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Searching for Escape, Authenticity and Identity: Experiences of 'Lifestyle Travellers'

SCOTT COHEN

Introduction

Since the 1970s, it has been argued that escaping from the pressures of one's 'home' society in order to search for more 'authentic' experiences is a primary driver in tourist motivation. On a broader level, escaping *from* in order *to* is reflective of Iso-Ahola's (1982) characterisation of leisure and tourism experiences as two-fold: dependent not only on an idea of escape or avoidance, but also on a process of seeking. Indeed, consumer experiences in the leisure and tourism industries can be linked to a notion of searching. Morgan (2006: 305) noted that the word 'experience' itself has been generally used in leisure and other industries 'to describe the essence of what customers are seeking and paying for'.

If individuals are seeking 'experiences' through the vehicles of leisure and tourism, how can researchers begin to understand experiences from a participant perspective? Certainly, this is a complex question that is not satisfied with the simple assumption that individuals seek to escape to authentic experiences. Nonetheless, the theories surrounding escapism and authenticity have been historically relied upon in various attempts to understand participant experiences in leisure and tourism. However, recent poststructural approaches have questioned both the possibility of escape and the grounds for authenticity, hoping to bury both of these concepts on the basis of their relativity.

Deconstruction has threatened the validity of the meanings and rewards that individuals may perceive in experiences by favouring discourse over subjectivities. The resultant backlash has re-emphasised ‘self’, as individual worldviews have been relied upon to re-justify escape as a state of mind and shift the focus of authenticity away from ‘objectivity’ and instead towards the authenticity of subjective experiences. With this, movement has come a wealth of research on identity as the notion of searching for a stronger sense of self has gained momentum as a useful tool in understanding leisure and tourism experiences.

In line with these theoretical shifts in trying to understand individual realities, this chapter (re)examines the dialectics surrounding escapism, authenticity and identity in the context of leisure and tourism experiences. Attempt is made to not only discuss escapism, authenticity and identity from a modern perspective, but to also give voice to poststructural discourses without losing sight of the meanings and values that individuals still place on subjective experiences. As such, the chapter is first focused on the broad theoretical debates surrounding escapism, authenticity and identity, while the latter part of the chapter uses an illustrative case study. The case study, based on interpretive findings from the author’s fieldwork with ‘lifestyle travellers’ in India and Thailand in 2007, provides a research-based example of the roles that escapism, authenticity and identity may play in participant experiences.

Escapism

Within modern literature on tourist motivation, the need to escape has long been posited as a key motivator for why some individuals go on holiday (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; see also Chapter 1). Escapism has been described as a push factor, which refers to factors that predispose an individual to travel (Dann, 1977). Crompton (1979: 416) noted that the desire to ‘escape from a perceived mundane environment’, or in other words, the tedium of routine, formed one of the major motives driving vacation behaviour. In Riley’s (1988: 317) description of long-term budget travellers, she held that her respondents were ‘escaping from the dullness and monotony of their everyday routine, from their jobs, from making decisions about careers, and desire to delay or postpone work, marriage, and other responsibilities’. Iso-Ahola (1982)

broadly suggested that individuals may try to escape dimensions of both their personal and interpersonal worlds.

From a psychology perspective, Baumeister (1991) commented that individuals may be trying to escape their current ideas of 'self'. He also suggested that escape may be temporarily achieved by 'shrinking' down the self to its bare minimum. Pine and Gilmore (1999) noted that 'escapist experiences' correspond with a complete immersion of a participant in an activity, a dimension that has also been called upon in Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) description of the concept of flow experience. The feeling of flow experience has been described as an enjoyable and focused concentration in which one experiences a loss of self-consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Hence, being in flow means temporarily escaping one's ideas of self.

A number of researchers have indicated wider aspects of modern Western society from which tourists may try to escape. Dann (1977: 187) suggested that a tourist may wish to 'get away from it all', so as to escape a feeling of isolation that may be felt in everyday life as the result of perceiving one's home society as anomic. Anomie is a sociological term used to describe situations where social 'norms' are conflicting or non-integrated (Roberts, 1978). When applied at the individual level, a derivative of anomie, anomia, can be used to describe someone who feels alienated and unable to direct her/his life meaningfully in a social context (Dann, 1977; Roberts, 1978).

Having supported a view that Western society may be perceived as anomic, Ateljevic and Doorne found in focus groups with long-term travellers that they had 'pessimistic perceptions of global capitalism and its associated lifestyle' (2000: 135) and an 'increasing dissatisfaction with the Western way of life' (2000: 133) that caused the travellers to view travel as a form of escape, which in turn allowed for 'personal growth'. This perspective was reinforced in Maoz's (2007: 126) study of Israeli backpacker motivations, in which the participants 'attempt to escape what they describe as a very materialistic, stressed and harsh society' and as such perceived a reversal of their previous 'conformist' lives. Davidson (2005: 36) found that 'many travellers imagine and experience travel as a route to "finding one's own space" outside the social, political and economic contradictions of life at home'. Thus, as suggested by Richards and Wilson (2004: 5) in their discussion of the nomad as an

idealised form of travel, travel may be experienced as ‘liberation from the constraints of modern society’. In this sense, travel is Romanticised as an exercise of ‘self-directed idealism’, for which striving to fulfil imaginative ideals is an integral part of the experience (Campbell, 1987: 213).

While the need to escape has been frequently suggested as a motivator for tourism experiences, it must be reminded that motivations are multidimensional, need to be contextualised and are changing over time (Crompton, 1979; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Ryan, 1997a, 1997b). As such, holidays may be periods of escape for some individuals at certain times (Ryan, 1997a), but for those for which escape is relevant, it may also be working in tandem with other needs and desires. Nonetheless, as a supposed means of resisting pressures and dissatisfaction with one’s home society, tourism has been regularly used in modern attempts to allow alienated individuals escape from the constraints of a perceived mundane existence and/or the anomie of Western society.

More recently, however, the possibility of actual escape, not just through tourism and leisure, but through all aspects of life, has come under scrutiny as the increasing commodification of experiences has highlighted the underlying social construction of many, if not all, forms of escape. Most people would view a quest to escape as a ‘projection’ out from the values of their society (Rojek, 1993). Within modern literature on escape attempts, there has existed an underlying assumption that a dominant reality exists that individuals may attempt to resist (Cohen & Taylor, 1992). This ‘paramount reality’ would have ‘objectively specifiable circumstances’ such as, for instance, a daily timetable, an occupational career and/or domestic routines (Cohen & Taylor, 1992: 3). However, Cohen and Taylor (1992: 15) pointed out that in recent years poststructural discourse has done much to deconstruct the notion of a paramount reality as:

...what ‘the collapse of meta-narratives’ implies is that there is no single meaning system or metaphor that we can use to obtain a sense of the world from which we want to distance ourselves or against which we want to construct an alternative.

In other words, rather than there being an underlying paramount reality, what seems real is that which is most successfully presented as real, however, such a reality is

actually just one experiential mode among many (Cohen & Taylor, 1992). Hence, poststructural thought argues that it is not possible to talk about escape when there is no all-encompassing reality from which to escape. As Rojek (1993: 212) fatalistically held: ‘There is no escape’.

Even though the impossibility of actual escape has been suggested, there are still reasons to consider escape as a useful metaphor. In addition to this book, other researchers have considered the poststructural rejection of escape but have still found it important and relevant to explore the experiences of individuals who may seek to escape (see Cohen & Taylor, 1992; Macbeth, 2000). As Cohen and Taylor (1992: 234) concluded: ‘None of our scepticism or pessimism should hide our continual amazement and delight at how people keep up this struggle, how they keep trying to dislodge the self from society’. As the rewards that individuals may hope to derive from tourism and leisure experiences are dependent both on a perception of escape and a process of seeking, the focus of this chapter is next turned to the notion of authenticity and then to identity, two concepts that have oft been used in trying to answer what individuals might be seeking through tourism and leisure experiences.

Authenticity

The search for authenticity has been a reoccurring theme in attempts to understand tourists over the last four decades (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). However, authenticity has a much longer history within existential philosophy where it has referred to experiencing one’s authentic ‘self’ (Golomb, 1995). Yet, authenticity’s source in existential philosophy has only been recently recognised within tourism studies (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), where it has been introduced as ‘existential authenticity’ (Wang, 1999). Prior to an existential conceptualisation of authenticity based on self, tourism scholarship had focused on the authenticity of toured objects.

The entry point for discussions on the authenticity of toured objects in tourism scholarship is most commonly traced to Boorstin’s (1964) lamentation of the loss of the possibility of ‘real’ travel. Boorstin (1964) criticised the growth of mass tourism and characterised tourists as a growing body of ‘cultural dopes’ satisfied by contrived ‘pseudo-events’. In response, MacCannell (1976) posited that tourists were not satisfied with pseudo-events, but were instead alienated moderns in search of an

authenticity to be found outside of the anomie of modernity. Thus, in a MacCannellian sense, tourism is seen again in a two-fold light as both a Romantic escape from the anomie of 'inauthentic' modernity and, in turn, a quest for authenticity.

Cohen (1988) suggested that MacCannell's views on authenticity assumed that the commoditisation of an experience was destructive to the authenticity of the experience for both locals and tourists. However, as cultures and societies are not frozen in time, but are dynamic, cultural products that were originally considered inauthentic can eventually become authentic over time (Sharpley, 2003). Cohen (1988) referred to this process as 'emergent authenticity', which recognised that authenticity is not a 'primitive given', but is instead negotiable.

Wang (1999) attempted to clarify the authenticity debate by first dividing the authenticity of toured objects into two usages: objective authenticity and constructive authenticity. Objective authenticity is an extraction of authenticity from museum terminology (Wang, 1999), where it is used to describe whether objects are genuine, real or unique (Sharpley, 2003). On the other hand, constructive authenticity, which allows for an emergent aspect to authenticity, considers authenticity as variable, socially constructed interpretations of the genuineness of a toured object, including toured 'Others' (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999).

Reisinger and Steiner (2006: 69) have aimed criticism at the utility of objective and constructive authenticity in understanding tourism experiences as they have claimed that the 'perspectives on the authenticity of objects are numerous, contradictory and irreconcilable'. They also reminded that through a poststructural lens, the boundaries between originals and copies have been dissolved. Thus, while the modern tourist has been associated with a serious quest for authenticity, for individuals who might fit Urry's (2002) description of a 'post-tourist', the authenticity of toured objects is irrelevant as tourism may instead be aligned with a 'playful search for enjoyment' (Cohen, 1995: 21).

Wang (1999) also identified existential authenticity as a third way of using authenticity, which does not rely on the authenticity of toured objects. Existential inquiry into the idea of an 'authentic self' has a rich philosophical history with existential philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus and Sartre

each having been concerned with the search for an authentic self (Golomb, 1995). As opposed to objective and constructive authenticity, which are judgements of the authenticity of external objects or activities, existential authenticity has been described as a subjective state of being in which one believes one has experienced one's 'true self' (Berger, 1973; Wang, 1999). Existential authenticity is suggested to have wider power in explaining tourist experiences as it can account for phenomena that are difficult to objectify such as nature experiences and interactions between tourists (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999).

Existential authenticity is described as a process of 'being in touch with one's inner self, knowing one's self, having a sense of one's own identity and then living in accord with one's sense of oneself' (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006: 300). Thus, existential authenticity clearly rests on the notion that an individual is able to maintain an integrated sense of self. However, poststructural discourse that has attempted to devalue the notion of the authentic in terms of the original has also cast significant doubt on the possibilities of experiencing a stable sense of self. While Wang (1999) argued that a deconstruction of the authenticity of toured objects had opened the way for alternative experiences of existential authenticity, other theorists such as Gergen (1991) have instead suggested that the multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships that exist in postmodernity 'pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self" with knowable characteristics recedes from view'. Hence, for postmoderns, experiencing one's authentic self loses all meaning as a 'bombardment' of external images erodes the sense of an authentic core (Cote & Levine, 2002: 41).

Thus, while the focus of authenticity in tourism studies may have shifted from toured objects to perceived experiences of one's authentic self (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999), poststructural perspectives continue to call for authenticity in all its forms to be buried entirely. Disagreement over the utility of authenticity in understanding tourist experiences has been paralleled by a prolific increase in tourism research pertaining to identity. This is not surprising considering that existential authenticity and concepts of identity both rely on concerns over notions of 'self'.

Identity

The accumulation of tourism experiences has been proposed as one vehicle through which individuals engage in the (re)formation of identity (Desforges, 2000; Neumann, 1992; Noy, 2004), often as part of a search for personal growth or a 'subjective sustained sense of self' (Finnegan, 1997: 68). From the point of view of individual experience, identity can be understood as the sum of reflections on the subjective experience of embodied self (Cote & Levine, 2002), or as McAdams (1997: 63) stated: 'Identity is the story that the modern I constructs and tells about the me'. Searching for identity has been argued as pervasive in modern society as the meta-narrative of self as an inner moral source with a potential that should be cultivated still pervades and drives much of Western society (Baumeister, 1986; McAdams, 1997).

Constituting a coherent sense of self, however, has become a difficult process in modernity as social organisation has changed so that choice has increasingly replaced obligation or tradition as a basis in self-definition (Cote & Levine, 2002). While personal identity is still largely constituted by broader societal forces such as nationality, class, gender, race, ethnicity and peer reference, among others, the need to link together disparate experiences into an individual life narrative has now become an increasingly important underpinning of identity (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Thus, for many modern individuals, constructing and maintaining a stable identity has become an ongoing issue (Bauman, 1996; Lanfant, 1995). As identities in contemporary times have become increasingly fragmented and fractured (Hall, 1996), most modern Western individuals still seek an idea of self that reflects unity and purpose, a cultural expectation that one's identity reflects 'a patterned and purposeful integration of the me' (McAdams, 1997: 60). In this sense, identity can act as an 'anchoring' or sense-making device (Kuentzel, 2000: 87).

In the context of tourism, Neumann (1992: 177) held 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'. As Rojek (1993: 178) noted, 'the traveller views travel experience as a resource in the quest for self-realization'. But while individuals may use tourism as a means of, and/or a place for, attempting to reinforce a coherent sense of identity, discursive

theory has meanwhile deconstructed the popular modern view of the self as a developmental project (Baumeister, 1986).

Foucault (1988) aimed to deconstruct the reflective dimension of self by situating it historically in linguistics. The reflective self signifies 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, and try to ‘examine, judge, and sometimes regulate or revise it’ (Seigel, 2005: 5). Through linguistic practice, or what Foucault (1988) referred to as ‘technologies of the self’, individuals are encouraged to learn socially condoned procedures for systematically reflecting upon their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Danziger, 1997). Thus, rather than the modern notion that one’s ‘true self’ can be slowly and arduously actualised (Cohen & Taylor, 1992), discursive theory has located the reflective self as culturally contingent, and as such, socially constructed.

Selves are not just reflective, however, but are also socially relational and embodied (Seigel, 2005). Correspondingly, while discursive theory has discredited the humanistic perspective of self-realisation or self-actualisation (Maslow, 1971) that has rested on the notion of a reflective self, research on self and identity in the social sciences that has conceptualised selves as situational and performative has gained speed. Beginning with symbolic interactionism and the dramaturgical metaphors of Goffman (1959), sociology brought to the fore of the discussion on self the idea that ‘selves are constructed, modified and played out in interaction with other people’, meaning that rather than one fixed self, each individual has multiple selves that are permeable and contextually dependent (Vaughan & Hogg, 2002: 101).

While a Foucauldian view of self certainly draws ‘attention to the socially positioning power of discourses’, it has also been criticised as ‘an extreme ephemeralist position that has no interest in the embodied self’ (Holland, 1997: 171). Butler’s (1990) work on the performativity of gender offers a useful perspective on identity constitution that may help to bridge the gap between the power of discourse and embodied selves, which re-opens theoretical possibilities for cultural and individual change (Bell, 2008). Bell (2008: 174) observed that as a theory of identity, ‘performativity has come to mean that we perform multiple and shifting identities in history, language, and material embodiments’. Butler noted that identity constitution is an embodied performance that is processual, wherein individuals are always ‘on the

stage' and 'within the terms of the performance' (1990: 277), yet 'just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation' so can individuals 'expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds' (1990: 282).

Thus, while all performances are citations, or enacted ways of doing, for instance, class, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, age and abilities, identities are also performative in that they are negotiated in and through a process of becoming (Bell, 2008). The theatrical metaphor of 'kinesis' offers insight into the performative nature of identity constitution as a process of 'breaking and remaking' in which performances not only mirror and sustain normative boundaries but can also subvert and transgress them (Bell, 2008: 13). An understanding that identity is not a fixed given, but is always in process, indicates that experiences can be opportunities for individuals to (re)produce a sense of personal identity. This may hold especially relevant during tourism and leisure experiences when individuals may perceive a higher degree of choice than in other aspects of their daily lives (Graburn, 1983; Neulinger, 1981).

Understanding Experiences of Lifestyle Travellers

While the earlier sections have discussed general theoretical issues surrounding escapism, authenticity and identity in tourism and leisure experiences, the chapter now turns to a case study in the context of tourism to illustrate how the concepts discussed may manifest in 'real' life. The author, with several years prior long-term travel experience himself, conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 25 'lifestyle travellers', while having undertaken participant observation over three months in northern India and southern Thailand in 2007. The inquiry was focused on interpreting why these individuals travelled as a lifestyle and the subjective meanings they may have placed upon their travel experiences. The criteria for selecting lifestyle travellers were a fluid combination of self-definition of travel as one's lifestyle and multiple trips of approximately six months or more. A number of interesting insights from the participant perspective relating to escapism, authenticity and identity emerged from the study.

The subjective experiences of many of the lifestyle travellers gave empirical support to the importance of perceived escape as a travel motivation and push factor (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977), as individuals frequently cited the desire to escape as a reason for why they had decided to go travelling. Several of the interviewees felt that escapism played a significant role in why they had first chosen to go travelling, and for some, why they had continued to travel. As Thomas (English, 29) observed, 'For me it was escapism at the beginning, purely and utterly escapism'. However, it seemed that escapism may have played a lessening role over time for some of the lifestyle travellers, which reflected Ryan's (1997a) suggestion that holidays may be periods of escape for some individuals at certain times. As Julie (German, 27) attested when asked if her motivation for travel had changed over time: 'Now I don't have to escape anymore. The first travelling was just an escape. But now I have such a nice life'.

The lifestyle travellers at times described escape in terms of their immediate personal worlds, but more often characterised their escapes as a broader movement away from the perceived values of their home societies. Charlotte (Canadian, 26) summed up travel as a perceived escape from one's immediate reality: 'In a lot of ways, I think it's an escape; that you want to escape the present reality that you've created for your self'. Respondents described feeling 'boxed in' by the expectations of their family and peers. This included not only expectations to work and pursue adult responsibilities such as raising a family, but also to act, behave and/or even dress in a certain manner. When asked what she generally liked about travel, Jackie (English, 26) focused on the anonymity that the travel experience seemed to allow:

When you're at home, there's always pressure from the people around you and the people that know you who expect you to do a certain thing. But when nobody knows you, they don't expect you to act in a certain way. I suppose it's the freedom of being anonymous.

Here, as with Davidson's (2005: 36) depiction of travel as an imagined route to 'finding one's own space', travel had afforded Jackie the opportunity to feel she had 'broken out' from previous patterns of behaviour, a process which may have been more difficult when spatially under the thumb of familiar social expectations.

A general dissatisfaction with the idea of fulltime work or ‘responsibility’ also pervaded many of the interviews. As Brendon (Irish, 26) commented on why he travelled as a lifestyle: ‘Escapism is definitely a huge part of it. Adult responsibilities seem a million miles away and you’re not thinking about rent, it’s definitely to escape.’ Many respondents felt trapped by their home society and attempted to escape it by physically moving outside the boundaries of it. Julie (German, 27) said of her life back in Germany prior to travel – ‘I felt like a bird in a cage’. Moreover, Fiona (New Zealander, 23) recalled her disappointment in returning to what she perceived as a mundane life in New Zealand after her first long trip away: ‘There was just so much routine, it was just all the same and people didn’t seem to be going anywhere, everyone just in a rut’. Respondents commonly felt negatively towards falling into a ‘routine life’, which credited the notion that individuals may desire to escape from a perceived mundane environment (Crompton, 1979; Riley, 1988).

In terms of escaping a perceived anomie in their home societies, many of the lifestyle travellers noted value differences with ‘Western society’ over the importance of naturalness, materiality, money and the drive to succeed. Julie (German, 27) described how she no longer identified with what she perceived as the dominant German lifestyle: ‘When I was three weeks at home it was horrible, absolutely horrible, because everything’s inside. Everyone is trying to be the best in everything, it’s terrible, and it’s all about money.’ A strong ethic of anti-materialism, which runs deeply through the traveller lifestyle and largely rests on the belief that one needs nothing more than the contents of a backpack, may have helped some of the lifestyle travellers to have felt they were freer from Western consumerism. Hence, the perception among many of the lifestyle travellers of Western society as anomic supported previous tourism research that has aligned travellers with feelings of alienation (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Dann, 1977; Maoz, 2007).

Alternatively, it can be suggested that while these lifestyle travellers may somewhat escape the cycle of working in order to buy tangible goods, that they are instead held captive by the need to purchase experiences. When asked if travel allowed for freedom from consumerism, Thomas (English, 29) responded:

This is modern materialism, we’re sold this dream and we buy in to it.
Experience things and see new things. But linking it with freedom, if you’ve got a free mind, you’re not bound by anything.

Rather than being deterred by the commodification of experience in the travel context, Thomas focused instead on the importance of escape and freedom as states of mind. Thus, while actual escape may not be possible, the subjective experience of feeling or believing one has escaped may satisfy some individuals.

Commercialised tourist escape routes beg questions of the authenticity of toured objects. However, the concept of authenticity, both in its toured object and existential capacities, did not emerge directly as a relevant theme in discussions with the participants. Rather than voicing concern over the authenticity of experiences with the 'Other', the lifestyle travellers did, however, express a desire to experience their 'true selves' through travel. Hence, many of the respondents indirectly touched upon the discourse of existential authenticity (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999), yet did so through using a vocabulary of self and identity. This indicated that the boundaries between perceptions of existential authenticity and identity constitution may be blurred as both concepts can be linked to the subjective experience of one's perceived 'true self'.

The concept of searching for self, a form of identity work, was frequently cited among the lifestyle travellers as a motivating factor for their engagement in lifestyle travel. However, while some of the lifestyle travellers consciously undertook a search for a more secure sense of self through travel, others instead recognised their identity work retrospectively. Yet, as Simon (Swiss, 50), the oldest of the respondents, suggested: 'I think everyone looks, searching for their self'. It was common for the lifestyle travellers to view travel as a developmental process of learning about their 'inner self', which was characteristic of Maslow's (1971) humanistic perspective of self-actualisation. Tamara (Canadian/Indian, 34), who had been travelling for the majority of the last 17 years, summed up the assumption of many of the lifestyle travellers that an inner self existed and could be discovered and developed in having said: 'Travelling is really about your self, about learning what's inside of your self'. In several instances, learning about the self was communicated as processual and based in daily experience:

Everyday you learn about you. Everyday you know you more and more. You know who you are more and more. Maybe it's really important to know who you are. For me, it's really important. (Eric, French, 35)

For Eric, who had sold his business in France in order to travel and work in Asia indefinitely, learning about the self was an ongoing exercise in which striving towards an idealised or felt 'true' self was an important part of the experience (Campbell, 1987).

Some of the respondents viewed 'self-discovery' as more fruitfully undertaken when physically away from their home environments as travel often allowed for the experience of new and different situations. This was supported by Ehud (Israeli, 34), who when asked about travel's role in regards to identity, related that it was helpful to be away from one's comfort zone in order to get to know the self better:

It gives you angles, gives you experiences, as you experience yourself in different situations you know yourself better. As much as you break your routine, your chain, you will know yourself better.

The new experiences that the travel context had presented Ehud were placed in contrast to the 'chains' of mundane life, thus again pointing to leisure and tourism experiences as a two-fold process of avoidance and seeking (Iso-Ahola, 1982). Through negotiating situations in which one was unsure of how to act, respondents expressed that they could test themselves and learn from the experience.

All these things that you endure and then you experience and that you learn so much about yourself that you don't even know is within your self and that might not even have a chance to come out if you didn't travel. (Tamara, Canadian/Indian, 34)

As such, challenging experiences were perceived by some of the respondents as potentially transformational moments in the search for self. As Fiona (New Zealander, 23) communicated about her travel experiences: 'I guess it felt empowering, and just having those experiences as your own made me feel stronger'.

In contrast to the intense work week he considered as typical of his home society, Alec (Scottish, 34) suggested that travel may provide a freer sense of space and time that can lead individuals to the feeling that something has 'shifted inside':

Maybe having moments of reflection and inner inquiry leads you to some sort of feeling. Maybe that's one aspect of why travellers have that, just purely from

that we have time and freedom to allow that experience to happen. Not necessarily saying it happens for everybody of course, but there's a lot more opportunity and potential for those people to even inquire into those things and possibly have some kind of understanding or experience or something, some shift inside just because they have the chance to.

The maxim of 'finding one's self' through travel was even somewhat lampooned by Laura (Canadian, 28), who seemed to realise for the first time during the interview that she had used travel as a means of addressing identity questions:

I think it was when I first went to England, when I was thinking, ok, well, maybe I just need another year off to find myself. I used that term, ha, ha. Maybe I need to leave the country and actually live somewhere else and find myself in a different country where I don't know anyone and I can sort of start fresh and go from there. I don't know anyone so I can be whoever I want, change my personality, which I always sort of figured I'd do but hasn't really happened.

With her latter words, rather than seeking an internal self, Laura seemed to have embraced the idea of changing her environment so that she could be whoever she wanted. Laura may have inadvertently hinted at a concept of identity that has the potential for multiple selves or performances. In a similar vein, when asked what 'grabbed him' when he first started travelling, Barry (English, 32) related: 'I suppose it is that, kind of, you can just shed a life each time you change places. You can just change your life each time you want to go somewhere new'. For Laura and Barry, self was not necessarily an innate object to be developed, but instead multiple and open to various performances (Bell, 2008; Butler, 1990). In contrast to the majority of the other lifestyle travellers, these latter views on identity were more representative of the trend in the social sciences to conceive of selves as relational, multiple and contextually dependent (Danziger, 1997; Finnegan, 1997; Vaughan & Hogg, 2002) rather than as an individual developmental project (Maslow, 1971; Neumann, 1992). Thus, the divergence in views on self among the lifestyle travellers reflected oppositional theoretical perspectives on self and identity that have run through the broader academic literature.

Conclusion

Modern theories on seeking escapism, authenticity and identity point to each of these concepts as critical in understanding dimensions of tourism and leisure experiences. Although the actual possibility of escape, an objective basis for authenticity and the concept of self have all been subject to deconstruction, the lifestyle travellers in this study seemed to have taken little heed of the supposed 'illusion' at the basis of their searching efforts. Indeed, the case study has demonstrated that some individuals still seek experiences that allow for feelings of escape and a stronger sense of identity, and that meaning and value may be attached to experiences that provide for these perceptions.

Though the lifestyle travellers regularly cited tourism as a means of escape from the constraints of a perceived mundane existence and/or the anomie of Western society (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977), concern over the authenticity of experiences with the Other was not voiced. Instead, many of the respondents indirectly touched upon issues of existential authenticity using a vocabulary of self and identity. This indicates that identity discourse may be a more useful theoretical lens for discussing 'self' than the existential conceptualisation of authenticity introduced to tourism studies by Wang (1999). While many of the lifestyle travellers sought to experience their 'true self', reflecting a widely held humanistic assumption that an inner self exists that can be transformed and developed (Baumeister, 1986; McAdams, 1997), there were also participant perspectives that alluded to selves as relational and performative, which instead pointed to opposing theories on identity constitution (for instance, Butler, 1990; Finnegan, 1997). Hence, there was a theoretical tension in perspectives on self and identity among the lifestyle travellers.

In their discussion of the 'experience economy', Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggested that a competitive edge will be gained by providers who are able to momentarily satisfy a consumer's search for personal transformation. Such transformational experiences reflect encounters in which a participant feels that she/he has changed as the result of an experience. To perceive self-transformation or self-change is a narration of identity (Noy, 2004). In this light, experiences that can provide a temporary perception of escape as well as allow participants to work and play with identity should not be under-valued.

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