

An Exploration of Travel and Transpersonal Development: A Heuristic Inquiry Into the Relationship between Travel and Spiritual Growth

John Thompson

Alef Trust and Middlesex University

This paper explores the relationship between travel, transpersonal development and spiritual growth. Due to the personal engagement of the participants and the author in the subject areas being investigated, Moustakas' (1990) heuristic inquiry was chosen. This is a qualitative methodology ideally suited to reveal tacit knowledge through those "who have directly encountered the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38). Interview analysis from the author's original MSc research uncovered themes that were presented through individual depictions, an exemplary depiction and a composite depiction, portraying recurrent collective themes. The composite depiction forms the results section of this paper. The discussion utilises insights and theories from transpersonal psychology as analytical tools to more closely explore the deeper workings of the phenomena being researched. It suggests that for people who are open to experience and capable of processing that experience, travel, through a search for authenticity and transcendence of the known self and outer world, can implicitly share similarities with spiritual practices, therapy, and rites of passage. This can lead to self-knowledge, meaningful transformation and authentic transpersonal development. Furthermore, the liminal aspects of travel can continue on returning home to aid the process of integration, and 're-create' both personal and communal life at home.

Keywords: travel, spiritual development, transpersonal development, transformation, authenticity, transpersonal psychology

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to John Thompson. Email: john68@btinternet.com

Recommended citation: Thompson, J. (2020). An exploration of travel and transpersonal development: A heuristic inquiry into the relationship between travel and spiritual growth. *Consciousness, Spirituality & Transpersonal Psychology*, 1, 17-33.

In 2003, whilst trekking in Nepal I was engaged in conversation by a gentleman who shared details of his research that entailed observing the behaviour of Tibetan and Nepalese pilgrims. Associating travel in general with pilgrimage, I asked if he felt that in some way he was on a pilgrimage himself and benefitting from the process. Although his response was negative, the question remained with me. This is because I have personally found travel conducive for the development of a spiritual or transpersonal outlook. It has raised my awareness of my personal and social conditioning, connected me to myself and others, and opened me up to new perspectives, through experiences of what various philosophies and religions look and feel like in practice. This is supported through literature across culture, time, and geographical location, from Buddhist hagiography (Conze, 2000), to Hesse's (1998) *Siddhartha*, Homer's (2003) *Odyssey*, to Bunyan's (2008) *Pilgrim's Progress*, that links travelling with passage rituals, development, and a literal outer and metaphorical inner transformational journey 'home'. As such views correspond with my experience, this research employed Moustakas' (1990) qualitative heuristic enquiry alongside transpersonal psychologies' insights and theories as analytical tools to investigate the experience of five participants and explore the relationship between travel and transpersonal growth.

In this paper, transpersonal development is considered *whole person* development based on transpersonal psychology as "an approach to psychology that 1) studies phenomena beyond the ego as context for 2) an integrative/holistic psychology; this provides a framework for 3) understanding and cultivating human transformation" (Hartelius et al., 2007, p. 7). Therefore it encompasses development that includes everything from a strong healthy foundational ego-self to post conventional growth that transcends and includes (Combs, 2013) or integrates a beyond-ego self that exists as a part of larger systems such as communities that may be local, global or universal.

Turner (1973) describes pilgrimage as *separation, limen, and reaggregation*. He argues that the non-centrality of pilgrimage opposes centralised state and church structure and corresponds to liminality in passage rituals. Here pilgrims anticipate sacred experience, connect with their real-self, sacred states motivated by holiness/wholeness, and realise cultural and religious ideals that culminate in "the pilgrim's journey becom[ing]...a paradigm for...behaviour- ethical, political, etc." (Turner, 1973, pp. 213-215). Turner (1966) employs the Latin phrase *communitas* to describe communal development through shared experiences or rites of passage and to differentiate these from common communal living. He defines three types: Firstly, *existential communitas* perceives humanity as unified, unstructured, free and epitomised by genuine relationships that "puts... social structural rules in question...suggests new possibilities...[and]...strains toward universalism and openness" (Turner, 1973, p. 216). Secondly, *normative communitas* where existential communitas becomes structured through societal values and ethical codes, and can take the form of social control. Thirdly, *ideological communitas* that describes cultural models, paradigms and utopias derived from the direct experience of prophets that complex societies embrace to transcend role-playing games.

MacCannell (1999) views tourism as a manifestation of surrogate religion. He suggests that differentiation in modern society leads to tourists engaging in pilgrimage-like quests for identity and *authenticity*. Using Goffman's (1959) notion of front regions where hosts and guests meet and back regions where hosts are themselves, he argues that reality becomes associated with back regions where we can recognise and accept others as they truly are. He proposes that once individuals reach a certain point in their development, where they have attained an understanding regarding their individuality and its relationship to the whole, there is a move towards the qualitative or quality of life. This opposes mere quantitative pursuits that are characterised by an endless search for more, and that at its extreme may be associated with an unbalanced or pathological materialism.

Cohen (2004) categorizes travellers according to risk. *Organized-mass-tourists* take group holidays; *individual-mass-tourists* pre-plan, but travel flexibly and independently; *explorers* evade mass tourism, but don't fully engage with host cultures; and lastly, *drifters* who live alongside their hosts. He describes tourism as "quest of meaning at somebody else's centre" (Cohen, 1979, p. 183) and says when this cannot be found at home, myth arises placing it elsewhere and necessitating archaic pilgrimage. He quotes Eliade (1969) suggesting this can be located through an actual voyage and Rasmussen (1972) describing a spiritual journey into different mental spheres (Cohen, 1979).

Grabum (1983) contrasts socially sanctioned periodic/annual tourism and "arduous, self-testing tourism, paralleling rites of passage...[or]... life crisis rites" (pp. 9-12) transcending societal rites of passage and embodying personal freedom. He argues that tourism is ritualistic and sacred and that travel's liminality leads to flow states and appreciation of deeper meaning that may be religious, secular, or derived from fundamental beliefs connected to deep emotions that can lead to re-entering society in a new life-stage or status. Grabum proposes three predictive patterns: 1) *Discretionary-income* that may exclude poorer economic groups from the experience affluent travel affords. 2) *Cultural-confidence* suggesting that those with a higher socioeconomic status and/or education will have a predilection towards new knowledge and experiences and those of a lower socioeconomic status and/or education will crave familiarity. 3) *Symbolic inversions* where usual meanings, rules and behaviour are suspended or reversed. For example, a movement from cold to warm environment or from rigid daily structure to spontaneity.

Norman (2012) posits "spiritual tourism... characterised by a self-conscious project of spiritual betterment" (p. 20), and "tool in the larger project of the self" (Norman, 2011, pp.4-21). He says spiritual destinations "offer education, achievement, time to work on the self" (Norman, 2011, p. 199), and equates time working on identity and personality with healing, counselling or psychotherapy. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008 as cited in Pearce & Packer, 2013) suggest humans aim to attain character strengths consistent

with well-being and values. Wilson (2011) highlights benefits from nature. For example, “enhance[d]...perceptions of physiological, emotional, psychological and spiritual health” (Brymer et al., 2010, p. 21; cf. Davis, 2004), and transformation through peak or flow experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990).

Literature discussing the negative relationship between travel and transpersonal development contends travel is irresponsible, spreads harmful economic and socio-political systems (Boissevain, 1996; Chatwin, 1989; Urry & Larsen, 2011), that it is environmentally destructive (Mieczkowski, 1995), and can lead to health problems (Beny et al., 2001). For example, Mehta’s (1993) *Karma Cola* describes the negative consequences of the meeting of Eastern philosophy and Western searchers in an exotic milieu of false gurus, abuse, misunderstandings, drugs and delusion, and illustrates how travel and spirituality combined can result in psychopathology. Lastly, Norman and Cusack (2014) suggest travel can lead to spiritual materialism/narcissism where in Martin Buber’s terms tourists “have a ‘I–It’ relationship to the... destination... they consume, rather than an ‘I–Thou’ relationship...[and]... meeting of equals” (para. 14).

Method

Heuristic Inquiry was chosen as a qualitative approach that complements the personal involvement of participants that have directly experienced the phenomena (Moustakas, 1990). It utilises “creative sources of energy and meaning that are often tacit, hidden, or denied” (Moustakas as cited in Hiles, 2001). It is compatible with transpersonal psychology and provided the opportunity to re-examine subject areas I considered myself familiar with through fresh eyes, and improve both my research and personal skills.

Procedure

Moustakas (1990) divides heuristic inquiry into 6 stages. My *initial engagement* involved twenty years of reflection on the dynamics and consequences of travelling on my life, and culminated as the subject of study emerged out of a postgraduate research forum. *Immersion* in the topic grew from reading travel related stories as a teenager to my first trip in 1989, and from 1999 coincided with an increasing experiential and academic interest in spiritual practices and religious psychology. *Incubation* was a stage where ideas were given time to develop subconsciously. The *illumination* stage occurred when previously implicit insights, meaning and new ways of seeing the subject emerged into consciousness and were recorded. *Explication* is the process of describing what has been learnt through *individual depictions* “retain[ing]... language... examples... qualities and themes that encompass the... [individual]... research participant’s experience” (Moustakas 1990, p. 51). An *exemplary depiction* epitomised the group experience, and *composite depiction* “encompass[ed]... core qualities and themes inherent in the experience... [and] ... core meanings of the phenomena” (Moustakas 1990, p. 52). Main

themes were illustrated through a *creative synthesis* describing my own experience. Finally, the research is validated through its meaning to those that read it.

Sampling

There was a selective sampling of participants “according to a preconceived, but reasonable set of criteria” (Sandelowski et al. as cited in Coyne, 1997, p. 302). This was *purposeful* in the sense it aimed to provide “information-rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to...the research” (Patton as cited in Coyne, 1997, p. 624). Criteria for inclusion entailed eloquent adults interested in transpersonal or spiritual development *and* travel, capable of self-reflection, and both able and willing to communicate their experiences. See participant information below (Table 1).

Table 1
Participant information

Name (pseudonym)	Gender & age	Declared ethnicity	Education	Declared travel experience	Occupation
Ronald	Male, 50	White British	‘O’ & ‘A’ Levels, Open University study	Europe, Africa, North/ South/ Central America, Indonesia, South/ South East Asia	Support work for adults with learning disabilities
Jean	Female, 55	White Welsh	MA ‘Certificate in Qualified Social Work’	Europe, Africa, South Asia	Social Work & Sound Healing
Arthur	Male, 28	White British/ New Zealander	GCSE & ‘A’ Levels	Europe, Australasia, North/ Central America, South/ South East Asia	Fitness Health Instructor, Instructor in Holistic Health Practices
Randy	Male, 74	American Christian	BSc. ‘Political Science’, Computing education, BA ‘Psychology’, Diploma ‘Medium psychology’ and currently studying MSc. ‘CSTP’	Europe, North America, South/ North East/ South East Asia	Student
Mstwoflower	Female, 33	British	Foundation Degree Mental Health Studies and Spiritual Counsellor	Europe, Indonesia South/ South East Asia	Local Authority Move On Officer for people with mental health problems

Interview protocol

A semi-structured interview was designed with consistent open-ended questions that enabled participants to express unique insights and experiences that could be easily compared. The design from my personal experience of the dynamics between travel and transpersonal development included questions intended to cover explanatory concepts within transpersonal psychology (Daniels, 2005), and the formative years of the discipline (Hartelius et al., 2007). See Table 2 illustrating how questions were formed in relation to transpersonal psychologies' defining themes, and the explanatory concepts they were considered likely to prompt.

Table 2
Interview design

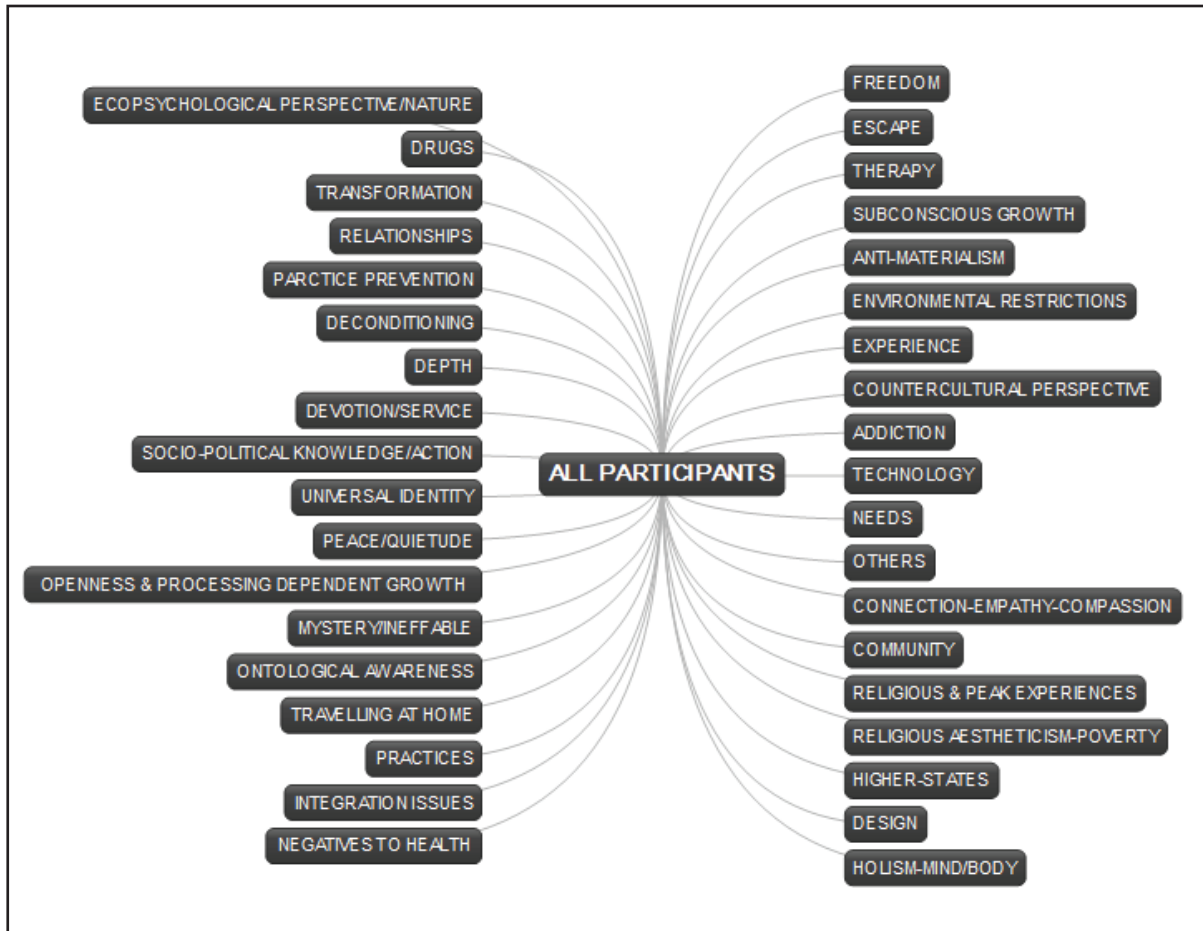
Question	Defining transpersonal theme potentially explored	Potential transpersonal explanatory concepts
7: What motivates you to travel in general?	1) Phenomena beyond the ego 2) An integrative/holistic psychology	Spiritual Emergency, Flow Psychology, Conditioning (e.g. Consensus Trance, Human Needs, Self-actualisation)
10: Could travel be detrimental to transpersonal or spiritual development, for example, could it be escapism, or avoidance of other aspects of life?	2) An integrative/holistic psychology	Spiritual bypassing and escapism, Spiral dynamics, Depth Psychology, Spiritual Emergency, Jungian Shadow, Conditioning (e.g. Consensus Trance, Deconditioning (e.g. practices/nature), Spiritual narcissism, Spiritual materialism, Human needs)
18: Does travel lead to more peak experiences?	1) Phenomena beyond the ego 2) An integrative/holistic psychology 3) Understanding and cultivating human transformation	Spiritual Emergency, Flow Psychology, Conditioning (e.g. Consensus Trance, Human Needs, Self-actualisation, Empathy and Compassion)

Results

The following results derive from the *composite depiction* which was put together as an amalgamation of the *individual depictions*. This illustrates essential themes of the group's experience (See Figure 1) that have been placed into Turner's (1973) categories of *separation*, *limen*, and *reaggregation* for simplification and to place it in a developmental perspective. *Limen*, where most of the travelling occurs, is further subdivided into *connections* and *higher states* to highlight how and why transpersonal development commonly occurred for the participants whilst travelling.

Figure 1

Recurrent themes: Constructed from common themes present in individual depictions



Separation

All participants acknowledged that escapism could motivate travel. However although they escape *from* something they equally escape *to* something. For example, from cold weather to warmth, existential crisis to meaning and community, monotony to adventure, common societal consciousness to a greater potential, transpersonal self and freedom. Simultaneously, they question whether escape is possible because *externally* travelling demands acceptance of the world as it is, and *internally* increased self-awareness makes avoiding dysfunctional mind-states increasingly difficult. Whilst aspects of escapism were considered positive, long-term denial or avoidance was not.

It was understood that travel could disturb sensitive individuals, hinder development, overinflate the ego of closed-minded travellers ignorant of alternative lifestyles and reinforce fears, cultural and racial prejudices. Similarly, travel could lead to poor diets and prevent spiritual practices due to distraction, lack of time, routine, increased tiredness, illness, and inappropriate environment.

Limen

Opposing the notion travel is negative to health and development, individual depictions simultaneously illustrated travel leading to innately present practices and therapies. For example, heightened awareness leads to *concentration meditation* and *insight meditation* that alongside significant/poignant experiences leads to increased natural and nurtured metacognition that resulted in personal and cultural deconditioning and transformed behavioural patterns/schemas. Also more free time leads to increased objectivity, self-awareness and happiness, and participants recognised how *travelling itself* could become a consciously applied transpersonal practice.

Excessive materialism was avoided, and travel and budget backpacking in particular were commended in developmental terms. Relatedly, pervasive technology facilitating constant contact with home was perceived as a threat to deconditioning, cultural immersion, separation, communal/relational aspects of travelling and direct experience. Relatedly, these factors and the participant's perception of mainstream media as being negatively biased later led to withdrawal from technology and mainstream media for some of them at home.

Connections

There is the notion of *coming out of one's shell* - revealing new perspectives and previously unacknowledged traits and shadow aspects which emerge more freely due to environmental triggers and travel's liminality. They are perceived as less fixed identities, both externally by others and internally by themselves. Time for the self appears to result in more to give to others, and an emotional expansion or awareness related to our deeper values. General consensus suggested extended trips correlated to increased immersion, deconditioning, more authentic experiences and assimilation of other cultures and outlooks. All participants valued authentic intense relationships with both locals in the countries they visit and "like-minded" fellow travellers.

Higher States

Travel helps to meet participant's needs through relationships with others and oneself. Even when basic needs are not being met travel results in higher order needs, naturally 'high' flow states, meditative and religious/peak experiences. Relatedly, all participants have taken drugs and travel itself was equated to drug experiences. One participant did not credit his major experiences to drugs, whereas for another it proved pivotal in his ecopsychological outlook. Travel transformed another participant's drug use from recreational to therapeutic use. Drugs were generally viewed positively for development and therapy, but participants were equally aware that as with other things, *including travel*, there was a danger of dependence and addiction.

Participants expressed an acute awareness of socially-constructed reality and/or *normative communitas*. Experiencing themselves in different cultures increased their perception and appreciation of different realities. This expanded their options, and

some participants are aware of more control over their ‘realities’, and they increasingly become conscious creators/co-creators of their experience.

Reaggregation

Travel-initiated development continues on returning home, and prolonged peak-experiences, being-states, and transformed perspectives can lead to integration issues and isolation. A changed self and new knowledge requires assimilation into the home environment and/or life at home needs to be transformed accordingly. Therefore, returning home is experienced positively *and* negatively. The realization that ‘home’ has not changed can require a balanced separation from previous lifestyles *and* deeper understanding and acceptance of others that requires continued growth.

Service and/or devotion to others whilst travelling is explicit in volunteering and implicit in the time participants dedicate to themselves and others, and this again parallels a therapeutic relationship. This appears to continue in participants’ home lives and how they make a living, and this is partially attributed to travel. The majority of transformation of their home life introduces the positive elements of travel into their day-to-day existence. For example, relocating to rural locations, more time in nature, continued practices, studying and research, teaching, therapy, joining and creating likeminded communities, and placing an emphasis on ‘happiness’. They are increasingly open, more compassionate and connected to themselves, others and a larger community, have more meaningful jobs and hobbies, a larger sense of self, and balance their lives with an increased state of being.

Discussion

The results suggest travel can implicitly share similarities with spiritual practices, therapy, and rites of passage, and that this can lead to self-knowledge, meaningful transformation, and authentic transpersonal development. Furthermore, the liminal aspects and ‘being’ states experienced whilst travelling can continue on returning home to aid the process of integration and ‘re-create’ both personal and communal life at home.

Participant motivation mirrored Campbell’s (1973) “call to adventure”, and MacCannell’s (1990) search for identity and authenticity. Typifying “deficiency motivated self-actualisation” (Rowan, 1995, p. 248), they move from boredom and loneliness towards exploration, *existential communitas* and B-Cognition (Maslow, 1968) associated with needs that *transcend and include* (Combs, 2013) self-actualisation and relate to spiritual growth and experiences that societies’ *normative communitas* does not always provide. For example, drugs were predominantly used for development and therapy and often consciously, and one participant illustrated an intuitive understanding of the importance of “set and setting” (Zinberg, 1986) by choosing to take them in inspirational environments. Negative narratives (Beny et al., 2001, Mehta, 1993) were acknowledged but rarely

concurrent with participants' personal experience. If travel is escape it appears to be from an industrialised culture historically critiqued for its psychological negativity, e.g., Durkheim's *anomie*, Weber's *disenchantment* and Marx's *alienation* (Szelényi, 2009). Likewise, there is no evidence of the narcissism Norman and Cusack (2014) mention. The participants recognise negative consequences of travel on individuals, culture and natural environment, and make conscious efforts to offset them, e.g., through relationships, using local transport, and planting trees. Narcissism may apply more to Cohen's (2004) *explorers* than to our participants, whose preference appears to be Buber's meaningful 'I–Thou' relationship. Travel enables the participants to be themselves and seek that same authenticity in others. They pursue cultural immersion and *experiential*, *experimental* and *existential* tourist experiences, and development resembling Cohen's *drifters* in Goffman's back regions (MacCannell, 1999) where they connect to others and previously unknown aspects of themselves.

Travel's liminality and openness appear similar to Washburn's *Dynamic Ground*, which he conceives as "the psychic energy that powers all...undifferentiated potential... the site inhabited by spirit...[and conducive to his]...regression in the service of transcendence" (Lev, 2005, p. 208), and acquaintance with previously unconscious personal and archetypal forces within the self. This correlates with Turner's (1973) and Grabum's (1983) notion that liminality precipitates meaning relating to deeply-seated religious/secular values and deep emotions. The participants appear to connect/reconnect to these through experiencing an emotional-self "closest to the core of our being" (Deikman, 1982, p. 93). They talk of a real or authentic-self, transformed perceptions, being-states and higher-states that could be viewed as re-enchantment, cathartic reawakening or the "re-creation" Grabum describes.

Excessive materialism was avoided and travel, particularly budget backpacking with its temporary lack of social standing, had a propensity to increase self-awareness, appreciation of natural beauty, and experiences of freedom and gratitude that parallels "sacred poverty" (Turner, 1964) and the life of the religious aesthetic/mendicant. Self-imposed 'poverty', withdrawal from possessions, responsibilities, lives/jobs with restrictive identities, and socio-political/socio-economic systems, enabled time for 'higher' personal and/or social needs. Freer of such limitations they enter Turner's (1973) liminal realm where enacting Grabum's (1983) *symbolic-inversions* they become increasingly acquainted with their fundamental nature, emotions and values. Contradicting Grabum (1983), it was suggested that money is not a major determinant of transpersonal development through travel. Moreover, limited finances were perceived positively for encouraging creativity and leading to more authentic, meaningful and transformative experiences. Agreeing with Grabum these derive from and lead to something like cultural-confidence.

Echoing William James (1985) the participants appreciate *experience* for its developmental potential, especially experience of alternative cultures capable of

radically transforming perception. Echoing MacCannell (1999), these experiences should be internally and/or externally *authentic*, which usually meant *challenging* and repeatedly correlated with budget backpacking. From *experience* come *lessons* (deeper understanding) and/or *connection*; and whether travel experiences were deemed developmentally positive or negative seems dependent on analysis that seems circularly related to openness and ability to process *experience*.

Corresponding with Diener and Biswas-Diener's (2008) suggestion, we aim to attain character strengths consistent with well-being, the participants seek and benefit from challenges. This builds a positive foundational ego and combined with lower needs generally being met leads to *abundance motivation* (Maslow, 1968), and conforms nicely to Engler's (1993) notion of *becoming somebody to become nobody* and the necessity of a strong and psychologically healthy ego on which the spiritual self can grow and thrive. This mixture of challenge and nurture parallels therapy and appears ideal for transpersonal development because personal development is inherent. For example, they all mention India in relation to transformation through challenges and raised metacognition, but also a cathartic-emotional opening consistent with its nurturing culture (Welwood, 1999). Here they process the past in a more fluid, objective, mind-state encouraged by an environment created by themselves, like-minded travellers, by nature (Wilson, 2011), and a host culture that acts like a *therapeutic holding container*. Additionally religious imagery/archetypes which are commonplace in such environments conceivably convey valuable conscious and subconscious meaning to travellers without the observer bias and negative associations of their native *normative communitas*, and lead to recognition of their universally significant values and associated emotional knowledge in the way Turner (1973) and Grabum (1983) suggest. This appears related to Wilber's "centaur stage" that encourages integration of lost and unknown aspects of self and healing (Rowan, 1995, pp. 147-150), and depends on one's ability to observe oneself in an open and objective manner opposed to the avoidance that the participants highlighted as negative. There are indications that travelling could relate to a subconscious and/or not fully articulated desire for growth beyond *consensus trance* (Tart, 1995) or limited societally programmed common consciousness, and that it helps to increasingly bring these issues into awareness. Much of the participants' development, self-knowledge and holistic perception derives from experiencing and understanding internal and external differences and extremes that provide comparison and renewed perspective. For example, experimentation with Grabum's (1983) *symbolic-inversions* such as easy and challenging travelling, internal-self and external-other focus, movement and stillness.

The participants appear to be MacCannell's (1999) modern pilgrims experiencing Eliade's (1969) actual voyage and Rasmussen's (1972) mental journeying, on Cohen's (1979) "quest of meaning at somebody else's centre" (p. 183) or Turner's (1973) *Center Out There*. But equally through raised awareness and self-knowledge they appear headed toward their own internal '*Centre In There*', what Deikman (1982) calls the

observing-self, utilized in Western psychotherapy and whose emergence leads to “emotions, thoughts, and sensations... becom[ing]... less compelling, less dictatorial and unquestioned” (p. 96), and that clearly relates to religious-spiritual free will. They typify Norman’s (2011) spiritual tourists working on a “*larger project of the self*” (p. 4), but what that self is appears complex. Growth comes from ego development, but the main aspect previously missing or not fully realized was their larger-self connected to themselves, others and environment. Travel helps rectify this, for example, through the naturally ‘high’ flow-states, meditative and religious/peak experiences traditionally explored by transpersonal psychology (e.g. James, 1985; Maslow, 1968, 1994) and intrinsic to developing a transpersonal outlook - and for the participants travelling could equally be described as a ‘project of the larger self’.

They experience Turner’s *existential communitas* (1973) and increased openness leading to Buber’s ‘I-thou’ relationships that seems comparable to humanistic client-centred therapy (Rogers, 1966). *Connection* is seen as central to transpersonal development, and travel connects them to their *real-self*, community, and humanity in general. Connection as increased empathy derived from first-hand experience, awareness of one’s own emotions and emotional responses in others tends to lead to a paradoxical appreciation of difference and a universal identity. Relatedly, nature is significant in the participant’s development. Affirming Wilson (2011) it plays a role in creating a confident ego-self through challenges, ego-transcendence through peak experiences, a sense of connection, and transformed perception.

The participants appear countercultural. For example, their criticism of consensus-trance, technology, mainstream politics, neo-liberal economics, mainstream media, materially biased culture, preference for spiritual practices, personal experience over organised religion’s *truth by authority*, their deep ecological leanings, interest in alternative healing modalities, and psychotherapeutic/spiritual drug use. Likewise, their socio-political/socio-economic awareness gained from travel leads to direct action, e.g., tree planting, and local/global community activism.

Therefore, the participants’ development appears paradoxically countercultural and simultaneously wholly compatible with the essence of both traditional religious and modern secular cultural values. Cohen’s (1979) quest for centre manifesting as myth elsewhere when no longer accessible at home clearly mirrors the countercultural notion of ‘finding yourself’ whilst travelling. Likewise, how this acts as surrogate religion as MacCannell (1999) suggests, albeit in a more functional, non-sectarian manner. For example, we see traditional pilgrimage-like journeys to religious sites and familiarisation with texts and/or myth to which they lend a more metaphorical interpretation mingling with day-to-day experiences leading to ‘lessons’ and an “education of the emotions” (Wilson, 1991) associated with both traditional religion and psychotherapy. The universal values and identity realised/actualised in the self, parallel as Turner (1973) says cultural models deriving from mystical experience and

leading to both secular values that manifest from the Western-Enlightenment such as *Liberty-Equality-Fraternity* and J.S. Mill's (2006) *Harm Principle*, that themselves mirror religion's Golden Rule. Here we gain insight into Turner's suggestion that traveller's journeys become simultaneously more sacralised and more secular as she or he moves away from home, and from learnt ego-self to actualised *real-self*. The irony being 'escaping' culture through travel could lead to becoming or realising that you've become or always were the embodied essence of that culture.

With the culturally conditioned veil lifted, transformation temporarily takes place in liminal peak experiences and being-states paralleling Turner's (1973) "cultural domain...rich in cosmological meaning...and...affirm[ing]...another order of things, stressing generic rather than particularistic relationships" (pp. 213-214). We see this in the participants' recognition of underlying universal motivations and emotions that transcend race and culture, and appreciation of a profound natural-supernatural order. Yet this is interwoven with the particular relationships they all value, benefit and learn from, and in this balancing of the universal and personal you can see how the "journey becomes...paradigm[atic]...for other kinds of behaviour- ethical, political, etc." (Turner, 1973, p. 215).

The biggest danger is perhaps addiction to being or B-cognition (Maslow, 1968), and for example, the negative perception of technology could be interpreted as opposing worldly integration and embodiment. However, such discernment corresponds with Wood et al. (2016) research highlighting social media's negative effect on spiritual wellbeing and the importance Campbell (1973) places on separation during rites of passage. Also, as our participants apply astute discernment, maintain responsible jobs, raise families and take part in socially productive activities, they do not appear to be left unmotivated by higher states associated with travel or spiritual development. Rather, they seem to partake in world-affirming action as advocated by Huxley (1970) and Ferrer (2008).

Having experienced extreme psychophysiological stimulation, being-states and freedom from cultural and personal schemas, integrating such states relates to what Welwood (1999) terms the difference between "realization and embodiment" and living up to transpersonal ideals. However, whilst travellers have some separation from day-to-day life, as already noted, unless on retreat they remain in the world and attempting to embody realizations on the go. Likewise, the participants' recollections of development through poor judgement that exposes their dark shadow (Jung, 1996), their need for challenges, and integration issues marks them out as Grabum's (1983) "self-testing" tourists that transcend societal rites of passage, and indicates a committed desire for authentic change rather than using travel as a form of "spiritual bypassing" (Welwood, 2002).

Welwood (1999) highlights dangers of avoiding personal and relationship issues, and problems seem to occur because the participants desire positive change mirroring their own change in their home environment. Here as Grabum (1983) suggests the

participants re-enter society in a new life-stage/status, and this requires integration with an unchanged environment that still perceives them as unchanged, and is likely to trigger their most deeply embedded behavioural schemas. Despite these challenges when integration fails, there is clearly an attempt to understand why, e.g., through recognition of different cultural ontologies or ‘realities’, comprehension of cultural conditioning, and effort to recognise people, including themselves, as they really are, as in Goffman’s “back regions” (MacCannell, 1999) at home. It is their awareness of cultural conditioning, some of which derives from travelling, that also leads them into examining their own behavioural patterns, both away when they can see them clearer and at home when prone to the challenges discussed. Furthermore, integration is also dependent on environment and it seems probable that the participants will deeply understand Krishnamurti’s (n.d.) statement: “It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society”; and balancing this with integration seems to be a process that necessitates further transpersonal development.

In travelling *and* returning we see MacCannell’s (1999) differentiation and move to the qualitative. For example, returning home, employment becomes more like a ‘way-of-life’ or Buddhist right-livelihood. They play and experiment more, and experience more being-states. Although it is not clear whether all participants anticipated Turner’s (1973) sacred experience, it was sought by some and certainly found by all to some extent. Turner’s (1973) stages approximate to the participants’ experience, but returning does not seem to end the liminal stage - this seems to be integrated into the lives of the participants in different ways, e.g., through practice, education, or therapeutic drug experimentation. It appears they bring *liminality* and *existential communitas* home or recreate it in different ways and therefore invigorate and transform society from within as a countercultural or deeper (more subconscious) cultural movement. This could be interpreted as an example of Turner’s (1973) complex society embracing *existential communitas*, but the integration difficulties that our participants mention suggest that the type of transformation that we arguably need in our interconnected globalized world is equally feared.

Further Research

Firstly, as all participants are ‘Western’ it would be interesting to see if ‘spiritual-tourists’ (Norman, 2011) from other places have different motivations deriving from different cultural experiences and needs. Secondly, as this research suggests that travel can parallel spiritual practice for certain people, it would benefit from more participants to reinforce these findings. Thirdly, it may be interesting to examine how travel for different purposes may lead to different effects, be they intentional or unintentional. Finally, more focus on the integration/return process and use of entheogens for development may prove insightful.

Conclusion

This research suggests that for people who are open to experience and capable of processing that experience, travel, through a search for authenticity and transcendence

of the known self and outer world can implicitly share similarities with spiritual practices, therapy, and rites of passage. This can lead to self-knowledge, meaningful transformation, and authentic transpersonal development. Furthermore, the liminal aspect of travel can continue on returning home to aid the process of integration and 're-create' both personal and communal life at home.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on the final dissertation research project undertaken by the author and supervised by Dr. Jessica Bockler. It was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MSc programme in Professional Development: Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. The programme was delivered by Alef Trust in collaboration with the Professional Development Foundation. The degree was quality assured and accredited by Middlesex University, UK.

References

- Beny, A., Paz, A., & Potasman, I. (2001). Psychiatric problems in returning travelers: Features and associations. *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 8 (5), 243-246. <https://doi.org/10.2310/7060.2001.24019>
- Boissevain, J. (ed.). (1996). *Coping with tourists: European reactions to mass tourism*. Berghahn.
- Brymer, E., Cuddihy, T. F., & Sharma-Brymer, V. (2010). The role of nature-based experiences in the development and maintenance of wellness. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport & Physical Education*, 1(2), 21-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18377122.2010.9730328>
- Bunyan, J. (2008). *Pilgrim's Progress*. Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, J. (1973). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton University Press.
- Chatwin, B. (1989). A lament for Afghanistan. In *What Am I Doing Here*. Vintage Classics.
- Cohen, E. (1979). A phenomenology of tourist experiences. *Sociology*, 13 (2), 179-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003803857901300203>
- Cohen, E. (2004). Who is a tourist? In J. Jafari (Ed.), *Contemporary tourism: Diversity and change* (pp.17-36). Elsevier. (Original article published 1974).
- Combs, A., (2013). Transcend and include: Ken Wilber's contribution to transpersonal psychology. In H.L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.) *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* (pp. 166-186). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Conze, E. (2000). Buddhist myth. In *Buddhist scriptures*. Penguin Classics.
- Coyne, I. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(3), 623-630. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.t01-25-00999.x>
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper Row.
- Daniels, M. (2005). *Shadow, Self, Spirit: Essays in transpersonal psychology*. Imprint Academic.

- Davis, J. (2004). *Psychological benefits of nature experiences: an outline of research and theory*. https://www.wildernessguidescouncil.org/sites/default/files/psychological_benefits_of_nature_experiences.pdf
- Deikman, A. J. (1982). *The Observing Self: Mysticism and psychotherapy*. Beacon Press.
- Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2008). *Happiness: Unlocking the mysteries of psychological wealth*. Blackwell.
- Eliade, M. (1969). *The quest: History and meaning in religion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Engler, J. H. (1993). Becoming somebody and nobody: Psychoanalysis and Buddhism. In R. Walsh & F. Vaughan (Eds.) *Paths beyond ego: The transpersonal vision* (pp. 118-121). Penguin Putnam Inc.
- Ferrer, J.N. (2008). What does it mean to live a fully embodied spiritual life? *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 27(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2008.27.1.1>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Grabum, N. H. H. (1983). The anthropology of tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10, 9-33.
- Hartelius, G., Caplan, M., & Rardin, M. A. (2007). Transpersonal psychology: Defining the past, divining the future. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 35(2), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873260701274017>
- Hesse, H. (1998). *Siddhartha*. Picador.
- Hiles, D. (2001). *Heuristic Inquiry and Transpersonal Research*. Paper presented to CCPE, London - October, 2001. <http://www.psy.dmu.ac.uk/drhiles/HIpaper.htm>
- Homer (2003). *The Odyssey*, Penguin Classics.
- Huxley, A. (1970). *The Perennial Philosophy*. Harper and Row.
- James, W. (1985). *The varieties of religious experience*. Penguin Classics.
- Jung, C. G. (1996). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Routledge.
- Krishnamurti, J. (n.d.). https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/jiddu_krishnamurti_107856
- Lev, S. (2005). Regression in the service of transcendence: Reading Michael Washburn. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 4 (1), 207-210. <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol4/iss1/23>
- MacCannell, D. (1999). *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*. University of California Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Towards a psychology of being*, (3rd ed.). Wiley and Sons.
- Maslow, A.H. (1994). *The farther reaches of human nature*. Arkana.
- Mehta, G. (1983). *Karma Cola*. Penguin Books India.
- Mieczkowski, Z. (1995). *Environmental issues of tourism and recreation*. University Press of America.
- Mill, J.S. (2006). *On liberty and the subjection of women*. Penguin Classics.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Sage.
- Norman, A. (2011). *Spiritual tourism: Travel and religious practice in Western society*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Norman, A. (2012). The varieties of the spiritual tourist experience, *Literature & Aesthetics*, 22(1), 20-37. <http://openjournals.library.usyd.edu.au/index.php/LA/article/view/7573/7905>
- Norman, A., & Cusack, C.M. (2014). Religion, pilgrimage, and tourism: An introduction. In A. Norman & C. M. Cusack (Eds.), *Religion, Pilgrimage, and Tourism*. Taylor & Francis.
- Pearce, P.L., & Packer, J. (2013). Minds on the move: New links from psychology to tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 40, 386-411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.10.002>

- Rasmussen, K. (1972). A Shaman's Journey to the Sea Spirit. In W. A. Lessa & E.Z. Vogt (eds), *Reader in Comparative Religion* (pp. 388-391). Harper & Row.
- Rogers, C. R. (1966). Client-centered therapy. In S. Arieti (Ed.), *American Handbook of Psychiatry* (Vol. 3, pp.183-200). Basic Books.
- Rowan, J. (1995). *Ordinary ecstasy: Humanistic psychology in action*. Routledge.
- Tart, C. (1995). *Enlightenment, altered states and endarkment*. Beyond the Brain conference.
- Turner, V.W. (1964). Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites de passage. In *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society, Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion* (pp.4-20). <http://www2.fiu.edu/~ereserve/010010095-1.pdf>
- Turner, V. (1966). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. (1973). The Center out There: Pilgrim's goal. *History of Religions*, 12(3), 191-230. <https://doi.org/10.1086/462677>
- Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. Sage.
- Welwood, J. (1999). Realization and embodiment: Psychological work in the service of spiritual development. *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 18 (2), 169-186. <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies/vol18/iss2/11/>
- Welwood, J. (2002). *Toward a psychology of awakening: Buddhism, psychotherapy, and the path of personal and spiritual transformation*. Shambhala Publications.
- Wilson, B. (1991). *The changing functions of religion: Toleration and cohesion in the secularised society*. The Institute of Oriental Philosophy European Centre.
- Wilson, M. (2011). Encounters with nature as a path of self-realisation: A meaning-making framework. *Journal of Transpersonal Research*, 3(1), 11-29.
- Wood, M., Center, H., & Parenteau, S.C. (2016). Social media addiction and psychological adjustment: religiosity and spirituality in the age of social media. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 19 (9), 972-983. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2017.1300791>
- Zinberg, N. (1986). *Drug, set, and setting: The basis for controlled intoxicant use*. Yale University Press.

About the Author

John Thompson (BA Hons, BSc Hons, and MSc) is lifelong learner with a passion for understanding what makes us human. His main interests are in the humanities, sociology and in particular the farther reaches of our nature explored by religion, spirituality and transpersonal psychology. He enjoys travelling, the natural world, gardening, walking, playing the guitar, supporting Manchester City, slowly learning Welsh and Visayan, and according to his children - beer.



Copyright © 2020 Thompson. This is an open-access article licensed and distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.