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Dean, Andrew Kristoffer (2019) *The enchanted snake and the forbidden fruit: the ayahuasca 'fairy tale' tourist*. *Journal of Marketing Management* . ISSN 0267-257X.

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## **The enchanted snake and the forbidden fruit: The ayahuasca ‘fairy tale’ tourist**

### **Abstract**

This ethnographic study increases our understanding of Westerners seeking genuine fairy tale experiences of magic, transformation, and enchantment within South American psychedelic ayahuasca tourism. Examining sixty-three tourists, this study shows how vision-based spirit sensegivers facilitate individuals in exorcising demons, to make sense of themselves as spiritual beings within an enchanted universe. However, and with this potion quickly wearing off upon returning to the West, tourists feel abandoned by their spirits, and disconnected from the fairy lands. Coupled with not wanting to re-experience intense inner tensions from stepping in and out of a fairy tale, further tourism is rejected. As such, ayahuasca tourism becomes a ‘forgotten’ fairy tale, rarely told.

**Key words:** sensemaking, ayahuasca tourism, identity work, tourist, ethnography

### **Summary statement of contribution**

This study shows that ayahuasca tourism offers what might be considered a real fairy tale, i.e. magic, transformation and enchantment. While eating this forbidden fruit enables tourists to view themselves as spiritual beings within an enchanted universe, returning to the mundane world quickly erodes such notions. This highlights that fairy tale identity work requires the perception of magic and enchantment for spiritual transformation to be maintained.

## **The enchanted snake and the forbidden fruit: The ayahuasca ‘fairy tale’ tourist**

### **Introduction**

Once upon a time, this ethnographic study examined the fairy tale journey undertaken by Westerners in the enchanted realm of ayahuasca tourism. Like all good stories, tales of ayahuasca consumption span thousands of years, but it has only been the past few decades that Westerners have sought this forbidden fruit to achieve transformation (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971), healing (Winkelman, 2001), spirituality (Krippner & Sulla, 2000) and to see the world as it really is (McKenna, Luna & Towers, 1995). Simply speaking, ayahuasca tourism involves Westerners travelling to South America to drink this potent brew with an indigenous shaman (Dean, 2018; Shanon, 2010). This pursuit can be linked to the West’s general move towards enchantment (Partridge, 2005), with individuals increasingly seeking their idealised selves through magical means (Gezon, 2017). While more common forms of otherworldly consumption necessitate consumers imagining enchantment, ayahuasca tourists do not have to dream, but are instead thrust into immersive phantasmagorical visions (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003; Kopenawa & Albert, 2013; Rotmann, 2017). Importantly though, and while ayahuasca visions brim with supernatural creatures and landscapes, they are also a source of intense sensemaking and identity work, where individuals can overturn their views of self and the world (Frecka, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Entering an otherworldly vision sets the tourist on a heroic quest to fight monsters and save their soul (Shanon, 2010). However, and before this study, little was known about the fairy tale elements of ayahuasca tourism, and the extent to which tourists try to remember or forget about their experiences when they return home (Holman, 2011; Marcoux, 2017). From the author’s seven-year experience as an ayahuasca tourist (Kottak, 2006), it seemed that single tourist journeys rarely guarantee long-term transformations (Chandler, Holden & Kolandar, 1992), and might just be a temporary escape from everyday life (Cohen, 1996; Lean, 2009; Robledo, 2015; Robledo & Batle, 2015). Considering that identity change is a key motivation for ayahuasca tourists (Dean, 2018), unpacking this journey may allow strategies to be developed to allow tourists to more easily reintegrate into their former mundane lives and potentially undertake further tourism. As such, this ethnographic study examined sixty-three

tourists throughout their time in South America, and in the following six months after returning home. With this being a tale of enchanted transformation, the research question driving this study is: how do ayahuasca tourists make sense of themselves related to their fairy tale journey? Throughout this study, it will become apparent that the ayahuasca tourist is a seeker of magic, eater of forbidden fruit, and teller of enchanted stories to make sense of the phantasmagorical. Finally, we will see the tourists distance themselves from their experiences and reject the otherworldly in an attempt to re-embed themselves within their former mundane lives.

*Fairy tales: enchanted journeys into magical transformation*

Elucidating the origin of fairy tales is no small task, with current thinking suggesting they have existed for at least seven thousand years (Chang et al., 2015; da Silva & Tehrani, 2016; Pagel, 2016; Tehrani & d'Huy, 2017), with their longevity being linked to the ability to convey complex archetypal ideas with ease (Pagel, 2012). Simply speaking, a fairy tale is a journey into enchantment, where individuals atone for past transgressions and transform themselves through magic (Brewer, 2003; Davidson & Chaudhri, 2003). Importantly, fairy tales do not have to include the presence of fairies (Tolkien, 2008; Leach & Fried, 1996), but must consist of (1) magic, (2) transformation, and (3) enchantment (Jones, 2002). For the protagonist, the route into the phantasmagorical is typically through an everyday opening, such as a door, cave, or hole (Bottigheimer, 2003), or even drinking a psychedelic cup of tea (Shanon, 2010). Once immersed in enchantment, individuals are often aided on their quests by supernatural beings, who guide them through the fairy lands, and back again into the mundane world, where they can return to their former lives (Bettelheim, 1976; Davidson, 2003).

While it is easy to dismiss fairy tales as children's bedtime stories, it is worth pointing out that as the West re-immerses itself within enchantment (Partridge, 2005), consumers are increasingly being invited to imagine themselves within heroic fairy tales, to achieve transformation through consumption (Badot & Filser, 2007; Brown, 2001; James, Handelman & Taylor, 2011; Veen, 1994). However, marketing-based fairy tales are often quite different to literary and oral accounts, as most consumer fairy tales are utopian endeavours, with little heroism or catharsis, and rarely a wicked beast to slay (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Zipes, 2002). This does not mean that consumers are not attracted to enchantment,

either by magic wielding marketers (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003), or through self-sorcery (Belk, 2001; Belk et al., 1997), but that homogenously framed products and services often limit the extent to which enchantment is viewed as plausible (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). So, while consumers can be thrilled, enchantment is often temporary at best, with longer lasting episodes being linked to unpredictable, immersive and magical tales (Ritzer, 2005). On this basis, consumer ‘knights’, are weak reflections of their literary counterparts, engaged in trivial quests for Snickers bars, or for the more adventurous, Disney experiences (Heath & Heath, 2016; Maclaren & Brown, 2005). This is not to suggest that literary fairy tales do not arise out of everyday events, as Little Red Riding Hood was just visiting her Grandmother, and Jack’s sale of the family cow led to magical adventures up the beanstalk. But more problematically, a fairy tale necessitates the emergence of magic and enchantment, which always overwhelms the protagonist, and is something we do not see with credit card wielding heroes. In other words, and while consumer experiences can be linked to magic, enchantment and transformation, they rarely draw on all three aspects (Arnould, Price & Otnes, 1999), which challenges the extent to which they can be considered fairy tales. Furthermore, marketed fairy tales rarely show the rejection of the profane, or adoption of the sacred, which are key parts of the literary protagonist’s transformational journey (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989). Perhaps then, it is fairer to say that fairy tale elements are more commonly consumed, in comparison to the full canon of what classically constitutes a fairy tale (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2003). Or looking at this a different way, marketed fairy tales are more akin to an extraordinary experience, where positivity abounds (Arnould & Price, 1993), rather than the cycling journey between heaven and hell associated with fairy tales.

Turning our attention to consider fairy tale tourism, it seems that beyond individuals travelling to watch theatrical performances, or to soak up the experience of where a story was composed (Hemme, 2005; Mossberg, 2007; Sidorsky, 1990), few people have sought to access the fairy lands through travelling (Dean, 2018; Gezon, 2017). This is not surprising when we consider that the fairy lands are typically seen as unreal, and as such, any attempted journey into actual enchantment, a fruitless task. However, it seems that ayahuasca tourism is going some way to fill this gap in the market, offering what is often

claimed to be true magic, transformation and enchantment, albeit through a psychedelic potion (Shanon, 2010).

Drawing this section to a close, the literature review explores several themes to show how immersive sensory experiences enable protagonists to make sense of themselves in a 'real' fairy tale. Following this, the ethnographic methodology is detailed, before moving to consider the findings, discussion and conclusions. Contributions to the literature are then highlighted, alongside the implications of this work, and then finally, further work is suggested.

## **Literature Review**

### *Ayahuasca tourism: a 'real' fairy tale*

Ayahuasca is a potent psychedelic brew, prepared from multiple South American plants, and argued by shamans as a means to experience otherworldly states through immersive visions (Ott, 1994). Intriguingly, shamans believe that this cup of tea contains the spirit of ayahuasca, who helps individuals make new sense of themselves and the universe within the visionary state (Luna, 1984a, 1984b). Beyond preparing these supernatural cups of tea, shamans are at the heart of their ayahuasca churches, actively marketing, selling and delivering ayahuasca ceremonies to those seeking transformation (Apud & Romani, 2017; Harner, 1973; Kehoe, 2000; Talin & Sanabria, 2017). Although indigenous peoples have used ayahuasca for two thousand years, ayahuasca churches have increasingly sold this potion over the past few decades, to expand their share of the spiritual marketplace (Holman, 2011; Singleton, 2017), and to meet tourist demands for magic, meaning and enchantment (Baudrillard, 1998; Murray, Lynch & Foley, 2016). More generally, such pursuits may be viewed as a means for individuals to rejuvenate themselves from the fatigue of mundane life, as they move towards novelty, authenticity and the exotic (Gill, Packer & Ballantyne, 2018; Smith, 2003; Yang & Wall, 2009).

Through drinking ayahuasca, profound shifts occur in consciousness, cognition and perception, that last for approximately six hours (McKenna, 2004). As individuals enter a state of enchantment, a

phantasmagorical curtain descends on the mundane world, where hallucinations distort waking reality (Kjellgren, Eriksson & Norlander, 2009). During this initial hallucinatory period, the world becomes replete with spirits and shimmers with magic and beauty in a way that is difficult to describe (Dean, 2017). After this, consciousness moves away from the outer world, and into dream-like fairy lands where visions are experienced with the eyes closed (Shanon, 2010). While visions can be chaotic, there is usually an overall story, with magical beings guiding individuals to overcome personal challenges on their path of transformation (Dobkin de Rios, Grob & Baker, 2002; Fernández & Fábregas, 2014; Frecska, 2008; Jauregui et al., 2011). Pivotal points in the story are often highlighted by individuals experiencing physical traumas such as crying, diarrhoea, and vomiting, which can result in multiple conflicting visions of self (Bahl & Milne, 2010; Frecska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016; Wilson, 2015). An example from the author's experience was the removal of demonic entities, which appeared to be vomited out of his body, while he saw several versions of himself at different stages of his life. However, and as the influence of ayahuasca starts to wear off, the fairy lands fade into the background, and then disappear altogether, leaving people wide awake in the physical world (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1991). While there is little to suggest that ayahuasca is addictive or produces long-term damage (Fábregas et al., 2010), it is clear that positive feelings towards this experience are lost over the upcoming weeks as the pharmacological effects dissipate, leaving individuals feeling bewildered and empty (Frecska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Thus, and as distance is placed between the tourists and their former state of enchantment, the ability to manage their identity tensions may well be hampered (Ahuvia, 2005).

These visionary experiences can be transformative (Metzner, 1998), with individuals often adopting views of a supernatural universe (Levine, 1994; Stringer, 1999), which in turn, tends to create conflicts with pervasive materialist beliefs when they return to the West (Charlton, 2007; Dean, 2017). Part of the difficulty for tourists leaving South America is that other Westerners predominantly position ayahuasca visions as akin to fairy tales, i.e. just fantastical creations of the mind, and as such, not real (Reinarman & Levine, 1997). This is not to suggest that mental and imaginary experiences cannot be profoundly meaningful, but just that they hold little weight in the eyes of Westerners embedded within non-supernatural cosmologies (Philip, 2003; Uriely & Belhassen, 2005). Troublingly though, drinking

ayahuasca and adopting indigenous views of a supernatural universe, are acts that invite criticism and stigmatisation from the typical Westerner who regards these practices as tantamount to drug use and the beliefs of the mentally ill (Crocker, Major & Steele., 1998; Goffman, 1963; Prayag, 2015a, 2015b; Winkelman, 2001). These negative views of psychedelics have existed for hundreds of years in the West, with an on-going critical stance towards those who eat this forbidden fruit (Boyd, 2002; Kehoe, 2000; Siff, 2015). This is not to suggest that all Western views are pejorative, as there are some who regard ayahuasca tourism as the gateway into the land of fairies, but that this is the exception and not the rule (Dean, 2017). As such, there is much for tourists to negotiate about how they view themselves and the world they live in during their time in South America and upon returning home.

### *Making sense of ayahuasca tourism*

Making sense of ourselves and the world we live in is an on-going task and is typically examined through the framework of sensemaking (Fellows & Liu, 2016; Weick, 1995). While there is much we understand about our day-to-day lives, it is not uncommon for our expectations to be violated, particularly in unusual and unexpected situations. The resolution to violated expectations is in creating ‘intersubjective meaning through cycles of interpretation and action, and thereby enacting a more ordered environment from which further cues can be drawn’ (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p.11). The main way that people give and make sense is through talking and telling stories (Fisher, 1989). Thus, when people speak, they give sense, which is known as sensegiving, to orientate the listener towards the speaker’s goal (Corvellec & Risberg, 2007; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Rouleau, 2005). Shamans have spent thousands of years using fairy tales to explain the complexities of the universe and our place within it (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2006; Evans-Pritchard, 2002; Walsh, 1990). These archetypal stories often echo through the ages as grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979), or as more complex accounts where good and bad guys engage in tempestuous cosmological struggles towards salvation (Jabri, 2012). Not surprisingly, the stories we tell are a means to include some, and exclude others, highlighting who we are, and the sensemaking models we use (Dean, Ellis & Wells, 2017; Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2015).



There are several properties within sensemaking, including (1) identity, (2) retrospection, (3) enactment, (4), being social, (5) on-going in nature, (6) cue driven, and (7) preferring subjectivity over accuracy (Mikkelsen, 2013). While it was initially thought that no property was prominent (Weick, 1995), recent findings indicate that identity is a foundation to all other properties, where making sense is an act of making self, and vice versa (Ellis & Hopkinson, 2014; Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills & Mills, 2009; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Our identities arise from our on-going negotiation of who we think we are, and how we think we are viewed by others (Lawler, 2013). This is known as identity work, where we continually ask, who do I want to be? And who do I not want to be? (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Briefly, identity is ‘the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves, and develop and sustain through processes of social interaction’ (Brown, 2014, p.23). While everyone has a personal notion of who they are, i.e. a self-identity (Watson, 2008), social identities become prominent through our interactions with others (Essers & Benschop, 2007). This is the first study to have examined identity work within the fairy tale canon of (1) magic, (2) transformation, and (3) enchantment (Jones, 2002).

As tourism often enables individuals to engage with different peoples and environments, it is a well-known means for people to adopt sense from different cultures, as part of working towards idealised concepts of self (Geary, 2008; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Singleton, 2014; Smith, 2003). Stories can be a critical part of the tourist sensemaking process (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), enabling individuals to develop coherent accounts of their experiences (Holt, 2004, 2006), as they search for authenticity (Belk & Costa, 1998). It is not uncommon for individuals to use tourism to try to escape their current notions of self (Baumeister, 1991), with it generally being accepted that the more immersive the experience, the more likely it is for tourists to escape themselves, even if just temporarily (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). While fairy tale based identity work has received little attention through tourism, it is generally accepted that fairy tales enable individuals to self-identify as archetypal heroes, working towards personal change and salvation (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Engaging with different cultures can thus enable shifts in sense and self, through the adoption of new socio-cultural beliefs and ideas (Bettelheim, 1976). As such, tourism supports sensemaking and identity work that takes place outside

of the gaze of friends, family and work colleagues (Graburn, 1989; Harrison, 2003). This can be critical for allowing individuals to renegotiate previously accepted objective truths, and work towards new personalised views of self and reality, frequently arrived at through cathartic self-transformations (Singleton, 2014; Smith, 2003; Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011). Problematically though, the greater the changes to sense and self, the more likely it is for tourists to have to continue their sensemaking and identity work when they leave their tourist destinations (Reisinger, 2013). Drawing this section to a close, the contribution of this study is in deconstructing the supernatural journal of the fairy tale tourist, where identity work and sensemaking are guided by the immersive visionary realms of ayahuasca, and the magical beings within them. The methodology now details how these aspects were examined to answer the research question.

## **Methodology**

This ethnographic study is based within an interpretive paradigm (Brewer, 2000) and arose from the author having spent seven years engaged in ayahuasca tourism, where he became acutely aware that although ayahuasca tourists often claim to have magical, transformative, and enchanted experiences, few seem to repurchase this tourism (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005; Stewart, 1998). With little known about what happens when tourists leave the enchanted realm of ayahuasca (Holman, 2011), this two-and-a-half-year study was pulled together to answer the research question: how do ayahuasca tourists make sense of themselves related to their fairy tale journey? Drawing on his contacts from being an ayahuasca tourist, the author was able to secure access to five South American ayahuasca churches, to observe and speak with sixty-three tourists (Layton, 1998; McCracken, 1998). Table 1 shows the purposeful, pragmatic, and anonymised sample of Western tourists that this study was built around (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Wengraf, 2004).

Participant	Gender /Age	Nationality	Education	Profession	Beliefs prior to ayahuasca	Country of ceremonies	No. of ceremonies	No. of trips	Ceremonial cost per week (USA dollars)	Previous psychedelic use	Searching for a fairy tale	Hid the psychedelic nature of their trip from social groups
Steven	M, 42	American	BSc Maths	Director	Spiritual	Peru	4	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Frank	M, 34	British	BA History	Teacher	Pagan	Ecuador	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
William	M, 59	British	BSc Chemistry	Technician	Christian	Brazil	3	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Vincent	M, 22	French	School	Retail	Wiccan	Peru	3	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Sarah	F, 31	Canadian	MA Marketing	Marketer	Wiccan	Peru	6	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Caius	M, 44	American	BA Literature	Teacher	Spiritual	Peru	4	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Benjamin	M, 23	American	BA English	Waitress	Spiritual	Ecuador	6	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Charlotte	F, 30	American	BA Business	Researcher	Pagan	Peru	4	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Sylvie	F, 71	Canadian	School	Retired	New Age	Peru	4	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Craig	M, 45	American	BA Linguistics	Translator	New Age	Brazil	3	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Ian	M, 51	British	BA French	Translator	Spiritual	Ecuador	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Stephen	M, 36	British	MBA	Manager	Spiritual	Brazil	5	1	\$600	No	Yes	Yes
Felix	M, 28	Swedish	BSc Maths	Manager	Pagan	Peru	3	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Daan	M, 37	Dutch	BA Art	Artist	Spiritual	Peru	4	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Andre	M, 30	French	School	Joiner	New Age	Brazil	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Luuk	M, 26	Dutch	BSc Biology	Tutor	Christian	Peru	4	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Antoine	M, 55	French	BA Business	Accountant	Spiritual	Ecuador	2	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Anne	F, 42	British	BSc Maths	Researcher	Spiritual	Peru	3	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Seb	M, 47	British	BSc IT	IT support	Spiritual	Peru	6	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Stanley	M, 42	American	BA Geography	Painter	Spiritual	Brazil	3	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Alexander	M, 33	American	PhD History	Academic	Spiritual	Brazil	5	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Elijah	M, 28	American	BA Art	Decorator	Spiritual	Brazil	4	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Markus	M, 30	Dutch	School	Artist	New Age	Ecuador	6	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Severine	F, 46	Spanish	PhD Literature	Academic	Wiccan	Ecuador	3	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Ashley	M, 29	British	BA Sociology	Retail	Pagan	Peru	5	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Bailey	F, 54	American	School	Retail	Spiritual	Peru	9	1	\$750	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gary	M, 22	British	School	Hairdresser	Spiritual	Brazil	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	No
Ken	M, 28	American	BSc Maths	Teacher	New Age	Brazil	6	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Mary	F, 31	Swedish	BSc IT	Developer	Wiccan	Ecuador	2	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Michelle	F, 37	Dutch	BA Marketing	Marketer	Spiritual	Peru	4	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Joanna	F, 27	English	MA English	Tutor	New Age	Peru	3	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Cody	M, 39	American	BA Business	Seller	New Age	Peru	5	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Deb	F, 60	French	MBA	Director	Pagan	Brazil	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Brandi	F, 27	American	BSc Geography	Tutor	Christian	Ecuador	7	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes

Christopher	M, 54	British	School	Retail	Spiritual	Brazil	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Al	M, 42	British	School	Electrician	Spiritual	Brazil	3	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Terry	M, 64	British	MSc Chemistry	Researcher	Spiritual	Peru	5	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Nick	M, 35	Greek	BA Business	Buyer	Pagan	Brazil	3	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Jo	F, 61	British	BA Sociology	Retired	Christian	Ecuador	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Reece	M, 29	American	PhD Sociology	Academic	Spiritual	Ecuador	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Margo	F, 66	American	MSc Biology	Student	Spiritual	Brazil	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Stuart	M, 36	British	MSc IT	IT	Spiritual	Brazil	3	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Heidi	F, 49	German	MA Classics	Painter	Spiritual	Brazil	5	1	\$1,400	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ray	M, 33	British	BA Languages	Translator	New Age	Peru	6	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Evi	F, 35	Greek	MSc Business	Retail	New Age	Brazil	2	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Robin	M, 39	British	MA Marketing	Marketer	Spiritual	Peru	6	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
April	F, 40	Canadian	School	Artist	New Age	Peru	4	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Irini	F, 26	Canadian	PhD Sciences	Academic	Pagan	Brazil	4	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Petro	F, 50	American	BSc Economics	Finance	Pagan	Ecuador	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Kristi	F, 34	Greek	BA Finance	Finance	Spiritual	Ecuador	3	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Joan	F, 24	British	School	Retail	Christian	Ecuador	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Paul	M, 33	British	BA Art	Artist	Christian	Brazil	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Bhupendra	M, 29	British	BA Graphics	Designer	Spiritual	Peru	3	1	\$1,200	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kenna	F, 37	American	School	Student	Wiccan	Brazil	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Max	M, 35	French	PhD Biology	Academic	Spiritual	Peru	5	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Joyce	F, 26	Spanish	BA Literature	Tutor	Wiccan	Peru	5	1	\$750	No	Yes	Yes
Christine	F, 29	Dutch	BSc Computing	Scientist	Christian	Ecuador	3	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Geoff	M, 47	Swedish	School	Chef	Spiritual	Brazil	4	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Ilse	F, 48	Austrian	BSc Finance	Finance	Spiritual	Ecuador	6	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Babis	M, 30	American	MSc Physics	Physicist	Spiritual	Brazil	3	1	\$1,400	No	Yes	Yes
Alfie	M, 23	British	BSc Chemistry	Chemist	Wiccan	Brazil	5	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes
Harry	M, 32	British	School	Seller	Spiritual	Peru	3	1	\$1,200	No	Yes	Yes
Jareth	M, 28	American	MSc Marketing	Marketer	Pagan	Ecuador	4	1	\$900	No	Yes	Yes

**Table 1** – Tourist information. \*A fairy tale is defined by the three foundations of magic, transformation, and enchantment (Jones, 2002).

Table 1 shows basic demographic information for the tourists including, age, gender, nationality, and experience with psychedelics etc. As was expected, the sample was predominantly well educated, affluent, and searching for the three elements found within a fairy tale (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2006). Importantly, only three of the participants had previous psychedelic experiences, and none of them had consumed ayahuasca before this study.

### *Fieldwork*

After securing access to the five different ayahuasca churches, the author spent between three to four weeks in each church over a two-and-a-half-year period. This involved the author integrating himself into daily life and working to form close bonds with the shamans and tourists (Gould, 2006; Hamilton, Dunnet & Downey, 2012). Throughout this time, the author avoided drinking ayahuasca due to the intense sensemaking challenges it creates, which he viewed as potentially problematic to the collection and analysis of data (Freckska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Arriving in each of these ceremonial venues was the first time that the author had met the tourists and shamans. It must be noted though, that the author had spoken to the shamans numerous times before travelling to South America using VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technologies such as Skype, FaceTime, WeChat, Viber, WhatsApp, alongside e-mail, text and phone.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection occurred during two stages, with the first being a hybrid ethnography carried out in South America (O'Sullivan, 2016), including the use of participant observation, informal conversations, autoethnography, tourist storytelling, and interviewing (Higgins & Hamilton, 2014; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; McCracken, 1988; Schouten & McAlexander & Koenig, 2007; Stewart, 1998). After securing on-going access with the participants, the second ethnographic stage took place after the tourists had returned to the West and shifted towards the use of VoIP face-to-face methods (Fetterman, 2010; Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016). Although distance prevented the variety of ethnographic resources available in South America, VoIP ethnographies are invaluable for assessing how people who have used psychedelics continue to transform themselves (Barratt et al., 2016; Kruithof et al., 2015; Marcus, 2009;

Masson & Bancroft, 2018). Thus, and in the first six months after returning home, all tourists were invited to speak to the author whenever they felt inclined to do so. This resulted in the tourists frequently contacting the author, driven by their concerns about being stigmatised as mentally ill drug users, should they mention their ayahuasca experiences to friends, family, and work colleagues (Prayag, 2015a, 2015b; Tupper, 2008).

Throughout these two ethnographic stages, close attention was paid to examples of identity work and sensemaking, to help understand the tourist journey into the fairy tale realms of ayahuasca and then back into the mundane world of the West (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Mikkelsen, 2013). The myriad of methodological approaches used was considered key to tracking identity work and drawing out the fine-grain process related to transformation of sense and self (Whiteman & Cooper). This led to over twelve hundred pages of transcripts being produced in South America, and over seven hundred pages from the digital ethnography.

#### *Working the data*

After the data was collected, it was transcribed by the author and read several times, to highlight potential themes, with additional insights being added from his memory (Arnould, 1993; Chronis, 2008, Lindlof, 1995). Preliminary analysis was carried out within days of collection, again after three months, and then finally after six months (Spiggle, 1994). Initial categorisation was carried out using content analysis, drawing out units of meaning based on frequency, aided by the author's sensitisation as a tourist and researcher (Chronis, 2008; Kottak, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1984). This process enabled several opportunities for the author to reflect on what was emerging in relation to the research question (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006).

The initial stage of analysis coded each participant separately based on multiple methods, with codes subsequently being contextualised between participants. For all ethnographic methods, elucidating the higher-order codes and the lower-order codes that supported them was a complex act (Spiggle, 1994). An example of this can be found with the comments that Caius and Ian made:

(1) Ayahuasca is a magic drink. (2) She transforms all who drink her. (2 & 3) I am here for her to show me true magic and to change my life forever (Caius).

(1) For years I've searched for magic. Now I've found it, and this is one hell of a ride. (3) Spirits, and more magic than I can shake a stick at. (2) I will never be the same again (Ian).

Examining these examples, we see multiple lower-level codes of (1) ayahuasca is magic, (2) ayahuasca transforms those who drink her, and (3) ayahuasca tourism is enchanting (O'Sullivan, 2016) being abstracted into (4), ayahuasca is a fairy tale (Jones, 2002). As might be expected, lower-level codes often supported a variety of higher-order codes, showing the interrelated nature of themes associated with identity work and sensemaking.

Having used a two-stage hybrid ethnographic approach, themes were validated using within methods triangulation (Denzin, 1970), where data was compared between methods and participants. Further validation was carried out by presenting initial findings to the participants via written reports, and then finally, via the author speaking directly with all participants about the findings (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). Importantly, all three stages were validated by the participants.

## **Findings**

This section starts to address the research question of: how do ayahuasca tourists make sense of themselves related to their fairy tale journey? As a starting point, the findings examine how the participants had been 'seeking magic, transformation and enchantment' from 'eating the forbidden fruit' of ayahuasca. The focus then shifts to examine the tourists leaving South America and 'stepping out of enchantment and re-entering the mundane', before finally considering the longer-term impacts in 'the collapse of the ayahuasca fairy tale'.

### *Seeking magic, transformation and enchantment*

Being in South America, and prior to the participants drinking ayahuasca, it was increasingly apparent that the tourists were seeking the three foundations of a fairy tale from their tourism, including (1) magic, (2) transformation, and (3) enchantment (Jones, 2002). This appeared to be part of a desire to bring out new personal spiritual truths, while backgrounding objective notions of a materialist reality, which might be a necessity for supernatural beliefs to flourish (Singleton, 2014; Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011). Problematically though, it often seemed that the participants had erroneously believed that drinking ayahuasca would enable a permanent change to themselves, and that they would not be involved in an on-going tumultuous process of sensemaking and identity work (Reisinger, 2013). In part, this appears to be a consequence of the perceived immersivity of ayahuasca, where stepping into a fairy tale would enable the tourists to escape their former notions of self (Baumeister, 1991; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Discussing this amongst the group of tourists, Craig said:

I was bored man, so very bored. I needed to change myself. I was sick to death of life and every mo'fucking thing promising magic wherever I looked. I love the USA, don't get me wrong. But everything is so fake and is supposed to change me into a god or heal my life. I mean really? What the hell man. This ain't even possible. I needed something real. Something longer lasting with a bit of mystery. Real magic, that's what I need. Real magic. Sounds odd doesn't it. I needed something to give me a real fantasy. I needed to see fairies, and I wasn't gonna get this by buying Coca Cola. But y'know I've been spiritual for years. I've bought crystals, chanted, prayed, but have never seen spirits. I was losing my faith. I have a few friends who believe in ghosts and magic, but you can't be an apostate. If they knew I had doubts, they would reject me [sighs]. But in spiritual circles we all know that shamans have real magic. Indigenous people remember the old ways, and haven't forgotten their magic like we have. So I went online and what's the first thing I saw? Ayahuasca! Hey presto! As soon as I saw that it was real magic, and I'd see spirits, I had to come here. Finally time to throw away the junk I'd learnt and get myself a real spiritual education. I told myself all kinds of wonderful stories about how everything would be perfect. I never really thought about the practicalities of how any of this might work in the long run.



Craig's comments were similar to the other tourists, suggesting a weariness with utopianist consumer fairy tale promises, which lack the ability to bewitch due to their homogeneity and obviousness (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). However, and having said this, there was little doubt that the participants were seeking utopian outcomes from their ayahuasca tourism, particularly towards concretising new views of self and reality. So, what had led the tourists to fall under the spell of ayahuasca tourism's promises? It appears that the guarantee of being able to see the fairy lands was highly persuasive, and in a world where 'seeing is believing' went a long way to validate these potential esoteric experiences as real (Ritzer, 2005). When we consider that most spiritual and religious practices offer little in the form of perceptual validation, it is not surprising that the potential for sensory experiences of real magic, meaning, and transformation is highly appealing (Baudrillard, 1998; Holman, 2011). Intriguingly, this led the participants to reject all former spiritual and religious practices, denouncing them as engaged in 'the 'lies' of marketing' (Dean, Ellis & Wells, 2017, p.773), in comparison to the authenticity and truth of ayahuasca tourism (Belk & Costa, 1998). This was particularly noticeable from several of the tourists openly throwing away their former religious books, and symbols that they had brought with them. However, and by discarding prior belief systems, the participants created a phantasmagorical void within themselves, which they tried to fill by telling themselves stories of what it would be like to meet magical creatures and become who they wanted to be (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Gill, Packer & Ballantyne, 2018). Telling the author about her journey so far, Anne said:

I kept thinking about how ayahuasca would change my life, and I'd turn into my real self. I kept telling myself stories and trying to visualise what I'd be and how all my life had been a failure up until this point. I saw my past failures and knew that they were all done with. This was a new chapter opening for me, where I'd become the true me. Most of my spiritual practices had left me feeling flat, mmm, getting to see real spirits though. That had me excited and I kept thinking over and over about what I'd become and how all of this would bring real positive outcomes to my life. I really did believe that I would become a new person, a spiritual person, and that everything about the way I viewed the world would change.

These are no small claims and suggest that the participants had high expectations for what ayahuasca tourism would enable them to achieve through identity work and sensemaking. But also, that they had given little consideration for the practicalities of these changes. So then, let us look at how the tourists negotiated this aspect related to the visionary wonderlands of ayahuasca.

### *Eating the forbidden fruit*

The journey into the enchanted realms occurred through drinking the magical potion ayahuasca, which led each tourist to claim that they had experienced an otherworldly fairy tale, where magic abounded, and transformation awaited each of them. In all cases, identity transformation was embedded within a traumatic and cathartic visionary story arc, where magical helpers such as the enchanted snake of ayahuasca, guided the tourists to see themselves as spiritual beings, within a supernatural universe (Jauregui et al., 2011; Luna, 1984a, 1984b). Discussing this with the tourist group after the first ceremony, Frank said:

Everything I was told about aya[hua]sca is true. I was fighting for my soul. A hero is supposed to suffer, aren't they? I kept hearing the screams within the ceremony and wondered what monsters people were fighting to save their souls. I saw these vile creatures, and angels, fairies and elves too. It's not made up. I ripped a demon outside of myself. It was as real as me standing here [pause]. Whenever I thought about something I hated about myself I purged, and saw evil leave my body. So now that I've gone through this, I don't want nobody harping on about their fake spiritual and religious experiences. Look friends, we both know that ayahuasca is the only route to see the supernatural, and for any of us to become our spiritual selves. I couldn't have done this without the grand lady though, y'know the spirit of ayahuasca. She guided me through my fear, and ripped me apart, and put me back together. She forced me to see my evil, and whenever I did, I threw up and it left my body.

Frank's view of being a suffering hero on a path of magical healing was common, as was his extraordinary claims of carrying out identity work and sensemaking aided by the snake spirit Ayahuasca. Importantly, and after the ceremonies, the participants often appeared to be elated, and commonly

laughed about their traumatic experiences. While magical helpers are commonplace in fairy tales (Jones, 2002), we might consider these helpers as vision-based sensegivers, who ‘speak’ directly to the tourists attempting to bring order to chaotic narratives through changing the dream-like psychedelic landscapes to aid sensemaking. Sitting in on the ceremonies, it was often possible for the author to hear the participants talking to these spirits. Commenting on her experiences with the spirits, Irini argued:

It was unbelievable, as she saw who I was and helped me clean myself up. She appeared to me in many different forms. First a tiger, then a bird, but there was always something snakey about her. She controls the magical worlds, and I mean literally. I felt her consciousness and heard her words. When she wanted me to see something, she’d literally convert the world around me to help me understand her message. Hmm, let me think. So I was having trouble understanding what she meant. She told me that I was casually cruel to people. And I didn’t get it. So she got annoyed, and made me see hundreds of memories where I’d been mean and ignored people. I saw myself as the people I’d hurt and quickly relived my past. Kind of like Scrooge but he was just a voyeur, whereas I became these other people and felt their pain. She is the ultimate teacher, and terrifying. Of course, she can show me anything. Pictures, movies, my memories. In the end, I always understood.

Spirit helpers are often an integral part of indigenous cosmologies (Eliade, 1972), and within the fairy lands of ayahuasca appear to have a host of visionary sensegiving devices to enable individuals to make sense towards becoming a spiritual being. Discussing his experience, the author said:

The ayahuasca snake often appeared and showed me what I wanted to change, visually amplifying my negative aspects. In turn, this quickly led to sweating, tremors, and violent vomiting. This was always a visual experience, where I’d see demons fly out of my body. After purging, I’d be gripped by serenity, and would drift into heavenly reveries, eager to continue my journey towards becoming an enlightened spiritual being. It was during these periods that I was tempted to reject materialist views of the universe, and the spirits of ayahuasca would work hard to convince me that the universe is conscious and alive. Euphoric feelings greatly enhance

the persuasiveness of this process, as do feelings of being loved and supported by the spirits. Importantly though, and while caring for travellers within the spirit lands, these magical creatures are keen sellers, actively suggesting further tourism to support identity work and sensemaking, apparently, only attainable through drinking ayahuasca.

Within shamanic cultures, purging is a well-known means to expel negative aspects of self, including behaviours, beliefs, and evil spirits (Talin & Sanabria, 2017), all of which can block individuals becoming true spiritual beings (Wilson, 2015). As such, we may consider enchanted identity work and sensemaking as visually and physically harrowing, with individuals commonly crying, screaming, and vomiting as they try to remove their 'evil' identity aspects and make spiritually orientated sense of the universe (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Frecska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Importantly, these processes are all part of the shamanic canon of ayahuasca, where this rite of passage is the only way to become your true spiritual self, capable of seeing the universe as it really is, i.e. as supernatural and conscious (Levine, 1994; McKenna, Luna, & Towers, 1995).

As might be imagined, such circumstances lead to beliefs in the supernatural rapidly being adopted by the tourists, alongside increased desires to become true spiritual beings. It must be noted however that the notion of what constitutes a spiritual being was often loosely defined by the participants, and seemed to be as ephemeral as the fairy lands they were engaging with. Broadly speaking though, and while all participants had arrived believing that their transformations would occur just through drinking ayahuasca, the fairy tale creatures within ayahuasca argued that such things were impossible. Thus, the tourists left South America, with the magically sourced information that true spiritual changes only occur through on-going ayahuasca ceremonies, facilitated through tourism. Let us, therefore, move on and examine the challenges of attempting to claim new identities and sense within the West, where psychedelic orientated views are routinely stigmatised.

#### *Stepping out of enchantment and re-entering the mundane*

With the participants returning to several countries throughout the West, data collection shifted to a six-month VoIP ethnography, focusing on how the tourists continued to view themselves and their fairy

tale experiences after consuming ayahuasca (Barratt et al., 2016; Kruithof et al., 2015; Marcus, 2009). Initial VoIP meetings suggested that the participants were experiencing intense inner tensions and conflicts from having left the anonymity and support of their ayahuasca churches. But more than this, that re-immersing themselves into societies that overtly denounce supernatural beliefs and the use of psychedelics, was deeply distressing for the participants (Graburn, 1989; Harrison, 2003). Importantly though, and with the participants having previously backgrounded the psychedelic nature of their trips, they were in control of what to tell others about their extraordinary experiences, if anything at all. Commenting on this, Seb said:

Being in Peru was like a dream, and it all came crashing down around me when I came home. Most people thought I'd gone for some good old sun and fun, but when I got back I made the mistake of telling some friends about ayahuasca. I've taken a lot of abuse since then, and mainly about being a druggie. Worst part is that I mentioned seeing spirits. Well they thought I'd gone mad, and said my brain is damaged and need to see a doctor. I tried telling them that spirits are real and now they think I'm deranged. I was left shaking and feeling sick. This is horrible. I'm terrified my boss will find out and I'll lose my job as some dirty drug addict.

Seb's experience suggests that discussing psychedelic tourism can result in rapid stigmatisation and exclusion from social groups, challenging the spiritual identities formed in South America (Dean, Ellis & Wells, 2017; Jackson & Esses, 1997). Thus, and while South America had been a time to tell yarns of magical transformation, returning to the West threatened to replace these stories with tales of degradation, illicit drug use and madness, which might indicate why so few participants discussed consuming ayahuasca apart from with the author (Prayag, 2015a, 2015b). Problematically though for the participants, the inability to speak about their supernatural experiences was an acute issue, as having witnessed such incredible visions, they wanted to continue making sense of them, but were facing great difficulties in doing so. Just as troubling, was that the participants claimed to have been instructed by their supernatural sensegivers to talk about what they had seen, on the basis that talking creates reality and self, and may be considered a form of invocation, where the universe and oneself are talked into being. Commenting on this, Stanley said:

I can't talk about what happened to anyone apart from you [the author], but I want to scream about it. You can't see this stuff and then return to normal life. You just can't. I'm going mad here, and nobody believes this stuff here. Back at the ceremonies I was with like-minded guys, but not here. I'm so alone now and feel completely lost. Everything here is unspiritual, and they hate anyone who believes in spirits. I loved being there [South America] as so many people supported me. I have no one here. Y'know so the spirits I saw said to me that I must talk about my experiences as it will help make me a proper spiritual being, but what they don't appreciate is that I'll be lynched here for saying this stuff. I feel like a ball of string unravelling into a complete mess, and nobody can help me. Where are the spirits now when I need them? They've abandoned me.

Failing to engage in everyday discursive supernatural sensemaking led to a rapid erosion of these new spiritual identities. This was coupled with the loss of the pharmacological effects of ayahuasca within a few weeks after the last ceremony, resulting in the participants feeling less connected to their otherworldly experiences (Frecka, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). This period was often described as one of great uncertainty and loneliness, where enchantment slipped away day-by-day, most noticeable through the participants decreasing ability to remember much of what they had seen and heard in the fairy lands, alongside feelings of abandonment by their spirit guides. Commenting on this, the author said:

Returning from my first ayahuasca trip I had no idea what to tell anyone, and it took me a few years to start to tell people about my experiences. But in those first few weeks back, I was very confused and still dreamt of ayahuasca, and experienced mild hallucinations. As the days went on though, I felt more removed from my magical experiences, and no longer felt connected to the supernatural. I believe this is quite common and certainly a lot of tourists have told me that their ayahuasca fairy tale was eroded within their first few weeks back home, which knocked out their magical identities and sense. It therefore seems that access to the pharmacological properties of ayahuasca, and magical helpers found within the otherworld are critical for maintaining these new phantasmagorical beliefs.

Thus, and while an ethereal curtain had descended on the tourists within hours of their first ayahuasca ceremony, this magical veil was quickly lifted by returning to the mundane West.

### *The collapse of the ayahuasca fairy tale*

As their time back in the West increased, the participants faced the challenge of whether to support their new identities and sense through further ayahuasca tourism or to reject these aspects as just a temporary escape from mundane life (Robledo, 2015). At the heart of this question, was what to remember, and what to forget (Marcoux, 2017). Commenting on this, Ashley said:

When I paid for the ceremonies, I had this wonderful idea that everything would be perfect and that I'd become a real spiritual person, healed from everything. But it's been three months since I left, and ayahuasca is like a dream to me now. Reality crashed back. I realise I can't do it again, as I'd have to give up everyone and everything here. I'm not ready to make that kind of commitment. I'm much happier not thinking too much about this anymore as it isn't my future. It's time for me to move on. I can't imagine spending my life being at odds with everyone I care about and them thinking I've lost my mind. Not to mention the costs of going back and forth to Peru.

We thus see that the participants had come to view on-going ayahuasca tourism as a profound source of conflict with friends, family and work colleagues. Although the participants might have continued to conceal the psychedelic parts of their tourism in South America, none seemed to think this was feasible, as Stephen argued: 'going once, yeah ok fair enough, people saw me change and I could hide that a bit. Going back several times, I'd become a different person and couldn't hide it'. The rejection of further ayahuasca tourism was, therefore, in part, a means to preserve self and sense, and to avoid becoming enthralled to this potion, where they might become unrecognisable to themselves (Frecska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Discussing this, Jareth argued:

When I think about it, I'd only been there a few weeks, and it seems crazy how much I changed, and then when I got home, changed back again. Wow, just wow. How can anyone do this for the long term? One week seeing spirits everywhere, and then a few weeks later, being back at work not seeing any. And there's a helluva risk of going and then being labelled a drug user. Is it worth it? For me no, not at all. I loved being there and it was the ultimate trip [laughs]. No pun intended. My life though, well it has to be in the here and now. I saw heaven and hell and the fairy lands, and now have a tale that I can't tell anyone about [laughs]. Honestly though, I miss my spirit guide and feel I've betrayed her. I hope she forgives me leaving Eden. Maybe what I need is something softer, and I'm looking forward to rediscovering a spirituality which allows me to keep my job, family and everyday things. After all, a man can't spend his life in a fairy tale can he?

Perhaps Jareth has a point, that the participants had not spent enough time in South America to more fully appraise their new views of sense and self, and to establish what they might become through further tourism (Cohen, 1979; Graburn, 1989; Heath & Heath, 2016). As such, the participants embarked on a downward spiral of storytelling, focusing on all they might lose, and with a growing irrelevance of what they might gain from further tourism. It must be noted though, that turning their backs on the enchanted and magical realms of ayahuasca was an act filled with some regret, as it was commonly felt that they were waving goodbye to their only sensory experiences of 'true' enchantment and magic. While this might suggest that the participants were stepping back into the profane, some caution must be taken with this notion, as in most cases, the participants were seeking to engage with less intense forms of spirituality to continue their exploration of personal truths (Singleton, 2014; Smith, 2003). Perhaps there is some synergy here with the journey of the literary fairy tale protagonist who completes their magical adventure and must find a way to live back in the mundane world, often hiding their experiences from those around them (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2006; Robledo & Batle, 2015).

Finally, the complete rejection of further tourism by this sample seems to fit with the author's experiences from engaging in ayahuasca tourism, where tourists often stepped away from re-purchasing this enchanted practice when back in the West. The few individuals that the author encountered (outside



of this study), who pursued further tourism, predominantly sought fuller transformations to become masters of the fairy lands, i.e. shamans (Chandler, Holden & Kolandar, 1992). These individuals often appeared content to give up their day-to-day practices and relationships in the West, in an attempt to merge the mundane and enchanted, to produce a liveable fairy tale (Heath & Heath, 2016; Heintzman, 2002). The author went some way along this journey into shamanism, having had two different teachers helping him to leave his everyday life behind, and fully adopt a shamanic identity and supernatural sense. Although the author committed to this spiritual journey twice, it was something he was unable to complete, as he could never reconcile himself with the rejection of his life in the West, or materialist beliefs from being a natural scientist.

## **Discussion**

Although fairy tales have existed for several thousand years (da Silva & Tehrani, 2016; Tehrani & d'Huy, 2017), they have increasingly been used to invite consumers to imagine themselves as part of heroic magical quests towards magical transformation (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003; Rotmann, 2017). However, and with the West shifting into a state of re-enchantment (Partridge, 2005), consumers are no longer just looking to imagine themselves within otherworldly stories, but now desire to truly experience the enchanted fairy realms (Dean, 2018; Gezon, 2017). Thus, and while products and services are often replete with fairy tale-based marketing claims, it is rare to find market offerings that open the door for individuals to have sensory experiences of the phantasmagorical. When we consider though that religion and spirituality are heavily embedded within the otherworldly, it is perhaps not surprising that the sale of 'actual' fairy tale experiences is at present limited to organisations such as ayahuasca churches. Furthermore, with the origin of fairy tales being linked to shamanism, and shamans routinely using fairy tales to describe psychedelic and otherworldly experiences, it seems fitting to explore ayahuasca tourism as a form of fairy tale (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2006; Evans-Pritchard, 2002; Walsh, 1990).

Having an in-depth emic and etic sensitisation to ayahuasca tourism (Kottak, 2006), the author was well aware that limited scholarly attention had been paid to the fairy tale elements of ayahuasca tourism, and

whether this form of supernatural tourism is a one-off purchase, or an on-going tourist practice (Holman, 2011). Undertaking this study, it became clear that tourists are often motivated by the ethereal promises of being able to consume the three foundations of a fairy tale, including (1) magic, (2) transformation, and (3) enchantment (Jones, 2002). With ayahuasca being a potent psychedelic, there seems little doubt that imbibing this magical concoction easily persuades tourists that they have just stepped into an enchanted otherworld, which is the source of their intense sensemaking and identity work (Freckska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016; Shanon, 2010). In the scheme of sensemaking and identity work, it is rare for psychedelics to be investigated, or for pharmacological explanations to partially account for who we believe we are. Yet, it is commonly accepted by both shamanic and Western accounts, that there is more at work in identity work and sensemaking than this potent potion, as shamans argue for additional supernatural explanations, and Westerners for socio-cultural influences (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Robledo & Batle, 2015). To the author's knowledge, this is the first study to have examined the role of magical helpers within identity work and sensemaking, where for example, exorcising evil spirits is a means for tourists to remove who they do not want to be. Considering that supernatural forms of tourism are growing in popularity within the West, it is critical that we come to better understand how supernatural actors play a part in the sale of this tourism.

Problematically though and for all of the compelling utopian stories the tourists had told themselves about what ayahuasca tourism offered, the participants had their new spiritual identities and supernatural sense severely challenged by returning to the West, which led to on-going fears of being labelled as mentally ill drug users (Goffman, 1963; Prayag, 2015a, 2015b; Winkelman, 2001). Importantly, it was not that the tourists were unaware that the West views psychedelics negatively, but more that they had failed to address how to cope with Western views and had not developed any resilience to criticisms. Such aspects were most acute during the first few weeks back in the West, due to the positive pharmacological effects of ayahuasca quickly wearing off, leaving the participants feeling increasingly distant to their enchanted experiences (Freckska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Thus, and by leaving South America, the tourists lost the ability to speak about their ayahuasca experiences, which was a highly erosive process towards these newly-claimed spiritual identities and supernatural

sense. Invariably, this led the tourists to conclude that while tourism enables sense and self to be restructured as part of fantastical visionary tales (Cohen, 1996), theirs had only been a short-term transformation, as on-going tourism is required for these changes to become longer lasting (Robledo & Batle, 2015). Further tourism was, however, something that the tourists were unwilling to engage with (Cohen, 1979; Graburn, 1989; Heath & Heath, 2016) suggesting that purchasing decision-making is partially influenced by the neurological activity of this psychedelic brew. It is, of course, worth pointing out that beyond the physical influence of ayahuasca, that these individuals had come to believe that ‘true’ magic was incompatible with their day-to-day mundane lives. Perhaps though, there is no middle ground for engaging with the intensity of the psychedelic fairy lands, as one must decide where to base one’s sense, i.e. either in the phantasmagorical or mundane. Having said this, this is what we tend to see in literary tales, where individuals either stay in the land of the fairies or sacrifice their newly found magical capabilities to live back in the mundane world, trying to build a new life outside of enchantment (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2006; Robledo & Batle, 2015; Smith, 2013).

## **Conclusions**

This study suggests that ayahuasca tourism may be considered a form of consumable fairy tale, temporarily satisfying tourist desires for magic, transformation and enchantment in otherworldly realms (Davidson & Chaudhri, 2006). This is certainly a unique offering in a marketplace that is often considered lacking in magic and meaning (Baudrillard, 1998; Murray, Lynch & Foley, 2016). Broadly speaking, fairy tales have long been used by marketers to spin stories of heroic magical quests that facilitate consumer transformations, no matter how meaningless or trite a product or service may be (Heath & Heath, 2016). But what about consumers who desire to have sensory experiences of enchantment and magic on their route to transformation? (Gezon, 2017; Partridge, 2005). Historically, the market has had great difficulties in providing such experiences, as few products and services can deliver immersive experiences of the phantasmagorical (Dean, 2018). It seems though that the relatively

new offering of ayahuasca tourism may well meet this consumer demand, particularly with shamanic organisations increasingly marketing these powerful potions in the West (Shanon, 2010).

At the heart of this study was the research question of, how do ayahuasca tourists make sense of themselves related to their fairy tale journey? As we have seen, there are multiple stages related to this question, with significant differences being noted before the tourists travel, attending ceremonies in South America, and after returning to the West. Thus, and while initial tourist views are based on wondrous expectations, it is clear that after drinking ayahuasca, the pharmacological properties of this brew heavily modulate notions of sense and self. As such, beliefs in enchantment and magic peak when this potion is at its strongest, enabling highly unique forms of identity work and sensemaking, where magical sensegivers change entire enchanted landscapes to aid tourists in making phantasmagorical sense. Facing such compelling sensegiving, it is hardly surprising that individuals rapidly develop beliefs in the supernatural, where they believe that they have been transformed through otherworldly magic. Although the notion of speaking with spirits is fairly common, this is the first study to have reported on the importance of supernatural beings in aiding these processes, and as such is considered one of the main contributions of this work.

Thus, and while the ayahuasca experience fulfils the canon of a fairy tale, it is at best, short-lived, with beliefs in the supernatural dissipating alongside the effects of ayahuasca (Freckska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). In keeping with the notion of a fairy tale, it appears that tourist sensemaking and identity work is only renormalised when this brew is on the wane. Having said this, and while this might suggest that ayahuasca is predominantly a pharmacological experience, we must bear in mind that supportive and anonymised venues are critical for individuals to explore sense and self, and to rapidly overturn a lifetime's worth of beliefs, no matter how temporarily (Geary, 2008; Graburn, 1989; Harrison, 2003). Problematically though for ayahuasca tourists, making profound changes to sense and self, necessitates on-going sensemaking and identity work (Reisinger, 2013), which is something that few are prepared for. When we consider that all participants in this study rejected further tourism, it seems that collisions of sense between indigenous and Western systems are at some level unavoidable, and raises the question of how might tourists who develop 'devout' supernatural beliefs cope in the West? From the author's

experiences, it seems unlikely that they will, unless this issue is addressed more fundamentally within the shamanic communities, who can aid their tourists in developing resilience to the challenge of returning home.

### *Implications*

Tourism has long been considered a means for individuals to transform themselves (Singleton, 2014), but the desire for transformation through magical workings within fairy lands appears to be a new tourist phenomenon (Dean, 2018; Gezon, 2017). Our understanding of such experiences has been severely hampered by a lack of products and services capable of delivering immersive enchanted experiences that enable individuals to commune with magical creatures and to explore phantasmagorical landscapes. If anything, the only real market offering was to imagine oneself within magical stories, which has often been at odds with the perception of external reality (Heath & Heath, 2016). However, and as psychedelic organisations have entered the spiritual marketplace, tourists can now engage in compelling visionary stories, where the mind is pharmacologically aided in undertaking identity work and sensemaking (Frecska, Bokor & Winkelman, 2016). Considering though that the West routinely links psychedelics to drug use (Prayag, 2015a, 2015b; Winkelman, 2001), this has presented an opportunity to develop social marketing strategies to improve public perceptions of this magical brew. This may include for example, emphasising the transformatory aspects of these indigenous magico-religious ayahuasca ceremonies, while backgrounding popular Western references that frame ayahuasca as an illicit product (Siff, 2015). Reminding ourselves though that the West is rapidly re-immersing itself within a state of enchantment (Partridge, 2005), such practices may facilitate ayahuasca tourism gaining a greater public acceptability. Furthermore, it may ease the journey of tourists back into the mundane West, where they can speak more freely about their otherworldly experiences. Finally, and considering that the supernatural can be conjured just by drinking this magic brew (Kopenawa & Albert, 2013), emphasising this rapid route into the fairy lands, might be an attractive motivation for tourism, in a market that routinely fails to provide such experiences (Baudrillard, 1998; Murray, Lynch & Foley, 2016).

### *Further research*

Although little mention has been given to the shamans who facilitated this study, an on-going closeness was developed between them and the author. In part, this was aided by the shaman's interests in better understanding their ability to resell ayahuasca tourism. For example, and before this study, the shamans had little knowledge of why most tourists reject further tourism (Holman, 2011), which has led them to examine whether they are focusing too much on marketing fairy tale tourism. When we consider that ayahuasca tourism has attracted Westerners seeking all manner of experiences, such as drug tourism (Winkelman, 2001), healing from drug addictions (Barbosa, Giglio & Dalgarrondo, 2005; Doering-Silveria et al., 2005; Grob et al., 1996), to achieve increased spirituality (Krippner & Sulla, 2000) and to see the world as it really is (McKenna, Luna & Towers, 1995), it seems that shamans have much that might be marketed beyond fairy tales. With the shamans simply seeking to expand their market share, they seem willing to reappraise their market communications to achieve repeat sales. As such, the first suggestion for further work is to examine tourists purchasing ayahuasca tourism other than for fairy tale purposes. While shamans have indicated that other tourist desires are less frequently encountered, they appear more likely to repeat purchase, but with much to understand about why this is the case. On this basis, this two-stage ethnographic study will be repeated, but focusing on those other motivating aspects for consumption, and resultant identity work and sensemaking.

The second suggestion is to explore the highly unusual arena of spirit-based sensegiving, which featured prominently throughout this study. While the notion of speaking to spirits is nothing new and has a history of thousands of years, this is the first time that spirits have repeatedly been cited as attempting to sell to tourists. Problematically, attempting to predict when people might have supernatural encounters has always been difficult, but within ayahuasca tourism, it appears that there is a high chance that individuals will be able to 'speak' to these magical creatures whenever they drink ayahuasca. However, and unlike their corporeal counterparts, these phantasmagorical sellers appear uniquely capable of altering visionary landscapes to aid their sensegiving towards selling of ayahuasca tourism.

Discussing this practice with the shamans, it has been agreed that further investigation will be carried out in this area, with a particular focus on the snake spirit Ayahuasca (Luna 1984a, 1984b).

The final suggestion is to explore psychedelic ‘fairy tale’ tourism beyond ayahuasca, including other magical plants such as ibogaine, magic mushrooms and *Salvia divinorum*, which are also sold into the West as a way to experience magical transformation and enchantment (Hernández-Bello et al., 2015; Reynaud-Maurupt, Cadet-Taïour & Zoll, 2009). In comparison to ayahuasca, much less is known about tourism related to these plants, how they marketed, and what drives Westerners to seek their consumption from indigenous and New Age groups. Having said this, and with the author having spent a number of years engaging in these communities, securing ethnographic access is already underway. Importantly, the pharmacological action of these other psychedelics is quite different to ayahuasca, as are the types of fairy tale visions experienced, with storylines not always leading tourists towards salvation or the adoption of supernatural identities and sense. There is thus, much to understand.

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