

Who am I?

An autoethnographic exploration of identity via travel

By

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Abstract

My travel is an existential mirror, reflecting back to me fragments of my identity. The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to explore how cultural issues play a part in my experiences as a traveller, and in turn how I use my experiences as a traveller to form my personal identity. In this paper I present story vignettes comprised of real moments of my past travel experiences and discuss theory in an effort to offer critical analysis as related to the question of identity, specifically privilege and gender. I conclude by offering possible sociological links for the reader to consider.

Introduction

In 2001 I accidentally walked from Singapore to Malaysia. My travel journal entry reads:

Wednesday, February 21st, 2001.

THE WORST DAY OF MY WHOLE YEAR OF TRAVELS.

(C. Moores, personal communication, February 21, 2001, all caps very much heartfelt.)

I go on to describe how I misinterpreted the signage when leaving Singapore customs and went through an emergency-only door that left me stranded outside on the Johor–Singapore Causeway between the two countries. There was no way to get back to my bus. My only option was to walk 1 kilometer alongside reams of traffic queuing up to enter Malaysia. I tried to ignore the raised eyebrows of serious-looking officials and the snicker of drivers as I marched across gated lanes of traffic into the Malaysian customs building.

A few days later in Kuala Lumpur while out for a walk, a local group of young women introduced themselves and asked if I would like to eat lunch with them. This was such a lovely interaction that most of the embarrassment of my border debacle faded away.

Both of these experiences shaped me. The border disaster pushed me beyond all possible comfort: extreme humiliation, fear of authoritarian consequences, and the awareness of knowing I was all by myself in an entire continent. These circumstances forced me to dig deeper than I thought was possible to manifest mental endurance, (twisted) humour, and self-compassion. My conversation with the women pushed me in other ways. I shared my thoughts on not being very interested in having kids, ambivalence about marriage, and my choices in makeup and clothing.

For me it's not a surprise that many of my extreme moments of growth and tests of my values take place when I'm on the road. Travel has a way of bringing me to the edge of my own borders for everything. What my tolerance is for danger, how much (and in what capacity) I'm willing to interact with other women and men, to what extent I'll seek out pleasure, and how much I might be willing to accept or challenge political and socio-economic forces wherever I am.

I also travel for recreation and relaxation, certainly. But I understand now after 20 years of adventuring that there's more to it than that for me. I use my travel experiences as my primary means by which to know myself. My travel is an existential mirror, reflecting back to me fragments of my identity.

Until now, understanding my identity has largely taken place through meditation, journaling, and animated conversations with fellow travellers. This paper is an opportunity to research, in a scholarly manner, how I use my travel experiences to make sense of my own identity. I will explore how my experiences abroad inform my sense of self.

This research is worthwhile to me because I hope to gain new understanding of who I am, and how the circumstances of travelling abroad can inform my self-identity. Perhaps it is possible that others reading this may find value in examining the means by which they define their own identity, be that travel or something else. Further, writing this paper at this point in time means I am creating a cultural artifact. I am reflecting on the society I was raised in, and how I create meaning from my own society as well as my experiences in different societies.

Problem and Research Question

Understanding my own identity is a broad topic. I'm using my past travel experiences as the means to explore identity because these have such personal significance to me. Additionally, I will continue to travel throughout my life, and as such, will have new opportunities to reflect on my values and identity each new time I travel. By writing a paper that explores how I create meaning through travel, I am setting myself up to continue this introspective exploration for every future journey.

My travel experiences are wide-ranging and diverse, and in this paper I will focus on a sociological lens. The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to explore how cultural issues play a part in my experiences as a traveller, and in turn how I use my experiences as a traveller to form my personal identity. Specifically, I am asking the following question: How do my travel experiences in other countries help me understand and define who I am?

Literature Review

I have chosen to share relevant literature within the autoethnographic narrative that follows below in the Findings section, as well as in the Discussion/Conclusion section. This paper aims to use the theoretical framework of transformation theory as the foundation for the research process, while also incorporating elements of social identity theory and feminist theory.

Transformation theory was proposed by Jack Mezirow. Developed as a theory for understanding adult learning (and sometimes referred to as transformative learning theory), the theory suggests that "the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is central to meaning

making and hence learning” (Mezirow, 1994). Mezirow states that critical reflection/self-reflection and critical discourse are major elements of the theory (as cited in Kitchenham, 2008). This critical reflection and discourse are what make a transformation in perspective possible (Kitchenham, 2008). Reisinger (2013a) applied Mezirow’s transformation theory to tourism, because travel and tourism have educational and transformational potential by opening one’s mind, fostering understanding, enrichment, growth, and personal development. I would like to continue the exploration of tourism through the theoretical framework of transformation.

I have also considered how social identity theory informs my research, which proposes that through social categorization, social identity is revealed. Likewise, feminist theory is considered, specifically ways in which I experience my gender.

By working with transformation theory, with its emphasis on critical self-reflection, and by incorporating social identity and feminist theories, I have chosen a multi-theory framework through which to explore the question of my identity.

Methodology

Autoethnography uses reflexive writing as a way to explore personal experience and search for meaning both within the author’s life and in the wider socio-cultural context (Jamjoom , 2020; Williams, 2021). It is used to examine “how identity is understood by the self and others” (Pennington, 2020) and to give “voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding” (Wall, 2008).

By using the personal to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011) I can examine how my travel experiences inform the cultural constructs I identify with, or reject, thus providing insight into the question of my own identity. Indeed, I'm unaware of another method of inquiry that would allow me to examine my own experience in this way. There are no surveys or questionnaires to be used to reflect on my experiences, and I am the only direct research participant. In short, because I am choosing to reflect on personal experience, it makes sense to use a methodology that uses personal reflection and personal meaning making as the means by which to conduct my research.

The term autoethnography originates from David Hayano in 1979, used to describe ethnographies that include an analysis of the author's own life as part of the process (Wall, 2016). This method, while not as widely used as others, continues to slowly increase in popularity thanks largely to the influence of the work by leaders such as Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner who (among others) reflect on the changes to social science research borne out of postmodernist inquiry (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011).

A growing concern in academia is the bias towards the Western and/or colonial perspective as an automatic academic authority. This paradigm of knowing is traditionally based on Positivism and a belief in absolute objectivity. Clough (2000), who regards autoethnography as a form of experimental ethnographic writing, observed that there is a relationship between the political and experimental writing. At the time of her writing Clough noted the evolution of experimental

ethnographic writing coincided with the cultural criticism towards the authority of traditional empirical positivist writing styles.

For the past several decades, academic voices that don't fit into this positivist tradition have been exploring alternative ways to research and interpret phenomena. For example, an author might use autoethnography as a means to decolonize research methods because it can be used as a platform to give voice to minority and disenfranchised voices traditionally marginalized in academia (Williams, 2021). Alternatively an author might use autoethnography to explicitly state his, her, or their own emotional experiences as part of the research process (Pung et al., 2020b).

Those who use autoethnography are not unified in its definition or methods. Some advocate for a more evocative writing style, eschewing more traditional elements such as defined criteria for assessment or rigorous, replicable study methods. Autoethnographies in this style are positioned as being outside of the empirical positivist paradigm altogether, hence their rejection of being analyzed and assessed using positivist standards from the traditional sciences. These manuscripts may be written in story and divulge deeply personal information about the writer and, by proxy, about others referenced by the writer. Evocative autoethnographies may also be presented as poems, or even in more avant-garde instances using non-written media such as video or visual art.

Others believe autoethnography to be more like a cousin to traditional positivist methods, and emphasize the analytical elements such as appropriate data sources, analysis, and relationship to theory. Wall (2016) notes that the disagreement between researchers on whether

autoethnography should be more like ‘analytic ethnography’ or more distinctly evocative continues. Some, like Ellis, really champion the evocative style whereas according to Wall (2016) others want to “tame” it into an analytic, reasoned analysis, which in some senses cuts off the appeal of why autoethnography developed in the first place.

Autoethnography offers an emergence of unique perspectives on social phenomenon (Wall, 2016). Méndez (2013) suggests the ease of access to data is a strength, as is the ability to contribute to others’ lives because they can reflect on themselves when reading the autoethnographic research of others. For my part, I appreciate how this method requires me to reevaluate what I consider to be academic knowledge. I see one of its strengths as its ability to challenge long-standing traditions of what it means to be academic, which surely drives into the heart of what it means to explore and research and seek knowledge. Berry & Patti (2015) use autoethnography to have “a deeper appreciation of the reach of stories.” I agree with this suggestion, as I’ve found myself more drawn to the work of those who tell me *who they are and what they feel*, much more so than those who provide facts without emotion.

But emotion is divisive. Wall (2016) expressed concern about the emotional dimensions of autoethnography, stressed that the key is to “deal with substantive topics/phenomena of sociological interest”, and fears that some authors emphasize personal emotions at the expense of making appropriate sociological connections. Related to emotion is ethics. The researcher is the primary data source in autoethnography, and traditional ethics approval is not usually required. However there is still the possibility of revealing personal information about others, which runs

the risk of being exploitative (Lapadat, 2017) depending on how they are portrayed by the author.

Another criticism is distinguishing what constitutes autoethnography versus another methodology. Wall (2016) expressed concern about this, citing manuscripts that use terms like narrative, autobiography, and autoethnography indiscriminately. Clough (2000) regards autoethnography as a form of experimental ethnographic writing, so we have yet another term to describe it. And beyond the definition, the methods used are also inconsistent and often tailored to each specific research piece. Conversely, even setting criteria to determine quality writing can be a challenge because it can limit or hinder the experimental quality of the writing (Clough, 2000). Wall (2016) states “autoethnography as a method seems to be heading in a certain direction, toward the evocative, formless, and unruly...what we understand [autoethnography] to be dictates how we undertake it.”

I'd also like to note the criticism of the data itself. Méndez (2013) notes that autoethnography is criticized for being individualized. Berry & Patti (2015), referring to feedback they'd received for an earlier journal submission, were told “inquiry should not be rooted in retrospection.” And Duncan (2004) noted that there are those who don't like that the self is used as data.

I understand why there is criticism, given the unsystematic definition of what autoethnography is (and is not). But I would also argue that some of the criticism is unfair, because it appears to be assessing and judging the credibility of autoethnography from a positivist perspective. Based

upon how autoethnography came into existence (as an alternative to positivist inquiry) I see no credibility in holding autoethnography to positivist standards. I argue it is not a methodology to be used by those who value the positivist paradigm above all. I do agree that some criticism is valid, but I don't believe this means the methodology should be abandoned. In truth, all methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses.

Gingrich-Philbrook (2016) noted that many, but not all, autoethnographic researchers believe that findings are “less *discovered* than *constructed*, first in the crucible of experience, and then hammered out in the work of writing.” I agree with this, and believe this distinction regarding how findings manifest from this methodology would be helpful to articulate to the reader.

Autoethnographic work has a substantive, iterative writing component from which meaning can be made. It's not just a matter of writing up a final report once the research itself is completed; the act of writing is where the research happens. I believe there is value in informing the reader that they, by reading the work, are witnessing research in action.

Méndez (2013) points out that some criticize autoethnography as being limited in its conclusions. But in the same article Méndez counters this by highlighting how Bocher & Ellis (as cited in Méndez, 2013) think this is “not valid because we individuals are part of a culture.” Berry & Patti (2015) state “we draw upon lived experience to assert that, in an important sense, we are all an “n” of one...claims of social scientific “validity” and “reliability” are not possible or desirable with AE. Claims of humanistic and philosophical resonance and interpersonal relation, however, are possible.” This leads back to Wall's (2016) position that when using autoethnography the

author must remember to provide analysis of the personal story, to link the personal with the social, otherwise the research may be regarded as “self-indulgent, therapeutic, and egocentric”.

Linking the personal with the social requires a willingness to look critically at personal experience. But the methods used still need to be legitimate (especially when using memory as a data source), and because even the layperson requires authenticity, sound method is vital (Muncey, 2005). Boylorn and Orbe (2020) describe this as taking “a critical lens, alongside an introspective and outward one, to make sense of who we are in the context of our cultural communities.” For my research, this means I’m not simply reflecting on my personal travel experiences. I’m also critically examining my own assumptions and beliefs that take place when I travel, and ultimately relating my findings to the larger sociological picture.

Data Sources

Duncan (2004) asserts that autoethnography is accomplished by interpreting multiple sources of evidence. Three of my sources of evidence are personal, and I argue that they are each distinct from one another. First, I am using my hand-written travel journal entries dated from February 2000 until the present day. Throughout my travels over the past 20 years, I have recorded my thoughts about my travel experiences. These journal entries include observations about my experiences with local food, culture, architecture, etc. but also include reflections about myself and my feelings. I also comment on my ethical and moral dilemmas while travelling. This source of evidence is focused on how I expressed myself, *to myself*, while travelling.

My second source of data is my sent emails while travelling. They cover both the same time period as well as content as the hand-written travel journal entries. However the reason this source of data is distinct from the first is because these emails are how I expressed myself *to others* while travelling.

My third source of personal evidence is a series of reflective journal entries dated from March 2021 until August 25, 2021. These entries are both a retrospective account of my past travel experiences as well as current reflections while writing this paper. This reflexive writing exercise has been the vehicle from which I use a critical lens to consider my past travels as well as the process of conducting the research for this paper. As a large amount of my data comes from personal sources, and as I am the only one who can provide this data, I have chosen to demarcate the three personal sources as follows for additional clarity:

(C. Moores, personal communication, travel journal entry, date)

(C. Moores, personal communication, travel email, date)

(C. Moores, personal communication, reflective journal entry, date).

Beyond the personal sources, my fourth source of data is the inclusion of theories that explore themes such as transformation, identity, and feminism. Finally my fifth source of data is published articles and unpublished graduate papers that explore the theme of transformation/identity through tourism.

Data Analysis

While there is disagreement within the autoethnographic community of researchers on whether or not criteria are explicitly required, I am choosing to use some. I agree with Bochner (2000) that there is an “impossibility of fixing a single standard for deciding the good and right purposes, forms, and practice of social inquiry.” So while I choose to have criteria for my autoethnographic analysis, I’m not suggesting that my criteria are equivalent to what is expected of other research papers, autoethnographic or otherwise.

While Bochner (2000) is less interested in theory, Berry & Patti (2015) suggest it’s helpful to put theory to the stories and especially emphasize the stories’ “use and function for readers.” Duncan (2004) suggests a similar approach and recommends linking the personal experience with broader theoretical concepts, and that the writing style should include “deeper levels of reflection or analytic scholarship”. Duncan (2004) also recommends ensuring the protocol of the research is reliable: the intention of which is not for others to produce similar results, but rather to be able to replicate how the research was performed (should they choose to do so).

My criteria, therefore, are to share my research process so that others could follow suit for their own research if they would find that useful, to include a discussion of theory, and to link the personal with the social.

My research process is systematic in that I will present several story vignettes comprised of real moments of my past travel experiences coupled with a theme related to identity. I will include a critical reflection on my travel experiences and discuss a theory (or theories) in an effort to offer

a critical analysis as related to the question of identity. I will then offer possible sociological links for the reader to consider.

In terms of ethical considerations, I will make efforts to write about my interactions with others in a way that's considerate. This means sharing only *my own* personal experiences and as much as possible (acknowledging I have personal bias like everyone else) and refraining from describing others from a place of authority or judgement. I cannot ever know what another person's intention or experience was, and I have a responsibility to keep this in mind as I write my travel vignettes. Furthermore, I have chosen to use the pronoun "they" where possible for individuals referenced in my travel stories. This is done to further obscure the identities of others as a means of respecting their privacy. It is also a nod to the socio-cultural context I am in as I write this paper, where social norms around gender are beginning to change.

Wall (2016) notes that issues of the ethics of the self is scarcely considered in autoethnographic work. I have considered this point many times: this is my first autoethnographic research project and I've been searching for an understanding within myself to know how much personal disclosure is appropriate. I do wonder if possible discomfort of the reader is more to do with the reader, rather than my methodology. If there is discomfort, who bears the responsibility? Should I share personal details if appropriate to my story, and possibly let the reader be pushed beyond their comfort zone? In the end I am simply using my personal barometer – I will only disclose in my writing what I'm comfortable sharing. Perhaps my level of personal disclosure will increase in the future, should I decide to engage in future autoethnographic work.

Findings

I return to my research question: *How do my travel experiences in other countries help me understand and define who I am?* I have determined that an autoethnographic approach is best suited for the exploration of this question, and that my exploration lies within the theme of transformation.

I took inspiration from the travel blogs of Hynes (2019) and White (2021) to consider the matter of privilege as related to travel: what both authors refer to as travel privilege. By examining my areas of travel privilege, I can contemplate my social identities such as ethnicity, gender, etc.

Below I share some travel stories linked to the theme of travel privilege that allow me to critically reflect on my past travel experiences and address my research question. As I don't identify as having male privilege, I have devoted a separate section of the paper to explore the theme of my gender as it relates to my identity.

Privilege

Passport Privilege

I usually don't give much thought to border crossings. True, I ensure I have appropriate paperwork like visas prepared ahead of time. But even that takes very little effort on my part. It has nothing to do with me being uniquely special, and everything to do with being born in Canada. I travel using a Canadian passport, which in terms of relationships with other countries, generally makes transiting through and visiting other countries easy and straightforward.

Only once has a border crossing caused me significant anxiety. I had travelled with three friends overland to the eastern edge of Turkey and we were entering Iran. In fairness, this wasn't a busy or popular border. Mainly for locals, only a handful of tourists pass this route compared to those arriving in major cities via international flights. The border was rural with some military influence on both sides. Between them my friends travelled using one Dutch and two British passports. They were processed quickly and escorted to the Iranian side of the building. I was left alone in the processing room. No one else, neither tourist nor local, was with me. My passport was taken away and all I could do was wait.

I have sometimes felt the need to assert that I am not American when I travel, because the United States has a different reputation and relationship with other countries. It's understandable that some people in other countries don't see much difference between Canadians and Americans, and I usually don't let that bother me too much. However waiting in the processing room between Turkey and Iran had me thinking about how I could distance myself from the American identity as much as possible.

While I waited I stared at a large poster on the wall that had a US flag crossed out and underneath someone had written 'Death to America'. I think in reality it was only about an hour, but being alone in that room, with nothing to look at other than that poster, felt agonizing. I didn't feel physically unsafe, but I genuinely wondered if they were going to deny me entry. My rational mind said "You're Canadian! You're different from Americans so it's fine!" But the reality was I saw triple and quadruple checking of my passport from behind the glass, phone

calls, and computer work for ages...telling me that being so culturally close to the United States might be a problem.

A decision was made that it was acceptable for me to enter Iran and I met up with my three friends with tremendous relief. The rest of my time in Iran was wonderful and I quickly forgot about my nationality's passport as having been less than ideal for my travels there.

Considering this is the only time in my life I recall having a challenge at a border, this reminds me of how often I've taken my nationality for granted. Because it's mostly a non-issue, I overlook how my nationality has shaped my privilege. The Henley Passport Index (2021) gives the Canadian passport a ranking of 9th place, which means Canadian passports have a lot of privilege compared to other countries. (More than one country can hold each rank: for 2021 Canadian passports share extremely high privileges with 25 other countries ranked in the top 9 spots.)

One of the findings in the study by Soulard et al. (2020) suggests an element that distinguishes transformative travel is its focus on intense emotions that can arise from a disorienting dilemma. (They also found that intense emotions related to joy are an indicator of transformative travel.) I would certainly describe my experience at the Iranian border as a disorienting dilemma. I experienced high stress and fear, while not being able to do anything about it. I was pushed into feeling intense emotions and, similar to the participants in the study mentioned above, experienced the situation as personally transformative (after the fact!).

Socioeconomic Privilege

To consider my identity in relation to socioeconomic status, I recall the time I felt indignant at having to pay three times as much as the locals in order to visit a historic site in Vietnam.

“Paid over 3 times as much as a Vietnamese person would to see some ruins in Huế.

Wasn’t worth it.” (C. Moores, personal communication, travel journal entry, September 9, 2002).

At that time, I didn’t give any consideration to my economic status compared to most in the world. All I could see was that I was being charged three times as much. This didn’t seem fair! We should all pay equal amounts! The signage (provided in English, yet another privilege in my favour) explained the higher price for tourists was to subsidize the ability for locals to visit, as well as to cover maintenance costs for the site. I ended up paying about \$3 Canadian instead of \$1.

I read this journal entry now and feel abashed. I was aware that the exchange rate was heavily in my favour, but I wasn’t able (willing?) to acknowledge the bigger picture. I have substantial socioeconomic privilege: I have been free to earn income at stable, reasonably well-paying jobs my whole life, and when I travel to other destinations I can take advantage of converting my dollar to the local currency. True, the Canadian dollar is not as strong as the US dollar or some other currencies, but there are still many countries where the conversion means I am able to enjoy a level of wealth out of reach for many of that country’s population.

Morgan (2010) shares examples of challenging situations where the locals expected some financial contributions by his group who had embarked on a transformative educational experience in a foreign country. For me, this highlights the staggering income disparity that exists in the world, and how I become implicit as a wealthy individual when I travel as a tourist. Were I at that historic site in Vietnam today I would not make the complaints my younger self did. I would pay the tourist price of \$3, with the awareness that my socioeconomic privilege allowed me to be there in the first place.

White Privilege

There are so many examples of times I've benefitted from this privilege that it's hard to note one for a travel story. This in and of itself is indicative of how much privilege I've received because of the colour of my skin.

I'd first like to comment on the general ease of which I've interacted with locals when abroad. When I say I'm Canadian I've never been asked any follow-up questions. No one asks about my ancestry or tries to figure out where I'm "really from". When I check into hotels, go to restaurants or head out shopping, I've never been treated with suspicion or contempt. I've never worried about receiving abuse because of my skin colour when travelling.

There have been times I wonder if my white skin has emboldened me when I'm on the road. Several years ago I was in Qatar. I waited for my turn to speak to the front desk agent at the hotel, and noticed two people walk over and stand on the far side of the counter. They arrived after I had already queued up to wait my turn. In my eyes, it was obvious that it was my turn to

be served next. However once the person in front of me finished, these two slid over and started speaking to the front desk agent. I was livid – I had been waiting my turn and wasn't going to let them cut in front of me. I walked right up to them and informed the front desk agent that I had been waiting first and it was my turn for service. The two apologized, as did the receptionist, and I was served first.

I can't say with certainty that I spoke up because of the colour of my skin, but I thought this was worth exploring. Am I more assertive because of the (unfair) security my skin colour affords me in many situations? The more I think about this the more I believe it must. I believe I have an innate right to speak up and be treated respectfully. As I become more aware and learn about the experiences of others, I see more and more that other individuals may not feel that right innately as I do. (Or perhaps that innateness has been taken away from others due to systemic oppression and racism.)

In her autoethnographic work, Cooke (2017) shares her experiences as a settler-Canadian and what it's like to exist in a place of extreme privilege. She describes her employment related to land use development for a ski resort, from which she got to directly benefit from when the resort was finished by skiing in her free time. Land use is quite often contentious, and Cooke sensitively articulates her awareness of the ongoing discussions in British Columbia about decolonizing the land, meaningful engagement with First Nations communities, and that she shares the responsibility in being an active and engaged member of this conversation.

So on the one hand, the colour of my skin gives me an extreme amount of privilege. And on the other, it can lead people to make inappropriate assumptions about me. I found this to be particularly true abroad regarding the perceived promiscuousness of white women.

In Turkey, while contemplating making a purchase in a shop, the employee leaned towards me in an attempt to kiss me. I was shocked and angry and backed away. The employee shrugged off the incident and joked about how “liberal” white women are so it wasn’t a big deal. This assumption, that my sexuality was available to any stranger who showed interest, was based on the colour of my skin. These kinds of incidents have happened in many of the countries I have visited. I have found it bewildering...the number of times individuals have attempted to be sexually inappropriate with me based on the assumption that because I have white skin it is acceptable to treat me in that way. (I’d also like acknowledge the reality that women of all races and skin colours experience sexual harassment, as do men.)

Pung et al. (2020a) found in their research that one of the dimensions that suggest tourist transformation is or will occur is the challenges faced at the destination. I definitely regard sexual harassment as a terrible and frightening challenge I’ve encountered while travelling. I’ve experienced it at home in Canada as well, but there are increased elements of challenge when this happens abroad. Sometimes there are language barriers, then there are social and cultural barriers, whether or not the local police can be trusted, and so on. So while being sexually harassed because of the colour of my skin is not a challenge I’d wish on anyone, I can say with certainty that every time I’ve had to face this experience abroad it’s resulted in some form of

transformation for me. It might be increased confidence in my ability to protect myself. At other times it might be the realization that I am far more vulnerable than I would ever want to let on. And even further it might be that I have much more ability than previously imagined to overcome natural shyness and strike up conversations with local women as often as I want when I could use some help.

What do These Privileges Mean?

These stories of understanding my travel privilege have moments of transformation for me. Some transformation occurred at the time (slowly realizing that my passport might mean I'm not welcome in a different country), but most of the transformation has come from reflecting on these travel moments while I write this autoethnography, thus encouraging me to expand my understanding of my experiences in the world.

Social identity theory was introduced by psychologist Henri Tajfel in 1978. This theory proposes that through social categorization social identity is revealed. My travel privileges show me that I am a white, Canadian, upper-middle class woman with significant socioeconomic power. I am someone who has personal agency and freedom. I categorize myself in these ways in part because of how I live in my own society, and also in how I experience myself when travelling. Reisinger (2013a) notes that the experiences of being away “creates human awareness, encourages the development of new values, and facilitates development as a mindful being with an increased understanding of life”. I find this insight helpful when it comes to recognizing my many layers of privilege, and where I've struggled to interact with others due to lacking an

understanding of their position. Travel doesn't mean I truly understand another's experience, certainly, but at the very least it allows me to expand my values in a manner that considers how I might be more understanding towards others.

The stories I chose to share revealed some challenging moments, but I don't regard this exploration as something negative. Rather, these are examples where I have been pushed out of my comfort zone, getting close to my own edges. Reflecting on experiences that have challenged me is where I need to go in order to have a greater understanding of who I am.

Gender is also a significant topic for me, and I have chose to explore this more fully below under its own theme, rather than as an exploration juxtaposed to male privilege.

Gender

Clothing and Makeup

At home in Canada there is a tendency to wear less when it's hot out. Perhaps this is because we have limited time in the year to enjoy warmer weather. Regardless, choosing my clothing for summer at home can mean a little more exposed skin, which is okay with me. This doesn't always work when I'm planning a trip, however. Of course there are some countries with similar societal norms as at home, in which case it's a non-issue. But travelling to Morocco for a month required a lot of consideration when it came to deciding what clothing to pack.

For me, clothing choices for travel are a combination of practicality and personal expression. Most pieces should be multi-purpose because I can only take so many things. But I also want to dress in a way that feels authentic to me. It's a matter of personality as well as my desire to express femininity, the latter of which can feel heavily influenced depending on where I'm travelling. All my guidebooks and online research advised me that Morocco was a more conservative country when it came to dress.

I would describe my personal style as relatively modest by Canadian standards. I don't usually choose to wear tight clothing, or clothing with low necklines or high hemlines. I don't regularly use makeup, and when I do it's also quite modest. It's just not my style, and it reflects my comfort level. However in preparing for my Morocco trip I determined that my usual style might be considered inappropriate for many of the places I would be visiting. True, I could likely get away with traveling in my Canadian clothes, but was advised I might receive unwanted attention. (My past travel experiences taught me that unwanted attention can come as aggression from men as well as disapproval from women – both of which can generate conflict and arguments with locals.)

So, what to do? It's true that I try to take in local customs and norms to a certain degree when travelling in an attempt to convey respect. But how far would I change my appearance? My Canadian tendency to wear less in hot weather was tempered by the reality of requiring protection from the Moroccan sun as well as my new knowledge of how local women dressed.

I decided it was best to cover up – in equal parts to avoid sunburn and to avoid social stigma. I began searching for ‘modest summer clothing’ and was surprised at how difficult it was to find suitable items. Yes, my local stores had great options for travel (overnight drying fabrics for the many sink washes ahead), but none of them went past the elbow or knee. My online searching did yield lots of modest clothing options, but many of them were too bulky to pack and not conducive to drying hung up in the shower in time to wear the next morning.

In the end, I found a few options from an Australian company specializing in sun protection. It was the best compromise I could find – Western in design, with lots of coverage to protect me from the sun. I was happy this sun protection would double as an effort to be even more modest in Morocco. I practiced wearing and washing the skirts and dresses at home first before deciding if they were okay to pack for Morocco, and it was an interesting experience. Wearing a dress with sleeves down to the wrists and hem to mid-shin in the Canadian summer felt odd at first. I felt as if I stood out. It wasn’t my intention to make a statement, but curiosity from friends and family suggested perhaps they thought I was. I tried to answer questions about why I was so “covered up”, but quickly became tired of being expected to rationalize my clothing choices to others.

When it came time to wear these clothes in Morocco, I also had to deal with comments and questions.

“So we’re in Fes now...[person in my tour group] commented to the whole group that they liked how I’m dressed. I think [they] meant it as a compliment but it was just weird.

I thought I might get scrutinized by locals. Didn't expect to be publically assessed by another tourist on my tour..." (C. Moores, personal communication, travel journal entry, September 14, 2019).

Others in my tour group asked where I got my clothes and why I was so covered up. The group consisted of Western tourists from Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia. I was the only Canadian. I'm aware that I share a lot from a socio-cultural standpoint with these nationalities, so perhaps I shouldn't have been too surprised to hear these questions because I was asked similar things at home. Yet I was irritated. In my eyes it was obvious, looking around, that the local women were more covered up, and I was trying to reflect local custom. Others in my tour group did not make a similar attempt, or if they did it was more muted than my attempt. This applied to the women (skin showing above the knee and elbows etc.) as well as the men (tank tops and shorts – I didn't see local men wearing either in public).

Looking back on this experience has left me wondering if I was right to try and reflect local custom, or if I was somehow abandoning my own identity by conforming to social norms that weren't my own. This morning, a quick scan of online travel advice for Morocco provided me with examples of women saying they didn't feel it was necessary to dress as modestly as I did, and that by and large they didn't feel uncomfortable. On the one hand, I think I made the right choice, because I dressed how I felt comfortable for that environment. On the other, I wonder if my clothing choices are an appropriate means by which to understand my identity, considering how easily I was prepared to alter my clothing in order to conform.

In general I don't wear makeup, and when I do, I don't wear much. While not explicitly stated that makeup was a bad thing, I certainly picked up that message growing up. Comments made by family members like "she's wearing *so* much makeup" carried a tone that informed a growing me that makeup was not appropriate. Now, in my 40's, I'm reevaluating my position on what makeup means. Having consumed messages for so long telling me that makeup carries a connotation of "bad" or "inappropriate" I find I struggle to know how I truly feel about it. Is the reason I don't use much makeup forever influenced by my upbringing? Is it possible to redefine what makeup means to me?

Perhaps I'll never wear a lot of makeup. That might simply be a practical matter of having sensitive skin. Or it might truly be that I don't feel like myself when I wear it. But I've often looked at the makeup others choose to wear, especially while I'm travelling, and wondered if I'd enjoy having anything similar.

"I'm noticing a lot of really exquisite makeup on the women I'm interacting with here [Tehran]. Someone suggested that because their clothing is so restrictive, makeup is one of the only avenues they have for personal expression." (C. Moores, personal communication, travel email, September 25, 2007).

Iran was a wonderful country to visit for many reasons such as the food, the architecture, and the hospitality. I really enjoyed my interactions with our guide and with the local women who felt comfortable speaking with me. I was confronted with challenges to my personal expression of femininity in this country more than anywhere else I've been, with having to keep my head

covered and wearing clothing that avoided showing any shape of my body. I looked at the faces of the women I met. Certainly not all of them wore makeup, but many women of diverse age groups did. And some of it was among the most artistic and creative I have ever seen. I myself didn't have makeup with me – I didn't deem it an essential as I had limited space and was travelling for a couple of months in several countries. But I've wondered that if I did travel with makeup, would I have tried out any of the more elaborate applications (such as very dramatic eyes) like the women I saw in Tehran do?

Years later, on the above-mentioned trip to Morocco, I had the chance to explore makeup in a way I didn't when in Iran. The final week of my month in Morocco was a female-only hiking trip from village to village in some very remote mountains. On the final night we had a celebration, and our guide invited a local woman to dress us up in the traditional clothing of the region and do our makeup.

At first I felt foolish...my own personal, cultural conditioning bubbling up telling me that “playing dress-up” was silly and weak. Some of the messaging absorbed in my particular Canadian childhood and adolescence was that dresses and makeup were almost the antithesis of modern feminism...that indulging in such things was a step backwards in my expression as a modern woman.

Slowly though, I began to enjoy the experience. I suspect this was partly because of being with the other women in my tour group, some younger and others significantly older, and seeing them

let loose and enjoy themselves in the moment. The time came for Kohl to be applied to my eyelids. And then I looked in the mirror. I looked so different: elaborate headscarf, colourful kaftan, and dark, dramatic eyes. I liked it, and didn't. I recognized myself, but also didn't.

One of the foci of feminist theory is its aim of trying to “understand how gender has been socially constructed” (Small, 1999). My experiences with clothing and makeup in Canada and abroad are examples of how my feminine identity is influenced by my socio-cultural environment. I still find it hard to know where my personal borders are with my femininity – am I wearing something because I want to, or because it's what's expected in that particular context? How much patriarchal influence is seeping into my autonomous sense of self? And how do I know if I'm truly enjoying what I'm wearing – is it genuine happiness, or simply a feeling of relief at not having to defend myself because my clothing and/or makeup helps me to ‘fit in’? I wonder if the longer I stay away from my Canadian culture, and distance myself from the influences of friends and family of origin, how much my outward appearance might change.

Experimenting with makeup and changing my clothing in Morocco and Iran transformed me. The differences between my modest Canadian dress, my mostly covered Moroccan dress, and my entirely shapeless dress in Iran have all influenced how I feel it is to express myself as a woman. For all my (presumably) progressive thinking, I'm surprised at how heavily I felt cultural influences pushing me to dress in ways that challenged my personal boundaries. I've often (...foolishly?) perceived my liberal Western upbringing as some sort of shield, protecting me from different cultural influences I disagreed with. But in practice my ideals gave me no protection from external influences I faced in these two countries. Granted, I don't want to go to

jail in a foreign country, so restrictive dress codes are simply a reality in some places like Iran. And yet...what does this say about me? Does it signify a lack of strong or defined identity because I'm so willing to conform to local norms?

Or is there room for a softening of my expression, such that it allows me to navigate foreign worlds otherwise inaccessible to me? I complied with the dress code in Iran, and was rewarded with being left alone by the State and having meaningful conversations with local women who were happy to speak with me. They told me about their lives, I admired their intricate makeup, and wondered if they were more feminine than I was with their shapeless clothing. In the end, even though I was covered up, I didn't feel that I had lost my femininity – it just looked different from the outside. In fact in some ways I felt a stronger connection with the feminine, especially when I tried on the traditional Moroccan dress and eye makeup.

Ross (2010) discusses a type of tourism called Goddess pilgrimage, which “provides women a unique opportunity to heal through reclamation of the feminine that renders a transformation of identity or enhances a felt sense of self”. By experimenting with clothing and makeup in ways I wouldn't do at home, I felt my sense of self deepen. Kottler (1998) describes the freedom to be different while abroad because no one knew the “real” him or the way he was at home. This felt true for me as well as I travelled.

Smith (2003) notes that travel increasingly focuses not on escapism, but on the traveller's engagement with the true self and to “attempt reconciliation of personal dissonances.” I have

pondered this statement at length. At the time, wearing different clothing and experimenting with makeup, I didn't consider any of my activity as related to resolving possible personal discord. But now I wonder if subconsciously I was engaging on some level in this manner. Did I miss opportunities to experiment with clothing and makeup at home? Was I sad about this? Do I feel like I missed out on a part of my feminine journey growing up at home? I don't expect to definitely answer these questions, but I do find it interesting that a significant part of this paper has focused on femininity as expressed through clothing and makeup. I didn't set out to purposefully have this discussion in this paper, but it has become a major theme, and that tells me this subject does indeed have significance for me.

Connection with Other Women and Emotional Expression

Mostly naked and sitting on the tiled floor of a traditional public hammam is as good a place as any to contemplate my own identity. I was in Chefchaouen, Morocco, sharing the experience with a few Western friends and some local women. I'd been to a hammam before, in Turkey, but the previous time I was on my own with no other Westerners. In that instance, I somehow felt more comfortable. So what was it that was different this time?

Something that interests me is how women relate to other women. I recall having plenty of female friendships when I was a child. I have a few close female friends now. I'd never thought to consider the style in which I relate to my female friends, but it was all I could think about sitting in the Moroccan hammam. I watched the local women chat and laugh and appear

comfortable in their own bodies. Then I turned to see us Westerners try to cover ourselves as much as possible. The air felt as heavy with body comparisons as it did actual steam.

I thought back to all the times I'd been at a swimming pool back home. The change rooms had a quiet and modest vibe, where most women turned their backs to one another to discreetly change out of wet swimwear. Not so here, where women were showering and scrubbing and trimming and clipping...all the while carrying on full conversations with one another. I noticed in particular what appeared to be a grandmother/granddaughter duo. The older woman was tenderly cleaning the young girl's back. I was surprised to find I was moved by the tenderness, and I quickly became embarrassed with myself.

Something about witnessing a tender moment shared between this grandmother and granddaughter left me feeling a bit raw. I scanned my own memory for moments of tenderness like that with female family members or friends, but couldn't find any. Even more interestingly, I had an awareness that I might be too embarrassed to engage in that kind of tenderness anyway.

Reflecting back on my hammam experience has me questioning how I've defined my own emotional boundaries with other women and if it would be possible for me to change them.

Although it was challenging to relax at first, eventually I did settle into the hammam experience and felt less self-conscious around the other Western women. We managed a few laughs and the experience bonded us.

So could I achieve the same kind of closeness back at home? More interestingly to me, would I want to? Or did I prioritize emotional bonding with women only when I was travelling? This line of contemplation encourages me to consider that perhaps one of the reasons I travel is because it gives me an opportunity to express myself in ways that I don't want to (or don't know how to) when I'm home. There is a kind of freedom that comes with travelling that allows me to let go of the cultural conditioning I've learned at home. While it's true, however, that I may have to comply with new cultural norms (such as a mandatory dress code in Iran), I can still explore other ways to express myself.

I find this to be a particularly relevant insight when it comes to emotional expression. I'm a Canadian with British ancestry, and looking back on my childhood it seems much of the "stiff upper lip" stereotype was true. It was an unspoken rule in my childhood home that displays of emotion, whether happy, sad, angry or joyful, were just not done. Expressing emotion carried a layer of embarrassment for others, which translated to shame for me. I don't often think about how I may be emotionally stunted in my adulthood, but certainly seeing other women express themselves freely acts as a catalyst for this kind of reflection.

Kottler (1998) states that when travelling he intentionally insulated himself from usual influences and "people whose approval was most important". He also suggests transformative travel can help those who "are guarded with their feelings" and want "to break out of the shell of emotional containment" (Kottler, 1998). The hammam, with its strong focus on female companionship and camaraderie, is a way of relating to women that I'm not used to at home. I had to put in

considerable effort to stop hiding myself in the corner of the bathhouse. I was more comfortable with the local women, but I did also detect an increase in comfort with my fellow Western travellers as the experience went on. Perhaps by stopping trying to hide physically I somehow paved the way to stop hiding so much emotionally.

Reisinger (2013a) explores how transformational learning theory (developed by Jack Mezirow) can be applied to tourism, and suggests that tourism experiences that transform the tourist create “opportunities for people to reach their full potential as human beings.”

She also suggests that the power of transformation can come from tangible things (like food or buildings, in my case the hammam) or from intangible things like rituals (in my case the bathing ritual). I’m not saying that one experience in a hammam has fully transformed me into a woman who is now totally emotionally open. But I will say that the experience did transform me in a small way, showing me that there are other ways to be emotionally expressive than what I remember growing up. The hammam opened my eyes to how much I can still struggle with open emotional expression. Do I want to be as emotionally open as I was sitting on the floor in the hammam? Probably not. But I’m grateful to have had the time to reflect on the experience. It showed me that I have buried a desired to be more open, and that it’s possible for me to open up if and as I’m ready to let go of how I used to be.

A Short Word on Marriage and Children

I've noticed that old tombstones often describe the woman buried there in relation to her male relatives and children. "Daughter of [father's name], wife of [husband's name], mother to [children's name]..." It's as if the woman herself doesn't exist unless it's in relation to these other people.

I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked about my marital status and whether or not I have children. Children and an affiliation with a man are ways some individuals/societies attempt to assess a woman's status by. (This happens in Canada too.) As I'm neither married nor have children, conversations with others sometimes fall flat. When this happens, I'm alerted to the possibility that my association with marriage and kids (or the lack of it in my case) has significance for my identity in the eyes of the one I'm conversing with.

But diversity can be found everywhere, and for all the times I was annoyed at people that were in disbelief that I was without husband or children, I found acceptance elsewhere.

"Going over some travel emails and I can see I sent a lot of exasperation to friends back home. How many times am I going to have to talk about not being married? I know I look weirdly young for my age, and people sometimes flip out when they realize I'm much older than I look. How can someone 'my age' STILL not be married or have kids? It was funny that I found allies in the most random of places though...like [Name Withheld] in the desert outside of Doha, Qatar. I thought they'd give me flack because of *my* assumptions about *their* age and gender. But not at all. They just shrugged and said

“those things aren’t for everyone” and that was that. The conversation moved on.” (C. Moores, personal communication, reflective journal entry, May 10, 2021).

I bring up marriage and children because it’s been my experience that it’s an inescapable topic when I travel. I think I’m okay with my choices, but it has felt hard on occasion to still feel good when I’m met with shock or puzzlement. Being unmarried and childless has occasionally left me feeling like I’m in a different gender category. Technically female, but in the eyes of locals not really a woman because I’m not associated with a man. Thankfully, this sensation has decreased in recent years of travel. But it does bring up another line of inquiry for myself: who am I when I exist outside of my relationship to a man or to children? Robledo, & Batle (2017) assert that personal transformation is a change in the way we feel about ourselves and the world...that it’s non-linear, involves self-reflection, and the adoption of new and broader self definitions. I don’t have definite answer to the question of who I am outside of a man or children. Rather, the question encourages me to consider stopping using circumstances outside of myself to define myself.

My Gender Experiences While Travelling

I don’t think about my gender the same way at home as I do when travelling. At home, being a woman is in my awareness, but it feels more like programming that’s constantly running in the background of my own experience. Abroad, my interactions with others bring the issue of my femininity to the forefront in some instances. Is it more important to claim my sense of womanhood when I travel? And why might that be?

Being a woman comes with its unique challenges and oppressions. Because of my social identity described earlier (white, Canadian, upper-middle class with significant socioeconomic power) I'm seeing more clearly how insulated I am from many of the barriers other women are subject to. I'm also seeing that by travelling I have the opportunity to try out new experiences within my own femininity that I don't explore when home. Is this indulgent? I'm not sure. Perhaps more than anything, I'm coming to understand that due to circumstances beyond my control (where I was born etc.) I have tremendous freedom to explore, define, and redefine my feminine expression.

Reisinger (2013a) states that transformational tourism provides opportunities for reflection, emotional healing, and even provides opportunities for the traveller to express their true personalities and be more themselves. I wonder if this is true of me, and to what extent? Are there parts of my personality that I repress when in Canada? Am I more myself when I travel?

Rountree's 2002 work on Goddess pilgrims as tourists explores the sacred that can occur while travelling. Sacred travel can be done expressly to explore religious and/or feminist identity. This can include "a re-inscription of the female body by exposing women to alternative representations of the feminine and by providing contexts in which the feminine can be re-imagined and re-experienced through symbolic activity and ritual" (Rountree, 2000). Further, Goddess pilgrimage "gives space apart from patriarchal structures and is not just about a reprieve from patriarchy, but about a permanent transformation away from patriarchy." I did not expressly take part in intentional Goddess pilgrimage, and certainly the countries I've mentioned in this paper have their fair share of patriarchy. And yet I was still drawn to this specific form of

tourism that Rountree has studied. Until reading her work I was unaware of the social science interest in female travellers intentionally travelling in order to explore and expand their feminine expression and intentionally unburden themselves from patriarchy.

Discussion/Conclusion

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly; to come down off this feather bed of civilisation, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints. Alas, as we get up in life, and are more preoccupied with our affairs, even a holiday is a thing that must be worked for. To hold a pack upon a packsaddle against a gale out in the freezing north is no high industry, but it is one that serves to occupy and compose the mind. And when the present is so exacting, who can annoy himself about the future? (Stevenson, 1879/2019)

I've loved this quote from Robert Louis Stevenson since I discovered his writing while living in Scotland 20 years ago. I too, find satisfaction with the physical act of travelling. It's not always enjoyable. In fact it can be uncomfortable, dangerous, and exhausting. Never the less I get something from it. Robledo & Batle (2017) suggest that the outer journey is a vehicle for an inner journey. And Ross (2010) holds that the transformational tourist "travels with attention to both an inner and outer journey, possibly even viewing the two as mirrors of one another". In the introduction to this paper I referred to my travel as an existential mirror, and so I love this

sentiment from Ross. To me travel is internal while external: the physical a metaphor for the emotional, the spiritual, the metaphysical, and so on.

Poutiatine, as cited in Reisinger (2013b), asserts that transformational change doesn't happen on its own, rather the individual chooses to actively engage in change. Transformational travel is "travel embarked upon by the traveller for the primary and intentional purpose of creating conditions conducive for one or more fundamental structures of the self to transform" (Ross, 2010). The key distinction from other travel, according to Ross, is that the traveller has conscious intention. I can't say that all of my travels have started out with this express intention, though it did develop along the way, and certainly the travel I embark upon now has this intention front and centre.

Robledo, & Batle (2017), in discussing the work of Mezirow as related to transformation theory, suggest everyone has the power to break free from their own situation to transform their life. I'd like to suggest that this may be true for many individuals, but I'd caution against the suggestion that transformation is an option for everyone. It presumes a relatively high degree of social and financial independence, a life free from violence and religious/political interference. I don't want to ignore or belittle the life circumstances that can make transformation a challenge for some.

Likewise, I wish to avoid romanticizing other cultures or suggesting that when I visit a different country there is a culture that is superior. It's all just different, with none being better than the other. I'd also like to state that my visits to other countries all occurred in modern times. My visit

to Iran, for example, did not “take me back in time”. I believe it would be disrespectful to infer a past-versus-modern perspective for any country I’ve visited. I wish to ensure I’m conveying that my explorations have occurred in societies undergoing their own transformations and that they are just as modern and future-oriented in many or all aspects as my home country. And finally I’d like to state that while I chose to highlight certain aspects of my own femininity, I have not intended to define femininity universally. For some, a discussion centering around clothing and makeup will have nothing to do with their definition of feminine expression.

Expressing myself in an autoethnographic research style in the section above was quite revealing. When I started writing this paper, I had a sense of what my research question would be and the possible themes I wanted to explore. These themes included whiteness and privilege along with femininity. As I progressed through the writing, I felt very engaged with the theme of femininity, but struggled to express myself in relation to my many layers of privilege. I think this is noteworthy...the countless ways my life has been made easier mean I have some very large blind spots when it comes to relating to others and appreciating how another person experiences the world and forms her own identity.

Given the amount of focus I placed on it, I take from this experience that my identity as a woman – how I define and describe my femininity – has a lot of significance for me. I see this exploration of femininity while travelling as a very strong barometer of how I choose to define myself. Are there other elements I use to understand myself? Yes, certainly. But for whatever reason, at this juncture in my life, I chose to understand myself via my experience of my gender

most strongly. I chose to reflect on my feminine expression, where the edges of that expression lie, and the ways in which I'm willing to adjust my feminine expression as I travel.

When I think of the transformations that occurred on these trips, it's as much about changes in attitude as anything physical such as different clothes or makeup. It's about where I chose to soften, where I chose to compromise, and where I chose to stand up for myself. Smith (2003) suggests that holistic travel encourages us to connect with our true selves, which might imply that we've lost site of some of our true identity in our everyday lives. And I agree with Kottler (1998) who says that "transformative change takes place over a lifetime". Perhaps I have needed to go away to be reminded of what I consider to be my true self, while allowing for the fact that I will continue to change throughout my life, especially if I continue to travel. Smith & Kelly (2006) describe the paradox of wanting to escape with the goal of 'finding one's true self. I recall many times hearing the phrase 'off to find her/him/my self' and it being met with cynicism, but I no longer feel ashamed that this has been, and continues to be, one of my motivations for travelling.

Ross (2019) argues that transformation is not completed once the traveller returns home, and that it continues through a process of integration. Robledo & Batle (2017) suggest that travel becomes truly transformative when it reveals our true self...a self that may never have existed before the travel. And Reisinger (2013a) states that transformative travel is about giving people the chance to reach their full potential and "reflect on the transformational nature of their existence and to realize their authentic place in it." Writing this paper has been a continuation of

my integration of all the transformative experiences I've had while travelling and to come to accept that I have a right to show up in the world and express my identity, and that my identity can change over time.

Even though I experimented with expressing my outward appearance differently, I don't have the sense that I somehow lost myself or gave up my pre-travel identity. It is more accurate to say my identity grew to be more complex because of my travels. De Villiers (2015) states that travelling brought about a deeper identity, one "more deeply situated in [the author's] personal values rather than cultural heritage". This resonates with me, because as I reviewed my travel experiences I didn't feel strong connections to particular cultural heritage. Instead, I felt more connection with my personal values that I put to the test depending on my cultural surroundings.

In terms of the greater sociological picture, what I take away from this is a renewed appreciation for how fluid the concept of identity, in particular femininity, is. That even within a culture (even restrictive ones) there is room for diversity of expression. I am reminded that individuals in their own cultures, or when visiting others, can still choose to have some personal expression. This expression can fall within societal norms, or it can operate outside of the norm, with the understanding that there may be consequences such as (misplaced?) appreciation or conflicts or even difficulty with local laws.

The participants in Rountree's 2002 study viewed self-transformation as a fundamental component of societal transformation, as they took their renewed/redefined feminine experiences

back home and looked for ways to integrated this expanded sense of femininity into their lives and society at large. Completing this paper has reminded me of the many times I've made assessments and judgments of other women, both in Canada and abroad. I see that I've used my own beliefs about femininity to approve or disprove of how other women have chosen to express themselves. I hope now to be less quick to judge others on their style of feminine expression.

Clough (2000) states that the unconscious processes of autoethnography are "not about the authority of knowledge but rather the very (im)possibility of knowledge." This rings true for me as I conclude my first autoethnographic work. I was never looking for a definable, concrete answer to my research question. Rather, I was interested in the process of deep reflection and allowing space for whatever came forth. Duncan (2004) asserts that "there is a place in scholarship for those who stand for attempting to know one's experience and shining light on that knowledge." It is my hope that I have been able to do so.

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