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## **Personal identity (de)formation among lifestyle travellers: A double-edged sword?**

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This article explores the personal identity work of lifestyle travellers – individuals for whom extended leisure travel is a preferred lifestyle that they return to repeatedly. Qualitative findings from in-depth semi-structured interviews with lifestyle travellers in northern India and southern Thailand are interpreted in light of theories on identity formation in late modernity that position identity as problematic. It is suggested that extended leisure travel can provide exposure to varied cultural praxes that may contribute to a sense of social saturation. Whilst a minority of the respondents embraced a saturation of personal identity in the subjective formation of a cosmopolitan cultural identity, several of the respondents were paradoxically left with more identity questions than answers as the result of their travels.

Keywords: identity work; leisure travel; lifestyle; cosmopolitanism; identity confusion

### **Introduction**

This article examines the personal identity work of ‘lifestyle travellers’, individuals for whom extended leisure travel is a preferred way of life that the individual returns to repeatedly. Encounters with the ‘Other’, and tourism in general, have been described as affording opportunities for individuals to engage in the modern project of (re)forming personal identities (Desforges, 2000; Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Neumann, 1992). Identities are generally described as temporary points of attachment to subject positions constructed through discursive practices (Hall, 1996). Based on the recognition of what one is not in relation to the ‘Other’, identities are dialogically constructed through difference (Appiah, 1994; Hall, 1996; Walseth, 2006). Recognising the socially constructed status of identities, Walseth (2006) employed the term ‘identity work’ to emphasise that identities are dynamic, under challenge and contextualised as opposed to essentialist or natural (Hughes, 1993).

Whilst Breathnach (2006) held that identities are neither wholly individual nor collective, several researchers have noted a divide between personal (individual) and social (collective) identities (e.g., Appiah, 1994; Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Walseth, 2006). Collinson and Hockey (2007, p. 383) pointed out that whereas social identities are ‘those we attribute or impute to others, situating them as social objects... personal identities refer to the meanings we attribute to the self.’ Jenkins (1996, p. 29) defined self as ‘each individual’s reflective sense of her or his own particular identity.’ Personal identity can thus be understood as a sum of reflections on the subjective experience of embodied self (Cote &

Levine, 2002). As this article is concerned with the personal identity work of lifestyle travellers, the focus in this context is on the human capacity to put 'ourselves at a distance from our own being' and to 'turn a kind of mirror' on our body, social interactions and consciousness (Seigel, 2005, p. 5). Though Foucault (1988) deconstructed self-reflection as a historically and linguistically constructed technology, McAdams (1997, p. 60) nonetheless maintained that most modern Western individuals still seek a personal identity that reflects unity and purpose, a cultural expectation that one's personal identity reflects 'a patterned and purposeful integration of the me.'

It has been noted that a breakdown of traditional identity roles in late modernity has made personal identity formation especially important in the context of adopted post-traditional lifestyles (Giddens, 1991). Lifestyle travel, which frequently takes the form of backpacking (Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002) and typically includes extended voluntary sojourns amongst other cultures, exists within a post-traditional context through which individuals may be exposed to an array of cultural praxes. Thus, issues of personal identity may be particularly relevant for individuals who travel as a lifestyle choice.

It is important, however, to recognise that personal identity work is not the sole preserve of lifestyle travellers, or even other types of backpackers. Issues of personal identity formation have been located within the wider context of tourism (Crompton, 1979; Desforges, 2000), where, for example, it has been suggested that tourist sites 'are places where people find themselves working towards forms of self-realization and meaning, attempting to fill experiential vacancies that run through contemporary life' (Neumann, 1992, p. 177). Indeed, such a phenomenon is by no means limited to the contextual dimensions of tourism, as attempts to resolve issues of personal identity are pervasive in modern societies (Baumeister, 1986; McAdams, 1997). But whilst questions of personal identity may be relatively commonplace in late modernity (Giddens, 1991), and can be explored through the intentions of various categories of tourists, amongst others, the literature on backpackers has emphasised 'the increasing importance of identity and perpetuation of self-narratives in backpacker travel' (Richards & Wilson, 2004, p. 48). The importance of personal identity work to 'independent travellers on the global "shoestring" trails' has been summarised by Davidson (2005, p. 31), who noted that research on these individuals is united by a desire to understand how they 'incorporate their travelling experiences into their own conception of self-identity.'

Rather than attempting to privilege the claims of lifestyle travellers over tourists of similar intentions, however, this article aims to provide a fuller understanding of identity work undertaken amongst individuals who voluntarily travel as a way of life. Although it is widely accepted that a leisure travel context can foment personal identity work (Desforges, 2000; Neumann, 1992; Noy, 2004), there is little empirical evidence as to whether individual subjects do experience a coherent personal identity through extended leisure travel. Prolonged exposure to a variety of cultures and ways of living might in fact serve in the opposite manner, resulting in a less secure personal identity for an individual (Gergen, 1991). This article explores the personal identity work undertaken by 25 lifestyle travellers interviewed by the author in northern India and southern Thailand from July through September 2007. It interprets a spectrum of personal identity perceptions described by the lifestyle travellers, who had largely hoped to derive a more secure personal identity whilst encountering alternative ways of life in a leisure travel context. By locating the voices of the lifestyle travellers through the use of theories on identity (de)formation in late modernity, this article questions the prospect of subjectively finding oneself through travel.

## **Identity (de)formation in late modernity**

Personal identity in late modernity has become a reflexive project that is interpreted or understood in terms of one's biography or capacity to maintain a particular narrative or story about oneself (Giddens, 1991). In this sense, personal identity can be seen as serving as a sense-making device (Kuentzel, 2000). The need to link disparate experiences into a coherent individual life narrative has become increasingly important in late modernity (Richards & Wilson, 2006). This has been attributed to identities being increasingly fragmented and fractured as they are 'multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall, 1996, p. 4; Lanfant, 1995). Constructing and maintaining a stable personal identity has become an ongoing issue for many individuals in late modern Western society largely due to changes in social organisation wherein choice has increasingly replaced obligation or tradition (Bauman, 1996; Cote & Levine, 2002; Lanfant, 1995).

Whilst identity is still largely constituted by broader societal forces such as gender, nationality, class, race and ethnicity, a growing 'openness' in social life for negotiating matters of personal meaning has coincided with new 'socialising technologies', such as Internet, television, air travel, radio and telephone that have radically changed human relationships (Cote & Levine, 2002; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1990). Local face-to-face interactions have become rarer, while globalisation, which has been marked by these new technologies, has increasingly exposed individuals to a new range of persons, forms of relationships, options and opportunities for constructing identities (Gergen, 1991). Resultantly, Gergen (1991) observed that the pluralisation of life choices offered through new socialising technologies in late modernity has led many late modern individuals to a state described as 'social saturation.' Social saturation suggests a cacophony of voices and options as 'for everything we "know to be true" about ourselves, other voices respond with doubt and even derision' (Gergen, 1991, p. 6). Consequently, whilst some individuals in late modernity might at times experience a coherent or ordered personal identity, others 'may lack a consistent feeling of biographical continuity' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53).

The feeling of biographical inconsistency fomented through social saturation has been described as the condition of 'multiphrenia', which refers to 'the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments' (Gergen, 1991, p. 73). Upon initial inspection, multiphrenia bears resemblance to Erikson's (1968) description of an 'identity crisis', wherein an individual may experience a subjective sense of identity confusion that is characterised by behavioural disarray (Cote & Levine, 2002). According to Erikson (1968), an identity crisis, characterised as a state of 'psychological limbo', typically takes place in modern Western societies when an adolescent's childhood identity is no longer experienced as suitable, but a new adult identity has not yet been established. However, where multiphrenia differs from an identity crisis is that the former need not be taken as a deficit, as connoted by terms such as 'confusion' or 'crisis', nor be linked to a particular 'developmental stage' in life. Although multiphrenia has been used to explain the stressful situations of individuals who unsuccessfully seek a coherent story of personal identity, for others, the experience of multiphrenia can be 'suffused with a sense of expansiveness and adventure' (Gergen, 1991, p. 74).

Multiphrenia is linked to the conditions of globalisation, wherein the notion of 'deterritorialisation', as a blurring of the boundary between 'home' and 'away' and a weakening of the connection between 'culture' and 'place', has been said to be the product of people increasingly dividing their attention, and even presence, between multiple places (D'Andrea, 2007; Hannerz, 2002). D'Andrea (2007, pp. 215-216) hypothesised that 'under growing conditions of globalization marked by processes of hypermobility, digitalization and

multiculturalism, the phenomenon of psychic deterritorialization will become more socially pervasive, variously affecting other segments that become exposed to such global pressures.’ In his work on the intersections of mobilities and identities, D’Andrea (2006, 2007) evidenced the conceptual claim that mobility can potentially ‘derail’ personal identity through his empirical study of migrant expatriates, termed ‘global nomads’.

A few classical studies from consular psychiatry concerning ‘mad travellers’ have also examined the potentially disruptive force of ‘pathological tourism’ in exotic locales on conceptions of personal identity (Airault, 2000; Hacking, 1998, p. 27). Through work as a psychiatrist for the French consulate in India in the 1990s, Airault (2000) suggested that travellers in India can become psychically ‘imbalanced’ as a result of their trip, an observation corroborated by Mehta (1979) in her cutting Indian commentary on perceptions of Western travellers. Yet, unlike D’Andrea’s work, studies from consular psychiatry that position identity confusion as a deficit or disease can be seen, like Erikson’s (1968) thesis on identity crisis, as attempts by the state to streamline or regulate behaviour into dominant discourses on ‘normality’.

Whilst the experience of identity confusion or multiphrenia may well be disconcerting for some, the welcoming of a multiphrenic condition is related to postmodernity, for which some individuals, such as Urry’s (2002) ‘post-tourist’, may slide from image to image and eschew substance, with identities performed on the ‘whim of the moment’ (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 26). On the other hand, the embracement of multiphrenia by modern individuals, who may still seek substance and a centre, can be linked to the ideal of ‘cosmopolitanism’, which as a perspective or mode of managing meaning has been described as identity formation through selective appropriation from the world’s cultural forms (Hannerz, 1990, 2002).

Mass media, Internet use and transnational friendship networks, in combination with travel, have also been cited as contributing factors to deterritorialisation, with a perspective of cosmopolitanism suggested as a possible outcome (Hannerz, 2002; Phillips & Smith, 2008). Giddens (1991, p. 190) summarised the ideal of identity formation via a cosmopolitan cultural figure:

A person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative. Thus a cosmopolitan person is one precisely who draws strength from being at home in a variety of contexts.

Hence, it is possible that modern individuals seeking to experience a coherent personal identity in conditions of social saturation may respond along a spectrum including identity confusion through to an embracement of multiple cultural forms, as in the ideal of cosmopolitanism.

Returning to the context of lifestyle travellers, extended sojourns within other cultures offer exposure to other ways of living and prospective physical distancing from one’s own culture. Moreover, Giddens (1991, p. 81) suggested that ‘the more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking.’ Thus, the pluralisation of life choices characteristic of social saturation may be particularly relevant in influencing personal identity formation amongst lifestyle travellers. Consequently, this article now turns to the individual journeys of the study’s lifestyle travellers, in an effort to interpret their own perceptions of personal identity work in a leisure travel context.

## **Study method**

The author, who has several years of lifestyle travel experience himself, undertook in-depth semi-structured interviews with 25 lifestyle travellers in northern India and southern Thailand

from July through September 2007. The inclusion criteria for lifestyle travellers was a fluid combination in which each respondent self-defined travel as her/his lifestyle and had been on multiple trips of approximately six months or more. The criterion of multiple trips of roughly six months or more provided a temporal starting point, as in the end the majority of the interviewees had taken several trips in the broad range of six months to one year, with three of the respondents having each travelled the longest at approximately 17 years.

Although lifestyle travellers are spread through many areas of the world, northern India and southern Thailand afforded fieldwork sites with established gathering points for conveniently contacting lifestyle travellers. The selection of northern India and southern Thailand was based on the author's personal experiences of meeting a high number of lifestyle travellers in popular traveller gathering points in these countries on previous trips, as well as on literature that has represented India and Thailand as attractive destinations for extended travel (Davidson, 2005; Richards & Wilson, 2003; Westerhausen, 2002). Specifically, lifestyle travellers were accessed in the towns of Rishikesh, Manali, McLeod Ganj and Leh in northern India and on the islands of Koh Phangan and Koh Tao in southern Thailand.

The author entered the field as both a researcher and a 'traveller.' He attempted to integrate himself with other travellers by dressing like them, socialising with them and moving through daily routines in the same networks of eating facilities and accommodation, a technique also used by Davidson (2005), Riley (1988) and Sørensen (2003) in their studies of backpackers and travellers. Lifestyle travellers were identified through casual conversations with backpackers in which introductory dialogues tended to turn to how long each person intended to travel in the respective country. Through the course of numerous conversations, the author periodically established he was speaking to a lifestyle traveller or was afterwards introduced to one. The interviews were digitally recorded and typically took place in the same settings the individuals had originally been encountered, often over a meal or drink. The interviews were mainly conversational and focused on the tourism biographies of the participants, their reasons for travel as a lifestyle and whether the meaning(s) they assigned to travel had changed over time.

The majority of the respondents were travelling alone and were from a range of 13 nationalities with English, Australians, Israelis and Canadians the most commonly represented. There were 11 females and 14 males with their highest education levels achieved spread from high school dropout to Masters Degree holders. The interviewees' ages ranged from 23 to 50 with an average age of 30. Following transcription, the empirical material was interpreted using a thematic analysis approach comprised of searching for emergent themes (Patton, 2002; Veal, 2006). From these themes insights and subsequent interpretations as to the meanings the lifestyle travellers attributed to personal identity work in their travels were derived (Patton, 2002).

### **Contextual dimensions of the lifestyle travellers**

Several studies focused on backpackers have identified a small number of individuals, or 'travellers', as they prefer to call themselves instead of 'tourists' or 'backpackers' (O'Reilly, 2005; Welk, 2004), who return to extended travel serially, and as such, treat travel like a career or way of life (Riley, 1988; Uriely et al., 2002; Westerhausen, 2002). As such, lifestyle travellers are different from backpackers, as the latter have traditionally been described as perceiving their travels as a self-imposed rite-of-passage or time-out from their 'normal' life path (Graburn, 1983; Maoz, 2007). The lifestyle travellers in this study empirically illustrate the practice of leisure travel as an ongoing way of life, with three of the respondents having travelled the longest at roughly 17 years. On average, however, the

respondents had taken multiple trips in the range of six months to one year, with the majority having totalled around four years of on and off lifestyle travel. The lifestyle travellers represented a highly mobile, mainly white and Western profile, albeit from an array of socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of these individuals engaged in lifestyle travel cyclically, as financial restraints required them to return to their home societies periodically in order to work and save money before once again travelling. Others combined leisure travel with casual work whilst 'on the road', blurring distinctions between traditional work/leisure divides.

When travelling, the lifestyle travellers navigated an infrastructure catering primarily to backpacker tourists, and when encountered in northern India and southern Thailand, were often to be found eating, drinking and socialising with other tourists. They also participated in a range of activities (often commercialised) such as yoga, meditation, scuba diving and beach volleyball, which provided further contexts for social interaction, and in some instances, opportunities to challenge previous perceived notions of personal identity. Encounters with the local culture were frequently of a commercial nature, placing into question the degree to which the lifestyle travellers actually engaged with the cultural praxes of 'Others' whilst in the contact zones 'where disparate cultures [might] meet, clash, and grapple with each other' (Pratt, 2008, p. 7). Indeed, it is arguable that although many of the lifestyle travellers sought to live as 'locals', their participation was often imaginary and instead largely voyeuristic. The shared culture they represented was one continually (re)produced by the travellers themselves, a hybridisation of nationalities tied together through discourses of Romanticism, Orientalism (Said, 1978) and 1960s counterculture.

Many of the lifestyle travellers felt that escapism played a significant role in why they had first chosen to go travelling, and for some, why they continued to travel. Their home societies were often depicted as anomic and restrictive, lacking feelings of freedom which they claimed travel provided. Often the lifestyle travellers came from previous lifestyles that they described as materialistic and production-oriented, with travel represented as a path away from Western consumerism. Set within this Romantic discourse, rather than being a liminoid bubble (Turner, 1977) from which the memories of their trip faded away, the lifestyle travellers regularly experienced culture shock upon returning 'home', a distressful cultural clash in which they found that their adjusted cultural values transcended a holiday/home boundary and increasingly conflicted with their compatriots. In turn, weakening nationalism helped to fuel longing for and repeated returns to the cultural milieu of a travel lifestyle.

## **Study findings**

Issues relating to personal identity work were commonly voiced by the lifestyle travellers, which suggested that lifestyle travel was being used by these individuals as a vehicle in constructing their personal identities. There was, however, substantial variation as to whether the lifestyle travellers felt that their travels were resulting in more coherent personal identities. As it was relatively rare among the respondents to claim that a firm personal identity had been achieved, the findings instead pointed towards experiences of identity as dynamic and fractured (Walseth, 2006). For many, personal identity was thus viewed as processual and developmental. Albeit a few of the respondents did believe that they had arrived at a firm sense of 'who they are' as a result of travel, several of the lifestyle travellers instead voiced feelings of identity confusion that had arisen whilst travelling, including individuals who described having felt metaphorically lost.

### *Personal identity as processual and developmental*

Several of the lifestyle travellers narrated their personal identities through a developmental lens in which identity was perceived as processual. Thomas (English, 29) located both identities and broader social processes as dynamic: 'Everything is changing constantly, as are you. So the guy who I am today isn't necessarily the guy I am tomorrow.' Further to a processual dimension, personal identities were typically viewed as developmental with their negotiation often placed in terms of maturation. As Max (English, 40) noted: 'It's the whole growing as a person thing, isn't it? I travelled at a reasonably young age, even at twenty-three; I was still sort of a young adult. I was still developing ideas I suppose.'

For others, rather than the negotiation of identities ceasing upon becoming an 'adult', personal identity was approached as a construct to be developed throughout one's lifespan. Brendon (Irish, 26) highlighted how developing a coherent personal identity can function as an ideal to be pursued indefinitely:

You can either work at it and say that I've reached this point, this is where I'm going, I'm here, or you can have it as a kind of ideal, to stay in dynamic movement... so you're within this constant state of becoming, becoming, becoming.

It should be noted that such developmental approaches tend to frame identity as monological, as the socially positioning power of discourse is largely ignored (Appiah, 1994). In tension with views of identity as developmental and processual, a few of the lifestyle travellers attested to having ultimately arrived at a secure sense of personal identity through the course of their travels.

### *A firmer sense of personal identity*

As an example of a lifestyle traveller who believed she had achieved a secure personal identity through leisure travel, Julie (German, 27) commented: 'I found myself during the travelling. That's for sure. I know now what I want, what is important for me, what I don't need.' Also, among those who experienced a more coherent personal identity was Tamara (Canadian/Indian, 34), an interviewee who had been travelling for the last 17 years who remarked:

I'm quite certain that I would not have been able to arrive at the solid sense of self that I feel now inside and out without having travelled. Because travelling gives you freedom of space and time to even meet the self, right, because you're completely out of anything familiar.

For Tamara, space and time away from the familiar became theoretically replaced by space and time with the Other through her travels.

Another respondent, Alec (Scottish, 34) noted how extended contact with the Other might allow for parts of different cultures to be used in constituting one's personal identity:

You just become broader, you learn about so many things. Every culture on the planet has something rich and diverse to offer, so you pick up little bits and pieces of them, which I suppose you just integrate into yourself as you just go along, consciously or subconsciously.

Alec's words supported Hannerz's (1990, 2002) description of a cosmopolitan cultural figure, wherein personal identity might be partially constituted through appropriation from a variety of cultural forms. In contrast to the lifestyle travellers who felt they were still in the midst of developing and negotiating their personal identities and the few lifestyle travellers who

believed they had ultimately achieved a secure sense of personal identity through their travels, many of the respondents were not as optimistic about the fruitfulness of their personal identity work in a travel context.

### *Identity confusion and feeling metaphorically lost*

Several respondents felt that their personal identities had become more fractured and confusing through the course of their travels and described feeling 'lost' at times. Jackie (English, 26) hinted that personal identity may become more problematic through travelling by having suggested that it was necessary to reassemble the pieces of oneself that may be shaken up through extended journeying:

I suppose you have to develop a peace with yourself because you've turned your whole world upside down by starting travelling and then you have to put yourself back together in some ways. You've left what you're from and everything that defines you so you have to get the bits and put them all back together and make yourself again.

The turning upside down of one's world through travel, as Jackie observed, may cause or perpetuate feelings of identity confusion.

Thus, rather than necessarily developing a more secure personal identity, divided attention and presence in multiple places over the course of extended leisure travel can lead to feelings of deterritorialisation (D'Andrea, 2007). Alec (Scottish, 34) further noted the 'danger' of identity deformation through lifestyle travel:

It's like a double-edged knife. In some ways you're getting a lot of experiences that are shaping who you are, but at the same time, I was doing so much of it, so much travelling. Then you're like, ok, where do I... you're like swimming amongst it. And that's one of the dangers of too much travelling, getting kind of really lost in it.

Iso-Ahola (1980) suggested that whereas it may intuitively seem that the more alternatives a person has, the more freedom they would feel they possess, in contrast, too many options can become confusing as opposed to liberating. Such seems to be the case for some lifestyle travellers, for whom prolonged exposure to multiple cultural praxes can lead to feelings of social saturation, as in Gergen's (1991) conceptual description of multiphrenia and supportive of D'Andrea's (2007) empirical work on the psychic deterritorialisation of global nomads.

A small number of the interviewees openly lamented searching for 'something' through their travels, without finding any answers. These respondents did not perceive a saturation of images through travel in a positive or liberating light, as has been suggested of Urry's (2002) playful post-tourist, or as cultural forms to be embraced in identity formation, as did some of the respondents above, but instead characterised their identity work as stressful, sentiments which echoed of Erikson's (1968) description of an identity crisis. For instance, Charlotte (Canadian, 26) expressed: 'It's like I don't even know what I'm chasing after anymore. And everyone's like, just be patient and it will come to you one day.' Moreover, as Laura (Canadian, 28) volunteered after several years of travel as her lifestyle:

I'm almost thirty and I feel like I just graduated but I'm ten years older and I have no idea where I want to go and what I want to do. I'm feeling a bit lost. It's not coming to me. I have no idea what I'm looking for. I mean I've been trying to figure it out for the last at least five years [through travel] by talking to different people and getting their opinions. Just sort of trying to get an epiphany.



Laura's openness towards addressing her feelings of identity confusion was rare among the respondents. However, Marie (French, 26) noted that it is not surprising that one may be hesitant in confronting feelings of being lost:

It was maybe too dangerous to think like that because it's very close to conflict with myself. I wanted to say to myself that I was lost, that was a reality, but I didn't want to think about myself like that. You can't say, wow, I'm totally lost in my life.

Marie communicated that feeling lost is often not a conscious thought process and she felt that its recognition could be experienced as a personally damaging admission. This corresponded with some of the respondents having depicted identity confusion as a past event, rather than their present circumstance.

Moreover, Marie (French, 26) reflected on the perhaps paradoxical status of travel as a vehicle for answering questions of personal identity:

I was a bit lost because I didn't have someone that told me this is the way that I can take and I wanted to find it by myself so it's like, you are a bit lost in the world and yourself. I thought that in travelling I will find a solution. It's not really true, for me. It's not by travelling that you can find a solution to your conflict; it's like an illusion from it. People that are travelling a lot, they are looking for their identity more than people that are working back home; but they also avoid this question by travelling. It's like a paradox.

Unlike Marie, however, most of the other respondents who had felt lost while travelling did not view lifestyle travel as a paradoxical vehicle for trying to answer questions of identity.

Even for individuals who did not have feelings of identity confusion, it was expressed that society can sometimes pressure them to question themselves as Western society often attaches negative connotations to ongoing 'drifting' without a culturally sanctioned purpose. Tamara (Canadian/Indian, 34) highlighted this feeling:

I think when you have been travelling or moving for 17 years, and you're kind of not living 'conventionally', I think a lot of other people, kind of, feel like you're searching and you're lost and so you can't help but then also have to ask yourself – gee, am I? Am I searching for something, am I lost? So, that kind of processing, I've always had to do.

Whilst backpacking as a one-off rite-of-passage now seems to be institutionally sanctioned (O'Reilly, 2006) as a moratorium before the assumption of 'adult responsibilities' (Cote & Levine, 2002), the continuation and repetition of leisure travel as a lifestyle is still a relative anomaly (Noy & Cohen, 2005; Westerhausen, 2002). Once individuals have exceeded culturally dominant perceptions of how long a rite-of-passage should last, they may be forced to battle a perception of their leisure travels as deviant. Lastly, although the array of possibilities that travel offered may have led some of the lifestyle travellers to a feeling of being lost or 'swimming amongst it', it cannot be assumed that extended leisure travel alone led these individuals to experience identity confusion. A feeling of being lost or confused, through a general saturation of options and images in late modernity, may have preceded the act of travel itself.

## **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that the prospect of subjectively finding oneself through travel can be a problematic endeavour. As the interpretation of this empirical material has shown, lifestyle travellers expressed a complex spectrum of perceptions on the identity work that had taken place during their extended travels. Whilst several of the lifestyle travellers viewed

their identity work as a developmental process that they were still in the midst of negotiating, a few of the respondents seemed to embrace the cultural images that they had been exposed to through travel, and in some cases, perceived the formation of a cosmopolitan personal identity. On the other hand, many of the lifestyle travellers experienced feelings of being lost during their extended sojourns. For these latter respondents, their personal identity work was often characterised as stressful periods of identity confusion. Thus rather than finding solutions to issues of personal identity, several of the respondents paradoxically felt that extended leisure travel left them with more questions than answers.

It has been noted that certain collective identifiers, such as 'first world' nationalities and white ethnicities significantly facilitate international travel (D'Andrea, 2006). Not only are this study's lifestyle travellers situated within this highly mobile profile, but their generation also follows in the tracks of the 1960s countercultural adherents. Berger (1973) suggested that the counterculture was the foremost example of the pervasiveness of identity crisis in Western society. Indeed, it seems that in the post-traditional context of lifestyle travel, personal identity formation is both increasingly important and problematic. For whilst their countercultural forerunners may have also sought self-realisation through their mobilities, contemporary lifestyle travellers negotiate contact zones increasingly hybridised through the technological forces of globalisation; a cultural landscape that progressively challenges the formation of a coherent life narrative (Giddens, 1991).

Even though lifestyle travellers only represent a small, and arguably extreme, proportion of tourists, the choice to travel voluntarily as a lifestyle and, for many, to seek a coherent personal identity amid an increasing array of life choices, is indicative of broader sociological trends in contemporary Western societies. Ericksen (2007, p. 92) has noted: 'Although it sounds hyperbolic to say that "we are all on the move," it is true in several senses that movement is also characteristic of contemporary globalization.' Hence, the identity work undertaken by this study's lifestyle travellers highlights broader social changes taking place that will continue to fuel the growth of post-traditional lifestyles as exposure to varied cultural praxes, whether voluntary or not, becomes more commonplace.

The empirical evidence in this study exemplifies how the negotiation of personal identities can play an important role in constructing the meanings that individuals attribute to leisure travel in their lives. Further research into personal identity work taking place in other post-traditional leisure lifestyles would offer a wider window into the relationships between mobilities and personal identities. It would be valuable to explore whether individuals in less mobile post-traditional lifestyles encounter similar issues of personal identity to the respondents in this study. With an ever-expanding array of cultural forms available with which one may attempt to construct meaning, late modernity presents challenging circumstances for lifestyle travellers who try to resolve, rather than play with, questions of personal identity.

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