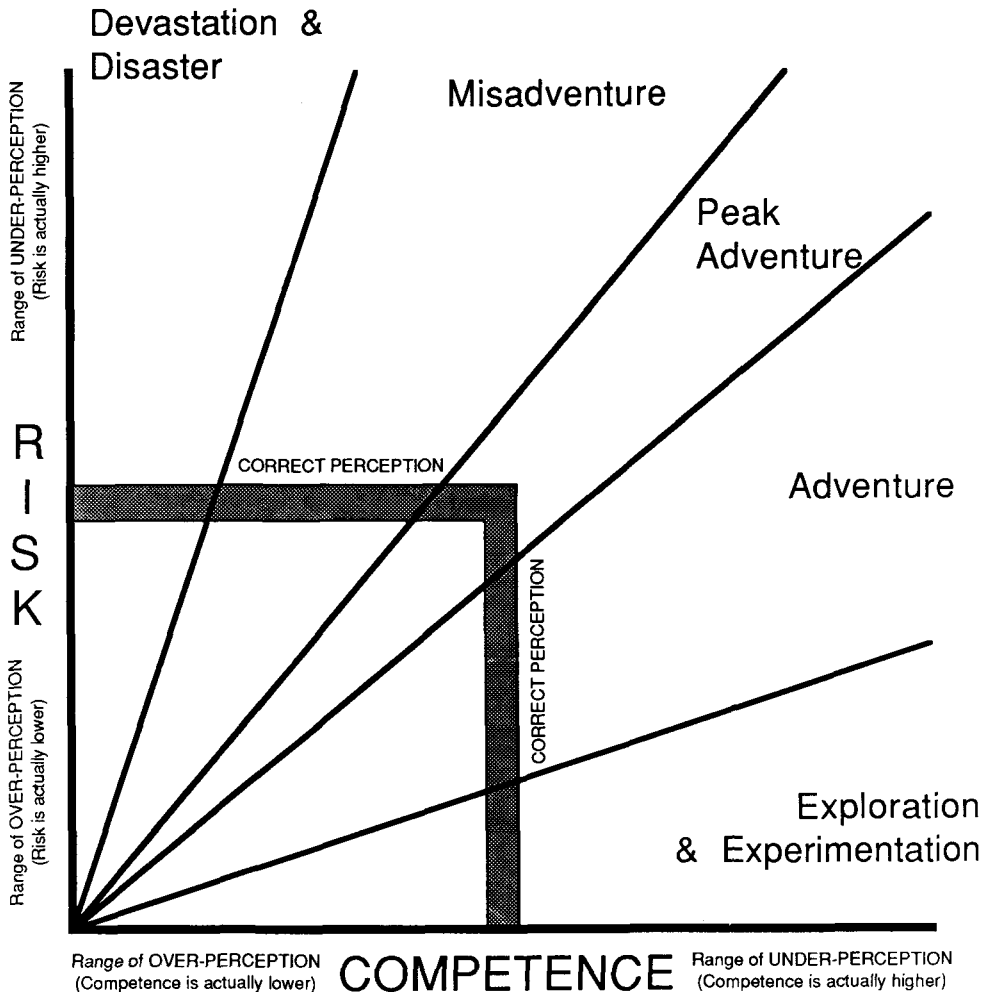


Fig. 1. The Adventure Experience Paradigm

Downloaded by [T&F Internal Users], [Miss Karen Allen] at 07:46 23 July 2015

where competence is high and risk is low. Under these circumstances participants are in a setting appropriate to learn or practice their skills. In canoeing, this condition equates to participants working to perfect their basic paddling strokes on a flatwater lake.

Condition two is *adventure*. As compared with the first condition, this results from increased risk and/or decreased competence. Perhaps the canoeists have ventured out onto a gentle river and are putting their new found skills to the test in moving water.

Condition three is *peak adventure*, where risk and competence are balanced. This is the middle ground where participants may become lost in a euphoric or intense concentration. Likened to a momentary peak experience, they perform at their personal best and their experience becomes most memorable. In the continuing example, the canoeists have encountered a rapid and are successfully negotiating it with their competence at a level that matches and meets the level of risk.

Condition four is *misadventure*. Here the level of risk has surpassed the level of competence and the outcome is unpleasant, but consequences are not permanent. The canoeists capsize, but wash safely out of the rapid. Further downstream they patch their scrapes and cuts, mend their bruised egos, and dry out their equipment and clothing.

Condition five is *devastation and disaster*, the logical extension of misadventure, where risk is high and competence is low. In this condition, participants lack the competence to deal with the risks and heavy losses may occur. In the canoeing example, obvious losses might be death due to hypothermia (prolonged cold water exposure), permanent psychological trauma from near drowning, or embarrassment from failing in front of peers.

### *Outdoor pursuits application of the model*

According to the paradigm, experiencing one desired condition or another is dependent upon the participants' *astuteness*. Participants are said to be astute when they accurately perceive the levels of real risk and real competence. Consider two possible values for risk and competence: real and perceived. *Real risk* and *real competence* represent the amounts of risk and competence which actually occur at a given moment in time. No one can tell with certainty where these values will lie, but they can be estimated by participants. These estimations, based upon subjective judgements, are known as *perceived risk* and *perceived competence*. Perceptions are important because they dictate the participants' goals for an adventure experience and the conditions they expect to encounter. Real values, on the other hand, determine the outcome which results. If misperceptions occur, as is often the case with novices, then although one condition was sought as the *expectant*, another condition is likely to be the *resultant* (Priest and Baillie, 1987).

Most participants new to outdoor pursuits lack the astuteness which comes from reflecting on intensive and extensive adventure experiences. Consequently, they are likely to misperceive the situational risk and their personal competence. The 'misperception matrix' depicted below (see Fig. 2) indicates the descriptors associated with individuals who under- or over-perceive the levels of risk and competence. In order to clarify, two descriptors will be discussed: the timid and fearful

		<b>COMPETENCE</b>		
		<b>OVER Perceived</b>	<b>CORRECTLY Perceived</b>	<b>UNDER Perceived</b>
<b>R I S K</b>	<b>UNDER Perceived</b>	Fearless and Arrogant	Bold	Naive and Innocent
	<b>CORRECTLY Perceived</b>	Assured	<b>ASTUTE</b>	Insecure
	<b>OVER Perceived</b>	Carefree and Exaggerated	Overawed	Timid and Fearful

Fig. 2. Misperception matrix for the participants in an adventure experience

individual, and the arrogant and fearless individual (Martin and Priest, 1986). Left to their own accord, most self-motivated participants will seek out risks which balance their competence in an effort to achieve a peak adventure. If the participant is astute, then a peak adventure will likely take place. However, if not astute, then the participant is likely to fall either side of the 'razor's edge' and experience only an adventure or a misadventure.

Consider the timid and fearful individuals with underperceived personal competence and overperceived situational risk. They enter an experience expecting peak adventure, but fall short of their goal as a condition of exploration and experimentation results (see Fig. 3). Now consider the fearless and arrogant with overperceived personal competence and underperceived situational risk. They too enter an experience expecting peak adventure, but over-shoot their goal, and a condition of devastation and disaster results (see Fig. 4). Neither of these two scenarios is desirable. The timid and fearful are destined never to reach their full potential or self-actualize in this activity. The arrogant and fearless are likely to injure themselves or others in their quest for excitement.

*The model in a non-outdoor pursuits context*

We know that people seek novelty and new experience, as well as structure and permanence in their leisure experiences throughout the life span (Iso-Ahola, 1980). Predictable and unpredictable life events may lead adults to change both themselves and their leisure activities. It seems a certainty that change will continue to nudge

Downloaded by [T&F Internal Users], [Miss Karen Allen] at 07:46 23 July 2015

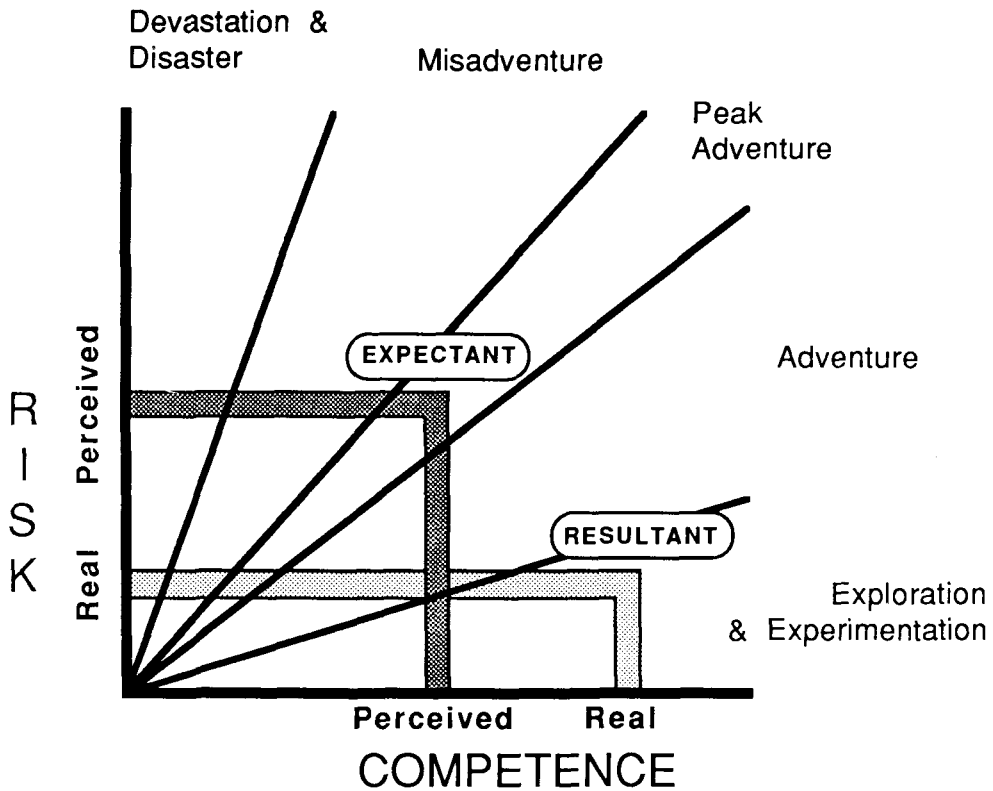


Fig. 3. Profile of the timid and fearful participant

individuals toward human growth and development throughout adulthood (Carpenter, 1987). Consider how marital divorce can affect individuals and alter their leisure pursuits. They may be faced with the need or desire to meet new people. Often familiar social groupings have become uncomfortable for them, or they may be interested in meeting prospective mates but not know where to find any. The time needed to seek new social environments is most likely to occur during discretionary or free time because other time may be filled by social role responsibilities related to tasks such as parenting and employment. So, when individuals face these circumstances, they have essentially become leisure adventurers, that is, people taking situational risks and employing personal competence. The Adventure Experience Paradigm can predict outcomes of human leisure behaviour in this instance as well as it does when describing an activity like canoeing. Furthermore, any novel or new experience defined as adventurous by the participant may become subject to understanding and interpretation within the context of the paradigm. Leisure experiences are a primary vehicle for social interaction and for forming new relationships (Howe and Carpenter, 1985). In the case of the individuals seeking social contact, perceptions of both risk and competence take on unique meanings when the five conditions of the Adventure Experience Paradigm are applied. Consider the perceptions of an initially shy divorcee who participates alone in a social event.

The divorcee anticipates the evening will consist of exploration and experimenta-



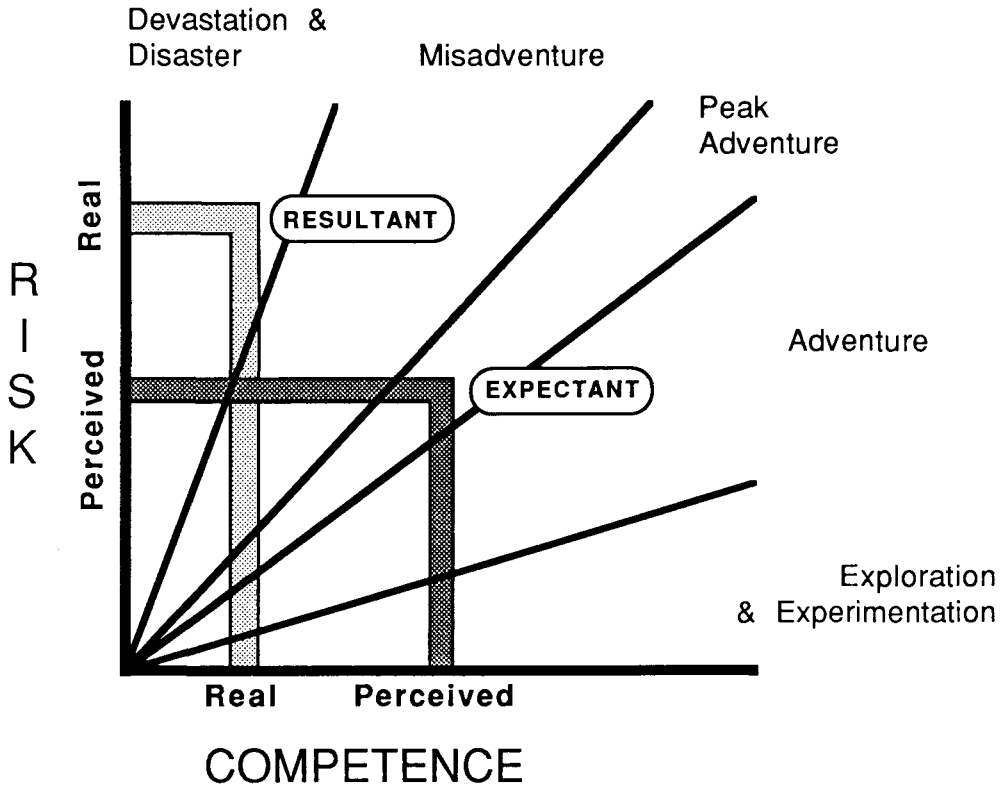


Fig. 4. Profile of the fearless and arrogant participant

tion: merely observing the environment (low risk) and talking only when necessary (high competence). However, as the evening begins, the divorcee begins to 'loosen up' and starts talking to a few people. Meeting previously unknown people in a new environment is a condition of adventure. The experience is characterized by the threat of feeling uncomfortable (increasing risk) and by the need to quickly recall 'rusty and dusty' social skills (decreasing competence).

The point at which the divorcee 'bumps into' and begins a meaningful conversation with an interesting individual is peak adventure (matched risk and competence). Here, for a brief moment in time, the divorcee meets the challenging environment by mustering sufficient social skills to maintain a pleasant interaction. The experience is one of excitement and uncertainty: an adventure in the truest sense of the word.

Toward the end of the evening, the new couple chooses to dance. Here comes a misadventure, because the divorcee feels intimidated by the dance floor environment (increasing risk) and lacks social dance skills (decreasing competence). As the evening concludes, the new found friend decides that repeating the night's experience is definitely not desirable. This creates an embarrassing environment (high risk) with no means of escaping socially (low competence); thus, the divorcee is left with a feeling of devastation and disaster.

What matters here is the divorcee's perceptions of risk and competence. Even if these conditions did not result in reality, it is the perceptions that they took place

that influence the individual's experience, and determines how such events will be dealt with in the future. To this end, each of the above conditions will be viewed differently by different people. Once again, consider the 'misperception matrix' (see Fig. 2). A divorcee seeking social interaction and relationships may be timid and fearful, astute, fearless and arrogant, or any other of the ranges of descriptors shown on the matrix.

Imagine the internal dialogue that seems plausible for a divorcee seeking social contacts. For the timid and fearful who suffers from underperceived competence and overperceived risk (see Fig. 3), the dialogue would sound something like this: 'I haven't had a first date in years . . . I'll never get one now. There are so many singles out there and I feel so self-conscious . . . I know that no one will want to talk to me'. Or the fearless and arrogant divorcee (see Fig. 4) would sound almost opposite in saying something like, 'It doesn't bother me that I haven't dated in years . . . I never had any trouble meeting people before, so why should I now? I look good tonight and just know that people are going to want to talk to me'. Both individuals enter into their leisure experiences expecting one condition, but due to their misperceptions, and the actuality of risk and competence, an unexpected condition results. Dreading a misadventure, the timid and fearful may experience exploration and experimentation. Hoping for an adventure, the arrogant and fearless may experience devastation and disaster. Once again, neither scenario is desirable and with some experience at social risk-taking, perhaps under the careful guidance of close friends, these two individuals may also become more astute.

### Leisure and adventure

The following discussion of comparing common elements found in leisure and in adventure is presented in order to broaden the applicability of the Adventure Experience Paradigm to leisure. Neulinger's (1981a, 1981b) conceptualization of leisure is generally accepted by leisure researchers and writers. Leisure is a *state of mind* characterized by freedom and brought about by engaging in *intrinsically motivated* activities experienced under conditions of *perceived freedom*. Following extensive review of psychological literature and empirical research, Ingham (1986) noted that agreement existed amongst most psychologists interested in leisure that concepts such as perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, competence, and optimal arousal/incongruity are fundamental in understanding the leisure experience.

Turning now to adventure, Mitchell (1983) wrote that adventure experiences required three elements: *freedom of choice*, *intrinsic rewards*, and a degree of *uncertainty* upon which the participant had some influence of determination. It appears then, that the states of mind known as leisure and adventure share the common elements of freedom and intrinsic motivation. The distinguishing factor between leisure and adventure may be the degree of uncertainty for the outcome. Therefore adventure experiences can be thought of as a subset of leisure experiences – the unique factor being that adventure is leisure with uncertainty.

Often, the adventure experience participant takes an active role in attempting to resolve the uncertainty of an outcome. So strong can this desire to influence be, that some adventurers have been noted to purposefully select and manipulate their environments so as to establish an elevated level of uncertainty and thus maintain

the essence of an adventure experience. Atkinson (1957) identified two behaviours associated with adventurers: those who sought to avoid failure and those who sought to achieve success. While the two descriptors may appear similar, each manifests in a very different manner. *Failure avoiders* select risks which are very low and where they are likely to succeed and thus avoid failure, or select risks which are very high and where they are likely to fail, but have plenty of reasons to excuse by. *Success achievers* select risks which balance their competence in an effort to create the greatest challenges. As success becomes more probable, they alter the situation (by increasing risks and/or by handicapping their competence) to enhance and extend the uncertainty for as long as possible. As examples of this last behaviour, climbers of Mount Everest have been noted to behave optimistically when dangers were imminent, and pessimistically as probable success came within reach. This enabled them to assure a motivational level of uncertainty and view the climb as a great challenge at all times (Ullman, 1964).

Two types of risk takers were identified by Ball (1972): those with an acceptance orientation and those with a control orientation. Gambling, which holds much uncertainty as to outcome, is probably the best example of his theory. Consider the card games of Poker or Blackjack, where skill is needed to overcome risks. Compare these with Roulette or the Slot Machine, where pure chance is the determinant of success. In the former example, gamblers use their collective competence in an attempt to control the play of the cards. In the latter example, players simply accept the luck of a spin. While both gambling examples are exciting leisure experiences, only the first qualifies as an adventure. The key is having the capacity, or at least the belief, that one can actually influence the uncertainty of an outcome.

This element of uncertainty may exist in non-adventurous leisure pursuits as well, but the desire to control or influence the outcome may be much less important to the leisure participant. Take for instance, reading a book, listening to music, or watching a movie. All three leisure experiences may be exciting to participants, but are not adventures since the participants are unable to take action which might resolve the uncertain ending of the book, determine the melody of the music, or influence the plot of the movie. On the other hand, if these participants were writing the book, composing the music, or directing the movie, they would have the power to influence uncertainty, and thus make the experiences adventurous.

Individuals seek the experience of leisure through adventure activities and non-adventure activities alike. Repeat involvement in those activities where leisure was previously experienced does not necessarily guarantee a leisure experience the following time. The same applies for adventure, since the experience is specific for person (competence) and situation (risk). People will enter into adventures based on their personal beliefs about competence and risks: their perceptions will dictate their behaviours. Both leisure and adventure are related to these perceptions and are therefore a state of mind where experiences are far more important than activities. Hence, the activity serves as a conduit through which leisure as a state of mind is experienced. Because adventure and leisure are often based on experiences, rather than on particular activities, these perceptions (states of mind for the participant) determine whether leisure is realized. Uncertainties determine whether an adventure takes place. In other words, adventures are merely a subset of leisure where uncertainty of outcome is present due to the interplay of perceived competence and risk.

## Summary and conclusions

The Adventure Experience Paradigm was developed to explain human behaviour in the context of outdoor pursuits. The intention of this article was to demonstrate the broader application of the model to leisure experiences which are not typically viewed as outdoor oriented. Following a review of the foundation and explanation of the paradigm, both outdoor pursuit and non-outdoor pursuit examples were presented and discussed. Leisure and adventure were seen to be states of mind characterized by having the similar elements of freedom and intrinsic motivation. Adventure had the added element of uncertainty.

The authors' premise was that all leisure experiences with an element of uncertainty qualify as adventures. Furthermore, experiencing adventures did not require outdoor settings. The crucial factor was the belief by participants that they held possible influence over the key element of uncertainty. To this end, the Adventure Experience Paradigm for outdoor pursuits had generalizability to a wider variety of leisure experiences.

Another purpose of this paper, not previously mentioned, is the desire on the part of the authors to present the Adventure Experience Paradigm in order to stimulate interest in it. The opening comments of this paper described the purpose of research paradigms as a means for presenting ways to examine phenomena based upon literature and practice in a manner that would stimulate further investigation. Efforts to empirically test the Adventure Experience Paradigm are presently underway. Five separate studies are quantifying the changes in perceptions of risk and competence which occur during an adventure experience such as canoeing through a whitewater rapid, rock climbing up a cliff, going to a movie alone, and making financial investments. Employing two versions of a Semantic Differential before-and-after adventure experiences, the results of these studies indicate that subjects gain a more precise perception of the situational risk and their personal competence with repeated exposure to adventure experiences. Further work is demonstrating that these same changes occur in other non-outdoor leisure pursuits such as driving, bowling, and gambling. Future research with the paradigm is aimed at investigating relationships between the perceptions of experienced instructors and novice participants (both introverts and extraverts) in order to establish predictive models for their behaviours during adventure experiences.

In a recent presentation commemorating the tenth anniversary of the National Recreation and Parks Association (USA) Leisure Research Symposium, Iso-Ahola (1987) discussed areas related to leisure which he felt needed research in the future. Though indicating that a good deal was known about peak or flow experiences, he expressed concern that these may not be realized in most of one's leisure life. As a result, he called for research to broaden, 'our knowledge from peak experiences to determination of antecedents and consequences of personally exciting leisure' (p. 24). Systematic and comprehensive research efforts are needed in order to verify the Adventure Experience Paradigm's basic assumptions, conditions, and applications advanced within both outdoor and non-outdoor pursuits.

## References

- Atkinson, J.W. (1957) Motivational determinants of risk-taking behavior, *Psychological Review* 6, 359–72.
- Ball, D. (1972) What the action is: a cross-cultural approach, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 2, 121–43.
- Carpenter, G. (1987) Leisure during middle adulthood, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 58, 34–64.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975) *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1982) Towards a psychology of optimal experience, in *Review of Personality and Social Psychology* (edited by L. Wheeler), Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, California.
- Ellis, M.J. (1973) *Why People Play*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Howe, C.Z. and Carpenter, G.M. (1985) *Programming Leisure Experiences: A Cyclical Approach*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Ingham, R. (1986) Psychological contributions to the study of leisure: Part one, *Leisure Studies*, 5, 255–79.
- Iso-Ahola, S.E. (1980) *The Social Psychology of Leisure and Recreation*, Wm. C. Brown Co., Dubuque, Iowa.
- Iso-Ahola, S.E. (1987) The social psychology of leisure: past, present and future research, paper presented at the NRPA Research Symposium, New Orleans, Louisiana.
- Martin, P. and Priest, S. (1986). Understanding the adventure experience, *Adventure Education*, 3, 18–21.
- Mitchell, R.G. (1983). *Mountain Experience: The Psychology and Sociology of Adventure*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.
- Mortlock, C. (1984) *The Adventure Alternative*, Cicerone, Cumbria, UK.
- Neulinger, J. (1981a) *The Psychology of Leisure (2nd ed.)*, Charles C. Thomas, Pub., Springfield, Illinois.
- Neulinger, J. (1981b) *To Leisure: An Introduction*, Allyn and Bacon, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts.
- Priest, S. and Baillie, R. (1987) Justifying the risk to others: the real razor's edge. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 10, 6–22.
- Ullman, J.R. (1964) *Americans on Everest*, Lippincott, New York, New York.