

Two's Company: An Investigation of Tulpamancy Practice and its impact on Self-regulation, Self-efficacy, Mindfulness, and Well-being

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ABSTRACT

Tulpamancy is a practice that aims to create sentient thought-forms called tulpas. Tulpas are often perceived by the creator or “host” person to be a distinct consciousness sharing their mind and body. This practice has become popular in the online domain but has received little research focus. The current study aims to further develop our understanding of tulpamancy and establish the impact of engaging in this practice on the domains of self-regulation, self-efficacy, trait mindfulness and well-being. Thematic analysis was conducted on guides available on the leading tulpamancy website to illustrate the processes which facilitate this novel self-perception. An on-line questionnaire ($N = 102$) was conducted with tulpamancers which gathered self-reports of their experiences. No evidence for poor self-regulation, self-efficacy, trait mindfulness and well-being were observed. Meditation practice exhibited a statistically significant effect on respondents’ self-regulation scores.

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1. Introduction

Tulpamancy is a meditative practice in which people who identify as tulpamancers (known as “hosts”) aim to create thought-form companions, called tulpas. These tulpas are created or “forced” using a variety of techniques including hypnosis, meditation, roleplay and narrative creation (Veissière, 2015). The created thought-forms are experienced as the source of various hallucinations, and are perceived as fully sentient, autonomous personalities sharing the mind, and often body, of the host (Isler, 2017). Hosts often report interacting with tulpas in imagined spaces termed “wonderlands” (Veissière, 2015), it is also reported that tulpas may also be “imposed” into external reality - experienced as real and as concrete as another physical person (Isler, 2017). Many hosts describe their tulpas as possessing a human-like form, others are inspired by fictional characters like ‘My Little Ponies’, and dragons (Veissière, 2015). The word tulpa is borrowed from Tibetan Buddhism and is defined as an emanation, display, or manifestation (Mikles & Laycock, 2015). Tulpas first came to the attention of Western society from the accounts of writer David-Néel (Magic and Mystery in Tibet, 1932/2014), who outlined how she created and subsequently dissipated a tulpa herself while in Tibet. Despite its Eastern roots, Tulpamancy is a modern practice which has grown from online subcultures, including those who identify as Bronies, Pluralists, and Lucid Dreamers, and the practice has consolidated in numerous dedicated websites and forums (e.g., <http://tulpa.info>; <http://reddit.com/r/tulpas>). The websites provide instructional guides, informative resources, discussions, and personal accounts for the host community. As many hosts practice in secrecy, this online network is also considered a source of support and communication by its participants (Isler, 2017).

The typical host is reportedly a formally educated, highly imaginative, middle-class, young adult European/American man (Veissière, 2015). Tulpamancy is most popular in America, but there are many self-reported practitioners worldwide. Isler’s (2017) study drew respondents from 16 different nations, with the United States comprising 58% of the population. Hosts often report loneliness and a limited social life as the primary motivator for initiating the tulpamancy practice and report a positive impact of tulpamancy on their mental well-being (Veissière, 2015). A large percentage of hosts are diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder prior to deciding to create a tulpa (Isler, 2017; Veissière, 2015). In some cases, hosts report that their tulpas assist them in coping with their disorder. Isler (2017) illustrates a case study of a schizophrenic host whose tulpa could “zap away” delusions. Similar reports are given from hosts with anxiety disorder or depression who report being calmed and cheered up by their tulpas. Furthermore, hosts with autism and Asperger’s syndrome were found to have higher levels of empathy and theory of mind than would be expected (Veissière, 2015). Other reported effects of practicing tulpamancy include increased intuition, enhanced recall, parallel processing and communication (Isler, 2017; Veissière, 2015).

1.1. Tulpamancy and self-regulation

Self-regulation (SR) can be defined as goal-directed behavior ranging temporally from goal selection to goal pursuit and finally to goal attainment (Hofmann et al., 2012;

Maes & Karoly, 2005). Successful SR requires self-reflective processes to adapt, maintain, or disengage strategies to achieve goals (Maes & Karoly, 2005). Self-regulatory goals are shielded from distractor stimuli and competing goals by the direction and redirection of executive attention (Hofmann et al., 2012). Thus, attention regulation (AR) is a seminal feature of SR. Many hosts report having hyperactivity or attentive disorders (Veissière, 2015). Similarly, emotion regulation (ER) plays an important role in modulating responses when pursuing goals, ER can serve to increase or decrease the intensity and duration of an emotional response to aid in task completion (Chambers, Gullone & Allen, 2009; Gross, 2013). Many hosts report diagnoses of autism, schizophrenia, anxiety, and other mood disorders (Isler, 2017), which are related to disordered emotion regulation (Gross & Munoz, 1995). There have been no previous studies that have focused on the potential benefits of practicing tulpamancy in clinical and non-clinical populations' self-regulatory processes. Tulpamancy practice requires daily sessions of concentrative and meditative effort (Isler, 2017), as such it may produce similar beneficial effects to meditation. Brown & Ryan (2003) illustrated that high-scoring individuals on a valid and reliable mindfulness measure reported significantly greater attentional and emotional regulation. Similarly, Shapiro (1992) found that participants who intentionally practiced mindfulness to improve self-regulatory processes achieved these results. Mindfulness interventions have also shown promising effects in the treatment of anxiety disorders (Miller, Fletcher & Kabat-Zinn, 1995), ADHD (Zylowska et al., 2008) and recurrent depression (Ma & Teasdale, 2004) all of which are common among hosts (Veissière, 2015). As tulpamancy involves daily meditative practice studying tulpamancers' SR offers critical insight into the potential benefits of the practice for clinical and non-clinical populations.

1.2. Tulpamancy and self-efficacy

Self-efficacy (SE) denotes one's beliefs about their capacity to achieve designated goals (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). SE is crucial in determining what kind of pursuits one will engage in, and what kind of commitment will be made to reach a desired end goal (Bandura, 1993). SE is a powerful predictor of one's ER, persistence, level of effort, and academic achievement (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1981), and is negatively correlated with depression, anxiety and negative affect (Bandura, 1993). High SE stands to benefit patient-populations most being an important factor in self-management. Patients scoring high on SE report greater capacity to overcome obstacles resulting from illness (Farrell, Wicks & Martin, 2004; Luszczynska, Scholz & Schwarzer, 2005). As such, SE plays a key role in adapting to stressful situations, in SR, and in maintaining overall well-being (WB). A large percentage of hosts have been reported to have neurodevelopmental, and mental health, disorders (Veissière, 2015), and many report that tulpamancy has helped them cope (Isler, 2017). Measuring hosts' SE provides further insight into the effects of tulpamancy practice on hosts. Sanaeia, Hossini, and Jamshidifar (2014) demonstrated that a series of 8 one-hour mindfulness training sessions had a significantly positive impact on female breast cancer patients' SE. Turner et al., (2016) illustrated a similar trend in patients with chronic low back pain with Mindfulness-based stress reduction interventions providing equivocal short-term benefits to patients' pain SE as cognitive behavioral therapy.

1.3. Tulpamancy and trait mindfulness

Mindfulness denotes a state of consciousness in which one is fully rooted in the present moment, paying full attention to passing sensations, thoughts and events in a passive and receptive manner (Chambers et al., 2009; Hülshager et al., 2013). Mindfulness is also a

measurable trait (Brown & Ryan, 2003), i.e., one's dispositional tendency to focus on the present moment and the task at hand (Ju & Lien, 2018), and attend to one's immediate experience with acceptance and non-judgement (Fountain-Zaragoza, Londerée, Whitmoyer & Prakash, 2016). Individuals possessing high levels of trait mindfulness (TM) are more capable of effective ER and SR (Anciha et al., 2012; Hülshager et al., 2013), exhibit greater psychological health and success in relationships (Allen & Kiburz, 2012; Davis & Hayes, 2011), and enjoy enhanced WB (Carmody & Baer, 2008; Short et al., 2016). Isler (2017) expounds the potential benefits of meditative practices commonly employed by tulpamancers. In this study (N = 62), 54% of respondents reported using meditation as part of their practice. However, Tulpamancers' TM has yet to be measured. Veissière (2015) found hosts scored high on the Tellegen Absorption Scale which measures one's capacity for trance states, hypnosis and synaesthesia. Similar results are expected in the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003), a measure of TM, given the level of routine concentration required to force a tulpa and the large number of hosts that report using meditation as part of their practice online.

1.4. Tulpamancy & well-being

Subjective WB is a scientific construct similar to happiness (Kern et al., 2015). Tulpamancers' happiness was assessed by Veissière (2015) using a battery of qualitative methods including the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Scale (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) in which they exhibited very high scores (N = 74, M = 35.5, SD = 7.5). However, WB entails a particularly stable, persistent happiness. It is not merely overcoming negative affect, rather encompasses overall flourishing across a variety of domains (Kern et al., 2014; Butler & Kern, 2016). The PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) posits that WB is determined by assessing one's proficiency in the interrelated positive functions of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This multidimensional approach to WB is key to encapsulating the multifaceted construct (Kern et al., 2015). Higher levels of WB are indicative of supportive friend and family groups, life and job satisfaction, and decreased risk of illness and early death (Kern et al., 2014). Furthermore, loneliness is a risk factor for functional decline and poor health outcomes (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Perissinotto, Stijacic Cenzer & Covinsky, 2012). Isler (2017) emphasizes the benefits of the increased social support and interaction that the self-reportedly lonely and isolated hosts gain from being a part of the larger online community, as well as the tulpas themselves. Being active in the community may increase WB through blogging and self-disclosure (Ko & Kuo, 2009) and by increasing one's social interaction which is highly associated with positive affect (Diener et al. 2017). Mental imagery ability has been shown to be positively associated with WB, and that engaging in mental imagery may help to foster greater WB (Odou & Vella-Brodrick, 2013), mental simulation too is efficacious in emotion regulation, planning and problem-solving to achieve personal goals and tackle stress (Taylor et al., 1998). These skills are practiced repeatedly in tulpa forcing. Furthermore, a recent fixed-effect meta-analysis has demonstrated a significant and consistent association between positive well-being and specific styles of daydreaming, namely, positive constructive daydreaming which is defined as an enjoyment and acceptance of internal mentation (Blouin-Hudon & Zelenski, 2016). Using the PERMA model many components of WB can be assessed, granting a thorough profile of people who practice tulpamancy. Given the persistent visualization and imaginative nature of tulpamancy one would expect to see high scores in the WB facets, similar to those who exhibit positive constructive daydreaming styles.

1.5. Rationale of the present study

This study aimed to assess the effects of practicing tulpamancy on SR, SE, TM, and WB using a mixed methods approach. Analysis was conducted on instructional guides to identify the main techniques used by tulpamancers, the associated phenomena of each method, any reported effects, and definitive elements of the practice. This was done to provide a substantive foundation for the construction of an online survey. The online survey was then administered to those who identify as hosts and measured ratings of SR, SE, TM, and WB. Meditation's potential as a confounding factor was also investigated. As there is a limited research literature on the practice of tulpamancy, this study aimed to develop our understanding of the impact of this practice on several facets of everyday functioning. It should be noted that the authors make no claim as to whether tulpas are sentient or real. To accurately detail these processes, the community's nomenclature was adopted. However, we wished solely to investigate the practice's effect on its practitioners, not to affirm or refute the validity of the practice in realizing its aims

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

Ethical approval was granted by the UCD UREC committee for this study. Part one of the study involved TA of the instructional guides downloaded from the tulpa.info website. The coding process followed the system outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) and Guerin (2013). Coding was carried out as follows: reading the guides several times to become familiar with the data, generating initial codes across the dataset, identifying initial themes by grouping related codes and producing an initial thematic map (Fig. 1), reviewing the themes across all levels of the dataset, defining the relevant themes to the research questions, collating similar themes into overarching themes, producing a final thematic map (Fig. 2), and reporting the results through overall trends and salient quotes.

The survey was conducted online with Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT), and was linked in the Research thread of <http://tulpa.info> with an attached information sheet on 05/01/2018 and the subreddit <http://reddit.com/r/tulpas> on the 24/01/2018. Responses were downloaded as a single SPSS version 24.0 (IBM Corp., 2015) file. All potentially identifiable information was deleted from the dataset. Data from respondents who failed to meet the inclusion criteria, or who had withdrawn from the study as evident by the survey's incompleteness, were also deleted. Data from the survey were used to construct tables outlining the techniques and features of respondents' tulpamancy practice.

2.2. Participants

People who practice tulpamancy were recruited online from study advertisement on two websites: <http://tulpa.info>, and <http://reddit.com/r/tulpas>. 172 respondents completed the questionnaire in total. Participants self-excluded if they were under 18 years. The final dataset included completed responses from 102 participants. Many participants failed to self-exclude based on the age requirement, as such any datasets from respondents who indicated they were under 18 years of age were excluded. Furthermore, any datasets which were less than 2/3rds completed were excluded as this was assumed to mean the participant had opted to withdraw from the study. Partially incomplete datasets were only included for analysis

when it was evident that the participant would have completed the survey within the allowed timeframe had the survey not been terminated.

The participants identified predominantly as male (68.3%), with female (21.8%) and other; including nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or transgender (9.9%) accounting for the remainder. There was an age range of 18 - 57 ($M = 24.05$, $SD = 7.3$). The majority of participants (55.4%) were American, and 42.6% reported a diagnosis of at least one neurodevelopmental and/or mental health disorder. Most respondents were employed (45.5%), 14.9% were unemployed, and the remainder of participants were full-time students. The majority (94.1%) had completed secondary/high school, with 44.6% receiving some college education, and 23.7% attaining an undergraduate degree, or higher. In terms of current relationship status, 62.4% were single, 25.7% were in a relationship (2.02% of which specified this to be with their tulpa) and the remainder were married.

2.3. Materials

2.3.1. Guide Analysis

General instructional guides, approved by the site's Guide Approval Team as legitimate and effective means of tulpa creation were downloaded from <https://community.tulpa.info/thread-list-of-guides--12660> into a word document and stored in a password protected file, on a password protected computer. All names were de-identified, and internal links to other users' guides censored immediately. The guides were labelled using numbers to avoid confusion in the coding process.

2.3.2. Participant survey

The survey gathered information on respondent's demographic, experiences and practice of tulpamancy, and concluded with a battery of 4 psychometric tests which assessed participants' SR, SE, TM, and WB.

2.3.3. Self-regulation

The self-regulation scale (SRS; Schwarzer, Diehl & Schmitz, 1999) was used to assess tulpamancers' SR. The scale consists of 10 items, including measures of AR and ER due to their role in maintaining goal pursuit. Items are marked on a Likert scale from 1 – 4, with 1 = “Not at all true”, and 4 = “Exactly true”. SR is determined by calculating the total sum score of all 10 items, ranging from 10 – 40, with higher scores indicative of greater SR. The scale exhibited good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.748.

2.3.4. Self-efficacy

Tulpamancers' SE was measured using the Generalized Self Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The scale consists of 10 items marked on a Likert scale from 1 – 4, with 1 = “Not at all true”, and 4 = “Exactly true”. SE is determined by calculating the

total sum score of all 10 items, ranging from 10 – 40, with higher scores indicating greater SE. The scale exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.860.

2.3.5. Trait mindfulness

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) was employed to measure tulpamancers' TM. The 15 item self-report measure assesses one's awareness of what is unfolding in the present moment. It consists of negatively worded items answered using a six-point Likert scale, 1 = "Almost always", 6 = "Almost never". Higher scores indicate greater levels of dispositional mindfulness. The scale exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.855.

2.3.6. Well-being

The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016) was used to assess Tulpamancers' WB. It is a 23 item self-report measure based on Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. The PERMA factors are assessed using 15 items (3 per domain), 8 further items assess physical health, negative emotion, loneliness and overall well-being (Sec. 1.4). The items are collated in groups called blocks, and marked on a 0 – 10 Likert scale, with 0 an extremely low level, and 10 an extremely high level. Only the poles of the scale are labelled, and their wording varies per block. WB is determined by calculating the mean of the single overall well-being item and 15 PERMA items. The scores for individual domains are determined using the means of their respective 3 items. The scale exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.832.

2.4. Statistical analysis

All statistical procedures were conducted using SPSS version 24.0 (IBM, 2015). Data from the survey was downloaded as an SPSS file. Descriptive demographic statistics were first calculated, additional information which had been given regarding respondents' experiences was analysed and trends calculated, informative quotes which gave insight into the personal experiences of tulpamancers were collated and presented with the results (Supplementary Table 6). The mean score for participants' SR, SE, TM and PERMA-Profile facets were calculated and the normality of their distributions assessed (Sec. 3.2). As the data gathered was ordinal, non-parametric analysis was appropriate. A median test was conducted to investigate whether there were any statistically significant differences between respondents' who reported using traditional meditation as part of their tulpamancy practice, and those who did not. The mean score for self-reported SR was then calculated for meditators and non-meditators for further comparison.

3. Results

3.1. Thematic Analyses

A total of seven guides were used to identify common methods of tulpa creation and other salient information relevant to the creation process. All guides used were approved by the Guide Approval Team on the website: <http://www.tulpa.info/> and validated by other tulpamancers as efficient and successful means of tulpa creation. The overarching themes and sub-themes uncovered during the TA were used to create an initial thematic map (Fig. 1), these themes were then refined in relation to the specific research questions and a complete thematic map (Fig. 2) The themes are presented and elaborated upon using quotes and frequencies. The reported themes are linked with findings in the survey data with the inclusion of relevant tables indicating the prevalence of specific techniques and features of the tulpamancy practice in the current population. Additional quotes given by survey respondents highlighting unforeseen subject matters or providing evidence of the prevalence of themes are also presented (Supplementary Table 6).

3.1.1. Forcing

Any process which helps create, develop, or directly involves, one's tulpa, is known as forcing. Forcing is a meditative process and can be done actively or passively. Active forcing consists of deliberately concentrating with the intent of creating, or interacting with, one's tulpa. It is done in sessions in which the development of the tulpa is the sole focus of the host. Pre-session meditation is encouraged by 3/7 guides to aid in relaxation and concentration, along with forcing in a quiet area where one won't be interrupted. Sessions should be as long as possible to ensure progress as; "You get what you put into the process.". However, longer than 3 hours and one is likely to get headaches. Forcing requires hosts improve their focus, attention and mental imagery abilities. Passive forcing entails developing, and focusing on, one's tulpa whilst doing other activities. This increases overall forcing time and has no negative effects. Many of the guides expound the need to engage the tulpa in the forcing process, and to use the word "We" when referring to forcing, as statements like: "We are going to force you." implies they play a collaborative role in the process. Survey respondents indicated the forcing techniques used in their own practice (Table 1).

3.1.2. Creation Steps

Forcing consists of developing the tulpa's personality, form, sentience, communication, and establishing a stable hallucination/projection, using the following techniques: (1) Narration; (2) Visualization; (3) Parroting and Puppeting; (4) Imposition. 3/7 of the guides used only parroting and puppeting forcing methods which allow the tulpa to grow and shape itself primarily through interaction. The remainder illustrated combinations of more meditative processes, and occasional parroting and puppeting, when necessary. Form and personality are typically established first, and imposition (hallucinating one's tulpa in reality) carried out last. No one order is necessary, but 4/7 of the guides recommend beginning with an introduction/greeting stage.

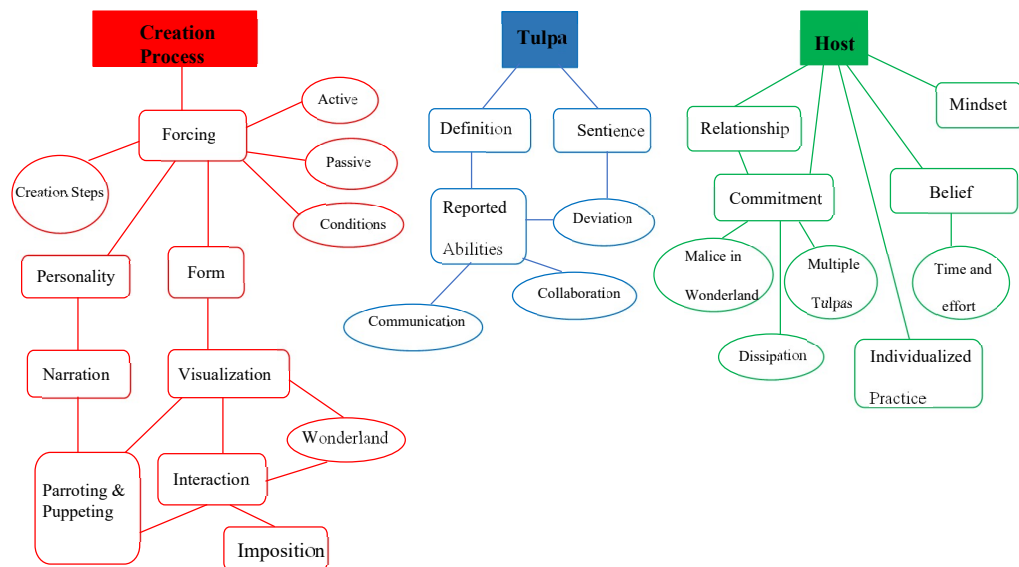


Fig. 1. Initial Thematic Map.

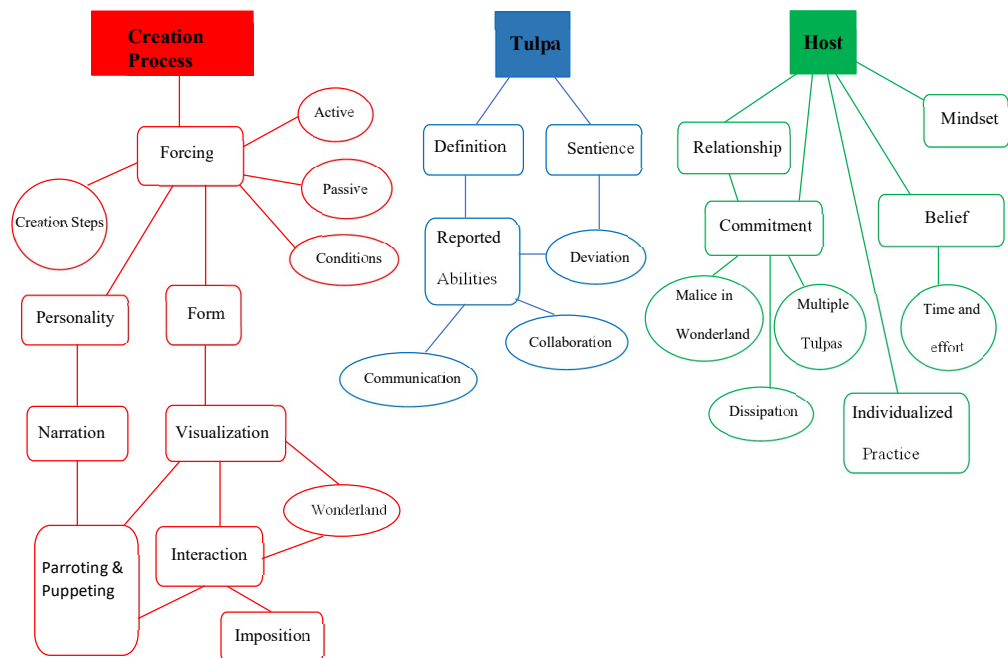


Fig. 2. Finalized Thematic Map constructed from the most salient information regarding tulpamancy practice in the guides that underwent TA.

Table 1
Techniques Reportedly Used by Respondents in the Creation Process.

| Technique | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| "Mind-voice"/ Narration | 97 | 96 |
| Hypnosis | 24 | 23.8 |
| Wonderland | 80 | 79.2 |
| "Mind's- eye"/Visualization | 94 | 93.1 |
| Imposition | 51 | 50.5 |
| Meditation | 58 | 57.4 |
| Other | 21 | 21 |

Note: Percentages vary as respondents could check multiple responses.

3.1.3. Form

A tulpa's form is their appearance, 3/7 of the guides explain that their form can be anything. Realism is emphasized by three of the guides as anatomical references can be used to model parts of their form, with greater realism allowing greater integration with reality. A tulpa can be given a placeholder form which they can reportedly alter at a later stage. Tulpas can also be created in the form of an existing character, though two of the guides warn that this may cause them to have an identity crisis. A tulpa does not need a form, but it can aid in reaffirming the distinct and individual consciousness of the tulpa. Survey respondents reported the assumed form of their tulpa and their tulpas' gender identities (Supplementary Table 1).

3.1.4. Personality

Personality is: "... essentially the foundation of your tulpa.", it defines them, and is unique to them. Personality forcing is only necessary if the host has a specific personality in mind for their tulpa as personality reportedly develops naturally through experience. There are three main approaches to forcing personality, elaborated in one of the guides as follows: (1) loosely define their personality and allow the tulpa to develop further themselves; (2) immediately define their personality rigorously; (3) parroting responses and puppeting behaviors to teach the tulpa how to respond on their own to later develop their own personality. Narration is key to developing a thorough personality of the host's design, this method consists of listing off various traits and explicating the situations and interactions which define each trait's expression. Symbolism can also be employed to implant traits, e.g., imagine a trait as food and feeding it to the tulpa. Personality is reportedly a fundamental precursor to developing sentience (Sec. 3.1.10).

3.1.5. Visualization

The process of creating and solidifying aspects of the tulpa's form in one's "mind's-eye" (imagination), however, it is not limited to sight, rather encompasses the formation of vivid and intricate details of in each sensory domain. Visualization can be done with closed or opened eyes, but 2 of the guides expound the benefits of opened-eye visualization making

imposition easier. There are many ways of improving visualization abilities; having one's tulpa copy their expressions in a mirror, using parts of one's body as height references, and zooming in on single features, to name a few. The process is tedious as it must be repeated several times to ensure consistently accurate recall of minute details including gait, facial expressions, gestures, various angles, etc. 5/7 of the guides explain how to create a wonderland; a dreamscape/imagined headspace used to aid visualization and a place for interacting with one's tulpa without the need for imposition (Table 1).

3.1.6. Narration

Interacting with one's tulpa, specifically talking to, or thinking about them, either out loud or through internal dialogue ("mind-voice") is called narration. Narration can be practiced actively or passively throughout the day and is viewed as a crucial step in establishing personality, building a tulpa's vocabulary and vocality, and it serves to feed one's "...tulpa attention... so they become more solid." as one guide explains.

3.1.7. Parroting and Puppeting

Parroting is defined as intentionally speaking for one's tulpa, whilst puppeting entails intentionally moving the body of one's tulpa. These techniques are reportedly opposed by some tulpamancers. However, they are the main methods recommended by 3/7 of the guides, which affirm that they are useful in moderation. The techniques are used like "... training wheels." and can be quicker than traditional methods as they can skip personality development. Parroting and puppeting teach the tulpa how to communicate and act via interaction, the tulpa eventually assumes control of itself and begins to develop autonomously. Too much parroting and puppeting reportedly creates a "servitor", a different type of thought-form to a tulpa, that lacks free-will and sentience (Sec. 3.1.9; Sec. 3.1.10).

3.1.8. Imposition

The process of visualizing one's tulpa over the external environment, reportedly resulting in hosts hallucinating their tulpa's form in reality and perceiving them with all of their senses. There are many imposition techniques, the most basic of which is visualizing one's tulpa over a flat wall. Imposition is the most difficult technique to master and takes the most amount of practice. It is not a necessary step to tulpa forcing as: "You can have a fully sapient, vocal, possession-capable tulpa, without ever touching imposition.". Many of the guides recommend postponing imposition until one can visualize their tulpa completely and consistently, and the tulpa reportedly exhibits signs of sentience. Survey respondents reported the ways which they experience their tulpa (Table 2).

3.1.9. Tulpa definition

Tulpas are defined as separate personalities willingly created to exist parallel to their hosts'. They are experienced as a distinct and other consciousness sharing the mind of the host and receiving exactly the same input. 6/7 of the guides report that tulpas possess sentience when fully developed, expounding their self-awareness, autonomy, free-will,

individual preferences, behaviors and emotions. Tulpas reportedly exist in a hallucinatory body which can be perceived in external reality given practice (Sec. 3.1.3 and 3.1.8), their form is often of their host's design. 3/7 of the guides acknowledge tulpamancy's Tibetan Buddhist roots as thought meditated into a material form, or as one guide elucidated: "Thought made reality". Thus, tulpas are distinct from imaginary friends and other thought-forms, characterized by their personalities and their reported ability to grow increasingly less reliant on the host's attention to be sustained. The guides detail that tulpas are made for friendship, they think and react like any other person, can communicate in several ways, will know the host better than anyone else, will act as a loving support providing new perspectives and be a lifelong best friend.

3.1.10. Sentience

Tulpas are not sentient from conception, but reportedly develop it through interaction, personality development and experiences. However, 3/7 of the guides note the benefits of assuming sentience from the beginning as it helps to more readily cement one's belief in their tulpa's personhood. Without sentience a host has not created a tulpa, rather a servitor. Deviation and spontaneity are viewed as hallmarks of sentience by some of the guides. Sentience is reportedly a necessary precursor before attempting possession, switching and imposition.

3.1.11. Reported abilities

Tulpas are reportedly capable of everything the host is and several novel abilities. Tulpas can reportedly enhance memory recall, parallel process (work on one task while the host works on another), play an active role in the creation process, help to create more tulpas, change their form and personality (called "deviation"), aid in alleviating physical pain and negative feelings such as depression and anxiety (Supplementary Table 6). Respondents reported what diagnoses they had received (Supplementary Table 3). Tulpas are reportedly capable of communicating in many ways (Sec. 3.1.12). Tulpas can reportedly develop their own personality and continue to learn and grow from their experiences. Tulpas reportedly only age if they choose to and will not die unless by the hosts' volition. Respondents reported their tulpas' abilities (Table 3).

3.1.12. Communication

It can take months for a host to achieve first contact with their tulpa, 3/7 of the guides assert that early communication is usually a series of "alien" emotions and feelings which were distinctly not the host's, or head pressure like painless headaches. Verbal communication ("vocality") can be encouraged by assigning a voice to the tulpa in the beginning of the creation process, or by parroting (Sec. 3.1.7), the first vocal response may be in the hosts' own voice. Many guides expound the benefits of assigning an "essence" to the tulpa for communication, this entails conjuring up a particular feeling and asking the tulpa to "broadcast" that feeling along with their thoughts to help differentiate them from the host's own thoughts. "Mind-voice" is the term used to describe the internal dialogue between a host and tulpa, though the host may communicate out loud if they wish. The tulpa's voice may be heard as an external auditory hallucination after the process of sound imposition (Sec. 3.1.8). One of the guides suggests practicing meditation to learn how to effectively

quiet mental chatter, a necessary skill in communicating with one's tulpa (Table 1). Tulpas may also wish to communicate to other people/tulpas, this is done by "proxying" a process in which information is relayed to the tulpa. Tulpas with a form can communicate through body language or gestures. Respondents indicated whether their tulpas were vocal and the methods of communication utilised by their tulpas (Supplementary Table 2).

Table 2
Ways Respondents Reportedly Experience Their Tulpas.

| Experience Type | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| "Mind-Voice"/Internal Dialogue | 96 | 95 |
| External Auditory Hallucinations | 22 | 21.8 |
| "Mind's-eye"/Internal Visual Hallucinations | 93 | 92.1 |
| External Visual Hallucinations | 25 | 24.8 |
| Somatic Hallucinations | 47 | 46.5 |
| Other | 13 | 12.9 |

Note: Percentages vary as many hosts have multiple tulpas.

3.1.13. Possession

When given ample practice tulpas are reported to be capable of controlling part, or all, of the host's body through a process called possession. Two guides give instructions on possession and assert that control must be given over by the host, but one guide provides anecdotal evidence of its occurrence during sleep and without the host's consent. There are two main methods of possession, both of which are symbolic. The first involves assigning a colour to oneself and another colour to one's tulpa, then imaging part, or all, of the body being filled with the host's colour. The body is drained of this colour, and the tulpa's colour poured into these areas symbolizing the tulpa gaining control of these areas. The second method entails imagining an item of clothing representing the area the tulpa will assume control of. The tulpa does the work in this method and tries to put on the symbolic item of clothing.

3.1.14. Switching

Tulpas can reportedly learn to switch places with their host, this is similar to possession only the host retreats into the recesses of their imagination (often in the "wonderland"), disconnected from their senses and must be given back control by their tulpa to reassume agency of the body. Two guides that give instructions on switching warn that long-term switching should not be used to escape from the reality of one's responsibilities. Survey respondents reported their tulpas' abilities (Table 3).

Table 3
Reported Abilities of Respondents' Tulpas.

| Reported Ability | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Talent/Skill Host Does Not Have | 31 | 30.7 |
| Knowledge Host Does Not Have | 25 | 24.8 |
| Enhanced Memory Recall | 36 | 35.6 |
| Parallel Processing | 35 | 34.7 |
| Increased Intuition | 46 | 45.5 |
| Can Alter Host's Sensations | 33 | 32.7 |
| Partial Possession of the Body | 57 | 56.4 |
| Full Possession of the Body | 43 | 42.6 |
| Switching | 28 | 27.7 |
| Other | 13 | 13 |

Note: Percentages vary as hosts could choose all appropriate responses.

3.1.15. Mindset

6/7 of the guides detailed beneficial perspectives one should adopt when beginning to force a tulpa. They described that it should be approached with a mature mindset, as it is a very lengthy process which will result in what many tulpamancers believe to be a sentient consciousness sharing one's mind. Some of the guides advise that one maintains a positive attitude and to: "... keep an open mind the entire time you are creating your tulpa, explore as much as you can, and most importantly have fun.". Belief is another trait which potential hosts must foster if they are to progress efficiently as: "Disbelief is one of the most detrimental things you can have in this process.". Scepticism hinders one's ability to reinforce the belief in their tulpa's independent consciousness. As one guide states; "Doubt is the cancer of tulpaforcing.", thus any disbelief needs to be challenged immediately, and evidence of the tulpa's sentience considered. Survey respondents highlighted their motivations for creating their tulpa (Table 4).

3.1.16. Individualized process

5/7 of the guides expound that they are not instructions to be followed word for word, rather merely make recommendations. Furthermore, they encourage experimentation: "Do what works for you and don't be afraid to experiment and try new things", and to use methods most suited to the individual: "Do whatever you are most comfortable with.". The process is highly subjective, creation times vary from person to person depending on the methods used, their ability to visualize, their imaginative capacity, and how much time they commit to their daily session. Patience, dedication and motivation are repeatedly encouraged as: "You get what you put into the process.". Survey respondents' length of tulpamancy practice ranged from 1 week to 48 years. Many respondents reported that their tulpamancy was unintentional/accidental (Supplementary Table 4).

Table 4
Respondents' Reported Motivation for Creating Their Tulpa.

| Reported Reason | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Curiosity | 71 | 70.3 |
| “For Science” | 33 | 32.7 |
| Companionship | 77 | 76.2 |
| Romance | 13 | 12.9 |
| Self-Improvement/Their Beneficial Effects | 54 | 53.5 |
| Loneliness | 50 | 49.5 |
| Boredom | 25 | 24.8 |
| Other | 19 | 18.8 |

Note: Respondents could choose multiple motivations for creating a tulpa.

3.1.17. Relationship

6/7 of the guides emphasize the companionship offered by tulpas, referring to them as lifelong friends which know the host more intimately than any person could as they reportedly “... access your memories and feelings”. The guides outline how tulpas should be loved and respected by their hosts, and how tulpas are innately predisposed to act accordingly. Tulpas and hosts reportedly act as supports for each other and tulpas care for their host in a positive way unless their host is malicious towards them. A host can create as many tulpas as they wish, with the second reportedly taking less time to create. One guide warns that it is unhealthy to live too much in one’s imagination and claims that: “... three can be a pretty nice number to have... without getting too excessive.” 5/7 of the guides exclaim that tulpamancy is a lifelong commitment for most hosts and a big responsibility as it is seen to be the creation of: “... another life”. One must be mature enough for the type of relationship that exists between a host and a tulpa, they will know everything about you, as such the guides warn that: “If you’re not ready for that kind of bond, tulpamancy is not for you.”. Respondents detailed how they came to create a tulpa and the number of tulpas they host (Supplementary Table 4).

3.1.18. Malice in Wonderland

Several guides warn about acting malevolently towards tulpas. 2/7 of the guides list the following reasons not to create a tulpa; (1) for sexual reasons; (2) specifically for their form; (3) to be used as a tool; (4) to quell boredom; (5) because it sounds cool; (6) in the form of an existing character as they may think they are that character; (7) of a dead person; (8) to treat like a doll; (9) to abuse; (10) to have temporarily; (11) to switch permanently. Furthermore, hosts are encouraged to allow deviation, as one guide explains: “... trying to control who she is won't make her happy or conformative.”. There is anecdotal evidence of negative experiences provided in some of the guides: “... a tulpa takes over the body, and the host is unable to regain control. Some of the stories entail a tulpa who hurts the host or is extremely mean to them or hates them. I personally don't believe any of these claims....”. Another guide explains how hosts are often sent to therapy if they tell their family about their tulpa, as another explains the practice is: “Seen as insanity by most.”. However, if necessary, a tulpa can be forgotten. Dissipation is the process of dissolving one’s tulpa wilfully or otherwise, by depriving it of attention. It can sometimes take more time and effort then creating a tulpa and is: “... a very tedious process. It involves completely depriving a

tulpa of attention, which is their lifeline.”. It is viewed as immoral by many tulpamancers, one guide exclaims that: “There is no excuse to dissipate your tulpa because you get bored or disinterested.”. Respondents’ experiences practicing tulpamancy were assessed by their rate of agreement with statements that expounded various effects of practicing tulpamancy (Supplementary Table 5).

3.2 Statistical analysis

Several Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were conducted to assess the normality of the distributions of the main measured variables. The total score for the Achievement facet of the PERMA-profile and the total scores for the SE and MAAS scales were found to exhibit normal distributions: $D(81) = .081$, $p > .05$; $D(93) = .073$, $p > .05$; $D(93) = .078$, $p > .05$, respectively. The mean scores for SR, SE, TM and the facets of the PERMA-Profiler were calculated using SPSS. The mean score for SR = 26.24. The mean score for SE = 29.47. The mean score for TM = 3.62. The mean scores for the facets of the PERMA-Profiler were Positive emotions (P) = 5.55; Engagement (E) = 7.00; Relationships (R) = 5.83; Meaning (M) = 5.67; Achievement (A) = 5.74; Negative emotions (N) = 4.46; Health (H) = 6.23; Loneliness (L) = 4.53; and Overall well-being (WB) = 5.98. From these results the PERMA-profile for the current population was produced (Supplementary Fig. 1). 57.4% reported practicing meditation as part of their tulpa forcing (Table 1). The group was thus divided into two groups; those who meditated as part of their tulpamancy, and those who did not. The median test found a statistically significant difference between the groups who practiced meditation and those who did not in self-reported SR: $X^2(1, N = 94) = 3.980$, $p < .05$. The mean scores illustrate that the meditation group scored higher on self-reported SR: $27.15 > 24.97$.

Table 5
Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) on all measures.

| Variable | Measure | α | Mean (SD) | N | Normative Mean (SD) | N |
|-------------------|----------------|----------|--------------|----|---------------------|--------|
| Self-regulation | SRS | .748 | 26.24 (4.95) | 94 | 28.98 (4.79) | 109 |
| Self-efficacy | GSES | .860 | 29.47 (5.55) | 93 | 29.46 (5.33) | 17,533 |
| Trait mindfulness | MAAS | .855 | 3.62 (0.93) | 94 | 3.97 (0.64) | 74 |
| Well-being | PERMA-Profile: | .832 | | | | |
| | P | | 5.55 (2.16) | 90 | 6.81 (1.95) | 23692 |
| | E | | 7.00 (1.51) | 92 | 7.38 (1.67) | |
| | R | | 5.83 (2.35) | 92 | 6.98 (2.14) | |
| | M | | 5.67 (2.55) | 90 | 7.16 (2.16) | |
| | A | | 5.74 (1.94) | 91 | 7.39 (1.74) | |
| | H | | 6.23 (2.00) | 90 | 6.96 (2.20) | |
| | WB | | 5.98 (1.62) | 89 | 7.14 (1.64) | |
| | L | | 4.53 (3.12) | 92 | 4.13 (3.04) | |
| | N | | 4.46 (1.77) | 87 | 4.51 (2.08) | |

Note: For normative means see Section 4.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the tulpamancy practice, its methods and its practitioners. The domains of SR, SE, TM, and WB were measured in people who practice tulpamancy to investigate whether these domains are impacted by the tulpamancy practice in this growing on-line community. The impact of meditation was assessed to determine if it was a likely confound as most participants ($n = 58$) reported practicing meditation as part of their tulpamancy. The TA highlighted the methods used by hosts to create their tulpas, these methods primarily entail the habituation of top-down hallucinations through rigorous repetition of visualization exercises, paralleled by the establishment and reinforcement of a firm belief in the sentience and distinct consciousness possessed by one's tulpa. The prevalent definition of tulpas as "lifelong friends" which support and love their hosts, was reaffirmed by the survey findings on hosts' reasons for instigating their tulpamancy practice (Table 4) as 76.2% reportedly created their tulpa for companionship, and a further 49.5% due to loneliness. The extreme side of this theme is reflected in the 12.9% who reportedly created their tulpa for romantic pursuits, with 2.02% reporting being in a relationship with their tulpa.

Many of the hosts were reportedly in the advanced stages of tulpamancy, having sufficiently grasped the most difficult techniques which culminate in their tulpa being perceived externally in reality in all sensory modalities (Table 2). This finding is not surprising as 50.5% reported practicing imposition, i.e., imposing their tulpa onto the external environment in all sensory domains (Table 1). Furthermore, 42.6% reported their tulpas were capable of full body possession, with a further 27.7% capable of switching (Table 3), which is cited in the guides as the most difficult skill to master. A comparison can be drawn between these voluntary processes and the hallucinatory multimodal experiences which characterize heautoscopy; a phenomenon which entails an individual perceiving a reduplication of their body in extrapersonal space. However, the duplicate illusory body can be experienced as the centre of the individual's self, they may even alternate between an embodied, and disembodied, self-localization (Furlanetto, Bertone & Becchio, 2016). This is akin to the phenomenological descriptions afforded to the possession and switching processes of tulpamancers and further research on tulpamancy may shed more light on the mechanisms of such hallucinations.

Respondents' SR as measured by the SRS (Schwarzer, Diehl & Schmitz, 1999) was approximately average (Table 5). Their score was surprising considering the daily meditative concentration that successful tulpamancy requires, as meditation interventions have been shown to increase SR (e.g., Shapiro, 1992). Diehl, Semegon and Schwarzer (2006) assessed SR in young adults ($N = 109$) with a mean age of 22.06 years, and found they exhibited a mean score of 28.98 ($SD = 4.79$), slightly higher than the current population. Perhaps tulpas distract their hosts from other stimuli, depleting their hosts' attentional resources similar to mind-wandering, which has been illustrated to have a negative effect on task-performance (Randal, Oswald & Beier, 2014).

Respondents' exhibited an average SE score as measured by the GSES (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Table 5). Luszczynska, Scholz and Schwarzer (2005) conducted several measures of SE using the same measure in various groups and found that the 6 tests exhibited mean scores between 28.61 and 32.11. Similarly, data from respondents of various demographics worldwide ($N=17,553$), was downloaded from <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/health/selfscal.htm>, the normative population exhibited a mean score of 29.46 ($SD = 5.33$). Tulpamancers, thus scored approximately average in their self-reported capacity to achieve specific goals based on their own abilities and skills.

TM as measured by the MAAS scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) was approximately average when compared to a control group from Brown & Ryan (2003), who found that 74 participants (55% female) with an age range of 18 to 62 years ($M = 37.6$) exhibited a mean score of 3.97 ($SD = 0.64$; Table 5). However, a group of practicing Zen meditators exhibited a significantly higher score than the current cohort ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.66$). This is surprising given the high number of self-reported meditators (57.4%). The tulpamancers scored most equivocally to a population of undergraduate psychology students ($N=60$) from the same Brown and Ryan (2003) study, who possessed a mean age of 19 years and exhibited an average score $M = 3.78$ over two times of testing.

Respondents scored average or above on all facets of WB as measured by the PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kerns, 2016) (Table 5; Supplementary Fig. 1). Respondents scored highest on the engagement dimension ($M = 7.16$) and slightly above average on overall WB ($M = 6.01$) and physical health ($M = 6.26$). The group also scored above average on negative affect ($M = 4.40$) and loneliness ($M = 4.20$) with lower scores more indicative of more desirable outcomes with these measures. The scores on the WB facets are presented alongside Butler and Kern's (2016) normative scores ($N = 23,692$) for comparison (Table 5). Relationships play a key role in positive emotions (Tay & Diener, 2011), it may be that the social interaction and friendly support offered by tulpas is responsible for the above average scores on the relationship and loneliness items of the sample. Tulpas may play a crucial part in these scores as companionship and loneliness were among the most common reasons for practicing tulpamancy (Table 4). The positive affect experienced by the hosts could potentially increase their interest in social activities (Whelan & Zelenski, 2012) and increase the amount of social interaction they engage in, as this is an area in which they reportedly experience deficits in (Veissière, 2015).

The positive effects of tulpamancy were expounded by the creation guides, and the survey sample in this study. These findings are in line with previous studies (Isler, 2017; Veissière, 2015). The study's respondents report many positive effects of practicing tulpamancy. 81.2% reported that the practice had a positive impact on them, 64.4% reported that the positive effects of tulpamancy outweigh the negative effects, and 95% claimed that they are glad to have practiced tulpamancy. Conversely, 2% of the sample agreed with the statement that tulpamancy practice had impacted them negatively, and 1% claimed that they regret instigating the practice (Supplementary Table 5). Participants in Isler's (2017) study reported their tulpas aiding in their ability to cope with the symptoms of several neurodevelopmental and mental health disorders. This claim finds further grounds in this study, as the guides highlight tulpas' ability to alleviate pain and negative feelings, including depression (Sec. 3.1.11). 32.7% of the hosts in the current study reported their tulpas' ability to directly alter their physical sensations (Table 3) and several respondents reported that their tulpas help them to manage negative affect, with one host claiming that their tulpa prevented their attempted suicide (Supplementary Table 6).

Meditation was a potential confound as meditation-based interventions have been shown to improve SR (e.g., Shapiro, 1992) and show promising effects in treating ADHD (e.g., Zylowska et al., 2008), anxiety disorders (e.g., Miller, Fletcher & Kabat-Zinn, 1995), and recurrent depression (e.g., Ma & Teasdale, 2004). The population was divided into two groups; those that were reportedly meditators, and those that were not. Median tests were conducted to investigate whether the meditators exhibited statistically significant differences on the variables. SR was the only variable in which meditators scored significantly higher. Furthermore, the definition of tulpamancy provided in the guides as being a deliberate act to create a tulpa was challenged by this study. Many respondents reported at least one of their tulpas being created accidentally or otherwise unintentionally (Supplementary Table 4).

The present study has served to construct a more complete profile of tulpamancers and the effects of tulpamancy practice on the domains of SR, SE, WB, and TM. Future research should investigate further the influence of the practice on aspects of everyday

function and the potential of specific aspects of the tulpamancy practice, such as visualization and meditation, to promote existing interventions.

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