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# Trust and Fragility: A Walking Dialogue

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I don’t trust people

a friend confessed to me

I don’t trust them because they are changing

I asked:

If you know that they are changing, what do you not trust?

One of the aims of critical tourism studies is to consider both the research and researcher as humans in a process of ongoing change and transformation (Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2007). However, questions arise: What does it mean to think of humans as changing and transforming, and how can we trust ourselves, or others, in that situation? I argue such inquiries give us insights, as researchers, and as humans, into the concept of trust in tourism studies.

In this walking dialogue, I specifically focus on *trust* in the context of solo female travel and how it relates to the concept of fragility. Although philosophies of trust commonly imply fragility, as there is no trust without the risk of being betrayed (Baier, 1986), literature on solo female travel rarely discuss trust. First, I conceptualize three different yet connected themes related to the experience of trust—trust the process, trust the self, and trust the other—through the concept of fragility. Next, I examine the theme of trust in the context of solo female traveling. Finally, I explore how this walking conference is also a process of learning trust and fragility through being-with fellow researchers, locals, nature, and strangers

## The Experience of Trust through Fragility

In tourism studies, positivism has been a dominant paradigm, which considers there is a truth or reality existing outside of our bodies. These researchers follow certain processes that leads to the answer. However, some researchers do not have a solid process, and sometimes answers remain uncertain (St. Pierre, 2017). These authors stay fragile, not knowing what will come to happen, and in doing so they can gain confidence in their own

ways of knowing and becoming from the experience of being able to "figure things out" at the end (Jutila, Höckert, & Rantala, 2024)—learning how to trust the process.

Even without direct experience, learning from other researchers also helps us learn how to trust the process through their writings and expositions of fragility (Jutila, Höckert, & Rantala, 2024). Conversely, covering up fragility means enclosing the space for creative and new ways of knowing, being, and becoming. By embracing fragility, rather than ignoring the feeling of uncertainty, we learn how to trust the self.

We also share fragility with others through our research. Yet, without fully knowing who these others are (whether they are readers or listeners), without the ability to conquer the other's way of knowing (Jutila et al., 2024, p. 50), without expecting that all others will fully understand what the point *is*, rather, trusting the other leaves open a space where others can freely think *with* our thoughts. This is the space for us to breathe together, being-with, a space that is so often covered by the certainty of knowing. I argue sharing fragility is an act of trusting one another. The co-constitutive experience of trusting in the process, the self, and the other

## Trust in the Female Solo Traveler Experience

Studies on solo female travelers commonly center on either the risks, constraints, and fears of traveling solo, or the positive effects of solo female travel that encourage women's empowerment and bravery. Research shows that women feel fear because their female bodies are sexualized so that they have to constantly care about what they are wearing, where they are staying, and when they go out (Wilson & Little, 2008). However, others argue that solo traveling has empowering effects on women. Through negotiating risks during their travel, they can learn how to deal with it, and they can recognize that they do not have to follow normalized gender roles in the society, which may lead them to resist gender norms upon return to their home country (Harris & Wilson, 2007; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018).

In their study about women hiking in the woods alone, Coble, Selin, and Erickson (2003) argue that some women negotiate gendered risks differently. One participant of their research mentioned having a self-dialogue to justify to herself that other people are out there doing the same thing—hiking in the woods like us in this conference—a dialogue that empowered her to not to be overcome by fear. She trusted the other and treated them as humans, not things that made her anxious all the time (Holton, 1994). Yet, there were still fears inside herself.

Traveling solo is not a clear-cut process leading to empowerment by learning how to

deal with dangerous situations or knowing how to resist gender roles. We trust our process of traveling solo, but at the same time, we experience the fragile condition of being solo. Through the practice of trusting the other, which eventually leads trusting the self because it allows our fragility to exist, we open the space for us to be humans, changing beings. We learn to be somewhat comfortable in risky situations; we learn fragility *and* trust.

## Learning Trust and Fragility

Through walking with researchers, locals, nature, and maybe some strangers, we can become attuned to the experience of trust and fragility. How do we trust one another in TeToWaCo and be comfortable walking together through nature and strangers? Will they—those who walk next to you—know and understand what you want to say, the *point*, and have a meaningful conversation with you? And will *you* understand what the other is talking about?

This walking dialogue is itself an act of trusting the learning process by exposing my fragility of not knowing fully about the concept of trust—of being uncertain—and yet expose my thinking to the experience of trust. In this fragility, this dialogue aims to learn what and how we think about trust through walking. Through experiencing trust and fragility together in a walking dialogue, a space is opened for us to learn and listen with curiosity, wonder, openness, and care (Jutila, et al., 2024, p. 50).

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