

The Pilgrimage Project: A study of motivations and experiences in sacred spaces

Results:

The aim of this project was to understand the interaction between motivations to go on pilgrimage, spiritual behaviours and experiences, and psychological outcomes. Four hundred and fifty pilgrims to the Roman Catholic sites of Fátima, Lourdes, the Pagan site of Stonehenge, and the New Age town of Glastonbury were asked to fill in a questionnaire. This included standardized measures of positive and negative affect (PANAS), personality (EPQ), magical/paranormal ideation, religious belief/experience, and motivations to go on pilgrimage. Spiritual Growth and Community/Care were the major motivational dimensions for pilgrims at both Christian sites, while Pagan pilgrims scored highest on Cosmic/Nature Closeness and Sensation Seeking motivations. Results for Positive and Negative Affect showed that Christian pilgrims were significantly higher on positive affect than Pagan pilgrims, while Pagan pilgrims scored significantly higher on negative affect. Pagan pilgrims also had significantly higher scores on magical/paranormal ideation and spiritual experiences. We suggest that Pagan rituals elicit higher arousal than Christian ones, and are less supported by a social and belief structure. This makes Pagan pilgrims more likely to experience negative affect (e.g. fear) and a higher frequency of unusual experiences. The higher frequency on unusual experiences is also partially explained by a schizotypal personality disposition and a tendency to process information in an intuitive way.

Published work:

Full Papers:

Oviedo, L., de Courcier, S., & Farias, M. (2013). Rise of pilgrims on the *camino* to Santiago: Sign of change or religious revival? *Review of Religious Research*, DOI 10.1007/s13644-013-0131-4

Harris, A. (2013). Lourdes and Holistic Spirituality: Contemporary Catholicism, the Therapeutic and Religious Thermalism. *Culture and Religion*, 4(1), 23-43.

Goldingay, S., Dieppe, P., & Farias, M. (under review). “and the pain just disappeared into insignificance”: The healing response in Lourdes - performance, psychology and caring. *International Review of Psychiatry*.

Chapters:

Farias, M. (2013). Inside the spiritual mind: Cognitive implications of religious *versus* spiritual engagement. In *Present day spiritualities: Contrasts or overlap?*, edited by E. Hense, F. Jespers, & P. Nissen: Leiden: Brill.

Harris, A. (2010). ‘A place to grow spiritually and socially’: the experiences of young pilgrims to Lourdes. In Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Ben Pink Dandelion (eds), *Religion and Youth*, pp. 149-58. Aldershot: Ashgate.

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Area(s) of interest:

Unusual and spiritual experiences; affect; motivation; personality

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