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## On Making a Difference: How Photography and Narrative Produce the Short-Term Missions Experience

Joshua Kerby Jennings

University of Kentucky, [joshuakjennings1@gmail.com](mailto:joshuakjennings1@gmail.com)

Author ORCID Identifier:

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8718-9795>

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Joshua Kerby Jennings, Student

Dr. Patricia Hyjer Dyk, Major Professor

Dr. Patricia Hyjer Dyk, Director of Graduate Studies

ON MAKING A DIFFERENCE:  
HOW PHOTOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE PRODUCE  
THE SHORT-TERM MISSIONS EXPERIENCE

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the  
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Joshua Kerby Jennings

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Patricia Hyjer Dyk, Professor of Community & Leadership Development

Lexington, Kentucky

2017

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## ABSTRACT

### ON MAKING A DIFFERENCE: HOW PHOTOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE PRODUCE THE SHORT-TERM MISSIONS EXPERIENCE

Short-term missions participants encounter difference in purportedly captivating ways. Current research, however, indicates the practice does not lead to long-lasting, positive change. Brian M. Howell (2012) argues the short-term missions experience is confined to the limitations of the short-term missions narrative. People who engage in short-term missions build assumptions, seek experiences, understand difference, and convey meaning, as a result of this narrative. The process of telling and retelling travel stories is integral to the short-term missions experience. Drawing upon literature on tourism, narrative, development, and photography, this study intends to evaluate the inefficacy of short-term missions through the stories which produce and are produced by photography. Through storytelling and photography from 21 short-term missions participants who have served in Ouanaminthe, Haiti, this project deconstructs the short-term missions narrative to understand, *what is the relationship between the use of photography and the short-term missions experience?* The results indicate a unique relationship between people, photography, and experiences within the framework of short-term missions.

KEYWORDS: Short-Term Missions, Photography, Narrative, Image,  
Haiti, Charity-Based Development

Joshua Kerby Jennings

10 April 2017

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By

Joshua Kerby Jennings

Patricia Hyjer Dyk, Ph.D.

Director of Thesis

Patricia Hyjer Dyk, Ph.D.

Director of Graduate Studies

10 April 2017

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## On Making a Difference:

### How Photography and Narrative Produce the Short-Term Missions Experience

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

People said the work I was doing was changing lives. I believed I was truly making a difference. I now understand the impact is far more complicated and deserves more thought. My work—participating in short-term missions—was part of a much larger phenomenon, one worthy of more observation and evaluation. In the summer of 2012, I spent nearly a month with long-term missionaries in Panamá. With hopes of appeasing family and friends at home, I maintained a blog throughout my travels, including my subsequent stint at a university in Costa Rica. My blog emerged as less a diary and more a devotional. Rather than report stories, I composed uplifting and thought-provoking messages for others to read. One day, after I submitted a new post, someone in the community approached me about it. I never told anyone there I had a blog, but she found it. Moments later, I remembered the post featured a very personal story about her. At first, I felt my privacy had been ignored, and I had underestimated local access to internet and social media. Then, I considered *her* privacy. She never gave me the rights to her story, but I made a performance out of her life.

#### **1.1 The Problem of Short-Term Missions**

For years, I have wrestled with the many nuances of short-term missions. Only recently have I greatly considered the impact they have on our relationships, our language, and our society beyond the Christian experience. My past motivation for engagement in short-term missions is indicative of my upbringing. As a Christian and an emerging scholar, I recognize the widening chasm between modern Christianity and the



Academy. This divide extends far beyond the people and into their ways of thinking, understanding, and behaving. From a similar perspective, Robert Priest (1993) writes, “My relationship to the discipline [of Anthropology] is characterized by cognitive tension—tension stemming from my relations to two different social communities and to two different conceptual worlds” (p. 85). For me, I remain connected to sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers; experts and policymakers of international development; and Christians. Each propagates conflicting ideas which continue to shape and motivate my research and life. I am heavily invested in short-term missions because I recognize their potential to promote understanding, lead to personal growth, and build cross-cultural relationships. I am, however, alarmed by their current trajectory, so I position my research as both supportive and critical.

In almost every measurable way, short-term missions fails to meet its own standards. But one must understand its nature to place it in modern discourse. Priest (2008) writes, “The short-term missions movement is a populist movement, emergent not out of the strategic vision of leading missiologists or theologians, but out of grass-roots impulses...[the movement is] unsophisticated and frequently anti-intellectual” (p. 67). The more short-term missions proponents continue to reject research and the more researchers disregard the potential of short-term missions, the wider the chasm grows. And the consequence is a serious travesty of global proportions.

My interests in this subject emerged from personal experiences and various coursework within the interdisciplinary graduate school program, Community and Leadership Development, at the University of Kentucky (UK). I noticed the absence of charities and faith-based initiatives in international development studies. Short-term

missions practitioners are often excluded from academic scrutiny. The great irony, though, is I am not sure they even wish to be included. As a Christian and short-term missions practitioner myself, I recognize the shortcomings of short-term missions, but I yearn for their potential success. Several concepts, especially vocabulary, emerge from extensive research and coursework in international development and the social sciences. A number of observations build upon the foundation of critical social theories, namely the idea of intersectionality within feminist political ecology. This research study incorporates multiple grounded theories and growing bodies of literature on tourism, narrative, development, and photography. The final product must appear before my faculty committee and the UK Graduate School in the form of a Master's thesis. Additionally, this research is intended for researchers and practitioners alike, addressing the concerns and goals of a variety of positions from supporters, critics, and skeptics.

The purpose of this research study is not to determine the efficacy of short-term missions. Rather, the study evaluates the *inefficacy* of short-term missions through the stories which produce and are produced by photography. This study does not intend to problematize short-term missions as a practice, as other major studies already do so; it builds upon them. Through storytelling and photography, this project deconstructs the short-term missions narrative to understand why this practice remains popular, with no signs of slowing down. Ultimately, I ask the research question: *what is the relationship between the use of photography and the short-term missions experience?* I am interested in the overall existence of photography as both an action and a product within the short-term missions experience, a process which is not confined to a specific trip.

To be clear, the short-term missions narrative conveys a few ideas. First, it convinces people there exists a need, often an urgent one. For without need, there is no reason for short-term missions to exist in the first place. Second, it cheapens development strategies, suggesting anyone can engage regardless of knowledge, experience or values. And third, it promises to be successful. The narrative perpetuates a false image of successfulness and accomplishment despite the practice's overall inefficacy. In order to fully understand this narrative, however, one must investigate within the framework of the short-term missions narrative. In order to fully understand the narrative, I identify the influence of photography. By allowing photographs to elicit memories, stimulate thoughts and produce storytelling, I can experience the short-term missions narrative without deliberately exposing it. Without outright discussing the short-term missions narrative, study participants demonstrated its confinement through their own words. Their storytelling reflected an overwhelming incapacity to understand encounters with difference and the practice of short-term missions altogether.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Practice of Short-Term Missions**

Over the last century, missions has changed dramatically (Priest, 2011). Perhaps the most significant shift is the rise of short-term missions or, henceforth, STM. Researchers trace this phenomenon to the late 1940s in the years following World War II. After many young Americans traveled in combat, they returned home only to want to travel again; this time as missionaries (Priest, 2010). In 1989, there were roughly 120,000 people participating in STM. By 2010, there were nearly three million every year (Moreau, 2011; Peterson, 2007). The STM industry is now worth billions and has exploded in popularity over the last 30 years. Despite this popularity, there exists no agency which regulates or enforces any aspects or ethics of STM. Undoubtedly, technological advancement and rising global awareness improved accessibility to the movements' actors: US Christians (Boorstin, 1992; de Grazia, 1962).

Few studies quantify the popularity of STM, and they fail to recognize its full scope. Most researchers exclude Catholics and mainline Protestants. Sometimes they only include participants engaging with formal STM organizations, overlooking hundreds of thousands of laypeople who participate through congregations informally (Priest, Dischinger, Rasmussen, & Brown, 2006). The numbers fail to capture the magnitude of STM on a global level. Likewise, most research fails to explore the influence of STM Christian culture throughout the US. According to Priest et al. (2006), one percent of American undergraduates study abroad in college, but nearly two-thirds of Master of Divinity students participates in an STM while in seminary; nearly 98 percent intend to do so in their lifetimes. The phenomenon impacts millions of Christians every year, has

become deeply embedded in US Christian culture, and has altered the way many people encounter difference in this world. To better understand STM, consider the more in-depth analysis by Priest and Priest (2008).

Historically, it has been difficult to establish a widely-accepted definition of STM. Peterson, Aeschliman, and Sneed (2003) composed a cohesive, eight-part definition which identified various factors of an STM. As a result, they proposed over 777 million configurations of an STM trip. For the purpose of this research study, I define STM trips as international travel experiences which last from two days to six months and are primarily focused on Christian service (Priest & Priest, 2008; Corbett & Fikkert, 2009; Howell, 2012; Livermore, 2013; Corbett & Fikkert, 2014). Many scholars use the phrase “religiously-motivated” which insufficiently addresses the movement’s popularity within modern US Christianity. STM participants are fairly representative of US evangelicals. They are predominantly white, heterosexual females who tend to be politically conservative, evangelical, and from upper-middle-class societies. Even non-American STM participants reflect most of these characteristics, coming from postindustrial, western societies (World Nomads, 2008; Howell, 2012; Fletcher, 2014). Christians in Europe, North America, Australia, Singapore, and South Korea not only provide the vast majority of STM participants, they also foster the majority of modern Christianity’s material resources. And the majority of STM participants travel from these places into other ones. Most trips come from majority Christian communities, traveling to other majority Christian communities (Livermore, 2013; Priest & Priest, 2008). Typically, these trips have ‘participants,’ or those who engage in the trip; ‘practitioners’

or those who facilitate the trip; and ‘hosts’ or the typically foreign people, organizations, or communities which receive the participants and practitioners.

A popular area of study is the motivation of service travel participants. This approach seeks to understand *why*, more than *what* or *how*. It shows people engage in STM for fairly self-centered reasons, and those who are more altruistically-motivated are actually less likely to be effective in the field. To be sure, the term “self-centered” is not inherently negative, but rather literal in this case. Most people are motivated by personal desires, such as self-growth, wanderlust, relationship-building, human connectedness, adventure, and self-advancement, or, for example, résumé-building (Chen & Chen, 2011; Coghlan, 2007; Coren & Gray, 2012; Daldeniz & Hampton, 2010; Daldeniz & Hampton, 2011; Sin, 2009; Wearing, 2001). Much of this research applies to secular service travel, too. At least in theory, STM is supposed to improve the lives of all involved, including hosts, separating them from similar practices like pilgrimages. But their consistent incapacity to do so makes STM less a development strategy and more a quest for personal growth and spiritual enlightenment.

Due to inconsistencies in STM definitions, participants, and purposes, it is difficult to evaluate them consistently. Most assessments indicate little positive change occurs as a result of STM. Part of this underperformance comes from minimal understanding and insufficient training. Priest et al. (2006) writes, “Youth pastors, for example, are expected to lead such trips—but receive little or no training in seminary on how to do so” (p. 434). Most people know about STM, but they do not understand them, how they work best, or how they can impact communities around the world because researchers and practitioners fail to collaborate. Whether or not it is intentional, this lack

of collaboration hinders STM from producing long-lasting positive change. As Malcolm Gladwell (2007) writes, “The key to good decision-making is not knowledge. It is understanding” (p. 265). We have the research on STM; it does not lead to positive change. Researchers know this reality, but they struggle to understand it. Practitioners who better understand STM, disregard the research. There is a vast “divide between scholars and practitioners, between missiology and short-term mission[s]” (Priest & Priest, 2008, p. 67). While scholars have dedicated time and resources to learn more about STM in recent years—especially doctoral dissertations—increased research is not leading to better STM (Corbett & Fikkert, 2014; Priest & DeGeorge, 2013).

STM maintains an unpopular reputation throughout most of the world, partially because of STM practitioners’ unwillingness to heed researchers’ advice. First, STM trips are brief and unsustainable. They focus on short-term impact and short-term relationships, which produce limited ownership over long-term efforts. Miriam Adeney (2003) writes, “Short-term missions have only a short time in which to ‘show a profit,’ to achieve predefined goals. This can accentuate our American idols of speed, quantification, compartmentalization, money, achievement, and success” (p. 1). She warns practitioners not to pursue quick fixes to their own agendas (2003). Second, STM overemphasizes the needs of the participant. This flaw perpetuates a North American agenda, overlooking both the needs and assets of host communities. STM is “the first missions movement in church history that’s based largely on the needs of the missionary” (Allen, 2001, p. 40). Practitioners and hosts design STM to satisfy the participants more than the community. Third, the STM experience—the process of preparation, implementation, and adjustment—is insufficient at best. Most people do not consider

learning and growing *before* an STM trip necessary. Also, traveling to and staying in a foreign country is expensive. Trips leave missionaries exhausted and resources depleted. And experiences do not result in long-term positive change for either participants or hosts (Cook & Van Hoogen, 2007; Fanning, 2009; Ver Beek, 2006). Finally, though this list is not exhaustive, practitioners often overestimate and oversell the impact of STM. Many practitioners, hosts, and participants overstate their importance, which leads to more unwillingness to listen to criticism. This behavior allows STM to ultimately harm some participants and many host communities (Corbett & Fikkert, 2014; Howell, 2012). But perhaps STM's actual inefficiency is less problematic than its fabricated success.

At the broadest level, STM research is inconsistent (Horton, 2011; Mustain, Jones, Yancey, & Horton, 2012; Ver Beek, 2008). Kurt Alan Ver Beek has analyzed several STM research studies, identifying a few major trends. One, many studies are unreliable and of low quality (Ver Beek, 2008). Two, qualitative studies indicate far more growth than any quantitative study. And three, "results showing positive impacts on STM participants are exaggerated" (Ver Beek; 2006, p. 479). He writes, "While participants reported that their trip had resulted in significant changes in their lives, including their financial giving, their donation records did not reflect any substantial differences—a fact which calls into question the self-reported positive changes" of STM practitioners, hosts, and participants (p. 477).

Researchers have applied several different tools to measure the efficacy of STM (Beers, 1999; Blezien, 2004; Manitsas, 2000; Tuttle, 1998; Wilson, 1999). According to Ver Beek the most reliable research studies indicate STM participants experience little or no positive life change (2008). Some cases actually report negative effects, such as



diminished appreciation for gender equality (Blezien, 2004) and decreased spiritual health six months after returning to the US (Manitsas, 2000). Perhaps better implementations of anthropological and sociological research methods can not only help scholars learn more about STM, but better understand them as well. The focus of STM research should move away from learning about the movement *toward understanding it*, including its popularity, its perpetuity, and its impact on the world, an impact which is deeply cultural, rhetorical, and powerful.

Placing STM within the broader context of volunteer tourism or voluntourism (VT) helps researchers understand it. While the fundamental emphasis on *Christian* service exists, many of the principles are similar. According to Stephen Wearing (2001), in his seminal work on VT, *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that Make a Difference*, VT applies to “tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake 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). The role of the natural environment is integral to VT, which many consider a later version of ecotourism, another major difference with STM.

## **2.2 Short-Term Missions and Conventional Tourism**

One can better understand STM and its sister alternatives within the larger context of tourism studies (Priest & Howell, 2013). Throughout history, the ability to travel reflected one’s socioeconomic status (Urry, 2002). Better resources and increased wealth led to more advanced travel. Now tourism—still very much an indicator of status—is widely accessible in an increasingly globalized society. Like many concepts in this paper, it is difficult to precisely define ‘tourism.’ The tourism sector is a broad, transient, and

ever-changing industry (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010, p. 8). Mathieson and Wall (1982) define tourism as “the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities they undertake during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs” (p. 1). Tourism experiences and the decision-making processes before, during, and after them influence society (1982). Understanding tourism as merely trips or travel ignores much of its impact on the world. As Bruner (2005) writes, “Tourism is always as much about the accommodations and forms of transportation as it is about the destination” (p. 15). Tourism is more than a trip; it is an experience of making decisions, preparation, taking risks, building relationships, encountering difference, conveying meaning, and telling stories.

Heightened demand for travel led to improved infrastructure and transportation, like the airplane which people once considered a fad (Boorstin, 1992). Now, people credit tourism with more than simply quenching a thirst for travel. Boorstin (1992) writes, “As a nation, we are probably the most traveled people of our time, or of any time” (p. 79). More people use travel to grow, connect with others, discover the world, and advance themselves and their own agendas. But rather than tourism produce lasting positive change, it has become a multi-billion dollar industry which seems to exist primarily as a money-making machine. Travel experiences are now commodities. They have become “diluted, contrived, prefabricated” (p. 79). The rise in conventional tourism evolved travel experiences into experiments (Milgram, 1976). With forty percent of international travelers visiting developing countries in 2008, tourism is no longer just a luxury for the wealthy, but also a necessity for the poor (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). Tourism is now an orchestrated business; tourists are now consumers (Bruner, 2005; MacCannell, 1976;

Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). Exposure to difference, or other cultures, languages, and races, for example, is now a commodity, too. Because of its impact and favorability, this commodification of encounters with difference brings about an important ethical conversation (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009; 2014; Guttentag, 2009; Lea, 1993; Lepp, 2006; Lovelock & Lovelock, 2013). The lines between mission and vacation are blurrier than ever. People must pay close attention to the impact of STM as it continues to shape the tourism industry (Livermore, 2013).

### **2.3 Short-Term Missions as Charity**

The development discourse has many contexts. Community development is primarily concerned with local, often grassroots initiatives which focus on improving social capital, expanding resources, and improving micro-level institutions. International development refers to relationships between communities, institutions, and systems on a macro-level. Dambisa Moyo (2009), a revolutionary critic of international development efforts throughout the continent of Africa, considers the “cornerstone of development” to be “an economically responsible and accountable government” and to improve social capital, “the invisible glue of relationships that holds business, economy, and political life together” (p. 57-8). Development is both a process and an outcome of strengthening assets, discovering capacity, and experiencing agency (Bhattacharyya, 2004; Haines, 2009).

Many people confuse humanitarian work, charity work, and systematic aid, but according to Moyo (2009), they are three different, but related components to international development. Often times, policymakers and development practitioners exclude charities from the discourse. But as Scherz (2014) chronicles in *Having People*,

*Having Heart*, charity done well deserves a place in the development discourse.

Development in all forms perpetuates harmful legacies of the past. Garkovich writes, “You cannot separate community development at the international level from the history of colonialism, the emergence of new states, the Cold War, modernization efforts, social justice movements, or the emergence of the global economy” (Garkovich, 2011, p. 28). Charity work, which undeniably includes STM, is a “culturally homogenizing force, spreading a monoculture...as an equalizing dynamic that reduces poverty” (Wuthnow & Offutt, 2008, p. 226-7). Vine Deloria (1961) says, “Missionaries did more to open up the West than any other group, but in doing so they increased the possibility of exploitation of the people they were purported to save” (p. 102). Development has potential, but the current systems perpetuate neo-colonial institutions which are harmful to communities around the world and the integrity of the industry (Dube, 1999; Escobar, 2012; Palacios, 2010). Easterly (2006) argues, “The specific problems created by colonialism seem to reflect more Europeans’ incompetence than their avarice” (p. 278). Development is more misguided than intentionally harmful. But intent does not justify. Palacios (2010) asks, “People [may] have the best of intentions and all the knowledge in the world, but is it appropriate?” (p. 861). People think they are acting out of generosity, but whose authority is it to tell the materially poor what they ‘need’? Development practitioners do so in spite of a history of failed efforts.

US Presidents Harry S Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson considered poverty a burden on the conscience of the United States; the latter quite literally declared war on poverty. Livermore (2013) writes, “There is a clear ethical responsibility that comes with encountering poverty” (p. 97; Escobar, 2012). But those encounters, no matter how

ethical, consistently do more harm than good, which in its own way is unethical. Dooling (1994) in his novel, *White Man's Grave*, articulates a common sentiment about international development. He writes,

That's when white people are most dangerous. When they try to make things 'better' for Africans. When white people are trying to enslave Africans or rob them, the Africans usually know just what to do. They've dealt with slave traders, invaders, and plunderers for centuries. They usually quench the world's thirst for slaves by capturing some of their enemies and selling them to the slave traders. But when white people come in with a lot of money or 'know-how' and try to make things 'better,' that's when things really go to hell. Why can't white people just visit? Why must they always meddle? It's as if you were invited to dinner at someone's house and during your brief visit you insisted on rearranging all the furniture in the house to suit your tastes. (p. 146)

Development disproportionately hurts impoverished communities around the world, and now tourism, including STM, propagates it (Richards & Hall, 2000). According to Deloria (1969), development and missions are paternalistic in nature, and in reference to their proponents, he writes, "No one asks them to come out. It is very difficult, therefore, to get them to leave" (p. 15).

Development creates unequal relationships built on neo-colonial institutions of power. Deloria (1969) says, "It was no feat, therefore, to convert [indigenous people] to a new religion. No missionary ever realized that it was less the reality of his religion and more the threat of extinction that brought converts to him" (p. 107). The longer STM practitioners and participants persist, the more harm they do. As a unique crossover between tourism and charity, STM imports "resources from outside the economy, without supporting trade, industry, and investment in the local context, no one is empowered, communities are not changed, and problems remain in place" (Howell, 2013, Why Helping in this Way Hurts section, para. 2; 2014). STM and tourism create an unhealthy dependence on international travelers and volunteers (Carlson, 2012; Richards & Hall,

2000). Essentially, STM remains “a short-term efficacious intervention [which] may have few discernible, sustainable long-term benefits. Worse still, it can unintentionally undermine whatever fragile chance for sustainable development may already be in play” (Moyo, 2009, p. 44).

## **2.4 The Short-Term Missions Narrative**

We see the world not as it is, but as we understand it to be. Stories reveal to us the world as we know it. Ishmael Beah (2004), a former child soldier and survivor of civil war from Sierra Leone writes in the preface to his novel *Radiance of Tomorrow*,

I saw that stories are the most potent way of seeing anything we encounter in our lives, and how we can deal with living. Stories are the foundations of our lives. We pass them on so that the next generation can learn from our mistakes, joys, and celebrations. Growing up, I would sit around the fire every evening and my grandmother or other older people—the elders, as we call them—would tell stories. Some were about the moral and ethical standards of my community, about how to behave. Some were just funny. Others were scary, to the point that you didn’t want to go to the bathroom at night. But all of them always had meaning, a reason for being told. (p. vii)

Storytelling is an essential part of human existence. Stories allow us to construct meaning, understand the world around us, and communicate our assumptions with others. This process is also known as narrative (Berger, 1997; Forsyth & Walker, 2008; Howell, 2012). Bruner (2005) writes, “Occasionally a story becomes so prominent in the consciousness of an entire society that its recurrent tellings not only define and empower storytellers but also help to constitute and reshape the society” (p. 169). Stories produce narratives, and narratives create realities. Our experiences and assumptions shape our narratives. These narratives construct our own reality. And we project our constructions onto everything (Haraway, 1989). An essential part of narratives is the production of discourse. Hall (1997) writes, Discourse “provides a language for talking about a

particular topic, one that constructs that topic in a particular way.... [it does] not simply reflect 'reality' or innocently designate objects. Rather, they *constitute them in specific contexts according to particular relations of power*" (p. 185, emphasis in original). In other words, language not only conveys meaning; language constructs entire worlds of meaning (Stewart, 1984).

People's travels shape and are shaped by narratives. Regardless of destinations, travelers, and experiences, people's understandings of, and therefore their stories about their travels, are strikingly similar (Daldeniz & Hampton, 2010; Howell & Dorr, 2007). Additionally, the travel narrative gives meaning to these places, experiences, and memories. Stewart (1984) considers the souvenir a tangible representation of the travel narrative. "We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative" (p. 135). The process of constructing travel narratives, which includes the STM narrative, never ends. Each time travel stories are remembered or retold, they further shape their narratives (Bruner, 2005). Narratives include "omissions, distortions, and condensations... No representation is ever an exact replica of an event" (p. 20). Additionally, narratives exist "below the level of consciousness. They are invisible to us, and yet constitute our world" (Hill, 2008, p. 19). In order to understand the power of a narrative, one must deconstruct it.

In the captivating *The Book of Jerry Falwell* by Susan Harding (2000), she argues the evangelical narrative requires believers to be born again, but in order to be born again, one must be a believer. The power of this narrative lies in its structure and its

capacity to reproduce itself. It is difficult to research evangelical Christianity, she writes, because “there is no such thing as a neutral position, no place for an ethnographer who seeks ‘information.’ Either you are lost, or you are saved” (p. 39). Perhaps a proponent of STM is the only person who can adequately understand the STM narrative because of their position *within* the STM narrative. The struggle to understand it, like other travel narratives, is apparent in other ethnographies, such as those by Bruner (2005) and Howell (2012). After years of congruous STM stories from students, Howell developed his understanding of the STM narrative. “Despite the seeming randomness of the destinations and even the diversity of the activities, it was clear that these were not disconnected events” (Howell, 2012, p. 8). The STM narrative perpetuates the popularity and accessibility of the STM movement. The demand creates the narrative, which produces greater demand. He writes, “They frame their trips as significant—even life-altering—experiences, largely in regard to personal spiritual and emotional growth, and often related through one or two significant relationships, divine relations, or meaningful encounters” (p. 19). STM participants, hosts, and practitioners rely on the STM narrative to both understand and articulate their experiences. As a result, the STM narrative produces seemingly similar experiences and stories, which overemphasize the importance and impact of STM.

As a result of exposure through photographs, particularly on social media, people construct their own understanding of STM. These assumptions, despite the absence of important “political, economic, and cultural specificities,” shape the STM experience (Howell, 2009a, p. 207). They tell stories through photographs and words in a reductionist way, which in turn produces a reductive STM experience. This is how the



STM narrative exists. Experiences form the STM narrative. The narrative shapes people's expectations. And their expectations ultimately shape the experience. Then, it repeats (Richards & Hall, 2000). Beah (2014) writes, "There's a saying in the oral tradition of storytelling that when you tell a story, when you give out a story, it is no longer yours; it belongs to everyone who encounters it and everyone who takes it in" (p. ix). There is no single writer or orator of the STM narrative. Participants, practitioners, and hosts live within the STM narrative reproducing it to all who will listen.

## **2.5 The Use of Photography in Short-Term Missions**

Photography has become an important part of the travel experience (Bruner, 2005). Travel photography relies on spaces which are suitable for photography, according to Milgram (1976). He writes, "The value of our vacation will depend not only on what we experience at the moment, but how it all comes out in the pictures" (p. 10).

Photographs are powerful, and they reflect the "interests and issues of the photographer," eliciting certain reactions from viewers (Crenshaw & Urry, 1997; Howell, 2009a, p. 207; Wehbi & Taylor, 2013). Photography shapes social discourse by creating and conveying meaning. Meaning produces narrative. And narrative produces travel experiences. Travel photography constructs understandings of difference and perpetuates ideas of colonialism and imperialism. This happens because technological advancements and increased accessibility pushed photography into the home where the average person could use it, ultimately making it an integral part of travel (Schwalbe, Silcock, & Keith, 2008). In the last ten years, social media completely changed the nature of photography. Several researchers analyze the rise of Instagram and its increasing impact on society, including on international development (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013; Hu,

Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014; Morlot, 2013; Schwartz & Haleboua, 2014; Tifentale & Manovich, forthcoming).

I apply two concepts to structure the supplemental photography analysis within this study. First, Rodríguez and Dimitrova (2011) claim visual framing influences perceived meanings of relationships. Building on other work, they say, “A close-up shot signifies intimacy, a medium shot signifies personal relationship, a full shot signifies social relationship and a long shot signifies context, scope, and public distance” (p. 55; Berger, 1991). Different levels of visual framing, or proximities to subject matter, designate varying degrees of intimacy among the photographer, the subject, and the viewer. The second concept derives from work on photography in international development by Keese (2011). He emphasizes the use of place in service tourism as a marketing technique. A person’s “memory is private,” but photography allows others to catch a glimpse into one’s mind—their desires, beliefs, and perceptions (Milgram, 1976, p. 7). Photographs “combine, compress, and communicate social meaning” (Rodríguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 56). And they impact the world immensely. Coghlan (2007) writes, “It is crucial for organizations to understand the images that they are projecting in order to understand their volunteers’ motivations, needs, and expectations” (p. 285). The overlap between photography as a window into the mind and a tool to convey social meaning is ridden with power and of the utmost importance (Dunaway, 2005; Finney, 2014).

### Chapter 3: Methodology

Before identifying my specific topic of interest for this research study, I wrote a series of papers throughout graduate school on related topics, including but not limited to the efficacy of VT, the efficacy of STM, photography and STM, encounters with difference in STM, and alternative tourism's exclusion of local knowledge. Tremendous data surrounds the growing popularity of tourism. Unfortunately, STM is largely unmentioned in academic literature. The minimal literature in existence indicates STM boasts immense popularity, fierce loyalty among practitioners, and lackluster developmental success. After writing prolifically on the subject matter, my largest interest lay in the absence of complex social issues within the STM experience. Participants were encountering tremendous elements of difference, such as race, culture, environment, and socioeconomic class. However, participation in STM reflected no evidence of improved understanding of difference. Participants not only seemed largely unchanged by the encounters; they were fairly unaware of them (Howell, 2012; Priest, 2007).

Perhaps the lack of data—which exists for many reasons—is partly the result of STM participants' incapacity to articulate their experiences; it could be the fault of the participants themselves. Building upon my personal experiences with STM and on existing literature, namely the research of Brian Howell, Robert Priest, David Livermore, Steven Corbett, and Brian Fikkert, I composed my research question: *what is the relationship between the use of photography and the STM experience?*

### **3.1 The Selection of Ouanaminthe, Haiti**

At the beginning of this study, the intent was to survey a general population of STM participants with a broad range of experiences. Through a process of refinement and seeking wise counsel, I narrowed my focus to one host community: an organization located in Ouanaminthe, Haiti. This organization, to which I have traveled seven times at the time of publication, is Haitian-created and Haitian-operated. Its endeavors include a school (from preschool through thirteenth grade with an enrollment of over 2,400 students), a medical clinic, a bakery, a farm, an apartment complex, and a barber shop. Its network of supporters reaches beyond North America to Africa, Europe, Asia, and other parts of the Caribbean. The organization is partially supported by a fundraising board headquartered in northeastern Ohio, with board members from all over the US and Haiti. Several churches are closely linked to the Haitian organization, including the two sponsoring megachurches represented in this study: one in northeastern Ohio and the other in Central Kentucky. The selection of these two megachurches is not only indicative of the STM movement, but also demonstrative of the far-reaching impact of U.S. megachurches (Priest, Wilson, & Johnson, 2010).

### **3.2 The Selection of Participants**

In order to recruit participants in this research study, I relied on people I knew in both of these regions who were closely tied to the fundraising board and the Haitian organization. These contacts, which included board members, church staff members, and STM trip leaders promoted the research study to their own personal networks of STM participants. I established a series of requirements in order to meet both my own expectations and standards for exemption imposed by the UK Institutional Review Board

(IRB). These required participants to have served on an STM trip with this particular Haitian organization in the past and to be at least 18 years of age. A lot of research focuses on the STM experience on youth (Hopkins, Olson, Smith, & Laurie, 2015; Hopkins, Smith, Laurie, & Olson, 2010; Howell, 2012; Smith & Laurie, 2011; Smith, Laurie, Hopkins, & Olson, 2013). An adult perspective is fairly underreported in research. To my knowledge, more than 250 solicited individuals qualified for the study. Considering this network, the pool of potential participants was probably much larger. In the end, 25 people completed the recruitment form, and 21 people participated in the research study, and they all derived from either Central Kentucky or northeastern Ohio. These 21 study participants were largely reflective of STM participants at large in terms of gender, age, and experience. For some specific characteristics of study participants, see Appendix A.

### **3.3 Distribution of the Recruitment Form**

In order to correspond with these 21 participants, they completed a brief Qualtrics form which consisted of seven brief questions. This form (sent through an instructional email) required participants to provide their (1) first name, (2) email address, (3) confirmation of age (at least 18 years), (4) intended focus group, (5) childcare needs, (6) dates of past STM travel(s), and (7) agreement to the terms and conditions of the study. To see the questions on the recruitment form, including the terms and conditions, in its entirety, refer to Appendix B. The email address was only used to confirm focus group details shortly before the groups took place. No participants requested childcare, and the dates of travel provided insight into the participants' different travel experiences.

Quantitative research shows STM participants experience little or no life change as a result of their travel (Hopkins, 2000; Jones, 1998; Ver Beek, 2006). This research varies in methodology, theoretical frameworks, and subjects. Any case which demonstrated potential life change was re-administered after some time elapsed, showing the change was unsustainable (Ver Beek, 2006). On the contrary, qualitative research reflects different findings. Ver Beek says most qualitative studies conclude STM leads to significant life change in participants, causing an intriguing discrepancy. He explains, “There are at least two possible explanations: (1) the participants may be significantly changed but the tests used may not be effective in measuring the change, or (2) the self-perception of the change was much greater than the actual changes in their lives” (Ver Beek, 2006, p. 489). In order to evaluate the STM experience (not its efficacy, but its popularity despite its inefficacy), I must conduct research within a context which assumes positive change exists. Therefore, I use a qualitative methodology.

### **3.4 Data Collection through Focus Groups**

Once I scheduled focus groups and confirmed commitments, four people ended up not participating (for four different reasons related to scheduling conflicts). As previously mentioned, 21 people participated in this research study in the form of four different focus groups, two in Central Kentucky and two in northeastern Ohio. I completed the focus groups in October of 2016. All participants agreed to the terms and conditions, were aware of the use of an audio recording device, and wore alphabetical and confidential nametags, which have since been randomly regenerated to ensure absolute confidentiality. Each focus group consisted of two primary parts: a photography analysis and an open discussion. In order to prepare the photography analysis, I received

over one hundred photos from the fundraising board's Director of Marketing and Communications. With the assistance of an expert panel, I selected eight of these photographs, categorizing them by the four levels of visual framing and their respective emphasis on either people or place. I printed the eight photos, coded them, and prepared a series of discussion questions, involving a prompt for the photography analysis. For the complete prompt and corresponding questions, see Part One of Appendix C.

The eight photographs, labeled one through eight, reflect various subject matters in ways which correspond to the levels of visual framing. Common observations from participants include: people, professions, emotions, faces, expressions, family, need, intimacy, and colors, among others. These observations invoked memories, emotions, assumptions, and creative storytelling which made the space conducive to hearty discussion. I gave people a tool, a platform, and a task. By using photography as my tool, I can dig a little deeper into their stories, their memories, their feelings, their motivations, and their assumptions. I could have asked about and analyzed these things more directly, but by emphasizing and speaking within the context of photography, I can approach from a different perspective. Additional analysis on the photography activity is in Appendix D, as the data are not central to this study, but perhaps helpful to practitioners or other researchers.

The second and central portion of the focus group consisted of a more open discussion. Participants engaged in the questions at different lengths and were encouraged to incorporate their own stories and experiences in the discussion, occasionally making references to the photography activity. I asked participants a series of questions in three parts: pre-trip, mid-trip, and post-trip experiences. Refer to Part Two

of Appendix C for the complete questions. In order to properly gather data, I not only audio recorded the four discussions; I took notes and worked closely with a co-facilitator. This co-facilitator helped execute the photography activity, managed the audio recording device, and took ample notes throughout the focus groups. I reached a point of saturation during the fourth focus group, when old ideas were simply presented in different ways (different because of the individual's experiences, not for any other reason).

After the focus groups, I composed separate transcriptions of the four audio recordings. This process provided continual analysis of the data, allowing me to draw themes and parallels throughout the four focus group discussions. Upon completion of the transcriptions, my faculty adviser and co-facilitator verified the legitimacy of the transcriptions by reviewing the audio files and transcriptions themselves. In order to produce the most possibly accurate transcriptions, I used a computer program which slowed down the audio recordings. Once I began my analysis, I identified themes which evolved into a coding process. I identified trends, organized the data by themes, and developed an extensive outline before composing the final product.

### **3.5 The Island Nation of Haiti**

Haiti occupies the western one-third of a Caribbean island it shares with the Dominican Republic. The nation of over ten million people is known for its rich colonial history. Its people speak Haitian Creole (a derivative of French and various African dialects) and are predominantly Catholic and of African descent. At its peak, the lucrative sugar plantations of Saint-Domingue—Haiti's colonial name—made it one of the wealthiest colonies in the world (Dubois, 2012).



Haiti declared its independence in 1804 after the largest—and only successful—slave revolt in world history. For more than two centuries, the Haitian people have faced serious challenges, including unregulated corruption and seemingly unending chaos. These include but are not limited to the recent Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and other past hurricanes; the earthquake in 2010, which killed some 300,000 people; failing development aid, such as the United Nations, USAID, the Clinton Foundation, and the Red Cross; prevalent health crises, such as the Zika virus, tuberculosis, cholera, the chikungunya virus, HIV/AIDS; and coups-d'état, failed elections, and authoritarian regimes (Dubois, 2012; Farmer, 2011; J. Katz, 2013). And recently, after almost two years of corrupted presidential elections, the country inaugurated Jovenel Moïse as its president on February 7, 2017.

Dubois (2012) writes, “When Haiti appears at all in the media, it registers largely as a place of disaster, poverty, and suffering, populated by desperate people trying to escape” (p. 3). As a result, most people, especially Americans, have a vastly negative perception of Haiti. Many visitors have “breezed through Haiti and then penned authoritative-sounding condemnations of the entire country” (p. 2). Dubois (2012) tells the story of one Haitian student, studying in Paris in 1883, who wrote a 600-page essay response to a negative portrayal of Haiti. He “found himself having to remind his readers that Haitians were real people, living in a real society. They had their problems, to be sure, but they could not be reduced to mere caricatures, presented with no sense of context or history” (p. 2). A country once visited by international travelers galore, now Haiti primarily receives disaster-relief aid, systematic aid, and tens of thousands of

international volunteers each year. The attention increased after the earthquake in 2010, and Haiti has not changed for the better.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 The Uses of Photography

Throughout both the photography activity and the open discussion, study participants discussed the many ways they use photography before, during and after their short-term missions trips. While the focus group began with the photography activity, it is helpful to first understand how exactly participants use photography. Once different uses become clear, it is easier to understand the different perspectives provided by the study participants.

**4.1.1 Pre-Trip Usage.** Photography influences people long before they engage in STM. One study participant said, “Through [my spouse], I vicariously experienced it, but not in person. So I didn’t have a blank slate, you know what I mean?” The truth is no one travels on an STM with a ‘blank slate.’ Photography helps produce the STM narrative; therefore, the STM experience might begin the moment a participant sees a photograph from a developing country or learns about STM. It was imperative to focus the start of the conversation on these early constructions. The photographs people see and stories they hear shape their assumptions, which are an integral part of the STM experience. The same study participant said, “The media portrays Haiti in only its extremes....there’s also a lot of negativity seen because why else would someone say you’re crazy to go to Haiti?” Several study participants spoke of instances when people criticized them for traveling to Haiti on an STM trip. US culture portrays Haiti in very precise ways, and those representations undoubtedly influence people’s expectations about Haiti, perhaps, years before they ever engage in STM.

The media portrays Haiti under extreme circumstances: Hurricane Matthew in 2016, the earthquake in 2010, failing development, recent health crises, and past government crises. These stories and their subsequent photographs shape people's assumptions about Haiti, creating an image of Haiti in the minds of US Christians long before they travel there. Once a person decides to participate in an STM trip, this exposure to Haiti increases, and photographs become even more influential in shaping their expectations. Study participant #1 said as soon as she knew she was going to Haiti, news about, photographs of, and stories about the country caught her attention everywhere. No. 8 said she looked at photographs to help her establish a "frame of reference." This term applies to the forces which construct certain assumptions and expectations. She relied on photography to help her construct her own understanding of the STM experience before she traveled to Haiti. This understanding was not based on reality, but rather perception, driven by the photographs she happened to look at.

Participants likely see photographs on their own, but many practitioners as well show their trip participants photographs to build this frame of reference. One study participant said, "We always show a video before we go so people get to see something, right?" Another participant said it is important for practitioners to show these photographs because it demonstrates to "people who have never been to Haiti that there is hope; there is happiness; you can help make a difference." This use of photography supposes a few assumptions: people who have never gone do not see hope; if a person goes, they will see hope; and when they go, they will make a difference. Another study participant shared about her own children's reaction to her photographs of Haiti. She said, "In our training they saw some pictures [and] they were terrified. They were

absolutely terrified—did not want to go. The whole first day and a half they were both so anxious and so upset that we had forced them to do this....The photos kind of created this anxiety for them.” Even with meaningful intentions, the power of photography lies in its capacity to influence people’s assumptions and expectations—even different assumptions and expectations—about a trip.

The frame of reference photography establishes, in this case, the STM narrative, helps people understand their experiences and communicate them to others. The STM narrative is the very force which both provides understanding and conveys the meaning of the STM experience. This narrative determines the very experiences participants will have and stories they will tell, ultimately leading to a reproduction of the STM narrative. Another trip leader said, “I try to control it because I have a certain purpose.” She later used the phrases “I want” or “I don’t want” five times to explain how she uses photographs before a trip. Her multiple uses of these phrases indicate her desire and ability to control pre-trip expectations. By using photographs before a trip, people set the STM narrative in motion, building assumptions, establishing expectations, and, ultimately, predetermining the outcomes of their own experiences before they even travel.

**4.1.2 Mid-Trip Usage.** While in-country, participants use photography in many ways and for several reasons. All 21 study participants have taken photographs while serving in Haiti. This was not a requirement for the study, but an important representation of how important photography is to the STM experience. Perhaps the most obvious reason for the widespread use of photography is its accessibility. Some participants expressed traveling with actual cameras, but most did so only with camera phones.

Additionally, several participants said they took photographs simply because other people were taking photographs. Some participants had traveled with designated team photographers, but they still took their own photographs because they wanted to. According to the study participants in one focus group, if someone took a photograph of something, everyone took a photograph of the same thing.

Several participants shared appreciation for photography as a tool which goes “beyond the language barrier,” according to #1. And #9 said, “You can communicate with your eyes and your face, and you can’t communicate with language.” While in Haiti, study participants used photography to interact with hosts, especially children, but they recognized understandings about when to and not to take photographs. Sometimes, they argued, taking photographs is inappropriate, dangerous, demeaning, and discourteous. No. 15 said it was important to be “cognizant of my surroundings and just think about the people that are around me and how it would affect them.” No. 14 said, “I didn’t want them to feel like a zoo animal.” Another, #7, empathized, “I wouldn’t want that when I was here [sic].” And #19 suggested, “Don’t just take pictures; ask permission,” a solution most study participants agreed was important. Several acknowledged the minimal communication skills necessary to point to a camera phone and say, “Foto?” One study participant who has led several trips explains these expectations to her teams often, and she always receives pushback. People feel patronized, she said, but the rules exist because people have broken them.

Some people gave very specific examples of incidents of inappropriate picture-taking. No. 11 told a story about when she took a photograph of a woman selling herbs in

the Ouanaminthe market. She took the photograph because she was excited to see someone selling the herbs. She added,

I recognized most of the herbs because I grow them and I was looking at them, and unfortunately, I had no money with me to buy any or I would have. And I was trying to explain that to her, that I was just excited to see that. And so I ended up taking a picture. But then afterwards, I started thinking, “I didn’t buy anything, she looks poor; it looks like a poor lady sitting there on a dirt road selling things.” And it just kind of broke my heart, and I just thought, “I wish I wouldn’t have taken that.” It felt like I took something from her that I didn’t deserve to, and if I could’ve communicated with her, it would have been different. I could have shared why I was excited about seeing there. But I couldn’t. So it felt awkward. I mean, it still, I can very vividly remember the weird feelings that it caused in me.

If she had money, she would not have been able to do anything with the herbs. If she could have communicated with the woman, the situation may have still been awkward.

But in the end, this participant felt uncomfortable, like she had exploited this woman.

Another participant told a story of an STM trip in Uganda. She concluded the similarly uncomfortable situation with “We are invading in on their space. Who do we think we are that we can just go do this and this and this?” These are questions STM participants and practitioners should ask themselves about more issues than just photography.

While I asked each focus group about their own rules and expectations, I did not ask them when they *could* take photographs, something participants brought up on their own in every discussion. Multiple times, study participants said trip leaders encouraged them to take photographs of the scenery and natural beauty of the country. Additionally, they always felt comfortable taking photographs of fellow participants and Haitians they built relationships with. When asked how many photographs she took on her first STM trip, #7 estimated roughly 30 in total. However, throughout the discussion, she described all the photographs she took, and a better estimation would put her number of photographs well above 100. The contagiousness of and social pressures behind

photograph-taking merit their own investigations. But perhaps there are numerous psychological, emotional, and social explanations for how easily participants influence each other. It begs the question, though, how else do STM participants influence one another?

**4.1.3 Post-Trip Usage.** Historically, people used travel photography in very few ways. Perhaps the most common was simply for personal use in the form of photo albums or framed pictures. Study participants, however, expressed a variety of post-trip uses for STM photography, including marketing, following up with supporters, future fundraising initiatives, personal décor, social media, and storytelling. Study participants were passionate about how to use STM photographs and what were the relevant limitations in doing so. One study participant is also the director of marketing for this school's fundraising board in northeastern Ohio. She asks people to give her every photograph "because I never know what I might need," adding, "You can talk to them all you want," but photography helps "people to be interested in [the organization]." Likewise, several participants rely on financial support from people in the US for their trips. No. 15 said she sent her supporters photographs from her trip, so "they were able to see what I was doing and where I was actually at and what the money went towards. And I know that even my parents showed a couple at their church back at home, and it was really powerful in that way just so other people could see what—other people could see what they helped me be able to do." No. 4 said, "I used a picture from my first trip in the GoFundMe for my second trip," a suggestion which other study participants supported.

Most expressed a tendency to use STM photographs for strictly personal use. Some created photo albums or books; several printed and framed them in their homes;



some gave them as gifts or used them as stationery; and most used them as personal backgrounds, screensavers, or wallpapers on technological devices. No. 11 created a family photo book because “I wanted to chronicle our experience as a family and my kids’ first foreign mission trip.” No. 1 said she looks at the photographs of her Haitian friends often “because I miss them, and I want to see them and be reminded of them.” No. 7 said the photographs are meaningful because they “are really special to me and really capture the trip.” Multiple participants expressed this desire to use photographs for personal use, but struggle to overcome busyness, laziness, and forgetfulness, keeping them from actually doing anything with the photographs. One study participant printed a few photographs out for this focus group discussion, saying it was the first time she had done so since her trip 15 months before.

Several of these uses overlap, but perhaps the most popular one in the twenty-first century is social media. Most of the study participants have social media accounts and have posted photographs on their profiles over the years. Several of them expressed strict expectations for when, how, and why they do so. Several use Facebook, including #4 who said posting photographs on Facebook helped her establish contact with a Haitian student with whom she wished to communicate. Many use Facebook to upload large albums, but Instagram allows them to be more artistic. Two participants agreed their favorite photograph from one trip was a photograph of a four-year-old Haitian boy on Snapchat with the ‘puppy filter.’ The two focus groups which use social media the most to promote their STM experiences undeniably consisted of the youngest study participants. This characteristic reflects the vast majority of Snapchat and Instagram users who are under 35 years of age (Jang et al., 2015).

The most frequent and perhaps most overlapping of the uses of STM photography is storytelling. Every study participant acknowledged using photographs to tell stories of their experiences in Haiti. Whether it was in formal capacities, like #13 speaking to supporting congregations, or in informal ones, storytelling through photographs is a common way to share about STM experiences. No. 1 said she shows photographs when talking about Haiti “just so [listeners] can have a good visual.” No. 14 said, “I used them to tell the story to family because words just don’t explain it.” Apparently, words do not fully explain the STM experience, and photographs can help. At the same time, participants recognized the limitations of photography. Simply put, both words and photographs are insufficient when used alone. Several participants acknowledged an importance of being selective with the photographs they share. No. 16 and #4 said non-Christians have criticized them for the photographs they have used on social media. And #12 told stories of Haitians disapproving of particular photographs. Some study participants stressed the importance of a photographer’s intent. While they considered photography an expressive art form open to interpretation, they argued, people should be mindful of potential interpretations and subsequent risks. The frequency of negative reactions suggests a responsibility of participants to be careful. Potentially harmful perceptions motivate some people to try to control and protect an image of STM and Haiti.

**4.1.4 Return Trip Usage.** The focus group discussions did not formally extend into return trip experiences; however, 12 of the 21 study participants have participated in multiple STM trips. Several of them indicated shifts in their photography usage from trip to trip. No. 13 said she paid too much attention to details on her first trip; #1 was not

allowed to take photographs on her first trip (a youth trip); and #4 felt all her photographs from her first trip were simply ‘wrong,’ a sentiment other participants agreed was quite possible. Each of these participants took more photographs of people, both American and Haitian, on their subsequent trips. No. 10 said, “Early on it was to take pictures so that I could show what I did, so taking pictures of the people and the places where we went and the different little towns, and that kind of thing, and truthfully, now I take very few.” He added, “I don’t need to take pictures anymore,” a mutual feeling among the most seasoned travelers in the groups. One can understand the power of photography by how far it reaches throughout the STM experience. Long before a person even goes, photographs form assumptions and expectations. During, photography elicits particular behaviors, almost giving a purpose to STM. Long after, photography recreates memories and invokes emotions. This process rewrites and retells the travel narrative.

## **4.2 Analysis of the Photography Activity**

After study participants ranked their STM photographs, they analyzed them and their own decision-making processes. I categorized their responses three ways to the question, *what matters in STM photography?* According to their responses, purpose, intimacy, and context matter. In just four focus groups, the following key words and phrases were used collectively over 100 times.

**4.2.1 Purpose.** This activity’s prompt framed the photographs as marketing material. The findings mostly, but not exclusively, apply to STM trip recruitment. Perhaps most important: prospective participants should look at a photograph and perceive usefulness. If practitioners intend for photographs to reflect their STM experiences well, the photographs should be relevant to the prospective participants’

skills, interests, and experiences. People look at photographs and quickly—almost subconsciously—gauge how they could contribute to the depicted project or thrive in the physical space. No. 4 said, “I tried to picture myself,” and #15 ranked her photographs based on “where I could go and make the most difference.” One photograph deterred #17 because of the “quantity of kids.” It overwhelmed him; therefore, he did not feel like he would be useful there. No. 20 said,

Well, first what my interest and what I enjoy doing. And then the personal, the one-on-one contact with people because they went from, you know, a single person to very broad in general where I can't see where I would fit in in the mass of people....What do you do there? Sit in the back and watch? Where here you have interaction and a closeness. Contact with people. That's what moves me is the being with people.

Several participants propagated the ideas of Rodríguez and Dimitrova (2011) without knowing the research or its relevance to this study. Each photograph emphasized either people or place across four different levels of visual framing. Many people noticed this transition and stressed the importance of proximity. When asked how she arranged her photographs, #11 said, “Whether it made me comfortable or uncomfortable. Crowds make me uncomfortable; smiles make me feel more welcome.” People feel useful when they feel comfortable.

Photographs must also imply usefulness by demonstrating an apparent need. No. 21 asked about one of the photographs, “Where can I be used? Where can I be useful to this community? Because it looks like they're thriving; they're happy. And I just don't see where I could help.” No. 2 described his highest-ranked photograph as representing “something that's outside the limits of the school, something that represents a need, a great, great need that needs to be met.” While people prefer depictions of need, they are turned off by the opposite. Only three people ranked one particular photograph in their

top three spots. One of them, #15, said this photograph of a hard-at-work baker reminded her Haiti needs jobs. Interestingly enough, nearly everyone else ranked the same photograph very low, citing its depiction of an employed Haitian implied there was no need for them. While describing another photograph, someone said it was “deceiving” because it looked like the people had more than they really do. Wehbi and Taylor (2013) wrote, “The rural setting of the image can be said to connote underdevelopment, thereby further lending justification to the need for Northern intervention” (p. 534). In other words, if photographs reflect the right amount of need, people respond favorably. No. 21 said about her highest-ranked photograph, “It just shows the dire need to me. I look at that and I just see the despair and loneliness and hunger and just negative, negative, negative and just, you know, ‘I have no future. This is my future.’” She is the only study participant to rank this particular photograph first. One other person ranked it as their second favorite, but only three ranked it in their bottom three positions. Most people considered it too sad, but not enough to draw them in or push them away from the trip.

Each of these participants has been before, and so looking at the photographs often invoked specific memories and emotions. Many felt they would rank them differently if they had never been to Haiti. The capacity to make a connection is essential to photography. For participants who have been, they recognize the physical spaces and sometimes even the people, building a powerful connection. Participants not only recalled specific memories when looking at the photographs, they drew parallels from others’ discussion points. They established a real camaraderie despite and because of their different experiences. The more familiar places and spaces received the highest average rankings throughout the four focus groups. Only two study participants

recognized the exact time when any of the photographs were taken. Collectively, those two have partnered with the organization and traveled to Haiti longer than almost any of the other participants. No. 18 said of one photograph, it “just brings back to me the early days” of the ministry. This ability to draw parallels and convey meaning often resulted in higher rankings for photographs. No. 16 selected her favorite photograph because she immediately admired the joyfulness depicted in it, stating, “If you’ve been, that’s what stands out to you.”

**4.2.2 Intimacy.** While people want to connect to a picture, they especially do so in a relational manner. Purpose gives meaning, but intimacy materializes it. Any photograph that demonstrates emotion improves the likeliness of a personal connection. If people look and perceive emotion (whatever the emotion), they connect with it; it invokes a reaction. According to the study participants, negative emotions push people to give and to share, but positive emotions get people involved. The most popular positive emotion (mentioned nearly 50 times) is “joy.” Several others used words like “happiness,” “pride,” and “hope.” These words were often used interchangeably, but there was an overall preference for “joy.” In the past, photographs of desperation and sorrow motivated people toward engagement. People often felt guilty if they did not participate. Now, people are more likely to engage when they perceive positivity. No. 14 said, “One of my favorite pictures was when the kids took our phones and they were seeing themselves, and that was just joy.” No. 6 said with “joyful pictures...you get more of the actual experience, rather than people being like, ‘Oh, we need your money,’ the sad ones. So you have a new perspective with personal picture.” No. 5 said, “You see poverty, but there’s joy in this little guy’s eyes, and it’s like, ‘I want to see this. I want to

be able to help someone like this.’’ This statement emphasizes the importance of perceived usefulness, need, and joy.

Anytime people see people, they connect. They establish connection based on personal experiences or desires to build personal relationships. Whether it is from past experiences, loneliness, or personal calling, people often long to build relationships on STM trips. Participants mentioned the importance of relationship-building over 20 times throughout the four focus groups. One way to portray relationship-building is to show actual relationships. Groups of people (preferably, joyful-looking ones) and people physically embracing one another suggest this place is somewhere viewers can build relationships, too—especially if there is an American in the picture. No. 19 described one of the photographs, “Here’s a mother taking her kids in their beautiful uniforms to school, and I want to get to know these people.” Some people felt the uniforms suggested a lack of need, but all responded favorably to the depiction of a family. When asked how he ranked his photographs, #10 stated, “People. People over things and places.” Another person said, “If you see a child’s face, it’s easier to put yourself in that picture because it’s like they’re looking at you.” Children, women, and elderly people are popular subjects to depict because of associated connotations.

Wehbi and Taylor (2013) write, “[An] image of [a] child connotes the important themes of rescuing, deservedness of aid, and underdevelopment” (p. 533). We associate a child with need because we consider them innocent and helpless. These connotations derive from a common belief: “children cannot and should not be held accountable for the conditions they find themselves in” (p. 533). Likewise, when we see people in need, we rarely know their names. This namelessness objectifies them and “serves Western

audiences' appetite for and curiosity to see faraway lands from a safe distance" (p. 533). Several people acknowledged their preference for working with children because it makes them more comfortable. But perhaps, they are more comfortable because they perceive children as more deserving of help—and urgently so—than adults.

Not surprisingly, people also prefer to see faces and to make eye contact with people in photographs. A person laughing, while looking off to the side of the photograph is effective. But a person laughing, while looking, seemingly into the eyes of the viewer (which in actuality is just a camera lens) invokes a far more successful response from the viewer. Archer, Iritani, Kimes, and Barrios (1983) developed a measurement for how much of a face is shown in a photograph. "Their faces aren't visible to me, and I can't see their excitement or their joy," #13 said to explain her low-ranking photographs. She struggles to project joy onto these people if she cannot see their faces. No. 10 said, "I have this as my last because I couldn't see their faces. Actually, my bottom three you couldn't see their faces." To be certain, while people matter, it does not mean place does not, as Keese posits. His work on the importance of place is imperative in developing effective marketing strategies because place is not merely physical, but a space of connotations and associations. Local people, dirt floors, natural beauty, pre-industrial transportation, foreign foods, and foreign-looking attire all establish meaning to places. Place not only can include people; it often times gives them greater meaning.

**4.2.3 Context.** In a world of "competitive photography" people rely on gut reactions and instantaneous gratification (Tifentale & Manovich, forthcoming). Context dramatically influences the likeability of photography, and it did so for this photography activity. For many of the young participants, photo quality was of the utmost importance.



If they could tell a picture was taken on an iPhone or was even slightly pixelated, they ranked it low in their analysis. They were dismissive of a couple photographs solely based on quality. Similarly, on several occasions, participants suggested that aesthetic appeal, beyond quality, mattered, too. It was, however, difficult to articulate this appeal. It includes the subject material, the color schemes, the applied filters, and the tools used to take the photograph. Another influential factor is the candidness of the shot. Several study participants suggested a preference for photographs that were not staged or posed—or if they were, it was tasteful and unnoticeable. Candid photos reminded viewers of memories and emotions more quickly than staged ones.

As previously mentioned, I framed the activity in the context of marketing an STM trip. Study participants agreed all the photographs were good, but because of the prompt, different elements caught their attention differently. Selecting photographs of comparable quality proved photo quality alone does not influence people's perceptions. Simply choosing "good" photographs to post on a website or social media site does not invoke meaningful responses. Participants select photographs which reflect purpose, offer intimacy, and convey specific meanings based on context. If they intend for a photograph to recruit participants, it must clearly indicate its project, the need, and its potential for relationship-building. If I asked study participants to rank photographs by favorability or strongest emotional response, for example, the results would be different. This is not to say emotions are irrelevant. As previously mentioned, in this particular context, it was very specific emotions which elicited certain reactions.

On a side note, several study participants expressed apathy toward the photographs they ranked in the middle. Even though they considered all the photographs

“good,” they were able to clearly designate a couple as “most appealing” and a couple as “least appealing.” On average, they expressed indifference towards photographs ranked in the third to sixth positions. This might indicate the importance of avoiding simply ‘good’ or ‘average’ photographs and marketing strategies which do not invoke strong reactions. A photograph which turns someone away because it conveys a clear meaning is perhaps more valuable than vague, unclear photographs which inspire little more than confusion and apathy.

### **4.3 Identifying the Limitations of Photography**

Study participants criticized photography for its limitations. They expressed a desire to continue using photography, but they remained critical of its incapacity to portray what they consider the ‘real Haiti.’ No. 9 said, “In the photo, you’re not there....it’s only catching part of the picture....so we can’t get the whole picture, even though a picture says more than a thousand words, even though pictures speak a lot, you don’t know the rest of the story.” He later added, “Photos can really steer your expectations incorrectly.” Despite their loyal usage of photography, study participants strongly criticized photography’s limitations. While looking at a photograph, #18 argued, “There’s so much in that picture....We know a little bit maybe what’s behind the picture....Because we saw the whole story.” Even when people ‘see the story,’ it elicits different reactions from different people. No. 21 said, “Every picture has a story behind it, but it may not be your story or her story.” Different perceptions of photographs demonstrate the importance of using photography well when representing STM.

Specifically, study participants suggested photographs do not adequately capture the relationships, people, and conversations of the STM experience. They felt

photographs fail to portray the significance of relationship-building. No. 6 said, “They just see the picture and they don’t see what we did or why our hearts are there or something like that.” Others said photographs do not capture the scenery or natural beauty of Haiti. Also, several participants expressed a very serious love for the natural beauty of Haiti. No. 4 said “one of my absolute favorite things about that place are [sic] the stars at night.” And another compared STM photographs to those of the Grand Canyon, arguing you have to go to fully see and appreciate it. Many study participants considered their visits to Fort Liberté, a 400-year old French military fort on a harbor in the northeastern part of the country, one of the highlights of their trips. Some even considered it the most beautiful place they had ever been. For some reason, this landmark invoked such meaning to these participants. Interestingly enough, no one mentioned ‘natural beauty’ or the ‘scenery’ as a reason for ranking a photograph high or low in the activity. It is possible (1) the photographs did not try to capture the natural beauty; (2) people do not associate natural beauty with Haiti; or (3) the photographs really do fail to capture the natural beauty.

Obviously, a photograph does not capture senses other than sight, but this limitation bothered some study participants. They felt the heat, the smells, the sounds, and the feelings of an STM trip in Haiti were integral to the STM experience, and photography cannot capture those. Several suggested photographs fail to represent the variety or vastness of Haitian life. Study participants consider Haiti somewhat a place of diversity in the lives and experiences of its people. The photography activity satisfied some study participants in representing the variety of Haiti, but they still regarded it as limiting. No. 2 said, a variety of photographs and material “is an honest appraisal of what

Haiti is.” Unfortunately, when someone attempts to portray a variety of photographs, they still select different ones for different reasons, inevitably leaving some out. There remains an element of control and power in shaping the discourse. Finally, study participants said photography does not sufficiently capture the respect and pride of Haiti. No. 4 said participating in an STM trip to Haiti gave her tremendous respect for the Haitian people, especially their joy. She said she appreciated “how they go about their life and how they handle their situation.” Another person said, “They’re so deserving. I want all the kids to come and be able to have an education in a college.” Unfortunately, these feelings are as condescending as the feelings they are trying to control. They wish to portray Haiti sufficiently, but yet their reasons for doing so are misguided and, most important, incomplete.

One study participant challenged the group to consider participating in an STM trip where photography was not allowed. He positioned his hypothetical situation as a question of obligation: are STM participants obligated to take photographs for any of the reasons outlined in this paper? The responses varied. No. 5 said it would force her to journal and reflect more, and #12 stated repeatedly, “It would kill me.” This question proves the use of photography is less a hobby and more an integral part in the STM experience. It creates memories, accompanies stories, and perpetuates ideas about the STM experience and, in this case, Haiti. But at the same time, it does indicate some potential consequences of an STM team simply agreeing to not take photographs while they travel.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### 5.1 The Image of Short-Term Missions

Morgan and Pritchard (1998) define 'image' as "the organized representation of an object, a person, or a place in an individual's cognitive system and embraces both a definition of that object, person, or place and a recognition of their attributes" (p. 30). Hall (1997) identifies 'image' as a series of "systems of representation that produce meaning through the display of objects" (p. 153). Stories, photographs, experiences, and assumptions shape a person's image of anything. A person's, place's, or object's image depends upon the mental constructs of every person they encounter; it depends upon narrative. Therefore, the challenge of image is the variation of interpretation, the inevitable (and theoretically uncontrollable) discrepancies from person to person. In practice, narrative dictates image, and one can control interpretation.

Images within tourism are "subjective, and temporarily and culturally-specific," something recognized in many studies across many disciplines (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998, p. 64). Those involved in representing tourism do so within existing power structures. Even with the best of intentions, photographs propagate a narrative which ultimately harms the developing world. This representation is evident in the performance of local communities around the world. Locals know to perform well and maintain strong relationships or risk losing support in the form of aid (Bruner, 2005). If US evangelical Christians insist on engaging in STM, it might be the best opportunity for a local community to receive capital or develop. Morgan and Pritchard (1998) posit the construction of tourism imagery is deliberate and ultimately misrepresents communities and initiatives in "much more complex" and "multi-dimensional" ways (p. 242). For

example, the image of tourism perpetuates colonial ideas, prolonging ideas of white, male, and Western dominance in the modern world.

There also exists a unique relationship between travelers and their own experiences, and it emerges in the struggles to convey their experiences to others. “I make a distinction between the trip as lived: as it actually happened, the reality; the trip as experienced: consisting of the images, feelings, desires, thoughts, and meanings that emerge in individual consciousness; and the trip as told: usually a story, but possibly a series of photographs or other forms of expression” (Bruner, 2005, p. 19). Photography is an integral part of the tourism experience. STM participants rely on photography to remember their experience. But perhaps it exists for other reasons too. Undoubtedly, its usage perpetuates their position as curators, controllers of the image or production of host communities (Bruner, 2005).

## **5.2 Curating the Image of Haiti**

Out of criticisms of both the usage and limitations of photography comes an important conversation about power. STM participants reflect a strong desire to curate what they consider a more authentic image of Haiti. For many, this desire is so strong, it inhibits them from realizing their own arrogance. STM participants should consider the risks in assuming such a responsibility—risks of reductionism and perpetuating colonial ideologies, to name a few. Is it STM participants’ responsibility to curate the image of the ‘real Haiti’? And whose authority is it to define the ‘real Haiti’? In reality, when STM participants talk about the ‘real Haiti,’ they are referring to their Western perspective of Haiti which they feel more Americans need to see.

One study participant is a host-parent to a graduate from the school at the center of this research study. She loved a particular photograph she had taken on an STM trip to Ouanaminthe, but he felt it portrayed Haiti too negatively. So she reconsidered how she portrayed Haiti to people in the US. At one point, his college in the US requested photographs of his home, and she sent several options. Later, they asked for different photographs which “showed him more deprived.” An essential part of the STM experience is realizing one’s power of curation. Several study participants have committed to using their personal skills to improve the image of Haiti. No. 13 said, “If you’re posting the picture, you want to give your perspective.” And #1 added, “It’s important to get across why you chose that picture so that no wrong perceptions are being made about that picture for some reason.” This conversation demonstrates the heightened responsibility of STM participants to represent Haiti well and control its reception.

One participant stressed the value of showing photographs to financial supporters and said it shows them what their money did. But actually, the majority of STM trip costs go to transportation, accommodations, utilities, and food. Typically, they contribute less to projects and more to people’s travel. Using photography in this manner illustrates its power in shaping people’s perceptions of the STM experience. Simply seeing the right photograph ensures worthiness of financial support and the efficacy of a project. It affirms to donors their money contributed to a good cause. STM photography can control people’s understanding of the STM experience—their expectations, their assumptions—reproducing the STM narrative.

One participant expressed humor about Haitians’ usage of social media. She and others laughed about the style of photography, graphic art, and facial expressions, for

example, of several young Haitians they knew in Ouanaminthe. When asked why it was so significant, she said it is because they are “expressing themselves, whereas we’re trying to show Haiti for them. They’re truly showing Haiti.” This discovery disputes the narrative-driven responsibility of the participant-curator. Perhaps, no matter how strategic one is, no American can truly represent Haiti to the rest of the world. Is it possible only Haitians can understand and show the ‘real Haiti’? On Donna Haraway’s *Primate Visions* (1989), Harcourt and Nelson (2015) write, “Whose voices are silent or silenced?...The elephant in the room is not who has the ‘agency’ to speak but who has the authority to speak—global South, global North, young, old, woman, man, white, black?” (p. 7).

### **5.3 Reductionism and Limited Understanding**

Study participants demonstrated limited understandings of fairly critical issues. These topics include, but are not limited to joy, development, religion, and poverty. First, as previously demonstrated, the perception and projection of joy is an integral part of the STM experience. When asked about ranking photographs, #6 said, “I guess I chose this one just because he looks like the happiest, I guess, you want to go on these trips to bring joy to these people and to see that joy.” In another focus group, someone said one of the highlights of his trip was attending church. He said the Haitian congregants were “singing just like nothing was wrong,” adding, if people in the US were facing the same poverty (which, of course, many are), “we’d be devastated. I don’t know if people’d be going to church.” Study participants applied the word ‘joy’ to describe the Haitian people more than any other word. But the evidence of this perceived joy lies in the smiles, worship, and warmth of the Haitian people *in relation to* their poverty.



Ver Beek writes, “North American guests should not mistake good hospitality, something we too would offer guests even when we were suffering, with happiness. Host organizations may have failed to help North Americans see the reality of [foreign] life—both its joys and pains” (Ver Beek, 2006, p. 491). Haitian life is complicated, diverse, and ever-changing. Too often, STM participants mistake pleasantries as joy. “We must be cautious about too quickly interpreting the meaning behind nonverbal behaviors. Smiles and laughter in another culture may in fact be signs of joy, but they may just as likely be responses to an awkward situation in which words cannot be used due to a language barrier” (Livermore, 2013, p. 71). Haitians may be polite, hospitable, and charismatic. While some may truly be joyful—as are some Americans—they are undoubtedly poor. Their lives are hard. And many combat the reality of these hardships on a daily basis. No. 12 captures this depth of emotion when she says, “Every year I went there I visited [a particular student’s] mom, and she lost a daughter in the earthquake. And every time I go over there into her home, she brings [a photograph of her daughter] out and we just cry together.” When we explain the courtesy of Haitians as joy, we elevate their morality and strip them of their humanity. We inhibit them from having complex, interconnected thoughts and feelings—not to mention negative ones.

Second, study participants misunderstand the essence of basic development and humanitarian work, especially its historical context and political complexity. They demonstrated an insufficient and critical understanding of charity work, especially the Red Cross. While the Red Cross contributed to failed development initiatives in Haiti, the situation is far more complicated. Additionally, several people tiptoed around issues of human trafficking. One participant described it as “huge” in Ouanaminthe. Another said

taking a photograph of a *restavek* was one of the most exploitative things an STM participant could do. No. 12 responded in agreement, acknowledging she only learned human trafficking was a problem in Haiti from a recent book she read. Most participants are oblivious to such atrocities, and far fewer actually understand them. Other than personal experiences, study participants did not reflect much personal or scholarly research on important issues surrounding Haiti or its development. No. 3 is perhaps the only study participant to frame development in Haiti as a complex or multilinear way. She understood development as not a linear progression, but rather a convoluted mess of systemic and institutional progression and regression.

Third, study participants seemed misinformed about Christianity and other religions, including Roman Catholics, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses, in Haiti. Vodou is a syncretic religion practiced in Haiti, as well as other parts of the world. It combines elements of several religions, but is stereotypically feared and portrayed in a reductionist way. No. 4 said when she was younger, she heard "scary, disturbing stories" about Haiti, which shaped her understanding (and fear of) vodou. When she finally went to Haiti, she saw "the opposite of evil," or perhaps more literally, the absence of vodou. Clearly, she misunderstands vodou as a purely evil religion and feels confident she could identify it. Likewise, study participants in every focus group mentioned vodou as an explanation for why some people oppose photography. No. 8 said STM participants should avoid taking photographs of vodou temples, for example, because Haitian Christians do not want to propagate that particular image of Haiti. No. 19 said vodou practitioners avoid photographs in fear of the photographer taking part of their soul. And #2 said they believe photographers are putting a curse on them. These participants offered

their own explanations for why STM participants should not take photographs of vodou-related people and places. But knowledge and understanding did not shape these beliefs. Superstition and prejudice did.

Lastly, study participants demonstrated reductive understandings of and assumptions about poverty, inequality, and broader socioeconomic issues. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, something a different participant mentioned in each focus group. Only one person articulated more specific details about the economy of Haiti. Participants can regurgitate a fact and then believe they understand everything about poverty in Haiti. Now, this fact is important to know, but it is incomplete. It provides little context; it does not propel people to ask, *why* or *what should be done about it?* Most people likely cannot name the current president, tell you the year Haiti achieved its independence, or name an influential figure in Haitian history. But for people who want to portray Haiti in a strategic, responsible way, why is this fact so often repeated? Study participants shared other statements about Haiti's push to rebuild its tourism industry or its shockingly low tree supply, but they did not seem to have quite the familiarity.

In addition to not understanding Haiti's poverty, some study participants made vastly reductionist assumptions about Haiti's poverty. No. 13 said taking photographs of children "was probably the best memory I had from that trip. It was just unreal to make a difference in their lives because they may not have even seen themselves before." Another study participant said, "The kids don't have pictures of themselves." On several occasions people suggested Haitians had never seen photographs because of their poverty. This commentary is reflective of a larger issue: when STM participants do not

understand something, they reduce it to something they think they understand, like poverty. Another observation, several participants referred to Haiti as a place which 'needs the Lord.' They 'know' this because of its poverty. Research by Corbett and Fikkert (2009; 2014) argues material poverty is only one type of poverty, entirely separate from spiritual poverty. No. 7 described Haiti as a "place [which] really needs the Lord. And this place really needs help." Another participant said she loves a particular photograph because "it represents their lack of things, but at the same time, the joy that they have." There exists an interesting discrepancy between Haiti as a joyful place and as a place in desperate need of God. Surprisingly, both assumptions are rooted in misunderstandings of poverty.

The limited understanding of poverty also emerges in the rhetoric of STM participants. Not only is the phrase "needing the Lord" an example of reductive thought, so too are several other terms used in these focus groups. In the development discourse, terms like 'third world' and 'uncivilized' are considered problematic. The three-part world (First, Second, and Third) does not exist anymore, and its continued usage perpetuates issues of colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. Similarly, to describe a country or community as 'uncivilized' (or to describe one as 'civilized') connotes a presence of barbarism or primitiveness in the other one. Referring to Ouanaminthe as "much more civilized," not only portrays it as superior, but reduces surrounding communities to primitivity (Finney, 2014). Study participants also demonstrated discomfort with using the actual term 'poverty.' Several euphemisms replaced the words 'poverty' and 'poor,' including, 'circumstances' and 'need.' Some referred to a person's poverty as "their situation." And the only time people were described as poor was when

someone said, “They’re not all poor.” When we insist “they’re not all poor,” we reemphasize negative connotations of poverty. No. 1 asserted, “They have a lot,” later adding, “Now I have respect for them. I think very highly of the vast majority of the people about the way that they handle their circumstances, the way that they live them out.” At one point, someone stated, photographs “aren’t a true representation of how the people are feeling about certain situations,” everyone is “carrying on about life” and not “walking around moping.” But “circumstances” and “situations” are euphemisms for poverty.

Study participants replaced more accurate words about poverty with “desperate,” “unemployed,” “dangerous,” “hungry,” “crazy,” not “civilized,” “uneducated,” “dirty,” not “well-kept,” and “chaos.” Less overt, but equally dangerous assumptions seeped through statements like, “I didn’t know they’d be good at English. That really surprised me.” And, “There’s more of a pride of keeping things clean than there used to be.” As well as, “With seeing the family structure there they do have—it’s not just kids running around—that there’s actually moms there holding their hands.” And, “That cheers you up no matter how devastating everything is around you! When you see the bright colors, it makes you smile a little bit, like ‘Okay, it’s not as sad and depressing here!’” One person described an impoverished community by saying, “The kids [were] living in a dump and the whole bit! I mean, it was just amazing!” While these people probably had the best of intentions, discussing poverty in this manner is particularly problematic for the people of Haiti. Poverty becomes less a state of being or a statistic and more something to encounter. Poverty becomes a commodified form of difference. It becomes something to

consume, and STM participants interact with it as they would something cultural, religious, or relational. And they hunger for it.

#### **5.4 The Problem of Poverty Comparison**

One unique demonstration of the understanding of poverty was the incessant need to compare. On several occasions, study participants found it important to distinguish one place of poverty from another, typically based on their assumptions and experiences with each place. One participant who traveled to several different places in Haiti before Ouanaminthe suggests STM participants in Ouanaminthe do not really encounter Haiti's extreme poverty. An important moment in this research consisted of intense comparisons. The conversation began when one study participant said, "The poverty back then [in 1999] compared to now, it's like now Haiti has come to where the Dominican was when I started going to the Dominican. And now the Dominican, you've got it so good now! It's just remarkable the change in both countries. It's still very poor but where it was to where it is a big difference [sic]." This statement invoked passionate responses from several others. The conversation continued,

#10 – Ouanaminthe is nothing like Haiti.

#20 – What?!

#19 – Yeah, that's true.

#10 – Ouanaminthe is nothing like 98 percent of Haiti.

#20 – I don't know if I agree with that.

#10 – Even driving from Ouanaminthe to Cap-Haïtien. That area is almost 'DR-ish.' The majority of Haiti we never got to see. You can't believe how bad it is elsewhere. Ouanaminthe is more developed.

#20 – I've been to Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien, and—

#10 – Well, Port-au-Prince is a city—

#20 – Right, but you can't say it's like the other big cities like Cap or Port-au-Prince. Yeah, so you're talking about big city or the rural.

#10 – The area between Cap-Haïtien, the industrial development, and Ouanaminthe is—that's not third-world anymore at all. But the majority of Haiti still is.

#19 – I would say it’s still third world [laughter]. But it’s much more civilized than if you took square footage of land than the cities. I think that’s what you’re trying to say, if you’re saying the big cities, Port-de-Paix, Jacmel, Cap-Haïtien, Ouanaminthe, even Hinche is pretty developed. Those are pretty developed...even Gonaives is not as developed as Ouanaminthe. But they just keep being destroyed by landslides and hurricanes...from what I’ve heard from everyone where it just got hit is the absolute poorest part of Haiti and we up in the northeast have no idea what that looks like. And I just can’t even imagine.

#11 – When you see the pictures of what just happened to them—

#19 – Yeah, I know. So, just because you think being there, “How can anything be poorer than this?” And yet, I understand the southwest is the poorest part. I mean, even the Haitians say the poorest part is the southwest, but it’s the most undeveloped, too. There’s no major city over there.

As the facilitator, this conversation was incredibly uncomfortable. Originally, I thought the most concerning part about this conversation was the defensiveness of some people, particularly #20. I hardly noticed the made-up statistics and the vastly reductive understanding of what ‘Haiti is.’ But the more I reflected on it, I changed. It’s not so much that Haiti and the Dominican Republic are not alike (by whatever standards). The real problem lies in the essential belief that they *cannot* be alike. Something nice in Haiti is not ‘real Haiti.’ People label it “DR-ish.” By this logic, advancement, infrastructure, and stability are not Haitian. They’re Dominican. And this reasoning prohibits a great deal of Haitian development. Anywhere people see progress, like Labadee, Haiti, or specific nongovernmental organizations, they immediately connect them with their Western financiers. The particular school where these study participants volunteered is Haitian-built, Haitian-designed, and Haitian-operated. However, a significant portion of its income is from the US, and hundreds of volunteers dedicate weeks at a time to serve on its campus. At some point, an operation becomes no longer Haitian, but American, Canadian, or Dominican. People are reluctant to attribute progress to the Haitian people.

No. 10's statement, "You can't believe how bad it is elsewhere," is particularly problematic. Differentiating Ouanaminthe from the "rest of Haiti" propagates this notion Haiti cannot equal progress. But perhaps more troublesome lies in the words *you can't believe*. In these words, there exists an arrogance so condescending it disregards the experiences of everyone in the room. To elevate oneself and one's experiences to such a place of pretentiousness is only to invoke an unequal, fruitless power struggle. This statement is inherently dramatic, but it also depicts an element of showmanship, a desire to make a spectacle of Haiti's lack of progress. These words construct a world where Haitian progress is not only nonexistent; it is impossible. Participants justified development in Port-au-Prince by categorizing it as a city. No. 19 said the phrase, "Even the Haitians say," to invoke a certain authority. And they classified the poorer parts of Haiti as not "civilized." This word, like "the Third World" is slightly generational, but it continues in social discourse. A struggling government and failing systematic aid are not unique to barbarism. Complete social and economic equality from city to countryside is hardly a requirement for civilization. This conversation is the product of an incessant need to compare poverty. By debating the 'developed-ness' of Ouanaminthe, they repeat harmful assumptions about Haiti's incapacity to succeed. They simply brag about their encounters with difference (in a terribly reductive and shaming way). And they do so with an intent to inform others about difference.

As seen by the passionate conversation above, there exists a strong desire to defend STM. No. 10's criticism, if anything, registered as a criticism of STM at large. Simply posing a critique invoked fear and hostility which ultimately questions the importance and impact of the movement. After all, STM relies on perceived need to exist.



No. 4 said, “One of my friends who’s not very religious, she doesn’t really understand it... [She assumes people] brag about going on a mission trip. And she just feels like it’s more self-centered at that point.... [That] opened my eyes a little bit to how other people view it.” No. 16 agreed,

I’ve definitely heard [that] and it kind of makes me sad too, just people who are even kind of skeptical of short-term mission trips, ... I’ve heard [long-term missionaries] be really skeptical of the shorter ones. And it just makes me sad because I get where you’re coming from, and I think you do need to be, you know, just aware of what you’re posting and what you’re saying and it can come off as that sometimes, I guess, but also we all have our own experiences, and God places on our hearts for a reason, and it just sucks, I guess, to hear people kind of be that way about it.

The study participants directed their comments toward misinterpretations of STM on social media. Many study participants had heard stories of people criticizing STM efficacy, but few had encountered skepticism personally. In some ways, social media users who catch a quick glimpse of a photograph without any context are likely to misinterpret the meaning of the situation. At the same time, social media invites storytelling and bragging. The social media industry thrives on the practice of self-promotion. Users constantly post stories, photographs, and videos for self-centered reasons. Fallon (2014) writes, photographs often times “do not claim ‘this is how it looked’ but rather ‘how I wanted to it look’ [sic] or ‘how I felt it looked’” (p. 59). Non-Christians might interpret an STM photograph as an act of self-promotion. This assumption is both reasonable and accurate.

The desire to represent STM well is complicated. If quantitative data indicate STM leads to no lasting positive change, and the majority of qualitative research shows the same outcome, at some point, the reason to defend STM is not based on research. Ceaseless defenses of STM are less about efficacy and more about personal attachment.

Eventually, the experience becomes less about making a difference and more about experiencing something different.

Study participants repeatedly evaluated varying levels of poverty in their conversations. One study participant felt the urge to tell others Ouanaminthe is really better off than other parts of the country. Another said she had thought,

All of Haiti was the same. That there was devastation, and the pictures I had seen and stories I had heard, because I know my home church, they do a lot with a mission organization in a much more impoverished—well, I think it's really close to Port-au-Prince, and so, it is I guess a little more dangerous area and there is just more poverty and more devastation and the stories I had heard and the pictures I had seen, yeah, I was just, I was pretty surprised like she said. There are still surprising things that you see in Ouanaminthe, but yeah, there's just really different than I expected.

Port-au-Prince is a city like most developing country capital cities. For some reason, this comment associates poverty, population, and danger with each other. While there might be statistical proof of criminal activity in Port-au-Prince, these comments are usually made without it. They are based on stories and assumptions, not research.

In the end, narrative is powerful. The STM narrative dictates the entire STM experience. It does so without people realizing it, too. STM participants reflect an ongoing inability to critically evaluate their own experiences. They draw parallels, as explained by Cindi Katz's (2001; 2004) *countertopographies*, or the act of making connections between two seemingly unrelated places in order to better understand the less familiar one. But this narrative controls the experience, reducing it to limited, compressed understandings of the world around them. In one interview with a pastor, Harding (2000) expressed her struggle to be passive. She writes,

'Susceptible' implies passivity, but I was not passively listening to [him]. I was struggling mightily against the grain of my ignorance and incredulity to make sense of what he was saying. His language was so intense and strange, yet

deceptively plain and familiar, full of complex nuances and pushes and pulls, that I had no time, no spare inner speech, to interpret him consciously, to rework what he said into my own words as he talked. I just gripped my chair, as it were, and took his words in straight. I was willfully uncritical as well in the sense that I wanted to understand, as best I could, his words from his point of view, to assume his position, to make his speech mine. It was not exactly what [he] said that brought me under conviction; it is that I took it up, merely by listening to him actively and uncritically. (p. 57-8)

When people narrate their STM trips, they use phrases and rhetorical devices which are, frankly, only understood by those who have similar experiences. The words are seemingly selfless and divinely inspired. It is in these contexts when people describe poverty as “amazing,” for example. Without a critical mind, those who listen will respond with uninformed skepticism or blissful, empathetic admiration. The STM narrative is not only keeping STM alive, it is alienating those who never engage.

Participants often describe STM experiences as authentic and uncomfortable in a positive way. This representation presents the STM experience problematically. First, STM is simply not the “real deal,” as #21 described it. She said, “I just love it because you experience the reality—the realness of each country, the realness of the people, the realness of how they live and just, you know. There’s nothing fake about it.” But other study participants expressed frustration with boundaries between Americans and Haitians. One study participant said, “You had the wall around you and, you know, what’s on the other side of that wall, and it’s just something else.” Bruner (2005) says the only authenticity of an experience like STM is their very own “authentic tourism production” (p. 5). There is basically nothing authentic about it. It may be a semi-authentic tourism experience or American experience in a developing country, but is not in and of itself an authentic experience.

Second, STM straddles a complicated line between comfort and discomfort. Tourism development has led to improved infrastructure; better, faster transportation; and advanced healthcare around the globe. While these allow travelers to go farther faster, more safely, they cultivate perceived authenticity. Likewise, specific communities often welcome better roads, utilities, hotels, and businesses. Out of these advancements comes a conflicting desire for both pleasure and discomfort. Several study participants said these improvements lead people to “miss out on...the full experience.” No. 17 said, “I was almost a little disappointed when [our trip leader] said we were going to be staying in a hotel...I kind of wanted the whole experience.” No. 8 said she avoids feeling “pampered,” because it “makes us feel [less] connected to the people that we’re serving, that we’re going down to be with.” Others agreed too nice of accommodations barred them from adequately connecting with Haitians. At the same time, too rough of accommodations were too uncomfortable and keep people from wanting to come back, according to #2. Boorstin (1992) writes, “[The American tourist] has come to expect both more strangeness and more familiarity than the world naturally offers. He has come to believe that he can have a lifetime of adventure in two weeks and all the thrills of risking his life without any real risk at all” (p. 80). STM participants desire adventure in hopes they will connect them with the people they serve. Unfortunately, this adventure is not only fabricated, it fails to really risk anything.

Third, despite attempts to elevate STM experiences, they are in their very nature ‘trips.’ Several researchers propose using the term ‘experience’ or ‘adventure’ because it implies preparation before the trip and accountability for change after the trip. While the intentions are good, avoiding the term ‘trip’ elevates STM to an assumed level of high-

impact. Throughout this paper, I use the term “STM experience” because it includes the far-reaching narrative, which builds expectations long before the trip and conveys meaning long after it. In practice, though, I am concerned by people’s unwillingness to acknowledge STM trips for what they are—*trips*. Similarly, people challenge the idea of STM as charity. No. 7 said the personability of STM attracted her to it. She said this quality makes STM more influential, in her opinion, than charities. Several study participants felt nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, and charities rely on negative, depressing photography to guilt people into engagement. As seen throughout this study, STM relies as heavily on photography to fabricate their image as charities and other organizations. And to be clear, STM is a form of charity work.

### **5.5 The Overstated Impact of Short-Term Missions**

The elevated impact of STM emerges in a few ways. One way involves the significance of becoming an STM participant. Practitioners likely consider people participants at the time of application or even travel. But the STM narrative is already at work, establishing expectations long before they enroll. As mentioned earlier, practitioners, participants, and hosts are the most common actors in STM. There are other important stakeholders, such as financial supporters or people who work administratively to organize trips. But at what point does a person become an STM participant? And, can anyone become an STM participant? No. 21 said, “Anybody—everybody should experience a mission trip.” Similarly, #20 said, “If you’ve never been to a third-world country. Everybody should experience, we’re so sheltered in America and our kids don’t get to see poverty and how the rest of the world—a big part of the world lives. So it’s...the cultural experience.” Many people within the US evangelical Christian culture

believe STM is inherent in the Christian faith. They say STM can use everyone and influence them positively. Likewise, #18 said, “Everybody should experience a third-world country once.” This belief suggests STM trips are important to do, but perhaps not for missions or development. While STM is often presented as poverty alleviation or international development in US evangelical Christian communities, it really champions personal growth from encountering difference and experiencing a developing country.

At the same time, several study participants suggested STM is more a product of divine inspiration or personal calling. No. 8 said when searching for her first STM trip, she did not care where she went, but her friend was specifically “called[ed] to Haiti.” No. 1 explained, “Some people for some reason God has drawn their hearts to this particular place.” For some, STM trips are parts of a bigger process. No. 15 said, “I just knew for a while that I needed to go and do missions. I’d done several domestic trips in other parts of the country, but I knew this was the next step.” Another, who is currently attending a university, applied for an STM trip which was facilitating a Bible camp because she felt it would help her discern whether or not she should become a teacher. One study participant explained her first trip, “It was probably really bad of me, but when I found out about the trip, I honestly didn’t even know where Haiti was, and had no idea, what part of the country, what they looked like, I had no idea. I was just like, it was a very God-moment when my mom was reading an email that [our church] sent out...and all of a sudden, my heart was like, ‘Oh, I’m going on that!’” Some participants rely on this spiritual inspiration to engage in STM, but many study participants agreed this feeling is not necessary. Regardless, as #14 explained, going on an STM trip is an act of faith. No. 12 said, “You just had to trust in the Lord, too, that they’d be okay” in reference to her

children going on STM trips. Nos. 7, 15, 18, and 21 shared stories of people discouraging them from traveling because Haiti was not safe, and they would potentially become ill. There are many reasons to engage in STM, but limiting it to a divine calling *and* opening it up to everyone overestimate its capacity to bring about positive change. Divine calling implies an efficacy which does not exist; openness implies an ability to adapt to anyone's skills, personalities, and beliefs, for example.

Another example emerges in an unspoken hierarchy based upon STM experiences. No. 12 said, "Until you live it, you don't really know." Similarly, #2 said, "Until that happens, you don't really get it...I don't think you can anyway." No. 18 said, people who have never engaged in STM "may not see the same emotions on some of these pictures that we're seeing...There's nothing like your first trip. I think that makes the biggest impact on you." According to these study participants, a person cannot understand the language and experience of STM until they have engaged. And apparently, once they do, their first trip will impact them the most.

As previously demonstrated, once people engage and have more experience, they begin to compare them. No. 1 traveled to Haiti three times before family members joined her. On her fourth trip, when her family members struggled to process their encountered poverty, she said to them, "Oh, this is crazy, but if you saw one of these other places I've been, it's just so different." People assume with more trips comes more experience and expertise. They believe with time, one can better understand difference. Despite the STM narrative's universality among storytelling and photography there are varying opinions about how experienced people are within the STM community. This hierarchy of experience transpires throughout the entire STM experience. In the beginning,

prospective participants select trips based on their own experiences. No. 8 said, “I can do VBS; it already makes me more comfortable.” No. 7 added, “I’ve done that my whole life; I can really, really do that. Especially for my first trip.” One trip invokes a certain respect and responsibility. No. 15 said about after going on one trip, “You can be an advocate for Haiti and Haitians and truly speak to—I mean, we all can—their character and their heart...I can speak for them and talk about how great they are and beautiful and that kind of thing.”

To be fair, practitioners and participants do evolve as they engage more in STM. No. 2 said, “If you go enough times you can become cold to the reality [of poverty] and overlook it, overlook the impoverished people.” He said his favorite part as a trip leader is watching the faces of his participants when they first enter the country. “It helps me. It helps me because I need that. I need to be reminded [of the culture shock] so that first image they have helps me to get my head on right for the trip because otherwise I could get cold....it helps me. It kind of gets me in the right frame.” For a practice which is open to so many, people are competitive. One study participant stressed the importance of his 16 trips to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, invoking a certain authority among his peers. Rather than divide people based on experiences, STM should celebrate diversity, ultimately improving training and relationship-building.

A final example of the elevation of STM is the inherent pressure to return to a place or engage in another experience. When applying for a trip, most people understand the commitment includes a few preparation logistics and the dates of travel. While they expect the STM trip to lead to lasting change, the research shows otherwise. One exception, however, is the desire to return. One study participant said, “When I go



again,” but only after she corrected herself for saying, *if*. No. 14, who has only participated in one trip, said, “I definitely feel like I left part of my heart there for sure, and I want to go back.” No. 1 said, “There’s so much joy. And that’s what I remember. That’s why a lot of the reasons I keep being gravitated to go back.” And #18 who leads a trip every year said, “You just want to take care of your team because I want them to want to come back. I want them to want to be involved in Haiti.” Practitioners often avoid the possibility of someone participating in an STM trip and never engaging in STM again. Perhaps, it is because travel narratives never end; reproducing and retelling stories as long as one lives. The STM narrative perpetuates a hope of returning, an idea of always being able to make another difference. To never return threatens the possibility of putting an end to the STM narrative; to acknowledge finality implies skepticism of STM.

## **5.6 The Absence of Long-Lasting, Positive Change**

There exists a serious struggle within the STM narrative to accept progress in developing countries. Few people participate in STM projects in sustainable and replaceable ways. Rarely, do they empower people and communities to take ownership without their leadership. Even if they say their intentions are to pass over ownership of projects, their exaggerated stories and perceived high-impact suggest they almost never do. Their behaviors are more often than not perpetuating reductionist Western understandings of difference. Simply put, an unwillingness to let others lead implies a belief they *cannot* lead.

Another demonstration of this struggle emerged with the willingness to sleep in air conditioned hotel rooms, but hesitancy to be separated by a wall. They demonstrated appreciation for better airline routes, but remain wary of advancements which inhibit

them from what they deem “the full experience.” Somewhere in the rise of the STM movement, people developed an expectation there would always be work to do and they could always do it the way they wanted to. Somehow, they created the most reliable job security, out of fear they would become obsolete. Perhaps the only thing more fearful within the STM experience than difference itself is the fear of not being needed anymore. Remarkably, organizations and churches around the US are scaling back on STM because they recognize their inefficacy. But the move has been met with great hostility from the movements’ proponents.

The great obstacle of progress is not STM itself, but STM proponents’ fear of becoming obsolete. Proponents of STM consider the culture shock, personal development, and perceived life change of the STM experience so valuable, they fear the consequences of actual progress. Encounters with difference, namely poverty, are regarded so highly within US evangelical culture, people are willing to sacrifice indigenous communities and real possibilities of development. This arrogance propagates a spirit of schadenfreude. This posture resembles destructive control more than complementary partnership.

Despite perceived lifelong change, STM participants rarely engage in long-term development efforts. Recruiting volunteers for this research study was a painstaking process. Out of over 250 people solicited, only ten percent committed to it (with fewer actually following through). The vast majority never responded to the initial emails. Likewise, organizations do not experience increased financial support or program sponsorship as a result of STM (March & Woodside, 2005; Priest et al., 2006; Ver Beek, 2006; Ver Beek, 2008). In fact, the only instances when STM leads to increased

involvement are when the increase replaces withdrawn support. Far too often STM trips promote short-term efforts with very little accountability. More people would have participated in the research study if their schedules allowed or if it was a different season in life. But at some point, proponents must recognize STM does not produce measurable, tangible, long-lasting positive change for anyone.

Additionally, STM participants are not returning to the US seeking opportunities to be involved. STM encounters with difference do not challenge participants' understandings of race, poverty, culture, or gender, for example. The STM narrative designs these experiences to perpetuate limited understanding, to advance Western ideas, and to reproduce a perceived need to simply be needed. Boorstin (1992) writes,

What is remarkable, on reflection, is not that our foreign travel has increased so much. But rather that all this travel has made so little difference in our thinking and feeling. Our travels have not, it seems, made us noticeably more cosmopolitan or more understanding of other peoples. The explanation is not that Americans are any more obtuse or uneducable than they used to be. Rather, the travel experience itself has been transformed. (p. 79)

It is important to stress these data reflect not an absence of change, but an absence of long-lasting positive change. There is evidence of personal improvements as a result of STM experiences. Some study participants demonstrated increased knowledge about Haiti, for example, and other topics they might not have known without their experiences. Not only did every focus group discuss Haiti's status as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, nearly every group distinguished urban poverty from rural poverty. Study participants exhibited ability to assess charities and critique media coverage. They shared stories of life lessons they learned and ones they continue to relearn. There is evidence of STM leading to positive change. But like a lot of positive change, it is unsustainable. The high-impact narrative prevents actors and stakeholders from critically

evaluating STM and from ever understanding them. But to be fair, this incapacity shows the STM narrative is not omnipotent. Its deconstruction and reconstruction are possible.

### **5.7 Photography and the Short-Term Missions Experience**

While the purpose of this research study is to evaluate the inefficacy of the STM movement, discussion, theory, and analysis relied on the relationship between the STM experience and the use of photography. First and foremost, photography radically shapes the STM narrative. Long before people engage in STM trips, their understandings of and assumptions about them are developing. As they prepare for trips, participants build expectations based on the photographs and stories from people further along in the hierarchy of experience. After all, in order to fully understand it, one must engage with it. Before they travel, participants build expectations. While they travel, they seek experiences, relationships, and projects which meet the expectations they built. The problem is these expectations are often unrealistic, irrelevant, or unimportant. And they only exist because of the photographs, stories, and overall image of STM.

While seeking these experiences, participants take photographs, acquire souvenirs, and reflect. They prepare for the process of returning home. They worry less about instilling sustainable life change, such as adjusting life commitments or reallocating their resources, and more about how they are going to communicate with people at home. Participants rely on their capacity to tell stories, often through the use of photographs, to portray an image of STM, and in this case, Haiti, specifically, to their community at home. Unbeknownst to them, their storytelling reproduces the STM narrative, pass it onto the minds of others. In the end, participants, practitioners, and hosts

criticize the efficiency of photography, but they rely on it to raise awareness and recruit more volunteers because the purpose, of course, is about sustaining the STM experience.

These experiences instill relentless support for STM, Haiti, and their specific projects within all STM stakeholders. Participants grow emotionally attached to their memories, their souvenirs, and perhaps more than anything, their photographs. The passion and nostalgia discovered within the STM experience influences the stories told and retold to others. People long to experience what others experience, and once they do, there exists an unbreakable bond: the common STM experience. There are several benefits to this STM community. Friendships form as a result of common STM experiences. While research struggles to measure it, the current US evangelical Christian community is more traveled and, theoretically, more culturally intelligent than in the past. At the same time, there are several consequences. As discussed throughout this study, the most harmful effects are perpetual failed development efforts and reductionist understandings of difference.

This capacity to tell stories emerged on several occasions, when study participants fabricated entire stories about photographs. There was no hesitation to create anecdotes which explained particular phenomena. Study participants did not lack creativity rationalizing, normalizing, or homogenizing what seemed foreign within photographs or discourse. Gladwell (2007) writes, “We’re a bit too quick to come up with explanations for things we don’t really have an explanation for” (p. 69). In telling stories of past trips, one study participant discussed a trip when the school installed public restrooms with running water. At the time, teachers and administrators were teaching the students proper public restroom etiquette, but this participant reduced it to, “They were trying to teach the

kids what a bathroom was.” This transformation takes real development and recasts it as uncivilized and unintelligent behavior. This study participant is one of the most experienced in the study, yet they lack a capacity to accurately portray difference. Their interpretation is not necessarily inaccurate, but incomplete. And this must change. Livermore (2013) writes, “We have a strong tendency to overgeneralize our unique cross-cultural experiences because of a desire to find common ground and make the foreign seem familiar” (p. 68). Our experiences are unique; every time we encounter difference, we are truly meeting the unfamiliar. But people must recognize the power of the STM narrative in limiting people’s capacity to sufficiently understand and convey their experiences to others.

## **5.8 Short-Term Missions and Encounters with Difference**

In each focus group, one particular question produced compelling responses. As mentioned earlier, study participants expressed the limitations of photography, critiquing its incapacity to capture relationships and the senses, for example. But when asked the question, *what is missing?*, study participants focused on literal responses rather than more critical ones. Four separate times, I asked this question so they could articulate their opinions on what is missing—what is missing from the photographs, from their experiences, from their memories, from STM. I outlined their answers above, and I stand convicted, not by their answers, but by what is missing from their answers. No one alluded to difference. Very few spoke of race, religion, or culture when critiquing photography. Even worse, on very few occasions did these elements of difference even come up. And when they did, it was never as an integral or understood component to STM.

The reality is the STM movement is too focused on the participant to produce long-lasting positive change. Perhaps from the very beginning, practitioners and hosts have pursued strategies in providing the very best travel experiences for those who engage. Housee (1999) says, “Travelling as a tourist raises many issues about identity and positionality—and one’s racial, gender, religious, cultural, and class positions all come into question” (p. 147-8). But no one spoke about *their* positionality when talking about STM in Haiti or even the Haitians themselves. There was not a single moment when someone situated herself as a white, upper-class American. Corbett and Fikkert (2014) write, “When we encounter things that are different or confusing, we tend to judge them negatively. Moving past this impulse is the first step in exploring the richness and beauty of [difference]” (p. 63). Better yet, we tend to disregard them. The narrative does not provide understanding; it promotes a limited understanding which people hear enough and eventually accept as truth. “We go and see but we often don’t ‘see’ in a way that leads to change .... We go and experience another culture and we end up uncritically reinforcing our own narratives and beliefs about things such as poverty, ‘the other,’ and our place in this world” (Ellis, 2015, p. iv).

Only one study participant acknowledged her whiteness, and she hardly did so. She said, “I’m already very obviously not Haitian at first glance, like the little kids, ‘blan, blan!’” At no other point did someone speak of race. Yet, Haiti has a rich history of race. At the time of the slave revolt, 90 percent of the population was of African descent and enslaved (Dubois, 2012). Afterwards with the fleeing of the French, Haiti became and continues to be a largely mono-ethnic culture. Hill (2008) writes, “Today most Whites see White racism as a part of the American past, and anti-racist struggle as largely

completed. Yet people of color—African Americans, Native Americans, Americans of Latin American or Asian or Middle Eastern ancestry—consistently report that they experience racism” (p. 1). Later she said, on several occasions, she has challenged discrete, unconscious racism in US culture, and it always “elicits from my fellow White Americans a defense of it that is acutely felt and even angry. To challenge this common sense is to become an oddball or a divisive radical” (p. 5). The role of racism and unconscious bias in US evangelical Christianity is real and merits more research. But at the risk of sounding radical, STM is only perpetuating it. The unconscious transmission of reductionist, potentially racist ideas becomes an “automatic, unreflective action and reaction that is very difficult to notice and contest” (p. 45). The perpetuation of US evangelical Christian values is a form of ethnocentrism; it contributes to prejudice and instigates conflict (Priest et al., 2006).

Study participants spoke about religion in similarly reductive ways. As previously mentioned, misguided understandings of other religions shaped assumptions about Haitian customs and behaviors. Additionally, study participants referenced divine inspiration or intervention, but rarely at any of these times did someone contribute theologically, missiologically, or apologetically to the discourse. Other studies find similar results (Linhart, 2004; Livermore, 2013). STM and scholarship often are but do not have to be mutually exclusive. Study participants recognized the importance of different cultures without ever going into what those cultures are, but it is a starting point. No. 11 described one photograph, it is “the combination of our world and their world, and it’s [the] coming together that’s really exciting...it’s a combination of our cultures.” Another said children like to play across all cultures, and this realization allows him to



relate well to Haitian children. Howell (2012) writes, “Our STM narrative of crossing cultures made the transcendence of culture the ultimate goal” (p. 143). Participants, practitioners, and hosts do not want to discuss culture or even understand it. They want to work above it. And this desire lacks awareness about culture. “Most people in most societies take their culture for granted and do not ordinarily think about it” (Bruner, 2005, p. 119). Ultimately, proponents fail to recognize the culture of STM. No community is free from culture, as culture produces narrative and discourse, which produce experiences and understandings within every community (Hofstede, 2010).

The desire to transcend culture also lies in the seemingly contradictory nature of STM. Encountering difference remains central to the STM experience, but most people “travel abroad to enjoy the culture of the very people they avoid at home—racializing at home and expressing empathetic interest abroad” (Priest & Priest, 2008, p. 69). Not only is this behavior possibly unethical, it poses an interesting challenge about STM encounters with difference. Livermore (2013) writes,

We interpret everything we see through our own cultural framework rather than learning, over time, to identify with another cultural framework. As a result, a short-term trip has the potential of further reinforcing inaccurate assumptions and interpretations rather than helping alter our inaccurate assumptions. Even multiple short trips to the same place don’t necessarily alter them. Continued brief encounters in the same place often result in continued observation of the same similarities rather than exposing the vastly different cultural paradigms at work. (p. 70)

Our way of living is deeply cultural. But the purpose of STM is not to turn foreigners into Americans or even American Christians. The goal is not to project our cultural misgivings or prejudicial interpretations onto others. The power of both human existence and Christianity lies in their abilities to invoke collaboration, support, and mutual understanding.

The previous discussions on poverty and class represent additional troublesome encounters with difference. Likewise, encounters involving gender, sexuality, and the environment reemphasize the inefficacy of STM. Howell (2012) analyzes the frequent breaking of gender norms throughout STM experiences. He says many women experience more autonomy and authority on STM trips than they do in other US evangelical Christian spaces. In STM, women often assume more equal positions of authority, opportunities, and responsibilities for teaching, planning, facilitating, and conducting physical labor. Howell (2012) writes, “The opportunity to do physical labor alongside the boys [was] an empowering experience. One of the Dominican leaders told me that this was an important aspect of the trip from their perspective—modeling cross-gender friendship and the equality of the sexes...None of the members of our team expressed an awareness of our trip as breaking U.S. or Dominican gender norms” (p. 174). This story proves STM provides genuine encounters of difference; there remains potential for STM to challenge social norms. But unfortunately, the STM narrative limits participants from recognizing these encounters as potential for growth. Our only hope is, as Adichie (2014) writes, “if we do something over and over, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over, it becomes normal” (p. 13). Perhaps STM will continue to provide encounters with difference—even more authentic ones. And as a result, real, substantive, positive life change will happen within US evangelical Christian culture. But this requires intentionality and strategy.

Not surprisingly, the STM narrative prohibits the exploration of sexuality and sexual orientation. Arguably, most people travel to more socially conservative places than the US. In some countries, homosexuality is a crime. And even as most US

evangelical Christians believe homosexuality is a sin, STM provides unique opportunities to promote lessons of love, acceptance, and grace. There is little evidence of STM trips promoting tolerance in response to controversial or harmful social issues in developing countries. After all, the STM narrative is one of preservation, not change, and if developing countries no longer need STM, the practice will disappear.

Likewise, STM maintains a complicated relationship with the natural environment. Several centuries ago, Christians developed a “principal preoccupation” with the “separation of the material and the spiritual, such that agency would be properly ascribed only to the spiritual (human and Divine). This has become a defining project of modernity, in which the material world is radically disenchanted” (Howell, 2009b, p. 258). Historically, US evangelical Christians have embraced this separation, consequently deemphasizing the importance of physical landscape. This core tenet of modern US evangelical Christianity has resulted in a history of harmful policies and ignorant disregard for the natural environment. In terms of STM, few projects take the natural environment into consideration. Ecotourism and VT often rely on ecological or environmentally-friendly projects, but STM has so far neglected them. It is imperative for STM to include the natural environment in the conversation. For, as feminist political ecology proposes, elements of difference are, in fact, interrelated. STM participants travel as though they are just Christians. But they are Americans and evangelicals and (typically) white and (often) female and (usually) wealthy. And each of these conditions impacts the others. These conditions intersect at the very point which is the person. STM relies on these “interlocking systems of power running along multiple axes” to “produce individual and collective identities in uneven and paradoxical ways” (Sundberg, 2004, p.

54). For further research on these intersecting conditions, consider ethical implications of tourism, specifically Christian tourism in Lovelock and Lovelock (2013).

The issue of STM is not the absence of difference. Participants absolutely must encounter difference throughout the entire STM experience, and they do so in a unique way. But the STM narrative does not invoke a desire to understand difference nor, at times, the capacity to even do so. The STM experience neglects difference. Participants are oblivious to it; they are taught to dismiss it. With the proper tools, training, and expectations, STM could provide experiences where actual life change occurs. But in their present state, they do not. And it appears, practitioners do not want them to. I ask the same question, although in a different context, as study participant #9 proposed, “Is it a sense of our American exceptionalism?” Is it because of our very situatedness—as developed, wealthy, privileged US evangelical Christians—we ignore difference? We must understand our tendency to champion certain elements of difference (and disregard others) is less a product of our inclusivity and more the consequence of our homogeneity. The act of celebrating a person of color or an overcomer of poverty is less because we do great work and more because we perpetuate a culture which marginalizes people of difference. It is perhaps not the fault of participants or their alleged unwillingness, but rather the fault of a narrative, so strong in its oppression, inhibiting those who engage from challenging their own ideas, pursuing uncontaminated truth, and striving to produce real, long-lasting positive change.

## Chapter 6: Recommendations

This thesis is not the first to propose better practices for STM. It is, however, the only one to highlight the power of photography in the STM experience. The following guiding principles build upon current research, including this study's contributions regarding the inefficacy of STM as a result of photography and narrative. These principles aim to advance the potential of STM.

**1. Do your research.** A lot of researchers propose their own methods to improve the STM experience for participants and hosts. Read books, watch videos, and listen to others. Start with Corbett and Fikkert (2009; 2014), Howell (2012), and Livermore (2013). For a more in-depth analysis, see Burgner (n.d.). Synthesize the various suggestions and consider the greatest needs of your own community. Scaling back on STM trip opportunities or even pausing your travel plans might provide the time and resources necessary to effectively evaluate your ministry. To do so, invite outsiders, expect people to be as informed as you, and listen. Dubois (2012) writes "life in Haiti is not organized by the state, or along the lines many people might expect or want it to be. But it does draw on a set of complex and resilient social institutions that have emerged from a historic commitment to self-sufficiency and self-reliance. And it is only through collaboration with those institutions that reconstruction can truly succeed" (p. 12). If you work in Haiti (or most other developing countries), understand the power dynamics, the systems, and the institutions which influence your work. Study the historical and political context of the country. Read books and articles, watch documentaries, and discover the thorough research others in the field have done for you. Consider the voices (especially of the marginalized and powerless in foreign communities). Listen to them; learn from

them; and respond accordingly. Each of these steps requires humility and gratitude, and this entire process requires you to start here.

**2. Emphasize partnerships.** One study participant said, “Don’t think you’re going to fix them! Don’t think you’re going to go down and Americanize them. We don’t have all the answers! And boy, have we learned a lot from them, haven’t we?!” Your host communities should have greater power and a more strategic planning role than any other stakeholder, including you. Your hosts must have the freedom to say, “No.” Better yet, let them ask you for help. And allow yourself to say, “No.” Collaboration surely leads to healthier partnerships and more meaningful engagement. In doing so, learn about the many perspectives and cultures, listen to the different voices, and celebrate the difference. No one thrives in a homogenous culture of reproductions. Innovate and take risks on new project ideas. Consider challenging hosts and participants to do work which might be unpopular or uncommon but more helpful to partner communities. It is imperative to stress, as Corbett and Fikkert (2014) say, projects are not the focus of the trip. They are important, but if the project is at the center of everyone’s experience, stakeholders will gauge success based on the completion of the project. In reality, we should measure success based on long-lasting positive change in our hosts’ communities. Throughout this entire process, invest in your stakeholders. Encourage them, and teach them; Let them encourage you and teach you.

**3. Establish clear objectives.** The inconsistency in STM trip purposes prohibit real goal-setting. Recognize the limitations of your trip: skills, abilities, time, resources, and language, for example. Some projects are not suitable for STM trips, like evangelism and discipleship. As the study participants demonstrated, building relationships and

playing games nicely complement seemingly more impactful projects. Often times, they are the most remembered moments. Rather than stifle participants' desires and urges to love and play generously, include these activities in the larger picture of the trip purpose. But do not overemphasize them as primary goals either. Hosts should guide the process of setting goals for the STM trip. Invite your participants to set their own goals, too. Locke and Latham (2002) propose their goal-setting theory, based on the idea "individuals are most motivated and will work harder to achieve their goals if: a) their goals are made public, b) if the goals are specific (not just do your best), c) if the goals are more demanding as long as it is within the individual's capability (most people have little motivation to achieve simple goals)" (Ver Beek, 2006, p. 492). If all stakeholders understand clearly-defined objectives and outcomes, they are more likely to create long-lasting positive change.

**4. Represent well.** Lead your experiences with excellence. It is obvious when a lot of research, planning, and goal-setting go into an STM trip. It is even more so when they do not. When you conducted your research, did you find in-country resources you can rely on rather than pack suitcases full of soon-to-be waste? Did you spend hours developing curriculum or material which already exists, is patronizing, or culturally irrelevant? Work hard, but do not be harmful to yourself, your participants, or your hosts. Take advantage of tools (like photography), but use them well. Preselecting a team photographer or turning off wireless internet connection might foster greater participation. Stakeholders definitely should utilize their strengths. But one of the greatest strengths available might be the ability to work together on developing a project, training people, setting goals, and representing yourselves and your ministries well. Allow

different races, cultures, genders, and other forms of difference to contribute to the conversation and to lead it as much as possible. Appreciate the beauty in diversity, even in opinions and beliefs, and encourage your participants and hosts to do the same. Do not compete with these other opinions or beliefs. Few things stifle development like siloed efforts in a particular community. Lastly, upon returning home, represent your hosts and your ministry well. In your photography, marketing, and storytelling, consider the potential perspectives which could lead to long-lasting harm. “The last thing you want to do is to harm brothers and sisters who are involved in healthy poverty alleviation ministries” (Corbett & Fikkert, 2014, p. 95). Be honest, but recognize your limited understanding and ingrained prejudices which exist because of your specific perspective.

**5. Don’t overestimate your impact.** Altruistic intentions and divine inspirations alone do not lead to lasting, positive change. STM experiences should never focus entirely on the participants. At the same time, do not pretend STM is entirely about the projects either. One study participant said, “I didn’t want it to end up being all about me somehow or anything like that.” Striking a balance between people and projects creates the right mindset to engage in STM. This allows stakeholders to establish realistic expectations for the projects and not overestimate them. Far too often, practitioners elevate the impact of STM to a point of *Missio Dei* (Howell, 2012). The health of your ministry and your stakeholders will improve when you promote realistic goals and purposes. If one pretends STM engagement is solely of divine propagation, there is little need for learning, meaning, progress, and critical-thinking. But these actions are essential to healthy development, and their exclusion leads to destructive ministry practices.



**6. Connect to long-term solutions.** Maintain long-term relationships with host communities. You should collaborate with them on long-term projects long before you bring an STM team to them. After you have brought a team to your host, it is imperative to support your stakeholders. Your hosts need sustainable partnerships, and your participants need community. People have always found comfort and solidarity in mutual understanding. Participants benefit from community or support groups where they can continue to develop the skills, information, and relationships they discovered while engaging in their STM experience. Study participants expressed frustration from rough adjustments and recoveries from their STM trips. One said she prepared so intensely for the culture shock of the foreign country, she never considered the culture shock of returning home. Provide your participants and host plenty of opportunities to debrief, process, and reflect on their experiences. Be sure to do this for yourself, too. Your participants, including yourself, and your hosts are a community. “For positive changes to last, they must be reinforced by a set of practices, relationships, and virtues taught in the home setting” (Priest et al., 2006, p. 444). This is possible within an STM community.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Research critiques the inefficacy of STM, but improvement is possible. “The experience *can* be structured to become a catalyst for such change...lasting positive change is possible, but it requires that participants are held accountable, and are encouraged to translate their good intentions into long-lasting actions” (Ver Beek, 2008, p. 476, emphasis in original). If STM participants return to the US and fail to reevaluate what they believe, how they vote, how they relate to others, how they confront difference, how they spend their time or money, for example, they might miss the experience altogether. This disconnect perpetuates a high-calling narrative and a low-impact experience. Perhaps the most valuable posture one can exercise in STM is of the listener. Instead of telling and retelling stories which are harmful, reductionist, and limited, deconstruct the STM narrative. Think critically. Ask questions. Do research. And encourage participants and hosts to do the same. Haraway (1989) writes, “Facts can be imagined as original, irreducible nodes from which a reliable understanding of the world can be constructed. Facts ought to be discovered, not made or constructed” (p. 3). Do not simply accept what the STM narrative constructs for you; discover truth yourself.

Researchers must focus their attention and resources on understanding the STM experience. Rather than reevaluate the efficacy of STM or re-propose suggestions for best practice, they should help practitioners, participants, and hosts deconstruct the STM narrative, rebuilding it with the assistance of local knowledge and diverse experiences. They should also reconstruct it so experiences can adapt to different ways of knowing and ways of being. The capacity to do this lies within feminist political ecology and other critical social theories. Unfortunately, many STM proponents are not prepared for such a

conversation. In the meantime, practitioners must recognize the consequences of flawed humans, broken communities, and failing systems within the STM experience.

Researchers and practitioners should investigate concepts of cultural intelligence. A great deal of research on the topic exists (Earley & Ang, 2003). And unfortunately, further reductionism is possible, but its principles are valuable; its objectives are promising.

Scholars should better understand how people interact with different epistemologies and ontologies. And practitioners should strive to be more aware and accepting of them.

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this research study is not to destroy STM. Livermore (2013) writes, “Guilt and shame do little to change these realities. But I do want to bring perspective to how we live our lives and think about our circumstances of many of the people we’ll encounter on our short-term missions experiences.

Perspective and awareness alone are not enough. But they are an essential starting point” (p. 31). STM do not work; they do not lead to long-lasting, positive change. But they are unavoidable, and they have potential. While STM often undermines “asset-based, participatory development that is at the very heart of effective poverty alleviation,” it does not have to (Corbett & Fikkert, 2014, p. 39). It is not the nature of STM to destroy. It is the nature of narrative to control. Understanding the difference elevates STM, not to a point of divine perfection or fabricated high-impact, but to one of stronger partnerships, increased understanding of difference, and long-lasting positive change.

One study participant said, “If it’s true about photography, you look at it, and it brings back all your emotions.” The power of the STM narrative, which often presents itself in the form of photographs and stories, is the only commonality across all STM experiences. People do different projects, travel to different places, feel different

emotions, and maintain different beliefs. But in the end, all of them engage in the STM narrative. Each person and their corresponding stories is a product of the STM narrative. Deconstructing this narrative reveals the stark codependency among stakeholders which inhibits any lasting positive change and keeps participants, practitioners, and hosts from making any real difference in the world.

Many people are comfortable sharing their ideas in order to be critiqued. Several people appreciate thoughtful feedback on their ideas. Most people want to know if their words are disrespectful or their beliefs are misguided. Generally, STM proponents do not wish to hurt people. But when it comes to the STM experience, people's stories are so personal, their experiences are so meaningful, and their convictions are so undeniable, it is difficult to call the movement into question. It is not in spite of these feelings, but *because of* and *with them* I challenge proponents to deconstruct the STM narrative. Think critically about the components of the STM experience. And reconstruct the practice in a holistic manner, one where indigenous and foreign needs are realized and communicated with those who have the resources, American or not. Implement a new narrative which provides people the tools to understand complicated social conditions and elements of difference, as well as convey them to people at home. Change is necessary, and it is also possible.

## APPENDIX A

Table C1  
*Analysis of the Participants*

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### Characteristics of Participants

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<u>Gender</u>	<u>No. of Participants</u>
Male	4
Female	17

<u>No. of Trips to Ouanaminthe</u>	<u>No. of Participants</u>
1	9
2-4	7
5-9	1
8+	4

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*Note.* Other characteristics such as age, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, etc., were excluded from the form in order to propagate the utmost confidentiality. In the end, interactions and conversations with the participants indicated these 21 participants were largely reflective of wide-scale demographics of short-term missions.

## APPENDIX B

Please complete the following survey:

1. What is your first name?  
*(This is in order to provide you with a code name for the research.)*
2. What is your email address?  
*(This will only be used to confirm your RSVP for the study.)*
3. Are you above the age of 18?  
*(This is to ensure your eligibility for the study.)*
4. Which focus group(s) are you able to participate in?  
*(Focus groups will be limited to six-to-ten people, and participants need only to participate in one session to complete the research study. Note: if requested, childcare will be provided.)*
  - a. Thursday, October 20, 2016 from 6-8 PM – Lexington, Kentucky
  - b. Friday, October 21, 2016 from 5-7 PM – Lexington, Kentucky
  - c. Saturday, October 22, 2016 from 9:30-11:30 AM – Lexington, Kentucky
  - d. Saturday, October 29, 2016 from 9:30-11:30 AM – Hudson, Ohio
  - e. Saturday, October 29, 2016 from 12:30-2:30 PM – Hudson, Ohio
  - f. Saturday, October 29, 2016 from 3-5 PM – Hudson, Ohio
  - g. Sunday, October 30, 2016 from 1-3 PM – Hudson, Ohio
  - h. Wednesday, November 03, 2016 from 6-8 PM – Lexington, Kentucky
5. Do you need childcare during any or all of your selected focus group sessions?
6. Insert the following details about your short-term missions trip experiences to Ouanaminthe.
  - a. When did you travel to Ouanaminthe, Haiti?  
*(If you have been multiple times, please indicate the approximate month and year of your first short-term missions trip to Ouanaminthe, Haiti.)*  
(Month and year)
  - b. For how many days were you in Ouanaminthe, Haiti, during your first trip?
  - c. How many times (including your first trip) have you participated in a short-term missions trip to Ouanaminthe, Haiti?
7. Do you agree to the terms and conditions of this study?  
*(Participants agree to participate in one two-hour focus group discussion under a designated code name (e.g. Participant A). They agree to fully engage in the discussion, answer questions and share original ideas and concepts. They understand that their responses will be recorded on audio, but that all data collected will remain confidential. They understand that though they might bring original stories, photographs, experiences and ideas, all data will be altered so as not to breach their terms of confidentiality upon publication.)*

## APPENDIX C

### Focus Group Discussion Questions

#### **Part One**

##### *Instructions:*

Assume each image represents a different STM experience. Rank them in order to which one you would MOST like to engage in to the one you would LEAST like to engage in. When everyone is finished, we will talk through everyone's rankings.

##### *Discussion:*

- Which photograph did you select as your most desired trip? Why?
- Which photograph did you select as your least desired trip? Why?
- What can you say about the middle photographs?
- How difficult was this activity? Why?
- Explain your thought process as you ordered the photographs.

#### **Part Two**

##### *Instructions:*

The remaining portion of this focus group will be focused on your experiences with short-term missions trips in Ouanaminthe, Haiti, and photography. Share anything you're comfortable sharing. Remember to allow others to share their ideas and listen to yours. Are there any questions about the nature of this discussion?

##### *Discussion:*

First, we are going to talk about your knowledge about and experiences with Haiti before your first trip.

1. What expectations did you have of Haiti before you ever traveled there?
2. How did photography (of any kind) influence this understanding of Haiti?
3. Why did you intend to travel to Haiti on your specific short-term missions trip(s)?

Now, we are going to discuss your actual short-term missions trip experiences in Haiti.

4. How did photography influence your overall experience while in Haiti?
  - a. Did you take photographs?
    - i. If so, how so? Of what?
    - ii. If not, why not? Were you the subject in them?
5. What sorts of expectations (if any) did you, your sponsoring church or your trip leader place on capturing photographs during your time in Haiti?

Finally, we will discuss the impact of photography on your short-term missions trip experience since your trip(s).

6. How has photography influenced your overall experience since returning to the US?
7. How have you shared your photographs since returning to the US?
8. What else would you like to share about the role of photography in your short-term missions trip experiences in Haiti?

## APPENDIX D

### Analysis of the Photography Activity

Rodríguez and Dimitrova (2011) apply the concept of visual framing to understanding the portrayal of relationships within photography. Close-up shots indicate intimacy; medium shots, personal relationships; full shots, social relationships; and long shots, context, scope, and public distance. This concept means the framing of people in every photograph conveys a particular meaning of relationships. Likewise, Jonathan Keese (2011) argues photography in international development relies on the promotion of place in its marketing. To give focus group participants both a tool and platform to discuss their photography experiences, an expert panel selected and categorized eight photographs based on (1) their preference for people or place and (2) their level of visual framing. The four photographs which qualified for “place” include people, but present the subjects in ways which emphasize foreign elements of place.

Focus group participants ranked the photographs from first to last, so a mean score of 1 would indicate all 21 participants ranked it first. Table D2 lists the mean scores for each photograph. The results show a strong preference for people in photographs. These data support but do not significantly add to the findings from the focus groups. Themes of purpose, intimacy, and context emerged as a result of open discussion.

Table D2  
*Analysis of the Photography Activity*

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<u>Preference for:</u>	<u>People</u>	<u>Place</u>
Close-up	2.6	4.2
Medium	2.7	5.9
Full	3.9	5.0
Long	5.6	6.1



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## VITA

### **Joshua Kerby Jennings**

#### **Place of Birth**

Louisville, Kentucky USA

#### **Degrees Awarded**

**BA, International Studies & Spanish**, Magna cum Laude 2014  
University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky USA

#### **Professional Positions Held**

Haiti Country Coordinator, Southland Christian Church 2017 – Present  
Teaching Assistant, Department of Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation 2016 – 2017  
Graduate Assistant, Office of New Student and Family Programs 2015 – 2016  
Community Outreach Coordinator, Office of the Fayette County Sheriff 2014 – 2015

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