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## Introduction

Using narrative inquiry this paper attempts to understand the experiences of young backpackers as a journey of transformation and how these journeys inform future journeys. Backpacking has frequently been associated with the concept of identity development and researchers have highlighted the significance of travel as a time of transition. This study focuses on how backpackers are changed by the experience but also how they influence the journey of others as individuals can change, but also be changed by their environment. Around 2,500 years ago Heraclitus asserted that no man could step into the same river twice. This paper considers this imagery to be particularly relevant as it finds application on two levels; the changing nature of the world and the changing nature of individuals in what Nayak (2008) sees as the indivisible nature of reality with the river representing the persistent passing of time- a process that would never be complete given the temporal and complex nature of lived reality. To this study the stepping into the river is representative of human action and in particular backpacking and how backpackers past, present and future are closely intertwined, continuously engaged in a process of change.

Using Campbell's 'Hero' as a metaphor, through a study of young backpackers this study explores the motives, challenges and the outcomes of their experience as they become part of the cycle of what can be construed as the common human consciousness of the backpacking norm. In a never ending cycle backpackers of the present embark on their journey which is shaped and informed by their past, present and anticipated future, but also by the journeys of former backpackers whose actions and experiences inform, change and shape what is understood as backpacking.

## Literature Review

### Backpacking: Definitions and Origins

Whilst backpackers may embrace an easily recognizable stereotype defined by the travel hold-all they use, from an academic perspective, they are very difficult to theoretically pin down and define, despite attempts to create typologies and

definitions representative to the backpacker norm (Cohen, 1973; Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Maoz, 2007; Pearce and Moscardo, 1986; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002; Uriely, 2009). To fully understand the concept of backpacking an appreciation and understanding of its development and evolution is required as the last fifty years have seen the transformation of backpacking from an unusual activity undertaken by hippies and adventurous drop-outs (O'Reilly, 2006) to a rite of passage for many young people before settling into a life of responsibility (Matthews, 2008). There is no doubt that the current population of backpackers does not only comprise of young individuals, as research has identified an increasing number of older backpackers who choose to take their journey later in their life cycle (Paris, 2012; Markward, 2008). However this study focuses on young backpackers as they mature and transform as they go through what Pearce and Foster (2007, p. 1285) call "a University of Travel".

The origins of backpacking can be traced back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Grand Tour and the characteristics of this extended travel inspired the earliest recognised form of backpacking as it started to take shape in the 1960s. Defined as drifters by Cohen (1979), backpackers were described as persons with a "...decentralised personality and lacking clearly defined priorities and ultimate commitments, [they] are predisposed to try out alternative life-ways in their quest for meaning" (1979, p. 189). Gradually the evolution of the backpacking persona was facilitated by economic and political developments linked to globalization (O'Reilly, 2006). Cheap international fares gave the middle class the opportunity to travel, discover and experience (Smith, 2009). Richards and Wilson (2004) argued that "...globalization not only increases the speed at which cultures are marginalised, but also increases the speed with which tourists can travel to see the other" (2004, p. 4). Inevitably globalization has given birth to the possibility of backpacking as a form of post-modern tourism (Smith, 2009).

The growth in the backpacking industry has created a new market for multinational corporations as international conglomerates have been able to tap into new markets producing a vast number of hotels, restaurants and backpacking travel trails, suggesting the incorporation of this once exclusive, personal activity into the McDonaldized system of conventional tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2004). For many academics and backpackers alike this opposes the very

foundations of backpacking, namely creativity, uncertainty and flexibility and they raise concerns that backpacking in its earlier form is a dying phenomenon (Noy, 2004; Richards and Wilson, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006). Garland in his famous novel, "the Beach" bemoans through his protagonist: "I want to do something different, and everybody wants to do something different. But we all do the same thing. There is no...eh...adventure" (1997, p. 19).

This standardization through homogenised processes has led to backpacking experiences morphing into one as they get shaped by powerful memes that are informed through a cyclical process that has created and is continuously shaping the backpacking market. This self-influencing replicated cycle hinges on the fact that human environments and experiences are suffused with the achievements of prior generations in a reified and materialised form which are continuously passed down to future generations (Hegel, 1961; Vygotski, 1929; Luria, 1928). Vygotski places this mediation of culture at the centre of human cognition and civilization progress. Without taking too much of a leap, it could be construed that the cultural symbols, norms and what constitutes the backpackers' identity are passed down from former backpackers to contemporary ones, and they in turn, will pass this down to their future counterparts in a never ending cycle that forms and continuously shapes the legacy and social norm of backpackers and the backpacking experience. Novice backpackers are gradually transformed into veterans and they continue to influence the market as they pass on the torch to new backpackers, as they move on. In order to understand how this cycle works this paper employs the Hero's Journey as a conceptual vehicle.

### **Tracing the Backpackers' Heroic Journey**

It is not difficult to fit Campbell's pattern or 'monomyth' (Campbell, 1968) within the scope of backpacking as the Hero's Journey has been repeatedly used in the study of tourist phenomena (Noy, 2004; Tomazos and Butler, 2010). The hero tourists seek to journey further than the norm to discover their own narratives and their true self. The hero analogy in the case of backpackers is substantiated by the once in a lifetime experience of transformative changes within the appropriate scenery and setting (Noy, 2006). In addition the rite of passage simulated from the backpacking experience encapsulates this change as the familiar world is perceived as inadequate to provide fateful moments of transformation or the disorienting

dilemma that usually triggers transformation in individuals (Lean, 2012; Pearce and Foster, 2007) as they travel beyond the threshold of their previous lives and comfort zones. Turner (1973) has captured this transformation as tourists seek the 'other' and "...experience their humanity in its unconstrained fullness as they enjoy *communitas* with their fellow human beings" (Dann and Cohen, 1991, p. 161). This venturing beyond the threshold is encapsulated by the Hero's Journey as it is derived out of myth, but most importantly as it is manifested as a pattern of human experience. Every obstacle, every challenge individuals face endows them with experiences which contribute to the building of a new perspective, a new insight and spiritual growth (Campbell, 1988). This link with human experience and the three stage motif of departure, initiation and return, fit perfectly with what may be regarded as the four components of backpacking and its liminality; ordinary life (routine, life at home), episodic nature of the tourist activity (time bound activity), challenges (going out of their comfort zone), transformation (effect on the individual). By adopting this motif this paper deconstructs backpacking as experiences beyond the threshold akin to Turner's liminal experiences (Turner, 1973), but it goes further by encapsulating this liminality in three stages of departure, initiation and return, or to put simply, before, during and after.

The use of Campbell's journey as a heuristic device also provides a context to discuss different backpacking experiences/journeys as individuals chart their own paths that to some extent are already pre-determined as many backpackers follow already established trails, wear similar clothes, carry similar equipment and prescribe to one single discourse the backpacking social norm. The use of Campbell also de facto recognizes that the outcome of the backpacking experience is open to a myriad of possibilities and eventualities. Just like the literature suggests, not every transformation can be positive (Lean, 2012) and backpackers as they make their own choices, they may find themselves in trouble. Using Campbell's monomyth allows the notion that at any given moment backpackers are capable of the best, but also of the worst; help locals or find themselves in prison for taking or smuggling drugs for example. What the use of Campbell brings to the table is the notion that anything is possible and just like Campbell's hero; the backpacker is one with a thousand faces.

## Method

### An Ontology of Becoming

The ontological position of this paper is one of becoming as opposed to being. An ontology of being views reality as rooted in substances, things and events; whilst one of becoming embraces flux, flow and continuity (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011, p. 75). This ontological position has important implications for the epistemological perspective of this paper that views knowledge as inseparable from action. It is therefore not finite nor static, but a process, understood from Deweyan thinking, as "...evolving as we live" (Hildebrand, 2008, p. 48). This relates to the temporal nature of knowledge whereby past experiences have an anticipatory influence upon future experiences (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011, 2011). George Herbert Mead offers valuable insight into the process by which knowledge is formed through relational action; "...it is only by taking the roles of others that we have been able to come back to ourselves" (Mead, 1925, p. 268). Therefore knowledge is constructed both reflexively and relationally through a continuously emerging process. This paper adopts narrative enquiry to explore the temporal dynamics (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of the backpacking experience. Narrative and its three dimensional space of inquiry is an appropriate strategy for understanding the backpackers' journey, as it has the potential to reveal insights into the multiple dimensions of reflexivity, relationality and temporality which are fundamental to the philosophical underpinnings of this paper.

The application of narrative enquiry has taken place on two levels; the individual and collective level. Although backpackers follow personal journeys, individuals adopt a common identity for a given period of time. By exploring stories both on a one-to-one (participant-researcher) and at group level, it was intended that the backpacking journey would be explored from multiple perspectives as in the group sessions the participants would be given a chance to feed of each other comments. This has been achieved by using two methods which have been developed for this particular study. These methods are individual story sharing sessions (ISS) followed by group-based reflexive story sharing sessions (GRSS). Twenty ISS sessions were employed as an interview based method with the objective of exploring the backpackers' journey. These sessions were designed for backpackers to share stories of their experience in their own way and a conversational interview

style was adopted (Anderson and Jack, 1991). The GRSS method was devised especially for this study through examination and adaptation of the focus group and listening post techniques. Focus groups seek to generate insights through collective interaction which could not be possible through one-to-one discussion (Morgan, 1988), while listening posts offer "...potential to surface the collective (and possibly unconscious) assumptions, hopes, anxieties and desires of members of the group in a way that more structured and individually orientated surveys and interviews would be unlikely to reveal (Bolden et al, 2013, p. 4). The participants were sampled using FB with the only criterion being young age (18-24), having partaken into backpacking recently (within the last 2 years) and geographical proximity (to the researcher- UK). Both ISS and GRSS sessions were audio recorded with participant consent. The sessions could therefore be played back they were transcribed after the event. Selected excerpts (given the word limitations) are used as illustrations to support the discussion of the findings.

## Findings and Discussion

### The Call to Adventure

The hero's journey stages are divided into three subcategories; departure, initiation and return. The journey typically starts with a call to adventure and in this study backpackers received a call to adventure which denotes the motivations a person has for partaking in backpacking. Using Crompton (1979) the dominant push factors were the opportunity to get away before committing to a graduate job, or taking a break from an old job, or seeking distraction from being laid off at work. Whilst some participants highlighted their desire to escape their mundane routine, a desire to escape their mundane routine, a desire to travel and see the world 'wanderlust' was identified by most participants as illustrated in the following excerpt from B6.

*B6: I love travelling and I love to see new places, try new things, and experience new cultures, foods, life-styles. I remember how foreign lands fascinated me and even at a young age I had my heart set on seeing the world. Backpacking was always at the back of my mind as I was growing up as my dad has backpacked around the world twice and I have been inspired by his stories to go myself*

Wanderlust is defined by an irresistible impulse to travel and experience different cultures and places, try new cultures and foods and see the lives of others, but what also comes through the above excerpt is the desire to follow in the footsteps of someone who was already completed the journey. As B6 was finishing the story about her backpacking father B2 spoke about his inspiration.

*B2: Two years ago my older brother did a round the world trip as a backpacker and he could not stop saying how these were the best few months of his life. For me mostly backpacking was the easier and cheapest way to travel and the best way to get to know other travellers, especially as my brother always talks about his companions on his trip and how they still keep in touch. In all honesty I think I was jealous of that; I wanted to live this for myself.*

What additionally comes through this excerpt is that one key part of the call to adventure is also the price element as participants were quick to identify that backpacking was the easiest and cheapest way to travel, but also the social element, as the experience is conducive to meeting new people and creating friendships.

When participants were prompted to reflect on any previous thoughts worries or reservations they had prior to their trip, they illustrated little doubt regarding their ability to backpack and rise to new challenges. While the Campbellian hero exhibits self-doubt over his ability to take part in the adventure, the participants appeared to be more pre-occupied with issues of timing and/or financial strains, as illustrated in the excerpt from B8 who prioritized her studies over traveling.

*B8: Going on the trip never really fazed me; I heard some horror stories from people, but I was never worried. Only stupid travellers get kidnapped by guerrillas, or find themselves in big trouble. Stay with the group and follow the trail and you will be fine; anyway I was supposed to go out with my friends after uni, but they decided to go before and take a year out.*

### **The Crossing of Thresholds**

Campbell (1968) ponders the dilemma that confronts the hero when he reaches the threshold guardian; "It is only by advancing beyond those bounds, provoking the destructive other aspect of the same power that the individual passes, either alive or in death, into a new zone of experience" (1968,



p. 75). For Campbell the threshold point is daunting yet desirable; destructive yet compelling. In this study the thresholds of the participants were largely variable dependent on the individual's comfort zone. Extreme sports were depicted by several participants as the crossing of a threshold. One participant (B6) described his white water rafting experience in Costa Rica.

*B6: Such a rush but what an exhilarating day! I guess you could say I had no idea of what I was doing and no idea of what to expect. I was pretty concerned though; if I fell out of the raft (pause)...that would be me...gone...those rapids.*

Despite the terror he felt, it is impossible to not feel the excitement in his voice talking about his day and his amazing - illegal in the UK and many other countries- very dangerous experience. Backpacking is often associated with once in a life time opportunities that encourage participants to push their boundaries and take risks (Ooi and Laing, 2010) challenging their fears and trepidations. Fear according to Campbell creates a distinct overlap between the crossing of thresholds and the next stage of the journey-the road of trials. Most interestingly one of the participants (B5) when prompted about crossing thresholds described the crossing as literal and not just a metaphorical movement into deeper waters.

*B5: As soon as I entered the water I was instantly transported to another world. I noticed that the ocean surrounding me was sparkling! Truly sparkling as if I was flying through space with the stars all around. The only difference was, unlike space, I was surrounded by life in all its beautiful complexity*

The above excerpt brings into mind the words of Braidotti (1991); "...cogito is all seeing, it sees and sees itself in the act of seeing, which in this geometrical universe gives it all immense power" (1991, p. 23). The identification of the physical crossing of the backpackers' threshold into a new environment simulates an internal threshold crossing as the setting is not only experienced by the gaze but by the body; a different space, feeling and perspective.

### **The Road of Trials**

This is the most favoured stage in mythology and fiction as the hero is faced with a number of tribulations that must be overcome for the journey to continue. In this study the participants were asked to reflect on any challenges they faced;

they ranged from the mundane to the life threatening. One of the participants recalled facing miner riots in Bolivia.

*B10: There they came, the miners, pitch forks, spades, flaming torches in hand, banging on the windows, shaking the car. The driver got out, left us alone, in the dark with the miners outside the car. We heard a gunshot to which we all went white as a sheet and realised the severity of what we were dealing with. The driver came - thank God- running back to the car hands covering his head.*

Some of the less dangerous trials faced by the participants revolved around the reality of living and sharing spaces with others. Just like the hero who is never alone on the journey, backpackers tend to travel with a friend or form travel groups at least in the early stages of their backpacking trip (Sørensen, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that participants identified living in close quarters as a continuous trial.

*B7: Travelling with just one other person was sometimes difficult. There were some prolonged journeys where you have nobody but each other that wound us up. We never had any fights but we had a couple of disagreements purely due to the short proximity to each other for such a long time. Luckily we managed to make friends in most places so it was not just us anymore.*

From the above excerpt it becomes apparent that living in close quarters can create friction, especially in stressful situations. While Fridgen (1984) underlines the need for personal space as an unconscious, but often sensitive issue for travellers, the literature puts emphasis on meeting other backpackers (Sørensen, 2003) but fails to acknowledge the related challenges of living with others. As illustrated in Campbell's work the road of trials is fraught with danger and challenges and each experience poses a great meaning to the hero; the discovery of powers he never knew he had (Neher and Fryer-Edwards, 2003). The biggest challenge that lies ahead is the hero's own self and the fight with temptation

## **Temptation**

The participants in this study highlighted three main temptations that they faced; namely sex, drugs and alcohol. The literature shows the strong relationship between these three factors and the backpacking experience (Uriely et al, 2002;

Cohen, 2003; Noy and Cohen, 2005). As illustrated in the following excerpt

*B12: There was a lot of temptation, but I had three rules to get myself through it without any danger. One, do not do drugs; Two, always wear a condom and Three, do not fall in love. Needless to say I broke all rules at some stage. However keeping them to a minimum was the best thing I could do.*

Tourists utilise the rationale of mindlessness to succumb to temptation as travel has often been used by tourists as a mechanism for escapism (Dann, 1977). The anomie identified in the individual induces the desire to travel to an alternative world. The allure of sex, drugs and alcohol is based on impulse, instead of conscious, rational thinking as illustrated in the following excerpt

*B16: There was a lot of alcohol and for me the super cheap narcotics I had to sample. Far too many temptations; the day we all went on the cloud forest to bungee jump, I think I only had one hour of sleep and I was still intoxicated.*

Clearly backpackers succumb to temptation more frequently than they would in their hometown because of their relaxed state of limited pleasure and the proliferation and accessibility of forbidden fruits (Bellis et al , 2007). As Campbell (1968) concluded; “ We are poor travellers in a world which is the Devil’s field [...] a world in which every nook whereof, the Devil is encamped with a band of robbers to pester all that have their faces looking Zionward” (1968, p. 105)

## **Supernatural Aid**

Supernatural aid within the work of Campbell represents the protective figure who aids the hero on his journey. Within the backpacking experience this aid is not restricted solely to first hand communication but it also extends to second hand sources of information. Traditionally backpackers have set trends and patterns for mass commercial tourism through the use of tools such as ‘Trip Advisor’ or publications like ‘Lonely Planet’. B4 found Lonely Planet very useful.

*B4: I used the Lonely Planet South East Asia on a shoe string which was very helpful and gave me lots of good tips and also ideas on where to go next. In many cases that little booklet was an absolute saviour.*

It becomes apparent that participants recognised the value of information and local insight in terms of making the most of their journey and by giving them peace of mind. In other cases participants underlined the value of finding support in the shape of western guides, experienced backpackers who acted as guides.

*B12: A French man named Jeremy who I spent a lot of time with in the second part of my trip. He made me really at ease and he taught me a lot of lessons that I was there to learn, such as Buddhism, self-discipline, and the universe as a whole. I felt a conversation with him was more valuable than a degree.*

This pattern of mentoring figures or guides was repeated as participants in the group shared their stories.

*B5: There were staff-members from different countries that helped teach and expand my horizons and my goals in life. They were former backpackers who saw an opportunity and started a business helping other backpackers. If it was not for them then I would not know, anywhere near, what I know now.*

*B2: Some people that travelled with us I made good friends with, the tour leader, other people on the tour who can give advice, other people travelling, not on our tour who could give advice, other people that gave me books to read related to the countries I visited.*

The above is indicative of the influence experienced backpackers or former backpackers could exert on novices as they provide advice and mentoring. Their support and guidance can be construed as the 'supernatural aid' received on their journey (Campbell, 1968). Having said that, the continuous institutionalization and standardization of backpacking is also evident from these excerpts, as backpackers travel in organized groups, complete with agents, guides and mentors. Such 'sanitation' of the experiences renders a magical 'deus ex machina' Campbellian intervention obsolete. If one also adds to the equation the continuous, updating and connectivity with social media (Munar, et al 2013; Munar, 2012; Pearce and Maoz, 2008) through the increasing availability of Wi-Fi and/or cheap data plans and SIM cards, the contemporary backpackers' crossing of the threshold is not as daunting nor as challenging as the threshold crossed by Cohen's backpackers as friends, family, loved ones and comfort are only a few clicks or a swipe of the finger away.

## Refusal of Return

According to Campbell once the journey is complete the hero must return to ordinary life, but not every hero goes back as the hero is reluctant to return from the land of adventure to everyday/ordinary life (Indick, 2004). Interestingly one participant recognised his life of adventure as having become his every-day life or his real life. When prompted to reflect on his feelings about returning back to ordinary life he made no distinction between the two.

*B5: Everyday life or ordinary life as you put it is a rather interesting notion. For me everyday life was what I had in Fiji. True ordinary life where all you had to think about was this day. In truth I preferred that ordinary life to ours but whilst I am home I shall abide by the standards and obligations set out by our everyday way of living, where every day involves worrying about the next week, the next month, the next year; and not just the day at hand.*

For some backpacking can become a preferred way of life. They become 'lifelong wanderers' as they are referred to by Noy and Cohen (2005) that convert their episodic engagement in the backpacking experience into their lifestyle consumption. Hottola (2004) found that lifestyle wanderers find it difficult to adapt to the social norms and cultural confusion upon their return; but return they must. All of the participants of this study returned, despite the fact they did not feel ready to do so.

*B1: I was desperate to prolong my adventure. I was really reluctant to leave but sadly I had booked my flights to return. I was definitely not ready to go home, to my routine. I would have loved to stay much longer*

Others had the financial capability and time to actually extend their stay.

*B12: I did prolong my backpacking trip. I was originally supposed to come home in May and extended my trip until September. With a few more savings and better planning I think I would have liked to have stretched it another two months at least.*

While initially the respondents were reluctant to return and tried to prolong their stay (some successfully) they all (in the end) acknowledged their responsibility to return home from

their finite trip to everyday life. It is the nature of the journey that requires it to have a definitive end. Unlike lifestyle travellers, backpackers perceive everyday life as their responsibility, as money worries, work and social commitments take sway and 'force' them back home (Sørensen, 2003).

### **Return Carrying the Ultimate Boon**

The 'ultimate boon' signifies the ultimate achievement of the hero. Now marked a superior human being, the hero has completed the journey's destiny and is granted an almost god-like status of indestructibility and accomplishment (Campbell, 1968). The ultimate boon is recognised for the backpackers as the personal transformation that has occurred throughout their journey. The participants in this study reflected on their own personal growth and enhanced confidence and self-belief.

*B5: My time away definitely changed me, however I can't truly tell you how. If anything I would say I have a lot more confidence in myself, my character and my abilities. I know I hold myself in a much prouder and confident manner now*

Clearly the participants saw the educational value of their experience as B6 reflected.

*B6: It teaches independence and social skills. You meet different people each day and learn to interact and get along with many different types of people. It makes you learn a lot about yourself and what is accepted in wider society. It builds both confidence and character.*

The participants appreciated the growth in their confidence and independence (O'Reilly, 2006). For some participants the ultimate boon was the improvement of their character, while for others it was the opportunity to grow and strengthen their confidence. The most important element of the return with ultimate boon is the self-evaluation of each of the participants. Backpacking is after all a personal journey, so the ultimate boon is subjective and individually perceived. O'Reilly (2006) enforces this concept drawing attention to backpackers' narratives of personal transformation and the following excerpt illustrates this point.

*B9: I had such a spectacular journey and I was definitely not ready to go home. The trip has given me so much. It has given me a glimpse of the world outside of my home country. Being*

*given the opportunity to experience other cultures and take part in such authentic experiences... I would never swap it for anything. I met so many friends that I try to keep in touch with and I hope to see them again. I learnt so much about myself. My confidence grew exponentially along with my independence. I gained such cultural awareness and found a new side to myself.*

## **Master of Two Worlds**

The final stage of the journey according to Campbell is the 'master of two worlds. The hero upon return has the ability to pass in and out of both worlds with freedom (Campbell, 1968). Some of the participants of this study were quick to identify some changes in themselves that would allow them to be more laid back in the future and more content with their daily lives. This shift in perspective is illustrated by the following excerpt as B12 reflects on his experience.

*B12: Visiting places of real poverty has been a wakeup call for me. Visiting places where people have nothing makes you appreciate what you already have. I used to get upset when I could not afford nights out or the latest game console. I now feel embarrassed that I used to think like that. Was I young, stupid, spoiled? Whatever I was, that is not me anymore.*

Participants were also very aware of the distinction between their backpacker self and their everyday self but they also said that they also looked for ways to re-live their trip.

*B14: I believe you definitely have a different persona. A backpacker will have a different set of priorities, a different outlook on life and a more leisurely demeanour. That is how I identify myself as a backpacker; for better or worse! Recently I started going into forums answering questions and commenting on my trip, recommending places to visit and places to avoid. It takes me back you know.*

Even for the most brilliant of heroes the ability to master both worlds cannot be shown at once. The two worlds remain separate but they merge inside the individual. Backpackers resume their ordinary life taking with them the lessons learnt on their journey. However the by now veteran backpackers retain both personas allowing them to maximize their existence in both worlds, should they choose to return. If they never return, at least they can pave the way and provide advice to others taking on the journey. "Just as the actor is always a man,

whether he puts on a costume of his role or lays it aside, so is the perfect knower of the imperishable always the imperishable and nothing else” (Campbell, 1968, p. 220)

### **A Never Ending Cycle of Journeys**

At the end of their journey or even during the trip backpackers can share their experiences with novices as they interact at different stages of their respective journeys. The interaction can take place through verbal communication, backpacking networks, for and/or social media. As the hero in mythology, the novice backpacker (Backpacker Z) can utilise the narrative of their predecessors (Backpackers X and Y) to determine their own journey. As illustrated in Figure 1 the journey of one backpacker can influence future journeys. This study has brought this relationship to the fore on different stages of the journey. Firstly it was recognised at the ‘call to adventure’ as participants highlighted former backpackers’ stories as key motivators for their journey, but also as encouragement and reassurance. Clearly the experience and lessons of one backpacker can pose as a stimulus for another backpacking journey to begin. Similarly in ‘supernatural aid’ the transferable knowledge and experience from past to present backpackers becomes a significant support throughout the inexperienced backpackers’ journey and finally when the journey is complete the interaction comes full circle as the former novices become the ‘supernatural aid’ for new journeys (Backpacker...n); either by inspiring a new generation from home- as the father and brother of the stories presented; provide advice on the internet, as one of the participants of this study already does, or stay on the journey indefinitely and become a backpackers’ tour guide (like the ones in the stories) and directly assist at ground level on the journey of others.

(PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE)

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to understand the backpacking experience and how the journeys of different backpackers, past and present are eternally interlinked through a continuous cycle of journeys. Using the stories of former backpackers and Campbell’s heroic journey this paper has sketched the



backpacking experience as a journey with a departure, an initiation, and a return. Along these lines there are different stages which influence the journey. This sketching is valuable as it allows for the experience to be segmented into distinguishable parts. In the departure stage it is useful to understand how former backpackers and their stories influence the new generation. During the time of trials in the initiation stage, it is useful to see how temptation can manifest itself in the shape of sex, drugs and alcohol, which could potentially get backpackers into trouble. In addition this study has shown how the increasingly commercialised backpacking supply helps novice backpackers along the way, either in the shape of standardised trails, travel agents, tour guides that make the journey less unpredictable. Having said that, the unpredictability of the journey came through in this study with the story of the miner riots in Bolivia, which shows that, even the most sanitised, standardised journey could hide unpleasant surprises. Finally it is very useful to understand how the journey comes full circle in the end with the former novice backpacker becoming the aid and inspiration for future journeys.

On a final note the cycle of transfer this model suggests can be theoretically underpinned borrowing from Durkheim as backpackers past, present and future contribute to a backpacking collective consciousness; from the days of the Grand Tour to the drifters of Cohen and to the backpackers of today, all backpackers demonstrate mechanical solidarity through their mutual likeness (Kusher and Sterk, 2005). The stages identified and the model developed only convey the key characteristics of different journeys and do not prescribe that each journey would be identical to the next one. However, the temporal dynamics of backpacking support the existence of a backpacker common consciousness. While the autonomous free will of backpackers must not be discounted, the parallel progression of each backpacker was shown to be influenced by their predecessor, and compounded with the globalization of the tourist experience in general; the backpacking experience is consistent with the theory of common consciousness. This study should be recognised as an attempt to build a conceptual bridge between the backpacking experience and how these experiences take shape. It has been shown that the novice backpacker of today eventually becomes the supernatural aid on the journeys of tomorrow. Future research should turn its attention to this relationship as it would help our understanding of how the backpacking norm and tourism phenomenon

evolves. In an ever changing world where everything is in constant flux, backpackers are transformed by the experience, while they also contribute to the evolution of the experience. Just like Heraclitus stepping in the river, they are changed, while the river also changes. Both the river and Heraclitus will never be the same.

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