

# Transformative tourism: Tourists' drawings, symbols, and narratives of change

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## ABSTRACT

Using the theoretical lens of Interaction Ritual Chains theory, the study investigates how transformative tourism narratives are symbolized by transformed tourists. Transformative tourism focuses on pushing tourists out of their comfort zone, encouraging inclusive worldviews, promoting cross-cultural understanding and social empowerment. A creative qualitative multi-method approach is utilized where transformed tourists draw, answer sentence completions, participate in in-depth interviews, and interpret the symbols associated with their transformative narratives. Those narratives can be used by practitioners to market the unique nature of transformative tourism by using symbols that resonate with prospective transformative tourists and aligns with their desire to travel in a way that positively benefits destination residents.

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## Introduction

Transformative tourism can be defined as “a process” where tourists engage in an inner journey that “is part of the awakening of consciousness, and creates more self-awareness, more self-inquiry into the purpose of life, living by a higher set of values, and making greater contributions to others” (Sheldon, 2020, p.2). It aims at triggering a disorienting dilemma by pushing tourists out of their comfort zone, encouraging them to self-reflect about the discomfort felt, leading them to value other cultures more, and fostering awareness about the ecological and social impacts of the way we consume services (Neuhof et al., 2020; Soulard et al., 2019). The most promising tenet of the transformative tourism theory, is that tourists become agents of change as a result of their transformative tourism experience, advocating for social empowerment and environmental protection in their community (Pung et al., 2019; Pung et al., 2020). From a theoretical standpoint, transformation is described as a series of steps (Mezirow, 1990), where self-reflection is critical to lead tourists to acknowledge their own biases, realize the presence of assumptions, decide to take actions, and bring positive changes in their community (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011). These transformations typically take place through socially and environmentally responsible interactions with host communities intended to benefit both transformed tourists and local residents at the destination (Pung & Del Chiappa, 2020; Walker & Weiler, 2017).

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While the objectives of transformative tourism are well established in the literature, gaps remain concerning the identification of the primary forms of symbolism that are the most appealing to prospective transformative tourists when marketing transformative tourism (Soulard et al., 2020). Calls are issued to investigate the importance of symbolism in transformative tourism and understand which narratives might be most effective in its marketing (Irimiás et al., 2020). One of the main difficulties is for practitioners to convey the notion of personal transformation and social change plausibly to prospective transformative tourists (Magrizos et al., 2020). While DeCrop et al. (2018) suggest that marketing content can be designed around symbolism related to magic, Robledo and Batle (2017) advocate for the use of symbolism focusing on explorers to attract prospective transformative tourists. Conversely, Germann Molz (2016) argues that depicting transformed tourists as explorers can inadvertently foster a narrative that perpetuates neo-colonialism. To further clarify these ambiguities, this study investigates how transformative tourism narratives are symbolized by transformed tourists.

Interaction Ritual Chains theory (Collins, 2004) provides an interesting theoretical lens to investigate those contingencies because it recognizes that social interactions are anchored in symbolism. According to Sterchele's (2020) application of Interaction Ritual Chains theory, transformed tourists share a common set of symbols that they use to make sense of their experiences. There are calls to encourage the application of Interaction Ritual Chains theory as a relevant lens through which to investigate gaps related to the roles of social symbols and their association with transformative tourism (Lamers et al., 2017). Investigating social symbols in transformative tourism from the perspective of Interaction Ritual Chains theory is relevant because past findings suggest that transformative tourism generates powerful emotions that are rooted in deep imageries and allegories (Pastor & Kent, 2020). Further, transformative tourism is inscribed in symbolism consumption leading to psychological wellbeing (Magrizos et al., 2020). Expanding on previous research, we propose an extended version of the theoretical framework by Collins (2004) that clearly depicts how transformative tourism fits within the Interaction Ritual Chains theory.

From a methodological standpoint, this study takes on a creative approach by combining in-depth interviews with the projective techniques of sentence completions and drawings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Building on the germinal work of Gamradt (1995), drawings are used as a tool for transformed tourists to reveal symbols present in their transformative tourism narratives. While Gamradt (1995) focuses on children, the present study applies this drawing technique to adult tourists by asking them to draw themselves before and after their transformative trip. Although the projective technique of drawings is commonly applied in the field of marketing, health, and political sciences, this methodology has been overlooked in the field of tourism (Mesías & Escribano, 2018). Possible reasons for this may be that researchers need to carefully design a methodological approach ensuring that they are not imposing their interpretations on the informants' drawings (Kubacki & Siemieniako, 2017). Expanding on the work of Pich and Dean (2015), we address this challenge and reinforce validity by having transformed tourists directly interpret the meanings behind their drawings and their own sentence completions, as well as incorporating method and data triangulation thanks to the use of different forms of data (visual and textual) and taking a multi-methods approach (projective technique and in-depth interview) (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004).

Concerning practical implications, the study offers a set of recommendations to tourism practitioners about the use of symbols in their marketing content. The objective is to help practitioners depict transformative tourism as an appealing experience because it aligns with prospective transformative tourists' idealized version of themselves and reflects how they want others to look at them while respectfully including destination residents (Cavender et al., 2020; Laing & Frost, 2017). Accurately depicting transformative tourism through symbols and narratives is particularly relevant in a post-COVID-19 world as transformative tourism can offer tourism experiences that foster meaningful interactions between tourists and destination residents, encourage social empowerment, and advocate for economic as well as ecologically sustainable practices (Ateljevic, 2020), ideals that Durko and Migacz (2020) argue are in line with post-COVID-19 tourists' priorities. To achieve this end, this study investigates how transformative tourism narratives are symbolized by transformed tourists.

## Interaction ritual chains theory

Collins (2004) uses the word *ritual* to characterize how social norms are created, reaffirmed, and sometimes reshaped through ritual interactions and posits that this is an interactive process of co-construction and/or reaffirmation of groups' sacred objects, norms, values, and identities. For example, football fans share symbols such as colors, songs, and clothing to create a feeling of belonging (Cottingham, 2012). Hence, emotionally powerful social interactions rely on symbols that are deeply inscribed into and generated by the micro-dynamics of communication and group inclusion (Calderón-Monge, 2017; Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018).

This emphasis on group inclusion can be applied to transformative tourism, as transformed tourists use social interactions to collectively reinforce norms about acceptable behaviors, traditions, and cultural heritage (Germann Molz, 2016). This shared knowledge of norms is also described as cultural capital (Wellman et al., 2014), upon which transformed tourists rely to develop successful social interactions (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Transformed tourists with high stocks of cultural capital act as magnets and become the center of attention during social interactions (Noy, 2004).

Expanding on the role of social interactions, Interaction Ritual Chains theory suggests that individuals are seeking social interactions because they crave the emotional energy released during those encounters (Sterchele, 2020). More precisely, Collins (2004) defines emotional energy as "a feeling of confidence, courage to take action, boldness in taking initiative" (p.39). When applied to transformative tourism, transformed tourists can be described as carrying this emotional energy with them into their next interactions, creating emotional chains between members of a society (Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Walker & Manyamba, 2020). Thus, this theory can be applied to transformative tourism because successful interactions develop a feeling

of solidarity among transformed tourists, foster the recognition of common symbols, and encourage them to value those symbols (DeCrop et al., 2018; Richards, 2015).

Successful interactions also rely on the concept of collective effervescence, or a feeling of elation resulting from taking part in the same social rituals (Coughlan & Weiler, 2018). Collins (2004) further defines collective effervescence as a “process of inter-subjectivity and shared emotion” that creates a feeling of communion (p. 49). For example, sporting events can create an opportunity for individuals to rally together among common values, such as tolerance and inclusion (Sterchele, 2020). Similarly, Sheldon (2020) explains that transformed tourists feel united in their quest to contribute to the general wellbeing of society.

As with any theoretical framework, the Interaction Ritual Chains theory possesses some limitations (Kemper, 2016). For example, Kemper (2016) suggests that two other factors, power and status, can influence individuals to engage in collective effervescence. However, Dermody (2017) argues that power and status are very context-specific and do not necessarily apply across all types of tourism. He gives the example of dark tourism where collective effervescence is more likely to rely on powerful emotions rather than status or power. This distinction is important as dark tourism is described as a type of travel that is likely to be transformative (Reisinger, 2013). While the Interaction Ritual Chains theory faces some criticisms, it has been applied across a variety of fields, has generated fruitful discussions, and is recognized as a compelling theory to examine the power of social rituals in transformative tourism (Sterchele, 2020).

### Interaction ritual chains theory framework and transformative tourism

The work of Collins is of particular importance when investigating the symbols and images that transformed tourists associate with their life-changing experience (Lamers et al., 2017). Notably, a series of ingredients listed by Collins (2004) need to be present for any ritual interaction to be successful, which also applies to creating a transformative tourism experience (Fig. 1). In Interaction Ritual Chains theory, group assembly describes the physical co-presence of people gathered in the same place, which activates the basic/primordial adrenaline and awareness of the potential pleasure or threats that others can bring (Collins, 2016). This ingredient provides the potential for the focused attention and shared emotional mood that characterizes successful interaction rituals. This importance of socially interacting is acknowledged in the transformative tourism literature where Knollenberg et al. (2014) find that prospective transformative tourists have clear expectations about interacting daily with destination residents.

Group members also define the social boundaries of a group that exclude outsiders (Collins, 2004). These social boundaries can also be physical in nature (such as being physically able to attend an event) or symbolic (such as shared language and knowledge) (Wellman et al., 2014). The presence of a barrier to outsiders is visible in transformative tourism when McWha et al. (2018) provide one example in which bloggers writing about their transformative experiences criticize mass tourists and compare them to herds of sheep. Once the boundary to outsiders is set, group members are free to take part in the mutual focus of attention, which is characterized by high levels of inter-subjectivity that bolster cultural capital (Wellman et al., 2014). When applied to transformative tourism, mutual focus of attention creates meaningful connections between transformed tourists and destination residents (Baral et al., 2008; Soulard et al., 2020). For example, Walker and Moscardo (2016) find that transformative outcomes are facilitated when transformed tourists learn directly from Aboriginal guides about the sacred symbolism associated with traditional paintings.

The last ingredient is *energy stars* who can be defined as specific individuals who channel the emotions of group interactions by being in the focus of everyone's attention (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2015). Individuals become energy stars through the cumulative result of participating in successful Interaction Ritual Chains (Sterchele, 2020). Individuals can either proactively seek to occupy that central position or serendipitously find themselves there due to the unfolding circumstances. The concept of energy star can be applied and is relevant to transformative tourism. For example, Laing and Frost (2017) found that female transformed tourists report a deep connection and feeling of oneness with destination residents and experience powerful individual emotions. These women then act as inspirational figures who encourage and inspire others to engage in transformative tourism, thus creating another Interaction Ritual Chain.

Collins also highlights four key outcomes of collective effervescence: group solidarity, emotional energy in individuals, symbols of social relationship, and standards of morality (Collins, 2019). Group solidarity occurs when individuals feel included and emotionally connected to one another (Collins, 2005). In an extensive review of transformative tourism in national parks, Wolf et al. (2015) find that group solidarity occurs during interpretive tours as tourists bond with each other through the shared values of preserving and enjoying the beauty of natural resources. The presence of group solidarity is also visible in transformative tourism experiences related to genealogical discovery where individuals' motivation to travel is anchored in their desire to connect with their origins (Santos & Yan, 2010).

Collins (2004) defines the second outcome of collective effervescence, emotional energy, as “a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action” (p. 49). Reports of emotional energy occur when transformed tourists share feeling deeply moved while visiting sites such as concentration camps, and those intense emotions trigger powerful self-reflection about society, peace, and human connection (Kidron, 2013; Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Müller et al., 2020). In subsequent studies on volunteer tourists, Coughlan and Gooch (2011) and Coughlan and Weiler (2018) also find that transformed tourists desire to take action and foster social empowerment as outcomes of their participation in community projects.

Symbols are an additional outcome that Collins (2004) defines as “representations (visual icons, words, gestures), that members feel are associated with themselves collectively” (p.49). Transformative tourism is itself associated with powerful symbolism depicting transformed tourists as explorers (Robledo & Batle, 2017). However, the symbol of the explorers does not give center

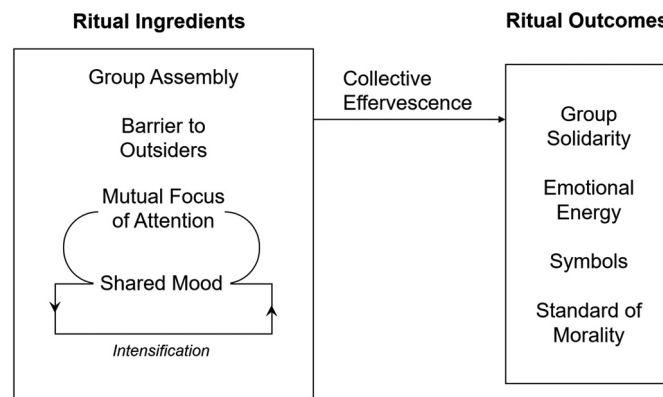


Fig. 1. Framework for the Interaction Ritual Chains theory based on Collins (2004, p.48).

stage to the community residents who are merely described as one element of an adventure (Noy, 2004). Thus, using references to explorers in marketing content can trigger connections with negative concepts, such as imperialism and white privilege (Germann Molz, 2016). Another set of symbols present in transformed tourists' narratives is related to existentialism (McWha et al., 2018). Yet, the symbols related to existentialism tend to be reduced to the negative emotions that emerge during the disorienting dilemma, when transformed tourists are anxiously reflecting about their identity and the meaning of life (Kirillova et al., 2017). For instance, Kirillova et al. (2017) describe how an interviewed transformed tourist uses the symbol of a beast to describe his existential anxiety. Transformative tourism also contains symbols related to magic (Walter, 2016). DeCrop et al. (2018) exemplify the symbolism associated with magic when they explain that transformed tourists feel enchanted as if bound by a spell that connects them with destination residents.

The Interaction Ritual Chains theory's final outcome, standard for morality, can be reflected in how transformed tourists often engage in proselytism at home, avidly sharing their own stories in a manner that encourages others to take part in transformative tourism (Noy, 2004). Frost (2010) suggests that having compelling characters through whom potential tourists can vicariously live is crucial to developing marketing content that successfully promotes transformative tourism at destinations. Therefore, the present study applies the lens of Interaction Ritual Chains theory to investigate how transformative tourism narratives are symbolized by transformed tourists.

## Methodology

This study employed a multi-method approach that combined in-depth interviews and projective techniques in the form of sentence completions and drawings. As researchers, we adhered to an interpretative paradigm, accepting ontologically that multiple realities apply to the same social phenomenon (Bailey, 2007). The interpretative paradigm is situated within a constructivist approach, which recognizes that knowledge is created in a dialectic process between informants and researchers (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). In alignment with the constructivist approach outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), we acknowledged that socio-cultural contexts influence our theoretical lens, method choices, and data interpretations. To fully grasp the impact of those contexts, we actively engaged in group discussions on the impacts that our past experiences had on our research stance. The main researcher also kept memos and self-reflects on the interactions between her experiences and the phenomenon of interest (Fig. 2) (Chen et al., 2020). Further, we adhered to an axiological stance that emphasizes the influences that the informants and researchers' values had on the research process (Lincoln & Egon, 2000). By being aware of our worldviews, we aimed to approach the phenomenon of transformative tourism with an open mind (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Epistemologically, we fostered inclusion by collaborating with informants during the production and interpretation of knowledge (Ponterotto, 2005).

In accordance with the scope of the study, informants were transformed tourists interviewed post-trip (Kirillova et al., 2017). Using purposeful sampling, informants were recruited via emails and social media posts sent by transformative tourism organizations to their clients' list. To identify those organizations, we created a roster by searching on the following public portals: The Transformative Tourism Council, GoAbroad.com, and the Adventure Travel and Trade Association. Based on Soulard et al. (2019), a set of seven criteria was used to select organizations and ensure the transformative nature of the offered experiences by looking at whether:

- 1) tourists and destination residents interacted in a prolonged and meaningful manner.
- 2) the trips were clearly designed with the aim to generate mutually beneficial interactions between tourists and destination residents.
- 3) activities were purposefully built in the itinerary to encourage tourists' self-reflection.
- 4) experiences were designed to push tourists out of their comfort zone.
- 5) activities were included to encourage skill development and cross-cultural understanding.
- 6) organizations took actions to reduce their socio-cultural and ecological impacts.
- 7) organizations stated their aim of treating destination residents in a socially responsible manner.

*Wednesday, July 31, 2019. Today, Heather\* mentioned that being part of the destination residents' daily life and seeing how they interact and fit in their community was powerful. Heather's experience in the volunteer tourism program reminded me of when I attended an event at a local school Tijuana with Mallory\* [the executive director of a volunteer tourism program]. I was impressed by how Mallory fitted within the community and knew everyone on site. I feel like trust is crucial to develop programs that create genuine interactions between travelers and residents. Heather also mentioned that she felt protective of her drawings and did not want family members to look at them. I felt privileged to be able to look at her drawings and listen to her story. Heather's desire to protect the drawings also makes me feel like they are good tools to tap into the emotions associated with the changes.*

*\*Aliases assigned to protect confidentiality*

Fig. 2. Memo entry example.

Participating transformative tourism organizations were also recruited to maximize variation by selecting organizations that offered diversity in terms of their target market (e.g., young adults or retirees), proposed destinations (e.g., different countries), and activities included in their programs (e.g., volunteering, adventure, and heritage/culture-based) (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Seven of the fifty-two contacted organizations agreed to share a recruitment message for the study with their clients via email or social media. From the forty-five informants who contacted us to express interest, thirty-seven responded to set a date for a phone interview. Two of these informants later declined to take part in the study, resulting in a total of thirty-five informants (Table 1) (Creswell, 2016). Data collection took place between May and August 2019. Although data saturation occurred after thirty informants, five supplementary interviews were conducted to confirm that data saturation was indeed reached (Masson et al., 2016). All informants were assigned aliases to preserve confidentiality. The year of the transformative trip ranged from 1993 to 2019.

In alignment with the interpretative paradigm, we used a multi-method approach combining oral (phone interview), textual (sentence completions), and visual (drawings) data that took into account the informants' communication preferences (Kubacki & Siemieniako, 2017). The sentence completions and drawings are defined by Boddy (2005) as "techniques [that] facilitate the articulation of otherwise repressed or withheld thoughts by allowing research participants to 'project' their own thoughts onto

**Table 1**  
Descriptive information about informants.

| Alias     | Age | Destination            | Duration of travel | Occupation               | Place of residence | Sex    | Travel year |
|-----------|-----|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------|-------------|
| Addison   | 51  | Nepal                  | 2 weeks            | Teacher                  | U.S.A              | Female | 2018        |
| Andrew    | 25  | Nepal                  | 2 weeks            | Unemployed               | Germany            | Male   | 2016        |
| Betty     | 77  | Tanzania               | 2 weeks            | Retired                  | U.S.A              | Female | 1993        |
| Bradley   | 79  | China                  | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | U.S.A              | Male   | 2014        |
| Brianna   | 65  | Germany                | 2 weeks            | Retired                  | U.S.A              | Female | 2016        |
| Brianne   | 18  | U.S. Virgin Islands    | 2 weeks            | Student                  | U.S.A              | Female | 2019        |
| Caylee    | 69  | Italy                  | 2 weeks            | Retired                  | U.S.A              | Female | 2016        |
| Charlotte | 55  | U.S.A                  | 2 weeks            | Homemaker                | U.S.A              | Female | 2018        |
| Colton    | 33  | South Africa           | 10 months          | Unemployed               | Australia          | Male   | 2017        |
| Daniella  | 73  | Russia                 | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2002        |
| Daphne    | 40  | Chile                  | 2 weeks            | Teacher                  | USA                | Female | 2015        |
| Dena      | 37  | South Africa           | 2 weeks            | Life coach               | USA                | Female | 2014        |
| Derek     | 63  | Cuba                   | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Male   | 2017        |
| Eloise    | 70  | USA                    | 3 weeks            | Communication Specialist | USA                | Female | 2019        |
| Emily     | 70  | Israel & Palestine     | 1 week             | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2016        |
| Eric      | 70  | Peru                   | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Male   | 2004        |
| Fabian    | 60  | Egypt                  | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Male   | 2008        |
| Felicia   | 60  | Poland                 | 2 weeks            | Professor                | USA                | Female | 2013        |
| Francine  | 55  | Bosnia & Albania       | 2 weeks            | Volunteer                | USA                | Female | 2016        |
| Giselle   | 58  | Switzerland & Scotland | 1 week             | Instructor               | USA                | Female | 2004        |
| Greg      | 67  | Hungary                | 3 weeks            | Technology Consultant    | USA                | Male   | 2019        |
| Gwen      | 27  | Israel & Palestine     | 2 weeks            | Project Manager          | Germany            | Female | 2017        |
| Heather   | 24  | USA/Mexico border      | 1 week             | Graduate Student         | USA                | Female | 2016        |
| Helena    | 71  | Ireland                | 2 weeks            | Librarian                | USA                | Female | 2009        |
| Ileana    | 25  | USA/Mexico border      | 1 week             | Resident Director        | USA                | Female | 2015        |
| Iris      | 73  | Cuba                   | 1 week             | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2016        |
| Julia     | 60  | Tanzania               | 2 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2014        |
| Kayla     | 66  | Tanzania               | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2019        |
| Makenzie  | 63  | China                  | 2 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2019        |
| Nicole    | 60  | Kenya                  | 2 weeks            | Consultant               | USA                | Female | 1996        |
| Penny     | 23  | Uganda                 | 2 months           | Graduate Student         | USA                | Female | 2018        |
| Rose      | 50  | Uganda                 | 7 months           | Tour Director            | Swaziland          | Female | 2010        |
| Sophia    | 60  | UAE                    | 2 weeks            | Graphic Designer         | USA                | Female | 2013        |
| Tiffany   | 70  | Ghana                  | 3 weeks            | Retired                  | USA                | Female | 2015        |



someone or something other than themselves" (p. 240). Sentence completions and drawings were selected because they facilitated free-flowing communication, offered relevant tools to address the emotionally charged and complex topics common to transformative tourism, and aligned with our interpretative stance that supported an emic perspective where informants decided which elements of their lived experience provided valuable insights (Gamradt, 1995). Those projective techniques were included in an interview worksheet (see Appendix A) and sent to informants in advance of the phone interview (Kearney & Hyle, 2004).

Following Dykens et al.'s (2007) guidelines for sentence completions, informants were asked to complete sentences as fast as possible with the first thoughts that came to their mind. Based on the work of Dykens et al. (2007) and Nurkka et al. (2009), sentence completions were included to foster discussions on symbolism by asking informants to qualify their transformative tourism trip by associating it with a color, an emotion, an animal, an adjective/noun, a picture, a fairytale/folk story, a magical creature, a magical power, and a spiritual entity. The guidelines for drawings followed Mitchell et al.'s (2011) recommendation to use a prompt that provides structure and facilitates the drawing process. Inspired by the Person Picking an Apple from a Tree (PPAT) prompt, informants drew themselves with something on the floor next to them, something in their hands, and something that they wore (Rollins, 2005). Informants completed two drawings, one representing themselves pre-trip, one post-trip, and wrote in a text bubble anything that their cartoon self-representation might want to say (Mesías & Escibano, 2018).

In their germinal works, Gamradt (1995) and Pich and Dean (2015) used drawings as a projective technique but did not ask informants to interpret their artworks. Building on their works, we asked informants to interpret their drawings and cross-check their interview transcripts, thus mitigating the threat of imposing our views (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Through their interpretation, informants can also develop a deeper understanding of their transformative experience (i.e., ontological authenticity) and can directly shape the findings (i.e., tactical authenticity) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Derived from Kearney and Hyle (2004), we asked informants how they felt when first asked to draw and whether the drawing effectively reflected their emotions. This strategy helped us to establish the informant's degree of confidence and enhance the findings' dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwant, 2014).

Informants' insights (Table 2) suggest that the drawings allow them to process their emotions (i.e., catalytic authenticity) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Based on Eldesouky et al. (2015), we used sentence completions combined with drawings to consider the informants' communication preferences and improve the confirmability of the findings by triangulating our methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To reinforce validity, we also combined the use of projective techniques with semi-structured in-depth interviews (Gamradt, 1995). Each interview was audio-recorded, took place over the phone after informants completed their interview worksheet, and lasted between 30 and 45 min (Creswell, 2016). During the interviews, informants answered questions about their transformative tourism experience, shared their answers to sentence completions, described, and discussed the meaning attached to their drawings (Guillemin, 2004). One limitation of our approach concerns recall bias. Informants can have difficulty remembering an event that has sometimes happened several years ago and/or informants can subconsciously alter their testimonies to reflect a desire that their trip was life-changing (Pung & Del Chiappa, 2020).

We followed Bailey's (2007) approach to coding, engaging in open coding followed by axial coding and consolidation. Under this approach, the main researcher started by immersing herself in the transcripts and answers to the projective techniques. For the open coding process of textual data (sentence completion and transcript of phone interviews), brackets were used to divide the textual data into smaller pieces, and codes were assigned to those pieces of text (Bailey, 2007). For the open coding of the visual data (drawings), each element within the drawing was described and assigned a code using NVIVO (Creswell, 2016). The next step was axial coding where codes were regrouped by combining those that tapped into the same conceptual idea (Bailey, 2007). The last step was data consolidation, where the themes that emerged from axial coding were merged into overarching themes that stretched over the visual and textual databases (Bailey, 2007).

The trustworthiness of the study was assessed through the four criteria originally developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was reinforced by member checks (Creswell, 2014) (Table 2). Transferability was enhanced through thick descriptions detailing the context surrounding each interview (Creswell, 2014). Dependability was strengthened through an audit trail, which was a journal in which the main researcher entered logs about the entire process of data collection and analysis. Confirmability was enhanced by looking for disconfirming pieces of

**Table 2**  
Validity check for drawings.

| Interviewer                    | Does your interpretation of the drawings effectively reflect the changes that have occurred?  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Sample answers from informants | <p>Yes. It's was actually a good idea to do the drawing because in a way it shows it a lot quicker.</p> <p>Yes definitely. It is kind of like my drawing makes me think of my five year old self, the level of happiness that I had was simple, it was just a simple happiness.</p> <p>Yes, I felt that it was very fitting to my experience because my experience was so unique. It forced me to be in touch with a part of myself that I am not used to be in touch with.</p> <p>Yes. It's also good to have some guidelines because at first I was thinking "I just have to draw a picture of myself, like how am I going to draw myself?" But I think having the items it's helpful to think about how I will represent myself.</p> <p>Yes, it was a really good exercise. I'm glad that I got to, it gives you a good visual to see the differences. I like the symbol in it. And I think if I were just writing that down, it might not be understood so vividly.</p> <p>Yes and I really stop and consider, "oh, well, what was this really about?" I thought it actually made it easier to show my feelings. It would have been very cliché if it wasn't drawn.</p> |

evidence (Maxwell, 2012). Validity was reinforced through data and method triangulation, as the study relied on several forms of data (i.e., visual, oral, and textual data) and methods (i.e., projective techniques and in-depth interviews) (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004).

Based on the recommendations of Kubacki and Siemieniako (2017), the interview questionnaire and worksheet were pilot-tested using a sample composed of fifteen undergraduate students from a large southeastern university in the United States of America who took part in a self-described transformative tourism trip. Based on their suggestions, several changes were implemented, such as underlining the words before and after in the guidelines and adding a sentence clearly indicating that informants would be the ones interpreting the drawings and sentence completions.

To evaluate the relevance of our study, we conducted phone interviews with a set of twenty transformative tourism practitioners. Those interviews were not audio recorded but we took notes about the relevance of the research, the challenges of marketing transformative tourism, and compiled them in Table 3. During the interviews, transformative tourism practitioners expressed that the research examined issues that were relevant to them. While practitioners recognized the importance of symbolism, several of them expressed concerns about images depicting transformed tourists as explorers because the focus is solely on the tourists' desires and forgoes the desires of residents (Robledo & Batle, 2017). The practitioners' comments further strengthened the argument for the need to investigate how transformative tourism narratives are symbolized by transformed tourists.

## Findings

Findings are organized into two overarching themes that emerged from the transformed tourists' sentence completions, drawings, and in-depth interviews. The first theme provides an in-depth look at the whole Interaction Ritual Chain and its transformative impacts on tourists, while the second theme offers additional specific evidence from the transformed tourists about the outcomes of their Interaction Ritual Chain.

### Going through a full transformative interaction ritual chain

Transformed tourists such as Felicia and Emily share that through their interactions with fellow tourists and destination residents, they develop what they perceive to be a mutual focus of attention, heightened intersubjectivity, and shared collective effervescence. Because the destination residents and fellow tourists were not interviewed, the findings focus on the informants' views of collective effervescence. Nevertheless, these perceptions of collective effervescence provide valuable insights into how personal transformation happens by building new group solidarities with fellow tourists and other individuals back home, experiencing emotional energy, and developing a moral bond with destination residents. This theme feeds upon three transformative subthemes oriented around how the informants are 1) taking concrete social actions, 2) implementing lifestyle changes, and 3) engaging in proselytism at home for transformative tourism.

Supporting the work of Ateljevic (2020), transformed tourists in this study share their desire to be actively engaged in fostering positive social changes around them that reflects their new value system. For example, Felicia experiences a first Interaction Ritual Chain while traveling with her friend to Poland when she reports feeling collective effervescence and increased emotional energy:

**Table 3**  
Key findings from pilot study with transformative tourism practitioners.

| Key findings from pilot study                                     | Supporting quotes   |
|---|---|
| Relevance of the research topic                                   | Actually, you're asking questions that all of us who are involved in this asked... These are the most important questions, your research will be really interesting and of interest to people in the business.<br>James <sup>a</sup> , Expedition Leader, Transformative tourism organization with a focus on adventure programs  |
| Importance of symbols and narratives to develop marketing content | Our logo is a Mandala, it symbolizes three circles that are designed to represent the three pillars of our organization: economic development, social empowerment, and environmental protection... In certain cultures, mandalas are connected with the community, they're done as a collective, and seen as an act of humility. They represent creating a mental expansion. They're stunning and beautiful... Our whole color palette is using greens and earth tones to symbolize environmental protection and health.<br>Allison <sup>a</sup> , Co-Founder, Transformative tourism organization with a focus on cultural programs  |
| Problem with the symbol of the explorer                           | We do consider how colonial our brand does seem especially to indigenous people. This is a hot topic right now among us in the company, to sort of acknowledging that our guests have that sort of connection with the themes discussed in the Odyssey... Our guests may not understand the nuances that are that we are dealing with in terms of reconciliation with our indigenous people... How do our indigenous partners feel about this super colonial logo that we have?... We try to make the character in the logo, androgynous and you can't tell if it's a male or female but it is harkening back to these classic tropes of imperialism and colonial exploration.<br>Fred <sup>a</sup> , Founder, Transformative tourism organization with a focus on adventure programs |
| Difficulty finding marketing professional                         | We started working with a marketing firm, and they changed everything: the scheme, colors, and logo. I guess they wanted it to be more serious and sophisticated. We fired them by now. I'm sure that this was a permanently correct choice.<br>Johana <sup>a</sup> , Co-owner, Transformative tourism organization with a focus on adventure programs  |

<sup>a</sup> Aliases assigned to protect confidentiality.

*I was showing off being an American who can afford to travel for my own pleasure in my before drawing. I am holding a credit card, which I feel illustrates the craft of American travelers. In the bubble, I wrote that I worked hard. I have everything, a nice house, a car, and a dog. After I came home, I don't believe that any longer. My friend Marsha knew the stories because of her relatives, and so she was more aware of the hardship. We stayed with my friend on a farm owned by her cousin. Before we got there, I thought that she was overdoing it a little bit, but I learned very rapidly that we have never been really challenged in our country, the way the Europeans were challenged to during two world wars. I realized it was all handed to me because of the available opportunities. I saw people who wanted to go to college or wanted a secure working wage and stuff, but there were no opportunities for that. My hardships were nothing compared to what I saw people endure...I was raised Catholic, and to travel through the Jewish Quarter, I felt as a human being the suffering of the people who had been put through that, and I felt so akin to the Jews after that. Felicia, 60, transformative trip to Poland*

In her testimony, Felicia mentions the presence of a standard of morality against regimes that oppress freedom of speech. Felicia uses flowers to symbolize peace and a prayer book to represent her devotion to freedom. She also draws and mourning clothes that symbolize her felt group solidarity with the death and devastation suffered by destination residents (Fig. 3):

*I wanted to put flowers in my hand because they symbolized peace. I was trying to offer peace to these people who have been so harmed. On my other hand, I draw a prayer book because I promised myself that I would honor those people by faithfully practicing my religion. I wear mourning clothes to show that I was sad about what I had learned. After this trip, I gave a talk at my church about the idea that we are free to practice religion and that people died trying to defend their homeland because they wanted that same freedom. The only way I thought I could honor those people who died fighting for those freedoms was I decided to be more cognizant*

a. Felicia's before drawing



b. Felicia's after drawing



Fig. 3. Felicia's drawings. a. Felicia's before drawing. b. Felicia's after drawing.



*and active in practicing my beliefs, either religious or political. I belong to a couple of different book clubs that read controversial books. I can say out loud how I believe the book is instead of being forced by some regimes.* Felicia, 60, transformative trip to Poland

During her interview, Felicia elaborates that a new Interactive Ritual Chain is born from her transformative trip when she decides to visit other countries seeking similar transformative outcomes, suggesting the presence of a ripple effect on the choice of future travel experiences:

*I just came back from Serbia. Croatia and Serbia are still at each other's throats and I wanted to understand that because my grandparents on my father's side are from Serbia. I feel that now when I travel somewhere, I am going to these countries to understand the differences and similarities. It is the only way to even the playing field.* Felicia, 60, transformative trip to Poland

Similarly, Emily is transformed by her interfaith trip to Israel and Palestine. Emily participates in a full Interaction Ritual Chain, where she experiences collective effervescence via meaningful interactions with destination residents and group solidarity with fellow tourists. During those interactions, she finds herself at the center stage and accumulates emotional energy:

*I am Israeli born, so that makes a big difference as to why I went. I knew the rabbi who was leading the trip. I wanted to go to find out for myself about the Palestinian issue. As an Israeli, it's illegal for me to go. So I sneaked in with a group, everybody was American, and there were two other Jews. And twenty of us were of different religions. We talked every night, and that was very helpful. What was transformative for me was when we were in Ramallah. What struck me was how beautiful and prosperous Ramallah was. I had the perception that all Palestinians were in a poor refugee camp living in tents or shacks. So it was like, wow, they are as professional and progressive as anyone. Here is a group of people who want to transform themselves and build a nation and have the same needs and aspirations as I do and other people do. We also visited some villages and talked to peacemakers. It was one of the most important points of the experience because there were relatively young Palestinians in their 30s, talking to me about peace and their lives and how they transformed from being terrorists to peace activists. We heard several of them, and this was one of the most transformative for me. I also stayed overnight with a Palestinian family. It was very touching and real.* Emily, 70, transformative trip to Israel and Palestine

In her drawing, Emily employs the powerful symbols of an open-heart and a protest sign to illustrate her civic engagement, while the oneness of the land is symbolized by a cactus that is present on both sides of the border (Fig. 4). Her interpretation also reveals the creation of a consecutive Interaction Ritual Chain, as she seeks to recharge her high levels of emotional energy by being at the center of new ritual interactions:

*In the before picture, I draw a big heart, I colored it black inside, and it says "closed heart," which means that I was mostly terrified before the trip. In my hand, I have a sign that says, "Arabs hate me." On the floor, I have a cactus. The cactus is on the floor because it is specific from the area, and it grows on both sides of the border. Once I crossed the border, the cactus was so poignant for me because the land was the same. It had the same spirit as the land I grew up on. In the after picture, the heart is open. I am holding a peace sign. The cactus is on the floor. And then the caption said: "Israelis have no clue about the Palestinians." [The trip] changed me; I believe peace is possible. I became an activist, and I joined a national anti-hate group in the U.S. I spoke several times over the next years in synagogues, mosques, and churches. It was good to speak to people about my experience and how my heart's perception was so different from the one in my head. It was a nice and beautiful country, and that's not what I would have thought before. Israel and Palestine are the same lands. I also went on a civil rights trip two years later here in the U.S.* Emily, 70, transformative trip to Israel and Palestine

Further supporting this evidence, Emily uses Wonder Woman to symbolize the processual dimension of Interaction Ritual Chains and her call for social change:

*If this was a magical creature, it would be Wonder Woman. I can say it is extremely difficult to explain to people how hard it is to transform. I still have fears but I just want people to know that they can change.* Emily, 70, transformative trip to Israel and Palestine

In the same fashion, Tiffany symbolizes the importance of social actions through a folk story in her sentence completions task. Tiffany's folk story also highlights the importance of subsequent Interaction Ritual Chains that reproduce collective effervescence based on collectively shared sacred objects such as cosmopolitanism, solidarity with others, and fundamental human rights:

*If this trip was a fairytale or a folk story, it would be the story of the stone soup. It's a folk tale about a young man who is very poor. He has this pan full of water but nothing else. And so he sits by this gate where people are coming in and out of a village. He has a stone in his pocket, puts this stone in the water, and starts stirring the water. Somebody comes by and says, 'what is that?' and he says, 'Oh, that's my soup. It's really wonderful', 'Can I have some?' And he says, 'Well, you know, it's not quite ready yet. Oh, look, you have a carrot. If you put your carrot in, I think it would be really wonderful'. So the man puts his carrot. Then another person comes by and has a potato and he says the same thing. It goes on, somebody puts in something else. Finally, he tastes it and says, 'Oh, this is so good.' Then he has something that he serves to everybody else. I love that story. I think about how you have nothing other than maybe your imagination, but you ask people to start to share and then people start to share more. It all starts to have a different flavor.* Tiffany, 70, transformative trip to Ghana

## a. Emily's before drawing



## b. Emily's after drawing



Fig. 4. Emily's drawings. a. Emily's before drawing. b. Emily's after drawing.

In the second subtheme, transformed tourists such as Dena and Nicole, reflect on the powerful lifestyle changes that they have directly implemented as a result of their trips. This subtheme also enhances the works of Matthews (2017) and Kirillova et al. (2017) by exemplifying how transformative tourism can be marketed as a meaningful. Dena details how singing is a meaningful action that leads her to experience collective effervescence and a moral bond with destination residents during her volunteer trip to South Africa (Fig. 5):

*Right before my trip, I worked at a YMCA, and I'm holding a dumbbell. I was a fitness trainer and taught classes. I have wanted to go for a long time and was interested in the apartheid. I have been reading Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela before the trip, and I was inspired by it and continue to be. During the trip, I helped out at a nursing home, and I got to meet people that lived through a lot. It just felt significant to me to hear their stories. All the people living in the nursing home would sing, and we got to be part of that. That's something that I still remember and carry with me. I got to make a personal connection. It helped me to have more empathy, gave me the ability to put myself in someone else's shoes. It motivated me to care more and educate myself about what's going on in the world. Dena, 37, transformative trip to South Africa*

Her transformative experience also encompasses group solidarity with her fellow volunteers, and increased emotional energy. She uses the symbol of a book and a guitar to illustrate her lifestyle change:

*I enjoyed talking with the other volunteers, sharing what our thoughts were. Just connecting with other volunteers and meeting like-minded people was powerful. My favorite part is seeing how that trip is life-changing for others and for yourself too. I realized that I found my identity. And that YMCA job wasn't my whole identity, so I ended up leaving that job after that trip. I started playing the guitar and making time for things like music in my life. Now, I teach guitar lessons part-time. This trip gave me the confidence to try something new. Dena, 37, transformative trip to South Africa*

## a. Dena's before drawing



## b. Dena's after drawing



Fig. 5. Dena's drawings. a. Dena's before drawing b. Dena's after drawing.

Further, Dena internalizes her emotions and reorients her life to engage in subsequent Interaction Ritual Chains symbolized by the passport:

*I just started living a lot more intentionally. I donate to different organizations. This trip made me more open to leaving my comfort zone and trying new things. It improved my relationships. I started connecting with people on a deeper level. When I'm drawn to like-minded people, friendships are more encouraging. I went on six more volunteer trips after that one. I went back to Cape Town. I did three in Uganda and two in the Dominican Republic. I always say I can't wait to go back. On the floor by me is my passport. Always ready to go again.* Dena, 37, transformative trip to South Africa

Nicole similarly explains that she now leads a less materialistic life that focuses on travel. When interpreting her drawings, she draws a larger head to symbolize her intellectual enrichment (Fig. 6). Her words about 'new travel friends all over the world' translate her new sense of belonging developed through the transformative journey. Nicole's testimony represents an excellent example of the consequentiality of transformative Interaction Ritual Chains and the different stages through which emotional energy circulates:

*In the before drawing, my life was pretty routine. It was what I thought was living a good life. I had a very nice home, my cell phone, my laptop, and I took those things to work. I followed the same path every day... Then at some point, I just kind of said, "You know*

## a. Nicole's before drawing



## b. Nicole's after drawing



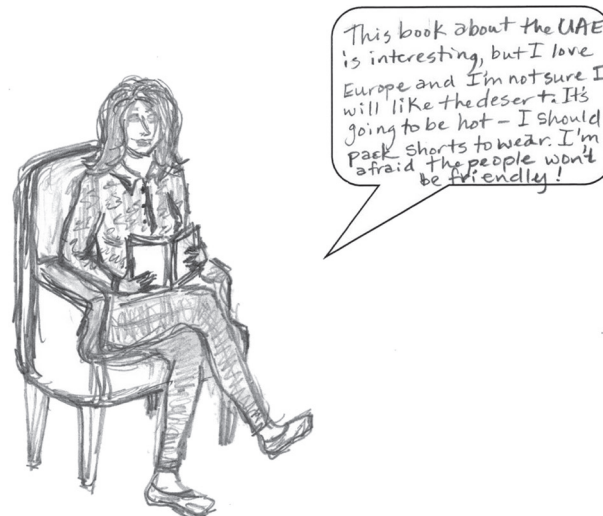
Fig. 6. Nicole's drawings. a. Nicole's before drawing. b. Nicole's after drawing.

what, I need a life, I need to get off of this path a little bit." I had a bucket list of all the things that I wasn't going to wait to do in my life anymore and travel became one of them. In the after drawing, you can see how my life has changed. My life is very full. My heart is large - I have a large heart now because I feel like I have more empathy for the different cultures and people around the world. My head is larger because I've learned so much. I always had a real passion for the animals. So now after this trip, I'm working with wild-life researchers in Africa to study, track, and monitor animals... So the elephants and the paw prints are here to represent that. I'm holding an antenna in my hand, which is how we track the animals. I had a plan where I decided to take a trip every year somewhere and see the world. I sold my house, started saving a lot of money, retired early, and changed my life. So this trip to Kenya has impacted me pretty significantly. Nicole, 60, transformative trip to Kenya

The last subtheme of engaging in proselytism at home builds on the work of Noy (2004) and represents the culmination of being a transformative energy star. The presence of proselytism is visible in Emily's desire to go on a speaking tour and is illustrated in Sophia's after drawing. Sophia depicts herself as engaging in a meaningful discussion with someone back home (Fig. 7):

On the before drawing, I was just trying to define how I was a little timid about going for the first time in Dubai and other areas UAE. I did not know what to expect and I was wondering how the people would be. I felt a little trepidation. Afterward, I came back and I felt relieved, we had a wonderful time. We were looking forward to returning and we wanted to see more and learn more. We had that little episode where we were stuck in the desert in the sand and three strangers just out of the goodness of their heart, without us even dragging them down, just turned around on their own accord. They could see we were in a bit of distress and they helped. The

## a. Sophia's before drawing



## b. Sophia's after drawing



Fig. 7. Sophia's drawings. a. Sophia's before drawing. b. Sophia's after drawing.

willingness to lend a hand means a lot to us. We saw the friendliness and courteousness. We were invited in and we were given this gift of these dates and so we enjoyed those when we brought them back. Sophia, 60, transformative trip to the United Arab Emirates

Further, her testimony exemplifies successive Interaction Ritual Chains as she celebrates and relives her felt emotional energy:

*In the after drawing, I'm talking to a neighbor or a friend. I spoke to a lot of people about it. I would tell that we didn't do touristy things ... but things that people are more likely to do if they were from the UAE. I will give them a quick rundown like we went to a regional festival, and we were pretty much the only Westerner there. A young man came up, and he identified himself as someone who worked with their equivalent of a chamber of commerce. So he was coming to welcome us. He showed us around and introduced us. He was gracious and welcoming. He told us what the different things were. We went to a camel beauty contest and a falcon race. We were getting ready to depart, it was starting to get dark, and he invited us into a huge tent. We came in, and everybody was sitting on these big pillows all over. So they told us they were bringing some food and drink. We just walked into that; most people would never have had that opportunity to do that. I also started asking more questions where other people were from and I wanted to hear more about them. Sophia, 60, transformative trip to the United Arab Emirates*

The first overarching theme provides evidences of transformed tourist going through a full Interaction Ritual Chain and carrying on other chains thanks to their heightened emotional energy.



### Outcomes of interaction ritual chains

The second offers additional specific evidence from the transformed tourists about the outcomes of their Interaction Ritual Chains: 1) group solidarity with fellow tourists and other individuals back home, 2) emotional energy, and 3) moral bonds with destination residents.

The aspiration for powerful human connections is central to the Interaction Ritual Chains theory as group solidarity occurs when individuals feel a sense of belonging (Richards, 2015). This finding also expands the work of Kirillova et al. (2017) who suggest that unity with others can act as a catalyst for transformation. While we did not interview their fellow travel companions, the transformed tourists share similar perceptions of others' role in transformation. For example, Heather draws herself surrounded by a group of fellow tourists who give her the confidence to engage in self-development and tackle the next phase of her life (Fig. 8):

*In my before drawing, I have somebody next to me that signifies my dad. My family didn't really understand why I felt the need to go on this trip. We worked with Border Angels, and we did a water job. We walked through a common path that immigrants usually take to come into the United States and drop the water. When they're trying to cross the United States, usually many immigrants don't have water or food. They can die. That was impactful for many people on our trip. That was probably the most real that things became for a lot of us. A lot of people were even being moved to tears. In my after picture, I have a lot of people around me, which is the people that I went on the trip with. I felt that I was still in a place of needing a lot of self-development. I knew from there that I was going on to grad school and I was not going to stay within New England. Thanks to that trip, I had more self-assurance that I was like "yes, this is the right thing for me to do. And I need to do this for myself to be happy and to move forward and develop as a person." Heather, 24, transformative trip to the USA-Mexico border*

This finding provides new evidence to the work of Soulard et al. (2020) and Pung et al. (2020) who suggest that transformed tourists may be drawn to experiences that foster self-development. In her completion task, Heather also supports the significance of group solidarity with fellow tourists:

*If this trip was a picture, it would depict community building and camaraderie. We had scheduled moments as a group together every night. We talked about high and low. Like "what was your high of the day?", "what was the best part of the day?", and "what was the worst part of the day?" Then we do different activities that our trip leaders would put together for us. We had different prompts that we had to answer going around in the circle. It just helps you to understand the people you are with better and where they're coming from. Heather, 24, transformative trip to the USA-Mexico border*

In addition to feeling group solidarity with fellow tourists, informants such as Daphne and Sophia report feeling group solidarity with others back home. This finding reinforces the work of Sterchele (2020) who suggests that group solidarity can have a ripple effect across time and locations. This ripple effect is present in the testimony of Daphne, an oncology nurse when she explains that her transformative experience is now helping her to connect with terminally ill patients by using the symbols of a watch, a cat, and people holding hands. Thus, Daphne's emotional energy during the trip helps her bring positive energy during her interactions with patients. Her experience can also be described as transformative because Daphne had forgotten about the importance of human connections and the trip renewed this priority in her life (Fig. 9):

*I pride myself on the relationships that I have created with patients. The part of me that needed to go on vacation was the one who had the watch on, was thinking about the potential negative side effects of chemotherapy, and was being responsible for this other human being. So I was looking forward to escaping the heat of the work environment and dealing with death. Being in that wooden cabin in Chile was a powerful moment. We [fellow traveling families] were cross-culturally connected with one another and agelessly too as well. There were teenagers sitting next to their parents sitting next to somebody else's parents. It was about an exchange of minds, a powerful connection. In my after drawing, I am holding hands with, it could be family members, patients, or coworkers. I feel like I was reminded of what's important. Oncology patients tend to really be relationship-driven, especially with their chemotherapy nurses. So I found it an easy trip to explain to them because they start over at the point in their lives, where Saturday isn't about how much you accomplished but it is about who you are with... It is like being a cat. As long as my cats' minimal needs are met, they are happy. If we dumb it down and make life kind of more simple then most of our needs are met. It's just about connecting with humans. Daphne, 40, transformative trip to Chile*

The importance of family unity and resilience is present in Daphne's answers when she uses the symbols of a penguin and a gift:

*If this trip was animal it will be a penguin. For penguin families, there is a sense of duty and responsibility to each other as a unit. And this trip was unifying. It was a gift. It was a soulful thing. Daphne, 40, transformative trip to Chile*

The second subtheme of emotional energy is at the heart of the informants' transformative experience. For example, Andrew shares how his transformative trip helps him fill a spiritual void and makes him feel part of a global community (Fig. 10):

*In the before drawing, I put myself at the desk. I did a lot of reading and just online surfing where I got a lot of inspiration about different countries and cultures. The bubble above shows things that were inspiring me. I'm not really feeling full or happy. To the right,*

a. Heather's before drawing



b. Heather's after drawing



Fig. 8. Heather's drawings. a. Heather's before drawing. b. Heather's after drawing.

there is a wall but it is not drawn with clear marks. This is sort of an invisible wall between me and the people around me because of different views. In the after drawing, I have my backpack on. I hold my computer in my hand which is also quite important to me because it makes me very independent as I work remotely. I volunteered in Nepal, where they had a strong community orientation, conscious living, and healthy living. For me, at least before, there was no very strong sense of feeling for these people. And now that I see for myself, it's like, you become so much more empathetic, you understand a lot more, why do things are the way they are, and I guess more understanding in general. I see a connection. My heart is healed and it's connected to people. There's no wall anymore. I don't feel like a stranger to people. I'm also connected with the heart of others. I call the whole world my home now even though I haven't completely discovered it yet but I feel globally connected. The things that were before in that bubble, kind of far away and that I was dreaming about, are now present. I feel more connected to the universe and I share this contentedness and energy with people. Andrew, 25, transformative trip to Nepal

Expanding on Cui (2018) and Santos and Yan (2010), a novel finding is that some transformed tourists experienced emotional energy via ethnic kinship. This emotional energy is visible in Helena's drawing when she explained how she became proud of her Irish ethnicity after suffering years of bullying as a child. The symbols described by Helena represent her recognition of the somatic similarities with her fellow Irish people (Fig. 11):

*In the before picture, I am fairly small and surrounded by bigger people who do not look like me. When I grew up, there were not many red-haired people. So as the Irish kid, I stuck out with them and I was somehow less than them. In high school, someone told me that I should not take an advanced placement class because I was taking the seat of someone who was going to go to college and I probably*

## a. Daphne's before drawing



## b. Daphne's after drawing

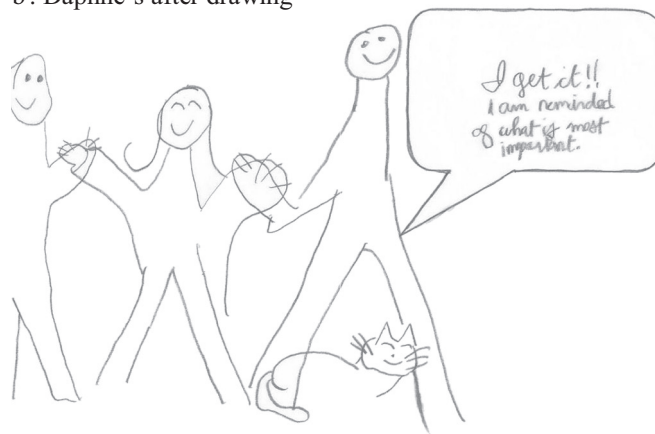


Fig. 9. Daphne's drawings. a. Daphne's before drawing. b. Daphne's after drawing.

wasn't...My clothes are nondescript, I have a book in each hand [and] a pile of books at my feet because I was a very withdrawn kid... In the after picture, I am the same size as everyone else. The single most powerful moment of the trip was when we just got to Dublin, we were walking down the street, and so many people look just like me. It is like, "Wait a minute, I have a whole tribe. I have a place in the world that I can claim and I can go anywhere I want." I am smiling, which I was not in the first picture. Here, lots and lots of people look like me. I am wearing a dress with a shimmer clover on the front because I am feeling both lucky and Irish. I'm holding a bag of wool. I still have a pile of books at my feet. After, I was way more comfortable in my skin. My husband and I talked about our experience. It was our first major trip together. We realized we had a similar experience growing up [with bullying]. I did not know he had a similar experience growing up, and he did not know either. It has never come up before the trip. I wanted to make sure my kids knew that, wherever they were, they had every right to be there and they belong there. Helena, 71, transformative trip to Ireland

Helena's narrative reveals a wealth of symbols linked to her ethnic kinship and transformation such as a smile, Irish clover, and physical appearance. Interestingly, Helena is first struck by the physical similarities between her and destination residents. The presence of this visual stimulus confirms Sterchele's (2020) proposition that senses play a key role in the Interaction Ritual Chain theory. Helena's answer to the sentence completion task reinforces the importance of those visual stimuli when she references that everything becomes brighter:

*If this trip was a fairytale or a folk story, it would be Cinderella because it was so transformative. I was the stepsister that did all the work and then all of a sudden I was the princess. Not that I was literally a princess but everything was just so different and brighter.*  
Helena, 71, transformative trip to Ireland

Building on DeCrop et al. (2018), transformed tourists mention that their interactions with destination residents foster emotional energy. In their sentence completion answers, Iris and Heather use magical power to symbolize their sense of elation

## a. Andrew's before drawing



## b. Andrew's after drawing



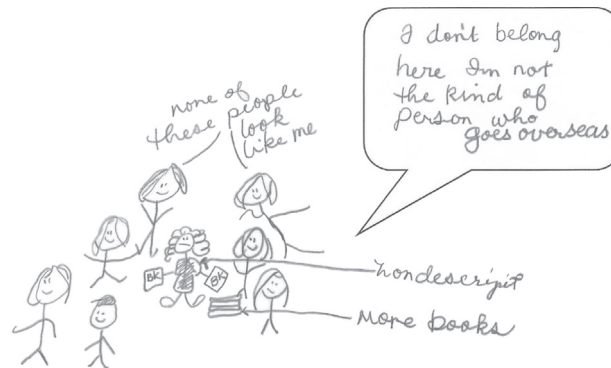
Fig. 10. Andrew's drawings. a. Andrew's before drawing. b. Andrew's after drawing.

and increased emotional energy charged by the collective effervescence of Interaction Ritual Chains. This evidence also supports Heather's testimony of collective effervescence when her fellow volunteers are moved to tears during their work for Border Angels:

*If this trip was an emotion, it would be empathy. I think that was brought out largely by our guide, Roberto. Here are people living in a very different country, living very different lives than I live, but they're just like me. Iris, 73, transformative trip to Cuba; Iris, 73, transformative trip to Cuba; this trip was a magical power it would be super strength. The people that we met have gone through these really challenging experiences and still feel successful, feel proud, and hold on to their culture even though the United States is trying to force them to get rid of or ignore their culture. Heather, 24, transformative trip to the USA/Mexico border*

Developing a moral bond with destination residents via a thorough understanding of their struggles, causes, and values is central to the symbols shared by Francine and Eric. Similar to the works of Soulard et al. (2019) and Curry and Gordon (2017), transformed tourists share that their trip is an eye-opener. Francine traveled with a non-profit organization specializing in building

## a. Helena's before drawing



## b. Helena's after drawing



**Fig. 11.** Helena's drawings. a. Helena's before drawing. b. Helena's after drawing.

understanding between Jewish and Muslim communities. By being confronted with the destination residents' struggles, Francine questions communist values:

*In my before drawing, I am carrying a notebook in my hand. I did some journaling and took notes whenever we met with people... I had always heard of Sarajevo in the news, but I never really understood what the conflict was about. I knew almost no one on the trip, except for my husband. It was wonderful meeting other people from different backgrounds and cultures. There were times that we had quite a bit of processing times as a group and having conversations. It was a very bonding experience being on the bus, especially when we traveled long distances. What struck me too was that it felt like I was going back in time. Because what I realized and understood as we went along is that Bosnia was behind because of communism. We saw the poverty that is still there. My husband and I did. We went to a school one day. We met these people at one of the programs with the [Name of the organization] while we were there, they were talking about what they do in Albania. Just one morning, we visited the school while the group did something else. The president and his family are wealthy, and then other people and other organizations can't even get funding to help close up a hole in the wall school so that the cold air doesn't get in. Francine, 55, transformative trip to Albania and Bosnia*

Further, Francine shares how meeting with Bosnian War survivors profoundly impacts her worldviews by using symbols such as a globe and a hug in her drawing interpretation. She develops a new sense of moral obligation to stand up against hatred and decides to become involved with the anti-hate group that organized the trip. Francine's testimony also echoes the work of [Pastor and Kent \(2020\)](#) about the presence of emotionally powerful symbols in the narratives of war survivors ([Fig. 12](#)):

*One of the most powerful moments was learning how the Jewish community in Sarajevo helped the non-Jewish community when the wars were happening in the early 1990s. They created a soup kitchen, and they helped smuggle out a few thousand Muslims so that they could be saved. And they helped get in medical supplies for those who needed it. Another powerful moment was going to Srebrenica and meeting a few of the mothers and wives whose husbands and sons were murdered. So meeting with them, hearing from them, seeing the graves, that was very, very powerful. I really connected with one of the mothers. In the after drawing, I have the globe in my hand because it was a part of the world where I had not been before. This trip made me a citizen of the world. I understand that part of the world and history better than I ever thought I would. I wanted to be involved with [Name of the organization]. I've given presentations on the next two trips. I say [to people] that they would enjoy getting to know the people on the trip, that it will be a life-changing trip. They will learn about the history of the region. They will learn about Islam and Judaism. Then I have a*



## a. Francine's before drawing



## b. Francine's after drawing

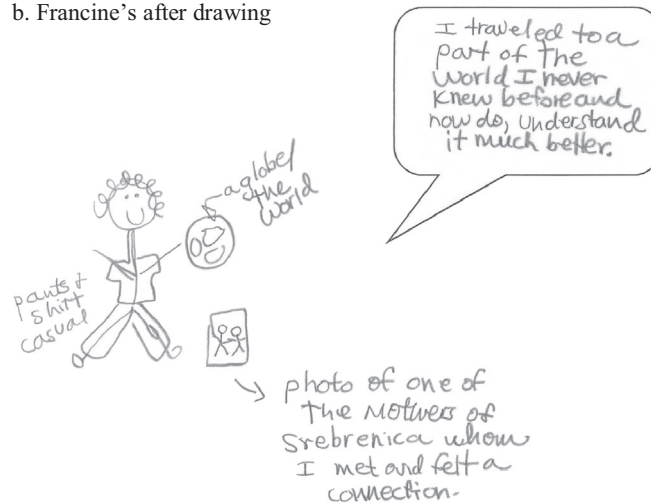


Fig. 12. Francine drawings. a. Francine's before drawing. b. Francine's after drawing.

picture by my feet of me hugging one of the mothers of Srebrenica, that's when we met up at the cemetery and where the United Nations was holding the men. She and I were hugging each other, putting our arms around each other. Francine, 55, transformative trip to Albania and Bosnia

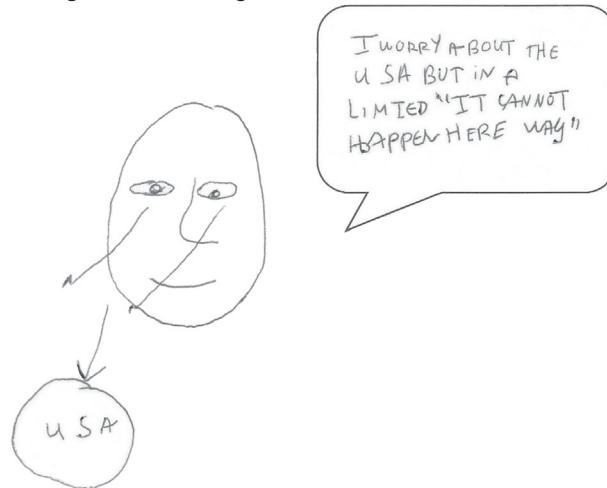
The transformed tourists' answers to the sentence completion task provide additional compelling evidence of their transformation by using animals to symbolize a different perspective on life:

*If this trip was an animal, it would be a giraffe. They are grounded and tall enough to look over everything and get a different perspective. Nicole, 60, transformative trip to Kenya*  
*If this trip was an animal, it would be an eagle because you can fly up and you get a bird's eye perspective or a different perspective on life. Colton, 33, transformative trip to South Africa*

Additionally, transformed tourists recognize threats to their group solidarity. This subtheme elaborates on the study by Goss and Sadler-Smith (2018) as transformed tourists become aware that out-group members are threatening their group values such as diversity and inclusion. In his drawings, Greg recognizes the threats of authoritarianism and fascism in out-groups. This new awareness is brought by a Hungary trip, where he visited a WWII museum that explains Nazi propaganda. Greg draws his eyes being closed and opened to symbolize the necessity to become more conscious of threats posed by neo-fascists (Fig. 13):

*I'm trying to say with my before drawing that my view was very limited and narrow, and now it is much more wide open. Even though I traveled a lot, nothing was quite impactful as going on this trip. I was very focused on what was happening in the U.S. without thinking things like authoritarianism and fascism could happen here too. I thought that some of the problems I saw in other countries may not ever happen here in the U.S. Certainly, my eyes are now open. And complementary to that, I'm much more of a global person on authoritarianism. So the whole Hitler thing made me think back to the characters we see running the country today. I'm looking up at the world rather than just down to the U.S., seeing the good and the bad, and the issues we all share. Greg, 67, transformative trip to Hungary*

a. Greg's before drawing



b. Greg's after drawing

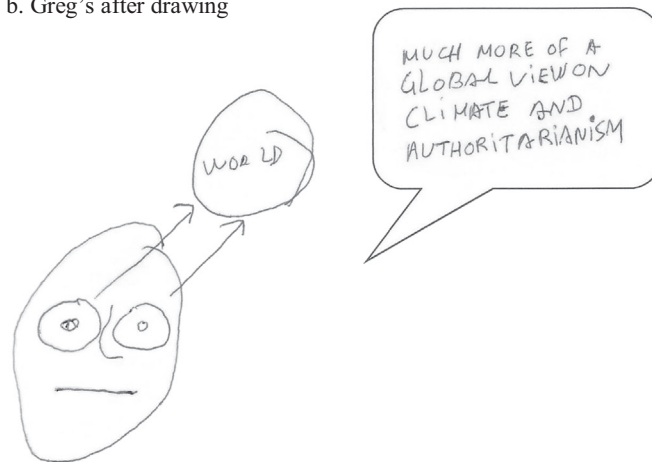


Fig. 13. Greg's drawings. a. Greg's before drawing. b. Greg's after drawing.

In conclusion, transformed tourists share rich symbols surrounding the overarching themes of going through a full transformative Interaction Ritual Chain and specific evidence about resulting outcomes. These findings have important theoretical, methodological, and practical implications.

## Discussion and conclusion

Using a multi-method approach, the present study investigates how transformative tourism narratives are symbolized by transformed tourists. From a methodological perspective, the present study reveals that projective techniques, when combined with in-depth interviews, offer a wealth of information for researchers investigating the symbols associated with the tourists' lived experiences. More specifically, by building on the work of Gamradt (1995), Kirillova et al. (2017), Pich and Dean (2015) and McWha et al. (2018) our approach enabled respondents to construct and interpret personal meanings in concert with the lead researcher, enhancing the validity of the data and providing a cathartic medium that enabled the transformed tourists to reflect on their emotions and thoughts. Interviewed tourists explicitly shared that the simple act of drawing allowed them to self-reflect, re-live their journey, and focus on its key elements.

In terms of theoretical contributions, the study answers the call by Lamers et al. (2017) for tourism research to focus on theories that investigate human behavior from social practices perspective rather than an individual or structural one. Findings suggest that the Interaction Ritual Chains theory offers a valuable theoretical lens to investigate social practices related to transformative tourism. Based on our findings, we propose an extended version of the theoretical framework (Fig. 14) by Collins (2004) that depicts how transformative tourism fits within the Interaction Ritual Chains theory. The presence of group solidarity with fellow tourists is directly witnessed by transformed tourists. The presence of emotional energy and a moral bond with

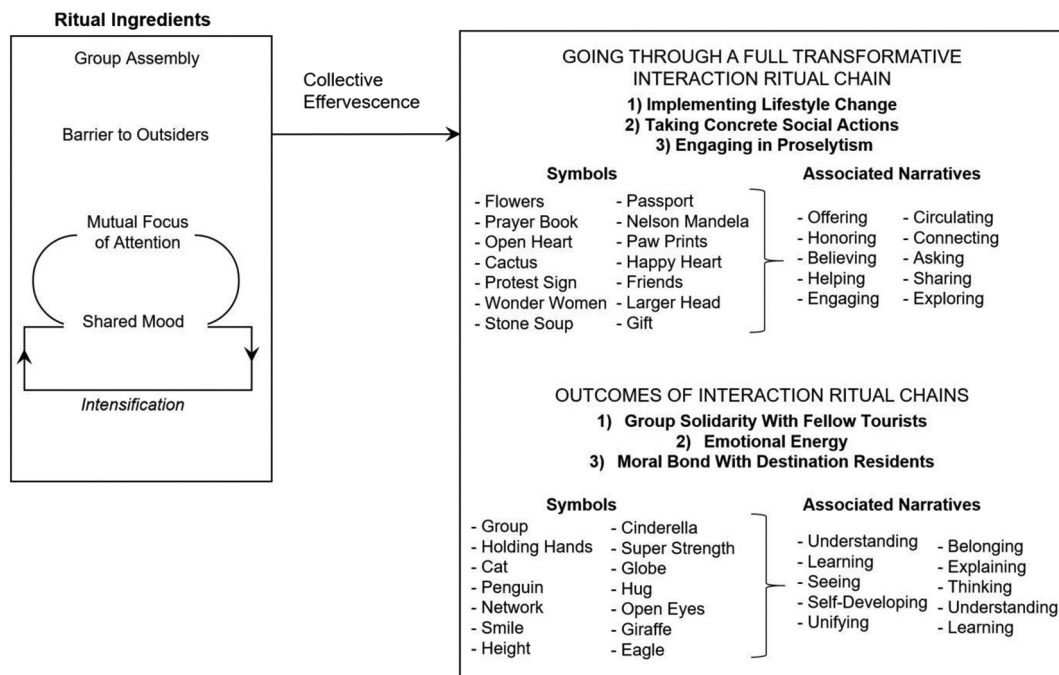


Fig. 14. Interaction ritual chains of transformed tourists.

destination residents is also suggested by the transformed tourists' testimonies. The symbols shared by transformed tourists are enmeshed within associated narratives that can be valuable for marketing purpose.

Based on Fig. 14, one key finding concerns the importance of symbols related to magic. Although Frost (2010) and DeCrop et al. (2018) mention magical elements when referencing transformation, transformed tourists suggest that they are more likely to perceive magic as being associated with their encounters with destination residents. For example, Heather uses the magical power of super strength to describe how Mexican immigrants preserve their culture while facing racism in the United States. This finding suggests that the magic of transformation may reside not in the transformed tourists' view of self but in their profound admiration and respect toward destination residents. More precisely, the transformed tourists' self-identity, particularly their social identity, changes through building moral bonds with destination residents. To some extent, what changes is the transformed tourist's perception of their own belonging to certain groups (with related symbols and values) that is different from the one they had before taking their trip.

Another notable finding concerns the symbol of the explorer and the tension with themes of imperialism and white privilege (Germann Molz, 2016; Robledo & Batle, 2017). Rather than describing themselves in terms of omnipotent explorers, transformed tourists in this study expressed a more humble approach. This humble approach is visible in Greg's drawings, where his gaze moved from being solely focused on the United States to encompassing the whole world and acknowledging his privilege. This ability to self-critique suggests that most transformed tourists do not shy away from complex situations, desire to be exposed to different worldviews, and crave authentic experiences that meaningfully connect them with destinations residents. Hence, transformative tourism practitioners can differently frame the 'exploration' symbolism by depicting transformed tourists as taking part in an introspective journey, along with destination residents, and exploring new ways to foster mutual understanding. This understanding can ultimately lead all stakeholders involved to explore more just social relations and structures.

While transformed tourists share symbols related to existentialism (Kirillova et al., 2017; Zahra, 2011), they mostly link their experience with other emotions than the angst felt during the disorienting dilemma. Although there is a danger in emphasizing the dark side, this is often a necessary part of any liminal process and transformational *rite of passage*, and it might be slightly misleading for transformative tourism practitioners not to depict it somehow when marketing these types of experiences. A solution can be to use new technologies to create visually dynamic symbols -like animated Graphics Interchange Formats-GIFs - that evolve through subsequent transformation phases. For example, a GIF can include a 'beast' that turns into a Phoenix. Transformed tourists in this study shared symbols inscribed in hope for the future, such as Emily's powerful drawings that express her desire for peace and her involvement in civil rights in the United States. This focus on hope motivates many transformed tourists to be involved in their community's wellbeing.

The findings also have important managerial implications for tour operators and NGOs focusing on transformative tourism in a post COVID-19 world. COVID-19 can shift tourists' priorities, as a wider array of people may now be looking for more meaningful human connections, desire to spend quality time with their family, and are calling for actions from the tourism industry to foster ecological sustainability and social equality (Durko & Migacz, 2020). These priorities are central to transformative tourism, which means that it has the potential to offer solutions for economic and even social recovery (Sheldon, 2020). Designing marketing

content that highlights these connections can demonstrate the relevance of transformative tourism experiences to broader audiences. Our research suggests that highlighting human connections, including genuine interactions with destination residents, guides, and fellow tourists, may strengthen transformative tourism marketing. Symbols depicting hearts, connecting hands, breaking walls, and building networks from this study may serve as a source of inspiration for transformative tourism organizations that are looking at developing a strong brand identity.

In light of the findings, transformative tourism practitioners might also consider creating marketing content that highlights strong family bonds (Germann Molz, 2016). Transformative tourism can be promoted as a way to strengthen ties between family members by going through meaningful experiences together. For example, practitioners can create a pre-trip booklet to share with prospective transformative tourists that include activities for children and parents/grandparents to complete together and learn more about the local culture/history of the destination. Those booklets can vary based on the children's age group and include activities such as scavenger hunts, word puzzles, riddles, drawings, stickers, and trivia. These activities create a dedicated bonding time between family members as they work together and get excited about their upcoming trip. Transformative tourism practitioners can also create marketing content that taps into the need to discover one's kin and develop partnerships with genealogy organizations (Santos & Yan, 2010). Prospective transformative tourists can be invited to create a personalized online account through a transformative tourism organization's website. Through this online account, excitement can build up before the trip by offering information about the prospective transformative tourists' ethnic connections and how this information is tied with the places that are visited as part of the itinerary using interactive maps. Thus, this recommendation encourages the prospective transformative tourist's anticipation and builds up the collective effervescence that they will experience through Interaction Ritual Chains during the trip.

Additionally, transformative tourism practitioners can use the findings to develop marketing content that generates trust and confidence in their ability to deliver on their promises (Magrizos et al., 2020). This trust and confidence can be fostered by tour guides, as transformed tourists emphasize that their connection with them is important to successfully navigate the transformative process (Baral et al., 2008; Irimiás et al., 2020). For example, Iris mentions in her sentence completion that her guide Roberto was the reason she was able to meaningfully and empathetically interact with Cubans. Incidentally, the guides themselves would act as 'energy stars' in these Interaction Ritual Chains. Therefore, transformative tourism practitioners could develop interactive content, such as online videos, to introduce the guides to the group of prospective transformative tourists before the trip.

An equally important recommendation is for transformative tourism practitioners to ask previous transformed tourists if they would like to become ambassadors for their programs (Soulard et al., 2019). When prospective transformative tourists contact an organization with questions about a trip, practitioners can offer to put them in contact with these ambassadors. In terms of the Interaction Ritual Chains theory, these ambassadors gain from being the center of attention, contribute to generate collective effervescence in the group, foster emotional energy in the prospective transformative tourists, and receive most emotional energy back for themselves while renewing their group connection. From a transformative perspective, interacting with ambassadors will help prospective transformative tourists to project themselves into the trip and create enthusiasm. Practitioners can also create videos, feature posts on social media, and design newsletters that showcase these ambassadors. The key is to make the content relatable, personal, and genuine so that prospective transformative tourists can identify with these ambassadors and their story of change (Mesías & Escribano, 2018).

As with any research endeavor, the present study suffers from limitations that are important to acknowledge. One limitation is related to the time passed since the tourists' transformative experience, as it might have altered the accuracy of their recollection. However, the transformative experience can be so powerful in nature that it is likely to have deeply marked the informants and leaves vivid memories (Kirillova et al., 2017). Time passed also provides evidence of the enduring nature of transformation. Another limitation is that the interviewed transformed tourists are self-selecting themselves for the study limiting the findings to likely best-case scenarios – the people for whom the experience was most meaningful and wanted to relive it somehow through the research. This means that the recommendations might not apply to less motivated prospective tourists, who might only recognize the real power of transformative tourism experiences after their trip (Pung & Del Chiappa, 2020). Additionally, the study focuses on individual perceptions of social change. We did not systematically collect the testimonies of the destination residents met by the informants or fellow tourists who were part of these transformative trips.

The present research also paves the way for future studies. Future studies can test via experimental design the effectiveness of different narratives in convincing prospective tourists to take part in transformative tourism. Based on the series of suggested symbols, transformative tourism practitioners can also use focus groups to test how their target market reacts to a new name and/or logo for their organization. For example, transformative tourism organizations that cater to a more mature demographic of prospective transformative tourists might want to explore symbols related to the family unit (e.g., hearts and holding hands). Symbols related to the thirst for knowledge (e.g., books and head) are likely to appeal more to prospective transformative tourists who are looking to understand more about the socio-political history of a country. Similar to the work of Simons (2019), future studies can investigate the application of Interaction Ritual Chains theory to online platforms and social media where virtual communities can be used to examine the transformed tourists' prolonged sense of togetherness, group solidarity, and communion. Lastly, future studies can take on a critical approach and investigate whether the Interaction Ritual Chains theory applies to destination residents who are hosting prospective transformative tourists. A valuable approach can be to include ethnographic observations of the tourists' interactions while they are at the destination, and/or upon their return home. Studies can explore whether there are some common symbols and narratives that are at the heart of the destination residents' decision to work with transformative tourism organizations. Similarly, future research can investigate how travelers participating in the same trip develop common symbols within their group. Based on the groundbreaking works of Germann Molz (2016) and

Sterchele (2020), researchers can monitor and/or interview groups of travelers after their trip to provide a longitudinal understanding of the transformations occurring in tourists. Most importantly, transformative tourism offers hope for changes in as tourists, practitioners, and destination residents work together to foster mutual respect and understanding.

## Acknowledgment

We are grateful to informants who took the time to meet with us and share their powerful testimonies of change. We also would like to thank the Associate Editor and the three anonymous reviewers who provided suggestions and guidance to strengthen this article.

## Appendix A

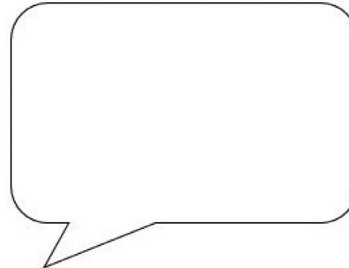
### B) Small Drawing/Basic Sketch Activity #1:

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

***Remember: it is not about how well you draw but about what you draw. You are not going to be evaluated on your artistic ability. We are interested in learning about the symbols/narratives that tourists like yourself associate with their life-changing trip. You will be the one interpreting and giving meanings to the sketches by describing/explaining them during the phone interview.***

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

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



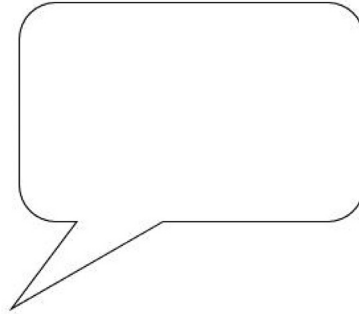


## C) Small Drawing/Basic Sketch Activity #2:

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

***Remember: it is not about how well you draw but about what you draw. You are not going to be evaluated on your artistic ability. We are interested in learning about the symbols/narratives that tourists like yourself associate with their life-changing trip. You will be the one interpreting and giving meanings to the sketches by describing/explaining them during the phone interview.***

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



### Interview Guide

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

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

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