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Getting Away from It All: The Construction and Management of Temporary Identities on Vacation

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When individuals go on vacation they take on a temporary “vacation identity.” Vacationers use props, behaviors, and interactions with traveling companions to define and bound the experience as separate and different from everyday life. Data are drawn from twenty in-depth interviews and participant observation with sixty international tourists in China during the summer of 2008. Vacationers’ participation in rites and routines and impression management techniques helped them construct a personally meaningful, yet short-lived identity. The results underscore the influence of others in identity construction and point to the importance of a nonpresent other in creating and presenting identities.

Keywords: identity, vacations, tourism, impression management

My dearest friend in San Antonio has a house in Miami and we go for a weekend to Miami. And it’s just fun. Because we can hang out and, like, I still like rap music. I can go listen to rap music. I can’t do that with my kids. So that’s fun. But it’s a very different trip. Because I’m traveling as myself versus as a mother. You know? . . . I don’t have to watch out for somebody. They have to watch out for me. (Mona, stay-at-home mother)

If I don’t call [my girlfriend] I can pretty much expect to get a phone call. . . . But it’s like, I don’t like to feel obligated. You know what I mean? Like I want to call somebody because I want to call them. I want someone to call me because they want to call me. Not because you feel like, oh, I have to talk to this person every day. And since it’s so new here and there’s lots of things I want to see and do, it would be nice if I could have that kind of flexibility. (Jake, college student)

The nature of the modern vacation is such that it provides the opportunity to suspend connections to the routines and responsibilities of everyday life. In this “time off,” individuals can engage the multifaceted nature of identity by acting out different roles within a new context. Although absent from everyday life, vacationers still perform this temporary identity in a manner that conforms to certain sociocognitive patterns

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of identity formation and manipulation. Participating in established patterns before, during, and after the occasion underscores the experiential foundation of constructing an internally coherent and externally discernable identity. In this article, I look at the routines, objects, and behaviors people employ to instrumentally create an identity that is temporary and shaped out of personal choice.

Vacations are fertile sites for analyzing ephemeral identities (Zurcher 1970) because they are distinctly bounded and structured to offer individuals an opportunity to put on hold selective features of day-to-day experience, or adopt new, favored behaviors. "More than just yearly rituals in which we connect with friends and family vacations are also exercises in self-definition" (Aron 1999:2). They are specifically built into the structure of the year to allow people this time off from select social obligations that constrict and regulate their daily behaviors, and are thus a period of enhanced personal freedom that can tell us much about how people choose to construct and enact an identity when social rules and proscriptions are eased, removed, or shifted.

Vacations mean different things to different people, and activities can range from a trip to the beach to cultural events and adventure tourism. I argue their significance is not in the specific activity undertaken but the temporary relaxation of one's experience of social structure. The time set aside for a vacation tends to be thought of as more lax, an "empty" time where certain rules and norms that structure everyday life are relaxed, and people feel they can behave in a more "free" way (Adler and Adler 1999:35; Cohen 1973:89; Graburn 1983:13). At the same time, while some roles of everyday life may be temporarily removed, like work, others, such as family obligations for a working parent, may actually be strengthened. I explore how social connections, activities, and use of objects both enable and constrain the production and presentation of these short-term identities.

A number of activities and objects help actors create boundaries around the vacation identity, and in doing so they highlight the relationship between practice and cognitive identity formation. These behaviors serve a dual function in experientially reinforcing identity for the individual and externally corroborating it with others. Packing one's bags for a trip, buying and wearing particular outfits, or indulging in an extra drink or dessert all allow the vacationer to create a distinguishable identity that is defined by its difference from the everyday one. Carrying out these actions that one would not normally do creates a contrast marking this time as exceptional to routine, everyday existence. These behaviors then serve as "sociomental" (Zerubavel 1993:398) signposts experientially underpinning the new identity. That people employ similar mechanisms regardless of the type of vacation they undertake underscores that these cognitive patterns of identity formation persist across substantively different situations. In his discussion of "the Adventurer," Simmel (1971:197) makes the point that the content of experience is not what makes something an adventure; rather, it is the "form of experiencing itself." The experience of the identity does not come merely from doing something new but from the way it is collectively conceived and individually performed.

Before discussing the strategies vacationers use to bound and project a temporary identity, I discuss the significance of the vacation as a site for identity work. I then introduce my data gathered from a group of tourists in China. Analysis follows their preparation before leaving, their activities while on the trip, and their return. I end with a discussion of how communication technologies complicate issues of identity construction.

VACATIONS AND IDENTITY WORK

Following Berger and Luckmann (1966), Cohen and Taylor (1976:119) describe vacations as “literally and metaphorically—excursions from the domain of paramount reality.” They conceptualize vacations as a type of “escape route” from one’s everyday reality, an “archetypal free area.” Vacations are conceived of as a break from routine (Rojek 1993) that is constructed in opposition to what makes up daily experience (Urry 1990). But, ultimately, lasting escape is not possible, as individuals must inevitably reassume their place in the everyday social structure. In this way, vacations can be thought of as a kind of pause in the rhythm of day-to-day life, rather than an escape from it. Specifically, it is a pause for rejuvenation during which people feel they can behave through choice rather than obligation and can highlight their own “personal style” rather than submit to the “social proscriptions of everyday routines” (Snow and Brissett 1986:11). Diekema’s (1992:489–90) description of solitude provides a useful parallel to the temporary withdrawal from and return to community done by the vacationer. Solitude, he says, is a

solidary relationship wherein a shared future is projected that involves the maintenance of social relationships even while maintaining the temporary withdrawal of an individual from an interaction. The individual knows the individual will be there tomorrow even if she withdraws today, and the community likewise knows the individual will serve the community upon return.

The escapes and inversions of vacations are possible precisely because they are temporary, and it is expected that the individual will return and resume his or her regular responsibilities. Although the individual usually is not alone on vacation, it is a short-lived withdrawal from community and certain acquaintances. Many of a vacation’s pre- and posttrip rituals, and the connections made to home during the trip, involve some effort at maintaining social relationships and reaffirming one’s place in the community through, for example, going-away parties, gifts, and postcards. Because of this interconnected nature, the vacation identity is one that can be thought of as simultaneously independent and dependent of social ties (Karp, Holmstrom, and Gray 1998), requiring a conscious management of a desire for independence with the need for connection.

The identity work that is conceived of as being done during vacationing and tourism fits into a narrative of social identity and biography that is associated with creating “new” identities through certain performances done while traveling (Desforges 2000). By situating themselves within alternate narratives, individuals create

“identity claims” that communicate components of a malleable, multifaceted identity (Elsrud 2001). With a few exceptions (Crouch, Aronsson, and Wahlstrom 2001; Larsen 2008; Rojek and Urry 1997), this work tends to conceptualize the everyday and the vacation as two separate realms, but in reality they can be thought of as a continuum. Some people make strong efforts to mark off their vacations and separate them from their everyday lives; others more willingly integrate the two.

Individuals manage these boundaries differently. Nippert-Eng (1996) identifies two ideal types to distinguish how individuals organize and bound multiple identities. “Segmentors” strive to keep certain identities separate, setting rigid boundaries that reduce the opportunity for overlap, while “integrators” allow more fluidity and comingling of roles and responsibilities. For example, while the more integrated vacationer may wish to stay in touch with what is going on at home through newspapers and television, the segmentor may consciously choose not to keep up with current events, to avoid contaminating the special vacation time with the banality of everyday life. To explore this work of integrating and segmenting, data for this article are taken from a distinct vacationing environment of tourists in China. Separated from most of the usual identity pegs (Goffman 1974) used by individuals to fashion their identities, issues of segmentation and integration become highlighted.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this article are drawn from a larger project on vacation and identity and involve a group of tourists who chose to spend their vacation time as volunteer-tourists in China in the summer of 2008. As Aron (1999:259–60) notes, the middle class in the United States has had a complicated relationship with vacationing, be-lying the ongoing tension between work and leisure. “Troubled by idleness we . . . continue to make our vacations worthwhile endeavors . . . possibilities that promise to challenge, instruct, condition or enlighten.” The cultural capital acquired through both long-haul and altruistic tourism makes it a desired use of vacation time (Munt 1994). The recent popularity of such vacation activities as volunteer tourism, ecotourism, and the more traditional cultural or educational tour reflect this tension and its instrumental use. For the middle-class vacationer, “holidays have moved beyond sheer relaxation and moved towards the opportunity to study and learn, to experience the world through a pseudointellectual frame” (p. 110). Comparable experiences abound at various levels of cost and accessibility: Elderhostel, Epcot, Eurail, Outward Bound, and all varieties of packaged cultural and educational tours. These forms of “serious leisure” offer opportunities for identity enhancement and self-fulfillment (Stebbins 1982).

Because of China’s perceived difference from American or European life in the view of Western travelers, the degree of immersion in a new culture or connection to home becomes a conscious choice to be negotiated by growing numbers of vacationers traveling to the country. If vacations are about creating inversions and contrasts with everyday experiences, these mostly upper-middle-class vacationers

have moved to an environment where they invert their everyday role by becoming “peasant for a day” (Gottlieb 1982), leaving behind the comforts of their daily life and temporarily living in an environment with fewer amenities and comforts than they are used to.¹

In China, linguistic and cultural barriers present a significant challenge to tourists unacquainted with the country (Lew et al. 2003). Many respondents in this study cited this difference as the reason they chose China for their vacation, with statements like, “It’s as far removed as you can get from the West.” This is a milieu that the vacationers themselves consider a substantial break from their everyday experience. Such an environment brings choices of integration and segmentation to the fore, as tourists must decide how much they wish to “experience” a foreign culture or maintain connections with a familiar home. As this study focuses on the methods of constructing an identity in practice, the volunteer aspect of their trip is not a focus of the analysis. Drawing from Zerubavel’s (2007) social pattern analysis, patterns of identity construction are understood to be consistent and present across vacation destinations and share similar formal properties that can be gathered and applied in various contexts.

Data consist of twenty in-depth interviews and three months of participant observation with sixty vacationers. Interviewees for this study were selected according to the length of their stay, being limited to a two- to three-week trip, and from those who identified the trip as a “vacation.” Those who did not think of the experience as a vacation were not included. Xi’an is a popular site in China for international tourism. As it is the location of the terra cotta warriors and remains a relatively well-preserved historic site, it is a standard stop for international tourists and hosts cultural and educational tourist programs. Participants ranged from age eighteen to seventy-five, with ten of the interviewees being college students, and the other ten aged twenty-three and above. Most of the vacationers were Americans, but there were also several British and Canadian individuals in the group.

The vacationers in the study lived in several apartments in the city’s center and, after two hours of volunteering each day, spent the rest of their time in such tourist activities as visiting local museums and temples, shopping, and visiting nearby sites during the day, and frequently going to bars and karaoke clubs at night. They spent the majority of their time in each others’ company, living together, eating all meals together, and touring together. Educational-themed activities were organized by the company in charge of the trip, such as Chinese cooking classes, calligraphy lessons, language lessons, and music lessons, as well as excursions to sites like the terra cotta warriors or a weekend hike in the mountains. Other activities, like weekend trips to other cities, were organized by the tourists themselves. A new group of ten to twenty tourists would arrive every two weeks, creating a constant turnover, but also group cohesion between those who arrived together.

I lived in the apartments with the vacationers and participated in volunteering, shopping, weekend excursions, meals, and frequent trips to bars and cafés in the evenings. Because of the high degree of group interaction, I was able to build a strong

rapport with subjects, despite their short stay. One- to two-hour interviews were conducted to first discuss respondents' experiences of their trip to China specifically and then their reactions to and conceptions of prior vacation and tourism experiences. These in-depth interviews loosely structured by an interview guide were chosen to allow participants the opportunity to convey their own conceptions of their identity work informally. Concurrent participant observation allowed me to establish close relationships with vacationers during their trip, as well as note the "mundane" details of their trip that may have gone unmentioned during interviews, but provide essential information on the mechanics of identity work. This familiarity of living with the vacationers allowed me to collect detailed data on their activities both within and outside structured interviews, including data on their activities before I had met them, when they were still preparing to leave.

ENTERING THE VACATION IDENTITY

The work of constructing and transitioning into the vacation identity begins prior to departure. There is much work to be done before one can leave for a trip, and vacationers engaged in various activities before leaving: booking plane tickets and hotels; making a checklist of things to pack; creating an itinerary; sorting through guidebooks, and online pictures and guides; arranging for time off work or getting someone to cover shifts; learning a little Chinese; and getting visas and vaccinations. Social activities as well, such as going-away parties and get-togethers with friends and family, also marked the beginning of the trip for many.

Along with complementary activities performed upon return, such as stopping and then restarting the mail and packing and unpacking one's bags, these actions serve an important experiential function in marking the beginning and end of the identity. By delineating the proper time during which it should be performed, these preparatory actions establish "brackets in time" (Goffman 1974:45) that mark off the proper temporal space during which the vacation identity will be performed.

Linda is a semiretired college professor who chose to come to China on her own. She enjoys learning about and teaching online courses on Asian culture, and thus she wanted to spend the majority of her vacation time visiting museums and cultural spots. As she hoped to make the most of her two-week trip, she put a lot of time into planning and preparing where she would go and what she would do. This included much research of her future surroundings and available activities. She listed some of her preparatory activities, including buying tour books and maps of multiple Chinese cities, reading fiction books set in the cities where she would be, and doing extensive pretrip reading on the Internet. She also put a lot of care into selecting the proper items to bring, shopping for new things she needed, carefully selecting clothing, and making a packing list. In an example of the thought she put into her preparation she says, "I had read, actually, in one of the tour books that this particular museum was very, very cold. So I tried to find something that would be comfortable. . . . That was both dressy and comfortable and didn't wrinkle and all that kind

of stuff.” Ultimately, she had to “pack and unpack five times” before she felt she had her suitcase just right.

These activities are more than just preparation. They are the rites of passage performed before entering a new identity (Turner 1969; Van Gennep 1960). As the physical transition into the vacation identity is abrupt, these actions prepare the individual both materially and cognitively for the shift (Rubin, Shmilovitz, and Weiss 1993). Through guidebooks and Internet research, Linda became quite familiar with her future environment and all the things she could do there. Pretrip shopping allowed her to buy necessary items, as well as acquire props uniquely associated with the future identity. And the suitcase, particularly symbolic of movement and transition, received particular care and attention, with much packing and repacking before she felt ready.

By investing a lot of time in the preparation, Linda was heavily integrating her vacation identity with her everyday one before she even left home. She welcomed the overlap of vacation-related activities into her everyday routines and allowed the two identities to combine. She is then contrasted with Jodie, a busy physician in the UK, who took a segmentor’s approach to her preparation, putting as little work into the temporary identity as possible before she left. This is exemplified in that she put off most of her preparations and packing to the last minute.

I packed my bag the morning I left. Apart from that, apart from booking and paying in time, I did very little. Apart from panicking. . . . Because I was just absorbed with other stuff that was going on. The only thing that I did do was download some Chinese lessons on my iPod. And when I went walking or when I did some sort of walk around the house I tried to listen to some of the Chinese lessons in the hope that I would be able to say a few things by the time I got here. And I started quite well, but then I got, sort of watered down, and I only got to lesson three or something and I’ve never used any of the words. So, that’s about the only thing I did. . . . But I got bored and I think, generally, I just sort of wanted to see what happened.

As Jodie was caught up in the demands of her job, she paid little attention to preparing for her trip; instead, she waited until the last moment to complete the necessary tasks. Although she made an attempt to integrate the identity a bit by downloading some Chinese-language lessons, this failed as she quickly lost interest. The future identity could not compete with the demands of her present one, and until departure she refrained from getting too involved in it.

PERFORMING THE VACATION IDENTITY

Once the vacationers arrived in China they began the work of acting out the identity. Work on impression management in leisure settings often focuses on creating and projecting a long-term identity or a favorable impression of one’s “everyday” identity in a new context (Jonas 1999; Vinitzky-Seroussi 1998). These individuals want their identity to be taken seriously. The vacation identity is different, however, in that it is short-lived and constructed only for the trip’s duration. The image being

projected to others is not necessarily meant to be a representation of one's ongoing behavior. Instead, vacationers want their performance to be interpreted as special or different from that of their everyday life. Their performance is meant to convey that "this is play" (Bateson [1972] 2000:179) and that everything that occurs during it should be interpreted as such. This involves a great deal of impression management work achieved through three primary means: props, behavior, and interaction with traveling companions.

Props

Vacationers actively use props in an instrumental way that helps generate personal conceptions of identity (Andrews 2005; Baerenholdt et al. 2004; Crouch and Desforges 2003). Lurie (1997) argues that objects are what comprise tourism and as they are invested with symbolic meaning, cultures travel with objects. Thus we can learn much about the vacationers themselves through their objects. This is true not just in the souvenirs and things that they bring home with them from their trip, which are discussed below, but also in the objects they take with them on the vacation and surround themselves with.

Clothes are a primary example of the use of objects to convey an identity. Dressing in a certain way that confirms one is on vacation is an outwardly oriented strategy in defining identity and soliciting the support of others in maintaining it (Gross and Stone 1964). Carrying certain objects such as maps, guidebooks, and language dictionaries further marks (Waugh 1982) the vacationer, as these instructions for getting by are guides that are needed only when outside one's everyday environment. Similarly, travel-sized toiletry bottles, portable alarm clocks, passports, plug adapters, and converters are all exclusively used during travel and reinforce for vacationers the identity into which they have moved.

Although they may make an effort to segment their everyday life from the vacation, the innumerable objects that vacationers surround themselves with are often mundane items brought into the vacation from everyday life, like electronics, clothes, CDs, books, and toiletries (Larson 2008). These objects unintentionally surround vacationers with reminders of home and bring an element of it into their vacations. When asked if he brought anything with him to remind him of home, Roger, an American college student responded, "Not on purpose [laughs]. I have a laptop with several thousand pictures on it. But I didn't bring the laptop to have the pictures." Nevertheless, they traveled with him on the trip and provided a close-at-hand reminder of his home life. Similarly, MP3 players were loaded with favored music, and cell phones stored old text messages, phone numbers, and photographs. Laptops carried music collections, video files, and work-related material saved from home.

While these items *unintentionally* integrated the home and vacation identities, some vacationers *deliberately* used objects to integrate the two. Jess, for example, an American mother of two in her midforties, brought a pound of Starbucks coffee with her to China because she was worried she would not be able to find

the franchise there and felt she could not go without. Sarah, a nineteen-year-old American, brought her pillow, and Carleigh, a British college student, kept a small travel alarm clock with her that she kept set to London time. Another popular activity among the younger tourists, buying and watching pirated versions of American television shows and movies, allowed them to interact with objects in a way that enabled them to replicate experiences of home. When watching these videos they could literally duplicate their home behavior while consuming images of familiar people and environments.

Others intentionally used their objects to segment their vacation identity. Jeff, a college student who planned an elaborate multicontinental trip for his summer break, presents an extreme yet illustrative example of this practice, as he bought himself a new version of everything he needed for his journey. He says, "Everything I have with me is new . . . I mean from my white T-shirts and my, like, ExOfficio travel underwear, to my suitcase and my shorts and my shoes and my hat. It was all in preparation for the trip." By wearing a completely new wardrobe, Jeff willfully segmented his everyday and vacation identities in a conscious attempt to ensure that none of the mundane objects from his everyday life would travel with him on the trip. For Jeff, this new wardrobe set the stage for a temporary identity in which he felt freer to indulge in some of the leisure activities he denied himself in his everyday life.

Behaviors

In addition to props there are many realm-specific behaviors that individuals adopt to bound the vacation as separate from everyday life. Many of these activities involve abandoning their day-to-day responsibilities. Many vacationers treat their temporary identity as more "free" than their everyday one and adapt their actions to reflect this. In this way, they actively create boundaries of the self that are less restrictive or more open to enjoyment than they otherwise might be. The suspension of daily structure allows the vacation identity to be an opportunity to temporarily abandon or transgress more restrictive ties of vacationers' usual identities. As a result, the experience can bring new openness in regard to drinking and drugs (Belhassen, Almeida Santos, and Uriely 2007), sex (Kruhse-MountBurton 1995; Lofgren 1999), "partying" (Diken and Lausten 2004), and danger and risk (Kane and Tucker 2004).

While these vacationers were ostensibly in China to volunteer, they still made use of their plentiful free time to enjoy some of the less restrictive laws on alcohol in China. As Xi'an is a popular tourist city, there are a number of English-friendly bars, nightclubs, and karaoke clubs aimed at tourists and backpackers. Many of these bars were conveniently located together on what the vacationers called "bar street." At these establishments they could drink alcohol, play pool, sing karaoke, and socialize with other North American and European tourists who were traveling through the city. Many of the college-age tourists made frequent visits to these establishments,

where the beer was both cheaper than at home and legal for those who would have been underage in the United States.

Karaoke clubs were also popular with all age groups, with many feeling they needed to “try it out” at least once. At these clubs, patrons would rent a private room with a group of friends where they could then select from a vast menu of English- and Chinese-language songs while alcohol and snacks were served by waiters. While everyone swore they would never do this at home, many would get quite engaged in the activity, sometimes making multiple trips back before their trip ended. Linda, the vacationer who meticulously planned her trip and spent most of her time visiting museums, was normally rather reserved yet was persuaded on her last night in China to visit a karaoke club. Despite her usual reticence to participate in non-educationally themed activities, she surprised all of her traveling companions with her spirited participation once the music started.

This feeling of freedom, and the inclination to indulge that comes along with it, comes from the creation of difference from everyday life while on vacation, itself partly derived from the temporary separation from roles and responsibilities. Jeff, the college student who bought himself a new wardrobe for his trip, exemplifies the attitude behind this change. “I’m a nerd during the school year. I’m a big nerd. I don’t do anything but school work. And I, whenever I come here, I come to party a lot, to drink a lot, because I don’t do it during the school year at all. So it’s completely different.”

The differences in how people approach this indulgence can be illustrated by two mothers, both of whom had busy home lives and came to China for a break from these demands. Although they came with similar motivations, they handled their connections to home differently. Jackie is a British woman in her late forties. In addition to having two kids, she works as a school counselor and takes care of her elderly mother. She comments on the sense of freedom she enjoyed while being away from these responsibilities, which was one of her main motivations for going so far away.

I think I’ve been, just more free, you know? Because at home I’ve got quite a few people that rely on me and sometimes I feel really tense and really sort of screwed up about things. It’s just been great to just, like, just be here and not have to worry about somebody ringing us up and saying, “can we do this, and can we do that?” My mom’s a bit of a pain sometimes. That’s why I came away, really. Just to get a bit of a break. And yeah, so I’ve been more relaxed. I’ve been more free. . . . I’ve got no one relying on me here. You know, if I want to go do my washing, if I can’t be bothered to do my washing. I don’t have to cook a meal or worry about shopping. It’s just been completely different. No pressure to do anything.

But Jackie maintained ties with her family while she was gone. She frequently sent text messages and e-mails to her kids and checked in with her mother often to make sure she was all right. She also set up a page on the social networking Web site Facebook so that she could easily share pictures and messages with people back home. In this way, although Jackie enjoyed the freedom she acquired from her long-distance travel, she remained highly integrated with her family, making sure to include them in the experience by keeping them frequently updated on her activities.

Jackie is then contrasted with Mona, an American mother of four in her late thirties who came to China for a month on her own, and also enjoyed the freedom to indulge that she felt she did not have at home. Mona frequently went out to bars and clubs with other tourists she met on her trip. Being away from her family life gave her a new feeling of freedom that she usually did not experience at home, where her attentions were more focused on her children. As part of this, she was able to put her own interests first in a way that she was not used to. "My daily life is so different. I don't have a lot of time to focus on me. I'm in a periphery of what's going on in my household. So to sit here and think, 'Do I want to read *Vanity Fair* with my coffee?' I don't get to do that."

Mona enjoyed the relative anonymity and potential freedom that come from traveling and spending time with a group of strangers, and changed her behavior in accordance. Beyond choosing which magazine to read with her coffee, she used the "free" time of her vacation to enact an identity that did not revolve around the care of her family. Although she shared the same feelings as Jackie, she remained much more segmented from her home life. She maintained the distance from her everyday roles by choosing not to call home for the first two weeks of her trip. Although she sent occasional text messages to her kids, she limited any interactions beyond that and only rarely spoke with her husband. To Mona, more frequent interaction with her family and the demands she felt they put on her would interrupt the space she set aside as her own time and thus interfere with her successful performance of a more free vacation identity. The presence of new people on her trip, individuals she did not know from home and whom she would most likely never see again, further enhanced the segmentation and facilitated her temporary identity change.

Traveling Companions

Traveling companions have a significant influence on creating and maintaining boundaries and changes to identity while away. Vacation performance is subject to both internal monitoring and external observation, ensuring that individuals will consider the presence of others in presenting their identity (Edensor 1998). Rather than experience their environment through a solitary "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990), cotraveling friends and family shape one's vacation behavior (Harvey and Lorenzen 2006; Larsen 2008).

Traveling companions are an audience for the performance of the identity and affect role performance in two ways. They can solicit "vacation-appropriate" behavior, as with Linda "letting loose" in the karaoke club and Mona going out to the bars, but they can also limit the new behaviors one may take on. When vacationing with family, for example, important roles and responsibilities associated with them cannot be left behind. Parents traveling with children cannot shed their responsibilities as a parent, as they would when traveling alone or with other adult friends (Shaw, Havitz, and Delemere 2008). Judy, an American mother of three, was traveling

through China with a friend from college. Both also brought their daughters along for the trip. She explains how her vacation-oriented behavior was tempered by the presence of the children. "I guess I would say my behavior has not changed. But I'm with my daughter so I have to . . . Jess and I would go out and have a drink more often, I'm sure, because we would be reverting back to our college years. Yeah, we'd be together more often." Judy and her friend's vacation behaviors are moderated because of their daughters. Rather than "revert" to their college days as they otherwise might, they must adhere to certain expectations placed on them from their role as mother that they have carried with them on their trip. Casey, an American physician's assistant in her midtwenties, similarly had her indulgent vacation shopping behavior curtailed by her husband. "If it wasn't for Jack I would have bought a lot more. I keep telling him he's holding me back."

People more interested in integrating are more likely to vacation with friends and family members, but face this consequence of not being able to participate in identity play as much as they might like. Traveling companions known from home, or even people met on the trip with a similar background, equate to surrounding oneself with a constant reminder of one's everyday experience. Shared norms, expectations, outlooks, material possessions, and language help ensure that vacationers will remain strongly connected to experiential reminders of home. Involvement in this "tourist bubble" (Smith 1977:6) of being "in" a place physically, but "outside" it culturally, is therefore an extension of home that hinders segmentation.

Segmentors are therefore more likely to make the trip alone, or exclude particular people from their vacation. Jodie, the British doctor who put off her planning to the last minute, describes her motivations for taking the trip alone:

I like it because, I like the freedom of the fact that you can just sort of do and be whatever you want to be, if you've got the actor's skill to do that. But I think you can just sort of start with a clean slate, you've got no one with you that you think, "I better behave because that person knows me." I think you do adjust if you've got someone with you that you know. And I wanted to have the opportunity to be able to talk to anyone here, because I didn't know anyone, and I like that. I like not knowing anyone because it gives you an enormous freedom, I think, to just talk to everyone and not feel responsible.

When Jodie says she has the "freedom to do and be whatever you want" she picks up on how the vacation can be used as a concealment track (Goffman 1974) to hide out-of-character behavior. With no one around whom she knows, she can act as she likes, and it will not get back to acquaintances at home. Traveling alone also ensures that she has no one to worry about but herself and can easily make new acquaintances without having to worry about overlooking the needs of her existing ones. On returning home, then, she can similarly choose the extent to which she wishes to include her acquaintances in her former vacation identity. These acquaintances are reminders of her vacation identity once she is back in her everyday identity, with shared memories, stories, and photographs. In this way, vacationing alone aids her in segmenting the identity after her return as well.

EXITING THE IDENTITY

Schmidt (1979:462) describes tourists as experiencing a “reality lag” when they transition between home and away and back again. “Tourists are still partially in everyday reality the first day of a trip, and similarly, still partially in tourist reality the first day back home.” I argue that this lag is asymmetrical. While they often abruptly transition into the vacation identity, the transition home is more of a gradual slide (Davis 1983). As Goffman (1974) argued that the closing brackets of a role may be more permeable than the opening ones, vacationers more willingly extend their temporary identity into their everyday one.

Van Gennep (1960) describes separation rites as being primarily concerned with severance, and thus eliminating elements from before. Rites of incorporation, on the other hand, reintegrate an individual who has been transformed in some way, necessitating inclusion of elements from the liminal period. He also describes these rites of separation and incorporation as having a double structure of reciprocity. By performing certain routines upon leaving and then similar ones upon returning, the two ends of the vacation mirror each other. These reciprocal routines bring an end to the feeling of absence from everyday life and close off the space demarcated as “vacation” that they initially helped create. Stopping and then restarting the mail, hiring and then paying a house sitter, dropping off a pet at a kennel and then picking it up again, having a going-away party and then a welcome home party, and being dropped off and then picked up at the airport are just some of the rites vacationers engaged in that opened and then closed the vacation identity.

The acts of packing upon leaving and unpacking after returning home illustrate well the asymmetrical boundaries of the identity. Just as vacationers had to pack their bags before they left, marking the beginning of their trip, they then had to unpack once they got back. This action that is singularly associated with travel therefore delineated the beginning and end of the identity. After returning home, though, some vacationers reported being somewhat reluctant to immediately unpack and thus bring the identity to a close. Kelly, an American in her midtwenties, comments, “I usually wait a day before I unpack. 'Cause you're on vacation, and you come home, and all of a sudden you have to unpack and get back to your life. So I like to extend that a little bit and wait a day before I unpack.” Those more inclined to integrate their identities will be willing to delay this time between unpacking and settling into their everyday identity. Segmentors, on the other hand, have different motivations. To Luke, a nineteen-year-old British student, unpacking represented too much of an intrusion of the vacation into his rapid return to routine.

Unpacking usually takes about a week. Or a week and then I decide to unpack. I just leave it. Just fall straight back into the routine of things. . . . so when you're eventually forced to do it it's not like you're unpacking, it's just like you're doing laundry and it's not anything related to the trip still. It's just that you have a bunch of stuff in this box and you have to spring clean it.

Luke can fall easily back into his everyday routines; he does not need time to transition. But the meaning of his things is not lost on him. He leaves his things in his suitcase until they have lost strong associations with the vacation and are just “stuff in this box.”

The transition’s asymmetry is emphasized by the fact that both integrators and segmentors will experience it. While integrators will be more likely to extend the vacation identity in various ways, like putting photos from the vacation on a computer screensaver at the office or organizing get-togethers with friends made on the trip, both of which were undertaken by vacationers after their return, only the most extreme segmentors would block off their vacation identity by not bringing back souvenirs or pictures to remember the trip by.

One of the most common ways that individuals let the vacation identity enter into their everyday one is through these souvenirs. The heavily commodified nature of contemporary tourism allows individuals to transform their trip into objects and images that encapsulate their experience (Bruner 1989). As they often have little other function than to store memories (Lofgren 1999), these souvenirs contract the distance between the vacation and everyday life and carry the significance of place back home with the traveler (Stewart 1984). These mementos of the trip are then saved and incorporated into the ephemera of everyday life, integrating elements of the vacation identity into the ongoing one, such as with a saved subway token or a foreign coin. In this way, “touristic souvenirs are found in every corner of daily life and embedded in every system of information” (MacCannell 1976:147). The importance that these items have taken on is exemplified in the lists of objects the vacationers purchased and brought home with them, to name just some: chopsticks, teapots, T-shirts, silk dresses, cushion covers and table runners, fans, hair clips, pencil cases, stuffed animals, musical instruments, paintbrushes, paintings, carved seals with Chinese characters, jade jewelry, Chairman Mao paraphernalia including small novelty copies of the Little Red Book and wristwatches with his waving arm, and anything with the Beijing Olympics logo.

That many of these souvenirs are objects that can be incorporated for everyday use testifies to how the vacation identity is objectified and then integrated into everyday life. Silver (1996:2) notes that objects take on a special significance during transitions, as they are “tangible evidence testifying to the salient characteristics of personal biographies.” These objects can then be given “new” meanings by the individual that become a part of narratives of identity (Morgan and Pritchard 2005). In addition to their myriad souvenirs, the vacationers accomplished this in various other ways, including creating scrapbooks for themselves and photo presentations for people back home, storing their photographs on their computers and creating screensavers out of them, and setting up special shelves to display their objects within their home. Jackie, the school counselor from the UK, turned a spare bedroom into a “Chinese room” for her guests to stay when they visited, thus integrating the experience into her daily life while displaying it for others.

In this way, souvenirs can be understood as an opportunity for a brief mental slide back into the identity and an attempt to make a small bit of the temporary permanent. Through interactions with these objects, vacationers can remind themselves of a positive identity they assumed in the past and one they can possibly take on again (Nippert-Eng 1995), as well as share it with those back home who were not there to experience it.

CONCLUSION

When seeking to “get away from it all,” individuals must negotiate their connections to home and their presentation of self to create and sustain a personally meaningful and externally validated temporary identity. One of the primary ways they do this is through identity integration or segmentation. Of course, people integrate and segment differently in different vacation circumstances. One would not necessarily, or possibly, always meld identities or always keep them completely separated. But while these decisions are usually intentional, these processes are becoming complicated by the spread and popularity of communication technologies. For the contemporary vacationer it is no longer a simple decision to pack up and segment off the responsibilities of everyday life.

Graburn (1977:18) writes, “Tourism is a special form of play involving travel, or getting away from ‘it all’ (work and home), affording relaxation from tensions, and for some, the opportunity to temporarily become a non-entity, removed from a ringing telephone.” The spread of communication technologies around the world is rapidly ensuring that escape from this ringing telephone is becoming less and less of a possibility. In fact, most of the participants in this study willingly brought their phones with them, not wanting to be separated from them. A large degree of the fluidity between identities is due to the prevalence of technologies that enable fast and easy communication from any location. The growing ubiquity of such technologies ensures that they cannot be excluded from contemporary discussions of identity and boundary work.

Increased access to information technology, changes in the way work and leisure are structured and the speeding up of time and space (Lash and Urry 1994) are contributing to the increasing cognitive overlap between “home” and “away.” New expectations put on the individual while on vacation exemplify these changing social structures and the way they affect the construction of identity. Vacationers looking for a break must juggle issues of salience and commitment as they seek to construct and bound a personally meaningful identity while moderating the degree they connect to home and work. Many of the vacationers in this study no longer saw their trip as a break from day-to-day experience during which they could “leave it all behind,” and then return home, as they may have at one time. Instead, through cell phones, e-mail, and social networking sites, they actively engaged in methods of controlling interactions with home while marking their time away as special.

Internet forums, social networking sites, and other online networks that allow one to convey images of oneself to others aid in constructing and presenting multiple, on-going identities (Turkle 1995), but these representations do not necessarily differ that much from everyday, offline identity work (Kendall 1998). Internet and similar media are more of a tool to complement and project a desired identity. They “announce” an individual’s identity to those who are viewing them (Walker 2000). By creating a blog to share their experiences, posting pictures on photo-sharing sites, and writing short updates for their social networking sites, the vacationers fashioned a particular image of their temporary identity that they were willing to show to others.

In this way, nonpresent others affected the production and presentation of the temporary identity. The fact that they were so easy to reach made acquaintances back home an additional, distant audience for vacationers’ performance. Instead of waiting until their return and retroactively reconstructing the experience, this work went on as they were creating the temporary vacation identity and moderated how they carried it out. This is exemplified by Jeff’s reluctance to wear the same outfit twice during his vacation because “Every day is a Facebook picture.” Vacationers were aware of friends and family back home who were always only a phone call or e-mail away.

The ease of communication enabled by technologies such as cell phones and the Internet have contributed to breaking down boundaries between home and away and have allowed expectations and control over interactions to be more double-sided. This gives people left at home more pull over the vacationer’s identity. With the ease of communication comes an increased expectation by those left at home that the vacationer keep in touch. In the past, with postcards or letters, the vacationer had more control over the exchange, and the one-way nature of the interaction ensured that it would be limited (White and White 2007). Today e-mail and cell phones allow people back home equal and reciprocal opportunity to locate and communicate with acquaintances who are away. With that ease comes an increase in an implicit responsibility of the tourist to respond.

The significance of this change extends beyond the identity demands of tourism and into the multiple role transitions actors make daily. Individuals similarly face these decisions not just during leisure travel but also while undertaking travel for work, deciding whether or how often to check work e-mail over the weekend, or even when bringing one’s cell phone along on errands. Issues of interaction without physical presence and attending to conflicting, coexisting obligations brought to the fore by the vacation identity make it a promising lens with which to study these changes, and would be applicable to other situations in which the individual is temporarily “away” from home.

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NOTE

1. The focus on Western tourists is not intended to imply that non-Western individuals do not go through the same work of identity construction. Rather, it is a function of methodological limitations, primarily linguistic barriers to gathering quality data.

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