

Drawings as a way of expressing transformation after a trip

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Drawings as a way of expressing transformation after a trip

Note: We previously submitted this abstract, and it was accepted for the 2020 International TTRA Conference. When the conference was canceled, we were given the option to retract our abstract and resubmit this year.

Introduction

We apply the Interaction Ritual Chains theory (Collins, 2004) to examine how transformative travelers use symbols when narrating their transformation. Transformative travel is a form of travel that encourages travelers to develop more tolerant worldviews and become agents of change in their community by promoting cross-cultural understanding and social empowerment (Reisinger, 2013). More precisely, the study uses an original multi-methods approach that includes drawings, sentence completions, and in-depth interviews to investigate how and in what ways are transformative travel narratives symbolized by travelers? We interview thirty-five transformative travelers and asked them to draw themselves before and after their transformative trip. Transformative travelers are the ones interpreting their drawings. Through their interpretations, they reveal deep and powerful symbols that are at the heart of their transformative journey. Transformative travel practitioners can use those symbols to attract prospective transformative travelers because those symbols align with their aspirations.

Literature Review

The Interaction Ritual Chains theory (Collins 2004) focuses on how symbols influence situations in which individuals interact with each other. In his theory, Collins states that individuals are looking for the emotional energy they gain from interacting with others (Benzecry & Collins, 2014). In his theory, Collins describes emotional energy as “a feeling of confidence, courage to take action, boldness in taking initiatives” (2004, p.39). A social chain is created between individuals because they bring the emotional energy from their previous interactions into the next ones (Kemper, 2016). Specific to this research, transformative travelers feel deeply moved by the intense connection with destination residents. By interacting with destination residents, transformative travelers self-reflect on their social and political views (Magee & Gilmore, 2015). Thus, the end goal of successful interactions is to foster unity and shared understanding between individuals through shared symbols (Collins, 2019).

Common symbols allow group members to experience a feeling of collective effervescence around symbols that Collins defines as “emblems or other representations (visual icons, words, gestures)” that have unique, powerful meanings for the group (2004, p.49). Researchers suggest the presence of common symbols in the narrative of transformative travelers (Sterchele, 2020). In his study on catalysts of transformative travel, Walter (2016) mentions that transformative travelers are likely to associate their transformative experience with symbols related to magic, wonderment, and enchantment. Frost (2010) also notes the importance of symbols linked with magic, mystery, and the supernatural. Hence, there is a need to identify the symbols and narratives present in the transformative travelers’ minds and common to their experience (Walter, 2016).

The Interaction Ritual Chains theory also states that symbols can be imbued with either positive or negative emotions (Collins, 2015). Identifying the right symbols that generate positive emotions in travelers is crucial for tourism practitioners (Sterchele, 2020). Unfortunately, there are

divergences concerning the symbols and narratives that best describe the transformative travel experience (Robledo & Batle, 2017; Walter, 2016). For example, transformative travel is associated with the explorer's symbol, but there is disagreement about the emotions it triggers in travelers (Bruner, 1991; Robledo & Batle, 2017). The explorer symbol depicts transformative travelers as heroes who venture into an unknown world to encounter dangers and difficulties (Robledo & Batle, 2017). However, other researchers warn against representing transformative travelers as explorers because explorers are also associated with colonization and imperialism (Germann Molz, 2016). This issue raises the question of what types of symbols and narratives should be put forward by transformative tourism organizations in their content marketing so that transformative tourism is presented in a manner that reflects its sustainable and social empowerment objectives (Walter, 2016).

While there is a debate about selecting the right symbols, the transformative tourism literature hints that it is possible to use symbols in marketing content successfully so that more travelers desire to take part in transformative tourism (Wolf, Ainsworth, & Crowley, 2017). For example, Wolf et al. state that “marketing should aim to appeal to the typical characteristics of the transformative traveler like intellectual curiosity, an emotional need or desire for challenges” (2017, p.1668). The Interaction Ritual Chains theory is commonly used within the marketing literature as a lens through which to investigate consumers’ experiences and emotions (Manning & Bejarano, 2017). For example, the Interaction Ritual Chains theory’s focus on symbol recognition and group membership make it particularly interesting to study marketing and brand image (Lounsbury, Gehman, & Ann Glynn, 2019). There are calls to investigate further how the Interaction Ritual Chains theory relates to the decision process and symbolic representation of experiences (Benzecry & Collins, 2014). Likewise, Laing and Frost (2017) advise transformative tourism practitioners to capitalize on the traveler’s narratives and market their destination as a place for self-growth, wellbeing, and spiritual discovery.

Hence, we apply the Interaction Ritual Chains theory to examine the travelers’ symbols and narratives associated with their transformative tourism experience.

Methodology

As researchers, we adhere to an interpretative paradigm that ontologically recognizes multiple realities to the same social phenomenon and that those realities are shaped by cultural, sociological, political, and historical contexts (Bailey, 2007). We also recognize that our own past experiences influence our selection of theoretical lenses, method choices, and data interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, we continuously engage in self-reflection by creating memos to provide us with an outlet to introspectively examine the impacts that our worldviews on the research project (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Participants

Participants were transformative travelers who were being interviewed after their transformative trip (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017). We used purposeful sampling to select participants (Creswell, 2016). Those participants were recruited by transformative travel organizations that posted a recruitment message on their social media platform. Transformative travel organizations were identified using the following public portals: The Transformative Tourism Council, GoAbroad.com, and the Adventure Travel and Trade Association. Based on

Soulard, McGehee, and Stern (2019), we used seven criteria to safeguard that the selected organizations were offering experiences that were indeed transformative (Table 1).

Table 1. Selection criteria for transformative tourism organizations

To be selected the organizations need to offer travel experiences in which:
1) Travel and destination residents interact in a prolong and meaningful manner
2) Special care is shown to make sure the travel experiences are mutually beneficial for travelers and destination residents
3) Activities are purposefully built in the travel itinerary to encourage travelers to self-reflect about their experience
4) The itinerary is designed with the objective of pushing travelers out of their comfort zone
5) The travel experience is designed with the goals of encouraging skill development and fostering cross-cultural understanding
6) Concrete actions are taken by the organizations to mitigate their socio-cultural and ecological impacts at the destination
7) Local residents are seen as equal partners and are treated in a socially responsible manner.

Transformative tourism organizations were contacted via an introductory email containing detailed information about the study and invited them to partner with us (Creswell, 2014). We contacted fifty-two organizations, and seven agreed to share a recruitment message to their clients via either an email or a post on their social media. This recruitment message detailed the study and shared the principal researcher's contact information so that interested participants can directly contact her. A total of forty-five participants contacted the principal researcher. Once first contact was established, this researcher shared an interview worksheet with participants and set a time for a phone interview (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011). This interview worksheet included guidelines and activities for the projective techniques. Participants were invited to email their completed worksheets before the phone interview. Of those forty-five interested participants, thirty-five answered to set a date for a phone interview. Data collection was conducted between May and August 2019. The process of contacting participants continued until we reached data saturation (Masson et al., 2016). Information about the participants is shared in Table A in the Appendix.

Design

The use of sentence completions was chosen because they offered an insightful tool to understand better the emotions, values, and desires that travelers associated with their transformative experience (Dykens, Schwenk, Maxwell, & Myatt, 2007). Additionally, sentence completions reduced the threat of social desirability and elicited rich data from participants (Hindley & Font, 2018). Sentence completions also reinforced validity because participants wrote their thoughts and perceptions instead of having researchers transcribing those thoughts (Nurkka, Kujala, & Kemppainen, 2009). The full interview worksheet is included in Table B of the Appendix. Sentences related to superpower, magic, and spiritual objects were based on the work

of Dykens et al. (2007). Sentences related to color, picture, emotion, animal, and adjective/noun came from the work of Nurkka et al. (2009).

The use of drawings was selected because it reduced the risk that researchers imposed their own biases and views on the participants (Anfara Jr & Mertz, 2014). From an ontological perspective, the use of drawings was congruent with our research stance because it acknowledged that there were multiple perceptions of reality as participants shared their unique perspectives on their transformative travel experience (Literat, 2013). To further facilitate the drawing process, Mitchell et al. (2011) recommended using prompts to help provide some structure. We adapted the Person Picking an Apple from a Tree (PPAT) prompt by asking participants to draw themselves (e.g., use stick figures) holding an object in their hands, standing next to something on the floor, and wearing something (Rollins, 2005). Participants were also asked to complete two drawings: one representing themselves before the trip and one representing themselves after the trip. Finally, participants were asked to write down in a bubble anything that they want to say about their trip (Mesías & Escribano, 2018). Further, the participants were the ones interpreting their drawings (Anfara Jr & Mertz, 2014).

In-depth individual interviews were added to the multi-methods approach because it combined very well with projective techniques (Nurkka et al., 2009). The in-depth interviews were semi-structured. We opted for semi-structured interviews because they provided a baseline of common questions between the different interviews while at the same time letting the participants developed themes and topics that were important to them (Creswell, 2016). Lastly, semi-structured interviews also aligned well with our interpretative stance because they supported an emic perspective in which participants could decide on their own which elements of their lived experience provided interesting insights (Marshall, 2016). After the phone interview was completed, member checks were utilized in which participants received via email a copy of the transcribed text of their interview and were invited to review it to ensure that their opinions were being truthfully depicted (Creswell, 2016).

Based on the guidelines of Caracelli and Greene (1993), each database (i.e., drawings, sentence completions, and interview transcripts) was coded individually during the phase of typology development. Next, we organized the data by questions and started the coding process by looking at one question after another (Nurkka et al., 2009). The coding process itself followed the approach outlined by Bailey (2007), which included open and axial coding. During open coding, we immersed ourselves in the data by repeatedly reading the materials. Then during axial coding, the initial codes were regrouped into themes by combing codes that were tapping into the same conceptual idea (Bailey, 2007).

Trustworthiness and validity

Trustworthiness was assessed through the four criteria developed by Decrop (2004): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was concerned with whether the findings could be qualified as truthful (Decrop, 2004). More precisely, we addressed credibility by using member checks by sending interview transcripts to participants for them to review (Maxwell, 2012). Transferability looked at whether the findings of the study can be reasonability transferred to other contexts, locations, and/or groups (Decrop, 2004). We enhanced transferability by using theoretical saturation and thick descriptions (Creswell, 2016). Dependability focused on whether the findings can be qualified as consistent and enough information was provided to be reproduced in subsequent studies (Decrop, 2004). We strengthened

dependability by using an audit trail (Creswell, 2016). Confirmability assessed whether the findings truly reflected the participants' voice and were not the results of the researchers' own biases and prejudices (Decrop, 2004). We enhanced confirmability by engaging in self-reflection and looking for disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 2016)

Validity was reinforced, not only by the use of the four trustworthiness criteria but also by the principle of triangulation (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). The present study enhanced validity by using four triangulation types: Data triangulation, method triangulation, and investigator triangulation. Data triangulation occurred because we employed different types of data (i.e., visual and textual data). Method triangulation took place because we used different methods to gather the data (i.e., projective techniques and in-depth interviews). Finally, investigators triangulation occurred because more than one researcher was looking at the data analysis.

Results

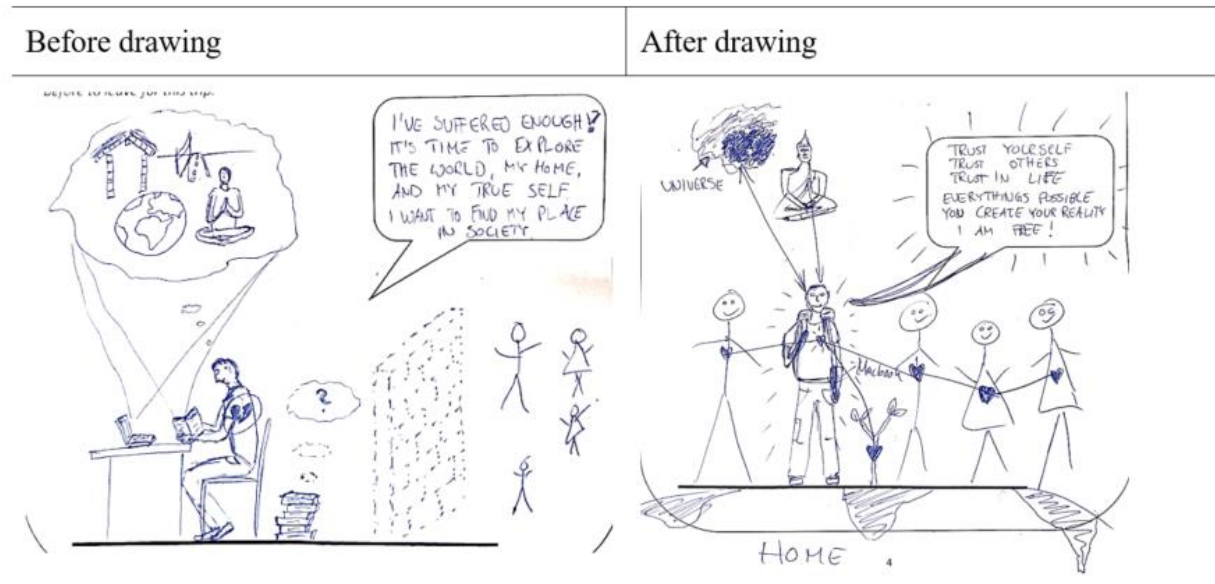
Three main themes emerge from the multi-method analysis where transformative travelers share symbols and narratives based on 1) an aspiration for powerful connections with destination residents, 2) a desire to take concrete actions and implement their new value system, and 3) thirst for knowledge. For the purposes of this study, we are focusing on the first two themes.

The travelers' aspiration for powerful connections with residents emerges as a key theme. Expanding on DeCrop, Del Chiappa, Mallargé, and Zidda (2018), transformative travelers mention that destination residents are crucial to helping them to negotiate deeply emotional learning experiences. These profoundly emotional ties are central to the narratives and symbols shared by transformative travelers such as Andrew and Heather. For example, Andrew shares how powerful connections with destination residents helped him fill a spiritual and social void. In his before drawing, he uses the symbol of the wall to represent social isolation, while his after drawing depicts him connected through the heart to a new global community (Figure 1). He interprets his drawings as follows:

In my before drawing, I put myself at the desk because I did a lot of reading. I got a lot of inspiration about different countries and different cultures. I'm not really feeling full or happy. To the right, there an invisible wall between me and the people around me because we have different views on life. In my after drawing, there is no wall anymore. My heart is healed and it is connected to people. I call the whole world my home now. I feel globally connected. I feel more connected to the universe. I share this contentedness and energy with people.

Andrew, 25, transformative trip to Nepal

Figure 1. Andrews' before and after drawings



Additionally, the sentence completion task also reveals the importance of destination residents to the experience. For example, Heather is deeply moved by her encounter with Mexican immigrants during a cross-border immersion program at the Southern border:

If this trip was a magical power it would be having a super strength. I think that the people that we met very much encompass this super strength. They have gone through these really challenging experiences but they still come out on the other side. They feel successful, proud, and hold on to their culture even as much as the United States might be trying to force them to get rid of or ignore their own culture. This the super strength I saw in the communities that we met.

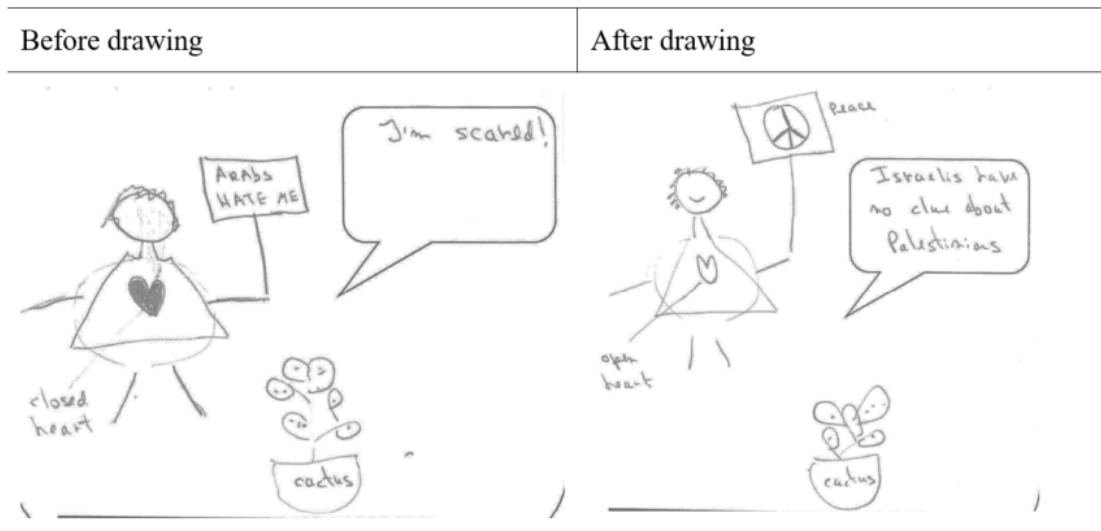
Heather, 24, transformative trip to the USA/Mexico border

Another theme that emerges from the participants' symbols and narratives is their inner drive to take concrete actions and implement their new values system. Expanding on Laing and Frost's (2017) work, transformative travel practitioners can share aspirational examples of real travelers to prompt potential travelers to take part in transformative travel and become agents of change. For example, Emily shares how her trip to Palestine and Israel leads her to become an active peace activist in the United States (Figure 2). She uses the symbols of the heart, cactus, and protest sign to illustrate her inner drive to become an agent of change:

I draw a big heart and I colored it black inside and it says "closed heart". Meaning that before the trip I was mostly terrified. In my hand, I have a sign that says "Arabs hate me." On the floor, I have a cactus. The cactus is on the floor because it is specific from the area and it grows on both sides of the border. Once I crossed the border, the cactus was so poignant for me because the land was the same. It had the same spirit that the land grew up on. In the after picture, the heart is open. I am holding a peace sign. The cactus is on the floor. And then the caption said: "Israelis have no clue about the

Palestinians". [The trip] did change me in a way that I believe peace is possible and I became an activist. I joined a national group called the Sisterhood of Shalom. It is an anti-hate group in the US. I spoke several times over the next years in synagogues, mosques, and churches. It was good to speak to people about my experience. I also went on a civil rights trip two years later here in the US.
Emily, 70, transformative trip to Israel and Palestine

Figure 2. Emily's before and after drawings



Similarly, Ileana uses the word hope to qualify her trip in the sentence completion task. She explains:

I chose hope because we learned a lot and it was a very humbling experience. We learned about the people, the type of work that they do, and how passionate they are. I think if anyone were to go on that specific experience or a similar one, it would be hard for them to leave it without feeling hopeful.

Ileana, 25, transformative trip to the USA/Mexico border

Thus, transformative travelers share symbols and narratives that tap into their aspiration for powerful connections with destination residents and desire to take concrete actions and implement their new value system. The next section discusses theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and opportunities for future studies.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Interaction Ritual Chains theory provides a solid theoretical ground to examine social interactions within transformative travel. An important discovery is related to how travelers use symbols and stories associated with magic. While Frost (2010) mentions magical elements when referencing the travelers' transformation, participants suggest that magical elements do not merely apply to their transformation but also community residents at the destination. In her narrative, Heathers describes how Mexican immigrants possess a super strength to highlight their resilience when confronted with xenophobia. This specific use of magical symbols suggests that

transformative travelers, not only develop a tolerance for other cultures but also come to deeply value and respect destination residents.

Another notable finding concerns the selection of symbols that trigger positive energy in the travels and trigger their desire to take part in the symbolic ritual of transformation (Sterchele, 2020). While Robledo and Batle (2017) suggest that the symbol of the explorer can create collective effervescence and generate positive emotions, others, such as Germann Molz (2016) warns against its relation to imperialism. Rather than describing themselves. Instead of seeing themselves as conquering heroes, transformative travelers share symbols that reflect their desire to take concrete actions to help others and foster tolerance (Sterchele, 2020). For example, Emily draws a peace sign in her after picture to symbolize her desire to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians actively. The travelers' symbols reflect their desire to connect with destination residents meaningfully.

The findings also have critical hands-on implications for transformative travel practitioners. Transformative travel practitioners can use the symbols and narratives shared by travelers to develop successful marketing content to present themselves coherently and develop a strong identity (Lounsbury et al., 2019). While some transformative travel organizations focus on the symbolism of the Hero's Journey, interviews with travelers suggest that symbols associated with human connections are more likely to resonate with them deeply. The marketing content of transformative travel organizations needs to reflect genuine interactions with destination residents. Examples of symbols that travelers share relate to hearts, connecting hands, breaking a wall, and linked individuals. Transformative travel practitioners can use similar symbols in their branding. For example, a transformative tour operator can use a logo that depicts a network of people.

Another recommendation for transformative travel practitioners is to use past travelers' testimonies in their marketing content to present themselves in a convincing way (Manning & Bejarano, 2017). For example, transformative travel practitioners can ask their past travelers to become ambassadors for their programs. When potential travelers contact a transformative travel organization, practitioners can introduce them to ambassadors who have been in the destination of interest. Ambassadors can also be featured on social media with live Q&A sessions. The objective is for potential transformative travelers to self-identify with the ambassadors because they share the same values.

There are several limitations to our study. For example, travelers are asked to draw both the before and after version of themselves after they have returned from their transformative trip, which can taint the way travelers see themselves. Nonetheless, Wu and Rau (2018) find that drawings provide effective and valid data even when they focus on prior experiences. While there are some limitations, future studies can build upon the findings to expand our understandings of transformative travel. A critical approach is needed where destination residents can share their opinions about the aims and impacts of transformative travel. Finally, marketing studies can employ focus groups to test which marketing messages effectively attract potential transformative travelers.

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Appendix

Table A. Participants Descriptive Information

<u>Nickname</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Duration of Travel</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Place of Residence</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Year of Travel</u>
Addison	51	Nepal	2 weeks	Teacher	USA	Female	2018
Andrew	25	Nepal	2 weeks	Unemployed	Germany	Male	2016
Betty	77	Tanzania and Kenya	2 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	1993
Bradley	79	China	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Male	2014
Brianna	65	Germany	2 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2016
Brynne	18	U.S. Virgin Island	2 weeks	Student	USA	Female	2019
Caylee	69	Italy	2 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2016
Charlotte	55	USA	2 weeks	Homemaker	USA	Female	2018
Colton	33	South Africa	10 months	Unemployed	Australia	Male	2017
Daniella	73	Russia	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2002
Daphne	40	Chile	2 weeks	Teacher	USA	Female	2015
Dena	37	South Africa	2 weeks	Life coach	USA	Female	2014
Derek	63	Cuba	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Male	2017
Eloise	70	USA	3 weeks	Intercultural communication specialist	USA	Female	2019
Emily	70	Israel and Palestine	1 week	Retired	USA	Female	2016
Eric	70	Peru	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Male	2004
Fabian	60	Egypt	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Male	2012
Felicia	60	Poland	2 weeks	Professor	USA	Female	2013
Francine	55	Bosnia and Albania	2 weeks	Volunteer in the community	USA	Female	2014
Giselle	58	Switzerland and Scotland	1 week	Instructor	USA	Female	2004
Greg	67	Austria and Hungary	3 weeks	Technology consultant	USA	Male	2019
Gwen	27	Israel and Palestine	2 weeks	Project manager	Germany	Female	2017
Heather	24	USA & Mexico border	1 week	Graduate student	USA	Female	2016
Helena	71	Ireland	2 weeks	Librarian	USA	Female	2009
Ileana	25	USA/Mexico border	1 week	Resident Director	USA	Female	2015
Iris	73	Cuba	1 week	Retired	USA	Female	2016

Julia	60	Tanzania	2 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2014
Kayla	66	Tanzania	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2019
Makenzie	63	China and Hong Kong	2 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2019
Nicole	60	Kenya	2 weeks	Consultant	USA	Female	1996
Penny	23	Uganda	2 months	Graduate student	USA	Female	2018
Rose	50	Uganda	7 months	Tour director	Swaziland	Female	2010
Sophia	60	United Arab Emirates	2 weeks	Graphic designer	USA	Female	2013
Tiffany	70	Ghana	3 weeks	Retired	USA	Female	2015

Table B. Interview questions

Please think back to a travel experience that has influenced, or even altered, your view of the world.

- Please tell me about this travel experience. Where did you travel to? What was the length of stay? With whom did you travel?
- What attracted you to go?
- What were some of the most powerful moments?
- How has this travel experience impacted the way you see yourself and the world?
- Did you experience any cultural shock or felt at time disoriented/uncomfortable?
- Did you engage in self-reflection during your trip as a way to digest everything that was happening? (by writing a journal, engaging in discussion with other travelers)
- Did you do anything differently after you came back home?
- How is this travel experience making you feel about yourself? How has this trip impacted your feeling of independence? Self-confidence?
- If a friend was thinking about taking a trip similar to yours what would you like him/her to know?
- Is there something else that you would like to add, maybe something that I did not ask but you feel is important and would like to add

Interview Worksheet

A) Thinking back to your life transforming trip, please complete the following sentences as fast as possible. Any answer that you give is the right one because it's your opinion, what you think or feel.

If this trip was an adjective/noun it would be _____

If this trip was a color it would be _____

If this trip was an emotion it would be _____

If this trip was an animal it would be _____

If this trip was a fairytale/folk story it would be _____

If this trip was a magical creature it would be _____

If this trip has magical power it would be _____

If this trip was a spiritual entity it would be _____

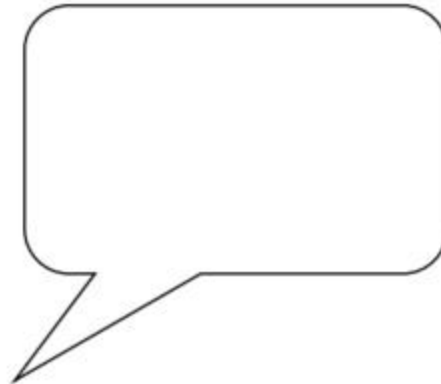
If this trip was a picture, it would depict _____

B) Small Drawing/Basic Sketch Activity #1:

*"Draw/sketch a picture of yourself **before** your life changing trip in the space below. Remember: it is not about how well you draw but about what you draw. You are not going to be evaluated on your artistic ability. We are interested in learning about the symbols/narratives that travelers like yourself associate with their life-changing travel experience. The focus is on how you would describe the changes that have occurred in the way you see yourself before vs. after the travel. (How did you used to see yourself? How do you see yourself now? What was your state of mind? How is it different now? How has this life-changing travel experience transformed you? Your worldviews? Your interactions with others? You will be the one interpreting and giving meanings to the sketches by describing/explaining them during the phone interview.*

Please complete your drawing by drawing: 1) something on the floor next to you, 2) something in your hands, and 3) something that you are wearing.

The last step is for you to fill the bubble with what your previous self would have say before to leave for this trip.



C) Small Drawing/Basic Sketch Activity #2:

*"Draw a picture of yourself **after** your life changing trip in the space below.*

Remember: it is not about how well you draw but about what you draw. You are not going to be evaluated on your artistic ability. We are interested in learning about the symbols/narratives that travelers like yourself associate with their life-changing travel experience. The focus is on how you would describe the changes that have occurred in the way you see yourself before vs. after the travel. (How did you used to see yourself? How do you see yourself now? What was your state of mind? How is it different now? How has this life-changing travel experience transformed you? Your worldviews? Your interactions with others?). You will be the one interpreting and giving meanings to the sketches by describing/explaining them during the phone interview.

Please complete your drawing by drawing: 1) something on the floor next to you, 2) something in your hands, and 3) something that you are wearing. The last step is for you to fill the bubble with what you would say after your trip.

