"It's Not Voluntourism": Unpacking Young People's Narrative Claims to Authenticity and Differentiation in the International Volunteer Experience
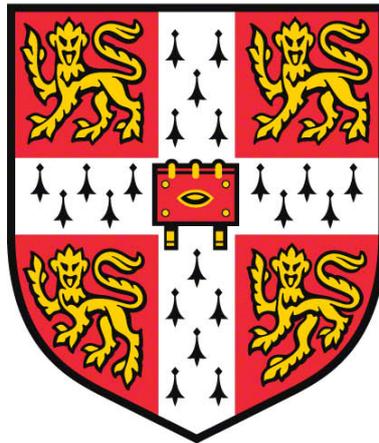
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Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This qualitative research study explores how a group of 27 British undergraduate students make meaning of their experiences as they prepare for, participate in, and reflect upon a short-term international volunteer excursion in Kenya. Through a thematic analysis of verbal and visual text (semi-structured interviews, field notes and photographic content posted to Facebook), I seek to understand the narrative claims young people come to make about this unique life episode.

In particular, I examine how study participants take-up and employ notions of 'authenticity' within their personal travel narratives, and on what bases they claim to have encountered the 'real Kenya.' Here, I document the specific criteria participants drew upon to assert the value and legitimacy of their experience, including the remoteness of their destination, their engagement in 'everyday' Kenyan life, and their intimate interactions with local people.

Next, I explore participants' attempts to differentiate themselves from 'other' volunteers - a grouping they referred to broadly (and derogatorily) as 'voluntourists.' Here, I detail the extent to which the critiques associated with international volunteering have become adopted into mainstream discourse, thereby helping to shape which identities (and particular labels) young travellers embrace and contest.

Finally, I analyse the ways participants navigate difficult representational choices when communicating their international volunteer experiences to a public audience via social media. Revealing these practices is key to understanding young people's impression management strategies and the types of 'performances' in which they may be invested.

Overall, this thesis is positioned as a sociological inquiry, theoretically informed by the dramaturgical perspective of Erving Goffman and the field of whiteness studies. I further situate findings within the context of late or liquid modernity.

1.2 Introducing Travel Narratives

This thesis arose out of a broad interest in travel narratives, and the important role that stories play in attesting to an individual's time overseas. Travel experiences provide a rich study setting because they constitute a unique life episode (outside of one's ordinary course) where the narrative landscape may be quite dissimilar from

travellers' home contexts. The anecdotes generated from these encounters may be returned to and repeated over time - perhaps even incorporated as an integral part of one's identity. In justifying this research focus then, I operate under twin assumptions: that stories say something about the individuals who produce them, but also that stories speak meaningfully to wider cultural themes.

I begin with a premise drawn from narrative scholarship that "we know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 7). Extending this principle into the specific context of travel, I follow Sin's (2009) argument that: "like all other choices an individual makes, the choice of where to travel to, how to travel, and what activities to engage in while travelling are all parts of the narrative about one's identity" (p. 491). Presumably then, undertaking an international volunteer excursion enables an individual to think of themselves as a particular sort of person and provides a venue for "expressing a story about who he or she is or wants to be" (Elsrud, 2001, p. 599).

In my early readings, I was particularly influenced by Noy's (2004) suggestion that the chronicles travellers carry home and share with an audience can be understood as 'narrative capital.' Noy (2004) conducted interviews among 40 Israeli backpackers within five months of their return from South America and Asia and found a striking resemblance across the accounts: backpackers testified to having undergone a profound personal transformation as a result of their experiences. Furthermore, participants described their newfound self in markedly positive terms - they were "wiser, more knowledgeable, more socially and emotionally apt" than when they had embarked on the journey (p. 84). This work alerted me to the possibility that young people might *use* stories of international volunteering to develop and sustain a narrative, and to showcase a particular self to others. Thus, in this research project, I endeavour to illuminate the performative task of narrative, including what types of identities young people may seek to secure and convey through their telling.

Second, because stories of travel are shared with others, elements of the storied experience may be transmitted to would-be travellers through a passing of the narrative torch. As such, thematic overlap between accounts can be expected because "previous encounters and tales heard, books read, pictures seen, have made them familiar" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 39). For Noy (2004), the normative patterns revealed across accounts - which are strengthened and reinforced by peers, the tourism industry and broader societal narratives - constitute a 'powerful tourist discourse.' In other

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words, individuals do not make meaning of life episodes in social and historical abstraction (from nowhere), and it is for this reason that travel narratives have resonance beyond the particular accounts presented.

1.3 Introducing International Volunteering

A commonly cited definition of volunteer tourism is offered by Wearing (2001) as "holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (p. 1). McGehee and Santos (2005) define volunteer tourism similarly as "utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need" (p. 760).

The rapid growth of the international volunteer industry was documented by Tourism Research and Marketing (2008) which surveyed over 300 sending organisations and projected an annual participation rate of 1.6 million people. A subsequent report has not been published, however, McGehee (2014) reviewed the last three decades of volunteer tourism literature and estimated a staggering increase in these figures, possibly reaching ten million individuals per year. Indeed, within the contemporary western democratic context, international volunteer experiences enjoy such popularity that they have been envisioned as a 'rite of passage' (Butcher & Smith, 2015; Crossley, 2013; Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011). In addition, these culturally-situated travel practices typically take place at the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood, and thus, may "take on extra significance for young travellers due to the socially constructed accent placed on this time of life as one of experimentation, growth and the trying on of adult identities" (Crossley, 2013, p. 170). Giddens (1991) refers to such significant junctions as 'fateful moments.'

A key premise that undergirds this thesis is that international volunteering (or the related terms 'volunteer tourism' or 'voluntourism') is a composite of work and leisure activity. The importance of this combination is present in literature that documents western-situated youth's motivations to volunteer overseas. Cremin (2007) examined promotional material specifically marketing Gap Year experiences (volunteering undertaken during a 'year out' from formal education) and divided the various catalysts into three 'injunctions' which fulfil one's respective desires to be ethical, to be enterprising, and to enjoy. The ethical injunction inclines young people to partake in travel experiences that emphasise their virtuousness, altruism and social responsibility. The enterprising injunction refers to the blurring of work and leisure

activities, such that travel experiences become preoccupied with the perceived need for productivity and gathering of social capital (including credentials for one's CV). Finally, the injunction to enjoy positions travel as a way to have fun and live life to the fullest. Wearing (2001) offers a more expansive list of incentives, in part related to the structure of the programme and its convenience (that the volunteer project is offered at the right time and in the right place), in part related to the individual's altruistic impulse, and in part related to the self-interested longing for travel and adventure, cultural exchange, personal growth and professional development.

While both work and leisure activities are expected to feature within the international volunteer experience, the emphasis placed on either element may be weighted differently depending on the particular project attended. Daldeniz and Hampton (2011) undertook two fieldwork case studies among European and North American long-term volunteers in Nicaragua and Malaysia and categorised the 16 individuals who visited Nicaragua as VOLUNtourists and the 19 individuals who visited Malaysia as volunTOURISTS. Here, the capitalisation within each term reveals the prioritised component: the VOLUNtourists were most concerned with making a positive impact within the host community, while the volunTOURISTS awarded precedence to the holiday aspects of the excursion; their 'helping' was largely incidental. Daldeniz and Hampton's (2011) delineation aptly foreshadows my next point: that international volunteer programmes vary widely in their quality and methods of implementation, and that by consequence, there is considerable opportunity for scholarship devoted to the task of differentiating between them.

Sherraden, Stringham, Sow and McBride (2006) distinguish between two types of international volunteering: service that promotes international understanding and service that provides development aid and humanitarian relief. In volunteer projects geared toward international understanding, the goal is to develop interpersonal relationships across contexts and deepen volunteers' awareness of global social issues. These excursions are primarily targeted toward youth, and volunteers are recruited based on their enthusiasm and desire to 'make a difference.' In contrast, development and relief programmes are arranged with a pre-determined set of objectives (for example, natural disaster or post-war recovery) and volunteers who possess particular knowledge sets and expertise are sought in accordance with project needs. These programmes tend to enlist experienced adults and retired professionals. Sherraden et al. (2006) further categorise projects based on their

structure (group or individual placements), degree of 'internationality' (whether the service relationship is unilateral, bilateral, multilateral, or transnational), and duration (with short-term placements lasting upwards of three months, medium-term placements lasting three to six months, and long-term placements lasting six months or more). The international volunteer excursion referred to in this thesis would be designated 'service that promotes international understanding' and be classified as short-term, unilateral (one-way or non-reciprocal), and group-based.

Callanan and Thomas' (2005) typology distinguishes between shallow, intermediate and deep volunteer tourists - where shallow volunteer tourists' primary motivation is furnishing the self (their personal growth and CV enhancement) while deep volunteer tourists' prerogative is the service-recipient (making a direct and sustained contribution to the host community). In this spectrum, the authors further differentiate between international volunteer programmes based on the importance placed on the host country destination (a high priority for shallow, a low priority for deep), the duration of the excursion (four weeks or less for shallow, six months or more for deep), the skills or qualifications required for participation (minimal or none for shallow, professional or technical expertise for deep), the extent of involvement in project work (passively engaged for shallow, actively engaged for deep) and the level of contribution made to the host community (minimal for shallow, substantial for deep). Participants in this study would likely be classified as intermediate volunteer tourists, a middling position on all of these measures.

Rather than offer a typology, some scholars describe the components underlying an idealised version of international volunteer practice. For Devereaux (2008), projects must meet six criteria to be characterised as 'effective long-term volunteering for development': that participants are compelled by humanitarian motivation, make a long-term commitment and live and work under local conditions, and that the project work they engage in involves reciprocal benefit, local accountability and strategies for tackling the root (instead of the symptoms) of social inequities. Hartman and Kiely (2014) advocate for a 'global service-learning' model which they define as "a community-driven service experience that employs structured, critically reflective practice to better understand common human dignity; self; culture; positionality; socio-economic, political, and environmental issues; power relations; and social responsibility, all in global contexts" (p. 60). Particularly in this latter conception, a deliberate educational strategy is employed with a strong

emphasis on intellectual preparation and reflexivity. The project that forms the basis for this thesis was facilitated by a UK-based charitable organisation rather than a higher education institution. While participants were invited to pre-departure training and post-excursion debrief sessions, the programme was not connected to formal curriculum or offered for course credit.

Whatever the preferred inflection, the volunteer industry has expanded to accommodate demand for diverse versions of 'alternative' or 'ethical' travel. It is, according to Ingram (2011), a 'crowded market place' which has forced operators (be they a private company, charitable organisation or higher education institution) into an unrelenting pursuit for exclusive or exotic offerings as a means of maintaining competitive advantage. This accent on the individual, privatised and market-driven aspects of volunteer travel are a key concern for scholars who frame their critiques through the lens of neoliberalism, including Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011), Conran (2011), Mostafanezhad (2014), Simpson (2005) and Vrasti (2013).

What becomes evident from this section is that international volunteering falls under an umbrella of related activities, including 'volunteer tourism' and 'global service-learning.' In this report, I have chosen to proceed with the term 'international volunteering' to recognise study participants' strong aversion to being labeled 'voluntourists' (this finding will be explored at length in Chapter 8). While the stamp of 'international volunteer' is by no means value-neutral, this wording seemed less burdened by negative connotation, and better approximated how participants themselves might self-identity (however, even 'international volunteer' was contested by some).

1.4 Personal Context

I participated in my first international volunteer excursion during the summer holiday following my freshman year as an undergraduate student. At the time, I had not travelled outside of Canada (save for a few family road trips dipping into the Northeastern United States), and was pining to have an 'authentic' experience in an 'exotic' locale. A sojourn in rural Costa Rica, I assumed, would imbue me with a sense of worldliness while satisfying my desire to direct my travels toward some greater good. I recall being somewhat enchanted with the notion that I could 'make a difference' during this four week interlude from my studies. The volunteer organisation I travelled with and the previous volunteers I spoke to reinforced these

notions, adding that I could expect to be profoundly changed by the experience (not to mention that such ostensibly socially responsible activity would enhance my CV).

Indeed, I have incorporated my memories of this excursion into my personal biography, and now 12 years hence, I still find myself sporadically recounting sensational tales of our group's harrowing truck journeys (weaving around tight corners, with no guardrails to keep us from hurling down the cliff face) or the time I awoke to discover a tarantula clinging to the ceiling of my bedroom (which I caught and ushered outside using a broom and a children's picture book). I also recall with fondness the everyday moments spent with my host family, like gathering to watch an instalment of the popular telenovela 'Rebelde' or sitting down to share a meal of rice, beans and fried plantains. More critically though, I also continued to interrogate the presumed 'value' we provided the community (painting and re-painting various built structures) as well as the nature of my own motivation to volunteer and the identity claims I had sought to secure through my participation.

Unresolved, I continued to involve myself in short-term volunteer excursions during subsequent term breaks, travelling to Peru and the Dominican Republic. In addition, prior to pursuing graduate study, I directed a global education programme at an independent secondary school in Toronto, Canada. In this capacity, I organised and facilitated a number of thematic group projects, including one particularly influential three week excursion in South Africa.

This personal history renders me familiar to the international volunteer experience. Indeed, my own recollections are fundamentally similar to the accounts participants shared with me during this study, and thus, I include myself in any critique that I offer. Further, in travelling alongside the group to conduct this research, I too brought home a 'travel narrative' from Kenya, which I shared with friends and family and presented on Facebook. In this report then, I necessarily turn the lens on myself occasionally, adopting what Frosh and Baraitser (2008) call a position of 'critical sympathy.'

The next three chapters constitute the literature review portion of this thesis. Chapter 2 lays out the terrain of international volunteering and proceeds in three parts: contextualising international volunteering, capitalising on international volunteering and critiquing international volunteering. Chapter 3 attends more specifically to 'authenticity' as a central thematic lens within tourism research, while Chapter 4

discusses the largely unchartered scholarship on the visual discourses adopted and expressed by western-situated international volunteers.

Chapter 2: Situating International Volunteering

This literature review takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on scholarship from the fields of education, sociology and tourism studies. Further, I utilise theoretical and empirical literature related to youth travel, including international volunteering, global service-learning, Gap Year, independent backpacking, study abroad and in-service teaching assignments. In doing so, my work accepts and values that "the same phenomenon can be approached and bombarded with impressions and ideas from a variety of different directions each shedding some light on what is actually going on" (Jacbosen, 2010, p. 19).

It is necessary to make a note on terminology before proceeding. International volunteering most commonly involves the one-way movement of relatively-affluent individuals to relatively-marginalised communities. As such, the literature on this topic includes a multitude of designations including 'First' and 'Third World,' 'developing' and 'developed,' 'western' and 'non-western,' and 'Global North' and 'Global South' - all of which make imprecise delineations between a collection of countries, and imply a hierarchy of primacy and superiority. There is simply no 'good' naming convention for expressing dualities based on unequal social relations. I recognise here that considerable difference exists between and within countries with respect to their "political ideologies, social structures, economic performance, cultural backgrounds and historical experiences" (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 308). Thus, where I employ such dualities, I do so as a rhetorical device - a 'strategic essentialism' - to illustrate the ongoing power dynamics and divisions upon which the international volunteer experience is based (Tomlinson, 2003).

2.1 Contextualising International Volunteering

As outlined in the previous chapter, international volunteering is not a single entity and encompasses a wide range of divergent approaches. As such, this travel practice has no straightforward lineage or ancestral heritage. Thus, in the following section, I trace the development of international volunteering through three lenses: as an elite educational pursuit (Angod, 2015), as a commercial industry (Simpson, 2004), and as evidence of shifting political discourse (Butcher, 2003; Butcher & Smith, 2015).

Regardless of the lens employed, tourism scholars typically acknowledge 'The Grand Tour' as a central antecedent of modern youth travel in the British context. Undertaken by aristocratic young men during the 17th and 18th centuries, this circuit of

Western Europe was an opportunity for would-be-rulers to spend time cultivating their intellectual, cultural and political literacy (Adler, 1989; Cohen, 2001; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Towner, 1985). This custom served as a maturation exercise, and was seen as a crucial step toward assuming an adult identity (Lennon & Foley, 2000).

Angod (2015) begins with 'The Grand Tour' to describe a chronological shift in emphasis from *seeing* the world to *doing good* within the world. The author is interested in international volunteering from an educational perspective, tracing how the practice became institutionalised within elite Canadian secondary schools. Drawing on document analysis of archival material, Angod (2015) shows how elite schools' replications of the 'The Grand Tour' gave way to war guest and international exchange programmes in the mid-twentieth century, which established opportunities for their students to host European and Commonwealth youth of similar social standing. Modern-day Gap Year and volunteer abroad programmes represent another point of departure, where travel for educational purposes became embroiled with taking action - becoming a humanitarian, assisting disadvantaged others into modernity or improving the plight of the Third World.

Simpson (2004) introduces the phenomenon of the Gap Year as inseparable from the legacies of missionary work and colonial conquest. The author draws its origin from 19th century British explorers in Africa - David Livingstone in particular - to show how travel was used to claim authority over knowledge production and to naturalise binaries between western (civilised) and foreign (uncivilised) others. Simpson's (2004) interest is in how the 'colonial gaze' is continually mobilised as a marketing strategy within the contemporary volunteer industry, where the opportunity for youth to consume Third World space and be positioned as the 'purveyors of modernity' are powerful commodities and employed as selling points within advertising imagery.

Referring to trends within the tourism industry more broadly, Butcher (2003) charts the progressive 'moralisation' of individual travel practice. Here, the author contends that 'mass' or 'package' tourists have developed an unenviable reputation, increasingly characterised by their sameness, crudeness and destructiveness. This pejorative portrayal is similarly summarised by Vrasti (2013) as "self-absorbed, hedonistic masses, with no understanding of local culture, no consideration for natural surroundings and no individuality beyond that which is sold to them through advertising and mass consumption" (p. 6). Arising in opposition, the 'New Moral

Tourists' actively seek-out encounters with difference, display cultural sophistication and sensitivity, and aim to be constructive or profitable to the host community (for example, by purchasing locally-produced crafts rather than mass-produced souvenirs). Butcher's (2003) scholarship serves to critique the ethical claims made under the auspices of the 'moralisation of tourism,' arguing further that the growing fixation on individual morality, etiquette and lifestyle choices only distracts from pernicious structural inequalities. This movement has nevertheless laid groundwork for the emergence of travel alternatives such as ecotourism, community tourism, sustainable tourism, and the like.

In more recent work, Butcher and Smith (2015) focus on the niche of international volunteering specifically, suggesting its arrival is inherently connected with the values of the broader political landscape. The authors begin by profiling two state-sponsored volunteer programmes which emerged after the Second World War, the Voluntary Service Overseas in the UK (founded in 1958) and the Peace Corps in the United States (founded in 1961). These initiatives were focused on protecting national interests (including reducing communist influence) and establishing good relations overseas, an agenda coupled with the mission to bring about large-scale economic and political development within the host countries served. Contemporary volunteering, they argue, conversely revolves around personal narrative and 'making a difference' through individual lifestyle and consumption patterns - with little reference to development beyond community wellbeing.

2.2 Capitalising on International Volunteering

'Being abroad' has long been considered a source of prestige, a strategic venture used to realise personal ambitions. Indeed, completing 'The Grand Tour' was once an exercise in refinement - of language, of taste, of manners - an activity that 'perfected' and 'completed' the English gentleman (Cohen, 2001). Ultimately, this experience was redeemed upon return, having provided evidence of one's "worldliness and a culture that would mark out their right to rule" (Butcher, 2003, p. 34). Still today, youth travel is often considered "an important informal qualification, with the number and range of stamps in a passport acting, so to speak, as a professional certificate; a record of achievement and experience" (Mowforth & Munt, 2009, p. 132).

In this section, I wish to highlight participation in an international volunteer excursion as a form of cultural capital, borrowing Bourdieu's (1977) definition as

"instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth worthy of being sought and possessed" (p. 488). Desforges (1998) and Munt (1994) have similarly drawn upon Bourdieu's (1984) classic text *Distinction* to make the point that travel is an important mechanism for distinguishing oneself from others. Desforges (1998) explored how 15 independent and group travellers framed their experiences in Peru, and suggests that individuals come to accrue cultural capital through the process of 'collecting places.' Here, notches are marked by travelling to unconventional destinations, notably those which are difficult to access financially or logistically. 'Collecting places' also allows young people to declare themselves as part of the 'club' of travellers, and ultimately, to "define themselves as middle class, gaining entry to the privileges of work, housing and lifestyle that go with that class status" (p. 177). For Munt (1994), travel is part of a 'frenetic struggle' used by the middle class to mark discernment through their consumption practices. Drawing on analysis of 57 travel brochures advertising Third World destinations, the author suggests that the emergence of specialised styles of alternative travel is related to individuals' need to convey exclusivity and "an aura of respectability" not retained by mass tourism (p. 106). In this case, travellers' superior taste is measured by 'ethical yardsticks' (Munt, 1994).

Highlighting the notion of cultural capital helps to contextualise why international volunteering has become a prominent fixture within higher education institutions, under the assumption that offering such international exposure "may help universities to form not just good future employees, but citizens of character" (O'Shea, 2011, p. 576). In Brooks and Waters' (2014) discussion of the internationalisation of British universities, the authors found that overseas excursion offerings were foregrounded on the homepages, school newsletters, and Twitter feeds of sampled schools, concluding that "mobility is deemed to be an important attribute of the middle-class subject, and often constitutes a key component of how elite schools present themselves to others" (p. 13). Similarly, Allan and Charles (2014) draw on two qualitative studies conducted in elite independent schools for girls in Australia and the United Kingdom to suggest that mobility is normalised in the construction of middle-class femininity, where "movement outside national boundaries [is constructed] as unremarkable and even expected" (p. 343). Finally, in Simpson's (2005) discourse analysis of institutional endorsements made in favour of the Gap Year, the expectation that travelling abroad is valuable in the process of youth becoming 'professional' appeared so widely accepted that: "a person risks

cultural impoverishment if going to university (and into other arenas) without the capital of Third World travel" (p. 451). In tracing these expressions of support though, Simpson (2005) adds that it was difficult to decipher upon what evidence or research such statements were founded.

Indeed, a broad discourse of personal growth and self-betterment is ubiquitous in literature on international volunteering. To give a flavour of the commonly reported benefits, I offer examples from longitudinal and large-scale datasets. Kiely (2004) conducted a longitudinal case study over a seven-year period to investigate perspective change among 22 American volunteers who had participated in an international service-learning program in Nicaragua. Through on-site participant observation, document analysis and semi-structured interviews, the author found that all participants experienced 'profound' changes in at least one of six dimensions of understanding, including intellectual (contemplating the nature of social problems), moral (feeling a sense of solidarity with marginalised others), political (desire to pursue social justice work), cultural (questioning western values of consumerism and individualism), personal (evaluating one's lifestyle choices and daily habits) and spiritual (searching for harmony and balance). Importantly though, participants struggled in their attempts to convert this newfound awareness into meaningful action upon their return, and described a hesitancy to share critical views with friends and family for fear of being chastised for holding 'radical views'. Frequently, these students felt compelled to conform to normative discourses - what Kiely (2004) describes as the 'Chameleon Complex.'

Lough, McBride and Sherraden (2012) reviewed more than 65 empirical studies to collate the outcomes typically reported by returned volunteers. This research synopsis emphasised increases in participants' internationally related life plans (committing to language learning or working with immigrants and refugees), civic engagement (participating in activism or community engagement efforts), establishing international contacts (building social capital) and intercultural competence (developing open-mindedness and respect toward different cultural practices). From these initial findings, the authors developed the International Volunteer Impacts Survey (IVIS), a 48-item questionnaire then administered to 983 American international volunteers. Comparing results to a group of non-volunteers, the authors found that returned volunteers scored significantly higher on most subscales, with the exception of open-mindedness, life plans and community

engagement (a finding inconsistent with the expectation that *all* subscales would be rated higher by returned volunteers).

In a later publication, Lough, Sherraden and McBride (2014) conducted a three-year longitudinal study to assess 464 returned international volunteers' development and utilisation of 'international social capital' - defined as the "enduring networks of engagement and organisational ties to people living in different countries" (p. 332). The authors found that volunteers capitalised on their connections with host community members to improve foreign language skills, to coordinate subsequent excursions, to secure additional opportunities to work abroad, to develop business networks and to enhance advocacy efforts in the Global North. As a caveat, the strength and durability of these connections was predicted by the length of the volunteer project; where short-term placements (of a few months or less) were insufficient for cementing the kinds of relationships that could be harnessed for future gain.

In the study highlighted above 'international social capital' is supposedly extracted from interaction with an ethnic other. This notion of 'others' as valuable resources is further explored in the field of education by Reay, Hollingworth, Williams, Crozier, Jamieson, James and Beedell (2007), who interviewed 63 London-based families about their reasons for choosing multi-ethnic, inner city comprehensive schools for their children. Interpreting findings through the work of whiteness scholar Hage (1998), parents articulated their desire for young family members to accrue an 'alternative' white middle-class identity (progressive and cosmopolitan) through exposure to 'productive diversity,' encounters which might offer 'ethnic surplus value'. Importantly, only those who displayed an 'aspirational habitus' were considered 'acceptable others.' In other words, "the multi-ethnic other needs to share in normative white middle-class values in order to be of value" (p. 1049). By contrast, 'unacceptable others' - the white and black working class - were perceived to offer less utility. In sum, this research alerts us to the uneven hierarchies of 'valuing' - individuals who embody 'difference' (which is supposedly desirable) are nevertheless accorded differential worth.

2.2.1 Pursuing Differentiation

According to Adler (1989), particular travel styles garner prestige and desirability when they are dissociated "from earlier or adjacent practices" (p. 1374). The author offers an historical example: medieval pilgrims positioned themselves

against travellers who ventured out of mere 'curiosity,' which was thought to be a frivolous indulgence. In the present research context too, for international volunteering to act as a marker of distinction, volunteers must differentiate themselves from other types of travellers. Here, I rely on Rey-Von Allmen's (2013) definition of differentiation as "an act or a process which tends to create, to make evident, to amplify differences and to constitute subsystems in a system which was previously undivided" (p. 48-49).

The moniker of 'tourist' is commonly understood as "a derisive label" worthy of ridicule (MacCannell, 1973, p. 592). It is no surprise, then, that previous studies have documented the ways in which travellers use the construct of 'tourist' to interpret their experiences but reject this descriptor for themselves. For example, Prins and Webster (2010) describe the prevalent 'anti-tourist stance' adopted by 11 American undergraduates enrolled in a two-semester service-learning course in Belize. As revealed through participant observation, reflection exercises and interviews, participants employed three discursive strategies to set themselves apart from tourists. First, they underlined their unselfish intentions - their genuine desire to contribute to and learn from the host community. Second, they highlighted their professional demeanour - their avoidance of the inappropriate or boorish behaviour they associated with 'rude Americans.' Finally, they appealed to their treatment by host community members - interactions which made them feel as though they belonged and had earned credibility. Overall, the authors treat participants' oppositional references to tourists as a 'rhetorical apparatus': "a conceptual prism through which students make sense of their identities and [volunteer] experiences" (p. 10).

In Gray and Campbell's (2007) case study of a sea turtle conservation project in Costa Rica, the authors draw on in-depth interviews with 36 stakeholders (including volunteers, host families and sending organisation staff) to interrogate participants' perception of ecotourism as a "special kind of tourism" (p. 472). With only one exception, all study participants stressed the dissimilarities between volunteers and tourists on four bases: their perceived contribution to conservation efforts, their sense of altruism and caring, their desire to learn from the host community, and their extensive interaction with local people. In addition, some volunteers touted the longer duration of their excursion and reiterated that they didn't need to "stay in a nice place" (indeed, host community members complained that

volunteers typically spent less money than tourists, and thus, provided fewer economic benefits) (p. 472). Overall, the authors critique participants' differentiations as internally referential - centred on *their own* attributes and objectives.

In Uriely, Yonay and Simchai's (2002) analysis of 38 in-depth interviews with Israeli backpackers who had visited South and East Asia, Latin America and Africa, many participants downplayed the components of their travels which might be perceived as violating 'backpacking ideology.' Notably, almost all underscored their active avoidance of 'touristy' destinations. Incongruously, participants later admitted to visiting the precise attractions and events they earlier abjured, including the Taj Mahal in India, the Grand Palace in Thailand and Carnival in Brazil. Perhaps by way of compensation, participants recalled the time spent at these sites as insignificant or circumstantial, and instead, "exalted their visits to 'non-touristy' villages, markets, and countryside sites as the pinnacle of their trip" (p. 534). Ultimately, the authors question whether backpacking is a distinct category of tourism.

Finally, Simpson (2004) conducted interviews and participant observation among 28 young people undertaking a Gap Year in Peru, and found that participants were hyperconscious of the differential value ascribed to the 'major categories' of traveller, tourist and volunteer. In addition, participants invented their own sub-categorisation - the 'ethno yah' - a mildly derogatory term used to describe Gap Year travellers from elite British schools who display "pseudo 'ethnic' pretensions": they "dress like they have picked up one piece of clothing from every stop" and "come back claiming to have seen it all" (p. 180-181). Overall, Simpson's (2004) research reveals the complex and increasingly refined valuation systems which may be internalised by young travellers and employed to 'other' fellow Gap Year participants.

In all of these examples the reader will notice the formation of binaries, whereby travellers set themselves in opposition to another category by applying different labels to what they do. Further, travellers confer distinction upon their *own* travel practices, partitioning and ordering experience to garner the highest degree of personal gain. Indeed, Urry and Larsen (2011) explain that travellers transform into 'critical sociologists' when making claims about their excursions: "complaining about and mocking *other* tourists for their superficial, snobbish or boring behaviour. This status and taste game engulfs everyone. Tourists flag identity through separating them from co-present others" (p. 201-202, italics in original). Paradoxically though, despite this scrambling to assert oneself as unique from the mass, the authors also point out

that "people are much of the time 'tourists' whether they like it or know it" (p. 97). In the findings chapters to follow, this thesis will examine how young people pursue differentiation and to what effect.

2.3 Critiquing International Volunteering

According to Vrasti (2013), international volunteering is justified as a topic for scholarly examination both because of its unprecedented popularity, but also because the notion of humanitarian helping receives "unabashed support" and holds a "virtuous place…in our collective imaginary" (p. 4). While this activity may in some ways represent "a standard of reference for what it means to be good" (Vrasti, 2013, p. 4), strong critique is also well-documented. Here, I am immediately reminded of Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich's (1968/1990) acerbic keynote address, delivered to a group of American students who were set to undertake a summer volunteer excursion in Cuernavaca, Mexico. In this speech, entitled *To Hell With Good Intentions*, the author articulates his strong opposition to the 'benevolent invasion' of international volunteers in Latin America:

> It is incredibly unfair for you to impose yourselves on a village where you are so linguistically deaf and dumb that you don't even understand what you are doing, or what people think of you. And it is profoundly damaging to yourselves when you define something that you want to do as 'good,' a 'sacrifice' and 'help.' (p. 320)

Illich (1968/1990) concludes by entreating volunteers to stay home: "The damage which volunteers do willy-nilly is too high a price for the belated insight that they shouldn't have been volunteers in the first place" (p. 320). In sum, the author's words are deployed as a defense against the pretentiousness and paternalism he views as inherent in international volunteer efforts.

More recently, in their exploration of how 'sustainability' is reflected through current developments in Third World tourism, Mowforth and Munt (2009) summarise that:

> An increasing number of reports tell of work projects that construct unwanted buildings, take jobs which would otherwise be taken by locals, promote projects which are opposed by some segments of the local populations, plant saplings which will not be tended, and leave 'white elephants' which cannot be sustained or maintained by the local communities involved. (p. 127)

The authors go on to caution that activities like international volunteering cannot be accepted as "an entirely innocent affair where there are some unfortunate, incidental impacts or some fortunate incremental benefits to 'host' communities" (p. 130).

Guttentag (2009) undertook a critical analysis of the possible negative impacts of international volunteering, which the author abridged into five key consequences: a neglect for the host community's desires due to their lack of involvement in decision-making, the completion of unsatisfactory project work due to volunteers' lack of skill, a decrease in employment opportunities for local professionals due to the infusion of unpaid labour, the reinforcement of volunteers' stereotypes due to the brevity or superficiality of intercultural interactions, and finally, the prompting of cultural changes due to the 'demonstration effect' - wherein visitors "parade symbols of their affluence" and locals "respond to the presence of wealthy tourists by trying to imitate the tourists' consumption patterns, and discontent can emerge when these items of wealth are beyond the reach of a host community" (p. 547). In this section, I would like to expand on two such critiques as a pre-cursor for the analysis that follows.

2.3.1 Unskilled Volunteers

A main critique of international volunteering is that participating youth possess insufficient experience for carrying out the tasks they are charged with, and that the work they complete is predictably low-skilled in nature. Indeed, in many volunteer projects, the prerequisites for membership rely more on the applicant's enthusiasm than their credentials. For example, in Callanan and Thomas' (2005) analysis of volunteer projects advertised through the online database 'Go Abroad.com,' participation typically required no specific qualifications and position descriptions made scant mention of pre-departure training. For example, within the 252 teaching projects identified, 83 cases (32.9 per cent) stated their suitability for young volunteers outright, and of these, only two required applicants to possess professional teaching accreditation. The authors understandably question the value of the contribution anticipated within programmes adopting such loose parameters, not to mention the quality of learning experience the children in the host community will receive.

Huish (2014) and Jakubiak (2014) provide poignant examples of underqualified youth working within two popular fields of volunteer travel. Huish (2014) critically examines short-term international internships encouraged by Canadian medical schools, wherein nascent physicians practice procedures in

overseas clinics "with only token education in ethics and minimal instruction in processes of international development or political economy" (p. 163). Here, the author is concerned that these practices "turn crowded resource strapped foreign hospitals into exotic clinical training grounds" (p. 164). In Jakubiak's (2014) multi-sited ethnography of English language volunteers in Costa Rica, 29 of the 31 participants possessed no formal credentials and arrived at their placements with little or no prior teaching experience. Instead, the sending organisations "stressed participants' native English language speaking skills as well as their good intentions" (p. 95). As a result, about half of study participants described their teaching efforts as ineffectual, impractical or unsustainable based on the brevity of their visit, the lack of resources available within the community and their own inability to communicate learning objectives in Spanish. Taken together, these findings highlight the wider ethical predicament of using countries in the Global South "as extensions of classroom spaces" (Tiessen & Huish, 2014, p. 3). Indeed, there is something deeply problematic, and potentially exploitative, about the notion of 'rehearsing' on less fortunate others - particularly where western-situated youth are unlikely to be held accountable for their outcomes.

In Simpson's (2005) discussion of the Gap Year as a 'professionalising' experience, the author notes that many young people do not yet possess the credentials for entry into many employment or internship spheres, and as such, the absence of qualifications demanded within the international volunteer industry becomes a central part of its appeal. For example, classroom teaching in my home province of Ontario, Canada is tightly regulated: one must successfully complete a Bachelor of Education degree, obtain criminal reference clearance and gain membership to the governing professional organisation before being considered to fulfil this role. Thus, for the young person interested in 'trying out' a teaching career, volunteering overseas allows them to secure a position that would be otherwise-unobtainable at home: "The freedom from qualifications makes Gap Year programmes accessible, and provides spaces in which participants can experiment with possible future professional identities" (Simpson, 2005, p. 465). However, by consequence, host communities become "training grounds where volunteers are encouraged to teach the children of the developing world, yet, unqualified, are not trusted to teach our own" (Griffin, 2013, p. 868-869). In this way, international volunteering could be viewed as heavily weighted toward the fulfilment of

volunteers' own cultural capital, rather than the development objectives of service-recipients.

The issue here is not just that young volunteers are unskilled for the roles they fulfil overseas, but also, that they are positioned as experts by virtue of their status as westerners. In Palacios' (2010) ethnographic study of 16 Australian university students undertaking a short-term volunteer project conducting 'life skills workshops' in Vietnam, the author recalls how the host organisation placed considerable trust in their capacities, almost to the point of discomfort. Here, participants were repeatedly deferred to as authorities, even though group members were not well-positioned to provide such input or advice (having only participated in a short induction programme, and having little proficiency in the topic areas covered within the workshops, including stress management, HIV prevention and conflict resolution). The author interpreted this veneration as evidence of "an implicit assumption that 'Australian university students' are somehow commensurate with 'knowledgeable volunteers,'" a correlation that he believes "misreads the extent of capacity that young volunteers have, by associating them, as individuals, to an image of advanced Western knowledge and education" (p. 869). The author concludes that sending organisations must distance themselves from 'development aid discourse' to avoid the charge of 'neo-colonialism,' the topic which I attend to next.

2.3.2 Neo-Colonial Volunteers

Some critics suggest that traces from the era of colonial conquest remain prominent in contemporary international volunteer practice, and are articulated when western-situated youth are placed in a position to make (civilising) impositions upon others or dictate what problems are addressed or neglected based upon euro-centric models of development. Further, the very impulse to 'help' in the first place appears firmly rooted in normative portrayals of the Third World as in-deficit, and therefore in-need of intervention. Scholars who have taken up this post-colonial line of inquiry include Conran (2011), Crossley (2013), Echtner and Prasad (2003), Griffin (2013), Heron (2007), Jorgenson (2014), MacDonald (2014) and Pluim and Jorgenson (2012).

Drawing on related literature and their own professional experiences as programme coordinators, Pluim and Jorgensen (2012) argue that international volunteering is a neo-colonial exercise in the sense that it remains entrenched in the process of material and immaterial acquisition. For example, international volunteering typically involves the one-way movement of northern subjects to

southern contexts, and further, it is the volunteers themselves who tend to be the primary beneficiaries of their charitable offerings. Indeed, the reflection that volunteers 'took away more than they had given' was a prevalent discourse in the authors' findings (see also Angod, 2015; Darnell, 2011; O'Shea, 2011). Observation of this largely-accepted imbalance lead Pluim and Jorgensen (2012) to remark that "it is difficult to evade the colonial undertones of the historical movement of people (and benefits) from the centre to the elusive peripheries and back to the centre" (p. 28).

MacDonald (2014) argues that one manifestation of colonial rhetoric that still populates contemporary volunteer travel is the positioning of the traveller as 'knower.' The author explored how five Canadian undergraduate volunteers described Nicaragua in post-excursion seminars and written reflections. Calling to mind their three-month journey, participants relayed their observations of Nicaragua as definitive statements, making claims about "what they had discovered Nicaragua *really* was" (p. 222, italics in original). The author refers to this tendency as 'mastering place': narratives which "work to define and claim expertise of a place" (p. 218). MacDonald (2014) is concerned that participants' accounts present an essentialist conceptualisation of Nicaragua - distilled into a singular, absolute or vital quality - which fail to recognise the 'folded and textured' qualities of place or the contingency of their own 'knowing.' Instead, the author observed that participants' accounts "often work to knead out these striations, and aim to make sense within frameworks they already have" (p. 224).

Drawing on interviews with ten UK volunteers returning from a Gap Year, Griffin (2013) found that participants reproduced the logic of colonialism when sharing two disillusioning aspects of their respective excursions. First, participants expressed frustration when service recipients did not fully endorse their project ideas, revealing their expectation that 'we know best' and 'others' should strive to mimic western-style development. Second, participants lamented the fact that they had not 'helped' as much as they had imagined, exposing an assumption that they "must be innately superior despite a relatively short time to accumulate life experiences and technical skills, and an often nonexistent level of local knowledge" (p. 862). Throughout the narratives, participants did not acknowledge themselves as neo-colonial, and indeed, Griffin (2013) suggests that this omission is "consistent with public and metanarratives critiqued for purposefully overlooking such discussion" (p. 871).

The present study takes place within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, where a neo-colonial critique may be particularly poignant. Contextualising her research location in Kenya, Crossley (2013) suggests that volunteers' emotional investment in Africa remains embroiled in "deep-rooted cultural fantasies" of emancipation (p. 90). The author draws on post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha to explain 'double-inscription': Africa is simultaneously cast as a place of desire (an exotic and idyllic paradise) and derision (primitive and impoverished). In Heron's (2007) study of 27 Canadian development workers in Africa, the sentiment is similar: "Africa [is] a modern-day trope for all that is not 'developed,' indeed, for much that is 'savage,' a view that mainly overwrites but at times still coexists with an earlier romantic notion of Africans as heroic and beautiful" (p. 16).

In fleshing out these primary critiques, my ambition was not to make a judgement about whether or not international volunteering is, in fact, ineffective or imperial (this kind of evaluation would vary widely by programme). Instead, I wish to highlight the extent to which the charge of unskilled or neo-colonial volunteering looms large in the discussion surrounding this travel practice. Because my scholarly interest lies in impression management, these criticisms are important because they permit a deep consideration of how international volunteering is *seen*. My own concern is how such perceptions may be adopted and mobilised within volunteers' narratives for the purpose of self-presentation.

The Pursuit of Authentic Travel Experience

McIntosh and Zahra (2007) followed the journeys of 12 Australian youth before, during and after a week-long volunteer project in an indigenous Maori community in New Zealand, collecting insight through in-depth interviews, diaries and participant observation. Here, the authors suggest that volunteers access a more 'authentic' and 'genuine' experience than tourists who attend commercial cultural attractions, both in relation to experiencing Maori culture ("I think we are going to leave New Zealand so much more enriched having seen the real Maori") and in building personally meaningful relationships with the host community ("We got to know them so well; it was like we'd known them our whole life") (p. 549-551). The authors further argue that the 'depth of interaction' and 'rich insight' participants achieved is particular to the dynamic fostered within the international volunteer encounter.

I read this article early in my doctoral project, and found the assuredness of McIntosh and Zahra's (2007) conclusions particularly striking. Can a seven day immersion constitute an experience "rich in authentic cultural content, genuine and reflective of modern Maori life" (p. 541)? More fundamentally though, the authors seem to accept participants' descriptions of their excursion as 'authentic' and 'genuine' at face value, without a critical interrogation of what precisely is being claimed here. Moving forward, I became interested, not so much in the veracity of these declarations (whether a travel experience had or had not been 'authentic'), but in taking a step back to consider why this particular marker is so culturally valuable and upon what evidence its supposed attainment rests.

Within the field of tourism studies, 'authenticity' has been a recurring paradigm through which scholars have attempted to understand travel experiences broadly and international volunteer excursions specifically. But what constitutes an authentic encounter and why does it figure so largely in travellers' valuations of their time overseas? This chapter begins by exploring 'authenticity' as a thematic lens within tourism research. Then, I endeavour to show how authenticity has been articulated: what are the precise qualities that confer this status upon a travel experience?

3.1 The Authentic Turn in Tourism Literature

Within tourism literature, it is essential to begin any discussion of 'authenticity' by paying homage to the influential contributions of MacCannell

(1973), Cohen (1988) and Wang (1999). I then highlight the recent work of Theodossopoulos (2013) who, writing from the field of anthropology, consolidates the theoretical dilemmas that arise when scholars employ this conceptual lens.

MacCannell (1973) famously examines the 'authentic paradigm' in relation to Goffman's (1959) conception of front and back regions. In the travel context, the front region is considered a reception area, spaces which are accessible and 'on display' for the public audience. The back region, conversely, is restricted to insiders and therefore represents a place of importance, refuge and intimacy. MacCannell (1973) argues that these back regions are revered by travellers precisely because of their seclusion, where the possibility of slipping 'behind the curtain' to enable one's deeper connection with the 'native culture' is highly valued. Tourist settings are therefore orchestrated to appear remote or 'non-touristic' to *create the impression* that the back region has been entered, what MacCannell (1973) refers to as 'staged authenticity.' Boorstin (1964) similarly offers the notion of 'pseudo-events' to describe tourist attractions which are set up to project a 'cultural mirage' onto what is, in actuality, a superficial replica. MacCannell (1973) contends that the tourist is unaware (or is willing to forgive) that they are viewing a well-contrived imitation.

A decade later, Cohen (1988) re-examines MacCannell's (1973) thesis and proposes instead that individuals approach the notion of 'authenticity' with varying degrees of strictness. The author suggests that some travellers are less fretful about the genuineness of their touristic experiences and may be quite willing to accept a substantially staged product - the 'resemblance' to authenticity will suffice. Importantly, these travellers have not been misled by the performance before them, they have simply applied less stringent criteria in their valuations: "mass tourism does not succeed because it is a colossal deception, but because most tourists entertain concepts of 'authenticity' which are much looser than those entertained by intellectuals and experts" (p. 383). Further, Cohen (1988) reiterates that the meanings invested in authenticity are socially constructed and thus, constantly renegotiated. Here, the author introduces the concept of 'emergent authenticity,' which honours the possibility that local customs and cultural products may "acquire the patina of authenticity over time" (p. 371). Put differently, something initially inauthentic may subsequently *become* authentic, and by extension, the process of commoditisation is not at all times destructive. Walt Disney World is a primary example of this 'gradual

authentication' or 'invention of tradition,' as the destination and brand (a blatant contrivance) is now held dear as a staple of American culture.

Wang (1999) builds on this discussion by suggesting that what is marked as 'authentic' exists only as a projection: "a label attached to the visited cultures in terms of stereotyped images and expectations held by the members of tourist-sending society" (p. 355). Thus, for Wang (1999), it is more pertinent to frame travel experiences through the lens of 'existential authenticity.' Rather than decreeing toured objects as genuine or not (a realist stance), 'existential authenticity' references the traveller's own subjective state of being, whether individuals "feel they themselves are much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than in everyday life" (p. 351-352). This version of the concept is concerned with the pursuit of an 'authentic self' and travel experiences which might "endow the individual's identity with a richer and fuller experience of being" (Noy, 2004, p. 85).

Finally, Theodossopoulos (2013) reviews theoretical approaches toward the study of authenticity and suggests that one dilemma facing scholars is its dualistic nature - an **'**authentic' implies a corresponding 'inauthentic.' While it is generally accepted that authenticity encompasses multiple and parallel manifestations, the researcher must occasionally rely on this simplified opposition in order to deconstruct it: "in their effort to explain local meanings and uses of authenticity, they end up comparing objects, groups, or social phenomena in terms of the binary criteria they have previously rejected" (p. 344). I too faced this dilemma in wanting detail how young people came to organise their travel experiences into authentic and inauthentic categories, while simultaneously wanting to problematise the very premise of these boundaries. For Theodossopoulos (2013), such theoretical 'entrapment' nevertheless serves as an invitation for scholars to unravel the concept's complexity.

3.2 Constituting Authentic Travel Experience

When Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) conducted interviews with alternative tourists over 13 months of fieldwork in Thailand, the author found that across travellers in all sub-groups (mass ecotourists, adventurers and backpackers), participants identified three aspects of their respective travel experiences as indicative of authenticity. First, participants prised rural locations and atypical travel destinations, spaces seen as differing considerably from modern or western life. Second, participants valued encounters with local people, particularly those devoid of commercial transactions. Third, participants defined authenticity as the absence of

other tourists, under the assumption that "'true' Thai life exists only in places where tourists are not" (p. 183). Further, for two of the sub-groups (adventurers and backpackers) an additional quality emerged in terms of travel style, where 'roughing it' or the absence of material comfort was held in high esteem. Kontogeorgopoulos' (2003) findings were echoed across the literature I reviewed and thus, serve as a helpful organisational framework for presenting a series of reports which have explored these subsections specifically. I have divided these similarly as: the perceived degree of difference from modern life, decommodified interactions with local people, and the degree of difficulty endured.

3.2.1 Degree of Difference from Modern Life

The decision to travel is oft embroiled with the yearning to embark on a journey that "inverts, suspends, or alters routine order and norms" (Wang, 1999, p. 361). 'Grand Tour' narratives too, as Chard (1999) explains, were historically characterised by "oppositions between the familiar and the foreign," a way of distinguishing one's travels from what would conventionally be encountered in everyday life (p. 40). Chard (1999) further contends that the trope of opposition has "survived the various transformations in travel writing…and has become naturalized as part of the array of methods for ordering knowledge of travel and foreignness that any late twentieth-century writer might use" (p. 48).

Maoz (2007) conducted interviews and participant observation among young Israeli backpackers travelling in India and found that most participants were primarily seeking a 'reversed' experience in an 'inverted place.' As one participant (Rachel) commented: "I needed something very extreme, opposite, nothing Western" (p. 130). Here, the young traveller relies on physical distancing to uncouple themselves (albeit briefly) from what they describe as a "materialistic, stressed, and harsh" home society (p. 126). The backpackers fully intended to resume their lives in Israel at the conclusion of their travels, but in the meantime, viewed India as romantic refuge in which to "play a game of make-believe" (p. 132).

The notion of 'difference' can be understood spatially, prompting travellers to seek fulfilment in physically distant spaces thought to be primitive or untouched; geographies which are "accorded a higher quotient of realness" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 30). In Davidson's (2005) 11-year participant observation study of independent travellers in India, the author was particularly interested in how individuals came to imagine faraway places quixotically, as lying outside the bounds

of modernity. In particular, participants were invested in the 'utopics of the countryside,' a fetishised view of geography which "reveals a nostalgia for an imaginary past modelled on Third World rustic simplicity as a prototype for ideal living" (p. 44). Here, the author observed a particular romanticisation of rural locations, where tradition supposedly remains intact and communitarianism still thrives. In sum, this research endeavours to show that *where* one travels is an important marker of authenticity.

Similarly, Echtner and Prasad (2003) analysed 115 brochures from North American travel agencies to inspect the marketing images used to advertise 12 Third World destinations. The authors found that depictions of Kenya, Namibia, Costa Rica and Ecuador could be clustered together due to their shared emphasis on seemingly untouched and untamed space. This grouping, which the authors refer to as 'frontier locations,' were presented as remote and natural landscapes; populated only by "inhospitable and bizarre vegetation" and "rare, often dangerous animals" (p. 675). Echtner and Prasad (2003) further argue that the pictures and text chosen to portray 'frontier locations' perpetuate the 'myth of the uncivilised' and echo a "highly nostalgic version of the era of colonial exploration" (p. 675).

In the case of volunteering in the Third World, poverty itself may be constructed as the primary marker of authenticity**.** Drawing on 16 months of ethnographic research involving 40 volunteers working among three non-governmental organisations in Thailand, Mostafanezhad (2013a) noted that for 80 per cent of the participants in her study, the impoverished conditions they encountered were viewed as emblematic of the 'real' Thailand. Where poverty acquires this romanticised aesthetic, young volunteers may deliberately seek placements in ostensibly underprivileged areas because they believe them to have retained a quality of purity and innocence. By consequence, Mostafanezhad (2013a) cautions that material inequities may become depoliticised as a natural (perhaps even picturesque) characteristic of the scenery, and as something that should remain unspoiled by development. Similarly, in Crossley's (2013) longitudinal study of ten UK volunteers' experiences in rural Kenya, drawing on participant observation and narrative interviews collected before, during and after the excursion, participants hinted toward their desire to preserve the impoverished conditions they encountered on two bases. First, participants perceived westernisation as a destructive influence, one which might compromise their own enjoyment of Kenya's 'traditional' cultural heritage.

Second, participants understood the Kenyan people they met as 'poor-but-happy,' making the prospect of their economic development redundant. In both studies, western-situated travellers confront a fundamental dilemma: their desire to protect the unadulterated character of Thailand and Kenya from external influences is pitted against the development goals that presumably inspired them to volunteer in the first place.

In volunteer settings where conditions are not impoverished, as was the case in Vrasti's (2013) ethnographic study of a small nature conservation organisation in Guatemala, participants expressed disappointment that the community members they met were not 'poor enough' - displaying no obvious signs of destitution, malnourishment or malady. This left participants feeling bored, underutilised and even deceived. Here, the lack of evident or urgent need failed to conform to "the photogenic poverty shots many of us had seen on charity infomercials and fundraiser posters" and also thwarted participants' impulse to provide compassionate 'help' (p. 14). As a result, participants soon chose to abandon their project work, preferring to spend their time poolside, in local bars or at internet cafés.

3.2.2 Decommodified Interactions with Local People

In Conran's (2006) ethnographic study of hill-tribe trekking tourism in Thailand, western tourists viewed the opportunity to have an 'intimate encounter' as a principal measure by which the authenticity of their excursion could be judged. These participants expressed frustration because their encounters with locals were limited to the owners of their accommodation, and even then, interactions were fleeting. In a later study in the same region, Conran (2011) reports that notions of intimacy - the "embodied experience that arouses a sense of closeness and a story about a shared experience" - permeated the accounts of 40 international volunteers, ten NGO coordinators and 25 host community members (p. 1459). Here, there was a clear tendency towards emphasising moments when individuals enjoyed emotional connections in earnest - what the author refers to as the 'aesthetic of attachment' (see also Mostafanezhad, 2014; Palacios, 2010). Conran's (2011) findings are included amongst others in Butcher and Smith's (2015) review of volunteer tourism literature to reveal the broader tenacity of intimacy as a theme within travellers' accounts, where "heart-rending moments with children, winning the trust or respect of local people and vignettes featuring poignant personal encounters are all prominent" (p. 68).

In Crossley's (2013) longitudinal study of UK volunteers' experiences in Kenya described previously, the author documents how the perceived authenticity of participants' encounters with host community members may be offset by the introduction of commercial transactions. In this case, participants came to avoid the 'demanding gaze' of beggars, beach vendors and adolescent boys - individuals who consistently pressured them to purchase items, and thus, interrupted their desire to engage 'genuinely.' Here, being treated as a resource caused a 'fantasmatic rupture' - one that made visible the touristic dimension of participants' excursion, their relative wealth, and the deep structural inequalities that undergirded their interactions. Crossley (2013) explains:

> Not only did the young men selling bracelets represent ungratefulness for the volunteers' work by forcefully trying to extract money from them and always 'expecting something'…but they broke from the passive norm of the grateful recipient, positioning themselves as economic agents in relation to the visitors. (p. 129)

Lozanski (2013) and Cravatte and Chabloz (2008) elucidate similar findings - the breach of authenticity through the commodification of the encounter - through the lenses of 'disorientation' and 'disenchantment' respectively. In Lozanski's (2013) interviews and participant observation of 29 independent travellers in India, participants described feeling 'disoriented' when beggars made overt demands for money. While participants believed themselves to be traveling on paltry budgets, these confrontations "hailed [them] into relationality" and provided an unwelcome reminder of their positioning as privileged westerners (p. 54). Further, instead of displaying "a quiet acceptance of this poverty," beggars remained agentic, thereby intervening in participants' expectations for gratitude and passivity (p. 47). The author concludes that even though participants voiced a theoretical desire to 'meet the locals,' they were uncomfortable with encounters that did not take place *on their terms*. In Cravatte and Chabloz' (2008) interviews and participant observation among eight French fair trade tourists during a ten day visit to Burkino Faso, participants became 'disenchanted' "when the asymmetric nature of their relation to the locals is brought to light, when they are brought back by the guides to their role of rich Westerner to be treated as a resource" (p. 243). These findings are notable because they occurred in the context of a sending organisation which expressly 'forbids' travellers and villagers from giving and receiving gifts in an effort to "create an

'authentic' meeting" and mimic "a 'normal' relation between economically equal people" (p. 240). However, aspects of this excursion - where guides collected commissions in the marketplace, or asked participants to fund their admission to excursions - were nevertheless premised upon the purchase of goods and services.

As a final note on decommodified-as-authentic travel experiences, it is curious that an international volunteer *industry* has rapidly expanded to offer packaged experiences promising 'real' encounters with the foreign 'other' - the irony being that 'authenticity' becomes a commodity available for purchase (Simpson, 2004; Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011). Indeed, one strong critique levied at international volunteering is that it masquerades as a genuine affair, but "paradoxically obscure[s] the most foundational of realities: the fact that the participants are there as consumers" (Mahrouse, 2011, p. 385).

3.2.3 Degree of Difficulty Endured

In anthropological frameworks, 'rites of passage' include a period of separation (the liminal phase) during which youth are "submitted to ordeal" in order to initiate a transformative movement between adolescence and adulthood (Turner, 1981, p. 154). Even 'The Grand Tour,' so often associated with the heights of pleasure-seeking and high culture, was nevertheless a strenuous journey marked by illness and physical fatigue (Butcher, 2003). Likewise, contemporary international volunteering is perceived as an opportunity for young people to be 'thoroughly tested' (Sin, 2009), and in this vein, the present section explores 'difficulty' as an important marker of authenticity.

Before proceeding, it is helpful to relate the notion of difficulty-as-authentic to McAdams and Bowman's (2001) discussion of 'redemption sequences,' a prevalent narrative motif in which life episodes initially involving deprivation, adversity or discomfort are later restoried to emphasise their rewarding outcome. Here, the experience of hardship is trusted to bring about a positive end, and the resulting narrative account attests to a self that is "growing, moving forward, making progress over time" (McAdams & Bowman, 2001, p. 5). Thus, itineraries which are seen to involve emotional or physical risk may be sought purposefully - what Giddens (1991) refers to as "active courting of risk" (p. 124) - on the basis that confronting such challenges allows the volunteer to successfully traverse a 'redemption sequence' and reap the sense of inner fortitude that awaits them in the aftermath.

For adventurers and backpackers in Kontogeorgopoulos' (2003) study described previously, achieving an authentic travel experience required 'rough' travel: "feeling hungry and tired, having to sleep on floors with cockroaches, and going for days without a proper bath" (p. 191). As a result, these participants attempted to 'live like the locals' and "voluntarily subject themselves to relatively harsh accommodation conditions…not only for budgetary reasons, but also out of a deep-seated mental association between material comfort and *in*authenticity" (p. 184, italics in original). While these discomforts "greatly taxed the energy" of the group, they simultaneously "boosted the authentic merit of their trip" (p. 191). In other words, participants attained social distinction as 'alternative' travellers based on their willingness to make 'sacrifices.'

In Elsrud's (2001) ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand, supported by in-depth interviews with 35 returned backpackers, the author explores how travellers use tales of risk and adventure to make statements about their identities. For example, participants emphasised the occasions when they had travelled to areas reputed for drug-trafficking or were the first white person to stay in a peripheral village (referred to as 'place narratives'), succumbed to stomach illnesses or sampled unfamiliar street food (referred to as 'body narratives'), and wore tattered clothing or got tattooed (referred to as 'appearance narratives'). Taken together, these place, body and appearance narratives constitute "the price you pay if you want to experience the real local culture" (p. 609). Elsrud (2001) draws on Goffman (1967) to suggest that navigating a degree of hardship is interpreted by fellow travellers as a marker of 'strong character' - someone who is 'gutsy,' 'brave,' 'exciting,' 'self-reliant' and 'powerful.' Similarly, Mowforth and Munt (2009) aptly summarise the importance of 'difficulty' in establishing narrative capital as follows: "Travelling in potentially dangerous regions, being hoisted from a bus and frisked at midnight or braving certain urban areas are experiences to be enjoyed and admired by other travellers. Risk titillates, even eroticises, adventures in the Third World" (p. 140).

Muzaini (2006) discusses the 'spatial,' 'behavourial' and 'bodily tactics' that 40 Asian and European backpackers traveling in Southeast Asia assumed in an effort to 'be like a local.' Drawing on interviews and follow-up email discussions, as well as the author's own auto-ethnographic accounts, participants authenticated their experiences by choosing the cheapest-possible accommodations, taking public transportation, eating at roadside stalls, haggling with vendors, and wearing clothes

bought at the night market. However, where discomforts associated with these tactics became too intense, participants were quick to abandon their concerns for immersion - retreating instead into tourist space, the company of similar others, and the material comforts of home - what the author refers to as 'counter-localization tactics.'

Kontogeorgopoulos (2003), Elsrud (2001) and Muzaini (2006) all recognise that while travellers are attracted to risk and adventure, they simultaneously seek assurances of their own security. As such, travel experiences involving deprivation, hardship or suffering may be short in duration and coupled with "safety cushions and well-marked escape routes" (Bauman, 1996, p. 29). Simpson (2005) speaks to this point in her analysis of Gap Year marketing, suggesting that sending organisations must concurrently represent their programming as dangerous *and* safe: "Gap Year providers need to convince parents and themselves that participants will survive their programmes, whilst simultaneously allowing participants a sense that survival will at least be a struggle" (p. 458).

On this note, I introduce the concept of 'enclaves,' the support structure created when youth travel in group settings with similar others. In their respective studies of Israeli backpackers, Noy (2004) and Maoz (2007) both observed that travellers tended to cluster in enclaves with other Israelis, even though their stated motivation for travel was to 'go-it-alone' and connect with local culture in South America and Asia. This practice of assembling in homogenous 'colonies' while overseas indicates participants' strong desire for 'continuity.' Indeed, the backpackers created social spaces that were "comfortable and familiar…lacking almost any sign of foreignness" and which allowed them to "continue, to a large extent, their back-home life" (Maoz, 2007, p. 132). Similarly, Hottola (2014) conducted a quantitative analysis exploring how 30 backpackers allocated their time in India over a 24-hour span and found that participants primarily chose to socialise with travellers of the same cultural background, while only five per cent of this period spent in 'genuine' encounters with locals. The author interpreted participants' predilection for seeking out 'people like them' as a strategy for managing the intercultural stress of travelling in a radically different social environment. Here, I find it intriguing that the international volunteer experience - while ostensibly about encountering 'difference' - is nevertheless carried out in the company of similar others.

Chapter 4: Visual Discourse in Tourism Studies

I did not come across research specifically exploring international volunteers' posting practices on Facebook. Thus, to foreshadow this aspect of the study, the present section proceeds in a deconstructed fashion, piecing together literature related to the importance of 'gaze' in tourism studies, the prevalent visual discourses utilised within the humanitarian aid industry, and individuals' more general self-presentation strategies on social media.

4.1 The Tourist Gaze

Urry's (1990) classic and influential text *The Tourist Gaze* considers the dynamics associated with visual consumption within tourism encounters. In this report, I draw on the third edition of this volume, co-authored with Larsen (2011). Urry and Larsen's (2011) purpose is to bring attention to 'seeing' as a socially constructed act, one constituted through individual experience, media circulation of iconic images and wider power relations: "the tourist gaze is structured by culturally specific notions of what is extraordinary and therefore worth viewing" (p. 75). Further, because seeing is "a performance that orders, shapes and classifies, rather than reflects the world," the authors suggest that 'gaze' is a useful conceptual tool for understanding "just what is happening in the 'normal society'" (p. 2-3).

Within this, Urry and Larsen (2011) introduce a variety of gazing forms, including the 'romantic gaze,' the 'family gaze' and the 'disciplinary gaze.' The romantic gaze is influenced by notions of idyllic solitude - a deserted beach, uninhabited countryside or quiet mountain stream - in short, spaces seemingly untouched by mass tourism (see also Noy, 2004). The family gaze portrays intimate social relationships - capturing affectionate moments and physical embrace between individuals - which connote relaxed and playful togetherness. Here, 'sight-seeing' is less significant or relegated to the background, in favour of joyful socialising (see also Haldrup & Larsen, 2003). Finally, the disciplinary gaze of co-participants acknowledges that travel tends to take place in the company of others, including fellow travellers and tour guides, who help to define norms about acceptable and unacceptable ways of being a traveller. This includes the potential for judgement and chastisement, perhaps resulting in self-censorship of one's behaviours.

Similarly, a number of scholars highlighted within this literature review have taken inspiration from Urry and Larsen (2011) to develop re-articulations of 'gaze' specific to their own findings, including the selfie gaze (Koffman, Orgad & Gill,

2015), demanding gaze (Crossley, 2013), colonial gaze (Simpson, 2004), scrutinising gaze (Vrasti, 2013), humanitarian gaze (Mostafanezhad, 2014), local gaze (Maoz, 2006) and intratourist gaze (Holloway, Green & Holloway, 2011).

To briefly expand on two of these examples, Maoz (2006) offers the 'local gaze' as a complimentary addendum to the tourist gaze. Where the tourist gaze is criticised for offering an asymmetrical focus on how western tourists imagine 'others,' the local gaze considers the ways in which hosts look back at these travellers. In doing so, the author contends that hosts are not merely passive objects - "everybody gazes at everybody" - and thus, both groups exercise agency and exert control (p. 225). Here, Maoz (2006) draws theoretical inspiration from French philosopher Michel Foucault to suggest that power flows in multiple directions and thus, domination is never total. Emerging from the context of an ethnographic fieldwork study of 25 Israeli backpackers and 15 Indian hosts, the author suggests that "most tourists are hardly aware of this gaze, mainly because they arrogantly dismiss its presence. They rarely feel they are being watched, and thus act in what they perceive as a totally free and permissive environment" (p. 229).

Extending Urry and Larsen's (2011) disciplinary gaze, Holloway, Green and Holloway (2011) introduce the 'intratourist gaze' to highlight "the manner in which tourists watch (gaze upon) other tourists" (p. 238). Based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out with senior tourists (also known as 'grey nomads') who frequent camping grounds and caravan parks in rural Australia, the authors found that participants readily noticed and reprimanded 'other' travellers for environmentally harmful practices (such as improper waste disposal), while simultaneously positioning themselves as responsible stewards. In this way, the intratourist gaze is "as focused on defending [one's] own tourist behaviours as it is upon criticising those of other tourists" (p. 247).

4.2 The Humanitarian Aid Industry

In the British context, the very idea of humanitarian aid brings to mind the Live Aid benefit concert of 1985, an event designed to rally funds and public support for famine relief in Ethiopia (Davis, 2010). This campaign (and the subsequent Live 8 event in 2005) drew on graphic images to paint a visceral portrait of misery, destitution and tragedy, showing "emaciated women and children with distended stomachs and fly-ringed eyes, usually dressed in rags or naked" (Grant, 2015, p. 316). In addition, the associated hit single *Do They Know It's Christmas?* utilised

patronising lyrics, characterising Africa as "a world of dread and fear" and a place "where the only water flowing is the bitter sting of tears" (Grant, 2015, p. 314).

The imagery employed by Live Aid is reminiscent of what Chouliaraki (2010) describes as 'shock effect' campaigns, wherein the 'other' is cast as a passive victim, shown in a state of extreme starvation or surrounded by squalor. A second dominant style of humanitarian communication is 'positive imagery,' which conversely depicts smiling children and hopeful scenes, intended to project the subject's dignity and self-determination. The author argues that both strategies are similarly utilised to drum up public action regarding social injustices through emotion-oriented appeals, eliciting feelings of guilt and shame in the former, and empathy and gratitude in the latter. For Chouliaraki (2010), this context also gives rise to a new 'post-humanitarian' sensibility - a popular media approach rooted in moral and political ambivalence, and mobilised through self-inspection of one's taken-for-granted privileges. Further, such post-humanitarian appeals tap into short-term and low-intensity sentimentality and encourage simplified modes of individual engagement (for example, to 'make a difference,' one must simply click their mouse to sign a petition or make a donation).

Koffman, Orgad and Gill (2015) draw on Chouliaraki's (2010) notion of post-humanitarianism to contextualise their discussion of 'selfie humanitarianism.' Here, the authors are primarily interested in humanitarian campaigns spread virally via social media - drawing specifically on the United Nations' Girl Up campaign as an example - wherein young women are encouraged to lend support for their southern sisters by uploading and sharing a 'selfie' (a self-composed portrait). Where selfies are positioned as an act of charity and an expression of solidarity, the authors view this trend as evidence of the depoliticisation of humanitarian communication and a reorientation toward narcissistic self-work: "the donor's own interior life is presented as infinitely more interesting and relevant than the conditions faced by those…she purportedly seeks to help" (p. 163).

Clost (2011) concentrated her analysis on the promotional imagery utilised by five Canadian volunteer sending-organisations. Across 270 photographs, the author identifies five recurrent motifs: 1) 'untouched' landscapes (including vast desert, lush vegetation and mud-and-thatch housing), 2) visible cultural adaptation (volunteers wearing 'traditional' dress or engaging in a domestic activity such as preparing meals), 3) compositional imbalance (a single white volunteer surrounded by a larger group of non-white locals), 4) visible technology (a group of locals huddled around a

volunteer's digital camera, or more broadly, locals 'being advised' by volunteers) and 5) 'Madonnas' caring for children (a trope unique to female volunteers, connoting motherhood, protection and sacrifice; see also Mostafanezhad, 2013b). Taken together, the author interprets these visual discourses as replications of colonial and Christian imagery, and well as an attempt to demonstrate the strong degree of change that takes place in the behaviour or lifestyle of young volunteers when they travel overseas. For the purposes of the present study, Clost's (2011) work is instructive because it gives a sense of what tropes may be reproduced within volunteer's own photography.

Drawing on a post-colonial lens, Caton and Santos (2009) analysed the 112 promotional images used by Semester at Sea (a popular American study abroad programme) to understand the representational dynamics communicated about host communities and student participants. Where hosts were the focus of the image, two notable themes emerged: they were typically portrayed wearing culturally-distinctive attire, and further, were never shown using technological devices, except where an American student was temporarily sharing their own digital camera or computer with them. The authors argue that these depictions reinforce a primitive-advanced binary which "masks the dynamism of their cultures, presenting them as people who have not yet 'embraced modernity'" (p. 199). Further, in the few photos where participants were shown *interacting* with their hosts, the majority featured children rather than adults. The authors contend that this emphasis on adorable and adoring youngsters offers a "Disneyesque vision of the world" and, by consequence, strips the encounter of its more challenging educative potential (p. 200). Overall, these findings hint towards the powerful fantasies of otherness evoked through the marketing of contemporary youth travel.

Scarles (2013) conducted prolonged fieldwork and photo-elicitation interviews with 20 UK tourists in Peru to unpack the multiplicity of ethical considerations travellers must navigate when photographing the host community, including concerns for privacy, permission and payment. Overall, the author found that participants demonstrated "a highly sophisticated mode of ethical reflection and negotiation rather than a single, immutable calculus of right or wrong" (p. 898). In some cases, this meant that participants would breach their own rules - for example, by taking a 'sneaky shot' instead of obtaining the subject's consent - leading the author to conclude that "photographing and touristic encounters with locals involves a delicate

balance, a series of compromises that often rely upon intuitive moral judgment, reasoning, and reflective justification" (p. 914). Scarles (2013) also contends that what travellers consider appropriate or acceptable picturing practice is influenced by 'third-party knowledges' - the norms gleaned from tour guides, sending organisations, guidebooks and the locals themselves. While this study did not take place in the context of 'humanitarian' travel, these findings nevertheless address the moral uncertainties which permeate individuals' representational decisions, as well as the wider platforms from which these choices are informed.

4.3 Self-Presentation on Social Media

A predictable avenue of inquiry for scholars interested in 'gazing' and 'visual discourse' is the practice of travel photography. Indeed, Urry and Larsen (2011) suggest that photography is an important way of collecting and representing travel experience, a device by which the traveller might "strive to make fleeting gazes last longer" (p. 156). The strength of this compulsion (to visually document one's travels) was illustrated empirically by Crossley (2013), who reflected that photography was a central concern amongst the ten UK participants she travelled with during a volunteer experience in rural Kenya. A description from the author's field notes is worth quoting at length.

> It was the second week of our stay in Kenya and we were about to leave on an excursion to look for roaming herds of elephants in the verdant hills that surrounded our accommodation. As we were gathering our rucksacks and cameras, ready to get on the bus with the guide, one of the girls said that her camera had broken and that she would not be joining us. Some of us suggested that she might still enjoy coming along and seeing the elephants, but she explained that there would be 'no point' in going if she could not take pictures. It was at this point that I realised how deeply intertwined photography, seeing, and experience were for volunteer tourists. (p. 121)

Here, where the young volunteer is left without the opportunity to "testify in the home world to the traveler's passage" the experience itself is construed as irrelevant (Adler, 1989, p. 1370).

In his discussion of the temporal dimensions of picturing practice in tourism literature, Crang (1997) suggests that composing a photograph is an 'other directed activity' whereby an image is produced for a later audience: "communicating some point about experience in one particular place and time to an audience or viewer in

another place and time" (p. 367). Here we might also think of the photograph as an *investment* in securing a later narrative, meaning that "each event is not so much experienced in itself but for its future memory" (p. 366). Crang's (1997) comments are made all-the-more relevant in the digital era predominated by social media.

Marwick and Boyd (2010) suggest that social media behaviour operates under a 'context collapse' in which distinct social circles - friends, family, professional colleagues and distant acquaintances - are flattened into one. Where individuals must present themselves to these numerous and overlapping audiences simultaneously, the result is a 'lowest-common denominator effect.' In other words, individuals post what they believe will be most appropriate (non-offensive) to all possible viewers. Referring in particular to Twitter (a microblogging site), the authors reviewed survey responses from 181 users and found that individuals tended to formulate content based on the anticipated judgement of an 'imagined audience' and in doing so, were inclined toward strategically concealing information. While the authors concede that some individuals applied self-censorship loosely or were deliberately provocative in their tweets, the majority exemplified hyperconscious impression management by refraining from controversial, sensitive, negative or overly personal topics.

Literature is beginning to emerge which helps elucidate how young people employ Facebook to create and sustain certain idealised self-presentations. For example, in Birnbaum's (2013) eight-month ethnographic study of 30 American undergraduate students' Facebook activity, the author draws on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical lens to identify six 'fronts' stressed within the profiles he reviewed: the partier, the socialite, the risk-taker, the comic, the institutional citizen and the eccentric. Young people employ these standardised performances, Birnbaum (2013) argues, "to ensure their peers believe they are fully participating in the undergraduate experience" and in response to pressures to demonstrate the behaviours that are valued in university culture (p. 155). Further, nearly all participants acknowledged that they develop their Facebook profiles calculatingly to foster a positive impression among viewers. One participant (Helen) observed: "It's a profile, it's not a person…I am not saying it's not accurate. Nothing on here is a lie, but it is definitely just a front. That's all a profile is" (p. 166). Finally, because users add photographs and captions asynchronously (posted for a future audience to respond to), one must anticipate what impressions might be given off, and judge which storyline to tell on this basis.

Based on a content analysis of 63 American undergraduate students' Facebook accounts, Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) described three impressions 'given off' by users (though not explicitly claimed): being popular among friends, being well-rounded and being thoughtful. The authors viewed these self-presentations as expressions of a 'hoped-for-possible-self,' one which is "socially desirable, better than the individual's 'actual self', but is not entirely fictional" (Zhao, 2013, p. 12). The authors also considered what aspects of young people's identities were *not* being projected within their profiles, namely pessimism, apprehensiveness and a lack of spontaneity - self-presentations which may be seen as unpalatable in the cultural context of the North American undergraduate experience. Further, in the absence of others' immediate, face-to-face reactions, users must hypothetically weigh the benefits and consequences of sharing particular content if they are to maintain a desired front.

Miller (2011) aggregated data from over 100 Facebook profiles and conducted follow-up interviews as part of a year-long ethnographic study in Trinidad. Providing an interesting counterpoint to the above discussion, the author describes how participants considered their Facebook profiles to be a more genuine depiction of *who they really are,* on the basis that "the truth of a person exists in this labour they perform to create themselves" (p. 50). Miller (2011) links this interpretation to the Trinidadian tradition of Carnival whereby "one can become the person you really are only through masquerade" (p. 122). Here, because one exercises choice in creating a desired appearance, the 'front' is a better indication of the 'actual' person than, for example, genetic characteristics or the conditions of their birth. This research alerts us to some of the complexities surrounding identity work, and points to the importance of self-presentation as a fundamental 'truth' about how individuals wish to story their lives.

4.4 Conclusion

In this literature review, I have highlighted the key empirical sources that have shaped my thinking on international volunteering as a scholarly pursuit. Indeed, the multiple concepts and terminologies presented here have contributed vitally to the deductive portion of my analysis and will be interspersed throughout the findings chapters to follow. While I believe this summary is thorough, it also alerts the reader to possibilities for continued critical engagement. For example, there is a pressing need for research which attends to the representational choices made by international

volunteers in the context of social media. Before revealing the specific research questions I chose to pursue in this study, I first present the three theoretical influences I will utilise to unpack young people's verbal and visual accounts of their experiences overseas.

Chapter 5: Theoretical Influences

This thesis is informed by the dramaturgical lens proposed by American sociologist Erving Goffman, as elaborated in his seminal text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). It is further influenced by whiteness studies and contextualised within liquid or late modernity.

5.1 The Dramaturgical Perspective

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) was a scholar of the micro-social world, his emphasis being face-to-face interaction in everyday life. His doctoral dissertation, which would become the foundation for *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, drew upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a small crofter community in the Shetland Islands. Here, Goffman relied on naturalistic observational methods to understand the impression management strategies employed by the islanders (for detailed biographical sketches, see Fine & Manning, 2000; Shalin, 2013). His later research interests - in psychiatric institutions and gambling establishments - maintained this interest in the dynamics of social interaction. Writing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Jacobsen (2010) contends that Goffman's key legacy was his attention to phenomenon that had been largely omitted from the mainstream sociology of his time; a pioneer in his decision to "proclaim the micro-social world and all its myriad interminglings a realm worthy of serious academic attention" (p. 3).

Contextually, Goffman's work arose within a symbolic interactionist tradition, a sociological perspective which holds that individuals construct meaning in interaction with others (facilitated through their words and gestures) and that the interpretations derived are subject to ongoing revision. Though Goffman himself never identified with the label - indeed, he resolutely "resisted and evaded any attempt at classification" - his work is consistent with its tenets (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 22). Goffman was a product of the Chicago School of Sociology and refers explicitly to Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel and George Herbert Mead as influences (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015).

Put simply, Goffman (1959) conceptualised identity as a performance. In his dramaturgical framework, social interactions are likened to stage productions, wherein individuals (viewed as actors) strive to create certain appearances for others (the audience), in line with what might be expected of their 'character.' Goffman (1959) summarises this work as an exploration of how the individual "presents

himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them" (p. 8). This process of impression management can be broken down into a few core ideas that undergird the remainder of the text. First, the individual strives to present an idealised or socially desirable self. Second, the individual strategically chooses what information to disclose or omit in order to maximise social recognition. Third, the individual tailors self-presentations based on context and audience, making ongoing adjustments in response to the feedback they receive. Fourth, the individual experiences insecurity towards decisions regarding how they shall present themselves and makes efforts to stem embarrassment. Finally, while Goffman views the individual as agentic (playing an active role in furnishing their performances), they are also constrained by social structures (where the 'rules' for appropriate presentation are tacitly understood and governed by a wider social order).

Goffman's (1959) notion of performance is distinguished from post-structuralist feminist philosopher Judith Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, in which the self is constituted through the repetition of stylised acts. Here, one's subject position (gender, for example) is viewed as a discourse, one imposed and policed by society's "highly rigid regulatory frame" (p. 25). While Butler and Goffman both dismiss an essentialist view of the subject - "agreeing that natural differences do not precede social ones" - Goffman maintains that individuals' self-performances are largely reflexive and elected (Brickell, 2005, p. 31, see also Denzin, 2002). The research questions and methodological design employed this thesis more closely align with this latter conception of the self.

Over his publishing career (1951-1983), Goffman did not attempt to advance an overarching or internally coherent theoretical paradigm (Fine & Manning, 2000; Jacobsen, 2010). Indeed, a key advantage of taking up Goffman's work is its indeterminateness. First, Goffman provides scholars with "an armful of concepts and methods through which others may carry on the work and improve upon his own initial attempts" (Strong, 1983, p. 353). In this thesis, each research sub-question (detailed below) includes a specific link to a Goffmanian concept, namely 'frames,' 'fronts' and impressions 'given' and 'given off.' Further peppered throughout the analysis, I draw on the author's notion of 'idealised impressions,' 'front and back regions,' 'treatment of the absent,' 'stigma,' 'action,' 'strong character,' 'character

contests' and 'destructive information.' Second, the inherent polysemy of Goffman's ideas continues to resonate across a diverse range of academic terrain, such that this thesis benefits from the insights of scholars who have previously applied his concepts to the field of tourism (Edensor, 2001; Larsen, 2010; MacCannell, 1973; Urry & Larsen, 2011) and social media studies (Birnbaum, 2013; Hogan, 2010; Trottier, 2014; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). Indeed, I take a keen interest in how Goffman-style conceptualisation 'travels' - how it "works differently (or is differently worked) when it is taken up in new places" (Morawski, 2014, p. 283).

Goffman's work is often criticised for being unconcerned with systemic inequalities. Giddens (2009) reflects on his re-reading of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* two decades after his initial encounter and laments the lack of attention paid to the discussion of power. Here, the author acknowledges that Goffman's interest was intentionally limited to visible interactions between individuals and that "any influences that go beyond such situations he simply defines as not his area of concern" (p. 293). However, Giddens (2009) views this defense as inadequate because it fails to wrestle with the 'vast bulk' of taken-for-granted structures which inevitably come to frame everyday encounters. In this thesis, I address this concern, and offer a less muted social critique, by drawing upon whiteness studies.

A second potential shortcoming is that the context which gave rise to Goffman's dramaturgical approach (Cold-War America) is quite dissimilar from the performance pressures faced by youth today (Lemert, 1997). For example, Branaman (2010) suggests that Goffman's work is best understood in the context of 'solid modernity' - wherein actors had a clear sense of the presentations expected of them, and further, what was considered an 'idealised impression' followed largely established and predictable codes. The author concludes that identity was a relatively stable concept in Goffman's world, not subject to the expectation of rapid reinvention. Thus, in this thesis, I attempt to bring Goffman's work forward (temporally and culturally) by weaving in late modern theories of individualisation, notably through the lens of Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman.

Following Goffman (1959), I argue that the ways in which individuals strive to present themselves 'in the best possible light' provides a sociologically revealing line of inquiry, permitting consideration of individual choice-making, but also the wider societal norms that constrain which 'definitions of the situation' will be socially supported. This thesis similarly investigates the performative function of stories,

under the assumption that individuals use travel narratives to envision themselves as particular sorts of people, and to communicate self-enhancing impressions to others. By approaching young people's volunteer narratives as self-presentations, I hope to shed light on the types of identities their accounts may work to uphold and outwardly project.

5.2 Whiteness Studies

Referring to service-learning programmes generally, Butin (2006) cautions that the opportunity to participate in structured volunteer experiences could "ultimately come to be viewed as the 'Whitest of the White' enclave of postsecondary education…a luxury available only to the privileged few" (p. 482). In the case of international volunteering, participation is similarly related to a broader privilege of mobility associated with "Western passports, disposable income and white complexion" (Vrasti, 2013, p. 83). Given that those who choose to volunteer overseas tend to occupy an intersection of dominant social locations, I turn to whiteness studies to understand how the dynamics of privilege might inform how participants make meaning of their experiences in Kenya. This lens is important in the travel context because whiteness is "a prominent feature of one's way of being in the world, of how one navigates that world, and of how one is navigated around by others" (Alcoff, 2015, p. 9).

Endres and Gould (2009) summarise whiteness as "an institutionalized system of power and privilege that benefits Whites" (p. 424). Scholars in this field view whiteness as a social construction (as opposed to 'white skin' as a biological characteristic) and endeavour to interrogate the systemic factors that protect whiteness as a location of structural advantage (Dyer, 1997; Fine, Weis, Powell & Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Katz, 2003; Leonardo, 2002; Levine-Rasky, 2013; Alcoff, 2015). The notion of whiteness used in this thesis also encompasses the intersectional expectation that "like all social categories, the boundaries of whiteness shift over time and place and that white subjects are constituted in diasporic, hybrid and transnational identities and affiliations" (Mahrouse, 2008, p. 90).

In her monograph essay, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh (1989) lists the various ways white privilege manifests in her daily life, and collectively describes these advantages as an 'invisible knapsack': the "unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 188). Here, the author speaks to the

constancy and mobility of white privilege, but also to the silences (the 'colossal unseen dimensions') that surround its existence and perpetuation. The 'invisible knapsack' is a particularly fitting image for discussing travel narratives - a reminder that "tourists never just travel *to* places: their mindsets, routines and social relations travel *with* them" (Larsen, 2010, p. 322, italics in original). Indeed, the title of this thesis, *Unpacking Young People's Narrative Claims to Authenticity and Differentiation in the International Volunteer Experience* is a nod toward this important piece of scholarship and its influence on my academic journey.

While the whiteness studies literature base illuminates the invisibility that surrounds membership in the dominant majority - where the white experience is positioned as neutral, ordinary or cultureless - recent research has shown how young volunteers become increasingly attuned to the dynamics of whiteness over the course of their travels. For example, in Vrasti's (2013) ethnographic study of a volunteer group teaching English in Ghana, participants reported being magnets for locals' 'intense curiosity' and 'excessive admiration.' When host community members would holler 'Obruni' or 'Yevu' (white foreigner), touch their skin or stroke their hair, participants' reaction to this 'scrutinizing gaze' was one of anger and anxiety. Vrasti (2013) noticed that the locals' routine of making white bodies visible and exposing their privilege had the effect of foreclosing participants' goal of simply blending in, and instead, left the group "confined in space, placed under intense observation and constant scrutiny, and made to feel particular and peculiar" (p. 110). Similarly in Larsen's (2014) case study of eight Canadian university students' service-learning internships in Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda, all participants recalled how they were referred to using the common term 'Mzungu' (white foreigner) and more generally "stood out like crazy" (p. 10). These participants expressed feeling 'judged' by the colour of their skin - irritated that they were targeted for money and other resources because they were assumed to be financially privileged. In both cases, participants seemed to take offense to being viewed as an 'undifferentiated mass' (Urry & Larsen, 2011), some even construing the attention they received as 'reverse racism' (shifting the story to their own vulnerable positioning). Further, while participants came to 'see' whiteness as a category of meaning, in line with whiteness scholars' critiques, none of the participants made reference to the structural aspects of their white privilege or to power.

To further emphasise how whiteness functions as a symbolic category, some research documents instances where participants of colour are designated white when travelling overseas. For example, Clost (2011) interviewed one Canadian volunteer who self-identified as black and Muslim but was referred to as 'Salaminga' (white foreigner) while in Ghana. Similarly, in Angod's (2015) participant observation of a three week volunteer excursion in South Africa, the author suggests that East Asian participants 'acquire' whiteness through their affluence, association with western culture, and institutional membership within an elite Canadian secondary school. Here, participating in an international volunteer excursion has the effect of "folding bodies into national and institutional belonging, whiteness, and civility" (Angod, 2015, p. 121).

These findings seem particularly poignant amidst the present-day Syrian refugee crisis, where the travel is non-voluntary and the travellers are positioned as an unwelcome intrusion. Much *unlike* the experiences of western-situated volunteers of colour who are designated white, many migrants are feared to be 'unacceptable others,' potential deviants or even terrorists (Reay et al., 2007). That Simpson (2004) made a similar comparison during her doctoral study over a decade ago attests to the persistence and pervasiveness of this rhetoric: "one only has to think of the popular discourse about refugees and immigrants to appreciate what a radically different reception travellers from the south receive, compared to those from the west" (p. 26).

Where whiteness is made increasingly visible and attuned to its privilege, research documents identity resistances that allow individuals to think of themselves as 'good whites.' For example, Wiegman (1999) offers the term 'liberal whiteness' to denote a "counterwhiteness whose primary characteristic is its disaffiliation from white supremacist practices" (p. 119). Here, the white liberal seeks to embody goodness via their hyperconsciousness, progressive stance and solidarity with non-white others. On a similar note, Ahmed (2004) analyses academic texts and popular culture to explore how whiteness becomes reinforced through the act of being declared. The author is sceptical that the admission of privilege alone - what she calls 'a politics of declaration' - is necessarily an ideal practice. Here, the author asks: "Is a whiteness that is anxious about itself - its narcissism, its egoism, its privilege, its self-centeredness - better?" (p. 1). Ahmed's (2004) point is that the confession of whiteness involves a 'fantasy of transcendence' - it is not, in itself, an anti-racist action. In fact, declaring white privilege may paradoxically work to secure one's

innocence and non-implication by "imagining that relations of injustice are brought to equality by stating that they exist" (Angod, 2015, p. 159).

Thus, white liberals face what Bailey (1999) calls a 'dilemma of white privilege awareness' wherein social privilege is "at once impossible to dispose of, and impossible to use" (p. 85). This dilemma recognises that individuals cannot fully divest the unearned advantages extended to them, but that the very act of using ones' white privilege to combat structural inequalities inversely serves to reproduce and perpetuate the systems of domination they wish to diminish.

5.3 Youth in Late Modernity

Late modernity is a term associated with the individualisation theorists Zygmunt Bauman (2000), Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Anthony Giddens (1991). Together, they describe a second wave of twentieth century modernisation, which they contend has altered the nature of social relations and individual identity. I present this framework primarily via Bauman (2000), who famously refers to the distinction between 'solid' and 'liquid' modernity.

The assumption underlying the era of solid modernity - following the age of enlightenment in the eighteenth century - was that the world was "controllable, largely predictable and rationally comprehensible" (Vogel & Oschmann, 2013, p. 62). Put differently, and as the name implies, solid modernity was expected to hold its shape. Progress was seen as linear and always en route toward a final state of perfection, and by consequence, change was accepted only as a temporary nuisance which would slow or stop once that perfection was achieved. Liquid modernity, by contrast, is characterised by permanent uncertainty: "a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines" (Bauman, 2005, p. 1). Thus, in liquid modern times, all new social structures are only momentary settlements which shapeshift immediately, given that "fluids flow and yield to the slightest pressure" (Rutherford, 2007, p. 9).

This context of late or liquid modernity (from here, I use these terms interchangeably) has implications for the 'task' of individual identity-making. First, this era is characterised by the expansion of personal choice, in which the individual "faces a diversity of possible selves" (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). Unlike in solid modernity, where adopting a particular identity was comparatively straightforward and based on widely-shared codes for behaviour, the late modern individual must "assemble their

own identity packages from a vast range of competing and contradictory biographical options supplied by institutions" (Howard, 2007, p. 13). Second, the individual is assumed to have autonomy over one's life - in Bauman's (2000) words "compulsive and obligatory self-determination" - such that the burden of choice-making falls primarily on the individual's shoulders (p. 32). Finally, in this context of rapid change and instability, the late modern individual faces perpetual indecision and anxiety about "which of many possible identities to choose and whether the chosen identity will yield the most possible happiness" (Branaman, 2010, p. 240). Thus, the expectation of self-definition is a mixed blessing - a 'precarious freedom' - requiring ongoing circumspection to assess the potential consequences and by-products of certain choices (Beck & Beck-Gersheim, 2002).

Bauman (2000) further introduces the concept of the 'disposable biography.' In late modernity, having obligations of any kind constitutes an obstacle, one that risks holding the individual hostage and shutting out their options to exploit future opportunities. Thus, social norms have a 'brief shelf life' and individual identifications must be held loosely and sustained only 'until further notice.' Late modern society demands this flexibility and favours those who remain unencumbered and willing to discard commitments as soon as they have exhausted their appeal. Fifteen years after the publication of *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman partners with Raud (2015) to argue that the commencement of the digital age further heightens the ease and speed of this disposability. Here, the authors contend that individuals can swiftly abandon online identities or social networks that no longer satisfy them "by pressing some keys and desisting from touching some others" (p. 83). While Bauman and Raud (2015) do not appear to consider the *permanence* of digital traces (making it impossible to withdraw what has been previously shared online), this work nevertheless illustrates how the internet enables the rapid removal or revision of identity content like profile photographs, status updates, peer networks and user preferences.

To include a final conceptual dimension, Bauman (2005) stresses the consumerist slant of liquid modernity, whereby society "judges and evaluates its members mostly by their consumption-related capacities and conduct" (p. 82). Butcher and Smith (2015) make the extension of this idea explicit, by positioning contemporary international volunteering as an expression of one's 'lifestyle politics,' rooted in the assumption that individuals "can bring about what they perceive to be

progressive outcomes through what they buy at the shops, cafés and travel agents" (p. 8).

I choose to draw on late or liquid modernity to trace the particular contours which give rise to the representational dilemmas faced by youth today. Such contextualisation is additionally appropriate in the international volunteer setting because this activity is an easily consumable and disposable identity project. For example, Lonely Planet (2013), a popular and mainstream travel guide, opens their international volunteering edition with a caution:

> The more popular international volunteering becomes, the more difficult it is to pinpoint where to go, what to do and which organisation you want to volunteer with. For starters, the sheer number of volunteering opportunities today can be overwhelming. Then there's the problem that not all volunteering is good volunteering. There are plenty of volunteer organisations that are not meeting or responding to local needs, not working in proper partnership with host communities and certainly not working towards sustainable solutions. And, let's face it, no-one wants to become that volunteer who has just built a bridge where no bridge was needed. (p. 9)

Here, the would-be volunteer faces a vast spectrum of commercial programme options, and the responsibility for making the right choice is resolutely the individual's. Further, there is also a policing tone implied: that one would (and should) be embarrassed to discover they had made an irresponsible project choice.

5.4 Research Questions

Developed from the literature review and theoretical influences presented above, the broad question that drives this research study is: how do young people make meaning of their experiences before, during and after a short-term international volunteer excursion in Kenya? Drawing on Goffmanian concepts (each defined below for clarity), I will further explore the following sub-questions:

1) Through which 'frames' do young people view and evaluate their international volunteer experiences?

In Goffman's (1974) terms, frames are the principles of organisation "which govern the subjective meaning we assign to social events" (p. 10).

2) What self-presentations or 'fronts' do young people foreground when they communicate their international volunteer experiences to an audience?

Goffman (1959) proposes that individuals adopt certain 'fronts' to disclose selective information to audience members. When expressing a particular front, individuals act in accordance with how they believe people are *supposed to* act in that role; adhering to behavioural, speech or gestural norms which have been "socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society" (p. 35). Importantly, these fronts serve as a promotional tool, which individuals use to cast themselves in the best possible light.

   3) What impressions do young people 'give' and 'give off' when they

     represent their international volunteer experiences on social media?

For Goffman (1959), individuals foster self-presentations through impressions 'given' and impressions 'given off.' Impressions 'given' are consciously emitted, information which the actor "uses admittedly and solely to convey the information" (p. 14). Impressions 'given off' are largely unintentional (or intentional in a covert way) and appear "symptomatic of the actor" (p. 14). These expressions are used in combination to control the 'definition of the situation.' However, because impressions 'given off' are made though inference and are thus somewhat 'ungovernable,' Goffman (1959) suggests that "the witness is likely to have the advantage over the actor" (p. 20).

Chapter 6: Methodology

The following chapter details the methodological and ethical principles underpinning the design of this research project. I begin with a discussion of the research stance from which I approached this inquiry. I then consider the principles and practicalities of the course I chose to gather, analyse and present this thesis research. I conclude by reflecting on the ethical considerations, methodological challenges, and possible limitations of the study design, and the strategies I undertook to mitigate concerns.

6.1 Research Stance

While I accept the realist premise that phenomena exist independently of human consciousness, in contrast to positivists, this research is based on an ontological position whereby "people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties" (Mason, 1997, p. 39). Thus, I acknowledge the objective qualities of a natural world and its influence, but am concerned intellectually with ways of knowing that are created and ascribed meaning by human actors, and are therefore open to multiple interpretations, dynamic across time and space, and contextualised within specific milieus (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For social constructionists, 'knowledge' is assembled through interactions between individuals and their environments, and therefore, understandings of the social world must be held "much more lightly and tentatively and far less dogmatically, seeing them as historically and culturally effected interpretations rather than eternal truths of some kind" (Crotty, 1998, p. 64).

I view narrative accounts as 'jointly authored' by the individual and the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded (McAdams, 1997). I uphold that individuals exercise agency and internality in the process of narrating their lives, and that "choice is implicated not only in the selection of what particular scene to narrate but also in how to narrate the scene, how to frame its antecedents and consequences, and what conclusions to draw from it" (McAdams & Bowman, 2001, p. 29). At the same time, these accounts are not produced in isolation from the structures of wider society, nor are they fully independent of the cultural narratives that preceded them. Thus, I take a middling position: "young people neither represent lone authors of a singular story nor are they floating receptacles for their symbolic expressions of selfhood" (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010, p. 46).

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From my perspective, the goal of qualitative inquiry is not to incrementally piece together the singular 'truth' behind an individual's storied experience, nor to somehow map the mind of its teller. Indeed, this type of work attempts to sit comfortably with the notion that 'the self' cannot be fully revealed or understood in any absolute sense. Instead, individuals' travel accounts are viewed as containing a 'narrative truth': "constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these 'remembered facts'" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 8). This acknowledgement is not meant to undermine the value of narrative as a research tool: on the contrary, because they are lifelike, intelligible and plausible, these texts 'ring true' to the human experience in ways that can meaningfully inform social theory (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I position myself as an interpretivist, in that I assume individuals will not make identical interpretations in response to identical phenomena, and thus, seek to deeply understand the multifaceted ways people make meaning of life episodes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In the interpretivist paradigm, it is expected that there is no straightforward way of telling a story: "it is always possible both to tell another version of what happened and to tell another story of our lives" (Kaplan, 2003, p. 10). Here, it is helpful to consider the hermeneutic notion of 'polysemy.' The text is capable of supporting many different interpretations, and therefore, the task of elaborating its meanings is never fully complete (Gardner, 2010). Ultimately, the purpose of this inquiry is to offer a 'translation' of young peoples' storied experiences overseas (in some sense, an interpretation of their interpretations), to look for the broader historical and cultural narratives which these texts may speak to, and to make these accounts available for interpretation by subsequent audiences (Gardner, 2010). While I find the inexhaustible nature of interpretation attractive, I do not assume a stance of relativism. As researchers, the interpretations we make remain governed by and responsible to the data at hand, and as such, some representations will be more plausible or convincing than others.

6.2 Positionality

Many qualitative scholars believe it essential to acknowledge their role as the primary 'measurement device' in the research process, and by extension, the differential power afforded to them in the construction of knowledge (Creswell, 2007). Indeed, researchers inevitably enter the process of interpretation with existing

preconceptions which are nestled "deep within us, understandings whose derivation may be some hidden mix of personal experience, scholarship, [and] assertions of other researchers" (Stake, 1995, p. 12). Such subjectivity is not considered "a failing needing to be eliminated" but rather, the necessary and inescapable situatedness from which a scholar begins to uncover meaning (Stake, 1995, p. 45). This admission, however, highlights the role of reflexivity, whereby the researcher considers the underlying assumptions that 'configure' their interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This principle is discussed as an ethical quandary by Sikes (2010), who suggests that "when we offer a version of someone's life [we must make] clear the nature of the gaze that is being brought to bear upon it" - at least to the extent that we consciously recognise our own gaze at play (p. 13).

I understand the act of 'positioning myself' as a responsibility requiring my attention throughout the entire thesis document, rather than a declaration to be bracketed and placed aside. Here though, I wish to summarise that I am writing from the social location of a white, middle-class, Canadian woman. Further, I use personal pronouns and an active voice to place myself continually within the text.

6.3 Research Study

The present research study follows participants' experiences as they prepare for, participate in and reflect upon a unique life episode, and is therefore designed to prioritise both depth (one person over time) and breadth (across numerous individuals) within its analysis. Participants were 27 current and former undergraduate students who took part a ten week volunteer excursion in Kenya, facilitated through a UK-based charitable organisation (herein referred to as the 'sending organisation'). This sample was divided into two cohorts: 12 participants were solicited from the outgoing 2014 volunteer cohort (whose journeys could be followed in-the-moment and across time), and 15 participants were drawn from previous years' excursions (who could provide a retrospective outlook on the 'same' experience). I consider this group a purposeful sample, which involves intentionally seeking the group of individuals who "can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). In this section, I will provide contextual information on the volunteer excursion and the participants themselves.

6.3.1 The Volunteer Excursion

The focus of this thesis research was international volunteers' individual narrative accounts, however, participants' experiences overseas were necessarily situated within and mediated through the framework provided by the sending organisation. As I did not conduct a project assessment, my comments on the sending organisation will be limited to the details I view as essential for background.

The sending organisation is primarily focused on improving the quality of education in rural secondary schools in southwestern Kenya. Volunteers are partnered with an individual school where their role is to develop an investment strategy (in consultation with school administrators) and then manage its implementation over the course of ten weeks. Project work varies at each school site, but commonly includes purchasing textbooks and science lab equipment, arranging small infrastructure projects such as installing electricity or water tanks, and facilitating extra-curricular programming focused on sexual health or physical fitness. The sending organisation recruits undergraduate students from three Russell Group universities in the United Kingdom to support their programming over summer holidays. While not formally facilitated through these higher education institutions, the sending organisation operates university-based societies and advertises through university-based mechanisms (student orientation fairs, departmental email LISTSERVs).

I became aware of the sending organisation through an advertising campaign soliciting undergraduate volunteers. I had considered approximately five additional sending organisations, a shortlist I created by collecting flyers at student orientation events and subsequent website research. I was specifically looking to partner with a single organisation that 1) offered volunteer opportunities overseas, 2) catered specifically to higher education students and 3) took place in a group setting. I attended a public information session run by the sending organisation and made contact with the presenting representative, who then connected me with members of the management committee. The management committee expressed interest in the research project and agreed to help provide access to potential participants as well as the volunteer site in Kenya. In return, the sending organisation asked that I share with them a summary of my findings and give a presentation about the project at an annual research symposium they organise.

Because my research questions revolved broadly around volunteer travel narratives, the study was not designed with any particular host country in mind.

Indeed, the same study could have been undertaken in another geographic context, perhaps even with similar findings. However, that Kenya was widely offered as a volunteer destination by the various sending organisations I considered was unsurprising. In Tourism Research and Marketing's (2008) survey of 300 volunteer sending organisations, 90 per cent of volunteer travel was located in Africa, Latin America and Asia, a finding that underscores the uneven flow of volunteer labour from the Global North to South. More specifically, in Callanan and Thomas' (2005) analysis of 698 volunteer projects advertised through the online database 'Go Abroad.com,' Kenya was listed as the eighth most popular destination for volunteer travel, and was second only to Ghana within the African continent (India, Ecuador and Costa Rica were host to the most volunteer projects overall). Kenya might be considered a desirable location for western volunteers because English is an official language (alongside Kiswahili) but also because it is perceived as "destitute enough to convince volunteers about the usefulness and urgency of their work and…safe and affluent enough to host, feed and entertain volunteers" (Vrasti, 2013, p. 65). That being said, in 2008, the sending organisation chose to move the project site to Uganda due to the eruption of post-election violence in Kenya, and so, three retrospective participants narrated experiences from this neighbouring context.

6.3.2 Participants

This research takes place in the context of a group excursion to shed light on the dynamics created when young people travel within a tight social network, or what Noy (2004) and Maoz (2007) refer to as 'enclaves.' In this study, the 2014 cohort travelled in a group of twelve, all of whom chose to participate in this study. The group was accompanied by three facilitators, all of whom chose to participate as part of the retrospective sample. To solicit participants for this study, I attended the sending organisation's pre-departure training session, where the entire 2014 cohort would be in attendance. The sending organisation allocated time within the day's schedule for me to give an overview of the research project, distribute a recruitment letter (Appendix A), and ask for interested individuals to provide me with their contact information so that I could send them an informed consent document (Appendix C) and arrange a convenient time to conduct the initial (pre-departure) interview. Members of previous years' cohorts were contacted electronically and via the sending organisation's alumni LISTSERV and extended an invitation to participate (Appendix B), followed by an informed consent document (Appendix D).

In total, this study includes 12 participants from the 2014 cohort and 15 participants from previous volunteer excursions (2004-2013). To maintain confidentiality, participants' names have be replaced with pseudonyms and this research report has been stripped of identifying information such as references to the individual cities, universities or organisations involved.

I did not seek to include or exclude participants based on demographic characteristics. The study criterion was simply that interested individuals were taking part in the volunteer excursion and were at least 18 years old (all participants were between the ages of 19 and 21 at the time of the excursion). Sensitive to the intersectional nature of identities, I did not focus on any social marker in particular, but make brief summarising notes on gender, nationality, race and social class here as a matter of context. At the time of their volunteer excursion, all participants (19 female and 8 male) were undergraduate students attending Russell Group universities in the United Kingdom. Eight participants were international students, citizens of China, Singapore, Poland, Spain, Greece and Germany. All but six participants identified as white - the exceptions being four Asian participants from China and Singapore and two British participants of Bangladeshi decent. While I did not ask explicitly about participants' socio-economic status, the volunteer project described in this study required participants to fundraise or subsidise approximately £2,000 to cover trip costs. I further positioned these participants as economically privileged based on the fact that they were enrolled in prestigious higher education institutions (post-fee increase) and had chosen to donate their time towards a ten week international volunteer project in lieu of paid employment. Comparing this sample against Tourism Research and Marketing's (2008) survey of over 8,500 young volunteers, this study's participants would be viewed as fairly typical, as findings pointed to the overrepresentation of white, middle-class, able-bodied women within the international volunteer sector (see also Jones, 2004). Indeed, I only came across one demographic counter-example within the literature I reviewed, found in Judge's (2015) study of two international volunteer excursions in Kenya and Zimbabwe which solicited volunteers from ethnically diverse youth groups based in low-income neighbourhoods in London. A summary of participants' demographics are presented in the tables below.

Table 1

Participant Demographics: 2014 Cohort

Name	Nationality	Gender
Celeste	UK	Female
Cynthia	Singapore	Female
Dominic	Greece	Male
Gabriela	Spain	Female
Jodie	China	Female
Karolina	Poland	Female
Logan	UK	Male
Lydia	China	Female
Max	Singapore	Male
Naomi	UK	Female
Paige	UK	Female
Tabitha	UK	Female

Table 2

Participant Demographics: Previous Years' Cohorts

Name	Nationality	Gender	Year Attended
Bradley	UK	Male	2007
Colin	UK	Male	2013
Fiona	UK	Female	2008
Gareth	UK	Male	2006
Gemma	UK	Female	2008
Harriet	UK	Female	2005
Isobel	Germany	Female	2009
Lucy	UK	Female	2004
Miriam	UK	Female	2007
Mitchell	UK	Male	2009
Natasha	UK	Female	2012
Robyn	UK	Female	2007
Trevor	UK	Male	2008

Whitney	UK	Female	2009
Zara	UK	Female	2008

All study participants had travelled outside of the UK on holiday, though no one in the 2014 cohort had volunteered overseas before. A few retrospective participants had previously participated in an international volunteer excursion - in all cases described negatively - and they drew on these experiences during their interviews as a point of comparison. These participants had chosen to volunteer overseas again in the hopes of 'fixing' their first disappointing or unsatisfying journeys.

6.4 Data Collection

Goffman has long been criticised for either addressing his methodological procedures vaguely or not addressing them at all. In Lemert's (1997) discussion of this scholar's legacy, the author suggests that Goffman "abjured all the self-authorizing manners of scientists and community organizers of various other kinds - appeals to protocols, laws, proofs, techniques, road maps, evidences, recipes, instruction manuals, rules for use, schedules, and the like" (p. xx). Unlike Goffman, I take a fairly systematic approach to data collection, analysis and presentation, and aim to offer the reader a coherent account of these steps in the following sections. I do this not just to satisfy the conventions of academic writing, but because I view the construction of one's research findings - how the research story came to unfold - as both inherently interesting and an aspect of my ethical stance.

This research study explores young people's narrative accounts verbally, by way of semi-structured interviews and visually, by way of photographic content posted to Facebook. I chose this approach because I wanted to combine the strengths of two research traditions (one well-established, and one just emerging) to multiply the angles from which young people's international volunteer experiences might be understood. In their justification for conjoining verbal and visual forms of self-presentation, Croghan, Griffin, Hunter and Phoenix (2008) suggests this strategy "allows individuals more scope for presenting complex, ambiguous and contradictory versions of the self" (p. 355). From this statement, I read 'more scope' as both an opportunity and a challenge: merging multiple methods opens the inquiry to increased (perhaps swamp-like) complexity, but is favourable because it extends the potential to build a nuanced research story which contributes to a currently-underexplored body of

knowledge. Thus, my goal was not to 'triangulate' evidence per se, but to widen the sphere of interpretation available.

The second reason I have chosen to explore two modes of self-presentation is because I see it as highly relevant to contemporary youth culture "to examine the hybridity between physical spaces and cyberspace" (Paris, 2012, p. 193). This strategy respects that there is increasingly less division between the online and offline social world, and views digital mediums as central to understanding how young people communicate meaning (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). This study is therefore a timely and unique opportunity to explore how individuals coordinate their identities across face-to-face and social media platforms.

Finally, this study follows participants' international volunteer excursion temporally (over time), but also spatially as they shift geographic contexts from an undergraduate campus in the United Kingdom to a rural village setting in Kenya. As part of the overall data collection strategy, I organised a three week field visit in Kenya, in order to conduct the second set of interviews and to make field notes. Crossley (2013), who also undertook research among a group of UK volunteers in Kenya, argued that a key strength of her study design was its ability to "extend research spatially," capturing a sense of "where the tourist has come from and to where they are returning to understand the relationship between their touristic and non-touristic existence" (p. 13).

To summarise, the data set - collected over 18 months and representing an 11 year span of volunteer experience - consisted of 55 semi-structured interviews, 839 digital photographs and personal field notes. In the next sections, I elaborate on these elements in turn.

6.4.1 Verbal Text

This research project embraces storytelling as a central mechanism through which individuals convey meaning. This study involved repeated, semi-structured interviews, inspired by the methodological work of narrative scholars. Narrative interviews are commonly utilised in qualitative research to gather rich, personalised data in the hopes of revealing central meanings expressed through talk (Chase, 2011; Hammersley, 2008; Riessman, 2008). While maintaining that the author cannot be fully known, verbalised accounts are nevertheless considered valuable data because they "invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator" (Reissman, 2008, p. 9). Here, one benefit of the interview design is that the

researcher has the opportunity to ask for clarification of meaning, thereby enhancing their grasp of the author's intention (to the extent that these intentions are known). In addition to illuminating perspectives consciously-held by individuals, conducting interviews may further "present to the researcher embedded and tacit assumptions, meanings, reasonings and patterns of action and inaction" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 116).

This study involved a repeated interview strategy. The 12 participants from the 2014 cohort were interviewed once before, once during (on-site in Kenya), and once after their international volunteer excursion. Collecting data at these three distinct moments supported my desire to build a robust understanding of participants' reflections on their experiences over time, capitalising on the notion that "living involves continually constructing and reconstructing stories of our lives, without knowing their outcome, revising the plot as new events are added" (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001, p. xv). McLeod (2003) further demonstrates the advantage of a study design which attends to 'multiple stories' over time:

> Focusing on prospective/retrospective accounts works against reproducing strictly linear conceptions of identity formation and individual development because it illustrates the recursive, shifting and uneven ways in which identities 'take shape', and in which we come to recognise and represent ourselves as certain kinds of people (p. 206).

The 15 participants from previous years' cohorts took part in one retrospective interview. This aspect of the study allowed me to approximate a longitudinal design and to gather perspective on how young peoples' narratives might evolve well-beyond the 'bounded segment' of the international volunteer experience itself (Riessman, 2008). The inclusion of these additional viewpoints are seen as instructive in the context of narrative work because, as Polkinghorne (1995) purports:

> The significance and contribution of particular happenings and actions are not finally evident until the denouement of the episode. Events which might have appeared insignificant at the time may turn out to have been a crucial occurrence affecting the outcome. (p. 8)

Thus, the retrospective interviews provide insight on how young people's stories 'hold together' over time, as well as the extent to which one's travel experiences come to be integrated into a wider life narrative. These retrospective accounts are important because meaning-making is "an ongoing process which extends far beyond the actual tourist visit" (Wearing, 2001, p. 3).

During one member-checking exercise (described later in this chapter), I learned that four 2014 cohort participants (Celeste, Gabriela, Naomi and Tabitha) returned to Kenya for a second excursion with the same sending organisation in summer 2015. This offered the unanticipated opportunity to capture a longitudinal perspective (18 months after the time of our first interview) with the benefit of participants' hindsight, but also, any new perspectives they gained through a subsequent return. Such opportunities for longitudinal research are rare, especially given the time and resource constraints of a doctoral thesis project. One example is Kiely's (2004) study of 22 American undergraduates' service-learning experiences in Nicaragua, research collected over a seven-year period, which was enabled by the author's own ongoing role as the programme's facilitator. Kiely (2004) suggests that this longitudinal design provided the substantial empirical documentation required to support his claims to the transformational impact this excursion had on participants' worldview and lifestyles (described in Chapter 2). As stated, I had already sought to approximate a longitudinal design by including a retrospective sample, and thus, was pleased to extend the study when the opportunity for a fourth interview presented itself. A summary of the interview timeline is presented in the table below.

Table 3

Data Collection Timeline

May 2014	Pre-departure interview (2014 cohort)
	Retrospective interview (previous years' cohorts)
August 2014	On-site interview (2014 cohort)
November 2014	Post-excursion interview (2014 cohort)
November 2015	Subsequent-excursion interview (Celeste, Gabriela, Naomi and Tabitha)

I choose to conduct semi-structured interviews because I wanted the option to prompt for additional information or to reword questions for clarity (Stake, 1995). Echoing the tenets of narrative research, my questioning strategy remained broad throughout the research process. For example, I opened the on-site interview with "Tell me about your journey in Kenya so far. You can start wherever it makes sense to begin the story and include as much detail as you wish." I did not follow a progressive focusing design which would "systematically reduce the breadth of their enquiry to give more concentrated attention to the emerging issues" (Stake, 1995, p.

148). In other words, I chose not to prompt for targeted information based on the content of previous interviews: for example, while I had identified 'authenticity' as a potential theme before conducting the research, I never asked a question about this concept. Surely a progressively focused approach was tempting (especially at the time of the subsequent-excursion interviews, when I had already identified themes for the findings chapters), but my primary interest was in the travel narratives participants brought up naturally. Further, I felt I could not make a solid argument about which stories had been consistent or contradictory across accounts if I had been the one prompting their telling. The strategy to remain broad was risky in a sense, because participants can sweep the researcher in multiple and unexpected directions, however, when themes do emerge strongly (as was the case in this study), it lends considerable strength to the researcher's claims. The interview frameworks are provided in Appendix E and F.

After posing each question, I assumed the role of a listener and avoided steering participants' narratives until they arrived at a natural conclusion (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Riessman, 2008; Wengraf, 2001). I found this strategy difficult at first, as my natural inclination was to converse dialogically. Indeed, when I listened to the recordings of the first few interviews, I found that it was my own interruption that lead to tangential and unfruitful contributions. With practice, I found the data was more manageable if I allowed participants to respond in full, interjecting only to clarify rather than to spark additional conversation. In general, I found that participants narrated their experiences with considerable ease, and at times, eagerly launched into long descriptive chronicles immediately after my opening remarks. More often than not, participants rolled each story into the next without intermission, and I was grateful for adopting a narrative approach that afforded them the space to do so.

Procedurally, each interview lasted approximately one hour and took place at a mutually negotiated time in comfortable public settings. I asked participants to submit a signed informed consent form prior to beginning the first (pre-departure) interview. Celeste, Gabriela, Naomi and Tabitha completed an amended informed consent form at the time of the fourth (subsequent-excursion) interview, as this was an addition to the initial study design. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and stored as a password-protected file on my personal laptop.

6.4.2 Visual Text

I was initially inspired to incorporate visual methods into this research project when I became acquainted with the work of Ingram (2013), who used photography as a participatory research method - in combination with document analysis and semi-structured interviews - to help understand seven civically-active Canadian girls' perspectives on citizenship and gender. In this case, the author provided participants with disposable cameras and asked them to document their daily lives, specifically including images showing what they believed a 'good citizen' and 'good girl' looked like. Following this, I was introduced to a study conducted by Cremin (who would later become my doctoral thesis supervisor) and colleagues, who employed visual methods to explore pupil voice among 26 disaffected and engaged secondary school students in the United Kingdom (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011). Here, the authors asked participants to take photographs and create annotated scrapbooks representing their schooling experiences, which then formed the basis for the researchers' interview script. While I chose not to pursue a 'photovoice' (Ingram, 2013) or 'photo-elicitation' (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011) data collection method, these studies were pivotal in exciting my imagination to the wider possibilities of qualitative research.

Indeed, my growing interest in photography as a visual method seemed in natural alliance with the study of travel narratives because, as Urry (1990) highlights: "our memories of places are largely structured through photographic images and the mainly verbal text we weave around images when they are on show to others" (p. 140). Crang (1997) concurs that images captured may signpost one's most significant memories and serve the narrator as "starting-points on which to hang personal stories" (p. 368). Thus, photography is valuable to the narrative researcher as both a standalone visual text, but also as an integral prompt for verbal storytelling.

While there is a strong realist tradition surrounding the medium of photography - the familiar adage that 'the camera doesn't lie' - I would like to bring attention to its socially constructed nature. In Sontag's (1977) essay collection discussing the philosophy of modern photography, the author underscores this point: "even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience…in deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects" (p. 6). Thus, photographs bear witness to *a view*

of the world, they are 'accurate' in the sense that they represent the way the photographer wishes to capture the scene.

While the use of photography as a research tool has enjoyed long standing in the social sciences (Crang, 1997), empirical research involving digital content posted to Facebook is relatively limited. I chose to focus on Facebook because of its well-established popularity worldwide, with 1.65 billion monthly active users (and 1.09 billion *daily* active users) as of the latest report, published in March 2016 (Facebook, 2016). Launched in 2004, Facebook is a form of online social media, in which users build a personal profile by uploading content to represent themselves to a potentially expansive peer network. A Facebook profile consists of a main profile photo and a 'wall' (public message board) upon which users can upload photographs, written commentary or links to other webpages. The option to caption each photograph invites the user to narrate the images they present, similar to a traditional scrapbook. This technology is what Castells (2009) terms 'mass self-communication,' an apparatus for organising and sharing life experiences with others on a relatively large and pubic scale. This method is consistent with my interest in impression management, as the primary function of Facebook is to distribute personal content to a wider public.

Facebook is also a social space. Facebook users interact with other users by becoming linked as 'friends.' Once this friendship connection is established, what is publicly visible on one account becomes accessible to the other. Users can 'tag' friends in the images they post, such that the friend's name appears when the cursor scrolls over their image. Those who are 'tagged' have the option to 'untag' themselves (for example, if they find the photograph unflattering) so that the content is no longer visible on their own profile. Thus, friends may frequently supplement one another's online self-presentations, but each user maintains control over whether or not they are identifiable in the images presented. By extension, this means that an individual must manage what they post to their own profile, but also what others post about them.

Facebook is a particularly relevant research tool because it permits a consideration of how young people select parts of their experiences (and not others) to establish a certain self-presentation. This element of deliberateness is important to bear in mind when undertaking an analysis of the images young people post to publicly represent their international volunteer experiences. The photograph itself (its

choice of subject, its composition) already tells the reader something about an individual's particular gaze upon the world, and Facebook adds an additional layer of interest because the user makes editorial decisions: which photographs to post online, in what order they should be arranged, and with what descriptions they should be captioned. Thus, photographs, and their intentional placement on Facebook, are a rich source of young peoples' non-verbalised statement making.

While Facebook is a mechanism for distributing content about the self, it is also an important source of popular culture information, where individuals share links to webpages, editorials or news articles. In Mathers' (2010) study of an American semester-abroad class in South Africa, the author includes an analysis of mainstream media sources, arguing that participants' accounts must be presented in tandem with the "simultaneous but fleeting" inputs that shape these encounters and link them to a broader conversation (p. 23). Here, the author maintains that researchers must "take seriously the way popular culture in various media forms was walking alongside their stories, possibly shaping them, but more importantly reflecting them, echoing them, and taking their narratives to a wider audience" (p. 20). In the empirical chapters to follow, participants' references to online popular media sources are fleshed out to honour the central role they played in volunteers' evaluations of their own experiences, and of the international volunteer industry more generally.

Procedurally, the gathering of visual text was limited to the 2014 cohort, all of whom had an active Facebook account during the data collection phase of this study. I could have also sought to include the archived Facebook activity of the retrospective sample, however, I had to quell my desire for gathering ever-more-data to keep the study commensurate with the time constraints and word limits of a doctoral thesis, and also to think deeply enough about the considerable data that was already being elicited. To access participants' Facebook profile, I opened a temporary 'researcher account' (separate from my own personal account) and sent a 'friend request' to each person who agreed to participate in the study. I chose to create a researcher account to protect participants' confidentiality, ensuring that my own peer network would be unable to see names, profiles or posts related to anyone involved in the study. This also served the practical function of organising participants' visual text into an isolated 'newsfeed' rather than becoming intertwined with announcements from my personal group of friends, family and colleagues. I accessed participants' Facebook profiles periodically, making notes about the subject matter, composition and thematic

patterns within the visual text presented. Because participants' Facebook profiles were their 'real life' accounts (rather than an alias adopted for the study), individuals also posted content unrelated to the international volunteer experience itself during the period of data collection. This content was visible to me, but was not drawn upon in the analysis. Further, this inquiry was limited to the photographs participants posted and any written captions they included to describe or explain each picture. While participants' Facebook friends could respond to these images in the 'comments' section, any such remarks have been excluded from the analysis because the peer network had not consented to be part of this project. Finally, I have reproduced a number of participants' own photographs throughout the findings chapters. Each of these images has been included with the permission of its author. In order to safeguard identities, I have avoided reproducing photographs that make clear the identity of the sending organisation or the volunteer site. In addition, I have blurred the faces of all individuals who have been captured in participants' photographs.

As I began to share this study's findings at various academic conferences, I was frequently asked whether I believed participants modified their online behaviour knowing that a researcher was lurking in the background. The answer, without doubt, is yes. While participants were not directed in any way about the type or amount of visual content they might share, I assume that any compositions made available were part and parcel of their impression management strategy - an attempt to be viewed in a positive light, and in line with the 'character' they believed the audience might judge most favourably. Facebook is, after all, an 'exhibition space' (Hogan, 2010) and it is precisely this notion of creating an 'idealised impression' (Goffman, 1959) that interests me. Here, I also assume that participants were subject to the 'disciplinary gaze' of fellow participants, who (perhaps inadvertently) help to streamline protocols around acceptable ways of presenting one's travel experiences online (Urry & Larsen, 2011). With this in mind, my position follows McAdams (1997): "neither the private musings nor the public manoeuvring is any more 'real' or 'authentic' than the other" (p. 64).

6.4.3 Field Notes

As part of the overall data collection strategy, I conducted a three week field visit in Kenya. This excursion was organised in conjunction with the sending organisation's management committee, and took place approximately halfway through participants' journey. The field visit was advantageous on a number of levels,

first and foremost in permitting me a deeper understanding of the context in which participants' narrative texts were produced (the schools they worked with, the accommodation where they stayed, the wider community landscape), with the ultimate goal of writing richly detailed portrayals of the volunteer experience. The field visit also served a logistical advantage, allowing me to conduct the second set of interviews face-to-face, as participants did not have reliable access to the online interfaces through which we could have otherwise communicated, such as Skype or Facebook Messenger. Alternatively, I could have asked participants to write journals and letters at predetermined intervals, a strategy utilised effectively by Sol (2013) to document the study abroad experiences of five black American women who travelled independently to Italy, Japan, South Korea and France. In my case, the opportunity to travel alongside was feasible because participants volunteered as a single group in a single location.

I do not position this research study as ethnographic. In addition to budgetary concerns, the research questions I pursued - with their emphasis on the analysis of verbal and visual text - did not require or justify becoming so immersed at the volunteer site that I 'went unnoticed.' Indeed, my interest was in the dramaturgical aspects of self-presentation: "the selective details that one presents in order to foster the desired impression alongside the unintentional details that are given off as part of the performance" (Hogan, 2010, p. 378). Thus, my approach more closely resembled Nast's (1994) explanation of fieldwork as "research where researcher and researched directly interact in relationships that tend to be periodic, short and intense" (p. 54).

Crossley (2013), Simpson (2004) and Sin (2009) all utilised a participant observation method to gain an in-depth and first-hand understanding of the dynamics underlying international volunteer work. Specifically, Simpson (2004) acted as a project leader for a Gap Year excursion in Peru, while Crossley (2013) and Sin (2009) enrolled as fellow volunteers during their fieldwork in Kenya and South Africa respectively. These authors acknowledge the difficulties they faced in differentiating between their role as a staff or team member and their role as a researcher, wherein "there was hardly a line between what constituted research and what did not" (Sin, 2009, p. 487). Furthermore, Crossley (2013) described her fieldwork as 'intense' due to "the lack of privacy within the accommodation, which consisted of dormitories and communal eating areas, the long days of volunteering and then socialising in the evenings, and the sense of never being able to switch off from my surroundings" (p.

76). My own data collection strategy avoided these concerns: I participated in group activities when invited, but my role was at all times that of a researcher. Here, Crossley (2013), Simpson (2004) and Sin's (2009) approaches benefit from intimate proximity, and mine from critical distance. While I do not believe this positioning provides me an 'objective' standpoint, it did solve some of the relational tensions encountered by these authors.

I chose to stay at a guest house in the central town, nearby the rental house where participants were accommodated as a group. I met group members each morning at the local matatu (mini-bus) station, and rotated between visiting the six secondary school sites associated with the project. I scheduled interviews with individual participants at their convenience, taking care not to encroach on their primary duties as volunteers. These formal conversations were enriched by informal interactions that took place in the spaces in between, particularly during our long public transportation commutes. I accepted invitations to social events, including communal meals, group debrief sessions and outings to local tourist attractions. I also extended invitations spontaneously, for example, to join me for dinner at my guest house.

While not in the role of a volunteer, this field visit enabled me to have my own bodily experience in Kenya. Goffman's (1989) approach similarly involved collecting data "by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals" (p. 125). While I had travelled to the African continent previously - as a facilitator for a group-based international volunteer excursion in South Africa - this was my first experience travelling to Kenya. My own naïve positioning, I suspect, engendered increased rapport between myself and participants. For example, during the pre-departure interviews, we shared uncertainties around local standards of dress, anticipated menu items, required vaccinations and the like. From my perspective, revealing some of my own vulnerabilities made our research relationship feel less like a site of unequal power.

Procedurally, I maintained a daily practice of writing field notes to document the research process as it unfolded and to reflect on my initial analyses. These field notes followed a chronological ordering of events, including descriptive summaries of the settings and interactions that took place each day. In line with the interpretive nature of this research project, I also captured my own intimate thoughts and

emotional reactions. Indeed, the field visit served as an important reminder of my own experiences as an international volunteer, and afforded me an opportunity to revisit and renew the ways I have storied my own travel narratives, now over a decade since. In this way, journeying alongside participants allowed me to fulfil what Vrasti (2013) refers to as a 'double rite of passage': "that of tourist entering the 'secrets' of another culture and that of a field worker penetrating the 'inner sanctum' of a disciplinary tradition" (p. 12-13).

6.5 Data Analysis

6.5.1 Procedural Approach

In this study, I followed an analysis procedure outlined by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) in their influential text *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*. Specifically, I undertook a 'categorical-content' analysis - the 'classic method' for conducting narrative research - wherein "separate utterances of the text are extracted, classified, and gathered into these categories/groups" (p. 13). Here, the researcher inspects several stories, teasing out the resonances across accounts, and then integrates these with concepts derived from prior theoretical and empirical knowledge.

I began my 'selection of subtext' (step one) by reading through transcriptions holistically to develop a general sense of pattern within the dataset. I then analysed each interview transcription line-by-line, making written notes, highlighting key passages and generating ideas for content categories. I shifted between reading transcriptions and listening to interview audio-recordings, as the tone and emotional sentiment of the written and spoken mediums illuminated different aspects of participants' accounts. I paid attention to word choice and recurrence within phrases (acknowledging that language is one means of socially constructing reality), but diverged from more structural approaches that would focus intensely on the linguistic constructions of speech (Riessman, 2008). From these readings, I created a 'definition of content categories' (step two), coding the various themes and sub-themes that had emerged within the text. Some of these categories were identified prior to conducting the research based on my review of literature (for example, participants' desire for 'authentic' travel experience), while others were emergent (for example, participants' reluctance to be framed as a 'voluntourist'). In other words, the codes were generated both inductively (data-driven) and deductively (theory-driven). Once I had established content categories, I worked in a separate word document to 'sort material into

categories' (step three), extracting sentences and utterances from each transcription and pasting them under the subheading I had assigned. This process was a 'circular procedure' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998) that involved considerable refinement and modification of categories as I made decisions about what 'counted' in each. Overall, these steps allowed me to gain a broad sense of "the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature, and the nature of the details the teller provides about it" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 63). Once I had established the themes and sub-themes I wanted to pursue within the findings chapters, I completed steps one through three a second time to ensure my initial analysis 'held up' to repeated descriptive treatment.

I utilised a similar analytical technique among the visual texts, first forming an overarching impression, documenting specific patterns relating to the subject matter and composition of images, and then tabulating content in a spreadsheet. Here, I assigned each photograph a category that captured the 'topic' of the image (for example, wildlife, landscape, project work, the host family home) as well as 'who' had been depicted within the frame (for example, the self, fellow volunteers, Kenyan people). I avoided double-coding photographs where possible, and instead, made an interpretive decision about what subject matter participants had foregrounded. I also noted how photographs were captioned, if at all.

The 'categorical-content' strategy I adopted diverges from Reismann's (2008) 'thematic analysis' - another 'common approach' within narrative inquiry - which endeavours to "keep a story 'intact'" (p. 53). Here, the researcher aims to represent each participant's voice fulsomely, rather than aggregating their experiences into a whole. Procedurally, this means the researcher "works with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account" (p. 57). By consequence, the resulting research report will be heavily weighted toward the 'full blown' description provided by the narrator, rather than a "subtle give and take between [researcher and participant] as they make meaning together" (p. 58). Sol (2013) utilised this approach commendably to construct 'life histories' (also known as vignettes) of five black American women embarking on study-abroad experiences in an effort to uphold the complexity, uniqueness and intricacy of participants' intersectional identities, arguing that "each story must be allowed to unfold within its own right" (p. 75). While this approach is highly appropriate in the context of a small case study, a similar technique would not have

been viable within my own research project due to the larger sample size, and moreover, would not speak as appropriately to the across-accounts structure implied by my research questions.

6.5.2 Interpretive Stance

Inspired broadly by the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Josselson (2004) adopts a framework for interpreting personal narrative she terms the 'hermeneutics of restoration' (Ricoeur's notion of faith) - which embraces participants' accounts as reported - and the 'hermeneutics of demystification' (Ricoeur's notion of suspicion) - which attempts to ascertain what participants would not or could not say. Both stances are necessary because a single narrative account is capable of supporting many different interpretations, some of which are explicitly articulated and others which may be inconspicuous or invisible. I find these notions of 'restoration' and 'demystification' an apt structure for expressing the dual priorities I hold within my own analytic approach.

When approaching the dataset through the hermeneutics of restoration, the researcher's purpose is to appreciate the meaning of the text in its given form; to seek an understanding of the participant's own standpoint from what is manifest within their stories (Josselson, 2004). Here, the underlying assumption is that individuals are capable of producing and conveying meanings based on their subjective experiences, and trusts that participants tell stories that they believe to be 'veridical' (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Young people's verbal and visual text, in this view, offers a window into the "world they feel themselves to be living in" and respects the ways individuals *choose* to interpret and articulate their lives (Josselson, 2004, p. 5).

When considering the dataset through the hermeneutics of demystification, the researcher is interested in the latent aspects of participants' narratives; what is inconsistent, contradicted, or omitted from their account (Josselson, 2004). Here, the underlying assumption is that not all meaning-making is transparent to its author. Indeed, this type of framework is necessary because "there are other aspects that may be of interest to scholarship that lie beside or beneath intention" (Josselson, 2011, p. 37). The researcher might therefore consider the self-presentations participants make available through silence, hesitation, defensiveness, negation or revision. Here, my interpretive goal was not to contest or undermine participants' own understandings, but to offer an alternative telling, and to reflect on *why* certain aspects of experience might remain unacknowledged. Indeed, attending to the hermeneutics of

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demystification was particularly important given my theoretical interest in whiteness studies, and the 'invisible knapsack' members of the social majority carry with them during their travels (McIntosh, 1989). In doing so, the inclusion of this stance generates insight relative to both the individual lives being investigated, and to the wider cultural discourses that might lead to one's self-surveillance.

Taken together, my choice to adopt the interpretive stance of the hermeneutics of restoration and demystification (Josselson, 2004) overlaps with the procedural approach of Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) who state: "We do not advocate total relativism that treats all narratives as texts of fiction. On the other hand, we do not take narratives at face value, as complete an accurate representations of reality" (p. 8). My intention, overall, is to provide a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on young people's verbal and visual texts, including "what the narratives are about, the structure of their plotlines, the social context in which they are repeatedly told and heard, and the broader discourses and practices of which they are a part" (Noy, 2004, p. 95).

6.6 Data Presentation

I have written this research report thematically rather than chronologically. A chronological presentation would have been appropriate if my research questions had centred on individual progression over time, however, my goal was to draw attention to content that ran across and throughout participants' narratives. Nevertheless, to make clear the temporal dimensions of selected quotations, I indicate in round brackets whether participant contributions were made 'pre-departure,' 'on-site,' 'post-excursion,' or 'subsequent-excursion.' Participants who attended in previous years (2004-2013) are indicated as 'retrospective.'

Because the narrator's voice is considered central within narrative inquiry, participants' own words are relied upon wherever possible. For the sake of clarity and readability, I have engaged in some narrative 'smoothing' through the addition of grammar (indicated by square brackets) and the omission of obvious repetitions or pauses (indicated by ellipses). Here, I acknowledge that "transcription is neither neutral nor value-free. What passes from tape to paper is the result of decisions about what ought to go on paper" (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 141). I occasionally use numbers to identify how many participants made similar references or used certain words or phrases. I use this notion of 'frequency' descriptively rather than

statistically, to formulate "a picture of the 'content universe'" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 114).

In presenting the following original findings, I have chosen to weave-in discussion and references to prior literature throughout. In part, this nested approach is a stylistic preference. While some scholars choose to write discrete discussion sections, I prefer to attend to the precise categories and sub-categories at hand to avoid extensive repetition or recapping. Further, my intention is to acknowledge the many layers of scholarship that have influenced and become integrated into this project, such that the analysis was generated both inductively and deductively at various points.

6.7 Ethical Considerations

I sought to adopt an 'ethical attitude' throughout the research process, taking seriously the 'explicit' and 'implicit' contracts forged between researcher and participant (Josselson, 2007). The explicit contract contains the elements one would typically find within an informed consent document, meeting standards set forth by the relevant ethics committee or professional body, in my case, the British Educational Research Association (BERA). This explicit contract includes a detailed description of the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, respect for confidentiality and the right to participate or withdraw (see Appendix C and D). The implicit contract, on the other hand, concerns the interpersonal expectations between researcher and participant, one founded on "the researcher's capacity to be empathic, non-judgmental, concerned, tolerant, and emotionally responsive" (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) similarly differentiate between 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice,' with the latter referring to the dynamic and layered 'microethics' that arise during the research process.

I find these notions of 'implicit contract' and 'ethics in practice' particularly instructive in thinking through the representational issues of interpreting and presenting travel narratives. As the researcher, I have acted as the 'conduit' for young people's stories, and thus, needed to remain sensitive to how they might want themselves represented (Josselson, 2007). Furthermore, I *liked* the participants I came to know in this study. Over the course of our repeated interactions and shared travel experiences, I came to care for these individuals and wanted to characterise them respectfully and empathetically. However, I balanced this delicacy against my commitment to the standards of critical scholarship. For example, it is possible that

participants will not find the interpretations I have written to be an exact replica of the image they hold of themselves, chiefly because my research agenda also included an analysis of what they left unacknowledged.

For Josselson (2007), explicit and implicit contracts cannot be entirely anticipated at the outset of the research process, as they are dependent on the particularities of the interactional terrain between researcher and participant. Thus, the author argues that the researcher's most ethical position is to remain "internally responsive to the tensions and dilemmas of this kind of work and…conversant with the ultimate complexity of moral choice when confronted with the situational particularities" (p. 559). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) similarly advise researchers to use reflexivity as a resource to guide them through 'ethically important moments': "the difficult, often subtle, and usually unpredictable situations that arise in the practice of doing research" (p. 262). This also applies to adaptations within data collection strategy, as was the case when I decided to add a fourth 'subsequent-excursion' interview with Celeste, Gabriela, Naomi and Tabitha. In sum, I approached my relational responsibility as a necessarily ongoing conversation, requiring transparency and conscientiousness across the research project.

The study design was not intended to raise significant ethical concern - interview questions were not overly probing, and I assumed participants would only share what they wanted to share. Further, the individuals who participated had all reached the age of consent, none voiced that they experienced distress resulting from any aspect of our discussion, and no one chose to withdraw.

6.8 Researcher Performance

Given that this inquiry is partly rooted in notions self-presentation, I would be remiss not to acknowledge my own performance as a researcher, namely, my desire to remain non-threatening in order to negotiate access to the research site and to develop rapport. I repeatedly stated to the sending organisation that my focus would be limited to individual accounts of volunteer experience rather than an 'assessment' related to the project. I further sought to engender trust by remaining transparent (for example, by providing a copy of the approved upgrade report, which outlined the proposed study in full) and by accommodating any request I received for additional information (for example, by accepting invitations to share preliminary findings at a management committee meeting and a research symposium).

While I embarked on this study with apprehensions surrounding the underpinnings and enactments of international volunteering, I did not want to appear disapproving of, or judgemental toward, the sending organisation or the participants who had devoted their summers to these endeavours (as I had done years ago). My positioning was reminiscent of Fine's (1993) 'kindly ethnographer,' one who acts as a 'sympathetic chronicler' while downplaying their own critical stance. This tension was eased because of the sending organisation's own self-reflexive stance, such that I never felt pressured to perform the role of 'cheerleader.' Indeed, the study involved no covert techniques, and were the sending organisation or individual participants to read this report, I do not expect they would feel as though I had turned out to be "a spy, an undercover agent, operating against the interests of the observed group" (Fine, 1993, p. 272).

6.9 Methodological Challenges

The data collection phase proceeded as planned, and without any notable difficulty. The key challenge I encountered in this study was instead related to my physically conducting fieldwork in Kenya. Leading up to the field visit, I prepared myself as I would for any overseas travel: I familiarised myself with the region, obtained relevant vaccinations, secured an entry visa, and booked well-reviewed accommodation and transportation services. However, as my departure date neared, two emerging safety concerns put the field visit in jeopardy. First, there were a series of terrorist attacks attributed to al-Shabab in the months leading up to departure, wherein explosive devices had been detonated on public commuter buses in the heart of the capital. Second, there were mounting concerns surrounding the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, thought to be the largest epidemic of this virus in history. While there were no confirmed cases of Ebola in Kenya, the country was considered at high risk given the centrality of Nairobi as a transportation hub. Indeed, several measures were undertaken within Kenya to avoid transmission, including flight suspensions and increased health assessments at airports.

In light of these concerns, I decided I would cancel the field visit if the Canadian government (where I am a citizen) issued an advisory against travel to southwestern Kenya. I also made a logistical decision to take a domestic flight and private shuttle to reach the volunteer project site rather than a public commuter bus, as I had originally planned. This decision felt like a personal failure, a cop-out, or at very least, a missed opportunity for my own 'authentic' travel experience. I was also aware

that this decision was only possible because of my financial privilege - that I could maneuver my research budget in order to better ensure my protection. In the end, the field visit went ahead as planned, but notions of comfort and security became important points of personal and intellectual reflection throughout my journey.

6.10 Limitations

As is customary within most qualitative inquiries, the findings presented in this research report are not generalisable; the travel narratives herein must therefore be interpreted as partial and contingent. First, participants offered one version among the stories they *could* have told, and it is possible that they would have told a different story on another occasion "making the idea of empirically validating [their accounts] for consistency or stability alien to the concept of narrative truth" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 165). This concession accepts that, while narratives serve to memorialise a particular account in time and space, these renderings exist fluidly within an 'evolving life story' and the author may always reinterpret the event in light of new experiences and shifting contexts (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2006). Further, because participants' narratives were created in conversation with myself as a researcher, what was said (and not said) between us was unique to, and mediated through, our relational circumstances. From a dramaturgical perspective, this means that participants likely positioned me as an audience member and performed "particular constructions of themselves in response to whom we seem to them to be and what we have asked them to tell us about" (Josselson, 2011, p. 42). Finally, the research report proceeds from my own interpretation of the verbal and visual text collected, such that another researcher working with the same data might have extracted different themes or arrived at alternative conclusions. With this in mind, I have ventured to be unambiguous about my analytical and representational choices to equip the reader with a frame of reference for evaluating this research study and its findings (Chase, 2011).

Indeed, narrative accounts may hold particular *value* because they are characteristically explicit about the particularised contexts from which they emerge, and some degree of transferability may be available based on shared or contrasting characteristics with other research settings. However, I remain attracted to qualitative investigation because it maintains an unresolved quality from which to catapult future inquiry: "new puzzles are produced more frequently than solutions to old ones" (Stake, 1995, p. 45).

6.11 Credibility

In addition to carefully documenting the research process, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest how scholars working from an interpretive paradigm might safeguard the integrity of their studies in triplicate, through the lenses of the researcher, participants and individuals external to the study. I have attended to these lenses throughout this chapter, but provide summarising comments here.

First, establishing credibility through the lens of the researcher requires 'disconfirming evidence' (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Here, the researcher formulates initial themes and sub-themes through coding, but then returns to the dataset to search for inconsistencies or contrasts. From the authors' perspective, disconfirming evidence does not pose a threat to the researcher's account, as it is assumed that there will *always be* variation in the ways individuals experience a common life event. As noted previously, I conducted a second round of the 'categorical-content' analysis procedure outlined by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998), and deliberately sought counterevidence at this time. Thus, in the chapters that follow, I report the content categories that were articulated strongly among participants, but with voiced disagreements or exceptions noted. I have also ensured that excerpts from every participant are represented, such that no singular voice is central within the analysis. I specifically detail which participants spoke about each theme presented so that data points are not mistakenly attributed to all participants, thereby suggesting a larger consensus than might actually exist. In sum, my decision to include counterevidence serves to *enhance* credibility by presenting a more nuanced account of the stories shared.

Second, establishing credibility through the lens of participants requires 'prolonged engagement in the field' (Creswell & Miller, 2000). When the researcher works to build trust and rapport over an extended period, participants may become more comfortable disclosing information, thereby increasing the likelihood that 'pluralistic perspectives' will be heard. This prolonged engagement also gives the researcher space to formulate robust perspectives which may be corroborated or challenged over the course of subsequent interactions (rather than relying on potentially-narrow hunches drawn from a singular instance). In the present study, I employed a repeated interview strategy; interacting with 2014 cohort participants at three or four distinct moments across their international volunteer experience, over the course of 18 months, and in two divergent geographic contexts.

Finally, establishing credibility through the lens of individuals external to the study requires 'thick, rich description' (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Here, the researcher sets out to describe the research encounter in vivid detail to create for readers a sense of 'verisimilitude': "the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). My decision to conduct interviews on-site in Kenya was particularly helpful in later crafting an account that will hopefully 'transport' the reader to the context in which participants' narrative texts were produced.

In addition, the credibility of this research report has been supported by multiple individuals who helped to validate ideas I presented in my works-in-progress. First, I shared drafts with my thesis supervisor in line with Eisner's (1991) notion of 'consensual validation': a concordance among knowledgeable others regarding the description, interpretation and thematics of an account. I also conducted 'peer debriefing' by "engaging, with a disinterested peer, in extended and extensive discussions of one's findings, conclusions, tentative analyses, and, occasionally, field stresses" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). These 'disinterested peers' included fellow doctoral candidates within and beyond my home department, as well as audience members at academic conferences where I presented various iterations of the findings. Finally, I conducted two member-checks during which I shared my interpretation of the data by way of a public presentation. These member checks were organised through the sending organisation and all participants were invited to attend. I was thrilled when participants expressed approval and appreciation toward my findings. One participant told me afterwards that she'd wished her close friends could have heard the presentation because she felt as though the findings captured the crux of her experience in a way that she had found it difficult to get across through anecdotal stories. Another told me that our interview had been a catalyst in her decision to re-establish a formal role within the sending organisation after a seven-year hiatus. These member-checks reminded me that the research interaction can be quite affirming and pleasurable for those who choose to participate (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), and further, that participants may use the distance of the researcher's gaze to view themselves from a different and perhaps enlightening vantage point (Lieblich, 2006).

6.12 Thesis Overview

In the chapters that follow, I present a research report interspersed with participant excerpts, my interpretations as the researcher, and references to prior theory, empirical literature and popular media sources. The order of these chapters roughly corresponds to each of the research sub-questions, answering them in turn. In Chapter 7, I unpack participants' narrative claims to authenticity through the lens of 'fronts.' In Chapter 8, I unpack participants' narrative claims to differentiation through the lens of 'frames.' Finally, in Chapter 10, I explore participants' dilemmas surrounding their online self-presentation through the lens of impressions 'given' and 'given off.' In Chapter 11, I provide some concluding thoughts, assess the scholarly contribution made, and indicate directions for future research.

Chapter 7: "You Get a Real Kenyan Experience": Unpacking Narrative Claims to Authenticity

I developed a curiosity about the notion of 'authenticity' during a pilot study I conducted in April 2013, which explored how six Canadian secondary school students retrospectively made meaning of short-term international volunteer excursions in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa (Schwarz, 2015). In an effort to trial the use of visual data collection techniques, I had invited participants to bring photographs from their respective excursions to help them narrate their experiences. Five of the six participants chose to also bring physical souvenirs, including a carved pot, painted mask, stuffed elephant, embroidered Maasai blanket and selection of beaded jewellery. What was striking to me about these objects was their similarity - while all of the study participants took part in different volunteer excursions in different communities, they brought virtually identical artefacts home to represent their journeys. Even more notable, participants described their souvenirs as 'authentic' - a claim warranted on the fact that they had been purchased from local artisans rather than a shopping mall. These assertions seemed suddenly peculiar to me, and I began to wonder about 'authenticity' as a primary way of valuing not just cultural objects, but broader travel experience.

In the present study, I did not ask participants directly about the perceived authenticity of their experiences overseas. My approach, in line with narrative inquiry, was to ask broadly: through what 'frames' do participants view and evaluate their international volunteer experiences (the first research sub-question)? However, based on the review of literature and pilot study I conducted, I was unsurprised when participants made strong, repeated claims toward having had a 'real Kenyan experience,' 'real Maasai experience,' 'authentic Kenyan experience' and 'actual Kenyan experience,' or had a chance to see the 'real picture of Kenya' and to experience what 'real life' in Kenya was like. This phrasing was used prior to, during, and after the excursion, suggesting that 'authenticity' was a quality participants sought from the outset, and were later satisfied that they had achieved.

Thus, this chapter seeks to dig deeply into an emergent research sub-sub-question: How do individuals take-up and employ notions of 'authenticity' within their personal travel narratives, and on what bases do they claim to have had an 'authentic' experience? In addition to documenting the explicit claim itself, I explore three aspects of the experience that participants drew upon as evidence of this claim:

1) the remoteness of the place visited, 2) their engagement in everyday life, and 3) their intimate interactions with local people. As counterevidence, I also document the aspects of participants' experiences that posed a threat to these claims.

7.1 Claiming Authenticity

In this study, participants used the prefixes 'real,' 'genuine' and 'authentic' to describe their experiences travelling and volunteering in Kenya. The declaration itself was accompanied by three main sub-claims as evidenced within the following excerpts: participants tended to emphasise that 1) they were *not* tourists, because 2) they had *lived* in Kenya, and as a result, 3) they *knew* Kenya.

> *Paige (pre-departure):* I thought [volunteering] was quite a good way to see a country and you get to know the country more, and it would be less just seeing it as a tourist. When you go to see it as a tourist, there are much more stops, whereas here you stay [in one place]. You get to know teachers. You get to know different children. You get to know a village.
>
> *Tabitha (on-site):* I was excited about the chance to get to experience the culture properly, not just as a tourist in that kind of detached overly clean way where you kind of see it, but you don't actually get involved with it. I was really excited about that opportunity, and getting to live in a village and get to know people out there and know what their lives are like and just really get integrated within the culture.
>
> *Karolina (on-site):* So being here, living in a village makes you feel different from other tourists here. The tourists we met on our trip are - they feel special because they visit Kenya and Kenya is quite far away. It's still quite a wild place. I probably would feel the same if I was a normal tourist, but I realise they have no idea what real Kenya is like, and this is an advantage of doing the project and living in a family here, because you get to know how real life in Kenya is.
>
> *Gabriela (post-excursion):* Last year I went to see Amsterdam for three days, and that was sightseeing and just wandering around and looking at things…but I wouldn't know [what it's like to be] a Dutch person, whereas now I know how [what it's like to be] a Kenyan - maybe not a Kenyan person, but a Kenyan community.

First, it was clear that participants in this study had adopted a strong anti-tourist stance, in that all references to the moniker 'tourist' were negatively-framed.

Participants repeated the phrase 'just a tourist' derisively, perhaps to establish a hierarchy of experience and to emphasise the seemingly limited vantage point available to the vacationer. In doing so, participants seem to construct their own mode of travel as a "special kind of tourism" (Gray & Campbell, 2007, p. 472). Second, participants stressed that they had been 'living' in Kenya instead of employing a transitory term such as 'visiting' or 'staying temporarily.' As a further example of this word choice, Logan (post-excursion) said:

> Living in the village, you get the reward of being able to kind of really try to integrate a lot more into the culture. You learn more about the customs, the music, the dances, the religion, everything about them, and the food and things like that.

Similarly, when I asked Celeste (post-excursion) to summarise the 'story' of her time overseas, she replied:

> The story [of my journey] wouldn't be about this international volunteering, it would literally be about *living* in Kenya…especially because I was part of a host family, I didn't feel that removed from the community at all. It felt like I was in there. I was stuck in there.

These statements seemed particularly incompatible in the context of a short-term international volunteer excursion, where participants had not taken up residency in Kenya in any formal sense (for example, though immigration). Third, participants repeated the word 'know' to suggest that they had gained access to an intimate understanding of Kenya and Kenyans as a result of their experience. Karolina's abovementioned claim was stronger - that tourists have 'no idea' what Kenya is like (nor conceivably *could* they as a mere tourist). Here, participants implied that Kenya possesses an essential core that can be "absorbed through proximity" (Mostafanezhad, 2014, p. 116), and appear to assume that their newfound knowledge is both accurate and complete. Max (post-excursion) gave this impression when I asked him to summarise his international volunteer 'story': "For me it's more about discovering what Africa is really about; it's more about understanding how life in Africa is." While it is expected that participants would have gained a deeper insight into the Kenyan context during their travels, this way of speaking is nevertheless problematic from a post-colonial perspective because it reinforces the script that the 'other' (indeed, all of Africa) can be a simplified and consumed. MacDonald (2014) refers to western-situated youth's propensity for making similar definitive statements as

'mastering place' narratives. Thus, it seems Said's (1994) reminder is still pertinent, that cultures are "hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic" (p. xxix).

Extending this point, during the post-excursion interviews, seven participants from the 2014 cohort expressed no strong desire to return to Kenya, seemingly because this particular country had already been fully 'lived' and 'known.' For example, when I asked Logan (post-excursion) about his general reflections on international volunteering as a type of travel experience, he responded:

> On the whole it's been very, very positive…[but] I would question whether I would do it again. Not because it wasn't positive. I think it's just that I've done it once and I'm happy I've done it once…I think I've gained a lot from it, but I think I can gain more things from different experiences.

Here, Logan's desire to 'mark notches' is reminiscent of Desforges' (1998) notion of 'collecting places' - where subsequent travel to the same location cannot offer one's biography new cultural capital and is therefore deemed less appealing. Taken together, these three sub-claims can be viewed as 'rhetorical apparatuses' which were used by participants to establish the authentic merit of their experiences (Prins & Webster, 2010). These statements were confident in tone and appealed to notions of familiarity to establish participants' credibility as insiders and to give the impression that they had been "deeply soaking themselves in the very essence of these native cultures" (Muzaini, 2006, p. 145).

Indeed, only Celeste was notable in reconsidering her initial narrative claim to authenticity. While Celeste (post-excursion) had emphasised that the crux of her experience would "literally be about *living* in Kenya," after a subsequent excursion, she questioned whether her relationship with her host family had been as intimate as previously believed. Here, Celeste (subsequent-excursion) re-asserted that "I do think I had meaningful experiences in the village" but also realised that "I had sugar-coated those memories." When Celeste read back over her own journal entries, she found herself thinking: "Oh wow! I actually don't live here and this is not my house and these are not my friends - well, they are my friends, but they're not." She also described the experience of returning to her host family as 'difficult' because it made her more aware of how the language barrier stifled their prolonged conversation: "You do ask 'How's your year been? Good. How's yours? Yes, good' but not really anything more…I had no idea how to deal with these vast stretches of time, a lot of

space where you really weren't communicating." While Celeste applied increasingly stricter criteria to judge her experiences overseas, this amendment nevertheless speaks to the *felt* (rather than objective or absolute) authenticity of her initial experiences - what Wang (1999) refers to as 'existential authenticity.'

Unlike Celeste, during the other subsequent-excursion interviews with Gabriela, Naomi and Tabitha, these participants did not re-examine their earlier claims toward having had a 'real,' 'genuine' or 'authentic' Kenyan experience. Quite the opposite, the theme of 'authenticity' was largely absent from these follow-up interviews. Here, I got the impression that these participants felt they had already 'established' the authentic merit of their journeys during our earlier interactions, and thus, did not feel pressure to reassert these declarations after 18 months and a second trip. When I asked Naomi (subsequent-excursion) what stories she tended to share with friends and family after returning to Kenya, she explained that having previously laid out a baseline understanding, she could then relay the lighthearted or trivial aspects of her travel: "Because I've been back, it was less of a 'THIS is what [the project] is,' but more of a documentation of the funny things that happened to us." In other words, Naomi was confident that her 'idealised impression' had been adequately communicated, and could attend to less critical facets of her performance (Goffman, 1959).

Having presented participants' explicit claims to 'authentic' experience, in the next section, I parcel out three aspects of the excursion that participants drew upon to reach this conclusion: 1) the remoteness of the place visited, 2) their engagement in everyday life and 3) their intimate interactions with local people. While participants drew on these dimensions in combination, they are separated for analytic clarity and I examine them in turn.

7.2 Remoteness of Place

As outlined in Chapter 6, all of the study participants had travelled outside of the UK on vacation prior to undertaking an international volunteer excursion in Kenya. However, during our interview conversations, a couple suggested that former holiday destinations were not particularly notable because they represented conventional, well-worn tourist routes. For example, when Trevor (retrospective) spoke about travelling across major European cities, he referred to these as "family friendly places…never to anywhere remotely relevant." Similarly, Gemma (retrospective) placed her excursion to Kenya atop a pedestal based on its perceived

dissimilarity: "It's first time I'd been *really* travelling. I've been to America and stuff, and I loved it, but it's kind of safe and everyone speaks English" Here, Trevor and Gemma define authenticity spatially, and give the sense that previous travel to westernised nations 'didn't count' or barely deserved mention.

Travel to Kenya, by contrast, was construed as valuable because the country is physically distant from the UK and because participants' peers had not travelled there - a 'frontier location' in Echtner and Prasad's (2003) terms, which is supposedly "beyond the furthest frontiers of civilization" and thus "perfect for penetrating journeys of discovery" (p. 675). During the pre-departure interviews, Cynthia, Jodie and Max (none of whom had previously traveled to the African continent) elaborated on the desirability of volunteering in Kenya. When I asked Cynthia (pre-departure) what had attracted her to the excursion, she responded:

> [Africa is] an adventurous place that has always held a lot of interest for me, I think, just because the culture and everything is so vibrant and so different from what I'm used to…it's quite an untamed, wild place, I think.

In response to the same question, Jodie (pre-departure) replied: "It's someplace I've never been and I really don't have much knowledge about. It's like a place that you only know from internet and TV and so it's very cool to actually go there." Max (pre-departure) described his motivation to participate as follows:

> Some [people] think Africa is not really a safe place. And I guess some other people think that Africa is quite exotic, because it's a place that most people never went to before. So yeah, I guess there is a mixture of both concern and amazement.

Here, participants reflected that they had been enticed by the prospect of entering a context they perceived to be dissimilar from home, but simultaneously, "such difference must not be so radical that the location's value and desirability is not recognised" (Simpson, 2004, p. 162). In other words, the location must still be part of "the common tourist vocabulary" such that the traveller can receive social approval and acknowledgement (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003, p. 196).

Within Kenya itself, the remoteness of the villages where service projects took place - approximately 300km from the capital city of Nairobi - was a highly valued orienting feature. Indeed, participants used the word 'rural' on 28 occasions to characterise the villages, and to a lesser extent, descriptors like 'isolated,' 'remote,' 'cut off' and 'far away.' These terms were used in a positive sense - casting what Urry

and Larsen (2011) refer to as a 'romantic gaze' onto the geography they had encountered. When I asked Colin (retrospective) to recall his first impression upon arriving in Kenya, he said: "It was quite small, very rural. You'll have goats being driven through the streets." In response to the same question, Isobel (retrospective) pointed out that: "When we went it was still very kind of rural, it was quite small, there wasn't any industry to speak of and it was pretty poor, and so that was different from anything I'd seen before." Miriam (retrospective) remembered this village setting affectionately: "It was very cut off, I guess, from anyone else. We weren't seeing anyone else other than the head teacher. I don't know, it was kind of a special time, I guess." Others spoke fondly about the lush surroundings and expansive space that typified the landscape - what Davidson (2005) refers to as the 'utopics of the countryside.' For example, Robyn (retrospective) described the bus ride from Nairobi to the village as follows:

> The landscape changes really, really dramatically from Nairobi's centre to kind of the slum outskirts…and then massive land. It's all savannah, and then it gets lusher and lusher and lusher and greener and greener and greener and then you're in [the village].

Harriet (retrospective) similarly recalled her reaction to the view from the window of the group's rental vehicle:

> You can kind of see the big expanses of space. I think the natural beauty of the place is something that stayed with me quite a lot…You're in the highlands and you've got the beautiful greenery all around. I think that's probably what struck me the most.

In line with 'frontier locations,' participants described Kenyan villages in contradistinction with modernity, as untouched space awaiting 'discovery' by western travellers (Echtner & Prasad, 2003).

Participants' descriptions of remoteness and isolation tended to be accompanied by 1) contrasts to more populous and easily accessible Kenyan cities such as Nairobi, 2) descriptions of the difficulty they encountered trying to reach the villages, and 3) a positive assessment that few other white bodies were visible in these settings.

First, participants suggested that the remote villages where service projects took place were more 'authentically Kenyan' than the country's city centres and wealthy suburbs. When I asked participants to describe their first impressions of

Kenya, some were careful to distinguish between their time in Nairobi (where the group's flight had arrived), the town centre in southwestern Kenya (where the group had spent weekends) and the rural village communities (where the volunteer projects were based).

> *Mitchell (retrospective):* Well, Nairobi, [the town centre] and [the village] are very, very different…Arriving in [the town centre] was absolutely manic, because you walk off the bus and you're immediately surrounded by people…[But the village was] really rural. There's not going to be running water, there's not going to be electricity…It was very simple but wonderful.
>
> *Gareth (retrospective):* There's actually three levels. There's Nairobi, [the town centre] and then the village…Actually, from the three levels, [you get] very different first impressions, which is part of what makes the experience so unique…[But the village] was a relief, just how quiet it was and how…welcoming everyone was with us and we were made to feel really at home from the very start.
>
> *Whitney (retrospective):* I think I knew that I was in a really different place. There was a big distinction between staying in Nairobi, which was like a little bit removed from England and then going to [the town centre] which was kind of the next stage, and again, the stage of…staying in a village…That was definitely more of a culture shock, but everyone was really friendly.

Here, participants used the words 'stages' and 'levels' to invoke an image of moving deeper and deeper towards authentic space and to infer a hierarchical ordering of traveller experience, where the village is prised for its quiet solitude and friendly inhabitants.

On either end of my field visit, I stayed in Nairobi with a fellow PhD candidate who had been hired by an international computing company for a summer internship. This friend was being housed in a well-appointed apartment complex in the capitol's upscale Kilimani area, and from this base, arranged weekend excursions to locations further afield. When I shared with her the finding that participants tended to associate 'authentic Kenya' with rural village settings, she seemed offended by the inference that her own ten week experience in-country had been less genuine or spatially legitimate. She asked aloud "Have I not been in Kenya this whole time? Does Nairobi not count?" Indeed, the extension of participants' remoteness-as-authenticity claim implies that while city-based travellers have physically entered the

geographic boundaries of what constitutes Kenya, these locations represent artificial or 'front stage' spaces (MacCannell, 1973). This conversation made clear the imaginative borders participants had drawn upon to delineate their notion of authentic space.

Second, participants ascribed the rural villages they visited greater authenticity because they were laborious to reach. In line with the backpacker ideal of travelling 'off-the-beaten-track' described by Elsrud (2001), participants in this study similarly appeared to revere distant locations "reached after hard and strenuous walks or rides with local transport" (p. 601). For example, on Facebook, Lydia posted the following status to announce her arrival in the village: "3 plane journeys, 1 taxi ride, 1 matatu ride and a 3km trek with me physically dragging my suitcases down. Finally arrived at my destination of the summer!" During Lydia's on-site interview, she elaborated:

> It was just this muddy road and it started pouring down halfway [into our
> journey] and it was getting dark and the road was slippery…we were literally
> just sliding in all directions and walking on mud with cow poo and whatever
> on the street, and you are just soaking wet…I thought I was going to die on
> that journey…I thought three years of a medical degree in [university] is hard,
> but it is nothing compared to this journey.

Similarly, when I asked Naomi (subsequent-excursion) what key stories she tended to share with family and friends after a return trip, she recalled a roundabout hike she made to find one of the project sites:

> The directions to get to this school were not good, so we went the long way
> around which meant an hour and a half walk uphill…I didn't enjoy walking up
> a mountain - basically a mountain - in the mid-day heat with a Kenyan man
> laughing at me because I was so hot and struggling to do it. He was like 'Oh,
> do you not *do* walking [in your country]?' and I was like [sarcastically] 'No,
> not in the equatorial heat at mid-day I don't, sorry that I'm sweating.'

These stories were recounted with mock-exasperation: the onerousness of the trek had been a source of frustration at the time, but was later restoried to emphasise its gratifying conclusion - what McAdams & Bowman (2001) refer to as a narrative 'redemption sequence.'

Third, some participants established authenticity by emphasising that the rural villages tended to receive few (if any) white travellers. For example, when I asked

participants about their initial experiences at the project sites, a few described how the arrival of western travellers had been cause for stir.

> *Logan (on-site):* We were told we were the first Mzungu to be in the town and actually physically stay in the town. So [the villagers] were really confused [by us]…we had a lot of looks and a lot of people gathering around us and asking us questions, which was nice.
>
> *Whitney (retrospective):* We got into the village and we had to walk up a massive hill to get to school and there was nothing other than farms and people who genuinely hadn't seen white people before, because we were the first people at that school.
>
> *Trevor (retrospective):* [These villages] don't get westerners very often…so the first time we [were] walking toward our little town, it was complete kind of disbelief. They were like 'Who are these white people walking through our town? What are they doing? Why are they here?'

For Elsrud (2001), being the first white person in a peripheral village is an important 'place narrative' - a way of marking one's distinction by developing a sense of scarcity, or 'relative solitude' in Munt's (1994) terms. Trevor (retrospective) later emphasised this point when he described time spent travelling in larger Kenyan cities as less 'special' due to the presence of other white volunteers: "There were also other charities hanging around there too, so there wasn't as much of a special occasion to be walking down the street as it was in the village. That's part of, I guess, why it felt less special." Overall, participants appeared to appreciate being encountered as a novelty; where "being a group of essentially white people where there aren't any others" (Gareth, retrospective) is a source of exhilaration. Further, the mere absence of other white bodies seemed to assure participants "that social *and* spatial distance are being maintained from the masses" (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003, p. 196, italics in original). However, under this logic, the very fact that participants have visited Kenya's remote villages serves to de-authenticate these spaces - as future groups of volunteers can no longer claim to 'be the first.' Indeed, in the advent of globalisation and international tourism growth, the search for 'untouched' space becomes an increasingly difficult endeavour - such that what is considered the 'back region' must continually move (MacCannell, 1973). Thus, perhaps inadvertently, when participants idealise the absence of white travellers within the rural villages visited, they frame their own bodies as contaminants.

7.3 Engagement in Everyday Life

Participants further supported their claim to 'authentic' travel by evidencing their engagement in the mundane and routine aspects of everyday life in Kenya. Here, I use the phrase 'everyday life' deliberately to invoke the seminal work of Erving Goffman (1959), and to make clear participants' narrative privileging of ordinary experiences. In particular, participants tended to describe partaking in two aspects of village life: 1) staying in local-style accommodation and 2) taking public transportation. In both cases, participants voiced their desire to *be local* during their travels, with the intention of acclimating to, and immersing in, the destination visited.

7.3.1 Staying in Local-Style Accommodation

Participants attempted to gain access to authentic experience by mimicking the living conditions of 'regular' Kenyan people as closely as possible. On the weekends, participants stayed together as one group in a rental house in the town centre. The house was equipped with a small kitchen, running water, flush toilet and electricity. Participants slept on foam mattresses under mosquito nets in one of three large bedrooms. On weekdays, volunteers worked in pairs at one of six secondary schools in surrounding villages. Here, participants' accommodations varied, as each placement school was responsible for arranging housing for their assigned pair of volunteers. Thus, some participants stayed directly with a host family and others stayed in separate properties owned by a school teacher or parent. In either case, the physical structures generally consisted of simple concrete rooms with a bed for each participant and a common area for sitting and preparing meals. Some pairs had access to electricity and some did not. Some pairs had access to running water and some did not. None of the accommodations were outfitted with refrigeration, flush toilets or shower facilities. Participants prepared meals using a small portable stove, relieved themselves in a 'long drop' (a hole dug into the ground) and washed themselves with buckets of water. Participants described these accommodation arrangements as 'basic,' 'rudimentary' and 'simple.' These words were used in a positive sense, as staying in local-style accommodations seemed to provide "a structure wherein students experience the local rhythms of daily life, learn informally from their host about the problems the students came to address, and receive their host's hospitality" (Prins & Webster, 2010, p. 28).

To strengthen this point, some participants had recast their own previous travel experiences as comparatively inauthentic because they had taken place in

comfortable, tourist-oriented settings. Here, associations with luxury and indulgence were actively disfavoured. For example, Logan (pre-departure) was inspired to seek out a more "dynamic atmosphere" because, in his earlier travels, "I was always with my parents, kind of in a little English bubble." Fiona (retrospective) had also "done quite a lot of travelling with my parents," including a vacation in Kenya, but conceded:

> I'd been to Kenya on holiday with my family, but not in any kind of meaningful way. We stayed in a resort, and we'd get a little taste of [the country], but not in the same way as living in a village and that sort of thing and directly interacting with local people that much.

When I asked Harriet (retrospective) if she had travelled to the African continent previously, she replied:

> I'd been to South Africa with my parents a few years before. But that's - when I go travelling with my parents, it's like some five star package. We stay in nice hotels and stuff. So it was the first time that I had properly done Africa.

Colin (retrospective), who had participated in an international volunteer excursion in Kenya during secondary school recalled: "It was four weeks staying in a church-run hostel, but it had warm showers, we had a buffet every night, we had bottled water provided for us…It was very, very cushy. And limited social experience." Finally, Cynthia (on-site) discounted the genuineness of *other* volunteers' experiences on the basis that the living conditions had been too comfortable and were therefore stripped of their more challenging educative potential: "[Other volunteers] live in relatively fancy accommodations, so in a sense they don't get the authentic Kenyan experience. So at least I feel our lifestyle here is quite true to what the locals here live like." Overall, participants communicated the impression that modes of travel which resemble home (particularly in terms of material comfort) work to obscure the "harsher reality of what life is really like in Kenya" (Logan, on-site); 'truths' which are seemingly made available through homestays. Further, it was the markers of poverty rather than wealth that participants viewed as emblematic of the 'real Kenya' - a generalisation that hints toward participants' expectations of deficit (see also Crossley, 2013; Mostafanezhad, 2013a).

For participants in this study, staying in local-style accommodation with basic amenities provided a unique opportunity to become accustomed to new routines and to reassess one's need for material comforts. With only a few exceptions - namely

Jodie and Lydia, who described struggling considerably with the hygiene-related aspects of their stay - participants tended to emphasise the ease with which they gained their 'footing' in unfamiliar domestic tasks. They repeated the phases 'I don't mind,' 'it's fine,' 'you get used to it' and 'it's not as bad as you think.'

> *Gabriela (on-site):* We don't have a shower or we don't have a toilet. We wash ourselves with a bucket and we do our things in the long drop. I think my perception of welfare or of what is needed has changed, because for me this is great, and I think we are in a great advantage being in this village in this home. So maybe in my perception of what is needed to be happy…I don't need a giant life to be happy, but I never thought that not having a shower would be as comfortable as it is now.

> *Naomi (on-site):* We don't have running water and I think the luxury of brushing my teeth with water from a tap is going to be amazing…[but] I really, really don't think it's been as difficult as I was expecting…We don't have proper beds, we just have mattresses, but that's fine…We don't really have any lights and so we sit in pitch black, but even washing my hair in a bucket doesn't really faze me…It really, really makes you think how much you don't need.

> *Dominic (on-site):* We have to boil water and then put it in a tank…I spent a few minutes calculating what the best way to get a 40 degree temperature is. How much cold water? How much boiling water? Things like that. I was quite surprised to see that the bathroom was a hole in the ground and a tank, but it's pretty comfortable…I didn't mind it. You get used to it. After a week you are just accustomed to it.

> *Zara (retrospective):* Having a cold shower and having to go to the loo outside - actually it's funny how quickly you get used to that sort of stuff. That didn't bother me so much…Even though the food was awful, I could have put up with it for longer. It's not like I was 'I've got to get home. I can't bear this food anymore'…Just kind of that learning what you can do without, and also, what you can put up with.

> *Mitchell (retrospective):* So we were integrated really well, really quickly…settling in was very easy and it's an adventure. You're in a new place. You're learning where the markets are, what food you can get, having to fend for myself in a way that you haven't necessarily before, working at how

to use a kerosene lamp for the first time. Don't have the wick too high, key

detail.

In the above excerpts, participants articulated a sense of pride and accomplishment rooted in their their ability to 'rough it' without conventional western-style amenities. Further, participants' successful navigation of inconvenience and discomfort offers them a symbolic badge of honour - it serves to illustrate their endurance, resilience and versatility - or what Goffman (1967) refers to as 'strong character.' Elsrud (2001) similarly draws on the Goffmanian concept of 'strong character' to suggest that travellers obtain status, not from the content of the obstacles per se, but from *how* they perform the task of endurance: "the risk has to be mastered in the proper way. A strong character is not generated through facing the risk with whining, shivering, and crying. It is demonstrated through displaying 'courage,' 'gameness,' 'integrity' and 'composure'" (p. 603).

From the perspective of whiteness studies, there is also a redemptive element to these claims: "in having to adapt to less comfortable conditions than they are accustomed to, the participants believe that [they] are sacrificing some of their privilege" (Mahrouse, 2011, p. 381). However, as Cynthia's (on-site) comment suggests, while participants attempt to mimic the local lifestyle as closely as possible, their dominant positioning is never entirely forfeited: "We live pretty much - we get treated better, of course - but living conditions are pretty much similar to how a Kenyan would live or someone from [this village] would live." Here, Cynthia's insertion of "we get treated better, of course" suggests that receiving differential treatment was an expectation; as if *not* being put at physical and emotional ease would be out-of-course or even inappropriate.

To further this point, I detected three 'safety cushions' (Bauman, 1996) within participants' narrative accounts which ensured these individuals (or their dominant positions) were never at significant risk: 1) participants' travel was facilitated through a sending organisation who acted as their custodian, 2) participants travelled in a group setting alongside other western-situated travellers, and 3) participants' immersion in local-style accommodation was knowingly temporary.

First, participants had chosen to travel on an excursion facilitated through an experienced sending organisation who acted, in Urry and Larsen's (2011) terms, as a 'surrogate parent.' For example, during the pre-departure interviews, some participants seemed to alleviate nervousness by placing their trust in the organised

nature of the project. When I asked Celeste (pre-departure) what had drawn her to the excursion, she recalled: "It's really well-organised and then there's a lot of us [in the group], it's not just me…it's not just something completely random that I found on the internet and then decided to do it." In response to the same question, Cynthia (pre-departure) replied: "These people know what they're doing. This charity has been around for 20, 30 years, I think. It's not just like they're new and they're leaving us alone in Africa to figure things out for ourselves." Colin (retrospective) noted that because the sending organisation operates through university-based societies, he and his parents could expect a professional service: "part of appeasing my dad is he sort of believes that this [excursion] is organised through the university, and the idea that there are professors and big brains [running it]...you know what I mean, like as in established." Here, the infrastructure provided by a reputable tour operator seemingly gave participants "a bit more confidence" (Colin, retrospective) based on their assumption that "the temporary escape from modern life will not be too dangerous, unfamiliar, or inconvenient" (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003, p. 191).

Second, participants had chosen to travel in a group setting with familiar others - what Noy (2004) and Maoz (2007) refer to as 'enclaves.' Cynthia (pre-departure) noted that it was reassuring "knowing that you are not alone in this. You are not going on a one-man trip to Kenya." During the on-site interview, she expanded further on this point:

At first, getting used to living conditions and then sometimes feeling homesick [was difficult], but I realise that I'm very glad to have [my fellow volunteers around], because…I didn't realise how much you need someone to talk to. Someone to just laugh about a situation, because that someone will get you…It's nice to always have someone who knows what it is like back home, and to pull you through as well.

Celeste (pre-departure) reported that she had purposely sought a travel experience where she could stay alongside similarly-situated volunteers: "I want that aspect of home…like a family feeling. So it's kind of just the comfort, because I know there will be times where none of us will be feeling the best." Naomi (on-site) described physically cuddling her partner and indulging in a few reminders of home on their first night together in the village:

We were both like 'We're in a really scary place. This is really strange'…So the first night we got there into this little hut, we were both 'Should we just

sleep in the same bed and watch films and eat peanut butter and chocolate that

we brought with us?' So we watched 'The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants'

or something…it was ridiculous, but I guess it was probably quite nice.

Here, participants described their fellow travellers as providing a "good support network" and an "outlet for the difficult things that were going on" (Bradley, retrospective). Indeed, descriptions of the inverse situation also supported the same point: a few retrospective participants (namely Colin, Gemma and Fiona) described living with a partner they did not get along with as the single biggest challenge of their time in Kenya.

Third, participants had chosen to participate in a ten week excursion, such that any hardship or inconvenience encountered would assuredly be short-lived. Conceivably, one can more easily endure a cold shower knowing that a warm one awaits them upon their return home. For example, when I asked Paige (pre-departure) what had attracted her to the project, she enthused: "How much fun would it be to stay in a hut for two months, and run around with no water and be in a completely different country?" Paige's use of the word 'fun' to describe conditions lacking basic infrastructure seems an enactment of what Bauman (2001) calls 'double freedom' - the privilege "to *move everywhere* and to *ignore selectively* is its baseline condition" (p. 90, italics in original). Here, Paige was able to overlook that some Kenyan citizens must navigate impoverished conditions indefinitely, and would be unlikely to describe this state of affairs as a choice or a source of enjoyment. Indeed, these western-situated youth's freedom of movement remains a "principal stratifying factor" between themselves and their Kenyan hosts (Bauman, 2001, p. 89). Further, should the voyage not proceed as expected or desired, participants could theoretically end the encounter at any time. Indeed, I learned that prior to the commencement of my field visit, two volunteers from a second site (who were not participants in this study) did choose to leave the excursion when reports of the Ebola crisis in West Africa became a growing concern. Thus, these young travellers can safely "immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element…on the condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish." (Bauman, 1996, p. 29).

Indeed, none of the participants indicated that they had come to *prefer* the living conditions in Kenya to those in the UK. When I asked participants about the experience of returning home at the conclusion of their excursion, they mainly expressed a feeling of relief and an increased sense of appreciation toward western-

style amenities. They used the words 'amazing,' 'great,' 'nice,' 'dreamy,' and like 'a children's book' to describe the vantage point from which they now viewed their 'regular' lives.

> *Lydia (post-excursion):* I was so relieved when I first got home and just being pampered, having food fed to me, nice bed, comfortable, don't have to worry about wearing long sleeves and stuff like that...I know how bad people's living conditions can be like, and now it puts a lot of things into perspective.

> *Karolina (post-excursion):* I really, really missed civilization so…I booked a nice hotel in Nairobi and the shower there, running water, was the most amazing shower I have ever had in my life. Even the fridge, I'm not even talking about the contents of the fridge, but the fact that the fridge was there and you could store food was amazing…I just appreciated the things more.

> *Mitchell (retrospective):* I went to see some family friends…who had a very nice house and I had a bath for the first time in three and a half months…I felt more like a human being because I had spent time with them, and we'd done very, very civilised things like drive to the top of the hill in a car and have a beer while the sun's setting.

> *Naomi (post-excursion):* No one [in the UK] appreciates a shower or a flushing toilet, or a toilet that doesn't smell horrendous…[Coming home] was very strange, but then, in a way, I'm glad it was because I think that's a reflection of the impact that [the excursion] has had [on me]. And obviously I'm completely back to being like this, but…[Kenya's] still a massive part of my thought process and I'm glad in a way, because I don't ever want to get to the point where I do take the things for granted that you become so aware of when you're out there.

These responses invoke Crossley's (2012) notion of 'redemptive poverty' whereby young people atone for having been previously incognisant of their fortunate circumstances by heightening their sense of gratitude. However, the author is concerned that the acquisition of appreciation "becomes an ethical end in itself, allowing volunteers to resume their lives back in the West in the knowledge that they have undergone a personal, internal transformation" (p. 243). In other words, such claims of gratitude enable young travellers to acknowledge the unfortunateness of poverty, while preserving the legitimacy of their western consumerist lifestyles. Further, participants continue to position their own lives as 'civilisation' which

suggests that their pursuit of authentic experience was not motivated by any *estrangement* from modernity as suggested by MacCannell (1973) and Cohen (1988). Rather, these experiences allow participants to take "a detour through other people's version of everyday life," which is desirable precisely because it is impermanent (Vrasti, 2013, p. 3).

7.3.2 Taking Public Transportation

When I asked participants about their most vivid or meaningful memories, over half shared a story about riding in a matatu: the colourfully-decorated mini-buses used for public transportation within and between cities. Mutongi (2006), who conducted a participant observation study of matatu commuters and matatu operators, summarises the experience as follows:

> The vehicles are easily recognized by their often dilapidated bodies and bald tyres, their loud music, their screeching two-wheel turns, and the choking haze of exhaust trailing behind…And they are usually so crowded with passengers that riders are left hanging out of the doors and windows, clutching their belongings. Predictably, they are one of the most dangerous means of travel in the world. (p. 550)

In matatus, riders squish together tightly on bench seating, and additional 'seats' are created by placing planks of wood across the aisles and by having one passenger straddle the stick shift beside the driver. Each vehicle has a 'conductor' who crouches in the entryway, collecting payment and making change, and then bangs on the roof to signal the driver to proceed onwards. There is no set departure time; matatus leave when full (to over-capacity). While passengers wait, vendors approach them through the windows and sliding van door to solicit purchases of water bottles, peanuts, newspapers and small knickknacks. During the ten week excursion, participants rode matatus frequently between the group's rental house in the city centre and host family accommodation sites in the surrounding villages. These commutes lasted two or three hours on occasion, depending on the length of time spent waiting at the bus station (a crowded parking lot). On Facebook, while the vast majority of images were captured in outdoor space, 21 photographs (or 2.5 per cent) were nevertheless taken inside matatus.

Figure 1. Matatu interior (participant photograph).

The matatu experience represents the mundane - in that it is a regular, everyday life occurrence - and affords participants "the impression they are 'going local' by choosing public over tourist buses" (Muzaini, 2006, p. 148). For example, Zara (retrospective) reflected that waiting for matatu departures was an opportunity for her to 'let go' and to accept 'Kenyan time':

> I was so much less stressed because so much was out of your control…You've probably heard this loads of times - we'd get on a bus and it wouldn't leave until the bus was full. So sometimes we'd have to sit on it for three hours and I'd just get my book out and just read, and things like that. Just a completely different lifestyle and way of life.

For others, riding a matatu was also an opportunity to meet and converse with 'genuine locals' (Hottola, 2014), to become comfortable with routes and destinations, and to display their knowledge of local prices through haggling. At the same time, the matatu experience represents the unusual and extraordinary: participants told stories about broken-down vehicles, car accidents and police searches and used word like 'confusing,' 'chaotic,' 'crazy,' 'dangerous,' 'scary' and 'adventurous' to describe these experiences.

Harriet (retrospective): [I share stories about] the matatus breaking down, and the oils or something is leaking from the bottom of the car, and you don't know if it's about to blow up and kill you all or whether it's all good.

Colin (retrospective): Halfway along the journey there was a police stop and [the conductor] either didn't have the money to bribe or they were breaking the law in such a way that it wouldn't be worthwhile to bribe, so they chucked us all out on the side of the road and then drove off, which left me a little bit stuck.

Lydia (post-excursion): I like to tell [people] about how shit matatus are [laughs]. I swear every week we had some kind of matatu incident. So either the police are catching them and you can't catch any to go back to [the village], or a really rundown matatu goes uphill and suddenly stops and starts rolling downhill or they try to fit 21 people in a 14-seater with chickens underneath your legs and luggage on top of you and [the conductors] hanging on the doors trying not to swing off.

Fiona (retrospective): We were involved in quite a bad traffic motor accident, and that definitely left a lasting impression on me…The coach was pulling into a [service] station…but as they pulled in the conductor of the bus was kind of hanging off the side of it through the open door. And the bus driver, for whatever reason, kind of misjudged the space…and this [conductor] just got completely squashed…so we were there with this guy who had the bottom half of his leg literally hanging on by sinews. Absolutely awful.

In these stories, there is an element of the uncanny - at times even traumatic - at least from the western perspective which is often associated with orderliness, predictability and respect for personal space.

One of my own most poignant memories from my field visit was being stopped by the police en route to one of the placement schools, where I was removed from the vehicle and told I was being arrested for being the 'excess passenger' on a too-full matatu. Heart pounding and mind racing to problem-solve, my immediate response was dumbfounded silence followed by apologetic pleading. The driver, however, expressed no surprise at the officer's threat; he quietly paid a bribe and I was sent away with a 'warning.' When I recounted this story to a staff member at my guest house, he laughed heartily and referred to the scenario as 'swift justice' - an apparently routine occurrence between matatu drivers and law enforcement of which

only I was unaware. Here, what appeared endangering to me as an outsider (and thus, the basis of a 'good story') was simultaneously revealed to be well-understood subtext and benign in the local setting. This lends support to Elsrud's (2001) point that "this bus-ride, irrespective of the actual danger, can then serve as an important ingredient in an identity narrative, or as Goffman would have it, the expression of 'strong character'" (p. 603).

These findings compliment those of Mathers (2010), who inversely found that *not* having a harrowing experience on public transportation disallowed American undergraduates travelling in South Africa from feeling as though they had achieved an authentic experience. In this case, participants had anticipated "a scary journey bumping along a dreadfully rough road in an ancient vehicle without suspension, often with goats and chickens along for the ride" (p. 76), and thus, their uneventful journeys along paved, multi-lane roads in Johannesburg were spoken about as "evidence of the modernity of South Africa and, therefore, its un-Africanness" (p. 77).

7.4 Intimate Interactions with Local People

A third way in which participants evidenced their experience in Kenya as 'authentic' was by emphasising the intimacy of their interactions with local people - what Conran (2011) refers to as the 'aesthetic of attachment.' Here, intimacy is understood as a sense of closeness, a relational experience that "involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way" (Berlant, 2000, p. 1). When I asked participants to recall their most vivid or meaningful memories, 21 spoke about the relationships they had fostered with members of their host family or the secondary school community where they volunteered.

> *Harriet (retrospective):* As a [volunteer], I think the key memories that form and stay with you are those in your school and the relationships you build up with students and head teachers…those kinds of conversations and those interactions, so welcoming and friendly.
>
> *Paige (post-excursion):* Unless you learn the language or have a reason to stay in a community for that long, you can't make friends in the same way and you can't build up relationships with people…Yeah, actually I've made really good friends. That, I think, is probably one of the really greatest things about [this experience].

> *Mitchell (retrospective):* I think it also taught me…the more you kind of plug into spending time with people and getting to know them, and being very proactive in building relationships - personal relationships, not necessarily just professional - the more rewarding your time is in the community.

Indeed, participants consistently devoted more time to sharing memories of their intimate encounters with the host family or the secondary school community than they did describing the volunteer project itself. When I asked Karolina (on-site) about her most vivid or meaningful memories, she made this point explicitly: "So experience with schools is very important because of the project, but the community experiences are the most meaningful, I think." Similarly, when I asked Lydia (post-excursion) how she would describe the 'story' of her volunteer experience, she replied:

> I think, for me, the investment in the school actually became less and less of a proportion [of my experience] as time goes on. So for the story, as I got to know the community better and the culture better…[it] becomes more about the people rather than what I've done there.

These findings resemble those of Conran (2006, 2011) and Mostafanezhad (2014), who similarly discovered that whether travellers in Thailand interpreted their experience as 'authentic' was correlated with their ability to enjoy seemingly genuine, emotional and embodied connections with local people. As MacCannell (1973) suggests, the stories which emerge from these intimate encounters are considered central because "they are seen as the core of social solidarity, and they are also thought by some to be more 'real' and morally superior to rationality and distance in social relationships" (p. 592).

Participants seemed to value the sense that they had been 'accepted' by the communities they visited. Karolina (on-site) noted that "the family was really, really happy to have us there," so much that they drove her and her partner to meet multiple extended family members in neighbouring communities. When I asked Tabitha (on-site) to describe her experience in Kenya to date, she spoke affectionately about how protective and parental her host father had been towards her:

> I think he was just worried we were going to feel a bit out of our depth, and he was just trying his best to make us feel welcome. And since then he's been the best thing ever. Living with him has been incredible.

During the post-excursion interview, when I asked Tabitha about her most vivid and meaningful memories, she reiterated: "I think just definitely living with [our host]

family…being able to get to know [our host father] and his family was a real blessing." Indeed, more than any other descriptor, participants labelled the Kenyan people they met as 'welcoming' (28 mentions) and 'friendly' (25 mentions). Further, some participants described their hosts a substitute parents who had 'taken us in,' 'looked after us' and even 'adopted us.' Here, participants established their experiences as authentic by appealing to the *treatment* they received from local Kenyans - which positioned them as cherished friends or extended family. These gestures appeared to produce feelings of belonging or what Crossley (2013) refers to as 'atmospheric intimacy.' To further this point, I detected two aspects of participants' intimate interactions that seemed particularly notable: 1) engaging in meaningful conversations and 2) sharing meals.

7.4.1 Engaging in Meaningful Conversations

First, participants seemed keen to gain insight into the inner workings of the host community, and to share details about their own lives, through meaningful conversation. When I asked Naomi (on-site) to walk me through her typical day in Kenya, she replied:

> We spent a lot of the time in the morning talking to all the teachers about the different things, and it got less of it being a working relationship to being more of 'What's Kenya like?' and 'What's the UK like?'…and I think when you cross that line, you get to know them a lot better, and they kind of take you more seriously, rather than just two white girls who come to the school with some money.

When I asked Whitney (retrospective) to recall her most vivid and meaningful memories from her excursion, her immediate answer was "sitting on the field with the students." She then elaborated:

> [That] was when we really got to know them…when they sat down next to us and said 'Ooohhh, have you got boyfriends?' And they really want to get to know you and often asked these personal questions…things like are we circumcised, are we going to get married, do we want to have children?

When detailing the content of these conversations, participants gave examples of light-hearted topics such as the relative merits of various UK football clubs, but also more challenging or politically sensitive material, including child rearing practices, gender roles, courtship, marriage, divorce, homosexuality, discipline practices (caning) and female circumcision.

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As a counterpoint, five members of the 2014 cohort stated that they purposely moderated their level of openness during conversations, knowing that they would be leaving at the conclusion of ten weeks. For example, while Celeste (on-site) was keen about "dipping my toes in, being friendly," she also felt pressure to maintain "a really professional front" because: "I'm there for ten weeks, and [the students] ask me all these things about my opinion…and I'm really friendly with them [but then] I leave and they never see me again." Gabriela (on-site) similarly spoke about needing to quell her desire for intimacy, particularly amongst the Kenyan children: "I always want more personal involvement [but] in the end, I cannot get so much involved because I am going to leave at some point and they have to be absolutely unattached from me." When I asked Logan (on-site) if he had modified his typical behaviour or ways of being whist in Kenya, he responded:

> Not in a negative way, but I intentionally try not to be too personal or have too strong a personal bond with the students…because I'm conscious that I'm going to go back home for a year. I don't think it will help them if they have the support system of myself to rely on, that they can talk to, and it disappears…I don't like making promises and say I'll definitely be back.

Here, participants acknowledged from the outset that the connections they had forged were unlikely to continue beyond the length of the excursion, and moderated the information they were willing to share accordingly. Indeed, none of the retrospective sample mentioned maintaining a close relationship with the host families, school staff or students they had come to know during their time in Kenya. Furthermore, Celeste, Logan and Gabriela appeared to construct intimate interactions as a potential liability, one that builds false expectations of a long-term commitment. Such attachments could be viewed as undesirable in the context of Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity, in which the ability to exit at will is highly valued.

Nevertheless, this section speaks to participants' continued desire for 'co-presence' - an interaction which "renders persons uniquely accessible, available, and subject to one another" (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). In the tourism context, Urry (2002) refers to this inclination as the "compulsion to physical proximity" (p. 263). Here, despite developments within digital meeting grounds (such as Skype), physical travel remains compelling because it "enables distanciated significant others to have pleasurable, yet obligatory face-to-face meetings that cannot be satisfactorily fulfilled through [virtual] communications" (Larsen, 2010, p. 318). Participants' desire to

engage in meaningful conversations with Kenyan others could also be read as their attempt to identify with the social struggles of marginalised groups. However, where conversation topics risked becoming too personal or unsettling, some participants responded by distancing themselves. Although participants framed their restraint as concern for the emotional wellbeing of their hosts, this strategy ultimately seemed one of *self*-protection.

7.4.2 Sharing Meals

Second, I was particularly struck that over half of participants detailed a story about sharing a meal with their host family or school staff. When I asked Whitney (retrospective) to describe her most vivid and meaningful memories, she spoke about "going to dinner" with the family who owned her village accommodation:

> We got to visit their farm and that was really fun, and it was a kind of acceptance into the community, and it wasn't forthcoming right at the beginning…It was very much like they waited, they got to know us and then they invited us over about four weeks in. That was very special.

In some cases, volunteers were also invited to participate in cooking practices. When I asked Tabitha (on-site) to walk me through a typical day in Kenya, she replied: "Sometimes we watch [our host family] cooking and we've been taught by Momma and the granddaughters…how to make mandazi [fried donut] and how to make chapatti [grilled flatbread] and stuff like that. And we sometimes do the cooking with them." Mitchell (retrospective) similarly spoke about neighbours who: "took us under their wing…They taught us how to make chapatti. They taught us how to make mandazi. We went over to [their] grandmother's house for dinner on the last night…so those were all absolutely lovely memories." Participants' descriptions of the inverse situation also supported the same point. Colin (retrospective) and his partner were placed in a village house on their own rather than staying with a host family, an arrangement he recalled with disappointment because of the missed opportunities to share meals with members of the community: "We were never invited into people's homes. People were generous to us, they would shake our hand, but we were never invited around for a meal, which I would consider a generous offering, to take food." He later added: "The family [my fellow volunteers] were staying with made me really jealous of the experience they were having. They were having dinner [together] every night." Overall, participants invoked the particular foods eaten, the preparation techniques, as well as their ability to consume the meal together as signifiers of

authentic experience (see also Johnston & Baumann, 2010). These accounts also speak to the multi-sensory nature of travel - that pleasure is generated from touching and tasting, rather than simply gazing.

Figure 2. Stews and chapatti prepared by host (author photograph).

Other participants recalled the experience of cooking for the Kenyan people they had grown most close to. For example, Celeste posted 23 images on Facebook chronicling in detail the process of preparing and serving a spaghetti dinner for her host family. Cooking was also present in Karolina and Naomi's Facebook albums, but to a lesser degree. In the interviews, Fiona (retrospective) recalled with amusement:

> We had a group of teachers round for dinner because we thought it might be nice to cook something for them, and went to loads of effort to make this dinner with the available ingredients that we had, and they didn't like any of it! They barely ate a thing.

Gemma (retrospective) was similarly entertained by the school staff's reaction to the meal she and her partner prepared:

> At the end of the trip we cooked dinner for the head teacher and the teachers at school because they were very nice to us. So we made them English food or as close to it as we could…and it's so funny because sometimes we would struggle to eat a lot of matoke [starchy banana] and things like that, and actually, they really struggled to eat our food as well because they found it too rich.

Here, the labour involved in cooking a meal was offered as a gift of thanks and a mechanism for participants to share one aspect of their home culture - this act was considered an intimate interaction even when the meal was disliked or left unfinished.

Figure 3. Volunteers preparing a spaghetti dinner for hosts (participant photograph).

Cooking was also a prominent theme in my field notes. After the site visit to Logan and Gabriela's school placement, we decided to have lunch at a nearby restaurant the pair frequented. Everyone ordered chai (spiced milky tea), meat or egg stew, and ugali (flour-based dough used for dipping). The restaurant owner was on her own, and it seemed that our arrival represented a 'rush' for the small establishment. Seeing this, Gabriela wordlessly moved behind the counter to help prepare the meal, not needing to ask or be asked to cross into the 'restricted' space. Gabriela entered and exited the preparation area effortlessly, maintaining conversation with us from the stovetop. When the owner realised she was missing a few ingredients, she left Gabriela to manage the kitchen while she walked into town for groceries. I felt a bit in awe watching this scene - Gabriela scrambling eggs and fanning the fire with a leaf so casually, as though she had practiced this task for years. I was also struck by the apparent trust the restaurant owner had placed in Gabriela, which was seemingly so established that it required no verbal confirmation. On another occasion, I joined Karolina and Dominic in preparing a spaghetti lunch when

I visited them in their village home. On the walk there, the pair had adeptly negotiated the prices of olive oil, fresh tomatoes and onions in the market square, which they then washed, chopped and simmered into a fresh tomato sauce over a propane stove. I remember feeling impressed when Karolina lit the burner with a single match - a skill I had not needed to practice whilst staying in a guest host, ordering from a menu. Taken together, these were the two experiences where I recalled sensing 'authenticity' most strongly - which suggests that my own instinctive definition of this concept is associated with fluency and ease of expression.

Participants' memories of mealtimes could be important for a number of reasons. First, participants perceived themselves to be gaining access to private, household space that would be otherwise 'off limits' to strangers - a 'back region' in MacCannell's (1973) terms. Second, where tourist experience might be associated with dining in restaurants or eating westernised versions of local foods, participants had been treated to homemade dishes which would be considered 'typical' fare within the village households. Muzaini (2006) refers to this strategy of achieving authenticity as 'consuming the local.' Finally, participants seemed to lend significance to the domestic activities that might be devalued as feminine in their own home context. Put differently, participants claimed authenticity by "integrating themselves within and among local, indigenous communities, learning from them forms of experience and knowledge rejected and repressed by the West" (Davidson, 2005, p. 51). In this way, participants were able to 'try on' traditional gender roles as a 'disposable biography' (Bauman, 2000).

To close this section, participants' claims to 'authentic' experience were largely about becoming integrated and immersed in the Kenyan community they visited - where the ultimate goal was to "blend in" (Cynthia, post-excursion) or "be part of the furniture" (Naomi, on-site). Because 'authenticity' was widely understood by study participants as the primary marker for assessing the value of their excursion, it is interesting to consider the pressures exerted upon youth to *appear* immediately comfortable and fluent in an unfamiliar setting. Indeed, Celeste (on-site) and Mitchell (retrospective) described measuring their progress against fellow volunteers and secretly worrying that they had not kept pace. Celeste (on-site) described feeling insecure at a group meeting after the first week of volunteer work had concluded:

> Everyone was 'Oh, we've really integrated with the community, we've gone here, we've gone there, we know the teachers in the school.' And I was a bit

like 'Oh, all I know is [my host], and some of the teachers'…We'd still just been sitting and observing…and so I was really conscious about that.

Similarly, when I asked Mitchell (retrospective) about the most challenging aspect of his experience, he recalled:

You are always going to have people who ostensibly look as though they are fully integrated, completely or 100 per cent happy, throwing themselves completely into it. And I think a lot of people use them as reference points and compare their own performance to them and are always thinking 'Am I doing that? Am I doing enough?'

These comments speak to my argument that the act of claiming intimate interactions with local people (as one facet of 'authentic' travel experience) represents an 'idealised impression' (Goffman, 1959). In this case, Celeste and Mitchell looked toward group members to help assess their own rate of acclimatisation, but were unsure to what extent they were being performed for.

7.5 Threats to Authenticity

In the previous section, I set out to describe the qualities of travel experience that promoted evaluations of authenticity in the narrative accounts I examined. The rest of this chapter is devoted to counterevidence - the aspects of participants' experiences that served to challenge these claims. Because "travellers project utopian social visions onto their representations…and incorporate them into their own narratives of belonging and becoming," this section details the ways in which participants' 'utopics' were interrupted (Davidson, 2005, p. 29). The threats to authenticity I will describe were initiated by the volunteers themselves (in choosing to conceal aspects of their 'true selves' from their hosts), and by host community members (in providing frequent reminders that volunteers remained privileged 'outsiders'). In Goffman's (1959) terms, these threats can be understood as 'destructive information' - the "facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters" (p. 141).

7.5.1 Concealing Private Thoughts and Feelings

When I asked participants if they had modified their typical behaviour or ways of being whist in Kenya, a few gave specific examples of personal information they had withheld from their hosts, including their religion, dietary restrictions and sexuality.

Karolina (on-site): I didn't tell them that I'm atheist, because previous [volunteers] told me that they really like it if we are religious and it's just like a bonding thing. So I told them I'm from the Church of England, but I'm not, but apparently this is the easiest way to justify why I'm not going to church.

Robyn (retrospective): I remember having to eat some horrendous things, because I'm a vegetarian…so I found myself having to either decide 'Well, eat it' or I'm going to awkwardly turn it down. And to be easy, I just opted to eat it. But definitely I have memories of being served the dangling chin of a chicken.

Gabriela (on-site): I never really show myself in front of anyone just as I am. To start with I'm bisexual, and being here it's absolutely - like I have to look very, very straight…When I'm here, I'm absolutely playing the role of being who they expect me to be, always, and this is very different than when I am at home…When I'm with [the other volunteers], I become myself again.

In these cases, participants chose to selectively hide parts of themselves (indeed, some key aspects of their identities) in an effort to preserve the comfort of their hosts and to prevent interpersonal conflict. In line with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, participants seemed keen to be viewed positively as 'good guests,' and were willing to adjust the components of their lifestyle or demeanor which they believed were incompatible with this goal.

Others described underplaying feelings of disapproval toward cultural practices they had witnessed or discussed while in Kenya - specifically, local approaches to sexual health (including disinclination toward condom use and limited access to abortion), methods of discipline and punishment, attitudes toward gender equity and homosexuality, and the central role of Christian religion and the church - in other words, 'traditional' values which were inconsistent with participants' progressive and cosmopolitan identities (see also Jorgenson, 2014). When I asked Dominic (on-site) about the most challenging aspect of his experience, he recalled feeling so irritated during debates with school staff and the village pastor that he had to remove himself from the interaction entirely:

[There were] moments with the teachers where I just couldn't socialise. I just couldn't go along with what they were saying and so I just kept my mouth shut. Yeah, there was kind of a peak in my kind of disliking the culture, where basically the pastor was saying 'Well, you can't stop caning, this is our

culture'…[And] especially conversations about women, equality…and how

the women basically don't inherit anything…the mentality is so messed up.

In response to the same question, Logan (on-site) described being present while a

teacher threatened to cane a group of students, "poking them with a stick and putting

the stick next to the cheek or the jaw." He reflected further:

I saw a punishment which I wasn't entirely comfortable with, but I didn't

think intervening would have been the best approach…I'm surprised, because

I thought they would not have done it if I was there watching. I had a feeling

they would have tried to keep it away from me. So that was a little bit

uncomfortable for me, but I was thinking 'It was their culture.'

Gabriela (on-site) referred to her interpersonal interactions at the school site as

'tricky':

It's very frustrating…because I couldn't tell [the students] 'Please wear a

condom' or whatever. I'm a Mzungu and I'm not - I would need a lot of time

and a lot of trust from them so that they'd follow what I say, and in the end, I

cannot just go and say what I think.

Here, participants expressed a hesitancy to make comment or intercede in the

presence of their hosts - they 'try not to object,' 'control my opinions' and 'kept my

mouth shut' - perhaps because they wished to avoid accusations of 'imposing'

western value systems upon service recipients (the primary neo-colonial critique of

international volunteer practice). In an effort to position the self as non-judgemental,

participants described their demeanor in-country as more 'professional,' 'culturally

sensitive,' 'cautious,' 'reserved,' 'tolerant,' 'conservative' and 'withheld' than in their

home context.

Here, the authenticity of the experience was threatened by participants'

inability to relate to cultural values or practices they viewed as characteristic of the

villages they visited. These feelings may have been 'unsayable' beyond the research

interview setting because they disrupt the expectation that volunteers should 'fall in

love' with and 'feel at home' within the host country (Vrasti, 2013). Indeed, I

detected reticence in participants' divulgence of negative views, which were typically

communicated to me through extended pauses and hushed tones, and shared near the

conclusion of interview transcripts. For example, during our interview in the bedroom

of her village accommodation, Gabriela (on-site) quieted her voice to a whisper when

she broached the subject of religion, and then stopped the interview to close an open

window to further ensure her private thoughts would not be heard by a passersby. Gabriela went on to share her opinion that the Christian zeal she had sensed in the community was:

> A very big constraint to the people and, of course, you cannot come here and pretend that you are going to change anything about that, because that should not be done anyway…[But it's] very much in the base of the society.

Overall, it seemed important for participants to adopt a stance of 'open-mindedness' toward their host culture - what Lough, McBride and Sherraden (2012) define as "a person's capacity to look at situations from multiple perspectives, to see various sides of a disagreement, and to be flexible in thinking and ideas" (p. 482). Indeed, the pressure for contemporary volunteers to remain unconditionally accepting may urge them toward "exhibit[ing] a distinctive relativism and a rhetorical deference to the culture of the society in which they are operating" (Butcher & Smith, 2015, p. 12). This impulse is positive, however, may simultaneously restrict young people's capacity for 'critical citizenship' where they feel they "can neither judge nor question that which he or she considers fundamentally different from his or her own culture" (Butcher & Smith, 2015, p. 98).

7.5.2 Being Positioned as Privileged White Foreigners

While participants described a number of instances in which they felt genuinely 'welcomed,' 'accepted' and even 'adopted' by the host community, they simultaneously retained their foreignness and remained "a spectacle" (Whitney, retrospective). For example, during my field visit, all of the 2014 participants spoke about the constant and overt attention they received from the Kenyan public - what Maoz (2006) refers to as the 'local gaze.' Participants described the ritual of walking through the streets, where townspeople would 'shout Mzungu' to grab their attention and 'touch,' 'grab,' 'grope,' 'pull,' 'target,' 'follow,' 'swarm,' 'crowd' and 'harass' them in an attempt to initiate an interaction.

For some volunteers, the 'local gaze' was constructed as a source of enjoyment and pleasure. When I asked participants about their most vivid or meaningful memories from the excursion, a few accentuated the positive reception they had received from local people:

> *Miriam (retrospective):* I remember when we used to walk to and from school, like literally the children used to go and stand outside the house and wave at us. It was literally like we were royalty or something. So I have these

memories of these journeys to and from school and waving to all the children and honestly feeling like this kind of local celebrity, which was pretty fun.

Zara (retrospective): Whenever you walk down the street, you get a trail of people following you, calling out 'Mzungu' which means 'white foreign person.' And the children were really, really cute and just follow you everywhere…their face would light up and they would be so excited to see you every time…I always liken it to what it must feel like to be famous, because you're somewhere where everybody notices you constantly and knows who you are and shouts your name out in the street.

Trevor (retrospective): [There were] swarms of little children saying 'Hi Mzungu' and waving, or singing and chanting…the kids especially were very eager. It's almost always that they are friendly. It makes you feel like that they liked that you were there…[It was] definitely a positive thing.

Here, participants' mere presence as white westerners was overtly celebrated and granted (seemingly automatic) high regard - a finding that overlaps with data collected during the pilot study phase (Schwarz, 2015).

More often than not though, volunteers described these exchanges as 'exhausting,' 'unrelenting,' 'tiring,' 'intense,' 'uncomfortable,' 'annoying,' 'bothersome' and an experience that 'gets on your nerves.' For example, when I asked participants about their general reflections on volunteer travel, some replied as follows:

Logan (post-excursion): Not in a bad way, but it's quite unrelenting in terms of just like walking to the shop you will get stopped and asked questions, people want to touch you, which is understandable because we are just so different and they are just curious, but it can be quite tiring.

Celeste (on-site): It's just because you are new and they have never seen you before, and at first that made me feel really uncomfortable…All these people just being like 'Wow, you're so different' and you're like 'No, I'm really not'…That's all they think I am. Just a walking weird thing.

Lydia (on-site): Yeah, it was just the fact of being a foreigner, and when you walk down the street…they shout 'Mzungu, Mzungu'…You understand people probably don't see Mzungus a lot and they find it very funny or interesting to pull on your hair or stare at you or make jokes of your ethnicity.

Although Maoz (2006) suggests that travellers are too caught-up in their own 'tourist gaze' to even notice a 'local gaze' is being returned, participants in this study acknowledged the attention they received for its constancy and intensity, more akin to Vrasti's (2013) description of the 'scrutinizing gaze.'

Here, it is interesting to note that participants who responded positively to the 'local gaze' were primarily drawn from the retrospective sample (for whom the attention was an amusing and distant memory), while negative reactions were primarily gathered during the 2014 cohort's on-site interviews (for whom the strain of community interactions was still ongoing). It is also pertinent to point out that the positive interpretations of 'the local gaze' tended to involve children (described as 'cute' by Jodie, Paige and Zara) whereas negative interpretations were associated with adult males (described as 'creepy' by Celeste, Paige and Max). Perhaps participants could more readily take pleasure from the attention of children because they viewed them as non-threatening (see also Crossley, 2013). Further, Caton and Santos (2009) suggest that interactions with children are gratifying in their simplicity, they "do not challenge tourists to expand their perspectives by raising discussions about cultural misunderstandings or global power imbalances" (p. 200).

A few participants went on to express discontent that some Kenyan townspeople had interacted with them as a homogenous group, bundled together as 'white foreigners' under the heading 'Mzungu.' While participants used this local terminology willingly to describe themselves (58 mentions in total), a few lamented that their unique attributes had not been recognised during social interactions. For example, Fiona (retrospective) recalled her reaction to seeing a note written by her school's deputy head teacher which referred to her and her partner simply as 'the whites': "When people shout 'Mzungu' to you, you're just 'Okay, that's what I expect' and that sort of the thing, but when you translate it [literally] into English [you think] 'That's it, that's how they see me, just a white person.'" Being labeled 'just white' may be unsettling for late modern youth who have not previously experienced their whiteness as category, and who are accustomed to having their individualised and hyphenated identities acknowledged. Indeed, as Urry and Larsen (2011) remind us: "One key characteristic of postmodernism, like post-Fordism, is people's refusal to accept being treated as an undifferentiated mass" (p. 101-102). None of the participants reversed this concern, to consider the prevalent and generalised discursive

construction of Africans as impoverished, uneducated, victimised and requiring rescue (Sensoy & Marshall, 2010).

The term 'Mzungu' was also consistently extended to, and adopted by, the four Asian participants and two British participants of Bangladeshi decent in this study (see also Angod, 2015). I was initially surprised when these participants recognised themselves as 'Mzungu' and used this marker with apparent comfort throughout our conversations. The two Singaporean participants (Cynthia and Max) instead expressed considerable annoyance that they were regularly assumed to be Chinese: in addition to being identified as 'Mzungu' they reported being called 'China' or 'Ching Chong.' Cynthia (on-site) described her irritation with this latter set of labels, which she interpreted as an act of discrimination:

> I suppose one other thing that bothers me, when you walk through the street sometimes…it's not that [the townspeople] intend to be racist, but they're racist as a matter of fact. Sometimes they tend to be rude. Sometimes they'll be like 'Ching Chong' and stuff like that.

During my field visit, while walking with Max through the central town, he divulged that the experience of being on-foot with me (a white woman) was preferable to being alone because he would not be shouted at in "gibberish Chinese." When I asked Max how he had responded in these moments previously, he told me he had learned the Kiswahili translations for the phrases 'That's not nice' and 'I'm not from China, I'm from Singapore' but had not yet had the opportunity to take corrective action due to the brevity of the encounters. Cynthia and Max's reactions reveal an opposition to mass treatment, *but only* when they were assumed to be Chinese, *and not* when they were designated white. To me, this seemed a powerful example of how whiteness remains a desired membership category and operates as a location of structural advantage.

In some cases, participants took issue that 'being white' signalled financial affluence to members of the host community. Naomi (on-site) summarised this conflation of social categories as: "We're from the west and we're outsiders and we're coming in as Mzungus and these Mzungus have money." In particular, a few participants spoke about feeling disappointed when someone they believed they had forged a personal bond with later asked for money or support.

> *Paige (on-site):* There was this boy who we made good friends with who came around [often]…and then one day he brought us loads of vegetables and it had

a letter in it being like 'Is there any way you can help me find a scholarship or do anything to help me get school fees?'…I didn't want to be cynical but it was 'All you see us for is money'…I don't know because he's a kid, but then everyone just thinks you can sponsor them but you can't.

Jodie (on-site): We are asked a lot about how they can get a green card, how they can get out of the country or random people, just strangers passing by, propose to you because you are Mzungu…[They ask] 'Can you take me to your country? Can you buy me a cell phone?' Which made me feel kind of weird because you realise that they don't really care what you are doing here.

These participants expressed frustration that the benevolence of their volunteer efforts (the donation of time and labour) had not been fully recognised and appreciated. Here, it seemed Jodie, Naomi and Paige believed they were "already giving and wanted to be allowed to give as they saw fit without having to contend with demands for more" (Crossley, 2013, p. 129). Paradoxically though, financial support is "clearly what these communities need, and what makes foreigners' presence an alluring one" (Angod, 2015, p. 158).

When participants suspected they were being interacted with for instrumental purposes - as a potential customer or as an economic resource - this lead some to question the authenticity of the relationships they had forged whilst in Kenya. For example, after treating school staff members to a night out and a few drinks, Celeste (on-site) found herself considering whether ulterior motives had been involved: "Do they only like me because I'm a westerner, or do they actually like me for me?" Upon Logan's (post-excursion) return to the UK, he described feeling less guarded when striking up a conversation with a British woman on the train:

If I was in Kenya, if I met somebody, they would normally turn it round to money or something whereas this was just a genuine conversation. So it's just kind of a nice and warm satisfying feeling, just to talk about my life to someone, rather than having an underlying cause of money or 'Can I have something' or 'Can you give me business?'

Here, participants' desire to interact 'authentically' was interrupted by the commodification of the encounter. In terms set out by Reay et al. (2007), aggressively entrepreneurial locals cease to offer the types of encounters with 'productive diversity' participants had imagined or desired. First, when host community members made monetary demands, it appeared to remind volunteers that they were not engaged

in 'pure relationships,' those maintained for internalised rather than pecuniary interests (Giddens, 1991). Further, these commercial advances splintered the promise of international volunteering as an idealised alternative to mainstream tourism - what Crossley (2013) refers to as a 'fantasmatic rupture.'

Overall, this section highlights a juxtaposition: participants experienced 'being white' as a source of pleasure when they believed they were the first white people to visit the villages or when their mere presence was received with fanfare, but as a source of distress when host community members made overt demands for money or support. Here, it seemed participants were comfortable with the visibility of their whiteness when it was a 'novelty,' but not when it reminded them of systemic inequalities or the entrenched nature of their own social privilege. Perhaps to obscure this uncomfortable truth, participants cast themselves as vulnerable (not free to move through the town centre without being targeted or harassed), a reaction anticipated by whiteness scholars and echoed in the findings of Vrasti (2013) and Larsen (2014).

7.5.3 Deflecting Sexual Advances

All of the participants in the 2014 cohort spoke with unease about the sexualised attention female participants had received from Kenyan men (see also Hottola, 2002). Paige (on-site), who had accepted a seemingly-innocuous invitation to have drinks with a male teacher, later recounted:

> It was the most horrible ten minutes of my life. You know, when something makes your skin crawl. [He] was actually just constantly looking [at me], just being 'I'm just so glad you're here'…saying stuff like 'Even though he's got a wife, it doesn't stop him being there [with me].'

When Gabriela's (on-site) male project partner fell ill and was taken to hospital partway through the excursion, she recalled being pursued by a group of local men:

> It was the first time I was left alone here, for a week. That was a bit tricky because lots of men started to be much more 'on me' and when they realised that [my partner] was not here…I got a ton of phone calls…Apparently this guy came with three other men that [our host] didn't know and they started looking for me and apparently they were very aggressive, telling [our host] 'Where is she now? We want to speak with her'…and they wanted to take me to some private place apparently.

When I asked Tabitha (on-site) if any aspect of the excursion had made her feel uncomfortable, she replied:

Sometimes the Kenyan men can be quite full on…It's normally alright because you are normally around other people and it's fine. [But one time] I was sitting right next to the [matatu] driver and so he was leaning over me to [move the gear shift] and he made me feel really uncomfortable. He was being really inappropriate. He kept trying to touch me up, wouldn't really let me out. He kept saying 'I'm going to take you to my place.'

Celeste (on-site) also relayed a story about being physically accosted in the confined space of a vehicle:

The other day we were in a matatu and the conductor was being really inappropriate and he made me sit in the boot and he was like 'You need to lie down, because we are going pass a road block, and if they see you then we are going to get fined'…So I lied down and he lied down and all of a sudden he starts licking his lips at me, and I was 'What are you doing?' So I got up and he put his hand on my leg and I was 'No, get off me.' And then he put his hands on my hips and I was 'Get off me' and I screamed.

In all of these accounts, the 'sexualised surveillance' described was forceful, intimidating and wholeheartedly unwelcome (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). Nevertheless, female participants tended to downplay the aggressive nature of these advances using qualifying phrases such as 'not in a mean way,' 'not in a menacing way,' 'I know it wasn't deliberate,' 'it's not made with any intention,' 'they are not doing it deliberately,' 'they are not being mean,' 'they are just curious' and 'I didn't feel danger or anything.' Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) refer to this linguistic technique as 'restrained criticism,' meant "to soften the judgement in light of the circumstances" (p. 152). Here, participants seemed to adopt the explanation that gender norms in Kenya were simply different from those in their home environments, and perhaps even that "because they occupied holiday spaces as women alone, they could expect to be the subject of sexual speculation" (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 344).

While these narratives were quite emotionally-charged, similar accounts were not prevalent in post-excursion interviews or amongst any of the retrospective participants (a few female volunteers from previous years mentioned only, with amusement, that they had received frequent marriage proposals from male strangers). I found it comforting to learn that the distress these young women had disclosed to me appeared not to last long-term. None of the participants asked for further support

through referrals to professional services. Nevertheless, I felt obliged to communicate this finding to the sending organisation (omitting any information that might identify participants) to support the ongoing development of their risk-management procedures and pre-departure training modules.

One poignant memory from my field visit occurred on a long commute from the central town to Naomi and Paige's project site. Squished tightly onto the rear bench of a matatu, I passed the time engaging in a pleasant conversation with the Kenyan man sitting next to me. We shared tidbits about my life in Canada and the UK and his life in Kenya - typical weather, prevalent natural resources, popular culinary staples and the like. When we arrived at the man's stop, he asked for my phone number and I replied that, while I had enjoyed our conversation, I did not give out my mobile. He wished me a good journey and, with that, we concluded our interaction. As the matatu pulled away, Naomi and Paige appeared flabbergasted, explaining that, on the many occasions they had been asked for their phone numbers they "didn't think you could just say no!" Naomi and Paige went on to explain the various strategies they had employed to politely evade these requests. For example, when they initially arrived in Kenya, they had given their numbers to any man who had asked in an attempt to seize opportunities for intimate (albeit platonic) interactions with 'genuine locals' (Hottola, 2014). However, when the incoming phone calls and texts become incessant (they eventually needed to block callers), the young women chose to adopt a new approach by either concocting stories that they did not own phones or suggesting that they were already engaged to be married. Indeed, it had surprised Naomi and Paige that I was willing to decline the man's advance *without* a placating excuse (other than simply not being interested). Overall, Naomi and Paige seemed unsure how to assert themselves in light of their priority to remain friendly, accommodating and open to experience - an illustration of what Butcher (2003) refers to as 'stifling etiquette.' Perhaps I felt less invested in maintaining these facades because I had travelled previously as an international volunteer, and had thus already satisfied the criteria for 'authentic' interactions.

The 'sexualised surveillance' (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008) described by young women in this study appeared to threaten the authenticity of their travel experiences in two ways. First, this unwanted conduct interrupted the fantasy (and preferred story) that 'everyone' in Kenya was nice, friendly and protective of their best interests. Second, while participants were attracted to itineraries involving emotional or

physical risk (Elsrud, 2001; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003; Muzaini, 2006), young women's angst about their vulnerability to the male gaze pushed too far beyond their personal comfort and the range of intimate interaction they had desired.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to show how 'authenticity' was the most prominent 'frame' through which participants viewed and evaluated their international volunteer experiences (Goffman, 1959). In doing so, I have addressed this study's first research sub-question. Extending from this base, I sought to elucidate an emergent research sub-sub-question: How do individuals take-up and employ notions of 'authenticity' within their personal travel narratives, and on what bases do they claim to have had an 'authentic' experience?

Overall, participants' expressions of authenticity evoked a Goffmanesque desire to pass from the 'front region' to the 'back region' (MacCannell, 1973). Unlike the easily-penetrable (and therefore undesirable) front region, participants attempted to cross this threshold by travelling to remote geographies, engaging in everyday Kenyan life (via local-style accommodation and public transportation) and interacting with local people (through meaningful conversations and sharing meals). These findings mirror the 'guiding principles' of volunteer tourism described by Wearing and McGehee (2013), where travellers venture to "put as much distance between themselves and mass tourism in trying to establish more contact with the local population, without a reliance on tourist infrastructure, in utilizing the same accommodation and transport facilities as the local population" (p. 27).

Indeed, the very act of 'framing' - "the subjective meaning we assign to social events" - necessarily involves the bracketing of experience into categories of inclusion and exclusion (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). In this case, participants tended to position authenticity as an easily-digestible binary (urban city versus rural village, hotel versus homestay) in which participants had supposedly always chosen the more genuine version of travel experience. In doing so, these young people highlighted the relational dimension of authenticity: that individuals must utilise notions of *inauthenticity* as an ongoing reference point for legitimising their claims. In this study, inauthenticity was assigned to markers of mass tourism specifically and modern life in industrialised society more broadly.

As I began to share this study's findings at various academic conferences, I was occasionally asked to offer my definitive judgement on the veracity of

participants' claims - whether their experiences were, in fact, authentic or simply 'staged' (MacCannell, 1973). However, an important premise of my argument remains that authenticity is a social construction, not an inherent or essential quality. In positioning authenticity as a 'frame,' I accept a view of this concept as subjective, fluid and context-dependent rather than "tightly anchored to any objective reality" (Branaman, 1997, p. lxxv). By consequence, I follow Goffman's (1974) instruction that "no very effective check may be available in the society regarding the validity or invalidity of a framework" (p. 200). Indeed, the analytic potential of this concept relies on the recognition of its evolving particularities.

In this vein, this chapter has considered the ways international volunteers construct authenticity within the context of their own experiences. In line with Josselson's (2004) 'hermeneutics of restoration,' this approach respects that if participants "empathically experience the toured objects [or the dimensions of their excursion] as authentic, then, their view points are real in their own right, no matter whether experts may propose an opposite view from an objective perspective" (Wang, 1999, p. 355). I also respond to Josselson's (2004) 'hermeneutics of demystification' by providing counterevidence to highlight the aspects of participants' experiences that served to challenge these claims - what Goffman (1959) refers to as 'destructive information.'

While the symbols or signifiers that mark an experience as authentic or inauthentic are individual and pluralistic, there was considerable overlap between participants' versions of this concept. Thus, I began to think of participants' claims to authenticity as an example of what Bruner (1991) calls 'narrative banalization,' accounts which are "so socially conventional, so well known, so in keeping with the canon, that we can assign it to some well-rehearsed and virtually automatic interpretive routine" (p. 9). This thematic continuity suggests both that the 'search for authenticity' continues to preoccupy western-situated travellers, and that there are "commonly shared manuscripts" for interpreting 'what counts' (Elsrud, 2001, p. 600).

The findings in this chapter also resonate beyond scholarship in the fields of education, sociology and tourism studies. For example, Johnston and Baumann (2010) analysed gourmet food writing and interview data from 30 self-identified 'foodies' to unpack the notion of 'culinary authenticity.' The authors found that food was accepted as authentic if it had geographic specificity (associated with a particular town or region), was 'simple' (fresh, handmade or affiliated with small-scale

producers), had a personal connection (resulting from the creativity and uniqueness of an individual culinary artist), could be linked to a historical tradition (the recipe is 'true' to its origins), or had an 'ethnic' connection (prepared by an insider who recognises how the dish should 'really' taste). Here, Johnston and Baumann's (2010) informants viewed mass-production in the same way that this study's participants viewed mass-tourism - as a violation of the standards of authenticity. In both research settings, participants ascribed positive values like 'sincerity' and honesty' only to that which was "distance[d] from the complexities and manufactured quality of modern industrialized life" (p. 76). These intersections are important because they tell us something about the how the contours of authenticity take shape in the broader social context.

As a final point, participants in this study offered *a particular view* of authenticity: one that 'gazed' from a western setting to a non-western setting. This means participants' articulations of authenticity must first be understood as resulting from a "*projection* of tourists' own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly onto toured Others" (Wang, 1999, p. 355, italics in original). I wonder, how might participants have responded if asked to reverse their gaze? Would similar evaluation markers have been used to define an 'authentic British experience'? Second, the notions of authenticity presented herein ought to be interpreted as constructions of power. As Bruner (1994) observed: "No longer is authenticity a property inherent in an object, forever fixed in time; it is seen as a struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history" (p. 408). Here, it is important to consider *who* has the authority to confer authentic status and the potential consequences of this differential power. For example, if young volunteers take pleasure in 'untouched' or impoverished settings, and frame their own presence as a contaminant, this positioning may inadvertently undermine the very 'development' they came to support. Indeed, participants did not claim strong social justice agendas or express an impetus to give up their advantages in order to shift the social conditions they had encountered.

Chapter 8: "It's Not Voluntourism": Unpacking Narrative Claims to Differentiation

This chapter explores participants' attempts to highlight distinctions between themselves and *other* volunteers - a grouping they referred to broadly (and derogatorily) as 'voluntourists.' As was my approach in the previous chapter, I grew interested in both the explicit claim itself (indeed, I incorporated Tabitha's post-excursion assertion that "It's not voluntourism" directly into the title of this thesis) but also upon what evidence these divisions came to rest. In short, participants sought to stake the moral high ground by differentiating between their own volunteer project choice and 1) projects which were shorter term, 2) projects which provided unskilled (even detrimental) forms of labour, and 3) projects which masqueraded as volunteering, but where the balance of time was actually spent 'on holiday.' These accounts exhibit a competitive tone (a strong propensity to define and distinguish oneself from others) and help to illuminate the criteria and values upon which these young people evaluated their experiences overseas. In the second half of the chapter, I show how participants turned reflexively inward and adopted a stance of self-critique when assessing aspects of their own international volunteer excursion; questioning what they may or may not have accomplished while overseas. Taken together, I position participants' narratives as devices for self-enhancement - or what Goffman (1959) refers to as 'fronts' (Goffman, 1959). In doing so, I aim to respond to the second research sub-question: What self-presentations or 'fronts' do young people foreground when they communicate their international volunteer experiences to an audience?

8.1 Rejecting 'Voluntourism'

Throughout my time interacting with study participants, most were at pains to emphasise that their international volunteer activities should not be misconstrued as 'voluntourism.' For example, even before the project had commenced, Cynthia (pre-departure) spoke about wanting to confirm amongst her peers that:

> I think [this project] is different...And so I think when my friends think of me as an international volunteer it's just clarifying with them, as well, what exactly makes [this project] different. And why I exactly I chose them as well, instead of other charities.

Similar statements were reiterated after the excursion had concluded. When I asked Tabitha (post-excursion) what message or general impression she wanted to communicate to friends and family about her experience, she replied without pause:

> That it's not voluntourism. Because I think a lot of [my friends]…they think that we went out and stayed in a nice hotel and went and hugged some orphans and then we came back type of thing. But I just want to make it clear that we didn't really do that. This is different.

In response to the same question, Naomi (post-excursion) said: "There's the voluntourism thing, like Gap Year. People thinking that you're going away and doing all these things that doesn't actually do anything, but [this project] is different than that, and I want that to come across as well." Naomi (subsequent-excursion) reiterated the same point one year later, after returning to Kenya a second time:

> I still feel the same way about voluntourism I think, and I'm glad that's not what we do. When people ask me about [the project] I'm very like 'THIS is what we do, and we don't do these things, and there are reasons why we don't do these things.'

Naomi concluded by reifying her excursion choice: "I wouldn't have wanted to do anything else that I read about, any other doesn't come close to what [this project] does." Here, Cynthia, Naomi and Tabitha all unreservedly asserted that the project they'd chosen "is different" from the activity they labelled as 'voluntourism.' In addition to the certitude of these remarks, I found it striking that participants implied members of their social circles would hold a negative view of international volunteering as a set-point. Conceivably, these young people would only feel pressure to 'clarify' or 'make clear' such dissimilarities if their peers' baseline position was assumed one of criticism or scrutiny.

Indeed, when I asked participants what being an international volunteer said about them as a person, all but two tempered any positive comments with a negative qualification, and about a third of the sample did not offer any positive comments at all. For example, Fiona (retrospective) hesitated and sought to clarify the question: "You mean those specific words? Because when you say 'international volunteer' some of it sounds positive and then some of it I don't actually think sounds particularly positive." Zara (retrospective) repeated 'I don't know' three times before answering:

You know the cliché joke about the Gap Year student? Yeah, so I think what it says about people…especially when it's people who are really privileged, just going out and doing projects which aren't necessarily ones that are sustainable…I sometimes think there's some kind of element of middle class guilt in it.

Celeste (pre-departure) was less restrained in her response:

I hate that [term] 'international volunteer' because I feel like sometimes it seems that [it implies] 'I'm from the West…I know what's good for you and I'm going to take all the things that I know and impose it on you.'

Mitchell (retrospective) responded with similar conviction:

I can very well see other people thinking that it's kind of arrogant, so even a kind of neo-colonialism, and that's a serious and compelling argument…I don't think that all volunteering is useful, and I don't think if you are a volunteer, if you've done something like that in the past, that it intrinsically says anything beneficial about your character. In fact, it might say that you are hideously naïve and have no idea what you're doing.

Here, participants were quick to disassociate themselves from the commonplace labels that might be used to identify their engagement overseas, and the problematic connotations they believed those labels invoked. That participants firmly negated the use of the term 'voluntourist,' and in more limited instances, the term 'international volunteer' is a reminder that such labels operate within "a symbolic value system that those using these terms are well aware of, and around which they negotiate their own identity. As categories, they are not passively applied and accepted, rather they are actively constructed, sought after and eschewed" (Simpson, 2004, p. 181).

Participants' depictions of 'voluntourists' can be related instructively to Goffman's (1959) 'treatment of the absent.' Here, individuals refer to 'others' not physically present using 'uncomplimentary terms of reference,' a collective label which "assimilates them fully to an abstract category" (p. 171). Goffman (1959) offers an example from the service sector, wherein staff may treat customers respectfully face-to-face, but gossip about them when out of earshot. Ultimately, the purpose of such derogation is to confer status on members of the in-group: it "serves to maintain the solidarity of the team, demonstrating mutual regard at the expense of those absent" (p. 169). In this research study, participants tended to fold 'other'

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volunteers into the broad and unflattering category of 'voluntourist,' in part, to position their own project choices as superior.

Intriguingly, only just 12 years ago, the category of 'volunteer' was construed quite differently by the 28 Gap Year participants in Simpson's (2004) doctoral research. Here, participants tended to view the 'volunteer' label with admiration, interpreted to be a selfless individual who undertook arduous project work and offered a sustained level of commitment to the host community. These Gap Year participants had thus excluded themselves from the 'volunteer' designation on the basis that their own travel pursuits had been too enjoyable and short-lived. In the present study, where participants did mention positive perceptions associated with international volunteers, they most often depicted an individual who was open to new experiences, desired a challenge, enjoyed travelling, was interested in other cultures, and who 'wants to help' or 'make a difference.' However, with the exception of Gemma and Logan, all diluted these estimations by suggesting that they held 'mixed opinions' or that the topic was 'controversial.'

None of the volunteers in the 2014 cohort had previously participated in an international volunteer experience, and thus, were not drawing on their own unsatisfying or unsettling experiences when they offered misgivings. From where, then, does this shift in discourse arise?

8.2 Displaying Awareness of International Volunteering Critiques

Participants in this study displayed a keen awareness of the prevailing critiques levied at international volunteering as outlined by Guttentag (2009). They primarily suggested their opinions on this topic were informed by 1) articles shared through social media and 2) the volunteer industry itself. Thus, in this section, I detail the extent to which the backlash associated with international volunteering has become adopted into mainstream discourse, thereby helping to shape which identities (and particular labels) young travellers embrace and contest.

First, some participants made specific reference to online editorials which parody or criticise aspects of international volunteering. For example, Cynthia, Max and Paige referred to a blog entry written by Pippa Biddle (2014), a 21 year old American woman critically reflecting on an international volunteer excursion in Tanzania she had participated in during secondary school. Paige (post-excursion) summarised the author's argument as follows:

Have you read that article called 'Voluntourism'? I'll link it to your Facebook. It's basically 'Everyone stop doing these [volunteer excursions], they're so bad, this is ridiculous, you're just perpetuating the white person stereotype, you're not helping anything, and stop pretending just so that you get to go on holiday.'

Indeed, Biddle (2014) addresses the criticism of volunteers being relatively unskilled for the work they are engaged with overseas:

Our mission while at the orphanage was to build a library. Turns out that we, a group of highly educated private boarding school students were so bad at the most basic construction work that each night the men had to take down the structurally unsound bricks we had laid and rebuild the structure so that, when we woke up in the morning, we would be unaware of our failure.

The author's concern is that, without specific professional skills to offer, the presence of young, white westerners is ultimately more detrimental than beneficial. She also nods to the constancy and mobility of white privilege by evoking the performative aspect of Tanzanian workers dismantling the work completed, assumedly for the volunteers' piece of mind. This opinion piece went viral only months before the 2014 cohort was set to depart for Kenya.

Similarly, Fiona, Natasha and Whitney cited the influence of a three-minute clip entitled 'Gap Yah' (Lacey, 2010). In this video, a young British man named Orlando (a fictional character played by comedian Matt Lacey) recounts tales of spiritual and cultural enlightenment during his Gap Year in Burma, Tanzania and Peru - each story concluding with him partying, becoming drunk and vomiting profusely. The word 'Yah' is purposely misspelled to draw attention to the 'rah' or 'snobbish' accent donned within the film. Through hyperbole, the sketch derides those youth who might exhibit pomposity and immoderation under the auspices of 'finding themselves.' Since its upload in 2010, this video has had over 5.9 million views on YouTube. When I asked Whitney (retrospective) where her resistance to 'voluntourism' stemmed from, she replied: "I don't know if you saw that YouTube video about the Gap Year volunteer - that publicised it and popularised [the critiques] a lot more." Similarly, Fiona (retrospective) asked: "Have you seen that new YouTube video called 'Gap Yah'? So when you say 'international volunteer' there's a little bit of that [image] that also springs to mind which I don't think it's particularly

positive." Natasha (retrospective) stressed the importance of distinguishing between the "different sorts of people…that do these sorts of things":

> I don't know if you saw the 'Gap Yah' video. It's absolutely ruined [international volunteering's image] because you're grouped into this area of rich kids having a lads' holiday. But you're trying to say 'No, actually we're quite professional about it.' We don't want to be associated in that kind of way. And it's quite hard to explain that to people.

Here, participants referred to 'Gap Yah' (Lacey, 2010) as a poignant counter-example, one which was antithetical to the 'idealised impression' (Goffman, 1959) they wished to communicate about their own time as an international volunteer. In referencing these parodies, participants positioned themselves as 'in the know,' and by extension, outside the scope of this same criticism.

Indeed, in choosing to undertake an international volunteer excursion, participants spoke about needing to overcome the 'Gap Year stereotype,' 'Gap Year cliché,' 'negative stereotype,' 'negative connotations,' 'negative perception' and even 'stigma' attached to these activities. Similarly, in O'Shea's (2011) post-excursion interviews amongst 29 undergraduate volunteers from the UK, participants expressed concern about being perceived as a 'Gap Year casualty' - someone who assumes their volunteer activities can be worked into and boasted about during all future conversations - and this trepidation lead many to suppress discussion of their experiences altogether.

Second, that participants took aim at 'voluntourism' in a pejorative manner appeared to be reinforced by the official discourse of the international volunteer industry itself. For example, the recruitment email I received from the sending organisation began with the question "Interested in development, but skeptical of 'unsustainable Gap Year' projects?" Perhaps unsurprisingly then, when I asked participants about the sources of their speculation, six cited the oppositional stance adopted by the sending organisation.

> *Celeste (pre-departure):* I think [my opinion] really does come from [the sending organisation], because I just feel since being in the charity, they've highlighted the importance of not being voluntourism, not being out there for a holiday. They seem really, really connected to their work and I feel that the term 'international volunteer' kind of removes you from the work that you've done.

>*Fiona (retrospective):* [The sending organisation] has tried to distance itself as much as possible from the kind of negative connotations...So, for example, volunteers get taught very early on that they don't teach and that teaching is not a good volunteer practice because it's unsustainable and that sort of thing. And so I think we tend to distance ourselves from a generic international volunteer.

Whitney (retrospective), referencing the 'Gap Yah' YouTube video detailed above, said:

>I think in a sense [the sending organisation] drew on that [clip] and really quite early-on said 'We're not one of those' and very much used that as their 'othering' mechanism and a differentiator. And so I guess partly [my opinion], it's from the charity.

It is possible that participants were attracted to this particular sending organisation because they already held misgivings about the underlying premise or implementation practices involved in volunteering abroad. Nevertheless, it is notable here that the sending organisation shares in the differentiation task, eager to market themselves as a distinct alternative to 'voluntourism.'

What are the specific contours and characteristics of this 'voluntourism,' from which participants seek distance? In the next section, I describe three facets of the experience that participants drew upon to differentiate their experiences from those of individuals who were 'just a volunteer,' a 'generic international volunteer,' or a 'holiday Gap Year volunteer.' Namely, participants sought to delegitimise projects which 1) were shorter term, 2) provided unskilled labour, or 3) allocated the majority of time to holidaying. This positioning mirrors Callanan and Thomas' (2005) description of the 'shallow volunteer tourist' who "participates in a project for a short duration of time, has no specific skills or qualifications relating to the project and…[where] the destination of the project is of paramount importance and should offer interesting off-site trips" (p. 196). Overall, I intend to show how participants use these markers to "express their own moral code about responsible touring via their descriptions of the transgressive behaviours of others" - employing what Holloway, Green and Holloway (2011) refer to as the intratourist gaze (p. 243).

8.2.1 Project Length

First, participants tended to draw on the ten week length of their project as a key differentiator between themselves and other volunteers. Participants categorised

the duration of their trip as 'long' or at least 'longer' than other volunteer excursions on the market, as noted by Cynthia (pre-departure): "It's probably one of the longest volunteering missions out there available to [university] students." Further, 14 participants explicitly named a shorter length of time that they believed to be inadequate to support a fulsome experience overseas. 'Other' volunteers, they suggested, were *only* in-country for 'a couple of days,' 'three days,' 'a week,' 'two weeks,' 'three weeks,' 'four weeks,' 'a month' or 'six weeks.' While participants framed their own 'ten weeks' as a considerably greater time commitment, all international volunteer projects measuring less than three months would classified as 'short term' under the typology put forward by Sherraden, Stringham, Sow and McBride (2006).

While participants relied on objective measures of time to assess merit, project length seemed to operate more symbolically as a proxy for 'legitimacy.' When I asked Paige (pre-departure) to describe her reasons for choosing the precise volunteer project she did, she replied: "Actually that was another thing that attracted me, the fact that it was so long, that it seemed quite serious. It wasn't just a three week thing where you…spent two [of those] weeks being 'Oh, let's just take photos.'" In response to the same question, Mitchell (retrospective) said: "I remember that I wanted to go and do something for a very long period of time. I definitely remember that that was a priority…because I thought anything less would be not a serious commitment." Whitney (retrospective) reflected similarly: "I felt [this project] was something that was a bit different, probably a bit better in my opinion, than having worked in the school for a short amount of time and realising that you can't just fly-in and fly-out." Here, participants contended that the ten week duration imbued the programme with an aura of professionalism, whereas visits where "you are only there fleetingly" (Naomi, on-site) or where volunteers "jetted in for a couple of days and looked around" (Bradley, retrospective) necessarily remained "superficial" (Gabriela, post-excursion).

Whilst participants strongly supported the ten week project length *theoretically*, it is pertinent to note that during the post-excursion and retrospective interviews, six reported that the excursion seemed 'too long' and that they would not participate in a project of this duration again. These participants did not suggest that the current project should be shortened, but rather, that the ten week commitment was a choice they would make on one occasion only. Paige (post-excursion) attempted to

explain this contradiction when I asked about her general reflections on international volunteering as a type of travel experience:

> Unless you…stay in town or in a community for that long, you can't make friends in the same way and you can't build up relationships with people so…I think that is probably one of the really greatest things about [this type of travel].

But later in the same interview reflected:

> I don't think [a volunteer] necessarily needs to spend ten weeks [in-country]…if it was shorter, you perhaps would not be so bored. I don't think you need ten weeks to deliver the project…I think a lot of people felt quite trapped, which is a shame.

Here, Paige reiterated that a lengthy project was required for establishing intimate interactions with local people (thereby strengthening one's claim to 'authentic' experience, as outlined in the previous chapter), but was also too monotonous to sustain volunteers' interest throughout. Karolina (post-excursion) was more emphatic when I asked if she would participate in a similar excursion again: "I think not this long. Ten weeks was a lot and I'm glad I did it…but definitely for a shorter period of time, maybe something like three weeks, four weeks. Definitely not ten weeks." Perhaps participants felt obliged to attend a lengthy excursion to meet the perceived requirements of 'good' volunteer practice, but would prefer to move on once a minimum standard had been comfortably bypassed.

8.2.2 Unskilled Labour

Second, participants asserted that their experience was unlike those of 'voluntourists' who work incompetently on tokenistic tasks or who naïvely "do more harm than good" - a phrase that was used verbatim by Cynthia (post-excursion), Max (pre-departure), Natasha (retrospective) and Paige (pre-departure). Most participants positioned their own volunteer project as having had an 'impact' (37 mentions), occasionally preceded by the intensifying adjectives 'big,' 'massive' or 'huge.' By contrast, participants named two specific types of volunteer work they considered 'detrimental' or 'unsustainable': teaching and construction. This rhetoric was echoed in the sending organisation's recruitment email: "We do not ask our volunteers to be teachers or builders, we ask them to immerse themselves in the school environment and make as large and sustainable an impact as possible."

In recalling their initial motivation to volunteer overseas, 15 participants stressed that they had purposely avoided teaching activities. When I asked participants to share their reasons for selecting the particular volunteer project they did, some revealed this disinclination from the outset:

Bradley (retrospective): I knew that I didn't want to go and teach, because I felt that was a really silly idea. There's no benefit to that, and then I found [this sending organisation] and the whole thing was 'No, we don't go and teach, we go and do this instead.'

Natasha (retrospective): The sustainability aspect is a good way of doing things. Whereas there's a lot of other studies about teaching and how it's not a good thing, it's not sustainable, you're just taking locals' jobs, things like that. So it's nice that [this project] wasn't that. And that's why I applied for it in the first place.

Gemma (retrospective): It sounded like quite a good project, because you weren't just - because a lot of projects are just teaching, and I didn't want to do that. This sounded more sustainable… It sounded like a better project to be involved with, basically.

Lucy (retrospective): I didn't want to do a teaching project. And I know that a lot of the [sending organisation's] publicity was all about marketing itself as not being a teaching project…the ability to actually make change was definitely what I was appealed to.

Here, participants declared their pre-existing ideological aversion to the prospect of teaching overseas, and their attraction to the sending organisation in part because it shared in this view.

Further, seven participants underscored the importance of not contributing to construction projects which were beyond young volunteers' capacities. For Tabitha (post-excursion), a central consideration in selecting an international volunteer project had been whether or not she might encroach on employment opportunities for skilled Kenyans. Thus, she took comfort in:

Doing a job which I think that I can do…as opposed to just going out and building. There are probably people in the village who could actually do a much better job than me, so I would actually be taking jobs from the locals and wasting my time and wasting their time.

In a similar vein, Paige and Celeste directed their objection at the potential deficiency of the finished construction product. After Paige (pre-departure) repeated on eight occasions that she was 'worried' about the upcoming excursion, I asked her to elaborate on the source of her concern and she replied:

> I am generally quite cynical about a lot of projects like this, the ones where you go and build a well and someone takes it down in the middle of the night…I'm quite worried about it, but hopefully this [project] is more sustainable than building a well that I can't build.

Celeste (pre-departure) concurred:

> And when you leave, it's not just something that you built that is probably going to fall down because you're not like a builder. You probably didn't even put in the foundation correctly, and stuff like that, and so that's why I was really attracted to [this project].

Here, participants' devaluation of construction work was opposite to assessments made by the ten UK volunteers Crossley (2013) followed in rural Kenya, for whom erecting school buildings, toilet blocks and houses was held up as tangible evidence of the group's positive contribution. Further, the physicality of such manual labour left 'traces on the body' (sweat, dirt, blisters, callouses) which volunteers admired with 'peculiar satisfaction' as proof of their endurance and hard work. In the end, these volunteers placed construction projects "at the top of a volunteering hierarchy" (p. 136).

It is possible that participants were quick to identify teaching and construction work as illustrative of 'unskilled labour' because these examples were readily available, consistent with their existing understanding of what international volunteering *looks like*. Indeed, in Callanan and Thomas' (2005) analysis of an online database containing 698 volunteer project options, the short-term placements advertised - those lasting less than four weeks or less than six months - most commonly involved teaching (foreign language instruction, classroom support or vocational training), building (constructing or renovating schools and hospitals) and community welfare (supporting social services for the elderly, children or people with disabilities). Participants may also have been troubled by the knowledge that, in the UK context, teaching and construction roles require considerable experience and professional credentials, such that regulation would prohibit young people from fulfilling these duties even if voluntarily. This highlights the ethical quandary of

allowing visiting youth to play specialised roles which would be unattainable at home and for which they are unaccountable for the results (see also Huish, 2014). That participants were responsible for a resource investment - essentially a project management role - perhaps provided a vague enough job description to relieve this concern.

From the data collected, it is difficult to determine precisely which volunteer activities this study's participants might have placed at the apex of the 'volunteering hierarchy.' While participants spoke frequently about the types of project work they didn't do (teaching and construction), they tended not to speak about the project work they *did do*. For example, when I asked participants about their most vivid and meaningful memories, only six mentioned the project work they had been involved in. Dominic (on-site) was atypical because he devoted almost his entire narrative to describing the intricacies of outfitting his partner school's science laboratory and library, including the procedures he had used to select plumbers, carpenters and electricians, the exact measurements of various materials used, and the final costs he had managed to negotiate, proudly under-budget. When I later asked Dominic (post-excursion) what memories he typically shared with family and friends, he chuckled to himself: "I should probably try to remember a lot of the stories in case anybody asks me because I seem to only talk about the very professional things we did, and it comes across as a bit boring I'd say." In general though, participants seemed unwilling to make a strong argument in support of their own project work - perhaps because their awareness of international volunteering critiques made them wary of upholding any one volunteer practice too confidently. This reticence reflects the 'disposability' of identities in liquid modernity, wherein individuals must retain their ability to 'exist at will' from any identification that no longer serves their best interests. In this case, endorsing any particular version of international volunteering risks 'mortgaging the future' and represents an undesirable constraint (Bauman, 2000).

Adding to the complexity of this point, while participants theoretically disapproved of offering unqualified 'help' overseas, in other segments of their accounts, they described international volunteer excursions as appealing precisely because they considered themselves too inexperienced to procure alternative forms of employment. For example, when I asked participants about the timing of their decision - choosing to volunteer during their undergraduate degree - about a third

suggested they had few other options in the absence of formal qualifications. Perhaps with this market in mind, the sending organisation recruits for volunteers broadly, seeking individuals with 'strong analytical skills' who can help determine how to make the 'biggest impact' within the approximately £2,000 budget allocated to each school site. Karolina (pre-departure), who was just concluding the first year of her studies at the time of our initial interview reflected: "There's a big peer pressure…on me to do an internship, but I think I'm not experienced enough after the first year to have a chance to do a good, interesting internship." Naomi (pre-departure) appeared to feel similarly, despite being in her final year and set to begin a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) the following fall. When I asked if she had felt pressure to undertake paid employment directly-relevant to her career interests she said: "I don't feel like I'm ready. I don't feel like I'm a proper person yet…[so] in terms of starting a career, I'm not even trying." Mitchell (retrospective) emphasised that having the opportunity to coordinate a project autonomously at such a young age was an imperfect arrangement, but an experience that contributed significantly to his personal development: "It's not going to be the best and most impact worthy thing that you can do, but it's probably the best we can do for the time in our lives when we essentially have no skills." Here, the absence of formal qualifications becomes "a major selling point for the [volunteer] industry, which is able to market placements on the basis of the opportunities they offer for professional and CV advancement" (Simpson, 2005, p. 465).

Some participants further marked themselves as incapable or immature by using infantilising rhetoric, for example, by suggesting that they had volunteered overseas when they were "basically children" (Bradley, retrospective) or "on the cusp of being a child" (Trevor, retrospective). Isobel (retrospective) had applied for the programme during her first undergraduate term - when she was "terrified of everything" - and recalled being surprised when her acceptance letter arrived:

> I don't know why [the sending organisation] picked me, because I can't have seemed a competent person to spend time in Africa in the summer and get stuff done, but anyway, they did…We were just kids coming in there and I was not in a state to be doing anything useful at the time.

In addition, seven participants made specific reference to a numerical age (between 18 and 21) to stress their relative inexperience. When I asked Miriam (retrospective) about the most challenging aspect of her excursion she recalled:

I think I was just quite aware of the ways in which [Kenyan] people might have resented us being there or felt like we didn't know what we were doing…Because I was 18 and to some extent felt a bit like I didn't really know what I was doing.

Naomi (on-site) spoke about how she had initially worried the teaching staff would disregard her ideas because she was young, white and female, but was equally disconcerted when she instead felt she had been extended elevated status:

Our school has been very much 'We trust you and listen to you,' which I don't know whether it's necessarily a good thing because what right do I have as a 21 year old white girl coming in to tell teachers who have been working in schools, some of them for 20 years in the same school?

Paige (on-site) similarly expressed feeling unsettled by the seemingly unearned high regard she received at her project placement: "Basically, my biggest issue is that I just can't deal with the fact that I'm a 20 year old white girl and people really listen to me." Here, while participants had been aware from the outset that they would be placed in a consulting role, in practice, being deferred to as an expert by virtue of their whiteness or western citizenship seemed suddenly absurd (see also Palacios, 2010).

8.2.3 Holiday Time

Finally, participants seemed keen to downplay - or not acknowledge at all - the relaxing and pleasurable aspects of their sojourns overseas. Here, participants were quick to suggest that 'other' sending organisations more closely resembled tour operators who, as Isobel (retrospective) supposed "just send people over there to have some fun for the summer." When I asked Jodie (pre-departure) to describe her reasons for choosing the precise volunteer project she did, she replied:

I've always wanted to go on some kind of volunteering project [but most of them are] not really doing volunteering things. They're more like volunteer-tourism. Like it looks like a volunteering program, but actually it's just tourism and it's not really beneficial for the community.

Cynthia and Tabitha sought to minimise other volunteers' excursions as 'easy' or 'lax' by making specific reference to their friends' involvement with different sending organisations. In the weeks following her return from Kenya, Cynthia (post-excursion) was able to compare her experience with summaries from peers who had also travelled that summer:

> A lot of [my friends] do volunteering, but it's very rarely on the ground like this…[My friend] went to Cambodia. [The trip was] very, very structured. Every day or so they will bring them on tours around the country…You're there for two weeks and pretty much one week is spent travelling.

After returning to the project for a second summer, Tabitha (subsequent-excursion) similarly re-emphasised**:**

> I think that international volunteering can be quite, like, voluntourism-y. A couple of my friends went away this summer to do voluntary work in China, but you'd like teach for an hour a day and then go out and party. It sounded more like a holiday. But this is like a job, you're working every single day and don't have much time to travel.

Overall, participants seemed to interpret the inclusion of touristic elements - or in Cremin's (2007) terms, the 'injunction to enjoy' - as having the effect of "diluting the experience" overseas (Cynthia, post-excursion).

While most participants cast aspersions at the notion of 'vacationing' within the confines of an international volunteer experience, in practice, participants were similarly afforded weekends off as well as a 'holiday week' halfway through the summer. On these occasions, participants visited a number of Kenya's most celebrated attractions (locations that draw 'regular tourists') including Maasai Mara Game Reserve, Hell's Gate National Park, Mount Suswa, Menengai Crater and Kakamega Forest. Indeed, when I asked participants about their most vivid or meaningful memories, leisure activities appeared central to their experiences: 17 shared a story about their holiday week and these accounts were typically narrated *before* including other aspects of the excursion. Now six years hence, Gemma (retrospective) immediately recalled: "We had so many adventures travelling. That was really fun. We went up the Rwenzori Mountains and we went on safari, but we didn't do it the touristy way. We just hired a taxi driver and then went." Fiona (retrospective) paused and sought to clarify the question: "Do you mean [vivid and meaningful memories] within the project itself or do you mean within the time I spent out there?" She then elaborated:

> Because the trip itself was also an opportunity to travel, so the opportunity to use wherever we were staying as a base to explore further afield. Certainly some of those trips stand out. We went to some incredible places during the trip.

Isobel (retrospective) justified a group getaway to Mombasa as follows:

> I think it was really good to take a week off. Before we went off it felt like 'Surely if you're in Kenya for eight weeks, not really doing any work, you don't need a holiday in the middle of it.' But you do really, because we did spend a lot of time [working] and it was tiring.

Here, participants did not appear to consider the content of their own leisure time as 'holiday,' in part because they viewed these relaxing interludes as an earned reward after intensive periods of work (see also Crossley, 2013), and in part because they undertook side-travel in a supposedly non-touristic fashion (see also Uriely, Yonay & Simchai, 2002). Nevertheless, these findings appear to lend credence to Sin's (2009) suggestion that international volunteers "do not necessarily shed all characteristics of mass tourists, and are constantly at the crossroads of negotiating and performing their identities as a volunteer and as a tourist" (p. 493).

While participants tended to draw hard lines partitioning their own volunteer activities from 'voluntourism,' in two instances, Natasha and Gabriela paused the reconsider statements from earlier in their accounts. When I pressed Natasha (retrospective) to elaborate on the precision of these boundaries, she replied less emphatically:

> The distinction is that [in this project] your work in the school is a bigger part than your socialising, the meeting people aspect…but it's hard to make that distinction because it's a really blurry line. If you do go and have a couple of drinks on the weekend, does that make you a voluntourist? If you were in any other professional job, you would definitely go out on the weekend and have a drink. But in this environment…I want to have fun, but then I don't want to be seen in a certain way.

When I asked Gabriela (post-excursion) what general impression she wanted to communicate to friends and family about her trip, she similarly reflected:

> [Other organisations] that I've seen here in the UK advertising themselves, I get so pissed now whenever I see on Facebook all these NGOs that say 'Volunteering Cambodia' and what you see is some white people jumping off a boat and then some fishes and you're like 'What sort of volunteering are you doing?' My day-to-day life was not jumping off a boat. Of course, I also - well, I did jump off a boat - I had fun, but if I think of volunteering, for me, that's not the image that I would give.

Here, Natasha and Gabriela re-evaluated the rigidity of volunteer project divisions mid-way through their responses, reminded that their own experiences involved parallel features. Further, both implied that the importance of these distinctions was not that they were literal, but that they *appeared* differentiated to others. When Natasha and Gabriela concluded "I don't want to be seen in a certain way" and "that's not the image that I would give," they reveal the preferential value placed on 'impressions given off' (Goffman, 1959).

8.3 Volunteer Fronts

Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals attempt to foster favourable impressions through the adoption and projection of 'fronts.' Within participants' accounts, I detected three: the serious volunteer, the discerning volunteer, and the self-critical volunteer.

8.3.1 The Serious Volunteer

The data presented in the preceding sections showed how the task of differentiation involves "establishing categories of group membership and identification with other travellers (and excluding others)" (Davidson, 2005, p. 33). Specifically, participants positioned themselves as serious volunteers (more committed, harder working), in contrast to the flippant and dismissible travel practices they subsumed under the label 'voluntourism.' Gap Year participants in Simpson's (2004) ethnographic fieldwork similarly established a traveller classification they referred to as 'ethno yah' - a concrete 'other' to present themselves against. Participants further utilised these binaries to confer symbolic distinction upon their *own* travel practices, assumedly to "increase the valuation placed on the particular forms of capital they happen to possess" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 102).

Viewed from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, individuals attempt to secure idealised impressions by maintaining control over the 'definition of the situation,' and this requires "the over-communication of some facts and under-communication of others" (p. 141). In this research study, that the volunteer excursion could be considered short-term, that participants were generally unseasoned in their roles as advisors, and that a prevailing 'holiday mentality' (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003) still populated their recollections *must* be deemphasised in order to sustain the front of serious volunteering.

Here, it is pertinent to note that participants did not differentiate themselves from non-travelling peers (as documented by Noy, 2004 and Sin, 2009), but rather,

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from similarly-situated youth who volunteered overseas in a somewhat different fashion. Perhaps because international volunteering is construed as a rite of passage within participants' social context, these non-travelling peers posed no threat to their accrual of cultural capital. Further, the 'fellow volunteers' that participants invoked were both actual (referencing the experiences of specific friends) and hypothetical (a broad category of 'voluntourists'). These findings provide evidence in support of Holloway, Green and Holloway's (2011) description of the 'intratourist gaze,' wherein "the general tourist cohort gazes upon itself, and in doing so differentiates other touristic cultures from the self" (p. 239). This overlap occurs on two dimensions. First, the authors suggest that the intratourist gaze may be directed toward unspecified travellers, one "where judgements about the behaviour of the 'other' tourist are inferred from the supposed results, without first-hand observation" (p. 241). Indeed, participants in this study charged unknown 'voluntourists' with the detrimental consequences they associated with insufficient project length, unskilled labour and copious holiday time. Second, and inconsistently, where participants censured other project approaches as objectionable, they adopted a 'mutable stance' toward their own transgressions and rationalised them as ultimately less destructive.

The pressure on young people to position themselves as serious volunteers may be intensified by the perceived scarcity within the awaiting job market. Vrasti (2013) points out that for university leavers "eager to distinguish themselves in an increasingly precarious and competitive economic climate, the promise of gaining exotic cultural knowledge and professional expertise outside of the classroom is particularly relevant" (p. 2). Indeed, when I asked retrospective participants about the importance of their international volunteer excursion in the context of their wider life history, six stated that they had drawn heavily on the experience in later job interviews. For example, Fiona (retrospective) viewed her acceptance into a master's degree programme as the direct result of her international volunteer credentials: "I've used examples of all of this in interviews and on my CV extensively…I completely drew on all of that experience [in my application] and I wouldn't have had a leg to stand on if I had not had that." Gareth (retrospective) similarly utilised examples from his project work when he applied for a management consultancy internship:

> I can honestly say that there is no way that I would have got my job had I not
> been involved in [this project]…During the actual process of the interview,
> most of my answers were about [volunteering]…I didn't have any

[professional experience] other than the two months that I had spent [in
Kenya].

Harriet (retrospective), who had continued her involvement with the sending
organisation in various managerial capacities, summarised the importance of
volunteering as a source of practical work experience:

> I've always been more senior in [the sending organisation] than I have been in
> my career, my work life, which has meant that [the project] has been a little
> sandpit for me. I get to try managing people, doing things, managing projects,
> being accountable…And then I've made fewer mistakes in my career which
> means faster career progression.

She later added: "Ten years after I first went to Kenya, [this experience] is still the
reason why I'm getting jobs." In these excerpts, participants suggested that "the
merits of overseas volunteering are mainly assessed *at home*" and that the capital they
accrued was valuable across various professional settings and over an extended period
of time (Vrasti, 2013, p. 87, italics in original).

8.3.2 The Discerning Volunteer

As outlined previously, international volunteering is a rapidly expanding
sector (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008). However, on this basis, a few
participants were hesitant to award themselves too much self-congratulation for
involvement in such a 'typical' youth activity. When I asked Fiona (retrospective)
what key moments or people had contributed to her decision to volunteer overseas,
she replied: "There's definitely a trend within young UK people, or young western
people, to travel overseas to do Gap Years and that sort of thing." In response to the
same question, Miriam (retrospective) reflected:

> I don't find it remarkable that I wanted to [volunteer], in that I feel like it's
> something that maybe a lot of people in my situation end up doing, and that
> there's quite a cultural trope around it, like middle-class kids going and doing
> some volunteering overseas.

Furthermore, in light of its popularity, Jodie and Trevor seemed unsure when I asked
what being an international volunteer said about them as a person. Jodie (post-
excursion) observed:

> [It's] a very big phenomenon, kind of social phenomenon - because through
> all this volunteering, we've met so many NGOs, so many people doing similar

things [to what] we are doing and you do get the idea that it's not just us. A lot

of people are doing the same thing.

Trevor (retrospective) similarly concluded: "It's not an uncommon thing to do and so I don't think people who do it are so different and rare…so there's really nothing distinct about saying you're an international volunteer." Here, the international volunteer experience was viewed as entirely commonplace, albeit within the very specific cohort of middle-class, university-attending youth in the UK. By consequence, participants implied that one does not score points for simply having participated; volunteers must instead distinguish themselves as *a particular kind* of volunteer based on the perceived merits of the programme they choose. In tow, this section highlights the ways in which participants positioned themselves as discerning travellers.

The task of differentiation is made possible because of the plethora of volunteer project opportunities available. Mitchell and Natasha spoke to this point when they described the abundance of sending organisations exhibited during a student orientation event. Mitchell (retrospective) remembered: "I purposefully was looking for an international volunteering opportunity and cruised along the halls, the rows of different groups, and picked up information on all of them." Natasha (retrospective) recalled the scene more overwhelmingly: "It's insane…You go around and everyone is screaming at you to come sign-up to everything. So I did that - I signed up to everything." Natasha went on to highlight the overt competition that occurs between travel providers:

There's a lot of different projects like [this one] and there's a lot of tension

between them because everyone wants to be better. There's a lot of

competition, maybe because you're trying to recruit all the same students.

They're all saying 'I'm better.'

These remarks gave a clear sense of the industry as a 'crowded market place,' with sending organisations scrambling for the attention of potential customers (Ingram, 2011).

With no shortage of volunteer excursions on offer, participants were consequently in the position to choose between multiple options. When I asked participants to share their reasons for selecting the particular volunteer project they did, the majority suggested that they had considered many, but inevitably picked a programme that aligned with their values and principles. For example, Gareth

(retrospective) had travelled to Kenya once before on a trekking-based programme and was keen to return in support of a 'self-sustaining' project:

> I put myself forward because it fit with what - having seen a previous experience in Kenya - fit with what felt to me like a more sensible model about the way charity should be working with people, schools or whatever in developing countries.

When Bradley (retrospective) first learned about the sending organisation, he applied immediately because "it just sort of all clicked":

> It was also really, really important to me that the nature of the project was right…So I'd been exposed to a lot of volunteering opportunities before, but never thought it was for me. It was only really when I found something that had the kind of impact or had the kind of approach that lined up with what I wanted to do.

Mitchell (retrospective) had previously participated in an international volunteer experience in Honduras but "didn't want to repeat the same mistakes." He elaborated:

> I think even then, [this project] was the one that was most focussed on a sustainable impact, and it seemed that it really thought quite carefully about what it was doing and why it was doing it. And it also seemed to be one of the best run in terms of being the most professional. And that for me was quite a big priority because my previous experience with volunteering had essentially been - it was for a company and it was just pure profit, really low impact, really questionable model.

In all of these examples, participants' decisions about with whom or how to volunteer were not casual. Quite the opposite, participants appeared to make carefully-selected choices against an ideological set of criteria.

> Upon their return from Kenya, Naomi and Gabriela reaffirmed their project choice as prudent, so much so that both undertook subsequent excursions with the same sending organisation the following year. When I asked Naomi (post-excursion) about her general reflections on international volunteering as a type of travel experience, she reflected:

> I guess going out [to volunteer overseas] is great, but it's great if it's for the right reasons. I don't think I would have put myself in a situation like that if I didn't really, really agree or believe in the ideologies of [this sending organisation]. It is an incredible charity.

In response to the same question, Gabriela (post-excursion) replied:

> There's lots of volunteering opportunities, but you have to choose well, and
> take care of what you do, because at the end of the day you are trying to make
> an impact in a community…Maybe the general message that I try to give is
> like 'Take care,' because it's not that every volunteering [excursion] is
> wonderful.

Here, Naomi and Gabriela expressed the same deliberate and conscientious choice-
making as detailed within the previous paragraph's excerpts, but in addition, were
instructive in their tone. While Naomi cautioned that international volunteering
should only be undertaken for the 'right' reasons, Gabriela advised potential
volunteers to choose carefully.

Two exceptions on this point were Tabitha and Miriam, who suggested they
had not belaboured considerations much beyond their own personal preferences.
While Miriam (retrospective) had explored volunteering options with 'some criteria'
in mind, she was generally 'open' to whatever guise the project might take:

> I think I like to take opportunities when they come along, but it's almost like
> I'm not that discerning about what they are. So with [this project], I knew I
> wanted to do some international volunteering and I was pretty relaxed about
> what it might be and I was going to apply for anything and everything that
> came up and [this project] was the first thing that came up and the first thing
> that I [was accepted to].

When I asked Tabitha (pre-departure) how she had initially become aware of the
sending organisation and what drew her to the opportunity, she replied offhandedly:
"I didn't actually particularly read the e-mail very thoroughly. I just saw 'Africa' and
'volunteering'…so I just kind of skimmed over it and sent an email back applying and
then, yeah, the whole rest of the process started from there." However, in a later
interview, Tabitha (post-excursion) reported that she would be more scrupulous in the
future as a result of her positive experience:

> Before I would just go for the country or see if it was vaguely around
> education and go for that, whereas now I would definitely focus on whether
> it's a sustainable thing...I'd definitely completely avoid voluntourism now,
> whereas before, I'd be a bit more like 'Oh yeah, that looks like fun' type of
> thing…[This project] showed me what a good type of [volunteer] experience

should be like and what I should look for if I was going to go in for another one.

Here, while Miriam and Tabitha had not been fastidious about project ethos at the outset, they came to believe that potential volunteers *should* thoughtfully deliberate the 'ethical injunctions' of their travel (Cremin, 2007).

A central message to extract from these accounts is that choosing the 'right' volunteer excursion is a personal responsibility. This positioning is predictable in the context of liquid modernity, where the shift towards individualisation consists of "charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance" (Bauman, 2001, p. 144). A similar rhetorical stance is reflected within the volunteer industry itself. For example, Lonely Planet's (2013) guide to international volunteering urges its readers: "Volunteering abroad should be the best thing you've ever done, but the onus is on you to act responsibly, do the research and find a volunteer programme that works both for you and for the host community" (p. 9). By consequence, the blame for choosing the 'wrong' volunteer excursion also rests solely on individuals' shoulders, the "result of the good or bad decisions that they have freely made" (Allan & Charles, 2014, p. 341). Indeed, Lonely Planet (2013) continuously reminds the aspiring volunteer that "it's crucial to do your homework" and to be "choosy right from the start" because "there are hundreds of sending agencies based all over the world. And it's all too easy to make the wrong choice" (p. 23-24).

In addition, this section highlights another of Bauman's (2005) key tenets, that late modern society "judges and evaluates its members mostly by their consumption-related capacities and conduct" (p. 82). By implication, the accumulation of cultural capital relies on individuals understanding the significance of their consumer choices, and this extends to how they elect to travel (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). To keep pace, sending organisations must also constantly reinvent themselves, at times adopting a 'holier than thou' position as a means of maintaining competitive advantage.

8.3.3 The Self-Critical Volunteer

Much of this chapter has been devoted to highlighting participants' critique of the volunteer industry broadly and the category of 'voluntourist' specifically. However, 14 participants also turned their gaze inward, openly questioning the significance of their efforts in the short and long term. In particular, participants described coming to the distressing realisation that 1) their impact was limited and

that 2) the social problems they encountered were more deeply-engrained and complex than anticipated. Overall, participants seemed keen not to be constructed as naïve do-gooders, but rather, as socially conscious consumers who were aware of the misgivings surrounding this complex kind of international work. The findings herein lend support to Butcher's (2003) characterisation of 'New Moral Tourists' for whom fraught reflexivity signposts a sophisticated moral compass.

First, some participants expressed a sense of disappointment that they had not 'made a difference' in the far-reaching manner they had imagined or desired at the outset. When I asked Miriam (retrospective) what aspect of the excursion she found most challenging, she replied:

> I didn't really get a lot of satisfaction out of the work. I didn't really feel that I'd done that much…I had been really bothered by these thoughts when I was out there about neo-colonialism and stuff…So in a way it made me more - some people may say 'inward looking' - but I actually think it was these ethical reasons of just feeling uneasy about what we'd been doing.

In response to the same question, Colin (retrospective) recalled:

> I got quite a large grant from [a funding organisation] and I was going to write them a report, and I just couldn't put myself to do it because I couldn't say we benefited the school, because I didn't really know if we benefited the school or not. Because when I came back [the following summer] I went straight to the library and the library was being used as a storeroom.

After Isobel (retrospective) stressed on ten occasions that she had wanted to be 'useful' to the Kenyan community she visited, I asked whether she had reached any conclusions on her outcome:

> We had a lot of discussions with friends that I went with about whether what we are doing was actually useful and how we could do it better…So I didn't feel terribly good about any of the summer, and having stayed involved [with the sending organisation], I'm still not sure. I think what we are doing is really, really good for the volunteers that go out…It's fun, it's interesting and it broadens their horizons in the short term, but whether it's got any effect in the long term, I doubt, to be honest.

Here, participants voiced contrition at having been inadequately prepared to 'fix' the social and material inequalities they encountered during their service placements (see also Darnell, 2011). In general, participants seemed more confident reciting the

benefits they had personally accrued during the excursion, but this too was a source of discomfort, perhaps because it laid bare the unevenness of the profits gained.

Second, some participants spoke about becoming cognisant of the entrenched nature of social injustices. When I asked Lydia (post-excursion) if she envisioned herself participating in an international excursion again, she said:

> I think I will be less eager to get involved in something like this in the future, because I feel like there was very limited that I can do…I mean, with resources, we can buy a water tank, we can install electricity, but the simple fact that the teachers are not paid because the government is not funding them…it just makes you feel very powerless against the system.

When I asked Robyn (retrospective) about the importance of the excursion in her wider life history, she lamented:

> Working at schools with the kids solidified my sense of frustration around inequality and the importance of education. And how the idea of meritocracy is stupid, an illusion, in that I've met some incredibly brilliant students who are never going to get the opportunities that I've already had.

Mitchell (retrospective) spoke about needing to adjust his expectations as the project progressed to account for the 'reality' of the work:

> [It's] part of a broader realisation about inequality and how ultimately, in the grand scheme of things, how minimal our impact will be. And struggling to come to terms with that realisation because people are constantly asking you for money, people are constantly asking how they can come to the UK, and there is always a background awareness of how privileged we obviously are, and not necessarily knowing how to respond to that.

Here, participants' narratives reveal an unresolved sense of distress and hint at the paralysing effect of confronting discordant information about the social world (for example, that western-situated youth have access to certain opportunities, while others who have also 'worked hard' do not). Lydia, Robyn and Mitchell seem unable to fully close their experience in the absence of an explanatory framework to account for such discrepancies, particularly where they suspect their own social privilege has been amassed at the expense of others.

While participants acknowledged the potential limitations of their service work, most retained a sense that the support they provided was still preferable to not

volunteering at all. For example, when I asked Harriet (retrospective) what aspect of the excursion she found most challenging, she recalled:

> [It's] that sudden realisation that you are not going to change the world and the kind of death of naivety…That kind of acceptance, yes, it's a little, but it still makes a difference and that's a positive thing in taking that away.

Lucy (retrospective) shared how she was forced to adopt more 'practical' expectations over the course of the project:

> I think I [started out] very much like 'Development is amazing! Rah, rah, rah!' And 'Oh, we're going to change the world!'…But you come out the end of it and you're 'I'm not really going to change the world, but I am going to change little things about people's lives that will have an impact on them and will make them happier.'

Naomi (subsequent-excursion) wavered between two positions:

> I am a bit sceptical about how much we can really do. Part of me is like if you help one person then that's amazing, or if you can have an impact on a small little part of these people's lives then that's amazing. But then the other half of me thinks are we just exacerbating this idea of white colonial [pause] - I don't know, I'm a bit up and down on it.

Miriam (retrospective) seemed uncertain about the benefits gleaned from her volunteer work, and so, took comfort in the notion that her presence had not been injurious:

> I do see [volunteering] as very important and it's something I would encourage other people to do. I think I still have the hang-ups I had around the effect on the kids in the school for example, but I would say that I don't think we harmed the kids in the school. We came and we gave them books and science equipment and stuff. I think there were things that were problematic about it, but I don't think we harmed them.

Here, participants' responses appeared to function under the justification (also prevalent within the Gap Year industry) that "doing something is better than doing nothing, and therefore, that doing anything is reasonable" (Simpson, 2004, p. 125).

Rather than concede disillusionment, a few participants framed their newfound criticality positively and voiced a sense of appreciation toward their revised perspective. Colin (retrospective) gave this impression when I asked him to summarise his international volunteer 'story':

It was an introduction to cynicism, but it was a good introduction to cynicism.
So I went in very, very chipper but…seeing how my project didn't go off
perfectly made me think a lot about 'How should the projects be done?'…I'm
thinking more critically about things.

Bradley and Lydia described becoming more critical, not just toward international
volunteer efforts, but toward charitable aid campaigns more generally. Lydia (post-
excursion) found herself 'passionately against' the ALS Bucket Challenge, a social
media campaign which launched in summer 2014 (overlapping with Lydia's volunteer
excursion), asking individuals to upload a video of themselves having a bucket of ice
water dumped over their head to raise funds for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
research.

I started realising that developed country people are very focused on their own
problems. By that I mean - have you seen the ALS Bucket Challenge?…My
friend tagged me [on Facebook] when I was in Kenya [urging me to
participate] and I was just like 'I don't have access to clean water. I don't have
access to ice, an ice bucket, cold water. I don't even have a fricking fridge…I
was just very, very annoyed. But I understand where people are coming from
and for people it is very easy to focus on what is affecting them immediately
instead of thinking miles and miles away…So it puts a lot of things in
perspective and I'm very grateful for the experience.

Bradley (retrospective) spoke sarcastically about Sport Relief, a UK-based biennial
fundraising campaign consisting of running, swimming and cycling events, and a
celebrity-laden live telethon. In this case, proceeds are distributed to a variety of
charitable projects, half within the UK and half across the 'world's poorest
communities.'

[Volunteering overseas] gives you a completely different perspective, and I
think it also makes you critical - but in a good way - of how international
issues are portrayed and how they are debated in this country. The big
example for me was the Sport Relief broadcast on TV a couple of months ago
- and everyone else looks at that and thinks 'This is really good. Well done.
You've helped this family. Now they've got this nice concrete home they can
live in. The daughter goes to school. Isn't that wonderful?' But actually what
you've done is you've air-lifted a celebrity in there, they've walked around
and just basically pointed out a family and said 'YOU. We're lifting YOU out

of poverty. Screw the rest of your people that live in this slum. They can carry on drinking dirty water. Isn't it wonderful that we've got this lovely example of this family that we can show a lovely little telly montage about?' So it makes you critical of that kind of thing in a good way, because it makes you think about how you can tackle underlying problems. This experience of being in Africa makes you look at everything in a much more principled way.

What I wish to highlight from these excerpts is the notion of criticality as cultural capital. Lydia and Bradley insinuate that, as a result of their volunteer experience, they had gained a 'perspective' unavailable to others at home (who enthusiastically and indiscriminately buy into charitable appeals). In essence then, participants procured two ethical credentials, one achieved through participating in an international volunteer excursion (appreciating diversity, helping vulnerable others), and a second earned through their enhanced criticality toward such work and related humanitarian efforts (expressing shrewd insight). Thus, while I had initially expected participants to valorise the merits of their volunteer work and to downplay any information which might create an unsavory caricature, I later came to view their self-criticality as an 'idealised impression' of a different sort (Goffman, 1959). Further, from the perspective of whiteness studies, these declarations put participants "in a place of double comfort: the comfort of demonstrating that one is critically aware, and the comfort of not needing to act to undo privilege" (Heron, 2005, p. 344).

8.4 Conclusion

I began this chapter by considering how participants invoked the category of 'voluntourist' and rejected this label for themselves. In short, participants inferred a hierarchy between different modes of travel, and positioned themselves as having chosen the better (more ethical) approach to international volunteering based on the 1) project length, 2) skills offered and 3) balance of time spent on holiday. Moreover, these markers of differentiation were not conjured 'from nowhere,' but rather, "emerge[d] as an amalgam of subjective reflection and third-party knowledge" including the rhetoric participants had gleaned through social media and the volunteer industry itself (Scarles, 2013, p. 900). The intended purpose of participants' assertions, as I interpret them, was to wedge distance "from the development enterprise as a whole, so that our critiques of it have the effect of enshrining us in virtue" (Heron, 2007, p. 103).

Are the boundaries separating participants' international volunteer project from other excursions really so distinct? From my view, while comprehensive measures might be available to make such comparisons, the more compelling sociological analysis resides in participants' *claims* to differentiation (a self-construction). Indeed, while these young people may not have "shed all characteristics of mass tourists" or the 'voluntourists' they disparaged, it is clear that they *understood themselves* to be radically divergent (Sin, 2009, p. 493). These findings speak meaningfully to the complex gradations youth apply to travel experiences and the particular brandings they come to embrace or contest.

At the outset of this project, I had expected participants might verbalise the theme of differentiation in the form of an anti-tourist stance (Gray & Campbell, 2007; Prins & Webster, 2010; Uriely, Yonay & Simchai, 2002). However, the level of criticality present within the narratives - made toward the volunteer industry, the category of 'voluntourist' and even participants' own volunteer project - was a surprise to me. I was heartened to learn that such reservations were not solely the purview of scholarly journals, but had become adopted into mainstream popular discourse and elaborated within individual volunteer accounts. Indeed, in this study, it was the participants themselves (not just the researcher) who challenged the conception of international volunteering as "a standard of reference for what it means to be good" (Vrasti, 2013, p. 4).

I have attended to three 'fronts' (Goffman, 1959) in this chapter: the serious, discerning, and self-critical volunteer, which participants used in combination to justify their consumption choices and "to claim some moral ground" (Mahrouse, 2011, p. 379). I recall feeling pressure to adopt quite different 'fronts' during my own time as an undergraduate volunteer in Costa Rica. While I had found aspects of our project work acutely problematic, I did not feel permitted to share these concerns within the group for fear of being perceived as overly critical, a threat to the team's enthusiasm and positive outlook. Instead, I endeavoured to maximise social recognition through performing the role of a 'helpful' and 'non-confrontational' volunteer. Back then, drawing attention to ethical concerns was something I had found 'unsayable,' while in this study, participants readily initiated similar remarks as a demonstration of their sophisticated approach to development work.

At the same time, I wondered to what extent participants' embrace of international volunteer critique was an example of Butcher's (2003) notion of

'fashionable cynicism' which, contextualised within a wider moralisation of tourism, is "the propensity to turn in on itself and to become *self-critical*" (p. 40, italics in original). For instance, while participants utilised the term 'neo-colonial' with comfort, we did not have any prolonged discussion about the colonial history in Kenya or the vestiges of imperialism more generally. Thus, I was unsure how deeply-felt this concern was, and wondered instead whether participants employed such phrasing in a more colloquial manner.

Further, participants' narratives - in focusing on the project design features of duration, volunteer skill level and allowance of holiday time - seemed to sidestep substantial reflection regarding how western-situated volunteers might be implicated more broadly in enacting domination. The fronts participants projected may thus represent a move to obscure their white privilege and power, as "we are crucially invested in *not* seeing ourselves in these terms because of our need to remain innocent in order to protect our own moral selves" (Heron, 2007, p. 151, italics in original).

Chapter 9: "I Have Tried to Stay Clear of Too Many Cliché Pictures of Small Children": Dilemmas of Online Self-Presentation

This chapter begins from the premise that content posted to Facebook can be read as a self-presentation; that individuals utilise social media to emphasise an 'idealised impression' (Goffman, 1959). This positioning follows Cohen and Manspeizer's (2009) acknowledgement that "images say more about our taste, about our attitudes toward Africa, and ultimately about how we view ourselves, than they do about the people and ceremonies they portray" (p. 88). In what follows, I endeavour to respond to the third research sub-question, inspecting the impressions participants 'give' and 'give off' when they represent their international volunteer experiences on social media.

In the first half of this chapter, I offer an overview of study participants' posting practices and provide an analysis of the content they made available for public consumption. Here, I describe the three main impressions 'given' and 'given off,' which I categorise as illustrations of the 'family gaze' (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003), the 'romantic gaze' (Urry & Larsen, 2011), and the 'gutsy gaze.' In the second half, and in line with Josselson's (2004) 'hermeneutics of demystification,' I explore the impressions participants omitted from social media. Here, I discuss the dilemmas participants faced in negotiating the 'moral maze of image ethics' (Prosser, 2000), including what sorts of factors constrained or enabled their choices.

This chapter includes data collected from the 2014 cohort only, supported by verbal explanations offered during the post-excursion and subsequent-excursion interviews. Participants uploaded the majority of this social media content once they had returned to the UK, as they had scant access to internet whilst in Kenya.

9.1 Posting Practices

In the following table, I summarise participants' activity on social media, including the number of photographs each participant posted themselves (where they were the author of the content), and the number of photographs each participant was 'tagged' in (where they were not the author, but the content was nevertheless visible on their profile). In total, 839 photographs were personally contributed by participants in this study. Teasing apart this dataset, the reader will notice that not all participants posted excursion-related content to their Facebook profile (seven participants posted at least one photo). Further, there was a considerably large range in the number of

images participants chose to represent their experience (as few as three and as many as 445).

Table 4

Participant Posting Practices

Participant	Personal Photos Posted	Tagged in Others' Photos
Celeste	445	128
Cynthia	4	39
Dominic	0	0
Gabriela	0	80
Jodie	3	12
Karolina	44	40
Logan	3	0
Lydia	10	39
Max	0	0
Naomi	330	80
Paige	0	115
Tabitha	0	80

Of the participants who chose not to post personal photographs, three (Gabriela, Paige and Tabitha) allowed themselves to be 'tagged' in others' images. This means that, while these participants did not author online content themselves, they were nevertheless represented publicly by others. Indeed, it was Celeste and Naomi who carried the representational load within the group, posting 445 and 330 photographs respectively. Paige (post-excursion) explained that she had been unconcerned with taking photos during the trip, in part because her phone had been 'smashed' early on, and in part because she knew her project partner had archived the experience on her behalf: "I didn't post anything publicly about this [excursion] at all. I've been tagged in some photos of some other people, but I haven't uploaded any myself…Naomi basically has an album of me in Kenya, so it's okay." Tabitha (post-excursion) reported that she was typically inactive on social media, and that in this absence, her mother and project partner had joined forces to document the excursion:

> My mom's really active on [Facebook], and so she was posting loads of stuff
> about Africa while I was out there, and she keeps re-posting Celeste's pictures,

and her and Celeste are friends on Facebook now…So most of my stuff probably about Africa comes from her and Celeste, and the pictures that other people are sharing.

Here, participants placed trust in fellow volunteers to represent them accurately, or at least favourably enough that the content did not need to be hidden or removed.

Of the participants who chose not to post personal photographs, two (Dominic and Max) were not tagged or untagged themselves in others' images. This means no visual evidence of the excursion was made available on their respective Facebook profiles. By way of explanation, Dominic (post-excursion) cited the effort involved in curating an album and concerns over personal privacy as dissuading factors:

I took loads of pictures, but most of them would be hard to describe in the context and I couldn't be bothered to upload the million pictures. I don't really like sharing stuff…I would show lots of pictures to my friends, to my parents, to my girlfriend, but I wouldn't post it publicly.

Max (post-excursion) suggested that his posting practices were a "good reflection of personality" in that he was neither an 'extrovert' nor an 'exhibitionist':

Personally, I didn't post anything…I notice over the past five years, I only posted less than five statuses…I go to Facebook frequently, so I just use it to look at what's been posted, but I don't post…I don't know, I don't really see much value in exhibiting to others.

Here, Dominic and Max revealed themselves as 'reluctant' rather than 'enthusiastic' Facebook users (Trottier, 2014); both maintaining a limited offline audience with whom they were willing to share the details of their experience.

9.2 Impressions Given and Given Off

This section relies on Goffman's (1959) conception of impressions 'given' and 'given off' - the ways in which individuals express themselves intentionally and unintentionally (or with 'calculated unintentionality'). In analysing participants' photographs, the meanings I derived were inevitably influenced by both of these facets; the somewhat straightforward subject matter focus but also the inadvertent or covert messages communicated. This framing is also apt because it highlights the central role of the audience in the meaning-making process: "the individual must rely on others to complete the picture of him of which he himself is allowed to paint only certain parts" (Goffman, 1967, p. 84). Within participants' photographs, I detected three key impressions 'given' and 'given off': one which represents a 'family gaze'

(Haldrup & Larsen, 2003), one which represents a 'romantic gaze' (Urry & Larsen, 2011), and one which represents a 'gutsy gaze.' These analytic categories pay tribute to the seminal contribution of Urry's (1990) 'tourist gaze' to the study of visual discourse in tourism.

9.2.1 The Family Gaze

In general, participants' online representations communicated a strong sense of in-group collegiality. Collectively, participants posted 320 photographs (38 per cent) of fellow volunteer group members, emphasising the social nature of the excursion and the strong friendships they had established (see also Mathers, 2010). In doing so, it appears as though participants "are not so much questing the picturesque or authentic Other, as they are searching for authenticity between themselves" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 26).

When participants were pictured with fellow volunteers, they tended to assume affectionate positions to display closeness, leaning their bodies toward one another or warmly embracing. The tone of these photographs is light and jovial: the individuals pictured are smiling, laughing or sticking their tongues out playfully. In these collectives, participants also tended to choreograph their bodies and adopt stylised gestures, including peace signs (13 photographs), hands clasped in prayer (four photographs) or thumb and fingers touching in chin mudra (five photographs). Larsen (2010), drawing on Goffman (1976), views imagery depicting such proximity and physical touch as a dramaturgical practice, whereby team members "bond as one social body" (p. 328). These images further portray a sense of relaxation, familiarity and joyfulness - or what Haldrup and Larsen (2003) refer to as 'familyness.'

Figure 4. Group of volunteers with hands clasped in prayer (participant photograph).

Figure 5. Group of volunteers posed in chin mudra (participant photograph).

In this dataset, participants were most often shown engaged in a group activity, such as hiking, biking, rock climbing, boating or sharing a meal. However, in 19 photographs (or 2.3 per cent), participants were pictured with fellow volunteers in an unidentifiable and featureless setting such as a dark room. While "most tourists express a simultaneous desire to make pictures *of* and *at* destinations," these images were poignant because they could have been taken anywhere - with no reference made to specific objects, attractions or the Kenyan context more generally (Larsen, 2010, p. 327, italics in original). Here, the only discernable 'reason' for capturing and showcasing the moment was to communicate the intimacy of a peer relationship. This finding does not necessarily signal participants' disinterest or dissatisfaction with the setting; but rather, reflects how travel photography is "significantly bound up with, and revolves around, picturing social relations" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 42).

Figure 6. Two volunteers in an unidentified setting (participant photograph).

Overall, participants' foregrounding of fellow volunteers overlaps with Haldrup and Larsen's (2003) notion of the 'family gaze.' The authors developed this concept during an analysis of 937 pictures and 20 semi-structured interviews with families vacationing to Hammershus Castle in Denmark where, despite the beauty and grandeur of the site, significant others were the focal point in more than half of the dataset. Rather than simply consuming an attraction, the 'family gaze' highlights tourism as a 'way of being together' in other places; it "stresses interactions, relationships and active embodied use of space" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 25). From a dramaturgical perspective, this form of capturing "is part of the 'theatre' that enables people to enact and produce their desired togetherness, wholeness and intimacy" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 179).

Participants further expressed the importance they placed on togetherness with fellow volunteers during their narrative accounts. For example, participants used the word 'bond' or 'bonding' on 17 occasions, but more often in reference to fellow volunteers (13 mentions) than to Kenyan people (four mentions). Strengthening this point, when I asked participants about the importance of the excursion in their wider life history, some mentioned the opportunity to meet other volunteers, but none noted the opportunity to connect with Kenyan people. Indeed, during my field visit, I observed a strong sense of mutual support and caring amongst group members, a sentiment which was reiterated explicitly by Gabriela (on-site): "These people are

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great and I'm very happy to be with them…I am very grateful that I've been put in this group." When I asked Celeste and Tabitha (who had been project partners in 2014) why they had chosen to return to Kenya for a second excursion, both noted that they had wanted another opportunity to spend concentrated time with one another. Celeste (subsequent-excursion) elaborated:

> [These are] the best relationships that I've had in my life. Tabitha is one of my best friends and we come from very different backgrounds. I can't think of anything I would have done other than Kenya which would have lead us to meet.

Bradley (retrospective) spoke about remaining close with the volunteers he met during his 2007 excursion despite the passage of time and physical distance between them:

> I've stayed…in really good contact with those guys…It shows the kind of really genuine, really lasting friendships that you can get out of doing this [kind of excursion], even though…they've been thrown all over the world [for their careers], but when we come back together, we still have a really, really, genuine deep bond because of the time we had together.

That participants' companionship with fellow volunteers featured heavily in their online representations echoes these declarations.

Crang (1997) has argued that travellers' picturing practices are an 'other directed activity,' and in this study, the audience of primary consideration appeared to be participants' fellow volunteers. Uploaded photographs were rarely captioned (39 photographs or 4.6 per cent), making the experience of viewing them largely guesswork. Indeed, I was largely able to code images by virtue of having physically visited the project sites during my fieldwork. Hashtags (keywords preceded by the # sign) were used on five posts, but appeared to contain inside jokes rather than existing popular memes. For example, Naomi posted an image of herself and two fellow volunteers with the caption: "#zebra, #glorifieddonkey, #holidayweek, #shiniqwa, #friedchickenisha, #twdg, #greencraterlake, #giardiasis, #10bob, #kanye, #motherfuckinclique." In line with the family gaze, these kinds of posts are valuable precisely because of their "inherently personal meanings and messages" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 38). Further, when I asked Celeste (post-excursion) why she hadn't captioned many of her photographs, she explained:

That upload was more for the people that I was out in Kenya with…I think I will at a later date go through and tag everyone and caption them, mainly for me…[but] I didn't feel the urgency to do it, because [our group] knows what it is about.

While presented in a public forum, Celeste inferred that her online content was intended for almost-private viewing, memories to be enjoyed amongst trip insiders.

9.2.2 The Romantic Gaze

The secondary focuses within participants' online representations were wildlife (106 photographs or 13 per cent) and landscapes (98 photographs or 12 per cent). This pattern mirrors Coghlan's (2007) analysis of promotional material used within the wider international volunteer industry, where amongst 1906 photographs gathered from 29 sending organisations, the most frequently used images were of animals (21 per cent) and landscapes (14 per cent). Indeed, such portrayals are akin to what Haldrup and Larsen (2003) refer to as the 'classical tourist image': "a romantic picture of a deserted 'cultural sight' or 'rural landscape'" (p. 29).

Figure 7. Wildlife (participant photograph).

Figure 8. Uninhabited landscape (participant photograph).

Figure 9. Uninhabited landscape (participant photograph).

Participants' emphasis on natural surroundings - panoramas of vast greenery, rock face, lakes, mountains and sunsets - can also be viewed through the lens of Urry and Larsen's (2011) 'romantic gaze' which is concerned with the solitary appreciation of undisturbed, magnificent scenery. Virtually all of participants' images did not feature built-structures, although a dirt road was occasionally visible. In contrast, only 12 photographs (or 1.4 per cent) depicted a town setting - shops, outdoor markets, or busy streets. Here, participants largely gave the impression of Kenya as an uninhabited 'frontier' location: "an almost primordial place, where civilization is largely absent and nature is savage" (Echtner & Prasad, 2003, p. 675). This finding

also reverberates participants' verbal claims toward the 'authenticity' found in remote space, as detailed in Chapter 7.

Occasionally, a volunteer is pictured at the forefront of an 'untouched' backdrop: "the appropriate people props are placed - sparingly - into a primordial landscape." (Echtner & Prasad, 2003, p. 676). In these photographs, participants mainly positioned their bodies using two conventions, either standing with their back to the camera, looking toward a vast horizon (32 photographs or 3.8 per cent) or standing with both arms widely outstretched (14 photographs or 1.7 per cent). From a dramaturgical perspective, these gestures are likely contrived for the camera, but are made to "preserve the fiction that they are uncalculated, spontaneous and involuntary" (Goffman, 1963, p. 14).
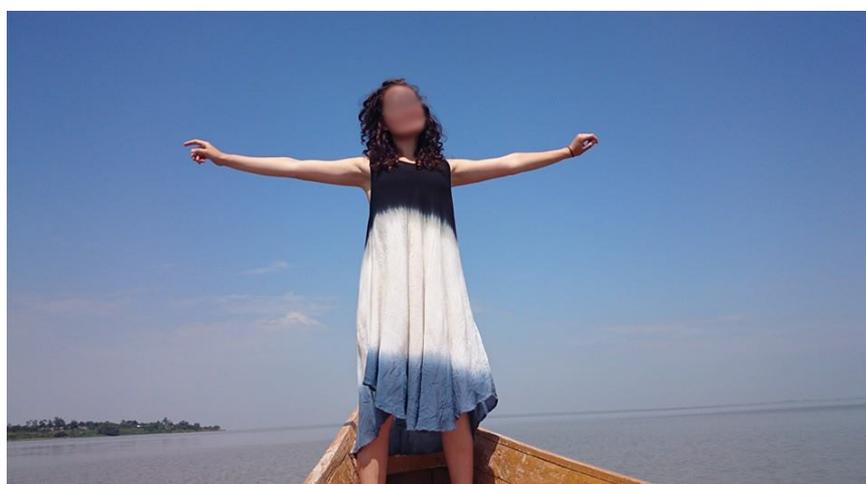
Figure 10. Volunteer with arms outstretched (participant photograph).
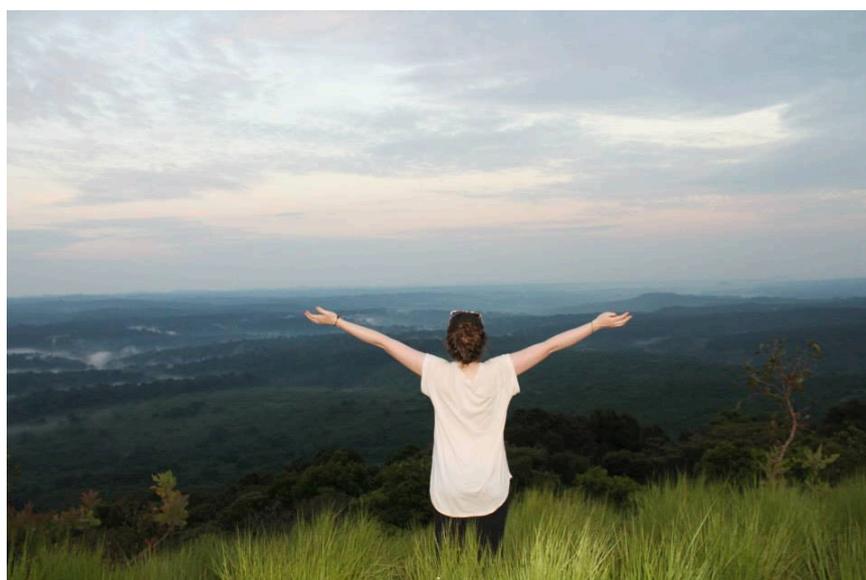
Figure 11. Volunteer with arms outstretched (participant photograph).

Figure 12. Volunteer looking toward the horizon (participant photograph).

Figure 13. Volunteer looking toward the horizon (participant photograph).

These photographs serve as 'personalized postcards,' a mechanism for participants "to stage the [self] within the attraction's socially constructed aura. To make a personal image that tells a unique story of an exceptional encounter between [oneself] and a publicly acclaimed, extraordinary attraction" (Haldrup & Larsen,

2003, p. 32). Beyond providing proof that participants had 'been there,' these images also give the impression of young volunteers as fully absorbed within their travel experience - they connote an openness toward, and freedom within, one's expansive natural surroundings. Here, participants pay reverence to the wonderment of the African landscape by posing in a way that suggests they have embraced all that they see before them.

Finally, this sub-section of photographs exemplifies the 'romantic gaze' by picturing the volunteer alone - urging audience members to feel as though they have stepped in on a private, contemplative moment. In doing so, the landscape is reinforced as remote and isolated, or in other words, cut off from mass tourism. Indeed, there are no unfamiliar bodies visible within these images, owing to the notion that "one has to be set aside from the 'mass' or the uniqueness of the act and actor would be lost" (Elsrud, 2001, p. 607).

9.2.3 The Gutsy Gaze

A few participants chose to emphasise the riskier aspects of their excursion using social media as a platform - representational choices I refer to as the 'gutsy gaze.' While the 'gutsy gaze' is my own term, I draw its influence from Elsrud's (2001) Goffman-inspired work on risk and adventure narratives among backpackers, accounts employed to make a "strong statement about guts, bravery, and experience" (p. 611). Further, while Urry and Larsen's (2011) 'tourist gaze' primarily focuses on the dynamics of 'seeing,' the 'gutsy gaze' respects that the body (in its entirety) is "a powerful instrument in narrative practices" (Elsrud, 2001, p. 611).

Immediately preceding her departure, Cynthia played up the potential perilousness of her journey with the status update: "off to Kenya for the next 10 weeks, intermittently contactable via fb! fingers crossed i'll make it back alive. whee hoo epic african adventure begins." For Cynthia, this post was perhaps a strategy to deal lightheartedly with safety concerns she had been negotiating more seriously in private. For example, when I asked Cynthia (pre-departure) how she had been preparing for her upcoming excursion, she responded:

> Well, right now it's mostly fear and anxiety about the trip. Plus you have to take vaccinations and things like that…Right now I'm quite terrified but I think in the long run it will be worth it. Right now I'm just worried about more technical aspects of the trip, like settling your visas and making sure you know all the health and safety rules and how to survive when you are actually there.

Cynthia also shared that she had experienced difficulty persuading her parents to support her decision to volunteer in 'a developing country.' Even in the few weeks before departure, Cynthia's mother was still 'very worried' and "doesn't approve of me going, but she respects that it's something that I want to do and I need to do." Here, Cynthia's own strategy for managing distress was to frame the experience as a 'redemption sequence' - the restorying of hardships to emphasise their rewarding outcome (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Indeed, as Simpson (2005) notes in specific reference to the Gap Year, "dangers, and the ability to survive them, can be an intrinsic part of establishing the cultural capital of travel" (p. 460).

On an evening I had been invited for dinner at the group's rental house, Logan arrived alone and unsteady, his beige t-shirt soaked with blood. In the absence of street lighting, Logan had lost his footing, fallen backwards into a ditch and hit the back of his head. Fellow volunteers washed and dressed the t-shaped cut Logan had sustained, and then accompanied him to the hospital where he received two stiches. Logan had been carrying his laptop and phone in his backpack, and both were damaged during the incident. To capture this event, Logan later posted the status update: "fell down a 5 foot drain. laptop, phone, Kenyan phone and virtually any other channel of contact are broken. #offtheradar." In explaining his decision to post about this experience, Logan (post-excursion) said: "I posted that I cracked my head open…once I was fine and knew I was safe, that's when I posted that and I did it because I did think people might find it comical."

Naomi had been diagnosed with giardiasis (a parasitic infection) early-on in the excursion, and suffered from bouts of fatigue, vomiting and diarrhea throughout her time overseas. Four weeks into the trip, Naomi posted the status update: "bacterial infection aside lolz, what a sick month #wakawaka." Naomi (post-excursion) explained that she wanted to share publicly about her illness to "make it a bit more light-hearted" and to avoid friends and family 'freaking out.' Initially, at the height of her symptoms, Naomi (post-excursion) had refrained from revealing that "I was lying in the foetal position on the floor rocking back and forward and I was dripping in sweat and [people were like] 'Oh my god, you're dying.'" However, after seeing a doctor and letting some time pass, she reflected:

I can see the funny side of it now. And it was quite funny really, to be

fair….It's not stopped me wanting to go [to Kenya] again. I still had the time

of my life…and in a way, it's kind of adding to [the experience], because you have to go through these things.

Here, Naomi construed her sickness as an attribute that augmented her personal growth, a further example of McAdams and Bowman's (2001) 'redemption sequence.' According to Elsrud (2001), who conducted ethnographic fieldwork amongst 35 backpackers in Thailand, tales of 'risk and adventure' were similarly prominent amongst the narratives: "travelers talk about attacks of diarrhea, or risks of catching this or that, as the price you pay if you want to experience the real local culture" (p. 609).

Logan and Naomi's status updates - in focusing on illnesses and other bodily threats - exemplify what Elsrud (2001) refers to as 'body narratives,' a way of establishing oneself as "belonging to the experienced, off-the-beaten-track travelers" (p. 610). However, both also tempered the severity of their situations by making these announcements *after* their respective predicaments had resolved, seemingly to balance the desire to share a 'good story' but not to incite significant concern back home. Their use of the hashtags #offtheradar and #wakawaka (presumably a reference to the official song of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa) further ensures a cheerful tone. Here, Logan and Naomi's more casual approach was perhaps a strategy for communicating that these incidents had been "mastered in the proper way," that is, with composure (Elsrud, 2001, p. 603).

I too had projected a 'gutsy gaze' within my Facebook profile. On the final morning of my field visit, I had lost consciousness and collapsed in the foyer of a shopping mall. Found by one of the storeowners, I was rushed to a nearby medical clinic where testing revealed that I had contracted an amoeba parasite, the effects of which had been compounded by food poisoning the previous evening. I received three stiches in my chin, intravenous fluids and a strong course of antibiotics. A Nairobi-based friend who came to visit later uploaded a photo of me sitting on a stretcher, face bandaged and dress stained with blood, but smiling and gesturing with a thumbs-up. In allowing myself to remain tagged, my intention (like Logan and Naomi) was to make light of what had actually been quite a frightening situation, and to foreclose any alarm among friends and family by revealing the situation's happy conclusion. As an 'idealised impression' (Goffman, 1959), this photograph also allowed me to declare my initiation into the club of 'legitimate' fieldworkers, those who have

successfully navigated a harrowing ordeal. In response to this image, my own peer network made comments about me being 'badass' and having 'massive street cred.'

What I kept private from social media was that my own 'body narrative' was far from resolved. Indeed, the data analysis and drafting phase of this thesis was punctuated with recurring symptoms, follow-up visits with medical specialists, and lingering feelings of anger and disappointment (for succumbing to sickness in the first place, and for not bouncing back immediately). Thus, my use of the term 'gutsy gaze' is in part a reflexive choice, a way of writing myself into the text and honoring the 18 months of gastrointestinal recovery that followed my field visit.

While the "traumatic inflection is part of the adventure we buy into" when pursuing travel (Cremin, 2007, p. 539), some participants were compelled to soft pedal risk and adventure narratives as a way of countering caricatures of Africa as a dangerous place. When I asked Karolina (post-excursion) what general impression she wanted to communicate to friends and family about her excursion, she replied:

> Another key message [I want to get across] is that Kenya is also a country in the world. You can go there and you will not be killed, you will not die from Ebola, and it's very diverse and you can travel a lot and enjoy yourself.

In response to the same question, Naomi (post-excursion) said:

> That Africa isn't what everyone thinks it is…I don't want people to come away with this impression that Africa is this one homogenous nation, that everyone in Africa has got Ebola because it's happening in one place. It's an incredible place…so hopefully [I can get across] that Africa is not as backward or barbaric or all these horrific things that people say about it.

Perhaps in this vein, participants made no mention on Facebook - even in jest - about some of the more serious concerns they had expressed verbally to me, notably, their fears surrounding terrorism, Ebola and malaria. Indeed, while participants used the words 'scared,' 'hesitant,' 'anxious' and 'terrified' to describe their emotional state leading up to the excursion, the tone of their public disclosures was largely tranquil and reassuring.

As a final example of the 'gutsy gaze,' three months after the excursion's conclusion, Logan uploaded a photograph of himself riding on the back of a boda boda (motorcycle taxi), a form of public transportation renowned for its poor road safety. Here, Logan was shown with both arms raised in the air, gesturing with peace signs. I suspect Logan waited to post this photo because the use of boda bodas are

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expressly forbidden by the sending organisation, making his choice to represent this experience transgressive. In doing so though, Logan positioned himself as a risk-taker, one who partakes in what Goffman (1967) refers to as 'action': life events which "are perceived to be outside the normal round, avoidable if one chose, and full of dramatic risk and opportunity" (p. 260-261). Further, unlike the head injury Logan sustained accidentally, he had sought the boda boda encounter purposely - what Giddens (1991) refers to as the "active courting of risk" (p. 124). My point here is that the 'gutsy gaze' can be applied to unintentional mishaps as well as deliberate exposures, as both forms of endangerment might vouch for one's 'strong character' (Goffman, 1967).

Figure 14. Volunteer riding on the back of a boda boda (participant photograph).

9.3 Impressions Omitted

The previous section explored prominent themes that emerged within participants' visual accounts of their time overseas. Next, I turn to the representations participants downplayed or excluded from their Facebook profiles in order to maintain an 'idealised impression' (Goffman, 1959). In short, participants avoided

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posting content they believed might misrepresent them as a 'voluntourist,' an echo of the concerns discussed in the previous chapter.

When I asked participants how they made choices about what to post or not post on Facebook in relation to the excursion, some expressed trepidation, reciting their desire to avoid the 'Gap Year stereotype,' 'Gap Year cliché,' 'negative stereotype,' 'negative connotations,' 'negative perception' and 'stigma' attached to these activities. For Paige (post-excursion) this meant avoiding seeming 'self-centred' in her travel accounts:

> There's such a stigma [around volunteers boasting] 'Hey, that really reminds me of this time on my Gap Year.' I try so hard not to do that, so therefore, I don't really talk about [the experience], which is a shame. But I also think that you can't ever really explain what it was like.

Similarly, Gabriella (post-excursion) suggested she did not want to appear as though she was fishing for praise or trying to secure the image of a 'good girl':

> I have tried to not advertise it…I don't try to hide things. It's just that I don't want to make publicity out of it…And actually, if people don't ask me about my summer, I don't feel like throwing it in, because I feel like it is trying to make an image again.

Upon further reflection, she added: "Maybe someday from the most beautiful pictures or most meaningful moments, I will post some pictures someday. But anyway, I still don't feel like - because people look at you differently after this. I don't feel like being judged yet." Here, Paige and Gabriela positioned their volunteer experience as a dirty little secret, one to obscure rather than publicly celebrate. Such concern is reminiscent of Trottier's (2014) Goffman-inspired notion of 'digital stigma,' which occurs "when sensitive personal details are made public through online platforms, resulting in negative affect, a compromised reputation and persistent discrimination" (p. 1). Indeed, participants seemed to expect social reprimand if they appeared too self-congratulatory or became a 'travel bore' - someone who "goes too far in impressing their experiences onto other people" (Desforges, 2000, p. 938).

After returning to Kenya a second time, Gabriela (subsequent-excursion) expressed feeling 'awkward' when a Kenyan school staff member tagged her in a photograph and effusively thanked her within the caption:

> That doesn't feel right because I haven't done anything extraordinary to be honoured for. And also, my friends [back home] who know how sceptical I am

about [international volunteering] will be a bit like 'Hey Gabriela, you're sceptical about that, but then [you show] people honour[ing] you for things. So maybe I've kind of dug my own well by telling my friends that I'm so sceptical.

Here, Gabriela's decision not to document her journey online was partly rooted in her concern that she might appear inconsistent or hypocritical, that celebrating her volunteer efforts publicly might threaten the 'self-critical volunteer' front she was keen to maintain. Indeed, Gabriela chose not to personally upload any photographs to represent either her 2014 or 2015 excursion.

For Jodie (post-excursion), distancing herself from 'voluntourism' meant downplaying the project work she had been engaged in: "[Some] people did upload a lot of work when they are in school, but I didn't. I just thought, I don't know, it just gives people this impression of a Gap Year thing." In contrast, Cynthia (post-excursion) felt it necessary to moderate the extent to which the groups' leisure activities featured within the content she shared:

Right now I'm very hesitant about posting [my photos] because I don't want people to feel like all we did in Kenya was to have fun, even though we did have a lot of fun, but we obviously did a lot of work as well…so I suppose part of what I don't want to show people is that it's voluntourism.

That 'voluntourism' is traditionally understood as a combination of both volunteering and tourism (McGehee & Santos, 2005; Wearing, 2001) appeared to leave Jodie and Cynthia divided on which portion of the excursion to highlight or hide. In general, participants pursued a representational strategy in line with Jodie - only three participants (Celeste, Lydia and Naomi) posted photographs showcasing their project work, which included images of water filters, science lab equipment, and the exterior and interior of school buildings.

Indeed, participants' Facebook content offered portraits skewed toward the 'holiday' aspects of the excursion. For example, Karolina's album was specifically titled 'Holiday Week in Kenya!' and represented only the seven day span of touristic experience within her ten week journey. Similarly, Lydia and Cynthia subtitled their albums without mention of the volunteer project that brought them to Kenya in the first place.

Lydia: From the sunrise over the Kakamega rainforest to the sunset over maasai mara, from be-friending a dung beetle to dancing gangnam style with

the second best air balloon pilot in the world (he claims). The ten week

journey ended with me getting blown miles away in a kayak and had to be

rescued by a tourist boat. Glad to be alive...Asante sana, Kenya for some of

the best moments of my life and I will be back soon!

Cynthia: Wading barefoot through leech-infested gorge streams, cycling

through Hell's Gate National Park with little to no motor skills and/or sense of

balance, horse-riding through herds of wildebeest and startled zebras, stalking

fluffy 11-month old baby giraffes, stubbornly climbing Menengai Crater in

one breath, brushing my teeth in the dead of night in a rubbish dump by

torchlight (read: savannah wasteland) #[Taking] Rift Valley by storm.

Finally, in the relatively few instances where participants indicated the location of
their photographs (40 photographs or 4.8 per cent), the places mentioned were those
the group visited on long weekends and holiday week (notably, Maasai Mara Reserve,
Hell's Gate National Park, Kakamega Rainforest, Lake Naivasha, Lake Nakuru,
Menengai Crater and Mount Suswa). Conversely, the town centre where participants
stayed for the bulk of their journey was only named on one occasion, labelling a
photograph of two donkeys.

This visual narrative was intriguing to me because it directly contradicted
participants' verbal accounts, in which they seemed keen to downplay - or not
acknowledge at all - the relaxing and pleasurable aspects of their sojourns overseas.
Indeed, that participants believed themselves to have spent comparatively less time
'on holiday' was a primary piece of evidence used to differentiate their experiences
from 'just a volunteer,' a 'generic international volunteer,' or a 'holiday Gap Year
volunteer.' Lydia (post-excursion) hinted at one possible explanation for this
inconsistency when she said:

What I post on Facebook is more of a hashtag Gap Year sort of

thing…Because I think with us it's kind of a peer pressure that you go have

fun during a holiday…The project itself is very interesting, but with my peers,

it's not seen as 'cool' if you know what I mean…If I tell [my friends] a story

of being next to a lion and then giving a 10,000-litre water tank to the kids,

surely they'd like to hear about the lion story.

Other participants similarly expressed having to cherry-pick the more sensational trip
moments for public display because friends and family "are not really interested"
(Dominic, post-excursion), "nobody really cares" (Paige, post-excursion) and "you

can see it in their eyes that they're not really paying attention" (Celeste, post-excursion). Here, it seems participants edited online content out of concern for audience interest, feeling compelled to highlight the most attention-grabbing and easily-digestible travel stories.

9.4 Avoiding Stereotypical Representations

Some participants made specific reference to online material created to mock or disparage the ways in which international volunteers showcase their experiences over social media. For example, when I asked Celeste (post-excursion) about her excursion-related activity on Facebook, she prefaced her response with: "I hate this hashtag Instagramming Africa…I wanted to come back and feel good about my pictures…so during that time, I was just literally probably posting pictures about the fun things that we did…never anything like with [my host father] and his family or any of the students." This reference invokes a blog post entitled *#InstagrammingAfrica: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism* (Kascak & Dasgupta, 2014) in which the lead author critically reflects on her own picturing practices during three short-term volunteer excursions:

> It was the photographs posted by other students that inspired me to go on my first overseas medical mission. When classmates uploaded the experience of themselves wearing scrubs beside adorable children in developing countries, I believed I was missing out on a pivotal pre-med experience. I took over 200 photos on my first international volunteer mission. I modeled those I had seen on Facebook and even premeditated photo opportunities to acquire the 'perfect' image that would receive the most 'likes.'

Drawing on these experiences, Kascak and Dasgupta (2014) describe three common tropes within volunteer photography shared through social media: the suffering other (a saddened child with a distended belly) (see also Chouliaraki, 2010), the self-directed Samaritan (a smiling volunteer surrounded by service-recipients) (see also Clost, 2011) and the overseas selfie (a close-range, self-composed photograph of the volunteer) (see also Koffman, Orgad & Gill, 2015). Taken together, the authors interpret these self-presentations as representing "an imaginary geography whose landscapes are forged by colonialism, as well as a good deal of narcissism" and conclude by recommending that potential volunteers "de-center themselves from the Western savior narrative" or perhaps simply "leave their iPhones at home."

Figure 14. The self-directed Samaritan (Kascak & Dasgupta, 2014).

Over the course of writing this thesis, I was frequently forwarded links to two satirical Tumbler sites - 'Gurl Goes To Africa' (subtitled 'I went to Africa and all I got was these pictures') and 'Humanitarians of Tinder' - both dedicated to deriding the motif of young white volunteers posed as helpful protagonists amongst Third World others, most commonly black children. These sites compile screenshots from actual volunteers' social media accounts and dating profiles (presumably collected without the authors' consent) for the purpose of public ridicule. Returned volunteers' Facebook representations are also made fodder in a spoof news report released by The Onion (2014) entitled *6-Day Visit To Rural African Village Completely Changes Woman's Facebook Profile Picture*. This article sketches a fictitious volunteer named Angela Fisher upon her return from a rural Malawian village:

> 'As soon as I walked into that dusty, remote town and the smiling children started coming up to me, I just knew my Facebook profile photo would change forever,' said Fisher, noting that she realized early in her nearly weeklong visit just how narrow and unworldly her previous Facebook profile photos had been. 'I don't think my profile photo will ever be the same, not after the experience of taking such incredible pictures with my arms around those small African children's shoulders.'

Figure 15. Fictitious volunteer with Malawian children (The Onion, 2014).

Finally, only weeks before submitting this thesis, the Instagram account Barbie Savior (2016) was established, curating a series of photoshopped images and sarcastic captions documenting the doll's imaginary international volunteer journey. At the time of this writing, the account has garnered over 112,000 followers, with the stated aim to:

> Shine a light on the people who fetishize and over-sentimentalize the experience of visiting Africa: The people who turn smiling African school kids into living photo-ops, who talk about how 'happy everybody is even though they're *so poor!*' and who never seem to specify exactly *what* country in Africa they actually visited (because, you know, Africa is a country). (Blay, 2016, italics in original)

Figure 16. Fictitious volunteer taking a 'slumfie' (Barbie Savior, 2016).

Caption: Just taking a #slumfie amidst this dire poverty and need. Feeling so #blessed and #thankful that I have so much more than this and don't have to live this way! #slumfie #blessed #lucky #fortunate #mygoodlife #slumbarbiemillionaire #povertyporn #entertainingdevastation #ghettofabulous #slumming #slumminit

Taken together, these popular media sources adopt a deconstructive role, taking aim at the perceived naivety of volunteers' own self-presentations and the condescending ways in which they represent service recipients. Here, the 'intratourist gaze' is applied in an online setting, a way of policing representations not in line with "the dominant norms and discourses of the particular tourist cohort" (Holloway, Green & Holloway, 2011, p. 238). Indeed, social media settings provide the infrastructure for 'electronic word-of-mouth' which "overcome the temporal and spatial constraints associated with the corporeal act of touring, and work to ensure the rapid diffusion of judgements arising from the intratourist gaze" (Holloway, Green & Holloway, 2011, p. 240).

Keenly aware of these 'third-party knowledges' (Scarles, 2013), study participants seemed especially careful to avoid reproducing the visual stereotypes they believed to be associated with the 'voluntourist,' namely, the 'overseas selfie,' 'suffering other' and 'self-directed Samaritan' memes described by Kascak and Dasgupta (2014). First, while participants did not shy away from posting pictures of themselves (170 photographs or 20 per cent), they tended not to do so in the seemingly narcissistic and vacuous way associated with the 'overseas selfie' (14 photographs or 1.7 per cent). Second, only ten photographs (or 1.2 per cent) might be considered similar to the 'self-directed Samaritan,' a coding I applied to a single volunteer with their arms around a group of Kenyan children. Indeed, one participant directly poked fun at this particular trope by captioning a photograph of a fellow volunteer about to be hugged by a Kenyan child with the caption "love you you little Gap Year ad." Finally, I considered only one photograph a depiction of the 'suffering other.' This was a picture of a child, sitting alone on the dirt ground, wearing muddy clothing, drinking from a rusty tin cup, with six flies on her forehead.

Figure 17. Volunteer about to be hugged by Kenyan child (participant photograph).

A few participants were explicit in noting their avoidance of stereotypical volunteer photography. For example, when I asked Naomi (post-excursion) how she chose what to post or not post on Facebook, she recalled:

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I have tried to stay clear of too many cliché pictures of small children…I don't want to look like 'Oh, she's been to Africa and she's got a photo with a small child'…I don't want to be showing off that I've done this [volunteer work] or putting [Kenyans] on a platform and being like 'Look at these people.'

While Naomi was determined not to perpetuate the voyeurism she associated with 'voluntourism,' she also expressed some frustration at the limitations she had imposed on herself in representing the Kenyan people she had come to know: "The thing that annoys me is that a lot of the [pictures] on my camera are actually taken by [the children I knew personally] because I just gave them my camera and they did it [themselves], but nobody knows that." Here, Naomi was unwilling to upload images of the Kenyan people who were pivotal within her experience overseas, not because she believed the photographs themselves were problematic, but because she feared these images would be *misunderstood* as ethically compromising by the home audience.

Naomi was not alone in her concerns. Collectively, participants posted 164 photographs (19 per cent) of Kenyan adults or children, however, seemed to avert potential criticism by 1) refraining from being in the frame themselves and by 2) giving the impression of subject consent. First, participants and Kenyan people were only depicted *together* in 60 photographs (seven per cent) - a strategy potentially employed to sidestep uncertainty over how one ought to be captured in interaction with service recipients. Second, these photographs tended to be posed with the subject(s) looking directly into the camera's lens, rather than covert snaps zoomed-in from afar - or what Scarles (2013) refers to as 'sneaky shots.' Indeed, it appeared as though subjects were generally aware of, and had authorised, their inclusion in the photographs. Perhaps to be undeniably clear about this, Karolina captioned three separate photographs of Kenyan children: "The children wanted photos all the time. Their favourite game was trying our glasses on."

While the majority of participants took measures to avoid what they considered stereotypical volunteer photography, as counterevidence, Karolina's Facebook content was notable in representing a visibly-impoverished Maasai family as a main subject focus (eight photographs or 22 per cent of her album). The inclusion of these photographs was unsurprising to me, as Karolina had spoken about her brief encounter with this family as a vivid memory both during and after the excursion. When I asked Karolina (on-site) to describe her experience in Kenya thus far, she

recounted a memory from the group's holiday week in the Maasai Mara, which included an organised visit to a Maasai family's dwelling:

> We were going to visit a proper Maasai family and we were expecting mud houses and then our guide brought us to a Maasai family and they had a television. They were just normal people, not much different from the people here [in the town centre]. And at first we were a bit annoyed, because we wanted the real Maasai experience, but then we realised this is reality, this is how Maasai people live. But then the next day we saw poorer Maasai people who really live in mud houses and who are much closer to tourist-y expectations and they were not living in this way just because of tourists. It was just the way they live.

Two months later, when I asked Karolina (post-excursion) which stories she most frequently communicated to family and friends, she reiterated this encounter almost verbatim:

> I tell people how we wanted to see how Maasai people live and our guide showed us Maasai people who had television and lived in a normal house which was not different to the house we lived in [as a group in the town centre]. And then by chance, when we were climbing on the mountain we met rural Maasai people. That's a story from travelling that I'm telling people about.

Here, despite Karolina's realisation that the more affluent family also represented a 'real Maasai experience,' she only included images of the 'poorer' family in her Facebook album. I interpreted this decision as an attempt by Karolina to reinforce the 'authenticity' of her experience, one in line with the "deep-seated fantasies about exotic places and poverty contained in the Western imaginary" (Crossley, 2013, p. 3). Indeed, the one-sidedness of Karolina's representation hints toward her desire to view locals in a primordial state: "We cannot envisage an urban Maasai - or if we do, she would seem out of place…There is the traditional, rural African, and the modern, urban African, and only the traditional African seems to have value" (Cohen & Manspeizer, 2009, p. 87). Second, in selecting what to include and exclude from Facebook, Karolina (post-excursion) noted that she had become Facebook friends with a few Kenyan people from the village where she had volunteered, and didn't want her images to show her hosts or their living conditions "in a bad way." Thus, in choosing to only represent unknown Kenyan subjects, Karolina could attest to having

encountered visible poverty but retained freedom from the potential objections of those documented. According to Scarles (2013), who conducted prolonged fieldwork and photo-elicitation interviews with 20 UK tourists in Peru, this strategy of "subjective anonymity mobilises a sense of security for tourists as they remain physically distanced, thus ensuring minimal intrusion yet securing the image they desire" (p. 903).

9.5 Practicing Self-Surveillance

Celeste's Facebook activity was notable because she became increasingly (and dramatically) more scrutinising of her posting practices over the course of the research project. Celeste had posted 445 photos to represent her initial international volunteer experience - the most of any participant in this study - but uploaded only two images after a subsequent excursion (showing herself fishing at a waterfall). When I asked Celeste (subsequent-excursion) about this striking behavioural shift, she shared that she had become apprehensive after friends and family made bothersome comments in response to her 2014 album:

> When I was talking to people they'd be like 'You're *really* active on Facebook, aren't you? You put a lot of pictures up and stuff. I can see your whole life on there.' And I was like 'That's not my whole life, that's what I've chosen to share'…So then I had a lot of anxiety about what to post and what I made visible.

Indeed, Celeste then proceeded to change her profile settings to ensure that only select individuals could view excursion-related content. She further reflected:

> I started thinking about 'What do I post on Facebook? Do I post quite personal things? Can people see things in a different way that I don't want them to?'...[And I've realised that], on Facebook, it really does say something about your life…I thought [a photograph] was just something you post…[but] you are sort of trying to shape the way [your audience is] thinking…[so] I've actually got a huge responsibility in the way [others] view things.

Here, Celeste spoke directly to the performative function of Facebook, but appeared caught between two explanatory frameworks. Celeste suggested that the content she posts online cannot holistically capture the complexity of her identity or her experiences overseas (it *is not* representative), but also that she retained considerable agency in shaping the version of events her audience received (it *is* representative). In the face of this 'huge responsibility,' and in acknowledging that her images have

'unpredictable afterlives' (Urry & Larsen, 2011), Celeste moved toward a strategy of self-censorship.

Given participants' voiced concern over potential misinterpretation, I found it curious that the majority did not make use of the option to caption the photographs they uploaded or identify their locations - the combination of which could clarify the author's intended meaning and eliminate other possible readings. Indeed, while Facebook provides a "crucial medium of visibility and public witnessing" (Miller, 2011, p. 180), participants did not appear to craft their online albums with the intention of sparking critical discussion, breaking down stereotypes, or revealing complex perspectives. Indeed, Tabitha (subsequent-excursion) choose not to upload any photographs to represent her two excursions, and accepted the educative potential of Facebook only passively:

> [There are] a lot of photos that I'm tagged in. I never like 'de-tag' or whatever because I think it's nice that everyone gets to see what kinds of stuff we're doing and it raises awareness on issues and stuff that people haven't been thinking about.

While this roundabout strategy bypasses the possibility of opposition and confrontation, it also seems a lost opportunity for broadening public discussion through vicarious experience.

9.6 Conclusion

Taken together, the data presented in this chapter highlight the considerable representational uncertainty participants faced in choosing how to document the self and others over social media, if at all. It seems these young people were forced to navigate what Prosser (2000) refers to as the 'moral maze of image ethics,' pausing to consider the consequences of their representational strategies both at the moment of snapshotting and then in the deliberate placement of the image online. These kinds of decisions may provoke feelings of insecurity or paralysis, particularly in the context of liquid modernity, where the rules of conduct are often unclear and in constant flux (Bauman, 2000). Scarles (2013) similarly concludes that travellers' picturing practices involve:

> A delicate balance, a series of compromises that often rely upon intuitive moral judgment, reasoning, and reflective justification. Indeed, with limited direct guidance or possibility of generic rules of practice, gaps, and interstices,

tourists' practices invariably arise through complex, intricate, and wide-

reaching ethical negotiation (p. 914).

Participants' 'third-party knowledges' (Scarles, 2013) - information gleaned through popular media sources, the sending organisation and the 'intratourist gaze' of fellow volunteers (Holloway, Green & Holloway, 2011) - combine to provide insight into what representational conventions are viewed as socially sanctioned *at present*. For example, participants seemed united in the understanding that the 'overseas selfie,' 'suffering other' and 'self-directed Samaritan' were too closely associated with the paternalistic or neo-colonial connotations of the 'voluntourist,' and thus, were inappropriate to replicate over social media (Kascak & Dasgupta, 2014). These visual tropes offer parallels with criticisms expressed toward the prevalent visual discourses employed within the wider humanitarian aid industry, where both 'shock effect' and 'positive imagery' campaigns are viewed as problematic (Chouliaraki, 2010). While these codes may too represent only a 'momentary settlement' (Bauman, 2000), they are instructive in revealing the broader policing efforts generated within the international volunteer community.

In line with Goffman's (1959) work on idealised impressions, participants tended to operate in strategic ways to maximise their social recognition and take precaution against potential embarrassment. However, it seems the stakes for giving off the 'right' impression (not committing the faux pas of being a 'voluntourist') are heightened in the context of 'mass self-communication' venues such as Facebook (Castells, 2009). First, participants must perform simultaneously for a broad audience consisting of distinct social circles - what Marwick and Boyd (2010) refer to as 'context collapse.' Second, when participants upload content to digital space "it instantly becomes part of the infrastructure of the *digital superpublic*, outliving the time and place in which it was original [sic] produced, viewed, or circulated" (Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589, italics in original). These considerations, and the ongoing threat of 'digital stigma,' may lead individuals to manage their Facebook profiles with meticulous care (Trottier, 2014).

In this study, participants seemed to adopt a stance of self-surveillance when choosing what to post and not post on Facebook. Trottier (2014) draws on Goffman to suggest that Facebook users manage their online self-presentations by heightening privacy settings, purging unprofessional content, constructing a neutral profile or refraining from uploading in the first place. These strategies were all mentioned by

participants in this study. Overall, participants appeared to err on the side of caution, posting what they believed would be acceptable to all possible audiences, or what Marwick and Boyd (2010) refer to as the 'lowest-common denominator effect.' Karolina (post-excursion) made this point explicitly when she summarised her posting practices: "I think the way I picked the photos was obviously picked the best ones, the most interesting ones and then the ones that are politically correct." Thus, participants seemed to resolve their representational uncertainty by striving for an uncontroversial or innocuous documentation of their time overseas.

The representational dilemmas voiced by participants in this study struck me as a recent evolution, as I felt obliged to adopt quite different picturing practices during my own undergraduate volunteer excursions in Costa Rica, Peru and the Dominican Republic. I recall, now with mortification, unloading from our coach bus and scrambling to take photos of myself draped around unknown local children (likely without their consent) before my volunteer 'work' had even begun. These photos, I assumed, would allow me to prove to friends and family how closely I had engaged with the community and how much I had 'helped.' Further, I *knew* these testaments would be celebrated upon my return to Canada - the possibility of a negative reception never crossed my mind. Further, Facebook did not yet exist, so I was under no pressure to consider my images as public or permanent installations.

That participants in this study endeavoured to provide socially acceptable and responsible representations of the people and places they had encountered should be viewed as commendable. However, participants' desire to partake in 'ethical' picturing practices can also be viewed as a mechanism for protecting their own image: "bound not only by consideration of the other, but also by an ethic of care for self…the feelings and emotions that underpin the vulnerability of the photographer during the fleeting moments of the photographic encounter" (Scarles, 2013, p. 910). Further, participants appeared to base their online representational choices primarily on the anticipated reactions of other western-situated youth - fellow volunteers and friends from home - suggesting their stronger concern for avoiding the scrutiny of the 'intratourist gaze' (Holloway, Green & Holloway, 2011) than the 'local gaze' (Maoz, 2006).

How ought international volunteers represent, document, and share their experiences online? When I returned to the literature on this topic, I was directed to the inaugural 'ethical photography contest' launched by Globalsl.org (2015) which

invited volunteers to submit imagery using the hashtags #ethicalphotography, #mutuallearning, #crossculturalcooperation or #newpossibilities. Entrants were further provided with the following guidelines:

> 1. Choose photos that represent the people truthfully and show dignity, equality, support and integrity. 2. Ensure those being represented in the images maintain the right to share their story in their own way. 3. Abstain from using photos that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places. 4. Use images, messages and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission (or subjects' parents/guardian) of the subjects.

Figure 18. Example of 'ethical photography' (Globalsl.org, 2015).

While the positioning of 'ethical photography' as a competition is problematic (with applicants ambling to produce the 'most ethical' representation in return for a cash prize), its launch speaks on a larger scale to the dilemmas of representation voiced by this study's participants, and demonstrates the corrective efforts being undertaken by industry insiders. While I am unconvinced that establishing any particular 'framework' can adequately attend to the 'moral maze of image ethics' young travellers must grapple with in representing their experiences overseas (Prosser, 2000), I end on this example to illustrate one attempt to 'solidify' codes of conduct and stem the anxieties of choice-making that accompany 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000).

Chapter 10: Conclusion

I approached this study with a broad research question: how do young people make meaning of their experiences before, during and after a short-term international volunteer excursion in Kenya? To answer this question robustly, I have woven together the verbal and visual accounts of 27 current and former UK-based undergraduate students, and included insights drawn from personal field notes. I have located my intellectual position as that of an interdisciplinary sociologist interested in the fields of impression management, whiteness and late modernity.

10.1 Scholarly Contribution

This research contributes broadly to the standing body of literature on youth travel, including international volunteering, study abroad, Gap Year and independent backpacking, but also makes specific and original thematic, theoretical and methodological offerings. Through this research, I have unpacked new ways of understanding how western-situated youth choose to position and present themselves through narrative claims, and have offered timely insight into the particular version of international volunteering that travellers hold as socially-sanctioned and worthy of pursuit. This work also succeeds in revealing an uncustomary representation of international volunteers, those who are hyperconscious of the labels and connotations surrounding this complex kind of international work.

10.1.1 Thematic

I am not the first to identify the embeddedness of 'authenticity' within travellers' narratives (notably Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999), and thus, the findings presented herein lend support to the tenacity of this 'frame' within tourism discourse. Indeed, once I identified 'authenticity' as primary theme within my transcripts and returned to the literature for analytic support, the amount of empirical work on the topic was already rich (Crossley, 2013; Davidson, 2005; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003; Maoz, 2007; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Vrasti, 2013). Thus, in an effort to extend this scholarship, I ventured to document the explicit narrative claim itself (that participants had achieved a 'real Kenyan experience'), but also to tease apart the aspects of the excursion participants drew upon as evidence of this assertion (the remoteness of the place, their engagement in everyday life, and their intimate interactions with local people). In doing so, I have advanced a subtle and layered understanding of the criteria and values upon which young people might evaluate their experiences overseas. I have

also endeavoured to hint at the *peculiarity* of the very notion of authenticity, in response to Bauman's (1990) call "to ask questions that make evident things into puzzles, to defamiliarize the familiarity of biography" (p. 10).

While scholars have previously documented travellers' attempts to differentiate themselves from mass tourists (Gray & Campbell, 2007; Prins & Webster, 2010; Uriely, Yonay & Simchai, 2002) and non-travelling peers (Noy, 2004; Sin, 2009), what is novel in this study is that participants primarily sought to distance themselves from 'other' volunteers, those they derisively labelled as 'voluntourists.' To accomplish this distinction, participants adopted various 'fronts' to reveal themselves as serious, discerning and self-critical. In doing so, this report captures the intricate striations made *within* the category of international volunteering.

Finally, this study contributes uniquely in its exploration of the impressions young volunteers 'give' and 'give off' on Facebook. The gazes that surfaced within participants' visual texts - the family gaze (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003), the romantic gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011) and a newly-introduced term, the gutsy gaze - coalesce to offer a portrait of the 'hoped-for-possible-self' (Zhao, 2013). This aspect of the study is particularly crucial because research documenting the representational choices made by international volunteers in the context of social media remains largely unchartered.

I have attempted to write a synthesised and coherent account of participants' experiences overseas. That there was considerable overlap between participants' narrative claims facilitated this process. However, I recognise that my proclivity to wrap structure around and neatly order study findings risks projecting a straightforward interpretation onto the multifaceted (and at times contradictory) logic of volunteer travel. With this in mind, I have placed a strong emphasis on counterevidence, highlighting majority views as well as dissenting positions. Ultimately, I have aspired to present a research story that captures an "array of fascinating, richly-detailed expositions of life as lived…full of nuance and insight that befit the complexity of human lives" (Josselson, 2007, p. 8).

10.1.2 Theoretical

This thesis draws its strength from "sitting astride disciplinary boundaries" (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 22). I have drawn on the fields of education, sociology and tourism studies to exercise, as Erving Goffman did, "the right to dip into any body of literature that helps, and move in any unanticipated but indicated

direction" (as cited in Strong, 1983, p. 349). This decision reflects a personal preference, but also, an ethical obligation to follow the lead of my dataset. For example, in the pilot study I conducted (Schwarz, 2015), I had situated findings within the field of transformative learning, typically associated with American sociologist Jack Mezirow (2000), whose model of 'perspective transformation' has been widely adopted within service-related literature (Chang, Chen, Huang & Yuan, 2012; Kiely, 2004, 2005; Locklin, 2010; Scoffham & Barnes, 2009). At the time, pilot study participants had reported the pronounced positive influence of their journeys - all but one referred to these excursions as 'eye-opening' and cited a 'change' in their level of 'awareness' or 'perspective.' I had therefore expected 'self-change' to feature prominently in the current study, especially given my use of a repeated and retrospective interview design. But when the dataset diverged, I felt no compulsion to force it to 'fit' a predetermined theoretical perspective, and in fact, was invigorated by the prospect of delving into a new line of inquiry. Now at the conclusion of this project, I maintain that social phenomenon are best illuminated through the intersection of multiple foundational traditions, and am thankful for adopting an approach that afforded me this flexibility.

Further, in making sense of participants' narrative accounts, I utilised three theoretical influences I have not previously encountered in combination. Here, I contend that the dramaturgical perspective is strengthened by the inclusion of whiteness studies (which draws attention to power, social privilege and systemic inequality) and is made relevant through contextualisation within late or liquid modernity (which highlights the unique pressures youth face in an individualised society). As one example, Goffman's (1959) work reminds us that individuals are motivated to "incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society" and will adjust their behaviour accordingly in order to foster an 'idealised impression' (p. 35). However, Bauman's (2000) scholarship argues that the very social scripts these individuals seek are both unclear and unstable. It is the blending of these insights that helps readers to account for the simultaneous rule-seeking and uncertainty articulated by participants in this study. In sum, I have offered a reading from my own (evolving) understanding of these perspectives, under the presumption that all philosophical thought is flush with 'unrealized resources' which are capable of being reopened, reapplied and developed further (Pellauer, 2007).

10.1.3 Methodological

While photographic imagery enjoys established standing within qualitative research, I was particularly keen to apply this method in an online forum. In reviewing the literature, I had not come across research documenting international volunteers' self-presentations on social media, and in redress, I hoped to carve a path for such investigation.

To explore young people's representational choices on Facebook more fulsomely, I could consider a photo-elicitation method in future. In the present research study, I chose to code photographs on my own (in line with my interest in dramaturgical impressions) and to ask participants a broad question about their strategies for choosing what to post and not to post (in line with narrative inquiry methods). However, having young volunteers participate in the decoding process by asking them to walk the researcher through each image would provide additional insight. For example, when I asked Naomi for permission to use a photograph she had uploaded featuring a group of volunteers with their hands clasped in prayer (Figure 4), she responded with an aside: "Haha of course (we were trying to be rhinos...)." Naomi's clarification of the intended symbolism did not discredit the reading I had offered - that participants tended to choreograph their bodies and adopt stylised gestures - but nevertheless serves as a reminder of the interpretive nature of these findings. While a photo-elicitation approach would be more time-consuming (both for the narrating participant and the transcribing researcher), this method would be advantageous for gathering individuals' in-depth accounts of decisions they made at the moment of snapshotting and during the album editing process (including what images were discarded and why).

Secondly, this study hints toward the methodological possibilities of popular media sources. Here, references to viral blog posts, opinion pieces and YouTube videos were not included in my data collection strategy, but nevertheless crept into the analysis when specifically referenced by participants. In doing so, this thesis provides a highly personalised account of the 'third-party knowledges' participants found relevant and instructive in the months leading up to their volunteer journeys (Scarles, 2013).

To explore this interplay thoroughly in future, I could pursue a deliberate document analysis of popular media sources. Over the course of writing this report, I came to appreciate the significance of these pieces as important cultural texts, central

to the way young people gather information and establish social conventions. At the same time, these mainstream discourses have far outpaced the ability of scholars to document them. Indeed, by the time this research moves through the lengthy steps toward academic publishing and is released, the conversations and contestations taking place over international volunteering are likely to have shifted dramatically. This too reflects the 'liquidity' of late modernity - in which "each new structure which replaces the previous one as soon as it is declared old-fashioned and past its use-by date is only another momentary settlement - acknowledged as temporary and 'until further notice'" (Bauman, 2000, p. 82). Despite this 'brief shelf life,' I contend that individual self-presentations can be instructively viewed though the repertoires they adopt from broader public narrative.

10.2 Implications

When I asked Miriam (retrospective) about the importance of her international volunteer excursion in the context of her wider life history, she described the experience as "this very special time that was totally different from any other period in my life…it was only two or three months [but] I think it has a disproportionate place in the story of me." Isobel (retrospective) awarded these memories a similar place of prominence:

> Maybe because it was so different from normal life at the time, I remember a lot of things really well. I couldn't tell you what I did in the weeks before or after I went to Kenya - it was five years ago, I have no idea - but a lot of the stuff we did there, in the school but also travelling, I just remember.

I bring these comments forward here to remind the reader of the central importance of travel narratives as 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1991) and 'enduring referents' (Alder, 1989) in the journey of self-making. In this project, however, my priority was to illuminate how young people *used* story as a powerful resource for crafting 'idealised impressions' and for showcasing a particular self to others.

At the individual level, this study's findings reveal participants' entanglement in 'character contests': "a special kind of moral game" in which individuals attempt to score points "at the expense of the character of the other participants" (Goffman, 1967, p. 240). In this case, young volunteers appeared to jockey for positioning based on the perceived authenticity of their experience and the discriminating ways in which they selected (and later represented) their project work.

More broadly, this study empirically illustrates the progressive 'moralisation' taking place within tourism practice (Butcher, 2003). Once I was alerted to this framing though, I began to see 'moralisation' - the process "in which objects or activities that were previously morally neutral acquire a moral component" - taking place everywhere I looked (Rozin, Markwith & Stoess, 1997, p. 67). As one example, I am reminded of the vegan movement, wherein social distinction is similarly accrued through one's participation in ethical forms of (quite literal) consumption. When I dug deeper into this parallel, I was astonished to discover an article by Greenebaum (2012), who similarly drew on the conceptual frameworks of 'authenticity' and 'impression management' to analyse in-depth interviews amongst 16 American 'ethical vegans'- those who have chosen the lifestyle out of concern for animal rights and welfare. First, the author found that participants differentiated themselves, not from meat-eaters or vegetarians, but from 'other' vegans (those who participate in the diet for health or environmental reasons). Further, when participants fell short of their own standards (occasionally purchasing leather shoes, eating honey or using pharmaceuticals), they engaged in accommodation strategies to afford their own transgressions some leeway, namely, confessing their feelings of guilt, defining an acceptable 'grey area' and blaming the larger social structure for failing to provide them with alternatives. My point here is that exploring international volunteering as an instance of 'moralisation' and an enactment of 'character contests' opens the reader to noticing analogous cultural patterns and themes.

10.3 Researcher Reflections

Throughout this thesis, I have analysed self-presentations amongst a group of 27 current and former undergraduate students who took part a ten week volunteer excursion in Kenya. As the researcher and author of this report, I have also been engaged in the task of *creating impressions* about this assembly of young people. Here, I have endeavoured to characterise participants as intelligent, reflexive and media literate. This depiction represents my own perception, but also supports my commitment to adopting an 'ethical attitude,' in that I have strained to consider to how participants might want themselves represented (Josselson, 2007).

These participants were not the 'naïve white people' I had expected to encounter at the outset of this project. I too had been influenced by the accumulated 'third-party knowledges' (Scarles, 2013) of academic and popular media critique, and was therefore surprised when participants revealed their striking scepticism toward

international volunteer practice. On the one hand, I was exhilarated to connect with like-minded individuals, but I also experienced a tinge of disappointment because these young people were stealing away the arguments I presumed *I* would be making. In this way, participants foreclosed my opportunity to claim the moral high ground and made visible my own investment in the differentiation efforts I have presented. As a result, I came to see my role as that of a meta-critic, offering a critical lens on critical narratives.

First, and empathetically, I want to stress that participants were caught up in a difficult task, having internalised the critiques surrounding humanitarian intervention but without "a coherent ethical framework of a distinct right and wrong" (Scarles, 2013, p. 900). Doubt and dilemma loom large in these narratives, as participants were forced to reconcile twin desires "between trying to construct an ethical identity as volunteers and responsible travellers, and upholding fantasies about exotic authenticity and the happiness of the local populace in order to maintain their enjoyment of both" (Crossley, 2013, p. 107). To resolve this tension, participants sought to undertake an international volunteer encounter on their own terms, to carve out a version of this work they found morally acceptable. For example, participants justified their participation by referencing the research they had undertaken to choose the 'right' sending organisation and by suggesting that their project work offered (albeit sometimes limited) beneficial support. In doing so, participants implied that the backlash aimed at the international volunteer industry broadly applied less strongly to them personally. Ultimately though, are the distinctions made between these practices overstated, perhaps as a mechanism for evading one's implication in an encounter which remains structurally unethical?

For Illich (1968/1990), individuals' decision to proceed with a volunteer excursion whilst knowing the problematics is reprehensible. In his keynote address to a group of American students en route to a summer volunteer excursion he rebuked:

> Your very insight, your very openness to evaluations of past programs make you hypocrites because you - or at least most of you - have decided to spend this next summer in Mexico, and therefore, you are unwilling to go far enough in your reappraisal of your program. You close your eyes because you want to go ahead and could not do so if you looked at some facts. (p. 314)

That participants in this study *did* go ahead in spite of potential repercussions is evidence that the desire to have a significant personal experience overseas remains

compelling and a priority for many western-situated youth. This further suggests that participants were able to engage their whiteness reflexively and ironically, rather than allow themselves to be paralysed or engulfed by the problematic nature of the work they were engaged in. Such findings speak to Giddens' (1991) understanding of self-identity as 'robust;' one that is "securely enough held to weather major tensions or transitions in the social environment within which the person moves" (p. 55). However, if cautionary tales do little diminish the allure of international volunteering, what role do they serve?

It seems notable that the popular media critiques referred to in this thesis tended to be authored by former, now-disillusioned international volunteers - Pippa Biddle (2014) in Tanzania and the Dominican Republic, Matt Lacey (2010) in Tanzania, Lauren Kascak (Kascak & Dasgupta, 2014) in Ghana, and the anonymous creators of Barbie Savoir (Blay, 2016) in East Africa (specific country undisclosed). I too was an international volunteer during my undergraduate studies and have pursued the scrutiny of these experiences as a *vocation*. That participation in these enterprises might serve an educative function and contribute to the volunteer's emerging social consciousness should be viewed positively. In this way, international volunteer excursions could be defended as a 'pedagogy of discomfort,' a term Boler and Zembylas (2003) use to describe an educational situation that makes visible (and problematises) one's existing frames of reference, daily habits and "unconscious complicity with hegemony" (p. 111). However, I have also endeavoured to highlight the performative function of such critical reflection. Here, I contend that critique of international volunteer practice may be a strategy for fashioning *a double distinction* - first through having completed an international volunteer excursion (the moral high ground of 'helping others') and then through denouncing it (the moral high ground of 'superior judgement').

By way of meta-critique, Jefferess (2013) examines the YouTube video 'Africa for Norway,' a spoof of the Live Aid charity single *Do They Know It's Christmas*, which urges Africans to send radiators to Norwegians suffering from the perils of a cold climate. The lyrics note sarcastically: "People don't ignore starving people so why should we ignore cold people? Frostbite kills too" (Radi-Aid, 2012). The campaign has been celebrated for using satirical inversion to denaturalise the simplistic and degrading ways development campaigns tend to represent Africa and Africans. While Jefferess (2013) welcomes this oppositional response, he nevertheless

questions the assumption that merely participating in these critical discourses "will make us *good*" (p. 81, italics in original). The author further contemplates the extent to which popular media parodies are equipped to examine the structural violence that undergirds humanitarian relations, including "the context and conditions for suffering in Africa, and how Europe and North America are complicit with, and may benefit from, those same causes and conditions" (p. 77-78). With these cautions in mind, I next consider the potential social *inaction* imbedded in critical reflection.

While some literature has extoled the role of critical reflection as *fundamental* to the service encounter (Cook-Sather, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Maher, 2003; Porfilio & Hickman, 2011), Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) and Furedi (2003) provide an interesting counter-argument, challenging readers to reconsider the value of the reflexive 'confessional.' These authors trace an 'affective turn' in contemporary western society (and British education policy in particular) which is characterised by an increasing orientation towards 'the self' and emotional well-being. By consequence, the authors caution that individuals may use reflection as a device to retreat into immobility, without consequence toward the social inequities they philosophically seek to resist. Extending these ideas to the present study, I wonder whether participation in critical discourses - those directed toward the self and those targeted at 'other' less virtuous volunteers - is in some sense arresting. Put differently, if the international volunteer satisfies their obligation to demonstrate criticality, will they be less inclined towards further advocacy? If so, criticality might function as a 'tick box' which re-centres the feelings of the western-situated subject and does little to address the political question of development. From the perspective of whiteness studies, members of the social majority may employ critique for a smoke and mirrors effect, to obscure their own complicity in the perpetuation of unequal social relations and to maintain their belief that they are good people. Perhaps then, a more fruitful role for critique might involve international volunteers interrogating "whether their work might have meant they were implicated in, rather than an alternative to, their own criticism" (Heron, 2007, p. 135).

To be clear, I am not suggesting critical inquiry be abandoned - quite the opposite, I view my scholarship in common purpose with 'self-consuming' learning, which is both introspective of and accountable for actively disrupting one's individual privileges and the structures that reproduce injustice (Butin, 2005). However, I maintain an academic responsibility to press against the impetus to conclude neatly,

and to force further interrogation into the scope of intervention available through inward glancing. As one example, it seems the proliferation of popular media critique described in this thesis has neither dampened the success of the volunteer industry nor resulted in concrete action toward dismantling the systemic inequality on which the encounter is based.

10.4 Recommendations

As I began to share my findings at various academic conferences, I was often asked how the knowledge I accrued might be *useful* to sending organisations. Here, I reiterated that the research study was not a project-based analysis, and thus, never aspired to offer the industry recommendations toward either maximising the benefits or reducing the deleterious effects of their operations (see instead Raymond & Hall, 2008). Rather than evaluate the 'impact' or 'effectiveness' of these programmes (a pragmatic concern), I believed it a richer line of inquiry to investigate the performative function of travel narratives (a sociological endeavour). Indeed, from the dataset, the reader does not gain much insight into what international volunteering *should* look like, although one might extrapolate 'best practice' based on the programmatic aspects participants reacted most strongly for and against. At least from participants' perspective, a superior (morally acceptable) international volunteer experience would be somewhat lengthy, offer skilled or specialised labour and include limited leisure time. However, as I have stressed throughout this thesis, I believe the establishment of these codes of conduct better inform our understanding of youth in late modernity than any particular volunteer policy or procedure.

I was also occasionally probed to take a definitive stance on international volunteering as a 'good' or 'bad' practice. In other words, should western-situated youth continue or suspend their participation in these types of excursions? On this point, I remain genuinely unsettled. On the one hand, it seemed clear from the narratives shared with me that the international volunteer experience can be formative for the volunteer, an encounter which "gives a traveller a powerful resource for telling a story about themselves to themselves" (Desforges, 1998, p. 189). Speaking personally, my identity as an avid traveller and my academic trajectory in the fields of education, sociology and tourism studies are deeply entangled with my early exposure to this industry. On the other hand, it is ultimately my *discomfort* with these journeys that has rendered them so compelling to me. Here, I continue to wrestle with the ethical quandaries of *whose* needs international volunteer efforts truly serve and what

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injustices might be reinforced or left intact in their wake. Ultimately, I have come to view the propagation of volunteer travel as an expression of the internalised 'helping imperative' among the white middle-class, rather than a 'solution' for anything (Heron, 2007).

10.5 Future Research

I consider this thesis to be a living document and a launch point for further study. Indeed, I have not exhausted the rich intellectual avenues made available within participants' visual and verbal narratives, nor the theoretical perspectives I could work with to contextualise the findings. In addition to the two methodological extensions I proposed earlier in this chapter (incorporating a photo-elicitation design and conducting a discursive analysis of popular media sources), I add here the urgency for research which creates analytic space for the 'local gaze' of the host community (Maoz, 2006). While including the perspectives of service-recipients was well-beyond the scope of this project, such repositioning is nevertheless an important way of redressing the nearly-exclusive focus on the western-situated subject. One counter-example can be found in Larsen's (2015) edited collection, *International Service Learning: Engaging Host Communities*, which endeavours to reveal the myriad ways host families and local partner organisations contend with the increasing presence of international students in their lives. Here though, western researchers were typically operating within unfamiliar cultural settings, and perhaps as a result, interviewees were reluctant to share frustrations or disappointments with them. Thus, additional research undertaken within-context and initiated by southern scholars could shed important light on the performative aspects of host community narratives and the 'idealised impressions' they seek to employ.

Finally, adjoining the limitations I identified in Chapter 6 regarding the specific methodological construction of this thesis, I did not code for gender within the analysis. Here, perhaps because my scholarly interest was grounded in social privilege (whiteness in particular), I was not primed to 'see' this identity marker within the verbal and visual accounts I collected. Gender was also largely absent within the narratives Heron (2007) gathered amongst 27 white, female development workers in Sub-Saharan Africa, leading the author to conclude that women may downplay how gender shapes their lived experiences as a way to align themselves closer with 'bourgeois subjectivity' (the white, middle-class and masculine majority) and to claim themselves as 'honorary men.' This signals that the *invisibility* of gender

within this thesis research may be instructive, and provide an additional research story for later exploration. Further, I realise now that I have a unique dataset at hand - one that includes male participants - which was uncommon amongst the service-related literature I reviewed. Thus, a re-reading of this study's transcripts may provide a rare glimpse into how masculinity operates in the international volunteer encounter.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter (2014 Cohort)

I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. I am interested in learning about how young people make meaning of their experiences before, during and after a short-term international volunteer excursion. You have been invited to take part in this study because you will be participating in a volunteer excursion in Kenya in summer 2014.

The study consists of three narrative interviews, during which I will ask you to share stories about yourself and your experiences overseas. Each interview will take approximately one hour of your time. The time and location of these interviews can easily be arranged at your convenience. The first (pre-departure) and third (post-excursion) interviews will take place near your undergraduate campus in the UK, while the second (on-site) interview will take place in Kenya, when I visit the volunteer site approximately halfway through your journey. To help me better understand your experiences, I am also interested in viewing the photographs you take of this excursion and share with your peers over Facebook.

By participating in this study, you would be helping researchers and educators learn about how young people understand their experiences of this unique life event over time. You may also enjoy the experience of sharing your story and reflecting on personally meaningful memories.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to [email]. I will then send you an informed consent form to read and complete.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kaylan Schwarz
PhD Candidate
University of Cambridge

Appendix B: Recruitment Email (Retrospective)

I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. I am interested in learning about how young people make meaning of their experiences participating in a short-term international volunteer excursion. You have been invited to take part in this study because you previously participated in a volunteer excursion in Kenya.

The study consists of one narrative interview, during which I will ask you to share stories about yourself and your experiences overseas. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time. The time and location of this interview can easily be arranged at your convenience.

By participating in this study, you would be helping researchers and educators learn about how young people understand their experiences of this unique life event over time. You may also enjoy the experience of sharing your story and reflecting on personally meaningful memories.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to [email]. I will then send you an informed consent form to read and complete.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kaylan Schwarz
PhD Candidate
University of Cambridge

Appendix C: Informed Consent Letter (2014 Cohort)

I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. I am interested in learning about how young people make meaning of their experiences before, during and after a short-term international volunteer excursion. You have been invited to take part in this study because you will be participating in a volunteer excursion in Kenya in summer 2014. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Data Collection Process:

The study consists of three narrative interviews, during which I will ask you to share stories about yourself and your experiences overseas. Each interview will take approximately one hour of your time. The time and location of these interviews can easily be arranged at your convenience. The first (pre-departure) and third (post-excursion) interviews will take place near your undergraduate campus in the UK, while the second (on-site) interview will take place in Kenya, when I visit the volunteer site approximately halfway through your journey. *Amendment: Those who participate in a second international volunteer excursion facilitated by the same organisation in summer 2015 are invited to complete a fourth (subsequent-excursion) interview upon their return.* With your permission, all interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

During my site visit in Kenya, I will be making field notes, which means that I will write down descriptions of the activities and interactions that occur in the setting. These notes will be hand-written and later transcribed into a word document. Where possible, I will request permission to join you at your project placement or other community events to help me better understand the day-to-day or routine aspects of your journey.

Finally, I am interested in viewing the photographs you take of this excursion and share with your peers over Facebook. To access your Facebook profile, I will open a

temporary 'researcher account' (separate from my own personal account) and send you a 'friend request' approximately one week before your scheduled departure. I will only review photographs you post in relation to your excursion in Kenya. I will only reproduce specific images in my research report with your explicit permission. The researcher account I create will be deleted at the conclusion of the analysis phase.

Right to Withdrawal:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without fear of negative consequences or judgment. Furthermore, you may decline to answer any question I ask during the interview.

Confidentiality:

It is my intention to publish the results of this study in scholarly journals and conference presentations. However, your identity (and specific information that could identify you) will remain confidential. Your name will be replaced with pseudonyms in my notes and interview transcriptions.

I have chosen to create a 'researcher account' on Facebook to protect your confidentiality, ensuring that my own peer network will be unable to see names, profiles or posts related to anyone involved in this study.

Data Storage:

Interview transcriptions and field notes will be recorded and saved as word documents. Electronic files will be password protected on my personal laptop. Material will only be shared with people involved in working with me on the research project.

Known Risks:

Participation in this study poses no known risks or harms. You will not be asked to do anything that you wouldn't already be doing as part of your volunteer excursion. The interview is not intended to be overly probing, and I encourage you to share only what you wish to share. In the extremely unlikely event that you were to experience distress resulting from any aspect of your participation, you are welcome to withdraw if you

wish, and I can provide you with appropriate referrals if needed. You are encouraged to ask questions about the study at any time before, during or after its completion.

Remuneration:

Participation in this research project will not be compensated. I would be happy to share the outcome of this research project with you for your interest.

Expected Benefits:

By participating in this study, you would be helping researchers and educators learn about how young people understand their experiences of this unique life event over time. You may also enjoy the experience of sharing your story and reflecting on personally meaningful memories.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the consent form below. I will collect signed informed consent forms before commencing data collection.

Kaylan Schwarz
PhD Candidate
University of Cambridge

Consent:
I understand what this study involves and agree to participate.

_____   _____   _____
Participant's Printed Name   Participant's Signature   Date

In order to send you a 'friend request' from the researcher account I will create, please provide me with the name you use for your Facebook profile:

_____

Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter (Retrospective)

I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. I am interested in learning about how young people make meaning of their experiences participating in a short-term international volunteer excursion. You have been invited to take part in this study because you are at least 18 years of age and previously participated in a volunteer excursion in Kenya.

Data Collection Process:

The study consists of one narrative interview, during which I will ask you to share stories about yourself and your experiences overseas. This interview will take approximately one hour of your time. The time and location of this interview can easily be arranged at your convenience. All interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

Right to Withdrawal:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without it affecting your relationship with myself or the University of Cambridge. Furthermore, you may decline to answer any question I ask during the interview.

Confidentiality:

It is my intention to publish the results of this study. However, your identity (and specific information that could identify you) will remain confidential. Your name will be replaced with pseudonyms in my notes and interview transcriptions.

Data Storage:

Interviews will be recorded, transcribed and saved as word documents. Electronic files will be password protected on my personal laptop. Material will only be shared with people involved in working with me on the research project.

Known Risks:

Participation in this study poses no known risks or harms. The interview is not intended to be overly probing, and I encourage you to share only what you wish to share. In the extremely unlikely event that you were to experience distress resulting from any aspect of your participation, you are welcome to withdraw if you wish, and I can provide you with appropriate referrals if needed. You are encouraged to ask questions about the study at any time before, during or after its completion.

Remuneration:

Participation in this research project will not be compensated. I would be happy to share the outcome of this research project with you for your interest.

Expected Benefits:

By participating in this study, you would be helping researchers and educators learn about how young people understand their experiences of this unique life event over time. You may also enjoy the experience of sharing your story and reflecting on personally meaningful memories.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the consent form below. I will collect signed informed consent forms before commencing data collection.

Kaylan Schwarz
PhD Candidate
University of Cambridge

Consent:
I understand what this study involves and agree to participate.

_____   _____   _____
Participant's Printed Name   Participant's Signature   Date

Appendix E: Interview Framework (2014 Cohort)

Pre-Departure Interview

Take me back to when you first learned about this project. How did you become aware of the opportunity and what drew you to it?

Looking back on your life history, tell me about some of the key moments or people that contributed to your decision to volunteer overseas.

You could have chosen to spend your summer holidays in multiple ways. What motivated you to undertake this international volunteer placement at this point in your life?

When you think about your upcoming journey, what visual images come to mind?

What aspect of the journey are you most looking forward to? What aspect of the journey do you expect you will find most challenging?

Looking forward, how do you imagine yourself at the end of this journey?

In your opinion, what does being an 'international volunteer' say about you as a person?

On-Site Interview

Tell me about your journey in Kenya so far. You can start wherever it makes sense to begin the story and include as much detail as you wish.

Tell me about some key moments that have stood out as especially vivid or meaningful in your experience so far.

Walk me through a typical day.

Has anything made you feel uncomfortable?

Do you feel that you act or behave any differently here than you do at home, and if so, how have you modified your typical behaviours or ways of being?

Have any of your perceptions changed?

Do you see yourself any differently from the last time we spoke?

Post-Excursion Interview

Tell me about the experience of returning home and settling back in the UK after ten weeks in Kenya.

When friends or family have asked you about your journey, what are the few key stories you share with them? What message or impression would you want to communicate to them about your trip?

If you were to look at your international volunteer experience as a story, what would you say that story is about?

Having now concluded your first international volunteer excursion, what are your general reflections on this type of travel experience?

Do you envision yourself taking part in an excursion like this again?

Tell me about your activity on Facebook in relation to this excursion. How did you choose what to post or what not to post?

Subsequent-Excursion Interview

You could have chosen to spend this summer's holidays in multiple ways. What motivated you to return to this project for a second summer?

Tell me about some key moments that stood out as especially vivid or meaningful.

When friends or family have asked you about your most recent journey, what are the few key stories you share with them? What message or impression would you want to communicate to them about your trip?

Do you look back differently on your first excursion to Kenya now that you've been back a second time?

Having now concluded your second international volunteer excursion, what are your general reflections on this type of travel experience?

Taken together, how important would you consider these two experiences in the context of your wider life story?

Tell me about your activity on Facebook in relation to this excursion. How did you choose what to post and what not to post?

Appendix F: Interview Framework (Retrospective)

Take me back to when you first learned about this project. How did you become aware of the opportunity and what drew you to it?

Looking back on your life history, tell me about some of the key moments or people that contributed to your decision to volunteer overseas.

You could have chosen to spend your summer holidays in multiple ways. What motivated you to undertake this international volunteer placement at that particular point in your life?

What were your first impressions when you arrived in Kenya?

Now that your journey has concluded, tell me about some key moments that stood out as especially vivid or meaningful.

What aspect of the journey did you find most challenging?

Did you notice a change in yourself over the course of the journey?

If you were to look at your international volunteer experience as a story, what would you say that story is about?

In your opinion, what does being an 'international volunteer' say about you as a person?

What compelled you to continue your involvement with the sending organisation (if applicable)?

Taken together, how important would you consider this experience in the context of your wider life story?